

Peter d'Errico's blog

"The better the society, the less law there will be."

Social Media Critics Recognize Mental Health Issues

On 9 October 2017, I wrote about how social media exploits the frailties of human consciousness and monetizes the results of mental addiction — "Capitalism's Attack on Mind; Meditation as Antidote to Social Media Addiction". I suggested meditation as an antidote because the mental phenomena targeted by social media are understood in meditation as forms of suffering, to be alleviated rather than exploited. Recently, other voices have pointed to the same underlying vulnerability in human consciousness and have suggested withdrawal from social media. Among the most prominent critics are former executives and engineers at Facebook (which a friend calls FacelessBook, to highlight the virtuality of its "community" experience).

On 12 December 2017, **the Associated Press reported, "Some of Facebook's early friends now its sharpest critics."** The AP report quoted Sean Parker, the company's first president: "Facebook exploits a 'vulnerability in human psychology' to addict its users." AP also quoted Chamath Palihapitiya, a former Facebook vice president: "Facebook is 'ripping apart the social fabric of how society works.'" Roger McNamee, a venture capitalist and early investor in both Facebook and Google, was quoted as saying "both companies 'threaten public health and democracy.'" The AP report adds explicit discussion by these figures about how social media aim to exploit human consciousness for corporate profit.

On the same date, **The Guardian newspaper published an article focusing on Chamath Palihapitiya, under the headline, "Former Facebook executive: social media is ripping society apart."** In addition to the mental health aspects of social media exploitation of consciousness, the article explored political implications: "Social media companies have faced increased scrutiny over the past year as critics increasingly link growing political divisions across the globe to the handful of platforms that dominate online discourse."

On 15 December, **The Guardian followed up with a report, "Facebook admits it poses mental health risk – but says using site more can help."** The report stated, "Studies have repeatedly found that Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites can damage the emotional wellbeing of heavy users, particularly younger people." As might be expected—following the lead of tobacco companies and other corporate actors faced with evidence of harm—FB "painted the literature on the subject as mixed and inconclusive." But the company also says it will introduce new user features to "hopefully make their experience more positive." *{BTW and FWIW: "Hope" was the last item in Pandora's Box.}*

As the issue becomes more sharply focused, we may see people taking their minds back from the algorithms. As Palihapitiya said of his former employer, “I can control my decision, which is that I don’t use that shit. I can control my kids’ decisions, which is that they’re not allowed to use that shit.” On the other hand, likely under pressure to tone down his critique—despite his personal withdrawal—Palihapitiya later “[walked back](#) his comments, saying: “I genuinely believe that Facebook is a force for good in the world.”

For the millions of social media users *{n.b., drug addicts are also described as users}* who begin to feel used and understand they are being used, the power to pull free remains in their hands and minds. Meditate on that.

This entry was posted in Politics on 20 December 2017 [<https://blogs.umass.edu/derrico/2017/12/20/social-media-critics-recognize-mental-health-issues/>].
