

♥ Like

Do you need a digital detox?



♥ Like

Your online life could be priming you for a real-life confidence crash. Aoife Stuart-Madge reveals why it's time to log off

When megastar Rihanna took a trip to Hawaii in 2012, she documented the holiday with a series of intimate 'selfies' on Facebook – seemingly self-taken snaps of her relaxing in a teeny-weeny bikini. There was no doubt that the chart-topping singer looked in amazing shape, and the thousands of people who 'liked' or 'shared' the album obviously agreed. But it seemed strange that the hyper-busy singer would choose to spend her precious downtime posting provocative pictures for her fans, when she could have been chilling out far from the glare of the spotlight.

'Attention-seekers desire positive feedback online just as they do offline,' explains Dr Vinita Mehta, a clinical psychologist. 'Social media is yet another arena in which to perform. It's another stage – and a high number of Facebook "likes" are a lot like thunderous applause.' And it's not just celebrities seeking this adoration. Thanks to

Facebook, you can now command 'likes' of everything from the delicious dinner you whipped up to the new dress you splurged on at lunch. There's no denying that as the number of little blue thumbs goes up, your ego gets a welcome boost.

Let's face it, it feels pretty good when virtual friends gush about how great you look in a picture or how cute your new puppy is. And science has worked out why: a study from Harvard University found that our brains respond to Facebook and Twitter the same way they react to other pleasure triggers like food, money and sex.

'Most Facebook posts promote the idea that everyone is having a fantastic time,' says Dr Lynda Shaw, a cognitive neuroscientist and chartered psychologist. 'This is because we want people to think we're popular, confident and socially in demand. And when those little thumbs up signs appear, we feel accepted by our peer group, which promotes high levels of self-esteem. But it can be addictive. We need to feel accepted – and that acceptance produces a cocktail of feel-good neurotransmitters. The lure of Facebook is powerful, especially with the promise of more praise.'

Praise you

Hold on – what's so bad about praise? Well, according to experts, it's a case of too much of a good thing: relying on virtual approval to fuel self-esteem can wreak havoc on your sense of self-worth. 'Looking for attention from others actually erodes self-worth and confidence over time,' says life coach Jayne Morris. 'When we look outside ourselves for approval, we disempower ourselves and find it increasingly difficult to measure our own self-worth.'

Personal development coach Julie Clements adds that the real problem starts when that online praise is taken away: 'What happens when there is no one around? How equipped are you to get yourself through negative or challenging situations if you rely so heavily on others to maintain your self-esteem? If you always seek praise from others, you stop learning how to boost your own self-esteem and that becomes a self-fulfilling cycle of limitation.'

3 TIMES IT'S OK TO WANT PRAISE

- 1** You completed a marathon, triathlon or Tough Mudder. You've been training for months and you deserve a pat on the back from your mates.
- 2** You gave birth. Now that's worth a 'Well done!'
- 3** You sat through an entire Grand Prix motor race to keep your partner happy.



What's more, by handing the control of your self-esteem to a virtual audience, that praise can be replaced with rejection at the touch of a button. 'When you're rejected in some way, this disapproval leads to damage, and insecurity prevails,' says Dr Shaw. 'Ridicule, unkind words or even intentional silence by your peers undermine how you feel about yourself. If you seek external approval to fuel your self-esteem, you'll always be vulnerable.'

Virtual unreality

An easy solution, when you're not getting the praise you crave, is to slip in a Facebook fib or two. A survey by OnePoll found one in four women distorted what they were doing on social media once a month. The lies could be anything from pretending to be out on the town when you're home alone, to embellishing holidays or jobs.

The reason for this kind of dishonesty, says Gemini Adams, author of *The Facebook Diet: 50 Funny Signs of Facebook Addiction and Ways to Unplug with a Tech-Detox*, is an old-fashioned case of keeping up with the Joneses. 'People are comparing themselves to others' Facebook personas – which, when you look deeper, aren't a real reflection of who they are,' she says. 'Most of us project our better selves into our online lives. Our profiles provide a warped perspective of who we are and how we live.'

'FACEBOOK POSTS PROMOTE THE IDEA THAT EVERYONE IS HAVING A FANTASTIC TIME'

Trying to compete with exaggerated online personas can take a toll on your own self-worth, as you naturally struggle to measure up. 'In a world where we are barraged with images and information about others, it can be hard to figure out where we stand. On Facebook, it seems like everyone else has an enviable life – meaning accurate social comparisons can be muddled,' says Dr Mehta.

Get real

So where do we go from here? You don't have to swear off Facebook and Instagram for good. But if you want to break the addiction to external approval, you need to reconnect with yourself and the things that nurture you, instead of the things you think will impress others.

'Find things to love about yourself – make a list and read it to yourself every day,' suggests Jayne. 'Make a conscious effort to become aware of the urge to seek attention from others and choose to do something that's self-nurturing instead – like taking a bath, exercising, painting a picture, going for a walk or watching a film. Set yourself goals. Enjoy or create things in your life that you have always secretly wanted – just for the pleasure that they will bring you, rather than as a means of gaining approval from someone else.' Now there's a status update that deserves a thumbs up. 🍷

PICTURES: NITO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; LANE MORRIS; JAYNE MORRIS; JULIE CLEMENTS; JULIE CLEMENTS.CO.UK; THE FACEBOOK DIET: 50 FUNNY SIGNS OF FACEBOOK ADDICTION AND WAYS TO UNPLUG WITH A TECH-DETOX (E656); LIVE CONSCIOUSLY PUBLISHING

♥ Like



♥ Like



♥ Like

