

Black Mirror's 'Nosedive' Reveals that Dystopia is Closer Than You Think

In the Netflix science fiction show *Black Mirror* actress Bryce Dallas Howard plays the part of Lacie in the episode "Nosedive." Lacie lives in a dystopian, not-so-distant future. In this reality, on social media via their smartphones, people instantly rate every encounter they have with another person.

The highest rating you can receive is 5, and each encounter instantly recalculates your average social rating. Those with aggregate social ratings of 4.5 and higher enjoy special privileges. Lacie's current rating is a 4.2, and she is determined to move into a dream apartment reserved for those who cross the 4.5 threshold.

Lacie is constantly monitoring her phone; she responds joyfully each time she receives a rating of 5.

Of course, there is a cost. Lacie is a complete phony; she presents a veneer of perpetual agreeableness and happiness.

In this dystopian world, beneath a surface cordiality rewarded by social media ratings, calculating individuals are seemingly incapable of normal friendships and true empathy for others.

Has this dystopian future already arrived?

When was the last time you compromised your own bedrock principles and values for the transitory gratification of social media validation?

Consider this extreme example. A 19-year-old Ohio woman livestreamed, on the social media site Periscope, the rape of her teenage friend. She [continued the stream](#) “because she ‘got caught up on the likes’ the video was receiving.”

Perhaps this woman believed Facebook “likes” would satisfy her need to feel connected or, as Stephen R. Covey put it, the need to be “seen.” In his book [The Third Alternative](#), Covey contrasts two modes of social interaction: “I see you” vs “I stereotype you.”

Interacting in “I see you” mode, we demonstrate authentic respect for the unique humanity in another person. When we interact in “I stereotype you” mode we see the other as a “thing” that we categorize instead of seeing the other’s unique humanity.

The Ohio woman’s maladaptive solution to fill her void, violated the humanity of her friend. When we don’t “see”

others, we cannot “see” ourselves.

[A global study by the Internet security company Kaspersky Lab](#) “found that many people will go to harmful lengths simply to win ‘likes’ from followers.”

Paradoxically, what if using social media excessively can produce feelings of isolation? [A study by Dr. Brian Primack](#) of the University of Pittsburgh found that among young adults ages 19-32, it did just that.

Dr. Primack theorized “that social media use could potentially consume a person so much that there’s little time for them to enjoy personal, real-world socializing.” Spending excessive time seeing the carefully curated lives of others “could also spark feelings of exclusion or jealousy.”

The Kaspersky Lab study of 16,750 participants found almost “60% of the participants viewed a friend as having a better life than their own simply by seeing that friend’s social media activity, and almost half were upset after viewing photos from a friend’s happy holiday celebration.”

Writing in *the Atlantic* [Stephen Marche reports](#) that, as measured on such scales as the UCLA Loneliness Scale, loneliness has been dramatically increasing in America. “A connection is not the same thing as a bond,” writes Marche. A study of Facebook users in Australia found, “significantly higher levels of family loneliness” compared to those who did not use Facebook.

While loneliness has been increasing there has been an explosion in the number of psychologists, social workers, life coaches, and other “psychic servants.” Marchie observes, “We have outsourced the work of everyday caring.”

Yet, judicious use of the social media can enrich our lives. Computer science professor [Cal Newport offers sage advice](#)—the critical issue is not *whether* we use social media but *how* we

use social media. Newport counsels,

“If a particular social media service supports an important value in your life...don’t let this be the excuse that allows the service full hegemony over your time and attention. Instead, think carefully about how exactly you will use this service in such a way that optimally supports those values without hurting other things that matter to you.”

In other words, your bedrock values must rule your use of the social media. Do not allow the social media to alter your values. With a focus on social media acceptance, our values might be sacrificed as we live life from the outside in.

We may get a fleeting lift from receiving social media approval, but Ralph Waldo Emerson offered timeless advice in his classic essay [Self-Reliance](#): “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself; nothing, but the triumph of principles.”

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[Image Credit: Netflix]