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Digital Intimacy

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Digital Intimacy

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Digital Intimacy

I cannot fathom a world without social media. I cannot imagine a world where I can't pull out my smart phone and with a swipe and five quick taps, know exactly what's going on in my friends' lives. I cannot imagine not being able to scroll through hashtags on twitter and having access to information on everything from the most up-to-date news about the 2016 presidential elections to the most up-to-date news about my favorite Hollywood couple. I also can't fathom going to dinner with my friends and not stopping to take a picture to post on Instagram to show off how "exciting" and "social" my life is, and then spending five minutes (five minutes that could have been spent actually talking to my friends) trying to pick the most flattering filter and the wittiest caption, all in a pursuit to get as many likes as possible. I can't imagine a world where I don't feel as if I'm in some constant unspoken competition with every other person my age to appear the most exciting, to get the most likes or retweets, and have the most followers. And most teens and young adults wouldn't be able to imagine it either.

There's no denying that ever since Mark Zuckerberg released Facebook to the general public in 2006 that social media has grown rapidly and spread far. And it's obvious with the introduction of Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Periscope, Google+, Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube, Vine, and more, that social media isn't going anywhere anytime in the foreseeable future. But the relatively sudden boom in social media isn't all-together a bad thing. It's allowed us to connect with other people who aren't near us, whether that be old high school friends or someone from across an ocean who you would have never met otherwise. Additionally, It makes it possible for

us to be more quickly aware of news around the world without having to wait for a newspaper to be delivered. The problem with social media is that we, as a society, have become so engrossed in social media that we are progressing further and further down a path of replacing face-to-face interaction with digital intimacy.

This idea of digital intimacy rather than personable encounters has a number of consequences for our society. At a base level, just the physical act of always having a phone or computer in hand to be checking social media has numerous consequences. When one is always on their phone (or any internet connected device) they're essentially disconnecting from the world around them. One of the most critical aspects of the human experience is connecting with other human beings (retweeting someone doesn't count). In today's society, if you walk into any room where anything interesting is occurring, it's highly probable that people will more likely be taking and posting pictures rather than focusing on sharing the experience with the people who are actually in the room with them. A concert is a wonderful example of this. Before social media, the point of a concert was to bond with the thousands of people in the same room as you who share a deep passion for an artist. Now, when you go to a concert nearly everyone in the stadium has phones up to their faces trying to get the best angle for a photo and posting it to Instagram.

Well, So what? It doesn't seem like that big of a deal that people are spending more time on their phone than watching an event. If they want to post pictures, go for it. So what? Well this theoretical concert scenario, while mild, is still indicative of a larger problem. As aforementioned, human interaction with other people is critical to the human experience. People are becoming engrossed in taking pictures/videos rather than being involved in the world around them. Rather than truly experiencing anything, we often now have "celluloid" experiences, in

which one isn't truly even living in the world around them because there are spending too much time trying to capture it on their phone. Then what one ends up with are all these experiences that are really just the attendee taking a video, and at that point you lose a lot of what the experience could have been and are left with flimsy reproductions.

Another consequence of the social media boom is the lack of social skills that are being developed, especially in the younger generation. With how often young people are accessing social media, it's beginning to quickly become a total replacement for person-to-person interaction and the lines between a social media account and an actual human being are becoming blurred. It's far more comfortable to have a conversation over Facebook messenger where you can pause between responses and think more clearly about what you want to say. Using online forms of communication is also more comfortable because one doesn't have to see a human face, which makes the conversation feel less real and, therefore, the consequences of what is said less tangible.

While there isn't anything inherently wrong with using online forms of conversation (it's often quick and convenient), when that becomes society's main course of communication it leads to a drop in the general social skills. We as humans still need to have the communication skills to proficiently talk with other humans. One can't grow as an individual unless they can learn from other human beings. Proficient communication skills can lead to being able to connect to great opportunities through things like networking or interview skills, and while those are important we can grow so much from even basic forms of communication. Each of every one of the seven billion people in the world has their own unique stories and experiences. One can learn so much just from talking to the women behind them in the checkout line at Kroger. However, if we lose our basic social skills because we relied too heavily on social media, then we can't make simple

connections with other humans and without those personal intimate relationships with others, we both limit our own growth as humans and chip away at our overall human experience.

Social media stresses our humanistic relationships with other people, but it also harms one on a more personal level. The biggest issue with social media is that it doesn't show the whole person behind the profile. A social media account shows, in a sense, a person's highlight reel; no one posts a selfie on Instagram when they first wake up in the morning and no one posts a snapchat about how they're 8 seasons deep in a Gray's Anatomy Netflix binge. By definition, people want their profiles to represent them at their absolute best. The issue occurs when young adults spend a majority of their time on social media and all they ever see are these highlights of other people's lives and begin to create unrealistic expectations in their own minds. It makes young adults feel inadequate because they don't feel that their life is as fulfilled as the life they see in the profiles of others. Society has become so engrossed in media at this point that it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the profile from the person and, in turn, people begin to try to tailor their lives so they can be more like the profiles they see.

This has highly negative consequences because all these teens and young adults are attempting to achieve these unrealistic goals and when they can't, it can cause heightened levels of anxiety and feeling of inferiority. In addition to the emotional effects, trying to compare to these "highlight reel" profiles causes one to get deeper and deeper back into these celluloid experiences because they feel they have to make sure that everything interesting in their life is going onto their profiles so they can appear as exciting as the profiles they see online. At that point, one stops living as much because they have to be constantly obsessed with what'll look good on Instagram rather than actively living in the experiences occurring around them.

Like most anything else, social media isn't inherently bad or negative in society, but it all depends on how we as a society choose to use it. Social media can be wonderful. It allows us to connect with anyone in the world in a matter of seconds, which is so beneficial to us because we can learn from people we wouldn't have been able to without the aid of social media. However, we need to become more conscious of our use of social media because it's only beneficial to the extent that it doesn't begin to replace true human interaction. People need each other to grow and to become better human beings. If we become so dependent on social media that we lose the necessary skills to communicate with others then we slowly start to lose our humanity because we cannot sustain a society on digital intimacy.