Social media makes you lonely

If you're like most people, you might assume that social media connects us. But it's also true that social media makes you lonely.

How could being connected to people make you *more* lonely? Here's how it happens:

Popularity is Measured in Clicks

In the past, popularity was often measured by how many people looked up to you, the number of friends you had, or even the activities you were involved in.

Now, it's partly measured by how many likes you have on social media. You get a number along with each new post.

Popularity has always been a public affair, but now it's more of an obsession. You can literally sit there and watch your number of likes increase. With each new click, you might feel more validated.

What's more, if you don't post often enough, there's a strong possibility that you will fade into the background. It's an "out of sight, out of mind" kind of thing.

This is one of the ways that social media makes you lonely. In short, it preaches that "likes" = value. This idea in itself tends to increase isolation.

Ignorance Was Bliss, Now Knowledge Hurts

With just a few taps on your screen, you can unearth a lot of social information.

Both teens and millennials update their status often. Sometimes it's just posting about the delicious bagel you ate for breakfast, or with whom you just took a selfie. But even if the information is simple, right there—instantly and undeniably.

Here's one of the biggest drivers of loneliness: you can easily see when you don't get an invite to a social event. You immediately know when a group of people you thought were your friends met at the mall without you. You know it because it's right there in the picture that was posted at 3:36 P.M. And it already has 72 likes.

For many people, it doesn't take long for loneliness to set in and feelings of rejection start to spin through your mind.

Of course, being left out isn't new. No one gets invited to everything all the time. But before social media, you weren't aware of it. Now, the exclusion is right in your face.

Though Not Intentional, Rejection Is Blatant

It's only natural to want to know where you fit in or who you can trust. But for some people, that leads to keeping score — although for most people this process is unconscious.

Because you can now see what everyone else is doing and who they're doing it with, your brain tries to try to keep track of it all. Our brains are wired to connect with other people, and to see how we fit in with our family and friends.

Wanting to fit in (and noticing when we don't) is as old as humankind. But now it's obvious, and because of that rejection hits harder.

The kicker is, though, that most of the time, it's unintended!

No one can be included in every social event 24/7. It would be impossible...and exhausting. But social media has an unfortunate way of portraying the natural ebb and flow of friendships and socialization, making it seem worse than it is. And in this way, social media makes you lonely.

So, How Do You Fix the Problem?

Social media is of course here to stay, so it makes sense to learn to deal with the the problems it creates, such as loneliness.

Here are some suggestions:

Recognize that your friends will get together without you, and know that it has more to do with circumstance than how they feel about you.

Be compassionate in your own posts by considering who can see your posts, and how others might feel about the content

When you feel lonely, spend more in-person time with friends

Although science says that social media makes you lonely, you can fight back. You can make the choice to understand its negative effect and take action. If you'd like to read more about studies on how social media makes you lonely, check out this article from the Atlantic.