

Session Four: The Digital Environment and The Adolescent Ghetto
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I. A Psychological Disorder: Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD)

II. Non-Disordered Separation Anxiety

Totally apart from when separation anxiety becomes a disorder, it is ordinary and healthy to enjoy family and peers, and to miss them when they are absent. It is especially common for many adolescents to avoid/evade being “left out.” Before digital technologies, such ordinary anxiety ordinarily only occurred when young people were in the physical presence of peers (waiting for the bus, on the playground at school, et al.). Now, however, there is an almost-constant concern that others are texting, YouTubing, Facebooking, etc., and adolescents do not wish to be left out of such activity. So they tend to log on to their digital devices to see what’s going on.

III. Digital technologies (therefore) tend to isolate adolescents from adults. For adolescents, the Internet is not the “World Wide Web;” it is the “World Narrow Web,” as it shrinks their horizons to their peers, and, notably, as it excludes adults.

“One of the striking features of emerging adulthood is how structurally disconnected most emerging adults are from older adults...Most emerging adults live this crucial decade of their life surrounded mostly by their peers—people who have no more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective, or balance than they do. It is sociologically a very odd way to help young people come of age, to learn how to be responsible, capable, mature adults” (*Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, by Christian Smith with Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. New York: Oxford, 2011., p. 234).

“A different social life and a different mental life have formed among them. Technology has bred it...Instead of opening young American minds to the stores of civilization and science and politics, technology has contracted their horizon to themselves, to the social scene around them. Young people have never been so intensely mindful of and present to one another, so enabled in adolescent contact. Teen images and songs, hot gossip and games, and youth-to-youth communications no longer limited by time or space wrap them up in a generational cocoon.” Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone under Thirty)*. Tarcher Press, 2008, p. 10

IV. Traditional “youth ministry” may exacerbate the problem:

“...life stages are not naturally given as immutable phases of existence. Rather, they are cultural constructions that interact with biology and material production, and are profoundly shaped by the social and institutional conditions that generate and sustain

them. So ‘teenager’ and ‘adolescence’ as representing a distinct stage of life were very much twentieth-century inventions...”¹

¹ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, op. cit., p. 6.