

How Living in the “Zoom Age” Affects the Mental and Social Well Being of a Student

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Introduction:

With the current pandemic our world is in, almost everyone had to resort to distance learning/working from home in order to keep the COVID-19 virus from spreading. Through this, the United States had to take many precautionary measures causing a disruption in the daily lives of many. What this did was impact the nation negatively, as unemployment rates skyrocketed due to the lack of workplaces being functional and safe along with the resilience of some American people in regards to not giving respect and attention to health officials regarding the dangers of this virus. As this occurs in an age where technology is key to directing the future, many students took this as an opportunity to take full advantage of the devices they have at home and use that as another way to potentially get more immersed in their studies or passions, also allowing them to provide more influence toward the ideas that they feel strongly about. This brings up how distance learning benefits individuals, as stated by Drs. Valentina Arkorful and Nelly Abaidoo, researchers at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, distance learning “enhances the efficacy of knowledge” through the “ease of access to a huge amount of information.” (Arkorful)

There are multiple downsides to this type of “isolation” in which students are prone to losing motivation for learning along with developing unhealthy habits. From my personal experience, I found it challenging to keep my focus along with finding ways to increase the quality of my well being. This involved creating better sleeping schedules, eating habits, ways to socially interact with others, and finding a routine that keeps my body active. Although living in this “Zoom Age” can bring great difficulty regarding a student’s mental and social qualities, it is up to them to determine what will benefit toward a healthier lifestyle during this pandemic.

Social Activity:

With the pandemic in place, social activity between individuals was stunted, forcing each person to use their electronic devices in order to interact with one another. What this created was an opportunity for the exploration of what can be done online. Social media applications allowed for this to happen, as there many were able to express their feelings about something they feel very strongly about, like the Black Lives Matter movement, including the #BlackOutTuesday hashtag that brought people together to emphasize the movement entirely. Other apps such as Discord, Snapchat, and Zoom allowed others to keep that same interaction, only leaving out the physical aspect.

With the incorporation of distance learning, individuals are pushed toward interacting with their friends in ways they are not used to, along with having multiple opportunities to talk with new people “face to face.” The classroom environment differs from this such that people do not have that online barrier they can place in front of themselves, ultimately changing the way they would interact with another person. Finding these opportunities allows one to display qualities that are able to potentially help in problem-solving processes and allows for a greater quality of learning.

However, with these interactions online, there is an increased risk of cyberbullying, which has been proven to have increased by 70% ever since the start of mandatory distance learning, according to a company named Light, which tracks online harassment. (“Increase in Cyberbullying due to COVID-19”) This can pose a major threat in one’s social life, such that they are at risk of negatively impacting their mental health and ruining bonds due to things said

online.

Outlook Upon Mental Health:

Bringin upon the effects of COVID-19 on a student's mental health, we have to take into consideration a few important qualities of social distancing that majorly affects the mental health and even social scene. One specific quality is isolation, in which the idea of being left alone with no physical or social contact could be achieved through the duration of this pandemic. Due to the unknownness of the duration of this pandemic, individuals attain more eagerness to go outside and socialize with their friends, creating a more anxious and panic-driven lifestyle. (Banerjee) Learning to deal with this idea is very difficult, as the continued emotions of loneliness build up due to very little physical interactions with others. The other quality is stress, which can be caused by an increased workload and the difficulty of figuring out how to use certain aspects of the distance learning programs. (Adedoyin)

Another factor that could contribute to this is the limit to the quality of life available to a student. For example, there was a student in Maine who had been denied what he was looking toward in life, but was cut short due to the pandemic. He suffered the effects of isolation; not being able to exercise with his friends, attending school once a week, failing to meet expectations with his grades, and ultimately committed suicide. (Burke)

We can also bring into consideration the impact of one's socioeconomic status in which they are unable to access specific resources to properly maintain a certain level of stability within their learning environment in this pandemic. According to an article written by researchers at Near East University in Cyprus, those with limited access to the internet or cannot afford internet

service due to poverty will eventually fall behind with their studies. (Adedoyin) Specifically in California, more than 700 thousand students had no access to online classes due to not having devices to learn on. (Natanson) Because of this, heightened anxiety and demotivation can occur within an individual under these circumstances.

What we could learn from this is that certain measures that are used to keep distance learning working are negatively impacting many students who feel very ambitious and anxious about going back to what they used to have before this pandemic. Increase in interactiveness between students within classes can provide for mental benefits, as long as the students are willing to be open to communicate with one another and create better relationships. (“Increase in Cyberbullying due to COVID-19”) (Banerjee)

Conclusion:

Due to the impact that COVID-19 has had upon our world, it has been a true struggle in many cases to adapt to the certain learning and social changes within our technology-driven society. It is important to always keep in consideration the psychological problems that could arise during this time, and with this realization we must be able to find ways to combat those specific issues. As we continue to figure out what benefits or detriments us, we should also make sure that we are keeping a healthy mental and social lifestyle in order to make our experience of social distancing and learning at home convenient for each other.

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