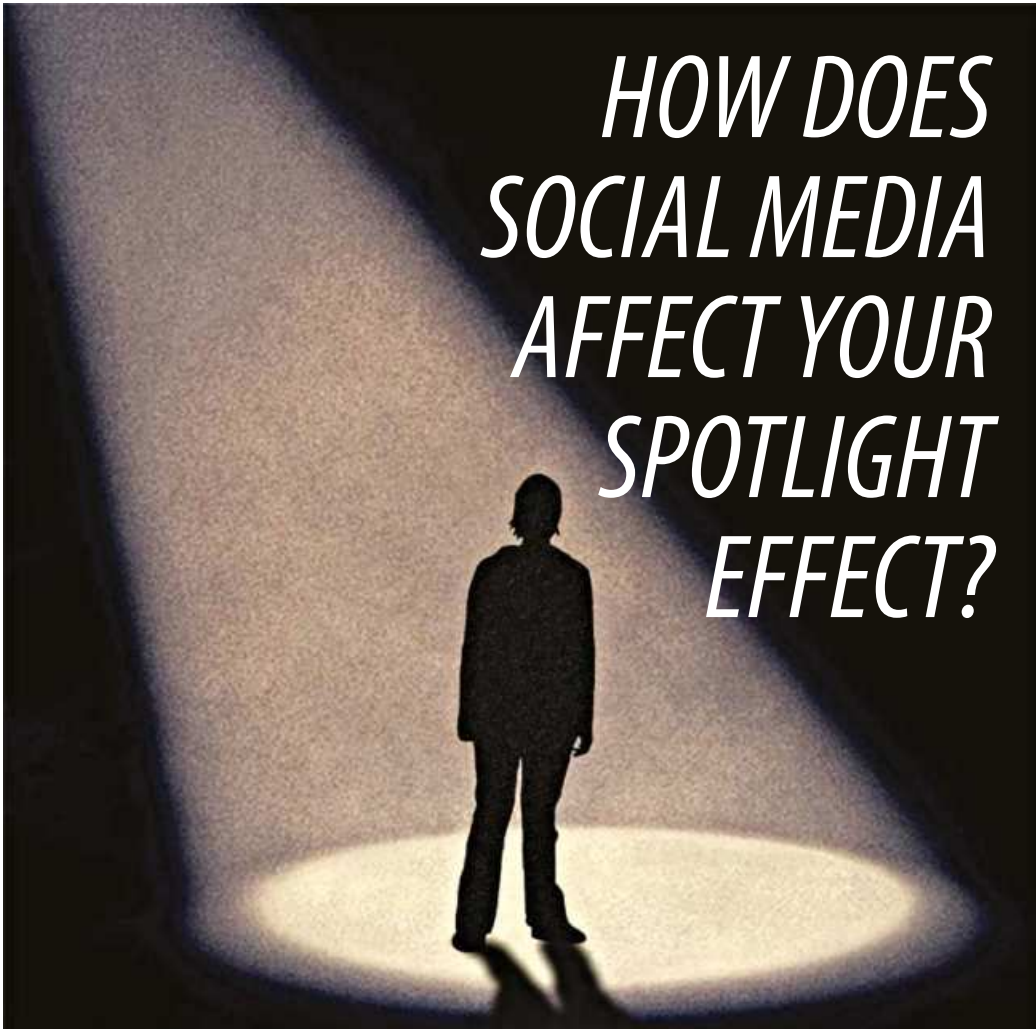


HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT YOUR SPOTLIGHT EFFECT?



TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

Anxiety that comes with expressing unpopular opinions, being hyperconscious of *one* micro stain on an otherwise pristine outfit, reliving the most embarrassing moments at 3 AM and shuddering at the thought of other people still remembering them, feeling the weight of people's judgement after one minor dip in one's grades — all of these felt normal to me until I came across the term "spotlight effect".

The spotlight effect is a term coined by social psychologists used to describe the tendency to think there is a metaphorical spotlight on us and everyone cares about, judges or remembers everything we do. A symptom of social anxiety, it causes people to overestimate the impact they have on the people around them.

It originates from one's egocentrism, which makes them believe that the world revolves around them. Spoiler alert, it does not. But it is difficult to realise that when one has social anxiety, especially in a time when social media is so prevalent. In a world where most people long for hyper-reality and try to satiate that need with validation from likes, comments, or even number of followers, it is easy to fall into the trap of the spotlight effect.

Amidst the rampant narcissists who post multiple selfies and random life updates a day with a sprinkle of mediocre memes thrown in for good measure, the social critic who gives verdict via Facebook status on the ongoing sensitive issue and the shameless misogynists littering the comment section under every post about women's rights, it is easy to believe that everyone feels comfortable expressing their lives and opinions on social media. On the other side of the spectrum, are these very people suffering from social anxiety in a real-life situation.

For a social media user suffering from the spotlight effect, the result of these two phenomena can be conflicting.

On one hand, the validation and sometimes

criticism of the hyperreality we have created on social media, serve as an affirmation of our misguided belief that everyone is hyper-focused on each of our actions. Social media conflicts, numerical presentation of how many of which reactions we got, cancel culture, being memefied for one bad moment — all of these things reaffirm this notion and generate a constant state of fear and anxiety.

On the other hand, it can help someone realise that the mob-like behaviour of people mindlessly scrolling through their posts probably does not care about their activities as much as they tend to think. If the meme about people staring at their own Zoom profile pictures rather than looking at the speaker was not proof enough, sh*tposting regularly will eventually help you realise that no one cares about that one grammatical error on your caption that took you six readings to figure out.

Like most other forms of anxiety, social anxiety in the form of the spotlight effect can be severe to the point it hampers a person's everyday life. In that case, it is important to take it seriously and seek help. However, for someone who wants to gain a bit more confidence, feel less fear in social settings and be more expressive in general, using social media can be a step towards making their experience of the spotlight effect more bearable.

References

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Tazreen is trying to prove her mom wrong by reviving her dead houseplant. Depending on your mood, send tips or tell her to give up at tazreenzahan@gmail.com

The Evolution of Female Friendships in Media

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In her 2015 essay titled "*The Art of Loving and Losing Female Friends*", author Rachel Vorona Cote said that female friends are not a pale imitation of romance and rather described them to be, "... a romance unto itself."

As an adult, having experienced the romance of platonic female friendships myself, I appreciate the quote. But imagine my disappointment when mainstream media constantly chooses to pigeonhole female friendships as a catty relationship filled with cliches and antagonism.

Sure, the negative aspects I mentioned are definitely present in a lot of friendships in general, but they are not restricted to friendships among women. However, throughout my formative years, movies and TV shows continually showed me a very particular brand of female friendships. They would be depicted to be superficial, shallow, and generally filled to the brim with soap opera-esque negativity. Sometimes, sporadic moments of genuine love or courtesy were peppered in it to make it seem somewhat "deep and complex."

On the other hand, male friendships were almost always shown in a positive light. Two buddies against the world, nothing could ever possibly come between them. Even if they experienced turmoil, they would have a revelation and would always drift back into each other's arms. I will admit that I always enjoyed buddy movies but I cannot help but think about the unfairness that occurs when someone who is completely detached from female friendships chooses to write about them.

I am glad to say that the tide has been shifting in recent years. With the emergence of new female writers and directors, friendships between women have been receiving the missing elements of complexity that they have been deprived of for so long.

For example, let us consider Meredith and Cristina's friendship in *Grey's Anatomy*. One of the most iconic lines in the show involves them telling each other "You're my person." Using this simple sentence, accompanied by years of building their relationship, female friendships received their due appreciation.

This is just one example of many more recent examples of on-screen friendships that have masterfully shown the intricacies and tenderness of friendship between women. Greta Gerwig's *Ladybird* (2017) did the same, not only with the friendship between two adolescent girls, but with the relationship between a mother and her daughter.

The days of showing girlfriends being vindictive towards each other are slowly fading away. Even if the trope did not fade away completely, it is certainly going through an evolution and I personally cannot wait to see what it will show us in the future.

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