

Hijacking Humanity's Happiness

With the COVID-19 pandemic, screen addiction has become more prevalent as people spend time isolated at home, turning to technology for entertainment. Akin to other practices such as eating, there are healthy and unhealthy ways to use screens. The unhealthy issue concerning screen addiction is “whether screen use causes problems in other areas of life or has become an all-consuming activity,” said lead author Sarah Domoff in a study at the University of Michigan (Bailey 3). Screen addiction steers people away from happiness as it disrupts all levels of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Beginning on the bottom of the hierarchy, people's basic safety and physiological needs are violated by insidious screens that slither into their daily lives like insatiable serpents. Screen usage releases the feel-good chemical dopamine that rewards the brain, setting off a pleasure cycle every time people use screens, all the while strengthening the connection between the stimulus and the reward which intensifies neurons' pleasure response to screen use (Haynes 3). This reward cycle makes it difficult to detach oneself from a screen. As a result, while staring at a screen for a lengthy period of time, a person may forget to attend to their physiological need of food and water, leading to dehydration and malnourishment which harms one's well being.

On the other hand, screen addiction can cause a person to consume more food than normal or necessary for them. Their mind would be fixated on the screen's content instead of alerting them to stop eating. Additionally, since generally people are seated when viewing screens, as screen time increases, pains including neck, back, shoulder pain, or headaches increase as well due to the prolonged strain inflicted on the body (“Pain Increases with Screen Time” 1). These aches arise because most people stay in the same position throughout and do not focus on maintaining proper posture. Also, while sitting in front of screens, clearly they are not

moving around. Consequently, less physical activity, having sedentary lifestyles, and mindless eating can induce unhealthy weight gain and bodily discomfort.

The discomfort, however, extends to one's eyes. People who spend more than two continuous hours a day using a digital screen have the highest risk of developing computer vision syndrome, also referred to as digital eye strain ("Computer Vision Syndrome" 2). Eye and vision problems impede one's daily functioning abilities, which can lead to frustration and discontentment. To help assuage this eye strain, the American Optometric Association recommends the 20-20-20 rule: "take a 20-second break to view something 20 feet away every 20 minutes" ("Computer Vision Syndrome" 1).

Moreover, screens have a detrimental effect on sleep quality and duration. The blue light emitted from digital screens suppresses the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, therefore exposure to screens at night disrupts the body's circadian rhythm (Hale 6). This is occurring as people use screens at night and procrastinate sleep in exchange for longer screen time entertainment. The screens interfere with sleep, delay bedtimes, make it more difficult to fall asleep, and lead to less and worse quality sleep.

Other than physiological needs such as food and adequate rest, screens negatively impact safety. For instance, screen addiction leads to people always feeling the necessity to be on their devices, even when walking on the streets or when driving. Not paying attention to their surroundings can cause people to injure themselves and get into traffic accidents. This unsafe lifestyle creates the risk of harm for other people too, which largely erodes one's security like a once sturdy boulder pierced into a thousand crumbling pieces.

Screen addiction further pierces into one's psychological needs of esteem and belongingness. Although technology is useful for communication through phone calls and video

calls, spending time on a screen takes away from face-to-face interaction with family and friends which is vital for humans to feel a genuine sense of belongingness. Not possessing this weakens one's self-esteem too. Using social media also lowers self-worth from shamefully comparing one's imperfections to other people's facade of perfect lives.

Finally, being addicted to screens hurts one's journey to self-actualization on the highest level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Devices create incessant distractions with their ringing and temptation, stealing away time that could be spent learning and pursuing passions. Screens are escapes from reality, dominating people's lives, and the addiction aspect is especially visible if screens become the only way to relieve one's mood when dejected.

Screen addiction is like climate change because as humankind pushes for improvement, most do not acknowledge its presence looming with a shadow that only grows alongside industrialization. People ought to explore solutions to this issue, such as spending time doing other hobbies and frequently stepping away from screens to be mindful, stretch, and walk around to prevent long stationary lengths of time. Though technology can be beneficial in fulfilling people's needs, excessive use of screens that turn into screen addiction undermines several aspects of happiness. People need to take action and learn how to resist the siren's song of screens that temptingly lures them.

Works Cited

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