

Social Media's

UNEXPECTED EFFECTS

*Social media means we are more connected to each other,
but are we more connected in a good way?*

The last 10 years has seen a drastic change in how we communicate with each other. Thanks to social media, we can instantly connect through text messages, emails, Facebook messages or Tweets. Is this really a good thing or is this new form of instant communication eroding how we interact with each other?

Friendships

Social media has introduced a new form of friendship - one with little obligation, intimacy or reward. While someone may have over 200 *friends* on Facebook, they probably only know a few of these *friends* well. They may devote a lot of time to these *friends*, so much so that they begin to lose the ability to connect to their non-virtual friends in the real world.

Dr. Sherry Turkle, in Alone Together suggests that this is due to a *dramatic change* where we can leave a situation without physically leaving. She argues that in the past when difficult personal interactions would arise, people would be forced to get over their awkwardness and learn to get along thus forming and strengthening relationships. Today, if a situation arises where someone feels unsettled, they simply pick up their phones and retreat to Facebook, or some other impersonal form of communication. They do not develop the ability to get along and fully connect with others. One result is that people may feel lonely even when surrounded with others. They no longer know how to connect on a deeper level.



Similarly, texting has replaced phone calls. Many people prefer to text as they feel it gives them greater control over what they will say. Gone is the spontaneity of a phone conversation which leads to more genuine communication between two people. With texting, everything a person wants to say can be read, edited and abbreviated. While you may be in constant contact with your friends, because of these guarded interactions you may know very little about who they are. You call them your *friends*, but they are almost strangers.

Families

Families are changing. As social media has expanded, it has become acceptable to pay attention to people who are not present at the expense of those that are right there with us. Family members are texting friends at the dinner table. Parents are checking emails while their child tries to get their attention. And family members are emailing during commercial breaks while watching a sporting event. It seems that less and less, family members make eye contact! All of this leads to less intimacy and less real connection with our loved ones

Couples

Couples have also been greatly affected by the new social media reality. Intimacy and privacy have been hit hard. New couples have never simply been with each other, without access to social media. They have never gone through the typical steps of forming a lasting relationship and have skipped the fundamentals of really getting to know each other- including awkward moments, revelations and conflict. Instead, they likely *googled* their partner, looked over their Facebook page and found out all about them before their first date. Often they continue to communicate in a similar fashion, without ever revealing who they are. Rather than have an honest and painful breakup discussion, some partners split by text or by changing their Facebook status to *single*.

Being Alone

What has also been lost is the ability to be alone. Solitude is not a bad thing. It can refresh and inspire us. But when we are always connected, we lose the ability to appreciate our own company. If our validation comes solely from others, then we lose the ability to **find worth in ourselves**.

As Dr. Turkle points out *It's a great psychological truth that if we don't teach our children how to be alone, they will always be lonely*. Social media has helped us forget this and other important things we used to know about life.



What Can We Do?

Social media is here to stay. Yet it is **IMPORTANT** that we try to keep some aspects of life *non-networked*. Making small changes can increase our non-virtual interactions and real connections. Here are some ideas:

- *Sit down to meals having silenced technology.*
- *Take a walk and appreciate the physical surroundings without technology*
- *Pay FULL attention- give whoever is present precedence over text messages.*
- *Make the bedroom a technology-free zone*
- *Take the time to deliver important personal messages in person - don't text.*
- *Don't put your entire life (or other peoples') online. Keep personal things personal.*

REMEMBER THAT EVERYTHING THAT IS ONLINE IS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE INCLUDING A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER, FAMILY MEMBERS AND NEW PARTNERS.

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