



# Making

# FACE TIME

Getting smart about tech's effects on love and life

by Nikki Sneed

In today's technology-filled world, it is easy to be connected with friends, family and even strangers instantly. With the simple touch of a button the entire world of information and communication is available to you.

But with so many distractions constantly vying for your attention, are you really connecting with your loved ones on anything more than a superficial level?

Relationships have changed drastically over the years, but in the past decade, thanks to the many advances in technology, our ability to truly connect and be present with another human in person has all but died.

When is the last time you went out to dinner with your significant other, or even just a friend, and didn't use your smartphone to pop on Facebook or check your text messages? When is the last time you listened to a story your child told you about his or her life without also scanning the TV channels

or skimming through emails?

With the ability to constantly be connected to everyone and everything, our minds become divided and distracted. The price we pay for instant access to the virtual world is that we can no longer fully tune in to the real world.

"Liking" posts on Facebook and Instagram gives our brains a quick burst of dopamine that makes our tech obsession a true addiction. Constantly searching for the next best photo or article changes our brain's biochemistry for the worse.

Additionally, studies have shown that excessive social media usage can cause severe damage to your mental health in the form of loneliness, jealousy, depression and disinterest.

One such study by the Psychology Department of the University of Michigan in 2013 stated, "We text-messaged people five times per day for two weeks to examine how Facebook use influences the two

components of subjective well-being: how people feel moment-to-moment and how satisfied they are with their lives. Our results indicate that Facebook use predicts negative shifts on both of these variables over time. The more people used Facebook at one time point, the worse they felt the next time we text-messaged them; the more they used Facebook over two-weeks, the more their life satisfaction levels declined over time."

In the summer of 2014, Russell B. Clayton, MA with the Department of Journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia published a similar case study on the effects of social media use, specifically Twitter, on relationship satisfaction.

"The results from this study suggest that active Twitter use leads to greater amounts of Twitter-related conflict among romantic partners, which in turn leads to infidelity, breakup and divorce. This indirect effect is not contingent on the length of the roman-

tic relationship. The current study adds to the growing body of literature investigating SNS use and romantic relationship outcomes," Clayton says.

Having so many ways to remain connected also provides numerous paths to conflict, as the studies above suggest. With the ability to make our innermost thoughts, feelings and opinions public, we open ourselves up to criticism and opposition. And with it being so easy to hide behind a keyboard, people are much bolder on social media. Friends fight over poorly-worded and hastily-posted comments. Family members argue over differences in belief. Lovers bicker over miscommunication and issues related to social media posts, likes and what may be taking place behind the scenes.

Those involved in romantic relationships are especially susceptible to the negative effects of social media. Personal information is not only easily accessible, but also every insignificant thought or interaction is recorded in writing for our self-conscious minds to potentially overthink.

Research has shown that people in romantic relationships are more likely to closely monitor their partner's social media feeds and analyze interactions, which leads to the relationship poison known as jealousy.

On social media, especially Facebook, jealous conflict often centers around previous romantic partners. This isn't surprising considering that these social media platforms pride themselves on the ability to so easily reconnect with people from your past. With such easily accessible reconnection, it becomes easy to wonder if it is possible to ever truly get over the past.

The lowered self-esteem and gnawing suspicion that come with jealousy have us seeking comfort in the attention of others, which is easy to get on social media platforms. "As a result, we now see more affairs that are emotional in nature because social media provides a platform for sneaky, attention-seeking behavior where a person can escape accountability," explains Sherrie Campbell, psychotherapist and author of *Loving Yourself: The*

*Mastery Of Being Your Own Person.*

So, how can we combat the numerous negative effects and incessant distractions caused by social media?

First, set definitive boundaries and stick to them. Just because someone invites you to catch up on Facebook does not mean that you have to respond right away. Remember that you don't owe anything to anyone. People decide how to treat you based on the way you treat yourself. "Social media is as much a boundary as anything else. You put boundaries around your physical body. Not just anyone can come up and touch you and you can expect that in social media, too. As simple as a thing as expecting a text message is a key to understanding what you think about yourself and how much you value yourself. Setting those boundaries is particularly difficult for us southern women. You have to fight, as a southern woman, to be fierce and strong. We are usually expected to be so accommodating," says Hannah Shadrack.

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local blogger, yoga teacher in training and Business and Creative Director of Tennessee River Gorge Trust. Second, make an effort to understand what it is that you are really looking for when you turn to social media. Are you actually searching for attention? Do you have a desire for intimacy? What do you really need and is it something that you could find in physical interaction with another person? Maybe instead of reaching for a phone or computer you should invite a good friend out for coffee or be more present as you listen to and watch as one of your children tells you a story.

"Anytime I want to pick up my phone and look at Facebook, I think to myself, 'Oh, I am really craving intimacy right now, is there someone in front of me that

I can connect with?' It isn't even necessarily sexual intimacy, just any kind of connection: coworkers, friends, etc. So, if I desire intimacy in my life, how do I cultivate that? Well, it isn't going to come from a screen in front of my face. You just need to be really clear about your priorities and what you want," says Shadrack.

Finally, you have to realize and accept that intimacy is hard work, but the benefits that come with that personal connection are far better than anything you can achieve electronically. Technology is great - for certain purposes. Keeping in touch with long distance loved ones, for example, is much easier and faster with a phone call than with a letter. However, it's important to remember that nothing can replace the deep physical connection that comes with looking someone in the eyes, listening to understand instead of just listening to respond, feeling their presence and knowing that they are fully there for you, just as you are for them.

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