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As teenagers, we are the most coveted target audience for pop culture and the media to cater to; between the stressful activities of our hectic lives, we obsess over movies, TV shows and other forms of entertainment. However, and perhaps it is because we are so busy, we barely ever take the time to stop and question why we are so fixated on these fictional experiences. In my opinion, the aspect we value most within entertainment—as well as within our own lives—is a genuine sense of communication and bonding between ourselves and our friends. Classics such as *Friends*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Back to the Future*, and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* resonate with our generation so deeply not because we can truly relate to them, but because we want to relate to them. We yearn for the experiences and relationships we observe in pop culture, particularly that of before our own generation, yet we restrict ourselves from these experiences through inefficient and lazy communication. I firmly believe that a prime example of this communication deficiency is, ironically, an app designed solely for people to communicate with one another: Snapchat.

Snapchat is revered and admired by many of us as a fun and easy way to interact with friends, but this social media app has produced a culture of mindless and lazy communication. It sounds appealing, and it certainly is; to be able to maintain and foster solid friendships with little to no effort seems like a breeze, and this is why Snapchat has a solid 4-star rating in the app store, plus an overwhelming 300 million active users. It is wildly popular, but in truth it is toxic; Fitzgerald 2 friendships require legitimate effort from all parties in order to thrive. How, exactly, does Snapchat, a social media app, inhibit our ability to properly interact with each other socially? Well, firstly, the setup of the app itself is a complete diversion from traditionally healthy forms of communication. Rather than talking face-to-face with one another or attempting to have meaningful conversations, we often send pointless photos of ourselves back and forth—verbal or written communication through the app is rare. While you participate in using the app, it seems normal to just send photos of yourself with no caption, substance, or meaning

involved, because everyone else does it; this is a group mentality. But if you take a step back and analyze how you and your friends conduct yourselves on the app, it might occur to you that this type of thoughtless exchange is awkward at best, and disingenuous at worst. Think about it: when was the last time you asked one of your friends any of these simple questions: “How are you?” “How's your day going?” “How is your family?” Now think again: when is the last time you asked one of your friends this *through Snapchat*? I am guessing that many of your answers will be consistent in that you rarely check in with your friends through Snapchat in a sincere fashion. Despite this, Snapchat may be one of the main ways you talk with your friends, as well as one of your most-used. But why? Why don't we take the time to show concern for our friends or bond with them on an app we all seem to use so often? The answer is simple, and it is one word long: streaks. Streaks were created by developers to make Snapchat feel like a game, and it is human nature for games to become addicting. As a company, Snapchat knows exactly what they are doing by capitalizing on this instinct. They are intentionally making their app addicting for users, but they disregard the social consequences; as their user frequency rises, so does their stock price and overall value, heightening the interests of investors and essentially maximizing their profits. As a result of this new feature, we are more worried about a number with a flame emoji beside it than checking in with each other and engaging in real conversation. Snapchat streaks not only encourage a careless attitude towards friendships, but even turn the aspect of friendship into a competition of sorts when that is not what friendship should be. The more streaks you have, the more “popular” you seem, leading to social exclusion as well as leaving people who don't have or use snapchat at a disadvantage. While people don't exactly rub it in each other's faces and say “I have more streaks than you” or “my streak with this person is longer than yours,” it is definitely an undertone within social circles that streaks can be competitive and correlate with social status. Streaks can even cause interpersonal conflicts: if one does not respond to a streak within twenty-four hours, the streak is broken, which can anger friends and even threaten friendships altogether. I have seen people go to extreme lengths in order to save their streaks, sometimes giving friends their Snapchat password while they are away. This should not be how we show care and concern for our friends. If we look to

the older movies and shows we so admire, we see close bonds between characters supported by their care for each other and the effort they show. Snapchat, in all its glory, prevents us from following these examples and doing the same. I worry that it threatens our ability as a generation to establish new friendships and maintain closeness with already existing friendships. If we have too many streaks to keep up with and avoid creating new ones with new friends, we are excluding those new friends from communicating with us. If we do not take the time to check in with each other and instead just snap pointless pictures back and forth, we lose touch with our friends and cease to recognize the overall notion of friendship in general. If we begin to value a trivial number next to a person's name more than the actual person themselves, what is the point of even communicating with them in the first place?

Snapchat does not need to be so deeply ingrained in our daily lives, and it does not need to rule or govern our social circles. We have options. We have the option to void our streaks, to text or call instead of only snapping someone, to log out of snapchat, to even delete the app entirely. It is up to us as a generation and as individuals to decide whether or not we will make those choices. If Snapchat brings you infinite joy, keeps you close to your friends, and allows you to immerse yourself in thoughtful dialogue, then that's great. You can use Snapchat to your liking. But a pattern I am seeing more and more in my peers is their frustration and annoyance with keeping streaks, and a sense of detachment from their friends. Is it worth the extra stress? Is it worth the trivial number? Is it worth the feeling of disconnect? In my opinion, no; I think that for many of us, it is time to take a break from Snapchat and start relearning what it means to be a true friend. Perhaps "Settling our Streaks" would be an appropriate slogan.