

How Social Media Can Steal Your Joy

'Tis the season to wrap gifts, build snowmen (snow people?) and Food Network-worthy gingerbread houses, sip egg nog, and, if you're *really* in a Christmas mood, roast chestnuts by an open fire. For some, it's even the season to daily locate that enchanting Elf on the Shelf who seems to get a little creepier by the year.

But no matter what your family's holiday traditions are, 'tis the season to view a plethora of festive photos and read many a Yuletide update as we plug into the various social media we use to record, journal, and share the merriment of our Christmas season.

And 'tis *almost* the season to make a 2014 resolution or two. For me personally, I'm resolving to show a little more self-control when it comes to the beeping and buzzing notifications that constantly beckon from my stupid Smartphone. (That's an oxymoron, I know, but you know what I mean.) I'm resolving to spend more time looking up at the sky, around at God's beautiful creation, or into the eyes of complete strangers instead of peering down at my mobile device whenever a precious kernel of unfilled time slides through the hourglass of my day.

Beyond my desire to engage more with the real world and less with the virtual ones, I want to protect and improve my emotional and physical health. In this article, I'm going to share two of the primary dangers social media pose and let you decide whether your involvement on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc. could be dialed back a bit.

1. It Can Cause You to Feel Bad About Yourself. Those photos of your friends ice skating at Rockefeller Center or

celebrating a Secret Santa party can make you feel like the Grinch. Researchers from two German universities studied 600 people who logged time on Facebook and discovered that one in three felt worse after visiting the site, especially if they viewed vacation photos. Facebook frequenters who spent time on the site without posting their own content were also more likely to feel dissatisfied.

“We were surprised by how many people have a negative experience from Facebook with envy leaving them feeling lonely, frustrated or angry,” said study author Hanna Krasnova from the Institute of Information Systems at Berlin’s Humboldt University. “From our observations, some of these people will then leave Facebook, or at least reduce their use of the site.”

Why, in a social network that is supposed to provide warm, fuzzy feelings of connectedness and interaction, are we sometimes stricken with sensations of jealousy, loneliness, and even depression? In the German studies, the most common cause of Facebook frustration stemmed from users comparing themselves socially to their peers, while the second most common source of dissatisfaction was “lack of attention” from having fewer comments, likes, and general feedback compared to friends. A UK study found that 50 percent of social media users evaluated their participation in social networking as having an overall negative effect on their lives. Specifically, they cited the blow to their self-esteem that comes as a byproduct of comparing themselves to peers as the biggest downfall.

Reducing your time spent on social media will provide more time for you to focus on making your own memories, pursuing your own passions, and spending time with your own family. You’ll be too busy being who the God of the universe made you to be—a unique and magnificent one in billions of people created throughout time—to worry about how you compare to your friends and role models you follow in silly cyberspace.

2. It can distract you from real life. Almost a quarter of Americans say they've missed out on important life moments as they've sought to share them with their eagerly awaiting friends and followers. (Slight sarcasm there. But if you think about it, your Facebook friends and fans can surely wait until *after* your birthday party or son's football game is over to hear and see all about it.)

In a society that constantly bombards us with technology, and the message that more of it is better, we start believing that the digital world is where we must be in order to keep up with everything from news, weather, and politics to what kind of cookies our neighbor is baking for next Friday's neighborhood Christmas pot luck. And, what time does it start again?

I like this quote from the 1986 film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*:

"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

Eighteen years before Facebook and 21 years before the iPhone was released, folks like Ferris thought life was fast even without an information superhighway. Today, with dozens of social media platforms vying for our attention, it's never been more important for us to fight to remain devoted to those who need our attention most.

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