

**Public Life**  
**Private life**  
**Secret life**

Social media is the new  
smoking for mental  
illness. It should come  
with a health warning.

What are the consequences of social media with regard to masking depression? In the day and age of posts and likes that have become social and real currency, I'm not the first person to joke about "I wish my life was as good as the one I post on Facebook :))" My sense is, that society has committed a massive foot fault when it comes to social media. We have unwittingly, yet voluntarily made much of our private life... public.

A new norm has been established as to "sharing", what was normally private. Others can detail all the positives and negatives of social media, my focus here is how I and others use social media to propagate the falsehood that "I'm ok". Apart from using social media for personal deception, that is I can deceive myself that I'm ok, because of how I appear on social media, I can and have used social media for indirect deception to others that "all's good" with my life. For those who don't have real conversations with me, social media is my brand to the world, having those conversations on my behalf.

I was a relatively early user of Facebook and LinkedIn, joining both around 2007. Have I posted stuff I regret? Yes. Have I made comments I regret? Absolutely. Posting while depressed? Yep put me down for that, and posting while drunk? Yep I'm guilty of that. The mental and emotional burdens of social media are now being discussed as contributing factors to mental health issues. Much is being written of "Millenials" and how brittle they are emotionally.

I'm not an expert on this topic, but I can say from experience that the presentation of life via social media can be a burden for those feeling poorly about themselves. The conversation you manage in your head is the most important one. For those stuck in a negative emotional state, obsessive rumination is a mental and emotional prison like hamster on a treadmill, with no end in sight, especially if you do not know how to change your state, via the standard tools of delay and distract.

Partying has become a lifestyle. When I was growing up, a party was something you went to, at most half a dozen times a year if you were lucky. There you drank too much, hit on girls and the really cool cats did dope out the back. Now to “party” is a life choice. The problem with this as the dominant narrative of social media is that, it presents scenes of happiness, joy, excess, “sexcess”, and success as a constant state of being.

Real life would suggest otherwise. So if this “state” of party, good times, miles and miles of smiles is taken to be real, then to feel opposite can put people at risk of themselves. In short, even though we know it maybe bullshit we process it as real. You can’t just party now you must be “famous” at partying . There was a point in human history where only the very few and elite had a “public life”. Politicians, rulers, generals, popes and captains of industry were famous and wealthy, but the fame we assigned to movie and sport stars was far more attractive to the mainstream population. In fact, it is said that soldiers in the second world war knew the currency of fame. American soldiers apparently would yell out “Fuck Hi- Rohito!” and the Japanese military would yell out “Fuck Babe Ruth!. Such was the changing value of fame.

Step changes in technology have always brought fame closer to ubiquity. Silent movies, to “movies” to TV, and with each technological revolution fame grew in size and addictiveness. The relationship between fame and technology is a binary one. In fact who serves who in that relationship almost gets very chicken and egg like. Suffice to say they both serve each other equally. Zuckerberg is an easy and obvious example. Reputation has always been carefully curated by those in the public eye but maybe they didn’t use that word. At best “management” or PR or good old fashioned propoganda. But now it’s a little more complex.

Being in the public eye always brought with it “un-curated” or “uncontrolled” attention. Pesky journalists, whistleblowers and the like discovering secrets and leaking information that others would rather leave in the dark, as it may have a deleterious effect on “image and reputation” of the famous person in question. All pretty ho hum.

Add a little bit of body text This saw the rise of the manager, pr exec, press flack and image consultant carefully trying, sometimes in vain to “control” the message and image of their client. Professional advice sometimes well worth the vast sums of money paid to such people. However, the Facebook generation received by enlarge no such professional advice. In the future we may divide our lives up into pre Facebook and post FB. A bit like B.C and A.D. Re Identity - i.e. people re creating a new or modified identity may well come become common practice, as a consequence of social media faux pars. We have willingly made public what in former decades was truly private and in so doing have made our private lives subject to the scrutiny and judgment of the public.

For better and worse.

There are of course certain younger demographics, who have shared more than others and the acronym TMI (too much information) seems to play to younger generations. Fame via social media bears similar characteristics to smoking. It makes you look cool, makes you look popular, is highly addictive, and it contains traces of shit that might kill you.

The reaction I see to the ignorance of these consequences will be the rise of secret life technology. By that I mean, for the things in our life that we regard as truly sacred, we will guard them vigorously with “secret keeping “ technologies. Arguably many of these are in place now, but yet to be the norm. These posts no matter how innocent can have uncontrolled meaning assigned to them and therefore, are at risk of being interpreted to suit an agenda, that may not be in your favor. It’s sophisticated white anting.

If an omission is a lie then what we omit about ourselves on social media is not so much a lie, because that would be too harsh, but moreover, a curation of image and self, that at one level seeks to deceive. As humans we are masters of deception. It must be a part of survival DNA. The need to deceive is at the heart of keeping depression a secret in the workplace. Social media can suit this purpose perfectly, and when someone says “ all’s good, see my last Facebook post”, they are willfully distracting you from their real selves.

We live in a time, where irrespective of whether you are a professional, or retired, or Joe public, you will need to manage your public, private and secret life assiduously. In each of your 3 “lives” i.e. public, private and secret, there is the opportunity for uncontrolled curation from others who assign, hi-jack or post items about you.

Even the most innocent of posts, like your playful behavior at a party, can be assigned meaning you did not intend, nor was a truthful depiction of yourself. Take it from me, no-one cares in a post truth era if your happy drinking self is harmless. In the hands of the clumsy or bitter that image may come to haunt you. You may already need to manage a new narrative around such material so its’ meaning is neutralised.

Controlled curation of your social media lives, is the second essential element to this model. You have an opportunity to control and curate posts about yourself in these 3 “lives”. Our digital fingerprints could be around for millennia.

That is an imposing thought.

Therefore, those at risk such as myself who suffer, depression, and bi- polar conditions are even more vulnerable to those who use our posts with malicious intent. Such events can place a person at “risk” even though this may not be the absolute intention of the perpetrator. That will be of little comfort to the family of anyone who ceases to see their lives as worth living and partakes in the ultimate tragedy.

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