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# Can't stand strong when we lean on apps

*By Kevin Frazier*

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By taking on the responsibilities that go with driving, young people also learn how to deal with other challenges in life.

There's a line between improving our lives through technology and tech crowding out our ability to live independently. In the case of many new apps, that line has been crossed.

Apps allow us to outsource our responsibilities, errands and duties. This is especially true of younger Americans — members of the Millennial and Generation Z age cohorts — who have seen their micro-responsibilities disappear. The cumulative result is a diminished ability to act independently. What's more, beyond threatening young people's ability to handle basic tasks and maintain their mental health, these apps reduce the need to engage with other community members. Meaningful relationships and exchanges are the mortar of our democracy and, as apps take the place of daily interactions, that foundation is in peril.

Apps have freed us to kick responsibilities down the road. Though the tasks tech has solved seem trivial — learning to drive, running errands, editing your own term paper for school — those who rely heavily on these tools have shown a noticeable decline in self-sufficiency.

For example, since 1983, there's been a 22-point drop in the percentage of 16-year-olds with a driver's license — falling from 46.2 to 24.5 percent in 2014. A driver's license is not necessary to become independent, but possessing one certainly adds to the likelihood that you will take on more tasks and responsibilities as you drop off siblings and pick up groceries, for example.

It's hard not to see a connection between the rise of more ride-hailing options and the decline in teens earning their wheels. The convenience of Uber and Lyft makes dragging yourself to the Department of Motor Vehicles for a series of endless lines and intricate tests look even more unappealing. On the whole, ride-hailing crowds out chances for teens to learn the rules of the road, deal with car-maintenance issues that inevitably arise, and, when they do, figure out how to use public transit. Why deal with the hassles of independence when #theylldriveforyou?

To add to the evasion of interaction and escape from responsibility, teens stuck driving themselves around may not actually have to "pick up" anything. Curbside, an app founded in 2013, uses location information from your phone to let a store know precisely when you are outside their door so that they can quickly shuttle your order to you through the car window — no lines, no wait, no chance for conversation. It's

important to note that this app carries immense potential for differently abled individuals for whom parking and navigating a store may prove difficult. However, for the Lyft-riding teen responsible for bringing home some bread for dinner, it is just another task that someone else can do for them. #neverleaveyourbubble

When our figurative Lyftriding, Curbside-receiving teen gets home and starts his or her homework, they'll find plenty of ways to delegate the responsibility-building tasks of the past. Case in point, teens no longer need to parse through their homework for grammatical errors. As you have likely seen from its ads, Grammarly can take care of the peskiness tied to learning how to write correctly for you. Again, knowing the difference between an em- and en-dash is not critical to maturation, but it allows young Americans to shift the burden of being meticulous and patient elsewhere. You can imagine the interaction between a Grammarlydependent student with a heavily red-lined paper and their professor quickly going sour — "If you would have just let me use Grammarly, it would have been perfect!" #crutch

The drive to be error-free that's accentuated by apps is fueling a mental health crisis among students. Students that use mental health services most commonly cite anxiety, depression and academic stress as the impetus for their visit, according to the Center for Collegiate Mental Health. The percentage of students using these services has spiked in recent years. Ashley Stauffer, a project manager at the center, reports an increase in threat-to-self characteristics exhibited by students over the past five years. This jump may help explain why suicide is the second-leading cause of death

among Americans between the ages of 15 and 34, an unsurprising fact given that about 50 percent of students felt hopeless during the past school year. #crisis

There's a cure for hopelessness, and it's not an app. The knowledge that you are capable, knowledgeable and flawed, but able to counteract those weaknesses, is the cure. A healthy dose of human interaction — the basis for building your support system — combined with the confidence gained by tackling a difficult task or arduous errand all by yourself can also pare back any sign of hopelessness. #solution

I am one of those young Americans who have felt hopeless, blamed someone or something else for a task I ought to have tackled, and overly relied on an app rather than a friend. I know that the hardest days occur when I am the most isolated and most dependent on others. Leaving my bubble and engaging with my community — that's when I'm thriving, and that's when our democracy thrives as well.

The value of human interaction has historically been recognized by conservative and liberal thinkers alike. Adam Smith, highly regarded by conservative thinkers, made clear that regular interactions with those around us lead to the dissemination of ideas, refinement of our morals and betterment of our neighborhood.

You can find support on the left as well. Jane Jacobs, a fierce advocate for communities built to facilitate interaction and a liberal thinker, staunchly defends efforts that foster community through interaction. #bipartisan

So here's a challenge to the tech community: Create products that take us into our community.

Thankfully, there are some great examples of apps prompting people to connect with others: WhereBy.us is making it cool (and easy) to share news with and learn from your neighbors, the Do-Something app presents users with a plethora of volunteer opportunities in their backyard, and Forward is making sure that one person's trash doesn't actually end up in the landfill by directing your donation to a local person in need. Apps like these incentivize interaction, foster community engagement and give young people opportunities to develop skills and relationships that are truly worth up-voting. #progress

Kevin Frazier is a transplant to San Francisco from Oregon, where he served as the president of the College Democrats of Oregon from 2013 to 2015.