



PSYCHOLOGY

Escaping the Infinite Scroll • Escaping the Infinite Scroll •

We're addicted to social media.
How do we get sober?

BY ALLISON PARSHALL
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARI LILOAN

IN 2022, WHEN TOM WAS 32, HE WENT TO EXTREME LENGTHS TO DEFEAT HIS TECH addiction. He flew from his home in Michigan to a town outside Stockholm and gave up his devices for a three-month, self-directed “dopamine detox.” He did cold plunges, worked out and hiked—all without looking at his phone.

It was a grand display of his willpower over a technology that had taken over his life. What had started as regular media binges in college had spiraled out of control. His sleep schedule and relationships deteriorated, his obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) worsened, and he had begun to think of suicide. “I was just constantly in a battle for my sobriety,” he says. “Literally any imaginable thing, I tried it. And nothing worked.”

The Swedish detox didn’t work, either. Now that he’d felt the serenity of sobriety, he was sure that he could return to social media and video games in moderation once the three months were up. Why would he ever choose to go back? “But then of course, I found myself, as we say, ‘on my back’: on YouTube or on the Dead by Daylight video game, just bingeing, bingeing, unable to stop,” he says.

Eventually Tom found something that helped him get sober. At his most desperate point in 2025, he found two 12-step programs: Internet and Technology Addicts Anonymous (ITAA) and Media Addicts Anonymous. “Once I joined 12-steps, what happened was I learned how to let go,” he says. The advice he found in recovery programs’ “Big Book” allowed him to stop white-knuckling his sobriety, calm his OCD symptoms and take back his life.

I first attended an ITAA meeting in Manhattan on a sunny Saturday afternoon in March. I listened, intrigued and uncomfortable, as I compared people’s stories of compulsive screen use with my own. That week I had averaged nearly seven hours a day on my phone, outside of work. That was fine, I thought. I’d gotten really into a television show that winter and spent a lot of time chatting and creating with other fans on social media. Sure, I’d often go on TikTok for a “quick” scroll and get spat out hours later, hating myself for it. Sure, the first thing I’d do in the morning was turn on a podcast. But I didn’t have a problem. Right?

The first of the 12 steps is admitting that your relationship with your vice has become unmanageable. This is true in “anonymous” programs for addictions to alcohol, opioids and gambling and to technology such as social media. If our society as a

whole could follow the Big Book, this is the stage we’d be at right now: collectively, we are beginning to admit that we have a problem.

In March a landmark ruling in a California state court deemed social media addictive and, for the first time, held tech companies accountable for those harms. Meta, facing lawsuits from nearly every state in the U.S., agreed to a massive \$18-billion settlement in August that requires it to change how kids can interact with Instagram and Facebook. The list of countries that have banned these apps for children under a certain age—Australia, Turkey, Indonesia, the U.K.—continues to grow.

“We’ve clearly crossed a Rubicon,” says lawyer Matthew P. Bergman, founder of the Social Media Victims Law Center. And although scientists remain split on whether we should call all of this unhealthy social media use “addiction,” their research is starting to reveal who is most at risk of harm and how we can regain control of our digital lives.

How can we enforce a balance between the good and bad of online connection? In other words, how do we get sober? “I think this is the question of our time,” says psychology researcher Lina Christin Brockmeier of the University of Basel.

TO MEG, A 56-YEAR-OLD ITAA MEMBER from Wisconsin, Facebook isn’t that different from alcohol. She has been sober from alcohol since November 2, 1996, but when Facebook became available a decade later, there were signs that it could become her next addiction. Before her wedding in 2008, her family and friends warned her not to join yet. “They actually came to me together and said, ‘Meg, you have to wait until after the wedding to join

Allison Parshall
is associate editor
for mind and brain
at *Scientific American*.

this,” she says. “‘We don’t want you to put down your wedding decorations!’”

By 2018 she was solidly hooked. She posted about every aspect of her life, obsessing over the font and color of the text adorning her photographs, staying up all night and sleeping until 10 A.M. This left her husband to get their two children with special behavioral needs ready for school alone, which she saw as her responsibility as a stay-at-home mom. “I would wake up at 10 just feeling such shame, but I couldn’t stop it. I did it over and over,” she says. Decades after putting down alcohol, “this just felt like the same kind of addiction.”

Psychiatrists call these “behavioral” addictions. They don’t involve chemical dependence, but they can still get people hooked. In Washington, D.C., ITAA shares a meeting space with 12-step recovery programs called Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, Debtors Anonymous and Overeaters Anonymous. With the exception of gambling disorder, behavioral addictions have received slim recognition in psychiatry’s diagnostic manuals—although doctors and researchers often still treat them as legitimate and potentially devastating disorders.

Even in the Internet’s infancy, there were signs it could become the site of a new kind of behavioral addiction. On a 1997 Internet addiction questionnaire, respondents are asked if they have “spent at least 3 h on the Net at least twice.” Internet addiction, however, never became an officially diagnosable condition. Researchers found it too imprecise: you get addicted not to the Internet itself but to the things you do on it. But now, as everything online morphs into algorithmic social media, the case for concern has crystallized into something quite specific. “I don’t think ‘Internet addiction’ goes anywhere,” says Luke Clark, a psychologist at the University of British Columbia. “But when we start considering social media addiction, it becomes a tractable question.”

Clark, who studies gambling addiction, sees modern social media as engrossing in the same way as slot machines. Their main similarity is a variable reward system: every swipe could net you a reward or a disappointment, and that payoff occurs at unpredictable intervals. The rewards also come almost instantaneously, can happen in quick succession, and don’t contain any natural cues to stop because of the “infinite scroll” feature, he adds. These features of slot machines and For You pages pique the interest of neural circuitry originating deep in the brain, called the mesolimbic pathway. Here brain pathways tuned to salient information such as reward and uncertainty pass messages using the chemical dopamine that make us feel good.

We evolved this system so that we will seek out

information important for survival, and activating it is “the shared feature that all addictive drugs have,” says Paul Kenny, an addiction neuroscientist at the Mount Sinai Icahn School of Medicine. Although different drugs or addictive behaviors cause different patterns of activation across the whole brain, all of that activity ultimately funnels down to this deep-brain reward system, he explains. In a world flooded with hedonic products and possibilities, from cigarettes to junk food to bite-size media, it’s easy to throw this reward system out of balance.

Researchers often characterize addiction with six core aspects. It involves a *salient* behavior or drug that causes *mood modification* effects, which you develop *tolerance* to over time, leading to a cycle of *withdrawal* and craving-induced *relapse* that can cause *conflict* in your life.

This pattern of escalation is the hallmark of addiction for doctors and clinicians. Just using something excessively shouldn’t count—otherwise, you’d risk diagnosing people with healthy high enthusiasm. “These are people who spend as much time gaming as they do working in their life, but they’re not addicted to games,” says Mark Griffiths, a behavioral-addictions researcher retired from Nottingham Trent University in England. But our everyday definition of addiction is much more lax. We may use the word to hyperbolically refer to anything we do more than we probably should, like saying “I’m so addicted to *Love Island*,” says Angela Lee, a communications researcher at Stanford University.

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—MEG ITAA MEMBER

In the slew of social media addiction lawsuits brought against tech companies, including Meta and Google, plaintiffs’ lawyers are generally using a more colloquial version of the term “addiction.” “When I started doing this work [in 2021], we used the word but understood it to be a bad habit,” says Bergman, who leads the Social Media Victims Law Center. Still, Bergman says he’s come around to believing that these products cause widespread addiction in the more severe, clinical sense, too.

Yet these lawsuits don’t rest on proving that social media is addictive like cigarettes or gambling. Instead plaintiffs’ lawyers have focused on what tech companies knew about their products’ capacity to hook kids and how they proceeded regardless.

State attorneys general alleged that Meta covered up internal studies on the impact of Instagram on teenagers' mental health. In court, lawyers read out loud from internal documents saying that "teens are hooked despite how it makes them feel. Instagram is addictive." They also quoted other Meta documents stating that "problematic use" should be used instead of "addiction" because of the "legal risk" involved with that word. Instagram "is a drug," wrote one Meta employee in a work chat uncovered in court. The reply: "We're basically pushers."

Meta avoids the term "social media addiction" because medical authorities do not recognize it as a diagnosis, a spokesperson told me. They added that the company is continually working to reduce problematic use. As part of the \$18-billion settlement, Meta has agreed to turn off the Likes feature for teen accounts, as well as cap screen time at two hours a day, disable notifications during school hours and give teens the option of switching to a nonpersonalized feed. The company is explicitly incentivized to lobby its peers, Google and TikTok, to do the same.

The trials have focused on children and teens not only because they are particularly vulnerable to harm but also because they are a valuable demographic of users for social media companies. Researchers at Harvard University estimated that Instagram alone generated \$4 billion in revenue from users age 13 to 17 in 2022—and \$802 million from users 12 and younger, despite them not technically being allowed on the platform. One internal study from Meta revealed in the court cases was entitled "Long Term Retention: The Young Ones Are the Best Ones." In the words of a 2019 Meta presentation: "Teens talk of Instagram in terms of an 'addict's narrative' spending too much time indulging in a compulsive behavior that they know is negative but feel powerless to resist."

A FEW YEARS AGO most of the patients at Stanford University's youth addiction clinic were there for substance-use concerns. That has changed, says the clinic's director, psychiatrist Bradley Zicherman: "Here we are in 2026, and I'd say about half of my referrals are actually for screen addiction."

Other teen treatment centers have been flooded with tech-addicted patients, too. "The main thing that I was seeing was a lot of really young, bright people being sucked into this way of being that was really dampening their development as human beings," says psychologist Nicholas Kardaras, who has run a tech-addiction program in Austin called Omega Recovery since 2018.

Adolescence is an exquisitely sensitive time in

the brain's development. "The brain is so sensitive to social cues, to the sense of belonging, to rewards, to peers," says neuroscientist Eva Telzer, who co-directs a tech and teen development center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In the past few years she and her colleagues have gotten a close look at how problematic social media use shapes the developing brain. For a 2024 study, she and her colleagues spent two years following 103 sixth and seventh graders on the cusp of puberty. They assessed students' addictionlike social media use at each check-in, then scanned their brains while they completed a task that simulates receiving a social punishment or reward.

Telzer expected the kids' brains to become increasingly activated by social feedback over the course of puberty. In those who used social media less addictively, that's what happened. But in those who used it more addictively, social reward activity peaked *before* puberty's onset. It then decreased over time in a pattern that mimics increasing tolerance to a drug. "That reward becomes less and less potent over time," Telzer says. "So you might need more and more of it to get that boost."

In another, forthcoming study, Telzer and her colleagues found signs of tech withdrawal in the brains of late adolescents. Forty-five college students with heavy social media use volunteered to have their phones locked in Telzer's laboratory for 24 hours. Before and after, they lay in a brain scanner and watched 10 minutes of TikTok videos. Their brain states changed markedly. After, networks that process emotions and internal states were activated longer, and a network that supports executive functioning was activated for less time. "It basically resembles what we would see in substance-use withdrawals," Telzer says.

But the parallel has one intriguing difference. When the researchers ran the study again and asked about mental well-being, students reported feeling better in the phone's absence. They had higher self-esteem, lower anxiety and fewer negative feelings overall, unlike what you would see in withdrawal from addictive substances or behaviors. "Kids now report, in pretty equal measure, both positive and negative [emotions] from their time on social media," says psychologist Mitch Prinstein, a collaborator of Telzer's at U.N.C. Chapel Hill. "They like the stimulation, but then they feel more lonely. They enjoy being entertained, rather than bored, but then they feel bad about the amount of time they spent on there that felt out of their control."

This year in Austria and four other countries, a massive experiment showed just how much appe-

tite young people may have for change. A program funded by Austria's Federal Ministry of Education asked students to decrease or outright eliminate their social media use for three weeks. "We thought that maybe 1,000 or 2,000 [students] would take part," says Oliver Scheibenbogen, a clinical psychologist at Sigmund Freud Private University in Vienna. Instead more than 45,000 students participated in this "Handy Experiment" ("Handy" is a colloquial term for a cell phone in Germany). Researchers gathered data on students' mental well-being before and after the intervention in March. Scheibenbogen reports that the kids who cut out social media entirely showed modest increases in mental well-being that started wearing off five weeks later. Most students stuck with it for the full three weeks. "It makes me very proud of the students," he says. At the same time, he says, "I see this as a cry for help from young people."

CHRIS JOINED HIS FIRST ITAA meeting at a very low point in his life in February 2024. "I've been in bottoms like that before, but this one was particularly bad," he says. He would stay up until dawn watching and scrolling on multiple devices; he would stream TV shows holding up his phone in the shower. He was 35, and he'd lost about a decade of his life to the deep unhappiness and anxiety of active addiction. "Something had just *really* broken inside me and said, you've got to try something extreme," Chris recalls. (We're using a pseudonym to protect his privacy.) So when he binged a show that featured a 12-step recovery program, he decided to seek one out himself. In that first online meeting, he bawled his eyes out. Then he got to work.

Whereas 12-step programs typically aim for total sobriety from the problem behavior or substance, tech-addiction fellowships have to be more specific in their definition of "sober." They have participants identify their "top," "middle" and "bottom" lines—online behaviors that are healthy, risky or flat-out dangerous, respectively. Bottom lines are often described as "the behaviors that once you start, you can't stop, and once you stop, you can't stay stopped." In fellowships such as ITAA, bottom lines are what you try to cut out. Chris's are: streaming TV shows by himself, scrolling social media, playing video games, watching porn, joining chat rooms and using dating apps.

Twelve-step recovery programs are free and accessible, making them a good (and often the only) option for many people. But doctors and therapists who treat drug and behavioral addictions have been steadily shifting away from sobriety to emphasize gradual progress and a reduction of harm instead. "I

don't think abstinence is a realistic goal for a lot of people," says Joshua Grubbs, who studies behavioral addictions at the University of New Mexico. He notes that, especially when it comes to behavioral addictions such as those to sex or technology, focusing on sobriety can cause fixation and a cycle of shame.

Instead modes of therapy that help people reduce black-and-white thinking, such as dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), are beginning to show promise in treating addictions. DBT, plus a four-week device "detox," is Kardaras's go-to for treating people of all ages in his practice. This type of therapy "is really good for tech addiction because the core principles are distress tolerance, emotional regulation and mindfulness," he says—all things that are often absent or eroded for people with tech addictions.

Most of the work of recovery is about treating whatever is causing people to escape their lives into endless scrolling and stimulation, Kardaras says. "Look at what's making the person feel empty," he says. "Whether it's substances or screen time, it's usually an inside job." For Chris, the source was religious trauma. Growing up in a tightly controlled religious community, he was forbidden from watching many kinds of movies and TV shows. Leaving the faith "kind of sent my life tailspin-

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**—NICHOLAS KARDARAS OMEGA RECOVERY &
NEW YORK CENTER FOR LIVING**

ning," he says. But a new world of entertainment that he could use to distract and numb himself was suddenly available to him.

In recovery, he has developed a relationship with his past self. "Now I can look back and be like, 'Okay, 19-year-old Chris, I also like you. I want to have you as part of my narrative,'" he says. "That's what sobriety has enabled me to do: sit with myself, be with myself, and be okay with being a messy, messy human. And I think because of that, I just feel so much more alive in the world."

Chris calls this shift a "deep inner replacement" of the role of media in his life. Kardaras aims for something similar with his patients. "That's what recovery looks like: having a full, meaningful life, where you recreationally might use your digital device but not compulsively use it," he says.

Building this life is the gargantuan task facing people looking to fix the role of technology in their



lives. Chris has started playing music again and going to open-mic nights. Meg took up voice lessons, despite always singing off key. Tom, who always felt like he was wearing a mask around other people, learned to show others his authentic self and found that people gravitate toward him in a way they didn't before. As Kardaras says, "The fuller your life becomes, the less you want to escape it."

EVEN THOUGH I have what I consider to be a pretty full life, the TikTok app sits there on my phone like a threat. Maintaining a full life can be hard. It re-

quires energy I do not always have, especially for socialization, which I find exhausting. "I've come to almost understand algorithms as being heat-seeking missiles that identify psychological vulnerability," Kardaras says. And so many of us have a vulnerability in common: the human need for connection, along with the various reasons that it might be easier to look for it on social media than to seek out the real deal. "It makes sense that people turn online when they're coping with isolation," says Jeffrey Hall, who researches relationships and technology at the University of Kansas. "The prob-



lem is, by and large, that is not a terribly effective means of coping with loneliness.”

For one thing, social media has gotten far less social since the advent of engagement algorithms and infinite scroll. For another, relying on the Internet for company can hurt us in the long term. Our social skills and opportunities can atrophy. Maybe they never get built in the first place. “Social behavior is like an exercise,” Hall says. “If you get out of the habit of doing it, you’ll become less effective at doing it.”

Hall doesn’t think social media is the root of our

current epidemic of loneliness. The amount of time we spend alone has been increasing since at least 1965, a recent study found. In a 2017 experiment, he found that social media mostly displaces time we would have spent watching other kinds of media. But it certainly may exacerbate our existing loneliness and tendency toward isolation, he says.

Ashley Gearhardt, who studies and treats food addiction at the University of Michigan, points out that social media fulfills our base need for socialization in the same way that ultraprocessed products fulfill our need for food. “It looks like something we

need to survive, like social affiliation or calories,” Gearhardt says. But it has been deconstructed and reassembled into something optimized for maximum consumption and the producer’s profit, she says. It’s also hardest to resist in the times we need that willpower the most—don’t go to the grocery store while hungry, and don’t scroll while lonely.

For this reason, Gearhardt emphasizes compassion. “You are in a system that is fundamentally mismatched with your biology,” she says. “This isn’t because you just lack willpower, and ‘if you’d only tried hard enough ...’ Fundamentally the system is rigged to make it hard to make healthy choices.”

MOST PEOPLE are probably not addicted to social media in the way Chris, Meg and Tom experience it. Tom describes himself as uniquely susceptible to this kind of stimulation, something that Kenny, the Mount Sinai neuroscientist, says may have some credence. “I do wonder if certain individuals may have a dopamine system—and other systems in the

“The stronger the technology, the more protection we humans need.”

—AZA RASKIN CENTER FOR
HUMANE TECHNOLOGY

brain—wired in such a way that they’re really vulnerable to this type of stimulus, this type of reward,” Kenny says. For the rest of us angsty over our screen time, the products may simply be working as intended: capturing our attention and keeping it with sleek design and endless feeds and becoming harder to resist at more challenging times of life.

I relate to Mathilde, a 26-year-old from San Francisco who lives in New York City and feels like she’s in a constant battle against her screen time. “Short-form videos have the ability to let you kind of turn your brain off for a little bit,” she says. She’s tried many screen-blocking apps, but after a while, they lose their authority, and she starts bypassing the blocks. Mathilde doesn’t know whether she’d call it an addiction, but as she scrolls, she feels her brain becoming more unreasonable. “Enter a headspace where I’m not able to think clearly.”

And during challenging periods in our lives, we may become more like Jack, a recent high school graduate from a rural town in upstate New York. “I had a really rough summer” before senior year started, Jack says. “I was averaging about 18 hours of screen time a day. Which is way more than I ever expected.” Like many people his age, he uses mainly

Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat, he says: “On TikTok, it’s just a quick flick, flick, flick, flick, flick...”

Feeling like we’ve lost control over our behaviors is part of what makes it feel like an addiction. But California Institute of Technology neuroscientist Ian Anderson, who studies social media habits, says automatic behaviors can also just indicate an ingrained habit. If you want to cut down on your screen time, it may be more helpful to think of it as a habit you can shape rather than an addiction that needs to be treated by a doctor. “Framing it as a habit not only offers a less pathologizing term but also offers research-based solutions for how to change your behavior,” he says.

Habits are usually paired with physical or emotional cues, and disrupting those cues can disrupt the habit. If you tend to scroll at night, for example, bedtime has become a trigger; you’re better off leaving your phone outside of the bedroom. You can also change where the app is on your home screen, remove the shortcut entirely or turn off notifications, Anderson adds. Plus, replacing scrolling with a different activity you’d look forward to can also make it easier to stick with your new normal.

There’s also a big difference between active and passive screen time, researchers have found. Passive screen time, especially with personalized feeds, can be a mind-numbing time suck that makes you feel less in control. But there are many ways to be more active during the time we spend online. “We can actually change what we’re doing *while* we’re scrolling to make it a more values-aligned behavior,” says Alison Tuck, a digital health researcher at Washington University in St. Louis. She suggests setting intentions for screen time that align with your values: finding connection, gaining knowledge or expressing creativity, for example. Keeping these in mind while you scroll can keep you feeling more in control, she says.

“Every time you get on technology, you have two paths: one is going up to the top of the mountain to see the sunset, and the other is going down a rabbit hole,” says Larz May, founder of a teen-led digital-wellness organization called #HalfTheStory. She’s made it her life’s mission to give people, especially kids, the resources they need to avoid harmful rabbit holes; Jack pulled himself out of his social media binge by joining the organization’s Teen Tech Council. It’s an uphill battle to go from the “doom loops” of algorithmic feeds to “joy loops” that enrich our lives, May says: “We have to fight for the joy loops.”

In Kardaras’s office at the New York Center for Living, a teen and young adult addiction-treatment center in Manhattan, I mentioned that I some-

times reach for the word “addiction” to describe my dissatisfaction with my own ballooning screen time, even though I am objectively not addicted—I’d just gone on a five-day vacation where I delighted in the excuse to not look at my phone at all.

“I don’t have any trouble stopping,” I said, a walking cliché.

He looked at me doubtfully. “You said there’s a dissatisfaction. What does that look like?”

I sputtered a little. I talked about finishing work mentally exhausted, telling myself I’ll just scroll for 15 minutes on TikTok to refresh myself before I make dinner—then getting up an hour later with even less energy than when I started. I know it will happen, but I do it anyway, and I can’t really stop once I’ve started. Yet at the same time, my online life is one of the most creative and sociable parts of my world; it often *does* refresh me. This screen contains some of the best parts of me, even as it threatens to bring out the worst.

“I don’t think that it’s absolutely a terrible way of being,” Kardaras said slowly, referring to my seven-hour-average daily screen time. “But this *can* be a rabbit hole.” If my life were a little bit different, he said, I might fall deeper in that hole. “We all have foundational tethers, things that keep us grounded: family supports, career things. But if you don’t have those things, then you’re kind of adrift.”

Kardaras continued, “That’s the part that they’re fishing for. They’re looking for the low-hanging fruit—the person that’s just kind of bored and scrolling and has a lot of self-loathing.”

AZA RASKIN HAD A PART in creating the slick social media feeds that engross us today. Microsoft patented infinite scroll in 2006; Raskin, then a tech developer, independently developed a similar version that same year. Now he lobbies against his creation and testifies in court to its addictive potential. “One of the best ways of subverting human free will is by appealing to the parts of ourselves that get addicted,” says Raskin, who co-founded the tech watchdog group Center for Humane Technology. Those vulnerabilities will always be there, and technology will only get better at finding them. “The stronger the technology, the more protection we humans need,” he says.

In our moment of reckoning, most of the current momentum is going toward enacting social media bans for kids younger than 16. Some experts believe this is a good start, but many see it as wholly inadequate. “It’s not changing that cesspool of what social media is like,” says S. Bryn Austin, who researches technology and youth well-being at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. “It’s just saying,

‘Oh, for your 16th birthday, we’re going to throw you in!’” The new changes to Instagram following Meta’s settlement may have similar limitations because they apply only to teen accounts and have minimal impact on the algorithms themselves.

Austin and her colleagues have created sample legislation for the kinds of laws they would like to see instead. Such laws would require third-party audits of social media algorithms to identify any harmful patterns, such as serving eating-disorder content to young girls more than to other groups. “They shouldn’t have that bad content pushed at them when they’ve never asked for it,” says Nancy Costello, a law professor at Michigan State University who helped to develop this model legislation.

Because these laws don’t touch the content on the sites—only adjust how social media companies deliver them—they may not run afoul of the First Amendment or a statute called Section 230, which have stymied previous efforts to hold tech companies accountable for what they serve to users. Recent court cases have used similar arguments, framing social media to judges and jurors as defective products causing children harm.

Bergman, the attorney whose law center helped to bring social media addiction cases to trial for the first time, can hardly believe the moment we’re in now. “If you had told me, told *anybody* in the tech law space in the fall of 2021 that Meta and YouTube would be facing a jury for allegedly harming kids, they’d have said you’re crazy,” he says. “I felt like we had won the day we started the trial because that was the first time a social media company had ever been held accountable.”

Meanwhile we’re all still here with our devices, trying to find a relationship with them that adds to our lives rather than diminishing them. “I see connection and disconnection a bit like the tide. There’s ebb, and there’s flow; they can’t exist without each other,” says Mariek Vanden Abeele, an associate professor of digital culture at Ghent University in Belgium. “I see [managing] this as kind of a new responsibility that we did not have to consider beforehand.”

Meg has been sober from her social media bottom lines for just over five years now. We spoke the day before her birthday, and in years past, she would have spent the entire day online responding to a flood of birthday messages. “There was a fear, for me, of getting [offline],” she says. That fear of missing out would drive her to use Facebook far more than she even wanted to. Now she’s swapped FOMO for another outlook that she first heard about in an ITAA meeting: Instead of FOMO, Meg says, “we have the joy of missing out.” ●