



Connection Beyond Wifi:

THE PROS AND CONS OF ZOOM



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At this point in our lives, Zoom calls have almost come to define working and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are starting to see how the shift from in-person school to socially-distanced learning is affecting today's youth. Many students are struggling with online learning. Zoom is negatively impacting people's ability to learn and socialize, making us less engaged in class and less likely to interact with friends. Known as "Zoom fatigue," the lack of motivation during the pandemic has led to difficulties staying connected with friends.

A few months ago, people began realizing that all these video calls were making them exhausted, more so than a day of in-person classes. According to psychologist Brenda Weiderhold, the cause of the Zoom fatigue phenomenon is that "technology can disrupt our normal intricate human communication methods that have been finely tuned over centuries to help humans survive."

There are many ways that video conferencing could contribute to the feeling of exhaustion. First, video conferencing forces users to make extended eye contact and, according to Gianpiero Petriglieri, professor of learning and development in the workplace, nonverbal skills require more effort. The way users see themselves, sitting for hours in one place, is unnatural. Zoom fatigue is applied to remote learning. Since Zoom is a video conferencing platform, it can be used nonstop. Many parents, teachers and students have argued that this does not allow students to go at their own pace and can cause some students to fall behind in their classes.

Psychologists who specialize in education research, such as professor of educational psychology Beth Doll, are concerned about how children will cope with the ongoing loss of access to friends, teachers and routines associated with going to a physical campus or classroom. Their research shows that the school environment is critical for fostering academic motivation and social development.

Many students claim that online learning lacks structure in comparison to the traditional classroom. The absence of a physical space at home to designate a work-zone, like the classroom once offered, can leave students with a lack of focus due to many distractions found in a household. According to The New York Times, students claim that the inconsistency of schedules from teacher to teacher as well as the different teaching

approaches used during online learning can make it difficult to keep track of what is assigned. These students have described their workload as increasing after transitioning toward online learning.

But socializing, a critical part of childhood development, is also being challenged during the Zoom era. Since the start of the pandemic, people have been staying in touch with their friends via Zoom. These virtual hangouts can make people feel less connected with their friends; it is hard to maintain friendships without seeing your friends in person. Before quarantine, our social behavior—facial expressions, tones and temperament—happened in different places, from school to work to social lives. Now nearly all of our social roles happen on Zoom.

The aspect of our lives that used to be separate are now all happening in the same place. This can make people associate work with Zoom, even if they are on a call with their friends. Being on a Zoom call with friends does not always feel like leisure because we are using this tool to do our work. According to Petriglieri, big group calls feel performative and depersonalizing.

Even though Zoom negatively affects people's ability to learn and socialize, it is still a way for us to see our friends and family while maintaining social distance. There are ways people have stayed connected via Zoom, for weddings, funerals, birthdays and graduations. You can have a karaoke night with friends, a book club meeting, a movie-watching party, a board game tournament and more.

Zoom is an unexpectedly diverse tool—which can both exhaust us and enhance our lives. It is important to recognize the negative effects of video chatting in order to consider how to use it for good purposes. While Zoom is not the same as seeing friends and family in person, it is a way for us to remain connected during this difficult time.

