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### Results of Life in the Zoom Age

As the Covid-19 pandemic sent the world into mandatory stay at home orders, Zoom's daily users rose from 10 million people in December, 2019, to 200 million people in March, 2020 (Evans). There was a sudden shift from planning an outfit for school the night before to waking up minutes before the first class of the day and logging on to Zoom, still wearing pajamas. The ability to attend classes virtually has granted students more freedom in how they use their time, while simultaneously taking away many of the social pressures that exist during in-person classes. Although life in the Zoom age has allowed for more flexibility, it comes at the cost of severe isolation and exhaustion as a result of the hours spent in front of a computer screen.

The term "Zoom fatigue" has been coined by several researchers studying the effects of Zoom on its millions of daily users. "Zoom fatigue describes the tiredness, worry, or burnout associated with overusing virtual platforms of communication" (Lee). Staring in front of a screen for hours on end, in place of being in a classroom or workplace actively discussing material face-to-face has lasting effects on people. Without non-verbal cues and a lack of eye contact, more energy and effort is required to remain attentive during Zoom sessions. Hesitations occur before a person decides to unmute themselves in attempts to blurt out the correct answer before someone else has the courage to do so. This constant consideration of what others are about to do

in a meeting or class takes a toll on individuals. Another reason for Zoom fatigue lies in the difference in the routines of virtual meetings and in-person meetings (Bauman, Sander). Stopping to converse with classmates while walking to another class or going into a room early to share ideas with a teacher are no longer options. These simple interactions previously provided support and put people at ease during the day and now that they no longer exist in the virtual classroom stress is added.

These simple interactions with peers take away stresses brought on by school while simultaneously allowing for a social outlet. Living in the Zoom age has brought on a vast increase in cases of anxiety and depression in students. There are also an increasing number of students saying they feel significantly more overwhelmed since virtual classes started (Jones). The use of Zoom has taken away social interactions necessary for many teens' ability to stay distracted from the problems in their life they would normally brush off. Research has shown that many teens rely on their friendships to manage their mental health and remain confident within themselves. Nearly one third of reporting students said that they became significantly unhappy and depressed in the months following the lockdown when they entered the Zoom age (Goldberg). Life through Zoom is impersonal and lonely. The repetition of a bland school day with no new excitement that comes with a spirit week or a big game at the end of the week has taken a toll on many adolescents' mental health. The routine Zoom provides makes life stagnant with little to which one can look forward. These events that would mask minor anxieties or depressive episodes for a short time no longer exist. Now, these issues add up and teens are forced to continue in this lonesome routine revolving around Zoom.

Zoom meetings' successes often rely on those leading them. One of the major downfalls of Zoom is the disconnect between the speaker and the listeners. It has never been easier to tune

out of class and get distracted by the smallest of things now that Zoom users are able to mute themselves and turn off their cameras. Once their cameras and microphones are off they are only loosely held accountable. One high school teacher explains how she has noticed all the differences with communication over Zoom that have made it more difficult to teach. Some of these difficulties include the lag that can happen when a teacher is talking, the missed visual cues, and the stressful feeling of talking over another person in a class discussion (Kelly). This lack of communication with teachers and the ability to be isolated from discussion by simply turning off the camera has greatly changed the dynamic of the classroom. The “Ringelmann Effect” explains that the larger a group present in a Zoom session, the more likely a person is to pay less attention and feel less of a responsibility to contribute to the conversation (Gershman). The penalty of a wandering mind amidst a Zoom meeting is greater than the penalty of a wandering mind in a classroom. There is a larger hesitation to ask for clarification as people often feel more alone behind the screen. It’s a larger effort to gain the courage to ask a question across a screen than it is in the classroom when surrounded by visible friends and peers who might share the same question (Gershman). School has always been designed to be in person, face-to-face with those from which you learn and those who you are learning alongside. Zoom is the closest model of a classroom that can be obtained during the Covid-19 pandemic but it does fall short of the classroom.

Zoom has introduced a new form of education and business with great success. This strictly virtual form of work has granted users more flexibility in the day, allowing people to wear pajama pants throughout the day and turn off their camera in order to use the bathroom in the middle of a meeting. While it has granted individuals this flexibility, it has taken a toll on the mental health and motivation of several segments of the population, especially adolescents.

Despite the negatives of virtual business and learning, Zoom will continue to be used because of its convenience and reliability. Given this new reality, it will be important to manage the negative effects of isolation and loneliness in a more proactive manner.

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