

Escape the Cocoon and be with Real People

Shôn Ellerton, May 11, 2021

A genuine concern of how the increased trend to cocoon ourselves away from interacting with real people affects us and our children.



Whilst driving home the other day, I was listening to a report on the radio that there was a poll that took place in the UK in which a staggering one-third of participants would rather *stay* in lockdown rather than mingle with friends and family. There are, of course, many others who *deny* that the virus even exists, some of whom exhibit their views openly by making themselves heard either in protest or to flagrantly disregard any mandates set by the State such as tracing and tracking or the use of face masks in certain situations. This, naturally, stirs up some of those who are pro-lockdown into a frenzy who then angrily denounce those ‘reckless mobs’ while the anti-lockdown crowd mock them by being over subservient and sheeplike to the State. And then you have the conspiracies like how Gates is bent on killing us all, or secret societies wishing to de-populate the globe, or 5G-controlled nano-bots being implanted into vaccines for the purpose of nebulous organisations to control our thoughts and actions, and let us not forget my favourite, the flat-earthers. *Surely*, there is enough evidence to prove that the Earth is spherical, or near as damnit.

This kind of behaviour all seems a trifle unhealthy, and I have no reservations to suggest that it has got progressively worse during the last year because so many of us have kept away from others during the pandemic. I am not here to suggest that it is or has been wrong to distance ourselves from others in various circumstances; nothing of the sort. However, it is inevitable that the repercussions of doing so, especially for extended periods of time, are having an

adverse effect on how we are interacting with others. And it is a deeply worrying trend.

Access to technology could not be easier

One observation that I have noted of late is that the sharing of divisive and political rhetoric, particularly through social media circles, shared by those in the 70+ age-range seems to be on the increase. Certainly, in the last ten years. Perhaps this is inevitable as technology in this area has improved drastically in the sense of being very easy and understandable to use. Many of those so tend to react in a punitive manner to views which are contrary to popular consensus as purveyed on mainstream TV news networks. The combination of being ‘holed in’ not willing to interact with others physically, the power and ubiquity of mainstream networks and the relatively time-consuming task and the lack of knowledge on how to effectively assimilate information from other news sources online makes this highly explosive. I generalise, naturally; however, the great ease in switching on the TV to watch one’s familiar news source is so often taken at face value without questioning the merit of the argument or ascertaining the source of the information, that many may never be aware that there could be another ‘side to the story’.

Dwindling numbers in communal events and activities

I believe one of the biggest damaging factors for this increased isolationist and polarised behaviour is the steady year-on-year demise of active participation in the community, whether it be taking part in your local charity organisation, getting to know the other parents in your child’s Scouts group, join a group with like-minded business interests, attend a church or temple, or simply joining a hobbyist group local to your area. Many moons ago in 2016, I wrote an article titled [*Has the Internet Really Brought Us Any Closer Together*](#) in which I quoted

“We are not becoming more time-poor, but rather, we have far more avenues of distractions at our beck and call.”

Too much Netflix

In 2021, one of the prime examples of being a distraction is, of course, Netflix, and other digital streaming services designed to keep oneself hooked. I have been guilty in watching too much Netflix on occasion, more often than I want to admit, and, to be honest, more than ninety-five percent what I watched is completely forgotten in a week's time and has never added an iota of any value whatsoever to my life. Sure, I have got no qualms with enjoying something on the 'box' from time to time, but the excuse that our daily lives these days are too busy to partake in community activities doesn't cut it.

What about Zoom and the workplace?

Well, one might ask is it not just as effective to hook up on Zoom or, on occasion, have a few drinks after work with those from the workplace? In my experience, no. Meeting in the virtual space is not the same; however, it is a very good substitute to catching up with people you are *already* friends with or keep in touch with family in situations where it is not practical to meet up in person. I, personally, do not know anyone who made a good friend without meeting in person beforehand. As for work, it is very seldom that I have made a good friend that I can call on at any time of day away from work. During those afterwork drinking moments, usually under the effects of a few alcoholic beverages, many of us are thinking at that time that a new friend has been made, but most often, after recovering the next morning, it is rare to find oneself making contact with that person out-of-business-hours to reach out as a friend. Many of us tend to keep a defined distance between work and play, and in some cultures, there are formal protocols which are always steadfastly maintained at work between colleagues. There are many occasions in my working experience where I kept in contact with those in a *previous* job, but it is usually the case, at least in my experience, that contact becomes more seldom as time progresses to the point that it becomes awkward to re-establish a connection.

Two relatively new trends have occurred in the workplace: Zoom and working from home. As useful as Zoom, and other similar technologies, have been in maintaining contact remotely, the year of the Zoom job interview, for example, has not been terribly kind for those who compete with others who can meet up directly in person. This is a simple fact of life and it is naïve to believe that all jobs can be won through meritocracy alone. Heck, I managed to wrangle a job

while discussing our favourite Pink Floyd albums through a casual interview at a local bar with little mention of the actual work I was to be embarking on. Perhaps Karma got the better of me because I, and twenty-six others, through no fault of our own were made redundant less than a year later! As for working from home, much as it appeals to many, it is not, personally, for me as it blurs the boundary of work and home life, but each to his or her own. However, working at home, which is sometimes the only option for some, can have the effect of further cocooning oneself away from society unless one makes an effort to participate with others elsewhere regularly.

Children and isolation

The deleterious effects of being isolated away from others cannot be more amply illustrated than in the case of children not being able to attend school or some other extracurricular activity involving interaction with other children. Without interaction with others, there is scant opportunity to learn, to share, to participate with and be respectful and tolerant of others. I, personally, know of parents with children who are afflicted with this ‘me-too’ trait and sadly, I have witnessed deeply disrespectful behaviour from their children. Another source of this behaviour may stem from children who are aggressively coerced by their parents to become prodigies in a specific talent, sport or profession chosen not by the child, but by the parent. A well thought-out and entertaining Korean series I watched on Netflix called [*Sky Castles*](#) alludes to this perfectly.

Some children are also isolated physically from others by their own free will preferring to remain in contact only online, many via the avatar-driven world of online multiplayer gaming. Many are afflicted with anxiety when extricated out of their bedroom cocoons when having to confront with others in person. I know of one child of a parent who seldom leaves his bedroom except for the occasional expedition to the refrigerator or the water closet, and during those times, as quietly as possible to avoid detection. I have, particularly during my mid-twenties, have taken part in online gaming on occasion and know too well the effects of how time flies; however, I like to think that I had the level of maturity to say enough is enough and to get on with more pertinent business to hand. However, for young kids, especially with parents who are not aware of the allure and addictiveness of online gaming may not be aware of the dangers they are presenting to their future; the inability to cope with other people in the real world.

Having family in other areas of the world where lockdowns have been prevalent for extended periods of time, I can sympathise with these issues. Not being able to enrol your child in the local soccer team, the choir group or participating in a venerable institution like the Scouts must be frustrating indeed, unless one is the sort of parent who *prefers* that their child do not socialise with others, for whatever reasons I can only wonder. Which is, of course, obviously unfortunate for the child's sake, as taking part in such activities and groups promotes bonding with others, attainment of life skills and, of course, fun.

Communal gatherings and the media

There is, perhaps, another reason for some of the decline in numbers of those participating in organised gatherings and activities, and that could possibly be attributed to negative press through media and social media. The pandemic has presented a viable excuse not to assemble in large groups; however, hypocrisy has been near-overwhelming in this department. For example, political rallies (of parties not in favour of the media of the day) and church gatherings have often been in the firing line by the mainstream media and yet, money attractors like sports or social justice movements (again only those popular by the media) seem to be immune from such harassment. The Scouts, particularly in the United States, has consistently been lambasted with accusations of sexual misconduct, a subject which the media are very quick to pounce upon. Statistically speaking, such occurrences, unfortunate as they are, happen in many walks of life but they are often grossly exaggerated in terms of occurrence as to create an illusion of, in the case of the Scouts, a morally bankrupt organisation. Without sounding at all conspiratorial, it could be said that when fellow kind get together to discuss such subjects which are open to enlightenment, it creates a hindrance to those who are enforcing and maintaining the dogma of the day.

And finally...

Lastly, I would mention that much focus in the prevention of mental illness and suicide is taking place through various charities and official government guidelines in many countries from the effects of lockdowns, job losses and other barriers presented by the pandemic. Where it is safe to do so and legally acceptable by the State, I believe it prudent that we start to spend less time

cocooned away from others and get involved with interacting with real people on a far more frequent basis than what we are doing now.