

CREATING BOUNDARIES WITH *Social Media*



Finding purpose and living a healthy and happy life is what many are thriving for. However, **a rise in cognitive disorders and obesity is becoming the reality for some** and **social media is likely decreasing life satisfaction**. Find out how.

Learning is such an insightful and meaningful process. You learn new things at every stage of your development and it's been an integral part of every aspect of your life. In today's age of information, it's become easier to satisfy your curiosities and to create your own personal inquiry projects.



You may have grown up thinking of learning as something you do to acquire information, but it's also a way for you to develop certain behaviours and characteristics.

B.F. SKINNER AND OPERANT LEARNING

Skinner was an American behavioural psychologist. He was interested in learning more about how the consequences of people's actions influenced their behaviours.

This later became known as operant conditioning - a type of learning where rewards and punishments are used to acknowledge certain behaviours.

Skinner invented the 'Skinner box,' an enclosed apparatus with a key or a lever that an animal could press to obtain food or some type of reinforcement. There was also a device that recorded each response provided by the animal. Over time the animal (a pigeon in this case) learned that by pulling the lever, they would be rewarded with food. Later, Skinner incorporated green and red lights into his experiment. When the lever was pulled as the green light flashed the animal would be rewarded with food. When the lever was pulled when the red light flashed, the

animal was punished with an electrical shock. Over time the animal learned to avoid pressing the lever when the light was red.

Through this experiment, Skinner learned that specific consequences are associated with voluntary behaviours in natural settings. This meant that rewards increased a behaviour and punishments decreased a behaviour.

REINFORCEMENT SCHEDULES

Skinner went on to discover that the timing and frequency of reinforcements influenced how new behaviours were learned and old behaviours were modified.

There are four schedules of partial reinforcements that impact the operant conditioning process.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS DESIGNED TO GAIN ATTENTION FROM THE REWARD CENTER OF YOUR BRAIN AND TO KEEP YOU HOOKED

1. **Fixed-ratio schedules** - Responses are reinforced only after a certain number of responses have occurred, i.e. receiving a gold star after turning in homework for five days in a row.
2. **Fixed-interval schedules** - Responses occur after a certain amount of time has passed, i.e. cleaning your room every Friday because you know you will receive a present.
3. **Variable-ratio schedules** - Reinforcing a behaviour after a varied amount of responses. This keeps you motivated, i.e. your teacher rewarding your class with pizza on any given day for consistent positive work habits. (unpredictable). Gambling is another good example.
4. **Variable-interval schedules** - Providing reinforcement after an unpredictable amount of time has passed, i.e. being given a treat after an unpredictable amount of time has passed between you doing something nice for someone at work/school.

UNDERSTANDING THE REWARD CENTER OF YOUR BRAIN

There are 'reward circuits' at the top of your brain stem called the ventral tegmental area (VTA) comprising of the amygdala and the nucleus accumbens it's where dopamine (a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and rewards) communicates with dopamine producing neurons.

The dopamine is later transported to areas of your brain through two dopamine pathways: mesolimbic and mesocortical. In the 1950's it was recognized that dopamine neurons are activated in your brain when it is exposed to pleasure and rewards. This is why certain actions such as: eating certain types of foods, ingesting certain drugs, sex and gambling give you a 'feel good' experience.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS DESIGNED THE WAY IT IS

Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter all may be used for different purposes, but they are designed with four things in mind: trigger, action, attention and investment.

- **Trigger** - a human need for everyone is to belong. In other words, you crave acceptance - well all do. Social media creates a community where you can easily be recognized.
- **Action** - you go on social media to share something, or to see what others are doing.
- **Attention** - you are rewarded with likes, comments and follows, your attention is now captured.
- **Investment** - the more you spend time and money, the more market research social media outlets acquire.

Social media follows a **variable-ratio schedule** similar to slot machines. You receive likes, follows, comments and DMs at random times and the swipe down feature to refresh acts like the lever to pull on slot machines. Having an *AHA* moment now?



ARE YOU EXHIBITING ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOURS WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE? (IF YOU FREQUENTLY EXPERIENCE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE YOU MAY NEED TO SET BOUNDARIES).

- Feelings of unworthiness
- Constantly refreshing and checking your social media feeds
- Posting selfies just to receive likes
- Having the need to be on social media during times of productivity
- Comparing yourself to others
- Having trouble with accepting your body
- Afraid to reveal your flaws and imperfections
- Easily influenced by celebrities and influencers showcasing aesthetic appeal as oppose to embracing the natural
- You feel the need to post pictures about every aspect of your day to feel accepted and recognized
- You look for sources of gossip and drama to satisfy your needs to appear normal compared to...

HERE ARE 10 WAYS TO SET BOUNDARIES WITH YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA HABITS

#1 Turn off notifications. Red is a 'need to take immediate action' colour. By turning off your notifications, you won't be distracted as much when you are trying to be productive.

#2 Unfollow accounts that don't provide you with any value. It's a fact that social media algorithms constantly show you accounts with the most 'juice' - nudes, dramatic headlines, etc. because it keeps you hooked but doesn't give you any added value.

#3 Be clear of your intentions. Each time you feel the need to post a selfie or to create a post that doesn't 100% reveal your true reality - ask yourself, why? Accept what you're really feeling and seek other ways to feel accepted and self-worthy. Consider speaking to a counsellor or a close friend.

#4 Create a social media schedule. If you are compelled to share what you think is beneficial information - set certain times of the week to post. And if getting the information across is important to you, you don't need to constantly be checking for likes. Post and walk away.

#5 Avoid liking posts of people you don't know. This is how the algorithm hooks you. Each time you like a post your behaviours and possible interests get analyzed and you see more of what you've liked on your feed leading you towards mindless scrolling.

#6 Replace social media with wellness habits. Spend time going for walks, or being in the company of your family and friends face-to-face.

#7 Create big life goals for yourself. By doing so, you will have a vision of yourself and your time will be spent in action towards your goals rather than in reaction to pointless posts.

#8 Communicate via text. Keep in touch with with text messages or phone calls. This way you have more control of your time and attention.

#9 Volunteer your time. If you want to increase your confidence and feel more self-worthy, altruism has proven to be the best way!

#10 Make time to learn. Develop more wisdom on things that are of interest to you.