center for
**integrative whole
person development**

**mind-body
wellness**
long island

Change Your Algorithm, Change Your Life - Mindfully Navigating Social Media for Better Health

Joshua Hendrickson, PHD, LCSW

www.mbwli.com   www.integratedwholeperson.com

Objectives

- Examining the effects of social media on mental health.
- Introducing professionals to the mechanisms through which algorithms shape online experiences.
- Providing actionable strategies for mindful social media use.
- Equipping participants to support clients in developing healthier digital habits.

Understanding Social Media's Mental Health Impact

- *Adolescent Mental Health*: Studies indicate that adolescents spending more than 3 hours daily on social media are at a higher risk for anxiety and depression (JAMA Psychiatry).

- *Impact* of social media on children and teens' brain development, self-esteem, and social skills.

- *Sleep Disruption*: Research links high social media usage, especially before bed, to poor sleep quality, impacting emotional regulation and stress tolerance (Journal of Youth and Adolescence).

- *Algorithmic Influence*: Algorithms prioritize emotionally charged content, prolonged exposure which can reinforce stress and anxiety. Studies reveal that exposure to fear-inducing or controversial posts increases mental strain (American Psychological Association).

Key Mechanisms:

- *Emotionally Charged Content*: Algorithms amplify posts that elicit strong emotions, creating an environment ripe for heightened stress and anxiety.
- *Echo Chambers*: Personalized feeds create feedback loops where users primarily see content aligned with past interactions, reinforcing beliefs and potentially skewing perception.
- *Social Comparison and Validation-Seeking*: Platforms encourage users to seek likes and comments, contributing to anxiety and validation dependence.
- *Time Spent and Algorithmic Addiction*: Endless scrolling and video loops lead to prolonged use, which can trigger negative emotions and reduce productivity.

Practical Applications: Strategies and Experiential Practices

- Step 1: Assessing Personal and Client Social Media Habits
- Step 2: Strategies for Mindful Social Media Use
- Step 3: Reprogramming Algorithms for Healthier Content
- Step 4: Transferring Skills: Supporting Clients in Developing Healthy Social Media Boundaries
- Step 5:Reflection and Practice

Share a Personal or Professional Experience

Briefly share one experience—either personal or client-related—that illustrates how social media has impacted their mental health or the mental health of someone they work with.

This experience might involve:
- Feeling overwhelmed after a long scrolling session.
- Noticing a shift in self-esteem or body image due to comparison with social media influencers.
- Seeing clients struggle with anxiety or depressive symptoms worsened by social media consumption.

Client Struggles with Body Image

I once worked with a teen client who was struggling with body image. She followed numerous fitness and beauty influencers on Instagram, all with highly curated and edited photos. She began comparing her appearance to these images, which negatively impacted her self-esteem. This led to her feeling dissatisfied with her own body and even skipping meals to look more like the influencers she followed. We eventually worked on unfollowing these accounts and focusing on content that promote body positivity, which helped her self-image significantly.

Client's Social Comparison Leading to Anxiety

I had a young adult client who frequently compared her life with those of her peers on social media. She felt pressure to keep up with others' 'highlight reels,' which often showcased promotions, engagements, and vacations. This comparison led her to question her own life choices, feel inadequate, and develop anxiety. Through therapy, we worked on reframing her views of social media, recognizing that these posts didn't represent the full picture. She also reduced her usage, which helped her regain self-confidence.

Social Media and Unrealistic Standards in Parenting

A client who was a new mother felt overwhelmed and inadequate after seeing parenting content on social media. She followed several 'mom influencers' who shared perfectly organized, curated photos of their lives, which made her feel she was failing at motherhood. We worked on helping her identify accounts that represented more realistic portrayals of parenting. This shift reduced her feelings of guilt and pressure to achieve unrealistic standards

Personal Experience of Anxiety from News Feed Scrolling

In my own life, I noticed a pattern of feeling increasingly anxious after scrolling through news feeds late at night. I would read articles about global crises, political arguments, and sometimes emotionally charged posts that kept me awake thinking about them. This pattern made it hard to fall asleep, as I was left tense and overstimulated. I started setting a boundary of no social media after 8 PM, and that simple change has improved my sleep quality

Evidence-Based Research and Practical Stories

- **The "Social Comparison Effect"**
  A study published in *Personality and Individual Differences* found that people who spend more time on social media tend to engage in social comparison, which can lead to negative feelings about themselves. This effect is particularly strong when users compare their lives to carefully curated and often idealized images posted by others, leading to feelings of inadequacy.
- **Instagram and Depression Among Teens**
  Research by the *Royal Society for Public Health* in the UK indicated that Instagram, among other social media platforms, is linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues, especially among teenagers. The study suggested that the visual focus of Instagram amplifies body image issues and creates a pressure to maintain a "perfect" online presence.
- **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Anxiety**
  A study published in *Computers in Human Behavior* examined the link between social media and the "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO). Researchers found that FOMO, exacerbated by seeing friends' social activities online, leads to higher levels of anxiety, as individuals feel they are missing out on exciting events or experiences.
- **Sleep Disturbances**
  A study published in *Journal of Youth Studies* explored how social media usage, especially late at night, can disrupt sleep patterns. Participants reported staying up late to engage with social media, which led to sleep disturbances, fatigue, and an increased risk of depression and anxiety.
- **Cyberbullying and Loneliness**
  According to a study in *Journal of Adolescent Health*, young people who experience cyberbullying on social media are more likely to report feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and depression. The anonymity provided by social media can often exacerbate bullying behaviors, further impacting mental health.

Assessing Personal and Client Social Media Habits

Time Spent on Platforms

1. Which social media platforms do I spend the most time on, and why?
2. How much time do I typically spend on social media each day, and am I aware of this usage while it's happening?

Emotional and Mental Reactions

1. What emotions do I feel immediately after spending time on social media?
2. How do certain types of content or interactions make me feel?

Behavioral Patterns

1. Are there specific times of day or situations when I am most likely to check social media?
2. What habits do I notice in my social media use? Do I tend to scroll passively, interact actively, or use it as a tool for information?

Exercise #1: Draw Your Relationship with Social Media
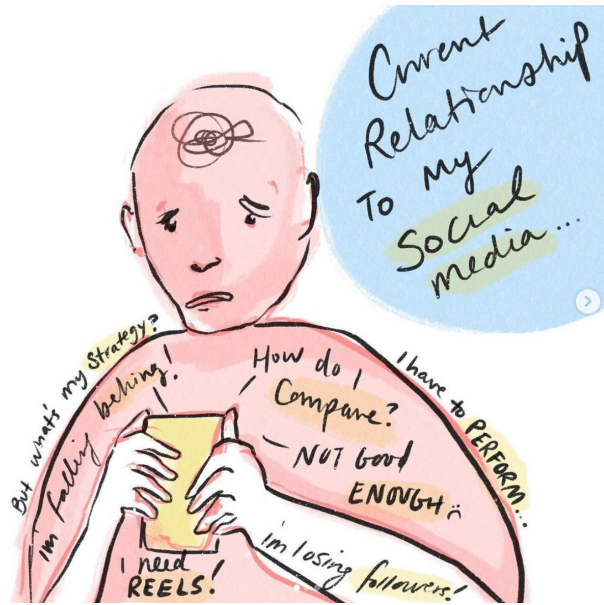
Questions for goal setting and healthier social media use

- What changes, if any, do I want to make to my own social media habits?
- How can I incorporate this reflection exercise into my work with clients?
- What specific goals can I set to limit my daily social media use?
- How can I create a more positive and supportive social media environment?
- What strategies can I use to replace mindless scrolling with more intentional actions?

Step 2
Mindful Social Media Use: Strategies for Change

Mindful Scrolling

Pause and Notice Method

Emotion Check-Ins

Setting Intentions Before Logging On

Awareness of Scroll Traps

Reflection

- Recognize patterns they may not have noticed before.
- Build self-awareness around emotional triggers related to social media.
- Develop self-compassion and understanding of how widespread these challenges are.
- Set goals for healthier digital engagement, such as setting boundaries around use or cultivating a more positive feed.

Step 3

Reprogramming Algorithms for Healthier Content

Curating Feeds

- **Feed Audit**
- **Following Positive**
- **Inspiring Content**
- **Setting Filters and Notifications**
- **Adjusting Privacy Settings**

Key Steps for Algorithm Reprogramming

- **Intentional Engagement**: Consistently engage with content that aligns with mental health and well-being goals, like mental health advocates, inspiring quotes, or educational material.
- **Building a Positive Feedback Loop**: Regularly interact with supportive or constructive content to signal the algorithm to show more of this type.
- **Avoiding Negative Triggers**: Avoid interacting with content that triggers stress or anxiety, as any engagement can increase its visibility.
- **Use "Hide" and "Snooze" Functions**: Hide or snooze specific posts or accounts to filter out negative content without unfollowing.

Key Steps for Algorithm Reprogramming

- **Report Inappropriate Content**: Report harmful or inappropriate posts to remove them from your feed and promote community safety.
- **Setting Boundaries with People or Pages**: Mute or unfollow connections sharing divisive or negative content to reinforce boundaries.
- **Explore Mental Health and Wellness Hashtags**: Search for and engage with hashtags related to wellness and mental health to influence the algorithm positively.
- **Follow and Interact with Wellness and Educational Accounts**: Engage with accounts focusing on personal growth, mental health, or skill development.
- **Engage with "Feel-Good" Content**: Interact with joyful, inspiring content like art, nature, music, or humor to improve mood and increase similar content in the feed.

Reflection

- *What surprised you most about this experience?*
- *What changes did you make to your feed, and how did it feel to adjust these settings?*
- *How might you use these strategies with clients, especially those struggling with anxiety or self-esteem issues?*

Intentional Interactions

Purposeful Engagement
Avoiding Hate Watching or Negative Engagement
Selective Following and Unfollowing

Recommendations for Future Application:

- Integrate these techniques into regular client sessions to foster ongoing mindful engagement.

- Consider offering follow-up workshops to reinforce strategies and address evolving social media features.

- Encourage collaboration and peer support within the professional community to share progress and insights on digital wellness.

Current Government Policies Addressing Algorithmic Influence on Mental Health

Governments are increasingly recognizing the impact of social media algorithms on mental health and are implementing policies to mitigate potential harms:

United States: In May 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory highlighting concerns about social media's effects on youth mental health. The advisory calls for technology companies to prioritize user health and safety in the design and development of social media products and services.
HHS

New York State: In June 2024, New York lawmakers passed the Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation (SAFE) for Kids Act, requiring social media platforms to obtain parental consent before exposing users under 18 to addictive algorithmic content. A companion bill, the New York Child Data Protection Act, restricts the collection and use of minors' personal data. Governor Kathy Hochul emphasized the necessity of these measures to address youth mental health issues and create a safer digital environment.
Reuters

International Efforts: The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a report in December 2023 recommending the development of industry-wide standards for social media platform design, transparency, and data use to minimize harm and maximize benefits to adolescent health.
National Academies

Follow-Up Support and Contact Information

- **Workshop Contact Information**: For questions, further guidance, or resources, please reach out to Dr. Hendrickson via email Josh@mbwli.com

CEU Request

Social Media's Impact on Mental Health

Overview

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, offering opportunities for connection, entertainment, and learning. However, research suggests that social media can have significant effects on mental health, both positive and negative. It is essential to understand how these platforms impact mental well-being, how to manage these effects, and ways to use social media mindfully.

Positive Impacts of Social Media on Mental Health

1. **Social Connection and Support**
   - Social media allows individuals to stay connected with family, friends, and online communities, fostering a sense of belonging (Primack et al., 2017).
   - Online communities can offer emotional support, particularly for people dealing with mental health conditions, chronic illness, or marginalized identities (Naslund et al., 2016).
2. **Access to Mental Health Resources**
   - Social media provides access to mental health information, resources, and advocacy efforts, promoting awareness and destigmatization of mental health issues (Barak et al., 2008).
   - Educational content and mental health discussions on social media can empower individuals to seek help and adopt healthier behaviors (Andrade et al., 2017).
3. **Inspiration and Motivation**
   - Positive content, including motivational quotes, fitness challenges, and wellness tips, can encourage personal growth and mental well-being (Fuchs et al., 2020).
   - Social media platforms enable users to engage with content that aligns with their values and goals, enhancing self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2020).

Negative Impacts of Social Media on Mental Health

1. **Increased Feelings of Anxiety and Depression**
   - ○ Extensive use of social media has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, especially among young people (Twenge et al., 2017).
   - ○ Social comparison, where individuals compare themselves to the often idealized versions of others' lives, contributes to negative emotions and mental health challenges (Vogel et al., 2014).
2. **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment**
   - ○ Social media platforms can be environments for cyberbullying, harassment, and trolling, leading to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and distress (Kowalski et al., 2014).
   - ○ The anonymity of the internet can exacerbate harmful behaviors and lead to lasting emotional damage (Pabian et al., 2015).
3. **Addiction and Overuse**
   - ○ Social media can be addictive, with excessive use linked to feelings of isolation, disrupted sleep, and decreased productivity (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).
   - ○ "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) is common, causing individuals to compulsively check social media for updates, leading to stress and disrupted routines (Przybylski et al., 2013).
4. **Sleep Disruption**
   - ○ Studies show that late-night social media use can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to poor sleep quality, which negatively affects mental health (LeBourgeois et al., 2017).
   - ○ The blue light emitted by screens interferes with melatonin production, making it harder for individuals to fall asleep and rest properly.

Managing Social Media's Mental Health Impact

1. **Mindful Social Media Use**
   - ○ Engage intentionally by limiting passive scrolling and focusing on content that aligns with personal values and mental health goals (Fuchs et al., 2020).
   - ○ Set time limits and boundaries for social media use to avoid overuse and ensure it does not interfere with other aspects of life (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).
2. **Curating Content**
   - ○ Regularly audit social media feeds to unfollow accounts that promote negativity or anxiety, and replace them with uplifting, supportive content (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2020).
   - ○ Follow educational, mental health, or hobby-related accounts that provide positive influences and create a healthier digital environment (Naslund et al., 2016).
3. **Privacy and Boundaries**
   - ○ Adjust privacy settings to limit exposure to unwanted interactions and control who can comment, message, or tag you in posts (Smith et al., 2017).

- ○ Consider muting or blocking accounts that share harmful content or trigger negative emotions (Przybylski et al., 2013).
  4. **Promoting Positive Interactions**
     - ○ Engage with content that encourages well-being, such as motivational stories or educational material on mental health (Andrade et al., 2017).
     - ○ Avoid engaging with negative or inflammatory posts, as any interaction can reinforce harmful algorithms and increase exposure to distressing content (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2020).

Social media has a profound impact on mental health, both positively and negatively. While it offers avenues for connection, learning, and support, it can also contribute to anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges when misused. Mindfully engaging with social media, curating content, setting boundaries, and maintaining privacy can help reduce negative effects and foster a healthier relationship with these platforms.

References

Andrade, C., & Narayan, J. (2017). Social media and its impact on mental health: A review. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 78(3), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.4088/JCP.16r10822

Barak, A., Hen, L., & Boniel-Nissim, M. (2008). A comprehensive review and a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of internet-based mental health interventions. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 26(2-4), 109-160. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228830802094429

Brailovskaia, J., & Margraf, J. (2020). Social media use and mental health in adolescence: A longitudinal study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 112, 106456. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106456

Fuchs, C., et al. (2020). The effects of social media on well-being: A review of the literature. *Social Media + Society*, 6(4), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120956010

Kowalski, R. M., et al. (2014). Cyberbullying: A review of the literature. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 7, 5-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.01.015

Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). Social networking sites and addiction: Ten lessons learned. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(3), 311. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14030311

LeBourgeois, M. K., et al. (2017). Digital media and sleep in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 140(1), e20170003. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0003

Naslund, J. A., et al. (2016). The effectiveness of social media in addressing mental health issues: A review of the literature. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 34(1), 33-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2016.1125369

Pabian, S., et al. (2015). Social media use and the risk of cyberbullying: A review of the literature. *Journal of Social Media in Society*, 4(2), 145-160.

Przybylski, A. K., et al. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral outcomes associated with media use. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 16(9), 637-644. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0158

Smith, A., et al. (2017). Privacy settings and online safety among social media users. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org

Twenge, J. M., et al. (2017). Social media use and mental health: The impact on adolescents. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 5(6), 1010-1024. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702617715671

Vogel, E. A., et al. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(4), 206-222. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000037

Basics of Social Media Algorithms

1. **Content Prioritization**
   ○ Social media algorithms analyze massive amounts of data to decide which content appears first or is prioritized in a user's feed. These systems typically favor posts with high engagement (likes, shares, comments) because high interaction indicates popular or relevant content.
   ○ Algorithms also weigh factors such as recency, meaning newer posts may be prioritized to keep content fresh and relevant. Additionally, they consider content format—videos, for instance, may rank higher because they tend to retain users' attention longer than static images or text.
   ○ Relationships are also key: content from close friends or frequently interacted-with accounts is often prioritized over other content to increase engagement.

2. **Tracking Engagement**
   ○ Algorithms monitor every interaction a user has on the platform, including likes, shares, comments, time spent on certain posts, and even "pauses" over content. These data points are used to determine a user's preferences and personalize their experience.
   ○ Engagement tracking extends to what a user skips or ignores, which can indicate disinterest. For instance, if a user scrolls past a particular topic or source repeatedly, the algorithm may reduce the presence of similar content in their feed.
   ○ Negative interactions, such as reporting or hiding posts, are also factored in to fine-tune what is shown.

3. **Targeting and Personalization**
   ○ Social media platforms use algorithms to target users with content and ads that align with their interests, demographic data, and past behaviors. By analyzing likes, follows, and engagement history, algorithms create a profile that advertisers and content creators use to reach specific audiences.
   ○ This targeted approach is designed to maximize ad relevance, making users more likely to interact with promoted content. Targeted ads rely on user-provided data and inferred interests to match users with products, services, or topics.

The Feedback Loop in Social Media Algorithms

1. **Algorithm-Driven Content Reinforcement**
   - When a user engages with specific types of content (e.g., fitness tips or fashion trends), the algorithm interprets these interactions as a preference, reinforcing that type of content in the user's feed. This creates a feedback loop where the more a user engages with certain topics, the more they are shown similar content.
   - Over time, this reinforcement can lead to "filter bubbles," where users are shown a limited range of content that aligns with their past behaviors, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives.
2. **Emotional and Behavioral Impact**
   - Algorithms are optimized to keep users engaged as long as possible, often by promoting emotionally charged content, as it typically generates higher engagement. This could mean users are exposed to more sensational or controversial posts, which can influence their mood or stress levels.
   - The feedback loop can also impact a user's self-perception and behaviors, as frequent exposure to certain ideals or lifestyles may shape their attitudes or aspirations over time.
3. **Self-Sustaining Engagement Cycle**
   - As algorithms continuously learn and adjust to user behavior, they become more effective at predicting and prompting further engagement, creating a cycle of sustained attention. This loop encourages repetitive behaviors, such as scrolling or frequent app usage, as users are consistently shown content they are likely to engage with.
   - Breaking the cycle requires conscious effort, such as engaging mindfully, limiting screen time, and curating one's feed to prioritize healthier, more balanced content.

Additional Resource:

https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/how-much-do-social-media-algorithms-control-you/above-the-noise-video/

Hendrickson, J. (2024). *Change Your Algorithm, Change Your Life: Mindfully Navigating Social Media for Better Health* [Workshop]. Whole Child Mind-Body Wellness, New York, NY

Privacy Settings on Facebook and Instagram

1. **Adjusting Profile Privacy**:
    ○ **Facebook**: Go to Settings > Privacy Settings. Select "Who can see your future posts?" and choose "Friends" or "Only Me" for higher privacy. You can also limit past posts by choosing to restrict older posts to "Friends" only.
    ○ **Instagram**: Go to Settings > Privacy > Account Privacy, and toggle on "Private Account." This makes the account visible only to approved followers.
2. **Controlling Comments and Messages**:
    ○ **Facebook**: Under Settings > Privacy > Public Posts, select who can comment on public posts (e.g., Friends, Friends of Friends, or custom groups). Under Settings > Privacy > Message Controls, limit message requests by selecting "Friends of Friends" or "Friends."
    ○ **Instagram**: Go to Settings > Privacy > Comments. Use "Block Comments From" to prevent specific accounts from commenting on your posts. For messages, go to Settings > Privacy > Messages to choose who can send message requests (e.g., only followers or people you follow).
3. **Tagging and Content Control**:
    ○ **Facebook**: Under Settings > Profile and Tagging, control who can tag you in posts and who can see posts you're tagged in. You can also enable "Tag Review" to approve tags before they appear on your profile.
    ○ **Instagram**: In Settings > Privacy > Posts, select "Manually Approve Tags" to control which photos and videos you're tagged in. This requires you to manually approve tags before they appear on your profile.
4. **Location Privacy**:
    ○ **Facebook and Instagram**: In both apps, you can turn off location permissions entirely in your phone's settings if you prefer to keep location information private. This ensures that posts won't include location data, and you won't receive location-based ads or recommendations.

Notification Filtering on Facebook and Instagram

1. **Turning Off Non-Essential Notifications**:

- ○ **Facebook**: Go to Settings > Notifications to customize which notifications you receive, such as likes, friend requests, or comments. Choose "Push," "Email," or "SMS" for each type, or turn them off entirely if they aren't essential.
- ○ **Instagram**: In Settings > Notifications, toggle off notifications for likes, comments, or new followers. This reduces interruptions and creates a more peaceful experience.

2. **Prioritizing Important Notifications**:
   - ○ **Facebook**: You can customize notifications for close friends by marking certain profiles as "Close Friends" (go to their profile, select Friends > Edit Friend Lists > Close Friends). This allows you to receive notifications only from people you're closest to, reducing less important updates.
   - ○ **Instagram**: Use the "Close Friends" list in your Stories settings, enabling you to limit updates to a select group. You can also prioritize notifications from specific accounts by going to their profile, selecting "Following," and turning on notifications for their posts or stories only.

3. **Enabling Quiet Mode or Do Not Disturb**:
   - ○ **Facebook**: Under Settings > Your Time on Facebook, you can enable "Quiet Mode" to silence notifications during specific times (e.g., during work hours or evenings).
   - ○ **Instagram**: In Settings > Your Activity > Manage Your Time, set up reminders to take breaks from the app and schedule "Do Not Disturb" times to limit notifications.

Hendrickson, J. (2024). *Change Your Algorithm, Change Your Life: Mindfully Navigating Social Media for Better Health* [Workshop]. Whole Child Mind-Body Wellness, New York, NY

Shift your Engagement

1. Mindful Scrolling

- **Stay Aware of Your Scrolling Pace**: Instead of rushing through content, scroll slowly and take a moment to fully process each post before moving to the next. This helps you become more deliberate with your time and focus, giving you a chance to appreciate meaningful content and avoid information overload.
- **Take Breaks to Reflect**: As you scroll, periodically pause to reflect on how the content you've seen makes you feel. If you notice that certain posts are leaving you tense, frustrated, or overly self-critical, it may be a sign to adjust the type of content you're engaging with.

2. Pause and Notice Method

- **Pause Before Reacting**: When you come across a post that provokes a strong reaction—whether positive or negative—pause for a moment before responding. Use this time to observe your initial thoughts and feelings, which helps prevent impulsive reactions and encourages thoughtful engagement.
- **Observe Without Judgment**: In the pause, practice observing your response to the content without judgment. For instance, if you feel envious of someone's post, simply acknowledge it without guilt. This step fosters self-awareness and helps you understand your emotional triggers on social media.

3. Emotion Check-Ins

- **Assess Your Mood Before and After Scrolling**: Before you start scrolling, take a moment to note your emotional state—are you feeling calm, anxious, happy, or stressed? Repeat this check after you've spent time on social media. If you find your mood consistently worsens after scrolling, it may be time to reevaluate the type of content or accounts you engage with.
- **Track Patterns in Your Responses**: Over time, you may notice recurring patterns in how different types of content affect your mood. Use these insights to adjust your feed—engage more with content that uplifts you and minimize interactions with content that triggers negative emotions.

4. Setting Intentions Before Logging On

- **Define Your Purpose for Each Session**: Before opening a social media app, set a clear intention for what you want to accomplish. Are you looking to connect with friends, learn something new, or just relax? A clear purpose can guide your interactions and help you avoid unintentional scrolling.

- **Limit Browsing Time for Specific Purposes**: Assign a timeframe for each specific intention, whether it's five minutes to check in on friends or ten minutes for news updates. Having a set purpose and time limit creates boundaries and helps you stay on track without falling into the scroll trap.

5. Awareness of Scroll Traps

- **Recognize Infinite Scrolling Features**: Many social media platforms are designed to keep you engaged indefinitely with features like endless scrolling and suggested content. Being aware of this design helps you remain conscious of when it's time to stop.
- **Set Physical Cues to Help You Stop**: Use physical cues, like taking a deep breath or putting down your phone, to break the scrolling loop when you notice yourself getting caught. You could also set a timer or use a "social media wellness" app to remind you when it's time to take a break.
- **Identify Your Triggers for Mindless Scrolling**: Notice what triggers you to engage in mindless scrolling—boredom, stress, or procrastination, for example. Once you recognize your triggers, you can be proactive in redirecting that energy to something more fulfilling or relaxing, such as reading a book or going for a walk.

Algorithm Reprogramming: Creating a Healthier Social Media Feed

Take control of your social media experience by actively shaping the content that appears in your feed. Through mindful engagement, intentional content searches, and personalized settings, you can reduce exposure to negative or unwanted posts and cultivate a digital space that supports your well-being. This guide will help you engage with positive content, hide or report posts that don't serve you, and adjust your privacy and notification settings to foster a more balanced and uplifting social media environment.

Step 1: Engagement and Content Curation

1. **Engage with Positive Content**
   ○ Scroll through your feed and look for positive content that aligns with your values or interests, such as posts about mental health, uplifting news, or educational resources.
   ○ Interact with these posts—like, comment, or share. Engaging with this type of content tells the algorithm to show you more of it in the future.
2. **Hide or Report Content That Doesn't Serve You**
   ○ Find a piece of content that doesn't support your well-being, such as a stressful news post or an unwanted advertisement.
   ○ Hide or report it. Choosing to hide or report helps the algorithm understand your preferences and deprioritize content that doesn't align with your goals.
3. **Search Intentionally for New Content**
   ○ Think of a topic that aligns with your interests or well-being (e.g., mental health resources, mindfulness practices, or professional tips).
   ○ Use the search function to find and engage with posts related to this topic, or follow accounts that provide relevant content. This signals the algorithm to include more of these topics in your feed.

Step 2: Reflect on Feed Adjustments

1. **Refresh and Observe Immediate Changes**
   ○ After making these adjustments, refresh your feed and see if you notice any immediate changes in the types of posts shown. Even minor shifts can indicate that the algorithm is beginning to adapt to your preferences.
2. **Evaluate Positive and Negative Content**

- Reflect on what you're seeing: are there posts that feel particularly positive or inspiring? Are there any accounts you realize you'd like to engage with more or less? Use these insights to refine your future interactions.

Step 3: Set Boundaries and Filters

1. **Adjust Privacy and Notification Settings**
   - Go to your social media settings and explore privacy and notification options.
   - Adjust these settings so you receive notifications only for meaningful interactions, like messages from friends or updates from educational accounts. This can help reduce distractions and encourage intentional engagement.
2. **Use "Snooze" or "Mute" Options**
   - Locate the snooze or mute feature for accounts that occasionally post stressful or negative content.
   - Use this option to temporarily mute accounts without unfollowing them, allowing you to stay connected without being overexposed to triggering material.
3. **Limit "Suggested" Content**
   - Many platforms let you limit suggestions for specific topics.
   - Adjust your preferences to prevent unwanted themes from appearing in your feed, which can help create a more positive and personalized experience.

1. Foster Purposeful Engagement

- **Engage with Intention**: Before liking, commenting, or sharing a post, pause to consider if it aligns with your values or interests. Focus on content that uplifts, educates, or inspires you.
- **Set Goals for Social Media Use**: Identify what you want to gain from social media (e.g., learning, staying connected, or finding inspiration) and engage with content that supports these goals.
- **Schedule Engagement Times**: Instead of mindlessly scrolling, set specific times for checking your feed. This helps prevent impulsive engagement and makes each interaction more meaningful.

2. Avoid Hate Watching or Negative Engagement

- **Identify Your Triggers**: Be mindful of content that provokes negative emotions, such as frustration, jealousy, or anger. Recognize these triggers and avoid engaging with similar content.
- **Challenge the Urge to "Hate Watch"**: If you find yourself watching content that frustrates you or makes you feel bad, remind yourself that engagement with this content can encourage the algorithm to show more of it. Instead, scroll past or hide the post.
- **Focus on Constructive Comments**: When you do engage with content, aim for positive or constructive comments. This can help keep your online interactions uplifting and aligned with your well-being.

3. Practice Selective Following and Unfollowing

- **Audit Your Follow List Regularly**: Periodically review the accounts you follow and assess whether they still add value to your life. Unfollow accounts that don't align with your interests or well-being goals.
- **Follow with Purpose**: Only follow accounts that genuinely inspire, educate, or support your growth. Avoid following accounts out of obligation or because others are following them.
- **Mute Instead of Unfollowing When Needed**: If you want to limit exposure to certain accounts without completely unfollowing (e.g., friends or family members), use the mute or snooze feature. This allows you to manage your feed without causing social friction.

Social Media Research

Algorithmic Reinforcement

- Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2020). *Defining "Fake News": A typology of scholarly definitions.* Digital Journalism, 8(2), 137-161.
  - This study examines how algorithms prioritize emotionally charged content, like fear-inducing or outrage-provoking posts, which are more likely to be shared and engaged with. The authors discuss how these algorithms amplify sensational content to increase user engagement.
- Bickham, D. S., & Rich, M. (2021). *Meeting the challenge of screen media time for children and adolescents.* JAMA Pediatrics, 175(4), 340-341.
  - This paper explores the design of social media algorithms to maximize engagement by showing content that triggers strong emotional responses, leading to prolonged time on the platform. This behavior reinforces habits that can negatively impact mental health, particularly among young users.

Psychological Triggers

- Casale, S., & Banchi, V. (2020). *Narcissism and problematic social media use: A systematic literature review.* Addictive Behaviors Reports, 11, 100252.
  - This review discusses how social media platforms leverage psychological triggers like FOMO, social comparison, and addiction to feedback mechanisms (e.g., likes) to keep users engaged. The study highlights the impact of these mechanisms on stress responses and mood regulation, which can contribute to mood disorders.
- Marengo, D., Longobardi, C., Fabris, M. A., & Settanni, M. (2021). *Highly-visual social media and internalizing symptoms in adolescence: The mediating role of body image concerns.* Computers in Human Behavior, 122, 106839.
  - This study explores how social comparison and FOMO on visually oriented social media platforms (like Instagram) can affect adolescents' mental health by increasing stress and body image concerns, leading to anxiety and depression symptoms.

Neuroscience Insights

- Turel, O., & Bechara, A. (2020). *Social media addiction and the brain: A review and future directions.* Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 24(3), 226-237.
  - This review provides insights into how social media use can trigger dopamine release, reinforcing addictive behavior patterns. The paper discusses the neurobiological mechanisms that underpin habitual social media use and how they relate to reward pathways in the brain, potentially leading to addiction and mental health concerns.

- Montag, C., & Diefenbach, S. (2019). *Towards Homo Digitalis: Important research issues for psychology and the neurosciences at the dawn of the internet of things and the digital society.* Sustainability, 11(12), 3321.
    - This paper reviews evidence linking social media use to dopamine release and the reinforcement of habitual behaviors. The authors explore the neuroscientific basis of these addictive patterns and their potential effects on mental health, especially concerning the reward systems in the brain.

Further Reading: Articles, Studies, and Books

1. **Articles and Studies on Social Media and Mental Health**:
   ○ *"Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S."* (Primack et al., 2017): This study explores how social media usage correlates with feelings of loneliness and isolation. Available through the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*: Link to Article
   ○ *"Social Comparison, Social Media, and Self-Esteem"* (Vogel et al., 2014): This study examines the effects of social comparison on social media and its impacts on self-esteem. Published in *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*: Link to Article
   ○ *"The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Mental Health in Adolescents"* (Kelly et al., 2018): This paper highlights research on social media's effects on adolescents' mental health, including risks of depression and anxiety. Published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*: Link to Article
2. **Books on Digital Wellness and Social Media**:
   ○ *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* by Cal Newport: This book offers practical strategies for decluttering digital habits and finding greater satisfaction offline. Link to Book
   ○ *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* by Jaron Lanier: Lanier, a tech expert, discusses the downsides of social media and the benefits of reducing screen time. Link to Book
   ○ *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* by Jean M. Twenge: This book explores how social media and technology affect Gen Z's mental health and development. Link to Book

---

Digital Wellness Tools

1. **Time Management and Screen Tracking Apps**:
   ○ **Freedom**: A browser extension that blocks distracting websites and apps. Available for both mobile and desktop use. Freedom Website
   ○ **Moment**: A mobile app for tracking screen time and setting daily limits. Moment Website
   ○ **Forest**: An app that encourages focus by "planting trees" that grow when the user stays off their phone. Forest Website
2. **Mindfulness and Mental Health Apps**:

- **Calm**: A mindfulness app offering guided meditations, sleep stories, and breathing exercises. It also includes meditations specifically for digital wellness. [Calm Website](#)
- **Headspace**: A meditation app with guided exercises, including modules on digital mindfulness and reducing stress related to online interactions. [Headspace Website](#)
- **Happify**: A science-based app designed to help users build resilience and improve mental well-being through activities and games. [Happify Website](#)

3. **Content Filtering and Notification Management**:
   - **StayFocusd**: A Chrome extension that restricts time on specific websites, helping users control social media and other distractions. StayFocusd Website
   - **Focus@Will**: A music app that plays focus-enhancing music to improve concentration and reduce social media distractions. [Focus@Will Website](#)
   - **RescueTime**: An app that tracks time spent on websites and apps, providing insights on digital habits and offering customizable alerts to limit screen time. [RescueTime Website](#)

Professional Resources and Organizations

1. **The Center for Humane Technology**: Founded by former tech industry leaders, this organization raises awareness of technology's impact on mental health and offers resources for digital wellness. [Center for Humane Technology Website](#)
2. **Digital Wellness Collective**: A global organization dedicated to digital wellness, featuring a community of experts, tools, and research on managing screen time and improving digital mental health. [Digital Wellness Collective Website](#)
3. **Common Sense Media**: This nonprofit organization provides reviews, research, and resources for families and educators to help navigate media and technology's impact on children. [Common Sense Media Website](#)
4. **The Social Dilemma Resources**: This site provides tools, guides, and additional resources based on the documentary *The Social Dilemma*, which explores the effects of social media on society and mental health. [The Social Dilemma Resources](#)
5. **American Psychological Association (APA) Digital Guidelines**: APA offers guidelines on digital device usage, media literacy, and the effects of technology on mental health, particularly for youth. [APA Digital Guidelines](#)

Hendrickson, J. (2024). *Change Your Algorithm, Change Your Life: Mindfully Navigating Social Media for Better Health* [Workshop]. Whole Child Mind-Body Wellness, New York, NY