

Is social media making us more passive-aggressive?

If you are on Twitter, chances are you've seen tweets like this:

Hey smelly guy on the Metro, invest in some deodorant!

This girl at the gym is hogging the machines.

People are tapping away their snide commentary on their smartphones, knowing full well that the person they are discussing will never see these commentaries or know he or she was being discussed at all.

People seem to be avoiding a confrontation. Or maybe they are avoiding an uncomfortable conversation. People seem to be expressing anger and distaste quite passively—by sharing it on Twitter—without actually solving the situation.

Perhaps this avoidant behavior is related to technology. Over the weekend, the Washington Post ran an article regarding entitled “It’s over. Didn’t You Get My Text?” (weirdly, the digital article is titled differently: “The Art of the Digital Breakup”). More and more, people are hiding behind their gadgets and avoiding talking to each other, especially about difficult things. In the article, Lisa Bonos writes:

And it's not unheard of for Facebook users to get news about their romances when the other person changes his or her status...

Bonos says that digital rejections seem easier because there is no interruption or arguments. But, it could be painful for the “dumpee” since there was no chance to interact, to ask questions.

I see it all the time (and have been guilty of myself): using email or social media to say something that we couldn't say to someone face to face.

It's affecting conversations for sure. But more distressing to me is that it seems to be affecting empathy and connection with other people. We figure that if we "like" something on Facebook, then we've connected with someone. But have we? Not really. I have seen many people who say they would rather text than talk. Some people even prefer posting things on social media to communicate with lots of people at once instead of bothering to talk to friends individually.

In the end, social media may not be MAKING us more passive-aggressive or socially awkward, perhaps it only exacerbates what was already there. And for me, social media has been the springboard to more meaningful personal connection. Sadly though, there are far too many people hiding behind their gadgets, making snide comments rather than confronting or connecting with other people.

What do you think? Have you seen the rise in passive-aggressive behavior? Does it affect you?