

Abandoning social media? Just ghost

By Raquel Laneri

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When it comes to exiting social media, is it best to warn your friends and followers ahead of time, or just disappear?

The question arose after Zelda Williams — the late Robin Williams’ daughter — announced on Sunday she would be taking a break from the Internet via [an Instagram post](#). The actress, who had previously deleted her Twitter account [due to attacks from trolls](#), said the reason for her hiatus was the upcoming second anniversary of her father’s death.

“[I]t’s so people can memorialize Dad on the anniversary of his death however they wish without me having to feel bombarded by it, or pressured by the expectation put on myself or my family to publicly acknowledge or join in doing so ... Thus, I’ll be excusing myself for a bit. Hearts just need little breaks sometimes!”

But does posting about one’s hiatus just draw more attention to it?

“[Williams is] a celebrity, so it’s a little bit harder for her to just disappear from social media,” says psychologist [Jennifer Lerner](#), professor of public policy and management at Harvard University. Particularly since friends and well-wishers may want to offer their condolences or

memories by tagging her on Facebook or Instagram. “But for the average person, we don’t need to tell everyone what exactly we’re doing, because they aren’t going to notice anyway.”

Sherry Amatenstein, a licensed clinical social worker and couples therapist, says that she understands Williams’ reasoning for announcing her hiatus: It was a tribute to her father in a way. But most of the time, it’s unnecessary, if not downright silly.

“Announcing you are taking a break from social media reminds me of musicians announcing their retirement from performing,” she says. “We don’t even get a chance to mourn before they are back on the road, and when they make another announcement it feels more like the boy or girl who cried wolf.”

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Lerner calls this desire to telegraph one’s every move the “spotlight effect.”

“We think that everyone is thinking about us much more than they actually are,” says Lerner. When in fact, everyone is too busy thinking about themselves. Sounds like the very definition of **millennial**, #amiright?.

Truth be told, the overwhelming onslaught of information that social media brings does take its toll. Often, people disengage because they need to clear their heads. Nowadays, says Lerner, “We have more information coming in than we have the capacity to process. Human attention is quite finite, and the amount of things demanding our attention is infinite.”

So, by all means: Deactivate your Facebook account, take flight from Twitter, ignore Instagram, ghost your Snapchat buddies. But maybe don’t go about trumpeting your exile from the rooftops.

“When you do that you run the risk of creating a hoopla where there didn’t need to be one,” says Lerner. And doesn’t that defeat the purpose of saying goodbye to all that?

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