ESCAPISM

aletheia
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aletheia

[A-LAY-THEE-UH]

(n.) *truth , disclosure*

(g r e e k)

ABOUT US

Aletheia is a student outreach publication that strives to provide a voice for all students at Lynbrook High School. Inspired by Los Gatos High's Reality Check and Monta Vista's Verdadera, Aletheia was created to facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and/or taboo issues within the Lynbrook community. Each issue of the publication comprises of firsthand experiences submitted anonymously by Lynbrook students and alumni, professional articles relating to that month's theme, and other resources compiled by the student staff. Finalized issues are published and distributed to the school. Past issues may be found on our website, under Archives.

The content in Aletheia is composed by the students at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Ideas and thoughts expressed within the publication are not necessarily reflected by the school administration or staff.

DECEMBER 2022: ESCAPISM

social media is easily addictive. for me, that was the form of escapism i needed. escapism was the way to let go of my problems and focus on something else, which evidently led on to a different problem.

rather than someone who wants to escape from reality, i think i am someone who is very aware of the reality we're in and i wish i could escape some of those aspects.

Student Submissions

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"escapism was the way to let go of my problems and focus on something else, which evidently led to another problem."

i usually don't go on social media, except for reddit if that counts. and i spend hours on it because of how carried away i get reading the threads. It's so interesting for me to see what other people have to say on certain topics and view different viewpoints.

it's also just interesting in general when people share experiences that have happened to them

i would consider myself as someone who wants to escape from reality because it's hard for me to face my own problems. i usually play video games, mostly minecraft or valorant to get away from my own problems and these are usually helpful for me.

i'm not sure what one considers a coping mechanism, but if playing video games counts as one, i would say that's mine, especially because i spend at least 3-4 hours playing them everyday

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"i would consider myself as someone who wants to escape from reality because it's hard for me to face my own problems."

I don't consider social media a form of escapism for me, but rather it is a creative outlet. I like to use instagram, tiktok, and pinterest to give me ideas on arts and crafts I'd like to create next. I also like to post things I've made and make aesthetic videos with my creations, so rather than a form of escapism, it's more like an outlet of creativity.

i wouldn't consider myself as someone who wants to escape from reality, largely because I like to deal with things straight up rather than run away from my problems.

Yes, for me a coping mechanism is reading and also doing diy projects because they allow me to channel my emotions into something else. i love to read because it allows me to not only gain knowledge, but also delve into another world. I mostly like to read fiction because of how unrealistic it is and i love how imaginative i get when i read.

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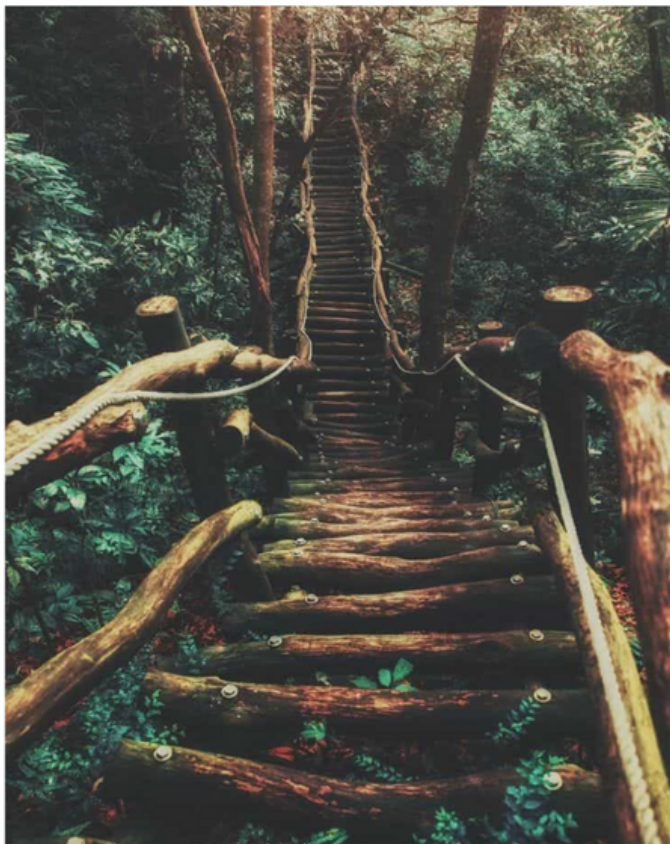
escapism for me is more of a way to channel my emotions rather than running away from my problems. I came about doing crafts largely because i needed an outlet for my creativity and that's how I started doing social media as well. i'm sure if i spent more time on social media, i would get carried away, which is why i limit my time and avoid comparing myself.

For me, social media has always been a form of escapism and it allows me to get away from my actual problems for once and see what other people are up to. It's sort of a way to not focus on myself, but this comes with some negatives. I find myself comparing myself to others which warps my perception of reality. I feel the constant need to be like the people i see on instagram or tiktok and makes me feel inadequate sometimes.

I don't consider myself as someone who wants to escape from reality for me, I believe in living in the moment so I wouldn't want to escape from my current situations. Rather I would want to face them and grow from them.

It's a normal human thing to want to turn to coping mechanisms when facing difficult situations. While I may take a while to cope with some things, at the end of the day, I realize I can't keep trying to escape from my life and need to deal with things head on.

I mostly use tiktok to escape from my everyday life and see other people's problems rather than facing my own. However, this can be especially distracting for me because I get carried away and spend hours on that app.

"I feel the constant need to be like the people i see on instagram or tiktok and makes me feel inadequate sometimes."

Teacher Interview with Kitchen Sensei

How would you define escapism and why would you define it so?

I think escapism is trying to leave your present reality, to avoid some of the things that you're facing, to find sort of an ideal place for yourself, or even just to kind of separate from some of the feelings that you're feeling and to just take that time to sort of step away. I think escapism comes in many different levels. There's momentary escapism, there's trying to completely separate yourself. I would say that from its root, this idea of "escape" is usually our physical world that we're trying to escape from. A lot of the time it's the mental and emotional stuff that we're trying to create a different space for.

You know many Lynbrook students try to escape from things in their reality like you said. What do you as a teacher and as a parent try to escape from in your life?

I think there are times that we all can get caught up in "How could my life be different?". Sometimes repetitive stresses or things that are in my workday, or when I have a difficult conversation, or I am frustrated that something didn't go the way that I wanted it to go causes me to want to escape. It makes us want to veg out and not think about those things through entertainment. I think as a teacher, definitely, you know, there'll be times where I just say, "that was a rough day, I want to focus on something else".

I think as a parent there are always challenges. When you are trying to parent your child the best that you can and when you don't see eye-to-eye, or, I think sometimes it's hard to see them go through struggles that you want to fix and you know you can't fix. And so I don't know if that always leads to escapism, but it definitely builds up that emotional baggage.

How has escapism benefited or hurt you in any way? How has it affected your overall well-being?

I think it's done both. I think sometimes I have a variety of escapist tendencies, and so I think to the extent that it gives me something fun to think about or a distraction from time to time. It takes off a little bit off of the pressure and allows me to kind of step away for a little bit. I have this tendency, and I think I see it in some of my students — when the pressure is high and I really need to get work done, those are the times that I choose to not focus in on what I need to get done.

In those times, I feel myself causing myself more struggle because I'm putting off the things that I really should get to, and either I don't feel as good with the finished product, or I end up losing sleep, or giving up time that I could have used in a better way. I've seen both sides of it. When I feel myself being stressed out, and I tell myself, "take ten minutes," and I will escape by leaving my room and going for a walk, or I will look at Japanese real estate sites and find really cool old homes. If I give myself ten minutes to look at it, and it is pretty harmless, I can step away.

Procrastination is a byproduct of escapism itself.

Sounds like a lot of what you're describing relates to procrastination.

I think so, but I think it's a specific kind of procrastination. I mean all of escapism, in a way, is a form of procrastination, but I think it's not just putting something off, but it's mentally putting yourself someplace else that's escapism. Procrastination is a byproduct of escapism itself.

When is escapism unhealthy?

That's a great question. I think in my experience it's not a bad thing to be able to step out of where you feel stuck. My escape involves nature and being outdoors or even sometimes with other people. It can be really calming and and allows me to refocus.

The addictive nature of the doom-scrolling or gaming can really take over, and I don't think they're unhealthy by definition. When they don't stick to their confined space in your life, and they are in your life in excess is where it then has sort of like a negative implication for you. I think at the end of the day, we need to come back to reality.

I like to think of it more as dreaming about the sorts of things you want to be doing in the future. Things that you allow you to turn things on their head and say, "Okay, what do I need to do to get there?"

What methods of escapism do you see in your students, and what effects do those methods have on their well-being?

Lynbrook is such an interesting place because so many people throw themselves into so many different things. People game like there's no tomorrow, and some people find great joy in that and there's a community around it. I've found that the more time people throw themselves into things and find community there, the healthier and the better it is in their well-being.

I see a lot of students throw themselves into art and drawing. Or music is another thing that I think can be a really calming, it calms a lot of the noise that goes into our heads, as well as the pressures and the emotions that we feel.

I personally coped a lot through life by running, which allowed me to leave everything behind for a while. When that escapism pushes you towards a community that supports you or towards methods that are able to help you process, I think it can be beneficial.

Our students here at Lynbrook do a pretty good job, but sometimes it's just really hard because there are different things that are calling to your attention at one time. You have all these extracurricular things that are pulling on you, there's family pressures, and your Discord pings. Finding ways to shut down all of those voices so that you are just in your own space, I imagine that would be really hard as a student.

Professional Article

Kiersten Luna

At times, most of us seek moments of distraction or a brief escape from our day to day responsibilities. Although this may take many forms, one very common and accessible way is through social media. When life is stressful, it makes sense that we may seek a temporary break and social media is one tool that can provide this.

As the Aletheia submissions thoughtfully illustrate, many teens notice a mixture of positive and negative impacts from their social media use. With so much information available, social media can be very engaging and entertaining. Social media can also facilitate connection or creative exploration. While the submissions showcased the benefits many find from utilizing social media, they also reflected some of the concerns teens may have about potential negative impacts of distracting with social media. One particular concern noted in the submissions and in research is the way that social media facilitates social comparison, which can stir up tough emotions. Research has also noted that frequent social media use may be connected to negative impacts on teens' sleep and mental health (Mayo Clinic, 2022).

If you have concerns about possible negative impacts of using social media as an escape or if you'd just like to try to spend a little less time on social media, I'd invite you to try an experiment. Right as you

grab your phone to begin to scroll on social media, see if you can pause for just a second and take a mental note (or even a note in your phone) of how you're feeling. Then, spend time on social media as you usually do. Afterwards, take note of about how much time you spent on social media and how you're feeling. Spend that same amount of time on another coping skill and notice how you feel before and afterwards. Other coping skills to try may include going for a walk or just getting out in nature, coloring, dancing to music, reading a physical book, baking, drawing, or playing with your pet. You could also try mindfulness breathing exercises, which research has shown to be quite helpful for teens in decreasing stress levels (Tang et. al, 2021). There are numerous mindfulness resources available and you can check out the resource list below to learn more about one: Insight Timer, a free mindfulness app.

When you try this experiment, see if you notice any differences between how you feel before and after using social media compared to when you use a different coping skill. The point of this experiment is not to convince you to stop using social media. Rather, it is intended to help you become more aware of the feelings that are arising in you when you turn to social media and how social media use may affect how you feel. It is also a gentle reminder that you have a variety of options available if you need to take a break. If you noticed a positive impact on your mood when you tried one of the other coping skills, I'd invite you to consider whether it would be helpful to utilize that strategy again sometime in the future.

If you notice that you reach for social media as a distraction when you are feeling distressed and need a way to cope with an intense emotion,

you might consider trying a Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skill, Self Soothe (Linehan, 2015). Self Soothe is a skill that involves using your five senses when you are feeling distressed. The intention is to find comforting things to do that involve sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. This might mean looking at a calming picture, listening to soothing music, smelling a candle, eating a sour candy, or wrapping yourself in a blanket. To learn more about Self Soothe and how you can create a Self Soothe box to have this skill easily accessible to you, check out the links in the resource section below. If the emotion you are experiencing is so distressing that you don't feel able to use this skill or if you are in crisis, there are crisis resources available and listed below in the resource section.

Whether we use social media or other coping skills as a distraction, we will all eventually be faced with the realities of our current situations. Sometimes, people notice that they are consistently having difficulty returning to reality or find that escaping to social media is making it very difficult for them to do daily tasks like homework, socialize with friends, focus on school, or get enough sleep. If you notice this, it may be time to seek out more support. This might include talking to your parents or other trusted adults about your concerns. It may also be a time to consider therapy. A therapist can help you better understand what could be driving you toward escapism. They can also help you process your emotions and give you more individualized tools to help you work toward your goals. Being a teenager can be stressful and you deserve support. Please see the resources below for more tools to help support you and your wellbeing.

About The Author

Kiersten Luna (she/her) is honored to write for Aletheia. Kiersten is an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist who provides therapy to teens and adults impacted by anxiety, depression, or trauma. She is employed by Christian Counseling Center in San Jose, where she works with people of all faiths and the general public. Kiersten, AMFT 115362, is supervised by Margaret Bennett Greig, LMFT 8364. When not working, Kiersten loves spending time at the beach, reading, or hiking. You can learn more about Kiersten at https://cccsanjose.com/luna/

References and Resources

Resources:

1. Insight Timer is a mindfulness meditation app with many free meditations available,
https://insighttimer.com/
2. DBT Self Soothe, a video explaining the Self-Soothe skill
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwnHez9TC6c
3. How to Make your Own Self-Soothe Box video, Hampshire CAMHS
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyfgodSSdV4
4. 30 Healthy Coping Skills for Teens, an article listing more potential coping skills to
consider https://psychcentral.com/blog/blog/2018/01/30-healthy-coping-skills-for-teens#1
5. Crisis Text Line, available 24/7, text HOME to 741-741
6. Trans Lifeline, provides trans peer support, 877-565-8860
7. Suicide and Crisis Hotline, available 24/7, Dial 9-8-8

References:

Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT Skills Training Manual. Guilford Publications.

Mayo Clinic Staff (2022). Teens and social media use: What's the impact? Mayo Clinic. https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in depth/teens-and-social-me dia-use/art 20474437#:~:text=Social%20media%20harms,much%20social%20me dia%20teens %20use.

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