

# The Negative Effect of Social Media on Society and Individuals

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*Social networking allows users to easily meet and communicate.*

Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace allow you to find and connect with just about anyone, from a coworker in a neighboring cube to the girl who played Emily in your high school production of "Our Town" thirty years ago. Browsing these sites can make you feel connected to a larger community, but such easy, casual connection in an electronic environment can also have its downside.

## **A False Sense of Connection**

According to Cornell University's Steven Strogatz, social media sites can make it more difficult for us to distinguish between the meaningful relationships we foster in the real world, and the numerous casual relationships formed through social media. By focusing so much of our time and psychic energy on these less meaningful relationships, our most important connections, he fears, will weaken.

## **Cyber-bullying**

The immediacy provided by social media is available to predators as well as friends. Kids especially are vulnerable to the practice of cyber-bullying in which the perpetrators, anonymously or even posing as people their victims trust, terrorize individuals in front of their peers. The devastation of these online attacks can leave deep mental scars. In several well-publicized cases, victims have even been driven to suicide. The anonymity afforded online can bring out dark impulses that might otherwise be suppressed. Cyber-bullying has spread widely among youth, with 42% reporting that they have been victims, according to a 2010 CBS News report.

## **Decreased Productivity**

While many businesses use social networking sites to find and communicate with clients, the sites can also prove a great distraction to employees who may show more interest in what their friends are posting than in their work tasks. Wired.com posted two studies which demonstrated damage to productivity caused by social networking: Nucleus Research reported that Facebook shaves 1.5% off office productivity while Morse claimed that British companies lost 2.2 billion a year to the social phenomenon. New technology products have become available that allow social networks to be

blocked, but their effectiveness remains spotty.

## **Privacy**

Social networking sites encourage people to be more public about their personal lives. Because intimate details of our lives can be posted so easily, users are prone to bypass the filters they might normally employ when talking about their private lives. What's more, the things they post remain available indefinitely. While at one moment a photo of friends doing shots at a party may seem harmless, the image may appear less attractive in the context of an employer doing a background check. While most sites allow their users to control who sees the things they've posted, such limitations are often forgotten, can be difficult to control or don't work as well as advertised.

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## **References**

- Oprah.com: Social Not-Working: The Perils of Too Much Communication
- Wired: How Twitter and Facebook Make Us More Productive
- CBS News: Cyberbullying Continued After Teen's Death
- Pew Research: Teens, Privacy & Online Social Networks

## **About the Author**

Brian Jung has been writing professionally since 1991. Currently he works as a software developer for University Hospitals in Cleveland, Ohio, where he also contributes reviews and commentary on children's and young adult literature to his own blog, Critique de Mr Chompchomp, and to Guys Lit Wire. Brian holds a Doctor of Philosophy in English from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.