



Virtual world has benefits and drawbacks

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“Parents, teenagers and researchers agree that smartphones are having a profound impact on the way adolescents today communicate with one another and spend their free time,” Markham Heid noted in the Nov. 6 issue of Time magazine.

“And while some experts say it’s too soon to ring alarm bells about smartphones, others argue that we understand enough about young people’s emotional and developmental vulnerabilities to recommend restricting kids’ escalating phone habits.”

Could there possibly be a cause-and-effect relationship between the growing propensity of rising generations to spend every waking hour staring at a screen and the unprecedented rise in anxiety, depression and suicide we have seen since the beginning of the current decade?

Something is happening here, and I’m pretty sure once again Mr. Jones doesn’t have much of a clue as to what it is. Technological innovation always precipitates unintended and undesirable consequences, just as it is a truism that human beings tend to rush full force toward its adoption before we have a realistic understanding of how it changes us in fundamental ways – and not necessarily for the better.

The ability to instantaneously communicate with one another (and the world) has tremendous benefits. At the same time, it has serious drawbacks that tend to offset those advantages. The evidence is mounting that over reliance on our cherished devices is interfering with our critical thinking and problem-solving skills, including those needed to resolve interpersonal as well as intrapersonal conflict.

There is a reason I banned electronic devices from my classroom at Western Kentucky University: they tend to impede the educational process. Some things take time and deep reflection to fully grasp, but thoughtful meditation is simply not possible when you are constantly mesmerized by what’s happening in the virtual world instead of grappling with the inherent complexity of universal human truths.

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