

Unplugging and Reconnecting

Since the invention of smartphones, they have continued to grow to be a necessity.

Whether it's used to make phone calls, text friends, or just play games, there are always people with a phone in their hand wherever you go in Hawai'i. It has become apparent that too many people — specifically teenagers — abuse the gift that is a phone and obsess over it. Hawai'i had once been known as a state with strong familial bonds, but since our phone addiction began, our belief of 'ohana has started to slowly fade. Social media, online games and the Internet all threaten the once-sturdy relationships we share with our family and friends. We have become so dependent on phones that we are unable to properly communicate and transform ourselves into independent people. Phones have lost their original purpose; mobiles make our lives easier, but they no longer help sustain our friendships.

In fifty years, we will be living our lives through technology if we allow this problem to furthermore develop. While teenagers may think that is their dream world, multiple cases have proved the negative effects of the infatuation with phones. During the year of 2018 in Hawai'i, 44 pedestrian accidents occurred due to the victims being distracted, primarily by phones. As reported by the Pew Research Center, about a third of Americans cannot identify the names of their neighbors. While it may be a survey of all Americans, I find this to be especially true here in Hawai'i, as I see no interactions in many neighborhoods, nor do I see people laughing with their peers at lunch. Instead, the only sight is students hovering over their phones to see the latest trend. In such a small place, being unable to properly communicate is dangerous, heralding a larger increase in strained relationships. According to the Federal Communications Commission, being on our phones too long affects our health as reports state that people who talk on the phone

for several hours a day are 50% more likely to develop brain cancer because of the surplus electromagnetic impulses and radio waves that are produced by mobiles. In accordance to The Vision Council, as digital use increases, so do potential vision problems, including eye strain. Another outcome is “text neck,” which has become a common problem with people sticking their neck forward to use their phones for texting. This causes muscle tension and can ultimately lead to nerve damage, the spine’s curvature, and the loss of lung volume capacity. All of these outcomes will only worsen and increase in numbers over time if actions aren’t taken.

Provided that current teens have been born into a more technical time, they are at a higher risk of developing an addiction to their phones than adults, who have become accustomed to socializing. I propose that parents and teachers join together to ameliorate the alarming behavior of children by minimizing screen-time. Parents can download apps that restrict the time limit their child spends. Some apps include Off the Grid and AntiSocial. Parents can also establish phone-free zones that will occur during meal times or events like family outings. With this solution, not only are the consequences of phone usage reduced, but healthy bonding times for families are promoted. Parents may, of course, just tell their children the limitations they wish to set. Since the children may not always abide by the rules, parents can monitor them using apps such as Social Fever and AppUsage. While the children are away from their parents’ watching eyes, schools may also decrease the time spent on a phone. Teachers can execute rules that make it mandatory for phones to be silenced during class. This way, students aren’t tempted to take a peek at the screen when they hear a notifications bell go off. By preventing children from being preoccupied by their phones, the next generation will be more focused and inclined to socialize properly. The desire to be on phones will lower and Hawai’i will regain its belief in 'ohana. As

for adults, an exceptional solution would be to set days where they turn their phones off for twenty-four hours and go to places beyond their bedroom. Not only will they be making friends and improving their communication skills, but they will also be setting an example for the younger generations, inspiring them to ditch technology for a while.

If Clarence T.C. Ching were alive today, he would be disappointed with our addicted behavior and lack of personal interactions. He cherished his relationships and tried on a daily basis to build more. His dream of a better Hawai'i included the familial bonds between friends, loved ones, and strangers. While this problem may not explicitly relate to the foundation's mission, friendship and companionship are two elements that Mr. Ching envisioned for an improved future. For years, Hawai'i has been known as a state of aloha, but we've slowly been losing our most famous trait.

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