

A New Type of Dementia Plagues America. Digital dementia occurs when one part of the brain is overstimulated and another part of the brain is understimulated.

By John Mac Ghlionn *[Commentary]*

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In the United States, it's estimated that at least 7 million people over the age of 65 have dementia. If current trends continue, by the end of the decade, more than 9 million Americans are expected to suffer from this loss of cognitive functioning—that's equivalent to the population of New York City.

Memory impairment isn't just affecting the elderly. By 2050, the number of U.S. adults over the age of 40 living with dementia is expected to more than double, from 5.2 million to 10.5 million. To compound matters, there's a new type of dementia plaguing Americans, one that's affecting people much younger than 40. It's called digital dementia, and millions of unsuspecting, young Americans are at risk.

A major health epidemic, digital dementia occurs when one part of the brain is overstimulated and another part of the brain is understimulated. When we mindlessly use digital devices, the frontal lobe, which is responsible for higher-level executive functions, gets little, if any, use. Meanwhile, the occipital lobe, the visual processor located at the back of the brain, gets bombarded with sensory input. Slouched over and spaced out, people, both young and old, are abusing their brains, day in and day out. Preteens and teens are particularly at risk for two reasons:

- * An American 8 to 12-year-old spends an average of 4.7 hours a day scrolling their lives away. That's around 70 days in a given year.

- * The prefrontal cortex (PFC), the brain region responsible for planning and decision-making, doesn't fully develop until the age of 25.

Digital dementia impedes both short-term and long-term memory. Moreover, as research shows, excessive screen time during brain development increases the risk of Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, in adulthood. Not surprisingly, excessive screen time is intimately associated with digital addiction. This, in turn, fuels digital dementia, which results in the shrinking of the brain's gray matter. White matter facilitates communication between gray matter areas. But without gray matter, which plays a critical role in emotions, memories, and movements, there's really nothing to communicate. White matter helps the traffic

get from A to B. Grey matter, on the other hand, is the traffic.

It gets worse. As Gurwinder Bhogal, an excellent British-Indian writer, recently noted, not only is "gray matter shrinkage in smartphone-addicted individuals" a growing problem, the Western average IQ is declining—rapidly, he added.

This has been the case for decades. The decline of brain power has been particularly notable in America. Lead exposure, and, more recently, the effects of draconian lockdowns, have had deleterious effects on Americans' IQs. As technology continues to rise, IQ continues to decline. Is there an association? The answer appears to be yes.

What we're witnessing is the Flynn effect in reverse. Named after James R. Flynn, the renowned intelligence researcher who passed away in 2020, the Flynn effect refers to a steady upward shift in IQ test scores across generations. In recent times, however, that steady upward shift has transformed into a spiraling nosedive. This isn't surprising. In fact, as our lives become more intertwined with technology, and as we outsource more of our thinking and doing to search engines and ChatGPT-like systems, we should expect this nosedive to increase in velocity.

As Mr. Bhogal noted, common sense suggests that the decline in IQ is "at least partly the result of technology making the attainment of satisfaction increasingly effortless, so that we spend ever more of our time in a passive, vegetative state."

"If you don't use it," he added, "you lose it." Indeed. By "it," of course, he means your brain. But brain function isn't the only thing being lost.

The rise of digital dementia, digital addiction, and lower IQ scores is a reflection of a much broader problem. The United States isn't just struggling with demographic decline; it's also wrestling with the unholy trinity of spiritual, psychological, and intellectual decline. The country is becoming fatter, sicker, older, and dumber. The movie "Idiocracy" wasn't a parody; it was a prophecy.

As intelligence levels continue to plummet and test scores continue to fall in the likes of math and reading, the United States risks becoming a society of brainless, aimless individuals, a nation consisting of millions of obese zombies. Contrary to popular belief, societal collapse doesn't occur overnight; it occurs in increments, a death by a thousand cuts. The biggest threat to the United States isn't necessarily external; it's posed by the numerous digital devices in our hands and homes. Technology has consumed both our minds and our souls; are we going to get either of them back?

Why Kids Need Boredom: Experts. Boredom strengthens problem-solving skills in kids, but constant entertainment from phones deprives developing minds of these cognitive benefits.

By Vance Voetberg

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Remember whining, “I’m bored!” as a kid on those endless summer days? In our world of smartphones and infinite scrolling, those moments of boredom are rare for today’s youth—but their mental health may depend on it.

Psychologists argue that a lack of boredom may actually stifle creativity and fulfillment.

Endless Entertainment Linked to Reduced Creativity

Boredom is the bedrock on which children and teenagers create their own ideas, according to Stephanie Lee, a clinical psychologist specializing in optimizing children’s education and mental health. Excessive digital entertainment often deprives kids of this boredom, hindering imagination, she noted.

Social media correlates with reduced creativity in adolescents, a 2019 pediatric study published in the Italian Journal of Pediatrics showed. The researchers noted that social networks and smartphone use may correlate with learning consequences such as low academic outcomes, reduced concentration, and reduced creativity.

The study echoes the burgeoning body of science showing the close relationship between social media and poor mental health among teenagers. For social media-addicted teenagers, certain life skills like problem-solving and resilience are often lacking, according to a 2021 study published in the Journal of Education and Health Promotion.

Entertainment can also discourage kids from creating if they compare their performance or output to the content they consume externally, Ms. Lee said. In contrast, different forms of entertainment—watching a thought-provoking documentary or attending a concert, for example—can stimulate creativity, she added.

Bored Kids Become Better Problem-Solvers

Boredom is the antidote that builds basic life skills, Sandi Mann, a psychology professor at the University of Central Lancashire in England, told The Epoch Times. When we swipe and scroll our boredom away,” she added, “We don’t allow our minds to wonder and find creative solutions to our boredom.”

Solving boredom hones problem-solving, which is linked to better mental health. Problem-solving ability may even predict depression and anxiety, one study published in the International Journal of Preventive Medicine found. “Independent problem-solving is a way we help children and teens build self-agency, self-esteem, and confidence,” Ms. Lee said.

While journaling and art advance problem-solving, social media impairs it. Social media’s quick dopamine hits provide fleeting satisfaction that may lead to depression. In contrast, solving problems brings lasting accomplishment and fulfillment.

Achieving the “Aha!” moments when we solve a problem nullifies feelings of helplessness, which is very damaging to our mental well-being, Ms. Mann added.

Idle Time Crucial for Building Teen Resilience

Studies link improved problem-solving with greater resilience, explained Ms. Lee. Boredom may, therefore, build resilience, which Generation Z, people born from 1995 to 2010, seems to lack. This generation spends hours daily on social media.

Just as entertainment dulls problem-solving, research shows it reduces teenagers’ ability to demonstrate resilience when faced with challenging scenarios. “The ability to manage boredom independently demonstrates self-agency and self-efficacy,” Ms. Lee said. These are the foundation for building resilience.

Another benefit to boredom? It helps children, teenagers, and adults manage stressful emotions and adversity. It prepares us for the greater challenges in life.

“We often have to use planning, strategy, and problem-solving to eliminate boredom, which is good practice for children and teens—and adults,” Ms. Lee added.