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Smartphone Addiction

by Denis Boyd, M.A., R.Psych.

The headline in the Globe and Mail read, “Your smartphone is making you stupid, antisocial and unhealthy. So why can’t you put it down?” by Eric Andrew-Gee.

As I began to read the article I became alarmed by the research quoted.

Internet companies have spent “billions of dollars” trying to figure out how to hook people into their programs. They have come up with strategies which access the same neural pathways as those affecting gambling and drug usage.

The natural drug that interests the internet industry is a “feel good” one by the name of Dopamine. This is a neurotransmitter which is released when the brain “expects a reward or accrues fresh knowledge.” A human vulnerability is being exploited by the internet industry and we are the victims.

Ex-employees of Google, Facebook and Apple have become alarmed by the technology they helped to develop and are now sounding the warning bells we need to hear. One of these past employees was quoted as saying “The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are destroying how society works. It is eroding the core foundations of how people behave.”

Professor John Ratey (Harvard Medical School), an expert on attention-deficit disorder, is quoted as saying “We are not developing the attention muscles in our brain nearly as much as we used to.” He went on to say that the symptoms of people with smartphones and those with ADD

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The Mental Health Boot Camp

by Chris Boyd, M.A., R.C.C.

Think about it. Your mental health plays a role in EVERY area of your life: relationships, work, physical health, spirituality, even sex. Isn’t it time you made it a priority? The

Mental Health Boot Camp is a new and engaging way to accomplish just that.

Created by Joanna Boyd, Dr. Brooke Lewis and Chris Boyd (along with their friend from Los Angeles, Dr. Ryan Howes) the project is the first of its kind and combines the commitment of a traditional ‘boot camp’ with a mental health focus.

The Boot Camp’s comprehensive and varied curriculum is hand-crafted to boost your awareness, self-control, and well-being. Each day you’ll complete 4 or 5 activities that only total the length of one episode of your latest binge program!

The program includes: thought provoking articles, inspirational videos, soothing meditations, and stimulating activities to experience, reflect upon, and integrate into your life. Topics include: psychoeducation on common emotions, cognitive reframing, character strengths & virtues, Big Five Personality Test, communication, gratitude exercise, acts of compassion, spending time in nature, and much more! The various strategies utilized in the program have been shown to help decrease feelings of anxiety, sadness and anger.

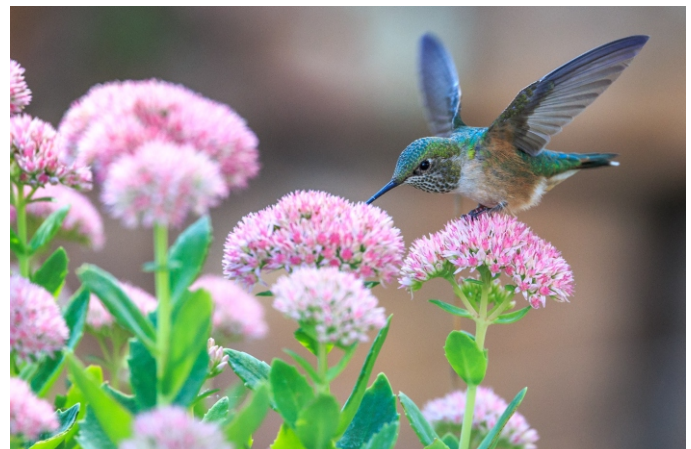
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(Attention Deficit Disorder) are “absolutely the same.”

Research into attention span is sobering. In 2000 the average human attention span was 12 seconds. In 2013 another study found that this time had shrunk to 8 seconds. If the investigation were to be done today, five years later, it is estimated that there would be a further decrease. Here is food for thought: the average attention span of a “goldfish” is 8.5 seconds!

A human vulnerability is being exploited by the internet industry....

Parents need to be particularly cautious with their smartphone usage, as the quality of their relationships with the children is being compromised.

When a mother nurses her baby (or holds a bottle for the little one), there is an opportunity for eye to eye contact with the child; this contributes to the bond between parent and child. It has been determined that, through this interaction, the brain waves of the baby and the mother will synchronize.

Mothers who are distracted with their devices are missing precious moments of bonding with their newborn and only time will tell the impact of this distraction.

Catherine Steiner-Adair, a psychologist, interviewed 1000 children between the ages of 4 and 18. She used the data she collected to write a book entitled “The Big Disconnect” in which she stated that kids said they no longer run to the door to greet their parents because adults are so often on their phones when they arrive home.

Andrew-Gee in his article added “And it gets worse once they’re through the door. One of the smartphone’s terrible mysterious powers from a child’s perspective, is its ability ‘to pull you way instantly, anywhere, anytime.’ (quoting Steiner-Adair).”

“To children, the feeling is often one of endless frustration, fatigue and loss.”

Other research findings indicate that “family time” has dropped one third between 2006 and 2011 from 26 hours a month to 18 hours. It was also determined that children are more at risk today due to distracted parents with a 12%

increase in injuries for children under five from 2007 and 2010.

Even when families gather, there is no guarantee of healthy interpersonal interactions. A friend recently relayed a situation he observed while out for dinner with his wife. A mixed generation family arrived and sat at a table nearby. He observed them from time to time and noticed: “They sat around the table and were all engrossed in their phones or tablets for the entire time they were in the eatery.”

I recall dropping into a coffee shop one morning and observing a father with his two kids having a visit together. The kids were quietly drinking their hot chocolate while their father was busy paying attention to his cell phone.

On another occasion, a couple of old friends and I were having lunch in a pub and couple sat down nearby. Once seated there was minimal conversation before the guy pulled out his phone to check messages while his tablemate sat looking bored, more or less twiddling her thumbs.

After a bit, the woman brought out her phone and began to scroll through while the fellow put his away and sat looking bored. He then took his phone back out and they spent the bulk of their time physically present but mentally miles away. An opportunity for some good relationship enhancing interaction was compromised drastically. (And of course I was distracted by what was happening!)

TD Bank is on the right track with a poster it has created for its downtown centre in Toronto: “Disconnect to Connect. Put your phone down and be present.”



The Mental Health Boot Camp

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After signing up, you’ll have 30 days to complete the 25-day program. This is meant to motivate you as the Boot



Camp involves a commitment of time and energy to complete. By the time you’re finished, you’ll have an increased awareness of yourself, knowledge of your

healthy and unhealthy patterns, and tools to help you live your mental-healthiest life!

This program was designed to boost your well-being and should complement, not replace, existing mental health supports. The program has a cost of \$39 USD. To learn more, go to: www.mentalhealthbootcamp.com

Warmest Wishes, Rick!

Our colleague Rick Hancock is retiring after 27 years of service as a psychologist. He offered compassion and expertise to his clients and affected countless lives as a result. We already miss his wit, his laughter and his fellowship and wish him much happiness as he spends time in Arizona soaking up the sun.





Getting to Optimum Health

Joan Schultz, Ph.D. R.Psych.

There are many books written about overcoming depression and anxiety, most of which are excellent companions to helping us move forward out of these difficult experiences in our lives. However, if we learn to practice *proactive* habits of self care and life engagement, we can inoculate ourselves against these debilitating conditions and build resilience for life's adversities. Here are a few of the daily life habits I recommend to anyone wanting to move out of depression and create a physically and mentally healthy lifestyle for themselves.

Daily Self care

1. Get into a regular routine of sleep patterns.

- ♦ Work with your body's natural circadian rhythms: Wake up before 8, work, eat and sleep at consistent times. Keep a consistent daily routine.
 - ♦ Get enough sleep (7 – 8 hours) but *not too much*. REM sleep is important, but also stages 3 & 4, which are the deep, restorative stages. Avoid too much caffeine--over 250 mg (1.5 cups) disrupts these sleep stages.
2. Get regular exercise – at least 3x weekly. Include cardio, weights and stretches. Exercise uses up stress hormones and produces the happy hormones – our endorphins!
3. Take care of yourself nutritionally. Use food as fuel, not stress relief.
- ♦ Drink 4 – 8 glasses of water daily to prevent dehydration, irritability, fatigue and headaches.
 - ♦ Take 1000 mg of fish oil daily (as well as Vitamin D through our BC winters).
 - ♦ Eat balanced meals and small nutritious snacks throughout the day.
4. Connect with a supportive person every day...and be a support to someone else daily. Take initiative to be social and consistently connect with others.
- ♦ Once a day, do or say something kind for another.
5. Plan something to look forward to every day.
6. Practice good personal hygiene and care. As much as we may not like to admit it, appearance is important. Be clean and smell good!

Healthy Thinking habits

7. Face your fears. By willing yourself to do what you need to do, you will actually change your brain as well as change the image you have of yourself -- and move from feeling helpless to feeling strong.
8. Be aware of when you worry and obsess about the same things repeatedly. Move on to more productive thinking and action. Talk to someone wise who can give you objective perspectives. Learn strategies from reading or listening to skilled professionals. *
9. Give yourself the opportunity to be listened to and understood.
10. What negative thoughts do you keep telling yourself? Write them down so you see what they are, and challenge them. DO NOT believe everything you think - especially if it is negative. (This is key to combating despondency.) Focus on what is good and positive and true.
11. It is OK to feel sad, and to acknowledge what you are feeling, but don't allow yourself to stay there. Instead, recirculate your joyful states: Remember wonderful times and people. Revisit photos. Listen to and tell stories of positive memories and people overcoming challenges.
12. Each day, ask: “What three things went well today?” OR “What three things am I grateful for today?” Write them down. Every Day.

Life Engagement

13. During stressful times, having fun, self-nurturing and humor are the first things to go. So keep doing these! Keep engaging in positive activities and take initiative to plan them with others.
14. Try new things! ...new foods, new activities, talk to new people... Don't let yourself get into a rut!
15. The most effective treatment for depression is “Life Engagement!” The opposite of depression is not happiness-- it is feeling alive!
16. Step back from resentment that attaches itself to the difficulties that others have caused us. Practice forgiveness. Make it a habit.
17. Have daily contact with nature and other living creatures. Get outside!

Keep focused and working towards valued goals – meaningful, purposeful things in life. Live with integrity, treating yourself and others with respect. Keep clear about what is truly important and how you can impact others for good. In that sense, your life is not your own – you are here for a purpose – to make an impact for good in your world. Determine to be an influence for good in your world.

*Check out the writings of David Burns (“[The Feeling Good Handbook](#)”), John D. Preston (“[You can beat depression](#)”) and Martin Seligman (“[Flourish](#)”), among others.



Lying.... why we do it

by Maureen Chapman, M.A., R.C.C.

Lying destroys relationships and damages the bonds between human beings.

The Journal of Intercultural Communication Research (2016)

states that 'we all lie, but not all lies are the same. People lie to achieve a goal: "WE LIE IF we believe HONESTY WON'T WORK". Essentially the truth comes naturally, but lying takes effort and a sharp, flexible mind. Lying is a part of the development process, like walking and talking. Children learn to lie between ages two and five, and lie the most when testing their independence.'

While it is a normal developmental process for children to lie, many adults get stuck in the same pattern and do not seem to grow out of a need to lie in order to achieve rewards or avoid perceived punishment.

Below is a list of possible motivations for lying:

TO PROTECT YOURSELF:

Personal Transgressions: Cover up a mistake/misdeed 22%
Avoidance: Escape or evade other people 14%

TO PROMOTE YOURSELF:

Economic Advantage: Gain financial benefits 16%
Personal Advantage: Bring benefits beyond money 15%
Self-Impression: Shape a positive image of ourselves 8%
Humour: Make people laugh 5%
ALTRUISTIC: Help people 5%
UNKNOWN: Motives are unclear, even to ourselves 7%

SOCIAL OR POLITE:

Uphold social roles or avoid rudeness 2%
MALICIOUS: Hurt other people 4%
PATHOLOGICAL: Ignore or disregard reality 2%

Dr. David Ley's research (Psychology Today), quoted below, can also help readers gain some insight into the way liars think. "Believe it or not, their lying makes some sense, when you look at it through their eyes."

1. The lie does matter ... to them. People lie when it just doesn't matter because they actually *do* think it matters. While everyone around them thinks it's an inconsequential issue, the liar believes it is critically important.

2. Telling the truth feels like giving up control. Often, people tell lies because they are trying to control a situation and exert influence toward getting the decisions or reactions they want. The truth can be "inconvenient" because it might not conform to what they are trying to achieve.

3. They don't want to disappoint you. It may not feel like it to you, but people who tell lie after lie are often worried about losing the respect of those around them. They want you to like them, be impressed, and value them. And they're worried that the truth might lead you to reject or shame them.

4. Lies snowball. If you tell a little lie, but then to cover that lie, you tell another one, then another, and another — each gets bigger and bigger. Finally, we're arguing about the colour of the sky, because to admit *anything* creates the potential of the entire house of cards tumbling. If a chronic liar admits to any *single* lie, they feel like they're admitting

to *being* a liar, and then you'll have reason to distrust them.

5. It's not a lie to them. When they say something, it's often because they may genuinely *believe*, at that moment, that it is the truth. Their memory has been overwhelmed by stress, current events, and their desire to find a way to make this situation work. Sometimes, this can become so severe that the person almost seems to have created a complete alternate world in their head, one that conforms to their moment-by-moment beliefs and needs.

6. They want it to be true. Finally, the liar might want their lie to be true so badly that their desire and needs overwhelm their instinct to tell the truth. Sometimes, liars hope that they can make something come true by saying it over and over.

Most people who lie may not be aware that others see through the facade of their lies. This is an entirely different subject to be addressed and begs the question of why the recipient of the lies does not compassionately address their loved ones' lies? It is likely for the same reasons the liar lies. To avoid conflict, deny reality, or having to confront an uncomfortable situation.

Facing the truth of why we lie and becoming dedicated to dismantling this behaviour allows us to stop hiding behind a cloak of desperation and fear. We learn how to become an honest and authentic human being. If you recognize yourself or a loved one who engages in these behaviours, consider getting therapy to stop the devastating cycle that destroys integrity, safety, trust, marriages and relationships.

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