Video transcription:
"Sam Vaknin: The TRUE toxicity of social media revealed, part 1.
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Transcriber: Vianne Fischer.
Headlines and text sections are added for readable reasons.

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Sam: The most popular accounts on Instagram have zero content. They are teenagers, usually girls, who eat bananas. Zero content, and they have 16 million followers. Here's the problem:

Signaling increases anxiety.
Signaling invariably leads, in studies that we had, to performance anxiety. In other words signaling enhances anxiety invariably. There is no situation, where signaling reduces anxiety or has no connection to anxiety. It always increases anxiety. It increases anxiety of course, because you have to maintain not only prospective success, but retrospective success. Let me try to explain it in common terms.

If your last post had 2,000 likes and in your next post has thousand likes, you failed. So you are constantly competing against yourself actually, not only against others and not only against the market, but against yourself. You have to exceed yourself all the time. This creates enormous performance anxiety. Actually we discovered that 41% of Frenchmen, who were on social media reported extreme anxiety compared to 18% of Frenchmen in 1985. So the number of Frenchmen, who reported extreme anxiety, tripled over this period of time and all of them are on social media and it was the only component, that changed between the two dates. Social media did this.

Social media as an epidimic.
We can safely borrow techniques and methodologies from epidemiology and regard social media as an epidemic. As we study Ebola or similar things we can study social media. If we do that, we discover some amazing new insights. One of the most important new insights is what we call in epidemiology "self-limitation".

All viruses spread very fast and then stop. Why didn't The Black Death kill all the population of Europe? Why did it stop at half of the population? Why didn't AIDS kill all of

us? Why does epidemic stop? Because viruses stop. Why do viruses stop? Because they want to propagate. They want to continue to survive. If there were a virus, who would have killed all the population, the virus would have died as well. We call this 'self-limiting'.

If social media are like viruses and if we can use technologies, then it means, that we are coming right now to a stage of self-limiting. It means that the growth, coefficient, of social media will now stop and the world will then be divided into two groups:
1) The group of people who do not use social media and 2) the group of people who use social media.
3:06

Social media users.
They are not geographical groups and they are not socio-economic groups. We can't say for example: The rich world will use social media, but not India and China. We cannot say rich people will use social media, but not poor people. We cannot say highly educated people will use social media. We can't say this, because the profile of social media users are about two billion by now. It's totally universal, no distinguishing facit.

The only thing that will distinguish these two groups, absolutely the only thing - it's not gender, not income, not education, nothing - only: Are you using social media or not? This is a revolutionary thought, because social media has a massive effect on psychology. In other words there will be one group of people, about two billion, with one type of human psychology and another group of people, of about five billion, with a totally different type of human psychology. This is the first time, that there is such a massive reengineering of human psychology in between groups which count in the billions. This is another way of looking at it.

I would like to also… I'm going to talk a lot and you can edit me out of course…
Richard: I wouldn't dare [laughing]
Sam: If I were you I would edit out the whole thing, bl**dy hell, I just lost thousand quid [laughing].
4:35

Social media creators.
I think one thing that's neglected when we consider social media, is by whom social media was created. Consider for example the fashion industry. The fashion industry was created by homosexual men. Homoseual men who had a liking to boys. They created an ideal female figure, which was boy-like, and to this very day, this is the ideal female figure. Females, women all over the world make the mistake. It's an utter mistake. We have numerous studies that show that it's a mistake, it's wrong, it's not true.

Women think that men like thin, anorectic, slim women, because that's what the fashion magazines are telling them. But the fashion magazines are telling them that, because most of the founders of the fashion houses and fashion magazines were homosexual men.

Richard: They are only interested in how they make the clothes look, they want clothes, that just it.
Sam: Yes, but the ideal female form is actually male, young male, teenage male.
Richard: So they're like androgenized?
Sam: Right, and women adopted this. They belive this is what men want, but actually we have numerous studies that show, that men prefer fuller women, curvaceous women, women with love handles and so on. Women refuse to accept these studies, they say this is not true. Why am I telling you this? Because social media was created by a very well defined profile.
6:08

All social media were invented by men. There was not a single woman involved. All social media were invented by schizoid's, people who recluse, hermits, people who were socially inapt. All social media were invented by nerds. Most of these men - later on when we read biographies and so on, we realized that they were asexual or with very low sexual activity. The profile of the men, who invented social media - and we are talking about all these men - is very, very narrowly defined.

They created social media in their own image, of course. Since they were asexual, asocial, schizoid white men, they created a tool, which was geared towards asexual, asocial schizoid white men. Then what happened to this tool to their utter surprise? For example you can read Zuckerberg articles. To their utter shock it took off and it started to cater to black men and black women and very sexual people and asexual people and social people. It started to cater to population groups, which were totally out of sync with the nature and character of the technology. I think we are witnessing this conflict.

The technology is designed for highly specific psychological profiles and yet it is being used, abused and misused by other psychological profiles. This creates dissonance. The technology has inbuilt dissonance and I think we are feeling this dissonance a lot.
8:00

Screen time.
We know that exposure to screen time – but not all screen time - and social media, we know that it tends to encourage depression, anxiety, suicide and so on. Anxiety among teens increased by 20% since 2007. 17% of all teens with anxiety are today with severe anxiety, life-threatening anxiety. 17% compared to 3 about 10 years ago.

We know that screen time decreases happiness, decreases life satisfaction - everything I'm mentioning is studies of that - and decreases self-esteem. We know that it increases, enhances anxiety and depression.

The Royal Society of Public Health published a study in June 2018, which found out that 63% of all Instagram users are unhappy. We don't know whether unhappy people gravitate to Instagram or whether Instagram made them unhappy, but since we have similar statistics from other social media, it would stand to reason that it's the platform that made them unhappy. Not the other way around.

We know that anxiety and depression among the young - between 15 and 24 - increased by 70% over the last 30 years. It has simply doubled. We know that since 2010 teen suicide climbed by 31%, so teen suicide is rampant. Today it is the first time in human history, that the leading cause of death among teens up to the age of 24 is suicide. Not any disease or not even accidents - it used to be accidents - today it is suicide. That's the leading cause of death and this is intimately connected to social media. It raises the question: Why is that ?
10:18

Social media, a conditioning tool.
I mentioned before that social media is a conditioning tool, not an addictive tool but a conditioning tool, and that it uses relative positioning. But what are the emotions that are attached to relative positioning? The first one is envy of course. Social media are constructed around envy, pathological envy. They are purveyors of pathological envy and amplifiers of pathological envy, and they quantify via various ranking algorithms. They quantify envy with likes, with retweets. They quantify envy and then they leverage envy to motivate you. In other words, they use envy to cause you to adopt some course of action. They weaponize envy, but not only envy. I think even more so: Aggression.

Of course pathological envy is a form of aggression. People confuse jealousy with envy and here's the difference:
1) Jealousy is when I look at you and I say "I want to be Richard Grannon". I will study hard, I will buy the right glasses and and so on, develop muscles, so it will motivate me to positive action. Jealousy is constructive. It motivates me to act, but in a positive way to emulate you.
2) Patological envy means that I regard you as a source of frustration, that I can't be like you, so I would seek to destroy you or to make you me. For example by forcing you to wear white shirts, which you will never do.

Pathological envy is a form of aggression and when we look at social media, we see that all social media encourage aggression via their algorithms in via the way they foster interactions. They encourage for example peer aggression, they encourage bullying, they encourage mobbing, gang stalking, they encourage black humour, they encourage brutal honesty and so on so forth.
12:25

Designed to condition.
You could say what you've been encouraged to. It's an empty space. In this empty space you can put brutal honesty or you can put compassion. It's not like they are forcing you, it's your choice how to abuse this empty blank space. Of course this is not true because these platforms have been designed to condition or, as the founders and constructors of this platform now are attesting: They were conditioned to become addictive. But it's wrong, it's not addiction! Never mind. We know what they're trying to say.

These platforms encourage repeat use, repeat compulsive use. Now we know from Psychology, that only these kind of emotions - aggression, envy, hatred - encourage repeated use. There is no way that they have designed these platforms without being aware, that they must leverage these emotions to create addiction.

Richard: You're saying that in order to guarantee that there will be eyeballs on the screen for longer, and more eyeballs on the screen, they've deliberately fostered negative emotions in that?
Sam: Yes.
Richard: Anger?
Sam: Yes, there was no other way.
Richard: Envy?
Sam: Yes.
Richard: Resentment?
Sam: Yes. They cannot come out and say "you're wrong, we similarly encourage love", because all psychological studies show, that love does not create or motivate repeat usage, repeat action, does not foster addiction.

We have forms of love which are addictive, but then we are talking stalking, erotomania stalking, infatuation. These are pathological states, pathologies. These platforms were designed with pathology in mind. It's not just what I am saying. Some of the founders of Facebook, the main engineer of Facebook in the first few years, have now gone public and admitted that they have built addiction into the platform.

How do you do that? The only way to build addiction into the platform is to foster an agenda and enhance exactly these emotions. There is no other way. You can't encourage volunteerism or love and expect repeat usage. Simply that there's no study that support this. It's no wonder that these platforms ended up being platforms for hate speech, for fake news, for bullying, cyberbullying, no wonder at all. They were absolutely built for this.
15:08

Consider for example Twitter. Twitter limited the number of characters - until recently - to 140. Now they've incresed it to 260, but never mind, 140. What we know is that aggressive speech acts are much shorter. I'm serious, completely! There are psychological studies from the 60s, 70s, Princeton studies and so on, that have demonstrated that aggressive speech acts are much shorter than non-aggressive speech acts.

Richard: It make sense. If I'm going to have road rage I'm going to say 'f*** you'. I'm not going to say 'listen, I'm very disappointed with the way that you drove'.
Sam: Exactly. We tend to send love letters. I've never heard of a road rage letter. If you would say 'I love you', the other part would be very disappointed or taken aback 'that's all you have to say?' Even if you say 'I love you' for a minute, the other part would usually say 'that's all he has to say', 'what's wrong with this guy', 'that's it'?

Love is effusive. Compassion and empathy are effusive in order to engulf, in order to accept, in order to make the glow, in order to create these positive emotions; you need to work hard and you need to be very verbose. However, in order to injure you or attack you or frighten you or terrorize you or whatever usually two three words are suffice.
16:44

Built with negative features.
We know from the start in the 60s and well into the 80s - which is the period that this was studied - that aggressive speech acts are much shorter, so why 140? What was the technological need for 140? Why not 1400? What was the problem? Server space? What exactly limited?
Richard: If you're right and I think you are, it's the inference. It's horrendous. They're deliberately fostering agression.

Sam: Again, it's not what I'M saying. I encourage you actually to plug in and find the latest interview with the chief engineer of Facebook, former chief engineer. He says: We built it for addiction and we built it with these features, with negative features. He said: I regret it, I feel horrible, I regret what I've done. Now PBS [Public Broadcasting Service] came up with two programs about Facebook which actually claimed, that it's an extremely, extremely sinister platform. It IS an extremely sinister platform. I am saying that it's extremely sinister because of the way it's designed and the algorithms behind it, and I'm saying this from the point of view of psychology, clinical psychology. Of course you can make use of these platforms in numerous ways, but you're not encouraged to.
Richard: You're not rewarded for it.
Sam: You're not rewarded for it.
18:10

The reward incentive system.
1) I can give you a knife and with a wink wink and a nod nod, I can tell you 'if you stab Richard I'll give you 4 thousand pound'. You know I can, I'm good at it and can do that.
2) OR I can give you a knife and say 'if you cut the bread for me I'll be very grateful'. It depends how you're motivated. Many people would stab Richard. The instrument of the tool is only as good as what you are rewarded for.

Rewards incentive systems and so on, usually determined usage. If there was no fear of using knives on people, many more people would use knives on people, because we have a negative incentive for using knives on people. We don't use them on people. This negative incentive is called prison. Simple, take that away, and trust me, there will be an epidemic of people stabbing people.

Incentives, both negative and positive, regulate behavior and to a very large extent regulate emotions, which would explain why anxiety, depression and so on so forth. If you're exposed to utterly negative territory where negative messaging is rewarded, where

negativity rules, where negativity is retreated and liked etc. etc., it will poison you. It's a toxic environment and you're poisoned simply as surely as with arsenic in your food. You're poisoned. Your mind begins to change. Neuroplasticity guarantees that. First of all you'll begin to defend against this toxicity and one way to defend is to withdraw. Many people withdraw.
19:57

Network effects.

Social media is the most asocial invention ever, like ever. It encourage more asocial behavior than anything before or after, in my view. Social media created an unprecedented wave of withdrawal and automization. That's a reaction to negativity and so on. On the other hand, those who have aggressive tendencies and so on would find social media an ideal turf. They gravitate toward social media and of course enhance the toxicity. It's a self-perpetuating feedback loop, a negative filter which amplifies and attracts and connects like-minded, aggressive, dangerous, lethal, the crazy people.

This simplification is known as "Network effect." Of course all these platforms of social media were designed as networks. You can say, wait a minute, what is this guy saying? That's a very trite statement. Of course it's a network, social media network. Why? We have numerous ways of organizing social interactions. Why did social media chose networks? Why didn't they chose hierarchy? Why didn't they chose curated conversations with editors, moderators?

Before social media came online, we had other ways of interacting online in the cyber world. Which had nothing to do with networks.
Richard: No. Forums were huge, right?
Sam: Forums for example. I had a forum for 5 years. It had 250,000 members and it had moderators. We had 30 or 40 moderators, it was what we call curated conversation. Everyone could say anything, it was super active, everyone was happy and satisfied, it spunned numerous out of the forums, it's said. What was wrong with this model? In other words, our natural assumption or instinctive assumption: We were brainwashed by social media to believe, that the only way to run social media is with a network model. It's not true.

This model was selected on purpose, because it's the only model that has what we call 'network effects'. Network effects leads back to epidemiology. Network effects are an epidemic, infection - intellectual and emotional and psychological infection - of people by other people. Exactly as you would spread The Black Death or Ebola, you spread your social media.

Social media could have selected, as I said, hierarchical model, curated model and any of twenty or thirty existing models for online interaction. Yet they chose none of them! They chose the only model which is self-propagating, self-replicating, invades your DNA, your psychological DNA, alters your brain via neuroplasticity, conditions you, and later gets you addicted. The only model that does this is network, because of network effects. This created shared psychosis in many cases, mass hysteria on many cases, cults, including death cults, including teenage death cults. And it created new types of role models such as schoolshooters.
23:42

Wikipedia vs. Nupedia.

Network effects theoretically can be leveraged for good. An example would be Wikipedia. Even Wikipedia started as a network and gave up on the model. Why did it give up on the model? Because it became a cesspool of aggression, misinformation, slander, libel.

Richard: You were an editor for Wikipedia from det early days?
Sam: I was one of the hundred founders. We were 100 people who founded Wikipedia - it was called Nupedia. Then Jimmy Wales threw away all of us and took over and made it Wikipedia. Wikipedia, when it started with Nupedia and it was curated. Each one of us had

a hidden editor. I wrote the entry for narcissism. I had an editor who was the professor of psychology. It was curated and we still created content. Jimmy Wales came and said 'no, I'm converting Wikipedia to a social network' and Wikipedia became Facebook. Anyone could edit, anyone could interact with anyone, there was no end, it was spreading, Network effects and so on. Within 10 years it became an utter sewage, cesspool, attacks, nutcases, slander, libel, hatred, hate speech – horrible!

I had a public altercation with Jimmy Wales on numerous magazines all over the world, Brazil, Russia, you name it. When finally - I don't know if it's owing to me, I suspect not only because of me, but I was the only one who sued him in court - finally Jimmy Wales retreated and changed Wikipedia back to Nupedia. Today Wikipedia is actually curated. It's not a network, but look what happened: The minute it became curated, the number of active editors dropped from 3 million to 70,000! People are not interested, people want the aggression. They want the chaos.
25:56

They know what's happening.
Realizing human nature, you are faced with two options:
1) Either you surf the wave, you ride the wave, or
2) you put up dams and you try to act civil and try to channel this energy or whatever.

Facebook, Twitter, all these networks are surfing the wave. They know it's a dangerous wave. They know people are drowning. They read all the statistics of increased suicide rate, depression, anxiety. They know absolutely everything. They have designed maliciously, malevolently and possibly criminally, I don't know. They have designed their algorithms and their networks exactly to cater to human pathology in it's most extreme forms. They have sown the wind. I'm not sure they will not rip the storm – I think it's coming.

Richard: You said that it's a self-limiting virus. Do you think, like the documentary we are making, we're plugged in and we can see that other people feel the same way? Do you think this is all part of that where people are saying: Okay, enough is enough?
Sam: Yes.

Richard: Then you said that there will be two groups. One group will continue, the other group will no longer use social media. Then I think you said their psychologies will be molded differently. Do you think that will actually be the social media users if they keep going for the 10 or 15 years? They'll be more pathologized or?
27:31

Sam: Yes. It's the first time in human history - that's why I said it's a revolutionary statement - we have created the technology that succeeded to pathologize 2 billion people.

These 2 billion people - most of them, not all of them - it's too late to save them. They are conditioned and addicted. Maybe 1 billion of them, 1.5 billion of them, 1.2 billion, I have no way to predict, but some portion of them will remain on social media forever. Their pathologies will increase and they will become sicker, more anxious, more depressed, more suicidal, more in need of therapy, less functional etc. etc., more automized, more schizoid, more everything.

This group of people will be like an island. They would live on social media. It's like these famous multiplayer games, they would live in social media, it will become their world. They will swap the delusional fantasy world of social media for reality. They will lose the reality test, which is the definition of psychosis in Psychology. This will be one group.

And the rest of humanity? There has never been a case in human history of a group that big going sick, mentally sick, never been a case. Maybe with the exception of Nazi Germany, maybe, but there's never been such a case. We don't know and I cannot predict what it would mean.

Richard: To be clear. What I'm hearing you say is that people have quite literally been driven crazy, dangerously crazy by the social media usage, and that it was designed to do that, to addict them to the social media.
29:12

A self-perpetuating loop.
Sam: It was designed to condition them and to some extent addict. It's more conditioning, but designed to condition them. Once they got conditioned, they reacted like any conditioned or addict: They'll develop depression and anxiety.

However, when you develop depression and anxiety in reality, reality has the capacity to cure you, to heal via what we call 'the reality test'. Reality keeps sending you messages that intrude on your depression and anxiety. For example: A beautiful girl smiles at you, you're promoted at work, something happens. This is how we overcome grief. Grief for example, time heals everything.

What do you do if you're firewalled from reality, and you live in a toxic environment that gets increasingly more toxic. Where you're exposed only to toxic messages and where you are engaged in a toxic activity of social ranking, which is made public in order to shame you and motivate you to further go into the toxicity. It's a self-perpetuating loop, you have no countervailing influences. It becomes what we would define a psychotic disorder. It's a psychotic world, it's a bubble.
30:28

Social media as a virus.
It's the first time it's happening in human history. I have no way to predict what would such a billion people do, because they're spread everywhere. They're men and women and they are of all age groups, of all socio-economic strata and all education levels. They are off limited. They are more or less like seeds and in this sense they are epidemic. When there's AIDS you have AIDS in San Francisco, you have AIDS in Paris, you have AIDS in Africa, you have AIDS in China. It's in this sense I'm comparing it to a virus. It's a group of sick people who are exposed to a virus known as "Social Media" and now they have sickness.

Every virus is self-limiting. This documentary is a manifestation of self-limitation, but we have other phenomena, which are even more impressive than this documentary. For example the fact that about 20% of all social media users pull out of social media. Disconnect, close their accounts or inactivate accounts and even get rid of their smartphones. That's more extreme, but there are people who are doing this. There is a new phenomena of retreats, where you cannot go with your digital devices. There's a new phenomenon of jammers, that when you enters cinema or ballet or opera, whatever, your smartphone is disabled automatically.

There are many signs of revolt and rebellion against the status quo. That's why I'm not saying that all 2 billion users of social media will be pathologized to the end, but a billion probably will. That's a gigantic number. It's what we call in physics "Phase transition". It's such a big number, that it must have universal all pervasive extensive effect on the totality of humanity. What this effect will be is anyone's guess. Even the pathology is not well understood. We don't really understand what is the pathology.

There's a new diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual edition 5/2013: Internet addiction. I don't think it captures sociological aspects and cultural aspects. None of this.

How for example are we, the "healthy" people, going to accommodate these people? What if someone is a therapist, how would you if someone comes and says 'listen I'm very depressed because I'm all the time on social media? What tools do I have to cope with it'? What if a group of these people sue for disability benefits: 'I can't disengage from social media, I'm on social media ten hours a day, I try, I can't'?

It opens all kinds of very interesting questions, political, economical, legislative, therapeutic. This is a group of sick people. As we had to cope with the outcomes of AIDS and the outcomes of the influenza of 1918; as we have to cope with previous epidemics, we will have to cope with this.
33:41

The social media epidemic.
The social media epidemic is much more reminiscent of zombie movies, than it is of anything else. If you have Black Death you die. If you had influenca in 1918 you also died. If you have AIDS up to a certain point you died and after that you lived. It was these situations we are familiar with.

But social media addicts are much more like zombies. Their psychology is altered to the point that some of us would have difficulty relating to them, even via empathy. We will have difficulty relating. It reminds me that there are groups of people, who live inside multiplayer games. They absolutely live there. These games have money of their own, you can buy all kinds of merchandising goods and so on and so forth. When you talk to these people - and I did - they try very much to pretend that they're in reality, but they're not, absolutely not! They live much more there inside the computer, than outside the computer. How would we relate to these people? We don't even have the common background.

Richard: Is that possibly a way of explaining the difficulty that people are having now relating to each other, because they lost the ability to relate outside of.

Sam: As I've said before, social media is the most asocial or even anti-social invention ever! It automized, pulverized, rendered the social fabric completely, by now completely. It started with 6 millions youths, but now we're talking 2 billions. The effect is global and total, so by now the effects of social media have been disastrous.
35:34

Teenagers on social media.
For example teens prefer to interact with other teens exclusively via social media. The number of face-to-face interactions among teens dropped by 70% - seven zero, not seven - in the last 10 years! The amount of teenagers dating dropped by 63%. The amount of sexual encounters, blow jobs, you name it, dropped by 50%.

In other words, teenagers have moved exclusively to social media. They no longer interact with each other, except via social media. There are numerous documented observations in cases of teenagers communicating via social media, sitting next to each other. Sitting next to each other. We have documented observations and studies of teenagers on for example trips, sitting next to each other but communicating via social media and not talking to each other.
Richard: Like something from a sci-fi dystopian movie, isn't it? People just sit there twitching and flicking their thumbs.

Sam: Of course this has effect on sex and in due time reproduction, family formation. Indeed family formation dropped to an all-time low. Less than 1/3 of people under the age of 24 consider having a family. More than 1/3 of people under the age of 24 are homosexuals and so on. Nothing against homosexuals, let me be utterly clear. Sexual

preference as I respect and I have no problem with whatsoever. I'm not a homophobic in any shape or form. But homosexuality reflects a basic disconnect, because we know that the historical figures for homosexuality were within a certain range. It is conceivable that a sexual orientation or sexual preference will triple within less than six years.

Richard: What do you think has caused that - and it's particular amongst the young, isn't it?
Sam: Yes, under age 24.
Richard: Social media you think is causing this?
37:55

Sam: Yes, one of the reasons is social media. It's much more comfortable to interact with your own gender, if you are not face to face. Social media enhances like-minded, what we call "bubbles", enhances like-minded people. For example politics: You will gravitate in social media to people who think like you, agree with you. You will read only news stories that agree with you. You will never read anything that disagrees with you.

Richard: Social media feeds back that which it knows you're gonna look at, right?
Sam: It's called "bubble". There is also a gender bubble. It's much easier for you to interact with the same gender. Same gender, same income, same education, same political views, same sports preferences. If you're a fan of this club, you will gravitate towards them.

Richard: So people literally fucking themselves? Or an achetype of?
Sam: Yes, as I said in previous interviews, homosexuality is auto-erotic, absolutely auto-erotic, it's a form of masturbation in effect. Of course it has psychosexual dimensions, it has emotional dimensions and it's as rich and as profound as any relationship between two opposite genders. No one is taking this away.

But there is something in homosexuality that does not exist in heterosexuality. It's the fact that you are making love to your own gender. In other words: A pronounced hot-auto-erotic element - and this is exactly what social media does! It closes you that with fragmented society into identical groups. I call this phenomenon "Identicalness" . We'll talk about it when we talk about "Malignant egalitarians" [part 2].
39:46

The selfie.
Identicalness is the tendency to propagate to collaborate and to interact only with people who are very very very very very much like you. Of course the epitome of this is the selfie. In the selfie, what you're doing: You're interacting with the only person, who is 100% like you. Selfies today constitute 60 percent of all activity on social network. We don't have statistics for the beginning, but I remember the beginning and I remember when social networks started. It was never about selfies. I don't remember selfies. Actually the word 'selfie' entered the Oxford English Dictionary only in 2015, 10 years after social media became popular. At the very beginning there was no such thing as a selfie.

Selfie became very prominent in 2014/15 and today it's 6 out of every 10 posts. In other words: 6 out of every 10 times we interact with ourselves. We watch ourselves, we shoot ourselves.
Richard: We are inviting the world to look at us too, 'I'm looking at me, look at me too'.
Sam: I'm looking at me, you look at me. ME.

I would put it like this: As far as autoeroticism - not as far as depth of emotions, not as far as depth of interest - but as far as the autoeroticism the heterosexuality is very different. It's not autoerotic, it's different. It's heteroerotic having sex with the other. Then there is homosexuality which is having sex with someone who is 50% like you, almost you. Then there

10

is selfie, which is masturbating, having sex with yourself.
41:42

Indeed the main sexual activity between 15 and 45, among men, is masturbation. It has become the main sexual activity. 51% of all Internet users consume pornography on a daily basis, at least once a day in order to masturbate. If you look on only the male side of Internet users, it's 90 percent. Women do it much less. We have a situation of making love to ourselves, literally making love to ourselves psychologically, falling in love with ourselves (taking photos of yourself all the time, you must be in love), developing emotional investment in ourselves. This is known as Cathexis. Cathexis is an emotional investment.

Object relations theory in Psychology told us, that we start by being emotionally invested in ourselves and then we learn to externalize this investment in invest in others. This is called object relations, we invest in objects. Social media reverses this process. It creates regression. Indeed social media encourages very very primitive, infantile, baby-like defense mechanisms, such as splitting. You're either my friend or my enemy. You don't like me, you are my enemy. You like me, you're my friend. It's the like – dislike. It's a very binary state, very primitive, baby-like.

Today Facebook added emojis and all kinds of possibilities, but have a look. Take thousand posts, no one uses them. Vast majority are still using 'like-dislike'. A few are using 'wow' or very few. No one uses them, it's very binary. Splitting is an example like 'you're my enemy', - 'you're my friend'. Black and white thinking, catastrophizing. That's why we have conspiracy theories. Social media caters to the most primitive defense mechanisms, behaviors, trades. It is in this sense psychologically regressive.
44:16

Social media is all by design.
Here's the problem: If they had good intentions, you could say, okay, they tried it, they got it wrong. No, it's all by design! That's the shocking thing. There IS no difference therefore between social media and tobacco, or drugs in effect. I can see a world where social media will be banned. I will not be shocked at all. Frankly, on psychological grounds alone, I would have banned it of course. Anything that increases suicide by 31% should be banned.

Richard: I was gonna suggest, within that paradigm of this documentary, that maybe we don't say to people, 'look, you don't have to stop, but maybe reduce that'. But based on what you've said here, really the only responsible thing to do is to stop. If it's that toxic, if it's actually designed to actively encourage aggression and envy in the way that you say.
Sam: And regression. When you regress you don't have control, so lack of impulse control results in very very serious and sick pathologies.

But forget all this. There is a direct link established now, beyond any doubt on three continents, between anxiety, depression and suicide. Simple, in the most vulnerable group, 15 to 24.

If there were a legal drug, that would have created the same effects, it would be banned by now. Banned. If someone came up with a pill for muscle enhancing or an energy giving pill, and teens would take it and then suicide would shoot up 31%. The pill would be banned. Don't you agree? That's what social media is doing.
46:01

Richard: So I can't say to people: You can have a little bit of this highly toxic substance?
Sam: Of course you can, and it's very telling, that social media is not doing this! For example, why not limit the usage to two hours a day? Why not have an inbuilt clock, that I can use my Facebook only 2 hours. After 2 hours Facebook will block me.

Richard: Well, Instagram, just last week, put a clock in. I imagine Facebook will do too, because they know that documentaries like this are being made and that the tide is turning.

Sam: If such clocks are introduced, it only enhances my proposition that it's an epidemic.

But that's not the real question. The real question: Why wasn't it done 10 years ago? Why wasn't it built that way? If the whole platform was built for addiction, as the chief engineer himself admits. If you knew that you were creating addiction, why didn't you limit the number of pills? Why didn't you limit the usage from the very beginning? Why did you have to wait until, by a rough estimate, 20 thousand teens died every year, every single year. Why did you have to wait for this to happen, before you introduced a watch?

Richard: It's being pulled up in front of the Senate committee and I think even in Britain they're trying to get him in front of some people here to question him as well.

Sam: Yes. It's exactly the same strategies of tobacco. Tobacco companies knew it's addictive. They introduced ingredients that made it addictive, their advertising made it addictive. It was all about addiction. It's exactly the tobacco situation.

And tobacco is addiction, not conditioning. Social media is conditioning. I can't emphasize enough how critical this distinction is. Addiction can be overcome. There are well-known techniques to counter addiction and reverse it and so on so forth. Conditioning is much more difficult, much more difficult.

Richard: Conditioning - undoing conditioning, is more like the type of work that we do when we are dealing with trauma victims, isnt it?
Sam: Yes, trauma victims have some conditioned effect in behaviors. But there is a much much deeper conditioning, for example to food or to pain aversion.
Richard: So it's primal conditioning?
Sam: Primal conditioning, yes.
48:23

The fear of not to belong.
Listen, we are social animals. The most terrifying thing for us is not to not have food, not to not be in pain. Pain doesn't frighten us, food doesn't frighten us, the weather doesn't frighten us. The most frightening thing for any of us is to be ostracized, to be excommunicated, not to belong. It's absolutely by far the most frightening thing.

We can look at history. People prefered to die just not to leave the community. The biggest weapon of the Catholic Church for 400 years was not burning at the stake or to defy, it was excommunication. Their worst heretics were left to live, but they were excommunicated. When Baruch Benedict Spinoza attacked the Jewish perception of God, the concept of God in Judaism, he was not killed. He was not stoned as the Talmud dictates. He was simply excommunicated, he was thrown out of the community. There is no bigger punishment. None.

If I was threatened with lack of food or no one will talk to me for 10 years, no one not even you, I don't know what I would have chosen. I think I would have chosen to go hungry. There's nothing more frightening. And THIS IS what social media is threatening you with! If you don't behave in certain ways, if you are not negative, if you're not hate speecher. If you don't behave in certain ways, your likes will be nothing, your likes will be minimum, it will not be retweeted. You will be ignored. You will be excommunicated.

If you want to belong, this is what you have to do: Do it! Be aggressive, split, dumb down, don't be intellectual, dumb down, keep it simple stupid. There is no manual in how to be popular.
Richard: It's coercive.
Sam: Trial and error. Then you discover: If I am stupid, I have more likes. The stupider I am, the more likes I have. The more scarce or sparse the content, the more likes I have. If I put a banana peel I will get more likes than if I put an Aristoteles quote. If I don't use long words, I will be more popular, if I don't pretend that I know something or if I don't tell people that I

know something…so you dumb down.
50:55

You are forced to hide your true identity.

One other thing it does: It forces you to hide your true identity. Social media forces you to become not you, to deny critical aspects of you. If you're intelligent, you have to deny that. If you are empathic, you have to deny that. If you're compassionate, you have to deny that. It forces you to conform to some kind of ideal that is essentially aggressive, regressive, infantile. In one word: Narcissists.

Richard: I am not proud, but I'll say it:
I watched a YouTube video that was talking about promoting yourself on social media and advertise. It said this is the thing that you should do: If you're traveling, you should take a selfie of yourself and show people that you're on a plane. I was like, 'that is the dumbest, most narcissistic and pointless fucking thing I could do with a smartphone'. I tried it the next day: The most likes I've ever had on a post. Then you saw me repeat that again and again and again. People loved that. It's not a picture of anything, it's just my stupid face.

Sam: That's a highly sophisticated, intellectual statement compared to some other things. I swear to you, there is a girl, I'm not kidding, there's a woman, I think she's a Russian girl, teenager. She has photos only with bananas. She's peeling banana, she's eating banana, banana peel is on the floor. By the way: No text, she and banana. I must give her points for creativity, how many things can you do with a banana, without doing what you can do. That's it. By the way, 20, maybe 20 posts, I mean not very active. She has 16.8 million followers.

Each of these banana things has like 270 thousand likes. 16.8 million, you can't say anymore, that they're all teenagers. They are not. Statistically they're not, I mean it can't be. There must be grandmothers of sixty years old there. There must be a few professors of Psychology there, there must be, statistically speaking. It's shocking that anyone who graduated primary school would like a teenage girl with a banana. I mean, what do they do?

And of course the jumping cats on YouTube.

Richard: That makes more sense, because it's funny. You get a dopamine hit from that, I'm getting something from it, it's funny. This is the most vacuous thing I've ever done on social media, ended up being one of the most rapidly popular. I mean, within 24 hours 800 likes. I was doing nothing. I said nothing, there's nothing there.

Sam: It forces you to deny yourself, even if you don't feel it: 'Oh wonderful I got two thousand likes'. Somewhere at the very very very back recesses of your mind, there is a tiny tiny Richard Grannon voice that says, 'look what you're doing, this is stupid, what's wrong with you'. It's a tiny tiny voice. And of course not only it forces you to deny parts of yourself, which are sometimes critical, but it forces you to fight with yourself. Because there's this small voice and you tell him 'shut up, I got a thousand likes, shut the fuck up, why do you keep tormenting me, I hate you'.
53:22

Social media creates dissonance.

It creates what we call dissonance. All behavioral social media is dissonance based, all of it. Because even when you post a selfie, it is automatically sharing the selfie with people you don't know, you don't care about, and haters, potential haters. You're opening yourself up, you're vulnerable. Posting a selfie is the epitome of vulnerability. You can certainly be attacked or reposted or whatever. It's anxiety enhancing.

The minute you post a selfie, your level of anxiety shoots up, absolutely shoots up. Of course after a million times that you're anxious. After two hundred thousand times that you have a fight with you in a voice. After three hundred thousand times that you denied part of yourself, you become depressed. These are the makings of clinical depression.

We are clinically depressed when we deny ourselves. We are clinically depressed when we have constant dissonance and feel helpless about it. With dissonance means two forces, two equipotent forces with the same power, that tear you apart in effect and so on. These are the makings of depression. Indeed teens, who were interviewed and were asked the simple question: Does it make you feel good to be on social media? A big portion said, I think about 40 something percent, said that it makes them feel very bad. Another 20 something percent said it makes them feel bad. Only 3 percent - three - said that it makes them feel good. Shocking!

Richard: It makes you just ask the question 'Why are they there'?
Sam: Conditioning. Precisely what I'm saying. The only reason we do things that make us feel bad is if we can't help it. And the only things we cannot help are addictions and conditioning.
56:26

Conditioning vs. addiction.
I maintain that social media is conditioning, not addictive. Of course every conditioning looks like addiction, because these are compulsive behaviors that you cannot control, they look the same, but they're not the same. They're not the same at all.

For example, one of the main features of addiction is, that it provides you with a meaning. Take the drug addict. A drug addict has to get up in the morning, find money, steal from his mother, find money and then buy, connect, call the pusher. If you look at it from outside, it's a bit like business: You have to get up, you have to manage your business, it's a mission, it has a purpose, it's goal-oriented. At the end of the day it's a product, it consumes the product. It provides meaning. We call it exoskeleton. It provides a meaningful exoskeleton. A conditioning? No. Conditioning doesn't provide meaning. Conditioning is totally automated, like 'I want food, I press lever'', 'I don't want pain, I don't press the lever'. There's no like 'the lever is my meaning and I'm goal-oriented'. It's utterly automated, robotic.

Most of the behavior in social media is robotic. It doesn't give meaning, it doesn't endow you with meaning. It's utterly robotic in the sense that it's one-on-one. You push – result, and again you push and the result creates the next push. If I put a selfie and I get 100 likes, I will try to put another selfie, so that I get a thousand likes. This is conditioning. This is one of the differences.

Addiction is a much much much much more complex phenomenon than conditioning. Social media is simple. There's no complexity there. Actually there's a hatred of complexity. That's why 140 characters. There's a hatred of complexity, it's anti-complex. This is one of the tell-tale signs: The simpler the activity of the platform, the more it is geared towards conditioning than towards addiction.
58:46

Three groups of internet users.
Richard: Pointing towards as the age issue, literally the age of the person who's using the social media and the age in which they were born. If you were born post 1990, I guess by the time you are coming into your sense of self more socially, which would be adolescent years after the age of 12. This is when social media probably will have the most sway over your perception of yourself and the world. Do you think that if you were born into using internet, that you're more susceptible and more vulnerable to the ill effects of that?

Sam: Assuming the Internet has an all pervasive influences as I just claimed, I think there should be three groups:
1) One is people who were exposed to the Internet in their late 20s, 30s, 40s etc. etc., and that would include dinosaurs like me.
2) Then people who were exposed to the Internet during adolescence,
3) Digital natives were exposed to the Internet during the formative years, were born with the tablet and exposed to the Internet.

I think **the first group**, of the oldies, still use the social media as a form of communication, essentially. Reconnecting with old flames and all pals and so forth, creating social network in the full sense of the word. Communicating as they would have done on a telephone or earlier via mail, post office. They would see social media as a natural extension of the telegraph and the telephone and the post office and so on. Therefore they would miss out on all the pernicious effects of social media, because they would limit their communication to the swapping of information, the expression of very basic emotions and the coordination of meetings. Essentially. They will be extremely reluctant to use social media for any truly intimate communication and conversation. They are more face to face.

The second group are people who've been exposed to social media during their adolescence. They would tend to use social media for social positioning, for competition, for information, for connecting, but for highly specific purposes. For example connecting romantic, using it as a romantic aid, or using it in order to exchange information about preferences; preferences in music, preferences in movies and so on and so forth. Again, the communication would be superficial, it would be motionless in many ways. Even this group, I would say, is pretty safe, because they've had exposure during the formative years to alternative methods and ways of communicating.
1h:02:10

Digital natives are doomed. They are doomed because social media pervades all types of communication as early as six years old. I have seen six years old communicating on social media. I've definitely seen nine years old and ten years old and so on.

The thing with social media is that the gratification is instantaneous, response times are very fast. Therefore any hormonal or other effects in the brain are immediate and addictive. Conditioning is total. Every other mode of communication by comparison looks lacking, it's either too slow or it's too accurate. Ambiguity plays a big role in social media, it's too accurate or it's too all-encompassing or it's too intimate or it's too something.

Social media is ideally suited to digital natives and it both shapes their brains on the one hand, and on the other hand reflects their brains and mentality. They grow up in a world where attention span is very truncated. Where the emphasis is on communicating unbridled sharp emotions, clear, very primitive, very infantile. Where all the defense mechanisms are activated in every interaction. Where aggression and similar negative emotions are freely expressed and used as means of social control, or peer control to be more precise. This is their world. Social media is well suited to it. They have no alternatives. They never experience anything else. Their face-to-face interactions are very limited, if at all.
1h:04:11

Disintegration of families.
Families have disintegrated, don't forget. We are talking about generations which also, concurrent with the experience of social media, lost all other social experience. People who are 40, 50, 60 years old have experienced the family. People who are 40, 50 years old experienced the extended family: The nuclear family, grandfathers, grandmothers and uncles and so on. People who are 20, 30 years old experienced only the nuclear family. People who are 15 to 25 years old experience no family what so ever, statistically speaking. 40 percent of them grow up with single mothers and about 70 to 80 percent of them come from divorced families.

The lack of all other social interactions and all other social dimensions makes it impossible for them to compare, to develop critical thinking about what they are experiencing, to realize the limitations and problems of social media and so on so forth. Social media is the only social world they know. They have no family, they have no nothing else to compare it to, and because they are not intermeshed, because they are not embedded in other types of social interactions and social units, there's also no control. There's no control over the usage of social media.
1h:05.45

Limiting access to social media.

This movement of controlling the usage of social media is very new. It's about two years old. Only NOW we are beginning to talk about limiting access to tablets, to smartphones, smartphone free hours, tailoring the use of social media to age groups etc. etc.

But even this control is rudimentary and utterly ineffective. There is no way to control the use of cyberspace. You can find children as young as 9 year old or 10 year old who are self-mutilating online, who are joining suicide cults, death cults, who are exposed to extreme violent pornography and so on and so forth.

Therefore there is a problem with the question. There is no 'world and social media'. Social media IS the world for digital images. There is no other world outside it, there is no reality outside it. They live inside social media. This reminds me of the question you asked me about simulation. These are simulated people. They live inside the simulation. They are in the matrix already.
1h:07:09

Denizens of the matrix.

Richard: You said that simulated people, they themselves are experiencing themselves as simulations.
Sam: They experience themselves as real people, who are living real lives, but they don't. They are living in a matrix. Social media is their reality. Bits and bytes come instead of atoms. Their families are peers. These peers are not real. They never see them or rarely see them face-to-face. They interact with digital renditions of other people, of objects, of places, of events. They are all digital and in this sense they are denizens of the matrix, absolutely. They live inside a simulation.

The gulf between someone who is 35 years old and someone who is 15 years old, is not a quantitative gulf. One who is 35 years old uses social media 2.6 hours a day, and the one who is 15 uses social media 6 hours a day. These are the statistics. It's not a quantitative curve, it's a qualitative gulf. The one who is 35 or 25 comes from reality and uses social media as he would use or she would use any other tool, a knife, a camera.

The one who is 15 lives inside social media. The one who is 15 years old or 10 years old or even 20 years old up to 24 - according to studies by Twenge up to the age of 24 these people live inside social media - perceive reality to be unreal. They perceive social media to be real and reality to be unreal, because everything they see, they see mediated via screen. If they see starving children in Yemen, these are bits and bytes and digits on a flickering screen. These starving children in Yemen are as real to them as their peers across the street, as their classmates. In other words, as unreal to them. The reality has vanished with this generation.

This is an open question. Ancients like me, old people, would say that this is an unmitigated catastrophe, because you know, they can't function in reality. They would elect someone like Donald Trump to the presidency, because reality TV and reality are the same. They would make decisions which are not grounded in reality, or badly grounded in reality. They would have bad outcomes and disasters and so on. Someone like me would feel that this is horrible.

Someone who is a bit younger or a lot younger may say: So what? Reality is becoming simulation. We are becoming the matrix. What's wrong with that?
1h:10:21

Simulations.

In the interview we had last time, you asked me about simulation and I said: Well, if I'm plugged in to the matrix and I am allowed to control how the program operates, in other words, to express my wishes and preferences and priorities, and the program abides by them, obeys me, why should we say it's not real?

For example, if I'm plugged into the matrix and my wish is to have a wife with two children. I instruct the program to generate a wife and to generate two children, and I live with this wife and two children for the rest of my life, another 70 years, and then I die. Could you say that I did not have a wife or two children?
Richard: I think that you wouldn't be able to say that there's a difference, so there's no way I can tell you.

Sam: I mean they look made of atoms, I agree, so what? The emotional reaction to this wife and two children, the experience of having a wife and two children, would be identical to having the wife and two children made of carbon. This is what people find very difficult to understand to accept: There is no difference - in principle - between simulation and reality. Reality is a simulation made of carbon atoms, that's all. While simulation is a simulation made of other materials or electric currents.

Philosophically speaking there is no rigorous argument that can distinguish reality from simulation. If the children live in social media and in cyberworld for the rest of their lives and never ever meet another human being made of atoms, I cannot say that their life has been meaningless, insignificant and lacking in any way. I cannot.
1h:12:18

Intimacy reduces the need for addiction.

Richard: I want to ask you a selfish question:
I'm single, but I'd rather be in a relationship and I've been trying for about six months to get myself into one. It's very very hard and there's a lot of difficulties that I've associated with that, and I want to just pull up two things. You said that social media encourages ambiguity, it encourages a lack of intimacy. Could you tell me why that is? And do you think that would bleed out into the real world?

These are the things I'm struggling with. People's communication is extremely ambiguous and there's a terror of intimacy. Just the intimacy of meeting face-to-face creates this relationship-destroying terror. Like, you will be fine until you want to meet in flesh and blood. Ah now that's a problem, because you've only ever met my false self. Why does social media need to be ambiguous and non-intimate?

Sam: The only antonym of ambiguity is intimacy. The only way to disambiguate anything is to get to know it, and the only way humans get to know each other, is via intimacy. When we become more and more intimate with another person, that person becomes less and less ambiguous to us. Every initial contact is always ambiguous and every relationship always end in certainty. It could be a very bad certainty, 'it's not the guy for me, it's not the girl for me', but it's always certainty.
1h:13:52

The thing is that social media is structured to prevent certainty and to deter intimacy. The reason it is structured that way is because intimacy reduces the need for addiction, it reduces the need for conditioning. Intimacy is in a way the biggest addiction. When you are in an intimate relationship, it usually consumes most of our emotional resources, cognitive

resources. There's simply no time for other addictions, or to put it very bluntly: Intimacy competes with Facebook. You're either intimate or you're on Facebook.

Of course intimacy has social aspects. It's a social activity. It's an interpersonal activity, but it's a social activity as you are never only intimate with one person. The minute you're intimate with one person, you're also automatically intimate with her friends, her family, with her background, even with her city. We are never intimate with one person. We are always intimate with networks centered around one person. In a way intimacy is a mini-mini-mini-social network with extreme addictive power, which of course renders the likes of Twitter, Facebook and everything else.

Twitter and Facebook purvey and rely on loneliness. They need automatized, schizoid, separated, hermits, recluses, nerds, socially inept, socially unable to bind, to bond and to be intimate. They need this kind of population. It's the only kind of population that becomes conditioned and addicted to social media usage in lieu of real contact in real relationships.

We know that manufacturers of products are introducing two elements into their products. First of all they try to make the products indispensable. Here we have iPhone 7. Why, iPhone 3 worked perfectly? Because they have rendered the product indispensable to our lives via status symbol, via branding, via other new functions, so-called 'new functions'. All manufacturers try to render their products indispensable and built in to their products obsolescence. These are the two mantras of manufacturing. Same goes with social media.
1h:16:38

How social media withhold the users.
1) Social media tries to render itself indispensable and would obliterate any threat to itself. The biggest threat by far is an intimate, mature, adult, healthy, engulfing relationship. Social media are anything but social. They need autimized, lonely individuals.
2) The second thing is obsolescence. Social media expires much faster than any product. The minute you post the tweet and the minute it's been liked, 24 hours later it's dead, its obsolete. You need to renew the product, you need to post another tweet, you need to tweet again. These are the only manufacturers in the world, who made you their employee. It's the only manufacturing industry in the world, where the users are its employees.

When you buy an iPhone, Apple doesn't expect you to go to Foxconn in China and put the components together. But when you use social media, you generate the content. Think about it. It's supposed to be a content platform, yet you generate the content. It's selling the content to advertisers, but you generate the content. It's supposed to be a communication platform, but you communicate. It's you doing everything. Twitter and Facebook are dumb, idiotic black spaces doing nothing but obeying your input. You are working for Facebook and Twitter - and others of course that I'm not mentioning.

Richard: Are you saying that the wizards of Facebook and Instagram are aware, that their users getting into intimate relationships would be bad for business?
Sam: Yes, I've no doubt about this. They discourage intimacy in every conceivable way.
1h:18:48

Richard: Do you think they're actually discouraging humans from meeting face-to-face with humans, because it would make them redundant, and that's written into the algorithms?
Sam: They're not worried about face-to-face meetings, because as I told you, the platform is built for instant gratification. It's very much like drugs, so that's not a real threat. The real threat is that you will find someone through Facebook or something, that with whom you will develop an intimate relationship.

Listen, it's extremely simple. When you start a love affair, you really have no mind for facebook. They need your eyeballs. Your eyeballs will now rest on the beautiful woman that you fell in love with, not on Facebook. She is their competition. They need to eliminate her

from your life, they need to monetize your eyeballs, they need your eyeballs. Anything that competes with them for your eyeballs is a bloody threat, your family, your girlfriend, television, other social network, anything, Google.

Why does Facebook not allow Google to crawl the Facebook database? Did you ever ask yourself Facebook does not allow Google to crawl the database, why? Some accounts are private, okay you can put a robot text and it will not be scanned. But why? Facebook does not allow Google to scan, because that would steal away eyeballs.
Richard: It's content, it's ressource, the product.
Sam: It's what they sell to advertisers and so on. If you have a girlfriend, your consumption of Facebook will collapse by 60%. Perhaps even your girlfriend insist that you don't use Facebook anymore, because you're flooded by offers from very beautiful women.
Richard: She did, she said something like that.
1h:20:40

Sam: Many do, by the way. Many say 'listen, if we get together, cut down on social media'. Every man, well almost every man is flooded with offers, sexting is much more common than you think, I don't know, it's your experience. It's there.
Richard: Oh yes, sex thing is a standard communication.
Sam: Sexting became standard. Imagine I have a wife or a girlfriend. Who would have agreed to that? She would tell you 'cut it off, cut it down'. So, it's a threat.
Richard: Love is a threat to social media.
Sam: Love is a threat, relationship is a threat, intimacy is a threat, togetherness is a threat, a community is a threat, friendship is a threat, anything that takes you away from Facebook.
1h:21:35

True intimacy, the antidote to social media.
Richard: If social media is a virus, is community, family, love, intimacy the antidote to the virus?
Sam: Yes of course. If you once in your life experience true intimacy, social media suddenly feels plastic, feels weird, feels creepy I would say, absolutely creepy. If you really for once in your life experience true intimacy. True intimacy is utterly addictive. You will spend the rest of the life looking for it again. You will travel to Italy, you will travel to.. You'll look for it everywhere.
Richard: Good place to start, Italian girls are lovely.
Sam: You will look for it again and again and again. Poets have been writing poems for the entirety of their life, because they've experienced love when they were 21. Real cases. They experienced love when they were 21. When they were 70, they were still writing poems about love, what is love, how it's love. We know physiologically speaking: Love is addictive, absolutely an addictive process. Why would you not assume that one addiction fights another for limited scarce ressources, your eyeballs, your time, your money?

Richard: So love would be antidote to the virus of social media?
Sam: The competitor.
Richard: So if I'm trying to generate intimacy with people whose brains are conditioned by social media, I am doomed to fail?
Sam: Yes, absolutely yes!
Richard: Because they will be ambiguous, counterdependent, shy of intimacy?
1h:23:20

Sam: No, they will be conditioned against intimacy. It's not a question that they are incapable of intimacy. They regard intimacy negatively, as a threat. They regard intimacy as a threat because one thing that most people neglect to mention is, that most interactions or social media are painful. Social media creates fault intimacy, fake intimacy, because it's very minimal, but even that is usually accompanied by some dose of pain.

In other words, you put your selfie up. It's a kind of intimacy, very minimal, tiny, but still it's intimacy. Out of 10 comments, 3 will tell you how ugly you are, and I'm being generous. Never mind if you're not. Never mind if you are a superstar, 3 will tell you how ugly are just to pain you, to hurt you. It's sadistic. People are conditioned to expect an experienced pain from even tiny minimal exposure. Now imaging intimacy, you expect intimacy from these people? Are you kidding me?

Richard: So you're saying they're conditioned to find micro intimacy very painful?
Sam: Macro intimacy is thousand times more painful. That's conditioning by the way, not addiction. It's an example of conditioning.
1h:24:54

Richard: The other thing I'm thinking is of course: If I've met them through social media and I've seen them with their filters and the photoshopping and everything else. The last thing they want is for me to meet, because intimacy, as you said, was a lack of ambiguities getting to know someone. Then I will see you as you are, not as you have been projecting yourself.

Sam: Yes. Social media encourage you to present only specific aspects of yourself or even photoshopped, kind of modified. But even those who are totally honest and don't Photoshop their photos, even they are of course extremely selective what they present, and they are selective because of the pain. I would love to be intimate and vulnerable on social media, but then I can expect thousands of...
Richard: You'll be stabbed, psychological speaking.
Sam: I would be stabbed to death. I had an extremely painful childhood and so on. Sometimes I want to share. I'm going through a very difficult period now, but I would never share this on social media, never.

I believe that from the very beginning some things are excluded. Then it's not real communication and it has very little to do with the real person. These people learn to interact on superficial levels. They can never go deeper, because they're terrified, they're pain adversers.
1h:26:13

What social media has done: It has exponentially multiplied the amount of negative social interactions and pain. Exponentially. There are these stories by Thomas Hardy and others about a small village or a small town. You did something wrong and then all the town is gossiping about you. How many people gossiped about you? 2,000. You can be easily attacked on a typical day by 20,000 people, easily on social media. Easily. Thomas Hardy in the worst nightmares that he created like "The Mayor of Casterbridge". This guy committed a crime, hinted to escape his death. If you count in the novel, how many people criticized him, we are talking I think about 60, right?

Any post on Facebook would get a bigger number of negative reactions.
Richard: Yes, without a doubt.

Sam: Social media amplifies exponentially the negative aspects of social interactions of all kinds and especially intimacy. In other words, pain adversion, conditioning. When the dog presses the lever to get food and is electrocuted, he would prefer to die of hunger. It's a fact. Dogs die of hunger in experiments, because every time they press the lever, they get electric shock. It's social media: Every time you press the lever, you get an electric shock, so you don't press the intimacy lever anymore. Even when it's offered to you in a safe environment, you would still not press it. When the electric shock was disabled, the dogs still did not press the lever, they died. See! That's what is happening to all of us! We're emotionally dying.
1h:28:12

Creating a parallel life.

Richard: If I could invite you to be prescriptive: What can I do in my situation where I am looking to be in a relationship. What would be the path that has the most chance of being successful do you think? Do I need to go to a country where there is no social media, where there is no internet?

Sam: Well, first of all I think that there are enclaves even in our society. Social media is much less dominated or prevalent of interest in for example academia. You can find gorgeous, intellectual girls who are far more interested in reading, and so on, than in social media. It depends to a very large extent to the message you are sending. I don't know if you're really talking about yourself.
Interviewer: Yes, I am.

Sam: If you are really talking about yourself: The message that you are sending is that your are social media savvy, that you live on social media, YouTube channel and so on. Therefore you create a filter.

Your message creates a filter. The women who would approach you are into YouTube, into social media, into celebrities, into gurus. Perhaps either dispensing with this filter or creating a different filter, creating a parallel life. A totally different filter would then get you the right woman, the right girl.

I'm lucky to have this. I have a parallel life. I have had a life on the internet much longer than yours actually. I have had a life on the Internet going on for 25 years. This attract these kind of women - and I utterly ignore them. I DO have a parallel life. I have written physical books and published them physically. I've been around before the internet, I work in academia etc. etc.

We are forced by social media to develop multiple personalities. If we want the old-fashioned way of loving, being intimate, catering to our deep emotional needs and so on, we are absolutely forced to divorce social media. To do that you need either to divorce, shut down the devices. Or, if you can't do that by excidency, I mean by your own, then you need to create a parallel life. You need to simply have two personalities, two parallel trajectories.

Then I think it's not too difficult to find, because they are in enclaves. Seriously speeking enclaves. Women who volunteer, women who work in academia, women who are into theater. There are absolutely enclaves. They are not into social media. Of course as you are now, you attract only such women.

Richard: I just got a love advice from Sam Vaknin - and it was good.
Sam: Good luck.
Richard: Historical moments. [both laughing].