

The Rock, Paper, Scissors Game of COVID

When reflecting on the challenges and difficulties of the last five years, it is difficult to come up with any that don't seem trivial compared to those that are associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been a once-in-a-lifetime tribulation that can not be compared to in terms of its momentousness, magnitude, and devastation. We often discuss the forces of nature and science that have defined the pandemic, but what defines the challenges and difficulties that persist beyond COVID's height are three different forces: technology, isolation, and relationships.

There is a unique relationship among these forces; one that is structured in such a way that I have begun to consistently think about it like a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Here is how it works: technology beats isolation, isolation beats relationships, and relationships beat technology. Technology closes the distance created by isolation through calling, texting, and social media. Isolation often destroys relationships by preventing quality time from being spent. Relationships "beat" technology because they are one of the human actions and behaviors nowadays that can persist independently from the ever present reliance on technology in modern society.

During COVID, this Rock, Paper, Scissors game was constantly in play. People were using technology more often and in different ways in order to overcome their isolation. At the same time, the isolation created by quarantine was eroding all kinds of relationships: friends couldn't hang out, couples couldn't go on dates, family members who were stuck together in their group isolation got tired of each other. Relationships were doing their best to sustain themselves, but the amount of isolation was staggering. So, when we all slowly came out of

quarantine and isolation and regulation, one would expect relationships to flourish back to their original state, right? Though a solid hypothesis, this did not turn out to be the case.

Because of the unique circumstances and challenges created by COVID, the balance of the Rock, Paper, Scissors game has been put in jeopardy. The main culprit? A greatly increased reliance on technology. Due to how cooped up and alone we all felt, we had no choice but to increase our consumption of technology, especially social media. However, once the forced isolation diminished, the high levels of technological consumption did not go down with it. And, there is no question as to the repercussions of this amount of consumption on individuals, relationships, and communities.

Although technology and social media are supposed to be connecting forces that bring us together during isolation, they are now doing the opposite. The main cause for the increase in this separating force is that with the increase in technology comes the increase of the amount and widespreadness with which information flows. This is a cause for harm because knowing too much information about the goings on of others creates tension, conflict, and insecurity. For example, one may be hurt if they discover that all their friends hung out without them. Or, an increase in social media could cause growing insecurity, especially during the isolation of the pandemic, in which one has more time to themselves to think and therefore more time to think critically of themselves. This evermore powerful river of information has been the reason that many would admit that they were left with fewer strong relationships at the end of the pandemic than at its beginning.

Even though right now, life seems to be turning more and more in the direction of “normal” everyday, we are still experiencing the aftermath of our technology problem. Considering social media has proved itself to be one of the most – if not *the* most – addicting

creations of our lifetimes, it is scary to try and think of how we are going to pull ourselves out of this pitfall. However, if we return to our Rock, Paper, Scissors game, we remember that we already have the answer to how to beat technology: relationships. The real-life, applicable solution is to begin to grow more meaningful relationships. This can pertain to past, current, and especially future relationships, and it starts with both a desire and a choice. One must want to see a change in the strength of their relationships, and they must make the choice to commit to building relationships in their community, rather than destroying them. Putting more focus into one's relationships will take the focus and reliance away from technology. The power to stop the increasing trend of disconnection, cyberbullying, and insecurity is in our hands as a community.

Those who are moving to new chapters in their lives, such as high school seniors, have the greatest potential to turn our social trends in a positive direction. Seniors should be incredibly optimistic about transitioning to college, because they get something that few have and many covet: a clean slate. Those with a clean slate can choose to be whoever they want, since their past and their reputation does not follow them. This means that someone who experienced the social despair of COVID is able to turn the page and be a sociable, selfless, friendly person if they choose to be. If enough people make that choice, then maybe we can start taking back control of our happiness.

I wish that I could tell you that I have a foolproof plan for creating a better society for the future – or even any plan at all. I also wish that I could truthfully tell you that I have hope that the trends we have seen will change for the better. However, from what I have seen happen to our communities in recent years, I find myself lacking in optimism – lacking it, yes, but not void of it. The image that keeps my despair at bay, and the image that should be a motivation to all of us, is the image of being a part of any community, big or small, in which each person is working

to create genuine, happy relationships, strong enough that they cannot be broken by the force of isolation of the negativity of technology. I hope that our communities can take control of our lives and our future, because I think we all can agree that it is better not to let the balance of our society hang on a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors.