

Embracing JOMO: The Joy of Missing Out

by Emily Rose Barr

It's Friday night, and after a long week, you can't help but breathe a sigh of relief that the weekend has at last arrived. While many of your friends may celebrate by going to the movies or checking out a restaurant that's just opened, you've decided to honor this highly cherished night of the week with a solo evening in. Whether it means popping open a bottle of wine, going for a neighborhood stroll, cooking yourself a nice meal, or ordering in, the night is yours to savor.

If you think this sounds relaxing, you're not alone. At least for a little while, until you start wondering if you made the right choice after all. A creeping doubt begins sinking in as you imagine the fun your friends are having in your absence. Suddenly, the quiet evening you planned for yourself begins to lose its initial appeal, and you find yourself in a slump as your excitement quickly turns to anxiety.

Fear of missing out, or FOMO, is a common sensation in our high-pressure, social media-frenzied world, particularly in Western society. A recent study defined FOMO as, "the uneasy and sometimes all-consuming feeling that you're missing out - that your peers are doing, in the know about, or in possession of more or something better than you." Under these terms, nearly 75 percent of young adults reported experiencing the phenomenon.

So what exactly are we so afraid we're missing out on? The endless array of opportunities that present themselves in our day-to-day lives, from activities with friends and family, to invitations to upgrade our technology and boost our livelihoods all contribute. But while fear of missing out may be presented under the guise of a pressure to keep up, it often stems from a deeper unhappiness.

Research has found that those with low levels of satisfaction derived from feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are more prone to experience FOMO, as are those who experience lower levels of general life satisfaction. Further exacerbating the all-too-common feeling is the rise of social media use, and pursuant ability to tune in to what others around us are doing on a near-constant basis.

Social media is often both the prescriber of and remedy for FOMO. Active users have a higher probability of comparing their achievements with others', even though social media traditionally fails to accurately portray others' lifestyles and instead focuses primarily on the highlights. Rather than find happiness through their own experiences, individuals begin worrying that theirs aren't objectively better than anyone else's.

Many, in order to combat feelings of loneliness, turn to sites such as Facebook in attempts to satisfy their need for connection. Those with a high level of FOMO in particular tend to use Facebook more often immediately after waking, before going to sleep, or during

meals, studies have found. By checking in on friends' activity, individuals frequently fail to obtain the reassurance they seek, thus confirming their original fear.

The consequences of FOMO are significant and far-reaching. One study conducted with first-year university students found that fear of missing out was associated with fatigue, stress, sleep problems, and psychosomatic symptoms. Furthermore, in a 2018 study of 1,045 Americans aged 18-34, nearly 40 percent of participants admitted to going into debt just to keep up with their friends' lifestyles, often through increased spending on food, travel, clothes, alcohol, and electronics.

The feelings that accompany the anxiety we often experience as a result of FOMO can be overwhelming and at times all-consuming. How do we combat the fear that seems to permeate everything from our relationships and leisure time to our media use and spending habits?

Begin with gratitude, suggests Eric Barker of Time Magazine. Not only is gratitude linked to lower levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, research shows it's also correlated with higher levels of life satisfaction and social integration. By reflecting on what you already have, you're less likely to expend valuable mental energy on worrying about what you don't.

Another alternative? Embrace JOMO, or the joy of missing out. Unlike FOMO, JOMO encourages individuals to turn their attention to the present moment and tune in to their unique desires. JOMO allows us to shift our focus to what we really want at any given moment, without feeling concerned about what those around us may be doing.

To welcome the joy of missing out, we must become comfortable with regularly allowing ourselves time to disconnect: to turn off our phones and tablets, to engage in something we enjoy while resisting the urge to upload and share it. While this may take practice and perseverance, the results are well worth the effort.

"Eventually, we'd rediscover the resources to cope with things as they are: the long line at the airport, the power outage, the hesitant, intimate moments of face-to-face connection," writes Renée Loth. "Untethered from our electronic leashes," she continues, "we could romp in the fields of our own imaginations, reading books, taking walks, sharing an insight that arrives naturally, not through a Google search."

When we're constantly plugged in, we fool ourselves into believing that the devices to which we're so attached will deliver something more urgent and appealing than the activity before us. Notifications quickly draw us away from the present moment, and fill us with surges of ecstasy, envy, anxiety, and excitement.

These feelings are often fleeting, making it all too easy to become dependent on attaining them regularly. Even the negative feelings that may arise become an invitation to seek relief, comfort, and connection. The very cycle from which we try to escape replenishes itself daily.

Instead of feeding the fear of missing out on the tempting menu of activities around you, begin embracing opportunities for solitude and self-discovery. It's easy to say yes to every invitation that comes your way, but over time, it can become draining and unfulfilling.

In what ways have you fallen short in taking care of and spending time with yourself, in favor of filling your calendar or answering to the needs of others? How often do you find

yourself saying yes out of fear or guilt, when part of you would rather say no? In order to have satisfying relationships with others, we must first become comfortable in our relationships with ourselves.

By embracing the joy of missing out, we make room for all the benefits that come from spending time with ourselves and the inner wholeness we contain. We create space to keep up with the things we wish we had more time for – gardening, reading, resting, exercising, cooking, learning, or simply being. We confront ourselves in new ways, and unearth the talents, fears, joys, and quirks that lie beneath the surface.

There will always be a multitude of activities to entice us, but when we become too caught up with keeping up, we can lose sight of what matters to us. The next time you begin feeling fearful that you're missing out, lean in to what lies before you. Make a choice about how you want to spend your time and relish the pleasure of your own company.

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