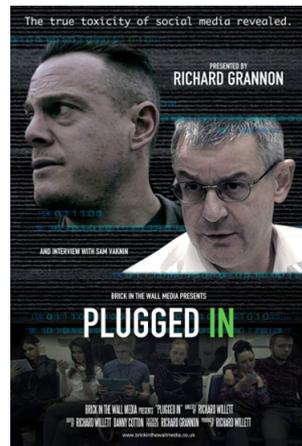# PLUGGED IN : The True Toxicity of Social Media Revealed (Mental Health Documentary) by Richard Grannon.

Premiere 23. January 2019
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVprI6_P8GE

Transcriber: Vianne Nygaard.
Text sections and some extra headlines are added for readable reasons.

Introduction quotes.

Fox News: Thanks for staying with us. There's a new study out, that's warning of the possible deadly consequences for teens using social media.

Dr. Travis Stork: Obviously, we know social media plays a role, but here we are in this day and time, where you're almost not surprised that this is occurring.

Meg Meeker, MD, Pediatricin: You know I'm so glad that you brought this up. And I do see a connection between teen depression and social media in my practice.

Judo Ho, PhD, Board-certified clinical Psychologist: I mean, teen suicide has gone up a lot in the last 10 to 20 years. It's been basically a 50% increase in females under the age of 17, and a 30% increase in boys under the age of 17.

Jarod Lamier, Founding father of the field of Virtual Reality: Society has been gradually darkened by this scheme in which everyone is under surveillance all the time and everyone is under this mild version of behavior modification all the time. It's made people jittery and cranky. It's made teens especially depressed, which can be quite severe.

Chamath Palihapitiya, Former senior executive at Facebook: And it is a point in time where people need to hard break from some of these tools, and the things that you rely on. The short term dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created, are destroying how society works.

Sean Parker, First president of Facebook: That thought process was all about, how do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible.

Abbie Hunter: Yeah, if I'm feeling down and I'll come and look on those things, they'll just make it worse. Or I might be feeling fine and then I'll look at social media, and then like plateauing, I just feel really anxious about how I look or what I'm doing or what I'm not doing.

Sam Vaknin, Author of "Malignant self-love, Narcissism revisited": 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 its most extreme forms.

Robert McCarthy: The idea of validation, it's constantly wanting to be validated, I want to post this, I want to block him, I want to say this, this. Because you constantly want their validation, their likes, like a dopamine hit, you're constantly, constantly just wanting the validation. So you put things out there that you know you don't necessarily believe in, or isn't in line with your moral compass. But you'll put things [out]because you know it might get liked.

Emily Freeman: I just hate that if you cry for help, it's attention-seeking. If you message your friends, they're too busy. If you look on their profiles, they're having an amazing time, and none of it is true.
2:46

Introduction by Richard Grannon.

The rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers have increased by 70% in the past 25 years. The number of children and young people turning up in accidents and emergency departments with a psychiatric condition has more than doubled since 2009. And in the past three years, hospital admissions for teenagers with eating disorders have also almost doubled.

We all already know that too much social media use might not be a good thing, but, that like many bad habits, if moderated, ultimately its use might be harmless. I originally set out to make a documentary that explored the possible positive benefits of diminished or controlled social media use. What I actually uncovered was something far, far darker.

Hello, my name's Richard Grannon. I run SpartanLifeCoach.com. We have a YouTube channel with over 105,000 subscribers, and what I do is, I take a fresh and unique look at psychology and mental health issues and recovery and healing from things like anxiety, depression, body dysmorphia, and a whole range of psychology topics.

We have all been sold on the idea of using social media on the basis of increased connectivity and inclusivity.
- But what if the design of social media has shifted to something else altogether?
- What if it is deliberately being used against inclusivity and connectivity? With the idea of face-to-face human interaction, vulnerability and intimacy actually being an enemy to social media usage, in terms of it harvesting the maximum time and attention.
5:04

The hidden toxicity of social media use.

In this documentary, we will be exploring the hidden toxicity of social media use.
We are not going to be telling you not to use social media or to throw your smartphones away.

But we do want people to understand the way that algorithms and artificial intelligence that you engage with, when you open your smartphone and use social media, affect and condition your brain and the dopamine reward system and your central nervous system, and even your very perceptions of reality itself.
5:39

Social media conditioning.

How it works.

The twofold cores of the problem is:

1. Excessive accessibility.
Unboundaried accessibility that trains the brain to find reward in dipping into social media as a coping mechanism. So you get people dipping and dipping and dipping. They're constantly pulling their phones out. I do it myself.

2. And then the other side of it is, you know, social media is ultimately, it's there to make money, it's a business. And so the people who design the algorithms have to design the algorithms around a purpose, and the purpose is to maintain attention. So social media is designed to be as attention-grabbing, as quickly stimulating, as quickly rewarding as it could possibly be.

Wanting to find out more about the negative effects of social media on young peoples' mental health, I sat down with psychology professor Sam Vaknin.
About halfway through shooting this documentary, we had the opportunity to sit down with Sam Vaknin and I thought we were going to have a general conversation about some of the ill effects on a person's mental health that excessive and unboundaried use of social media might have.

What we uncovered, and what Sam explained to me, was far, far darker. That actually social media intrinsically may be designed to provoke feelings of confrontation, feelings of resentment, feelings even of hatred, anger and aggression, just to keep peoples time and attention focused more on social media.

Sean Parker said it openly, explicitly: We are trying to harvest as much of people's time and attention as we can. And why? For gain. It's capitalism, they're doing it for profit. The more human beings who are looking at Facebook and Instagram for longer, or SnapChat or whatever it is, then the more value that platform has economically.

Sam Vaknin: It was designed to condition them and, to some extent, addict. It's more conditioning, designed to condition them. Once they got conditioned, they reacted like any conditioned or addict, they developed 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. So for example, a beautiful girl smiles at you. You're promoted at work. Something happens, gradually, and this is how we overcome grief, grief, for example. Time heals everything.

What do you do if you are 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're 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. And so, it becomes what we would define as psychotic disorder, psychotic world, it's a bubble.

It's the first time it's happening in human history. I have no way to predict what such a billion people would do. Because they're spread everywhere, and they're men and woman and they are [from] all socioeconomic strata, and all educational levels. I mean it's not, they're not limited. They are more or less like seeds. And in this sense, they're epidemic.
9:27

Social Media Awareness.

Jonathan Bertrand: Hi, my name is Jonathan Bertrand, I am from Orlando, Florida, USA, or United States. I am the pioneer of Social Media Awareness. This came about because I was bullied online, and I had two options, pull the trigger or seek help and develop a new outlet, and that was Social Media. Over the course of eight years, I ended up developing what I call "The Social Media Persona" through a theory that I developed called "The Triple Conscious Theory".

Through that persona I understood the impacts, not only on my personal life, but also business life,
and then eventually I found out that it affected more than just me, it affected everyone.

So I developed what I call "Social Media Awareness" in 2015, and it expanded to just my local school of Florida A&M, and it went beyond that to a global reach. Now I'm on a mission to start promoting social media awareness beyond just here in the states, but internationally.

When I was at a national council and I spoke, if you ever listen to the interview that I had online, you can actually hear them laughing at me. And what they don't show is the other side of the room of 300 executives. These executives laughed at me, because when I said "you think you know social media but you don't", one guy actually stood up and said, "Why are you here? This is about marketing and branding, not mental and behavioral health." And I said, huh? [laughing] The look on my face was confused, because I'm like, what are you talking about? This is what social media is. It IS marketing and branding, but it's all about mental health.
11:04

Rewarded for being controversial.

Richard: I sat down with some students from Liverpool University to hear how they felt about social media usage.

Liverpool Science Park.
Social media discussion – December 2018:
Richard Grannon: So one of the people that we interviewed is a professor. He was saying that what actually is happening is you're being rewarded for being controversial. And punished for not being controversial. So if you say something that's neutral, you just get ignored, because the punishment-reward system is either you're noticed or you're ignored. Now, if you're rewarded for being controversial and punished, "punished", for not being controversial, you're training people to be controversial. You're training people to be like a wind-up.

Envy is weaponized.

Sam Vaknin: Well, 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. So 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. So they weaponize envy.
12:33

Richard Grannon [sitting with the students]: Do you remember what it was over?
Natalie Kearney: It was just stupid, like something really petty, to be honest. Someone messaged me, and I just had a huge argument with him because he didn't like the fact, who I was born, like didn't like the fact that I was born a boy. So he kinda just, like went off on one, and it was my fault, and if it was my fault, like, you make me fall for the fact that you were a

biological woman. I'm like, I didn't make you fall for nothing, I was like 'listen to me, we're living in the 21st century', and it just went off.

Richard: Messaging or publicly-like was it?

Natalie: It was messaging, but then he did lead into comments, because I blocked him from messaging me. I didn't block him from Facebook. Then he went on me Facebook and commented on a few things, like everyone needs to know that this is 'a tranny'. So I deleted the comments and blocked him altogether. But the argument was just ridiculous.

Richard: Do you think that he was talking to you in a way, that he wouldn't have done if you was face to face?

Nataiie: Yeah, of course, because it wouldn't be the same reaction from me to be honest.
13:33

Richard Grannon: But what is far more common is not actual violence, it's emotional violence, it's psychological violence. At least I can have an impact on you. If I can torture you, if I can make you harm yourself, or even kill yourself, then I have meaning, I have power, I have agency in the world. That in the face of all this beauty and wonderfulness and the best of everything and just the sheer numbers of people, I'm meaningless, I'm insignificant, and I loathe that, I hate that. And it makes me feel disenfranchised, anxious, and very very aggressive.

Sam Vaknin: It's no wonder that these platforms ending up being platforms for hate speech, for fake news, for bullying, cyberbullying, no wonder at all. They were built for this. They were absolutely built for this. Consider for example, Twitter. Twitter limited the number of characters, until recently, to 140. Now they increased it to 160, but nevermind, 140. What we know is, that aggressive speech acts are much shorter. I'm completely serious.
14:44

Richard Grannon [sitting with the students]: So in terms of finding events, social activism, there's useful things, connecting with your mates, there's useful stuff there. And I like what you're saying. I don't agree with it, but I like it, because it's optimistic. I think it's an idealism that I'd like to aspire to, which is, it's just a tool, it's neutral. So if the intent is good, then it should be okay.

That's how we started the Documentary. This started as: Why are we looking at rates of suicide amongst teens that are so high? Like right now, they're at this peak. Why is there so much mental health issues amongst young people? And then as I started to unbox that, I was like, well the thing that's changed in the last 10 years that's caused this big, not caused it necessarily, but the common denominator seems to be social media usage.

And so, I think there can be things where you look at and you go, theoretically this should be fine, this should be okay if my intention is good, then things will work out. And I'm not saying I'm right, I'm pretty sure I'm not definitely right. But the idea being that, even if the intention is good, because the algorithms are set the way they are, and human psychology being the way it is, it still can have a negative influence.

Markus Servan: That's the thing, I agree.

Ricard: You agree with that, yeah?

Markus: You've got a point, yeah. I mean, you may say social media is neutral. We are human beings, I mean, we make mistakes. Sometimes we use things too much, it hurts us. I mean people smoke every day
even though they know they get cancer. Yet they still do. I mean, there's reasons for it. So maybe we quite simply don't understand either the reasons, or ourselves.
16:35

Social media, a risky behavior.

Bailey Parnell, Founder CEO of Skillscamp: By every measure, social media is a risky behavior. Like sex, like drugs, like alcohol. We know this, because we judge a risky behavior as something where, when you participate, you expose yourself to potential harm. It's very easy to understand what the harm is with drinking and drugs, because it's been around forever. But we know for sure that by participating on social media, you expose yourself to potential harassment, potential depression, potential stress, potential traumatic imagery. So you are exposing yourself to potential harm, no doubt. Now if we start calling it a risky behavior, then we can start treating it as such.

Sam Vaknin: If there were a drug, 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, I don't know what, a muscle-enhancing pill, energy-giving pill. And teens would take it and then suicide would shoot up 31%. The pill would be banned, don't you agree?
Richard Grannon: Absolutely.
Sam: That's what social media is doing.
Richard: So then 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 a clock, an in-built clock, that I can use my Facebook only two hours? After two hours, Facebook will block me.
17:55

Markus Servan: I mean, I don't know too much about mental illness, but it seemed liked I was depressed. My friends said I was, so yeah, I was depressed, let's just say that. And that exactly what I did, just spiraled down deep in my own thoughts, in my own mind basically. And when your mind constantly, not your mind, yourself, it has to be yourself, I guess. When you tell yourself constantly you're shit, well…you start believing that and you don't believe in yourself. I mean, that's the opposite, that's not loving yourself. Because if you love yourself you would also believe in yourself, and that would make you able to do things. Because if you don't believe in yourself, you don't have the confidence.
19:01

The programming of digital natives.

The known negative effect on young peoples mental health and wider society at large.

Richard Grannon: 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 Vaknin: 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 old 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 I think 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. And that's where it will end.
20:47

Jonathan Bertrand: With me it definitely did have an effect, but I was able to catch it early. So I caught it in 2012, but it was because I literally snapped, like I had no perception of reality, like I just lost my purpose. I actually used to talk about this publicly, like I did not care, my emotions, it was just dead like everything was dead. Now I would say, why am I here?

It was one of those things where, you know, that barrier is getting bigger and bigger as our generation goes on. Like your generation, you're like why can't we just go, well here the say the bar, the pub, I don't know how you say it in England [laughing]. But like why can't we just go to the bar and have a conversation, like what's the problem? I don't want to DM you, I don't want to direct message you, I don't want to text you, I don't want to like your emoji. I don't want to FaceTime you when you're right down the street from me, what's the issue? And these are the kind of things that I'm still to this day trying to figure out.
21:47

Social media encourages narcissistic and toxic behavior.

Bethan Jones: Probably there's lot of things, lots of different things. I think it has got a grip on me, like definitely. I'll be with my fiance and I'll unknowingly just bring out my phone and then he'll be like, oh why do you need your phone? And I'll be like, oh I just need to check something. And it's like, do you need to check? No I don't, actually, I don't need to check. So I'll put the phone down.
Richard Grannon: What are you checking for?
Bethan: Just like, messages, or like WhatsApp groups, or these group chats you have on Facebook. Everything's like pinging all the time, so it's like you fail. It is really bad that you know it's a bad thing, but you're just so aware that it's like, it has got a grip on you.
22:30

Robert McCarthy: I do that a lot of time that I feel like people become addicted. A lot of people can't be in the present moment. It's like they're there, but they're not really there and they're always… It's like you go to a dinner or you go to get food or whatever and they're just stare at their phone. I think you only notice it once you step outside of it and you're not on your phone and you see someone else. And you try to have a conversation and you try to be genuine with them and you can't, you can't be genuine with them at all.
22:56

Richard Grannon: We have intelligence, we have imagination, but the further we go into symbolism, the further we are away from reality. And the further away from reality you are, the more insane you are by definition. Nobody in the mental health community would argue with that. You can't abandon reality and not expect mental health issues. And the primary mental health issues that this will cause, will be depression and anxiety. People will not feel good, and I think that's what's happening with these kids.

They're investing in a symbolic world that has abandoned reality. That has really very very little bearing on the reality that they live in, and they're sinking themselves deliberately, wholeheartedly and with energy into delusion, not just a singular delusion though. A shared delusion.

Therefore, social media usage could be effectively said to be: Mass psychosis.
23:50

Digital natives are living in a matrix.

Sam Vaknin: Social media is the world for digital natives. 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 a simulation,

they're in the matrix already. 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 instead of atoms, come instead of atoms. Their families are peers and 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. These are all digital, and in this sense they are denizens of The Matrix.
24:56

Claudia Cockerill: If I look at the likes on my Instagram, most likes I get are on selfies. And if I post something about seeing a band I like, or I like a scenic view, I get like half the likes. And it encourages you to post more like self-obsessed things like…
Richard Grannon: It's narcissism.
Claudia: Yeah, focus on your personal appearance, rather than what you're interested in and parts of your personality. So in a way it can diminish your personality, because you're just more focused on what you look like.
Student: I think narcissism is so common nowadays, you know.
Student: Yeah, I believe so.
Richard: We're being rewarded for it.
Student: It's madness.
25:29

Selfies.

Bethan Jones: I think for me, having suffered with an eating disorder before. Like I said, there's like a big community online of kind of people in recovery and people supporting people trying to recover, or supporting people to lose weight. And like having that, showcasing their body image and that kind of thing. And it can become very toxic environment, and without knowing you can get sucked in and be part of this.

Sam Vaknin: Selfies today constitute 60% of all activity on social network. We don't have statistics from the beginning, but I remember the beginning, and I remember when social networks started. It was never about selfies, I don't remember selfies. Selfie became very prominent in 2014/15. And today it is 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 Grannon: The number of likes in "the world", and that would cunning us to 'I'm looking at me, look at me too'.
Sam: I'm looking at me, you look at me, me. So we have a situation of making love to ourselves literally. Making love to ourselves psychologically, falling in love with ourselves. Because if you take 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. But 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.
Richard: It's binary, yeah.
Sam: It's a binary state.
Richard: Very simple.
27:59

Suicide & cyber bullying, part 1.

Ronan Parke - singer, BGT runner up 2011: Well, when I obviously did the show, I just kind of, I didn't think about what was gonna happen. I didn't have any expectations. I was just like, I'm doing this, I love singing, I'm gonna do it. So I did it and had the reaction that I had,

and was very lucky to have that. But nobody can really kind of prepare you for what comes with it, and at 12 I had a Facebook page that was private, and I had all my settings private and I only hand friends on there. And I didn't have Twitter, I didn't have Instagram.

And then it was like, okay, you have to have these things. You have to have an official page, you have to delete your private Facebook, you have to have a Twitter account and it's all gonna be official, and it's not gonna be your friends, it's not gonna be people you know, it's gonna be people who watch a huge TV show. And you kind of open the doors for everybody's opinion. Everybody who watches the show or watches anything always has an opinion on everything.

But I guess I just wasn't prepared for the kind of people that didn't know me to have so many opinions of me
and so much to say about me. So I guess that opened my eyes to how things work when you're kind of in the public eye as such. And yeah, I had to get used to that quite quickly. The opinions would come flooding in,
and they weren't all gonna be great.
29:19

Richard Grannon: When somebody's involved in an online interaction and it's become fractious, and maybe it's an argument or they've actually decided to target somebody for bullying, and they actually type the words, you should kill yourself, there is multiple levels to why they would do that.

One level, yes, it would be that they don't really see the human. They're not being the human, they're not seeing the human. Their humanity has dropped out because of this humanity break. It's all just glowing pixels.

I think part of the problem with the internet is: It's global, it's huge, it's the biggest expression of the most numbers of people that you or I could get hold of. We could go and stand in the middle of Piccadilly Circus with a loudspeaker, we might get a couple hundred people. The internet is the world, is anybody who has access to Wi-Fi.

So you feel invisible. Everybody feels like the status anxiety issue. Again, everybody feels invisible, and that generates hostility, very quickly - amongst all of us. Even if you're a healthy, emotionally mature person, your inconsequentiality will generate feelings of hostility in you.

The person being bullied isn't really a human anymore. They're dehumanized, but that's what bullying does before social media. Social media just facilities the dehumanizing. They're an avatar of weakness. It is a narcissistic and psychopathic response to eradicate weakness. Psychopaths loathe weakness, but the weakness they loathe is their own fragility, vulnerability and instability.
31:01

Ronan Parke: It was intense, especially when I was on the show. Every week I was on the television, so every week people had new things to say. So I guess to begin with, it was really difficult, and I'd always speak to my parents about it. I mean, my parents used to kind of read some of the things and it was shocking that these people could say such awful things about someone they just don't know. And I'd never done anything to them, I was just a little kid singing on TV.

And then, after the show it kept happening. And so I was able to kind of say to the team of people I was working with, look, I don't want to be on social media, I don't want to be doing this, it's not good for me, really. Especially at the age that I was, it really upset me. It was something that I was struggling with.

So I spoke to everyone that I was working with and my family, and they kind of got people in, that kind of did the social media for me, and so I didn't have to read it, which was really good. Because now I'm at the stage where I just don't care anymore. You know, I'm on social media, I accept it. If I see it, I really don't care, it doesn't bother me. But it took a while to kind of accept, that that's how it's gonna work and that's how society is. People are always gonna have opinions, and they're not always gonna be positive.
32:18

Suicide & cyber bullying, part 2.

Alisia Roberts: I used to get bullied on Facebook. And things have been sent around about me on it which were unpleasant. I think it was on SnapChat as well and Instagram as well. I've had them all.
Richard Grannon: Was this a group of people who were bullying you in the real world as well, were these kids at school?
Alisia: Yeah, it was when I was getting bullied in school as well.
Richard: So they're bullying you at school and then they continue it in cyberspace.
Alisia: Yeah.
Richard: Okay. You think… obviously that made it worse for you, I imagine.
Alisia: Yeah it made me feel dead low and that I was ready to pass.

Emily Freeman: I've got like groups made about me, private chats made about me that have come to light. Notifications where I've made a status and the girls that had an issue with me would comment just for the sake of an argument.
Richard Grannon: Right, and do you know what motivated them to do that?
Emily: Not a clue, no, I just thought it was boredom.
Richard: Boredom, maybe, yeah. And they're definitely doing it more online than face to face?
Emily: Yeah I remember occasions where I didn't even have issues with some girls, and I'd go online and someone had just made an issue out of something.

Ronan Parke: You know when I shared my story, the amount of support and love that I got from people, where they were sharing their stories. It's all about communication for me. I just think it's so important to always be open and honest, and always speak to people if you're ever having any problems. Because there's always gonna be someone there for you, whether it's your parents, whether it's your siblings, your colleagues, your friends, whoever. There's always gonna be someone that will be willing to listen.

And that, for me, has been the reason why I feel that, you know, I'm strong today and I'm proud of who I am today, because I've always had people to go to. And even if I didn't have my family, which I'm so lucky to have, I would have kept going and speaking to somebody until somebody would listen and be there for me, and there's always gonna be that person.
34:22

Richard Grannon: I think the education system, and I worked in it for five or six years, has totally failed to really grasp what bullying is. Usually what they do is they say, it's bad, don't do it. What's that, that's no answer? That's no answer to it, we all know it's bad. The people doing the bullying aren't doing it thinking, 'oh this is a good social duty I'm performing here', they know it's bad. People receiving it know it's bad. Everybody knows it's bad. 'Don't do it', doesn't help anything.

You've got to get into the mechanics of it and say, well, who does it, why is the person being bullied? How did they get targeted? How did they end up being the person that gets bullied? The people who are doing the bullying, is there a structure, is there a framework? Is there an alpha bully? And there are their beater, right the way through to omega bullies that follow. Maybe they don't always follow. Maybe some people who do occasionally bully, are also helping the person receiving the bullying.

This definitely happens. I was raised in a boarding school, I could see that happening. I was also involved in it. I bullied kids, I was bullied as a kid. And it really is, you know, the old cliche, it's that Lord of the Flies scenario, where you see people being reduced down to their animalistic states, trying to ameliorate the dreadful sensation of status anxiety, trying to create a sense of security.
36:02

Resolution.

What can be done.

Richard Grannon: We're now beings that crave community and purpose, and we have no community. We've destroyed our own communities. We have no purpose. We've destroyed all sense of purpose. We are rudderless, we are objectiveless. We have no destination to sail to, and as a consequence of that, we just turn on each other and turn on ourselves. And it's very very painful.

It's a very strange and dislocated time in which people find themselves completely isolated even as they're surrounded by others. Because we cannot offer the quality of time and attention and conscious awareness to each other, because we're giving it to the great big shiny god, that we carry around inside of our pockets, that we all bow to each and every day.

Unbeknownst to our participants in the interview that we're gonna be doing with them tonight, I'm actually going to be setting them a challenge where I'm gonna challenge them to stay off the smartphone and stay off social media completely for a month. And I'm gonna give them a dumb phone and tell them they can only use the dumb phone for a month. I don't know whether they're gonna sign up for it. I don't know whether they're gonna agree to it. Hopefully a couple of them do. I'm also gonna do it. I'm just gonna use a dumb phone for a month, zero social media, and just see what happens. And then we'll come back after a month
and see how people found it.

Sam Vaknin: They grew 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. So this is their world, social media is well-suited to it.
38:06

The dumb phone usage experiment.

Richard Grannon: One thing I'm gonna invite you to today, I'm not taking your phones off you, but I'm gonna try and do a month. No, I'm not gonna try, I'm going to do a month of no social media and no smartphone. I've got a dumb phone. Would any of you be interested in trying to just use a dumb phone for a month?

Student: Yeah, I actually really miss mine.
Richard: I didn't sign up for this, what the hell?
Natalie Kearney: Well I'm kind of like, this is really tricky, because I'm kind of like getting a connection with someone and we're kind of like meeting and need to do arrangements and stuff, so I'm gonna say no.
Student: Can you still use messages?
Student: I think the person will think this is pretty cool.
Richard: I think they will too, yes.
Maria-Stefania Paval: I would, but actually I was talking to my grandma. I was telling her that I'm gonna come here, what it is about, and she was like, yes, computers are bad, and I was like, not exactly.

Richard: That's not what we're talking about, but close to that.
Maria-Stefania: So I explained to her that you have to know how to use it, not abuse it. Because I would say yes, but then I realized, oh there are like people I can ask things about, I don't know. Or I have a group project, I have to have a way of talking to those people.

Richard: The thing is, the research that's gonna be published in this month of December 2018, he said tagging for the video, from the University of Pennsylvania, is a positive definitive correlation between less social media usage and better mental health. So if you and I both do it for a month.
Abbie Hunter: I'll do it, I'll get rid of Messenger.
Richard: Really, you're gonna get rid of Messenger? You're gonna do that?
Abbie: Yeah.
Richard: What the theory is, the hypothesis is, we'll come back in a month and go, we actually feel better.
39:49

Richard Grannon: The implications of it are quite frightening really, because what are we gonna find?
Are we gonna find that these young people can't do without their smartphones?
Are we gonna find they can't do without social media?

And I actually sat here, and tonight's the first time I've thought, I don't think they will. Because up until this I was thinking, ah it's only social media. They'll come off it, after four or five days they'll feel alright and the end result will be: Everybody felt better. I'm looking at them and I'm going, I don't know about four weeks without smartphones. I think we're gonna have a few people saying, couldn't do it.
40:30

Bailey Parnell: But for now, if you start treating it like that risky behavior, then again, you start building awareness. You start making sure that we're speaking the same language and I mean: To put pressure on parents and educators:

Do you actually really understand why your kid wants that SnapChat streak? Do you even know what that is? Does it make sense to you when they come to you and say, 'this person DM'ed me', and they're upset about it? Does that even make sense to you, or are you just thinking, get your head out of your phone? Because that's really unhelpful.

Now, if kids start seeing it that way, then they can start putting the pressure on schools. Beause there's no system who supports for this, really. Even though it might be even having a worse, more dramatic, and longer term effects than something like alcohol.
41:13

Validation by proxy.

Richard Grannon: I think it's a good point. And it potentially is problematic if parents are taking a lot of pictures of their kids, putting them up online, and then saying to their kids, look. You're training children from a very early age that this is where validation comes from. This is where admiration comes from. You made me, your father, happy by getting a lot of likes from here, so we're learning validation by proxy.

Validation by proxy is one of the core structural elements in the personality disorder that's called narcissism.
So if you're training a child to seek feelings of validation not directly from you as a parent, but through this by proxy of an audience, which is always faceless, because in psychological terms we can't really know who a thousand people are. We don't have the capacity to hold that in, so they're just people, they're just fans, they're just followers, they're blank, faceless followers. They're not humans.

So it's dehumanizing everybody in the system. It dehumanizes me as a parent, because I'm now not offering what I should be offering. It's dehumanizing you as a child, because you're not being loved for you and your essence, you're being loved for the reactions you can get. And it dehumanizes the fans, the followers. They're nothing, they're just clap machines to give you likes and make you feel good.
42:35

Jonathan Bertrand: Well, we gotta figure out the triggers. What triggers people? And the worst part about social media: Everybody's different! So it can't just be a general thing. So, we're developing what those triggers are, so we can develop a pool of triggers and they can decide. Because it's all about what THEY want. It's not about what we want, we can just provide the platform and the educational side.

Sam Vaknin: If you, once in your life experience true intimacy, social media suddenly feel plastic, feels--
Richard Grannon: Weird.
Sam: Weird. Feels creepy, I would say.
Richard: Feels creepy, yeah.
Sam: Absolutely creepy, if you really, for one single life, experience true intimacy. And true intimacy is utterly addictive. You will spend the rest of your life looking for it again. You will look for it again and again and again. I mean, poets have been writing poems for the entirety of their life because they've experienced love when they were 21. Real cases.

Jarod Lamier: Once you can see that there are alternatives, you realize how strange it is, and how unsustainable it is. This is the thing we must get rid of. We don't have to get rid of the smartphone. We don't have to get rid of the idea of social media. We just have to get rid of the manipulation machine that's in the background.

Bailey Parnell: If I'm being honest, what I want to see more than social media change, is people offline change. Right now we are in a state where we're still learning how to use social media, we're still learning
social norms with social media.

And so I've even experienced myself when someone is abstaining from social media, you hear, 'what, you're not on Facebook, what? How am I supposed to contact you'? And that kind of sounds a bit similar to when someone doesn't drink. Like, 'what, you don't drink'? And that seems a bit wild. You say that and you think, what? So it's almost like our view of people, if they're abstaining from this or they're pulling back or they've decided to use it in a certain way, that's their choice. Maybe something has happened to them online.

The other thing I want to see offline is people building self-confidence with use. Self-assurance, self-awareness, resilience and time management.
44:43

Richard Grannon: Though they might not feel it immediately, if they were drawn to - or watching the documentary back - if they're drawn to seeing how they feel internally, they've just spent two hours in a conversation. I wonder how often they get to do that. Two hours of just chatting, being heard, listening to the people, responding to what's being said in real time, not through text, not through glowing pixels, not through a f****** device. Through this device, through this device, through this device, real world communication. I would like to think that they came out of here in a better state than they came in. I think that they enjoyed that and that they got something from it that they couldn't from anything else.
45:31

Conditioning vs. addiction.

Sam Vaknin: 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 rough estimate, 20,000 teens died every year, every single year. Why did you have to wait for this to happen before you introduce a watch?

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 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.
46:46

Richard Grannon: Maybe the lesson then would be, this thing that you're craving when you're on your phone for hours, scrolling and scrolling and you're jumping at every notification that comes through, and you have separation anxiety from your smartphone, what you're craving is to be heard. What you're craving is to be seen. What you're craving is to interact. And you're not, it's fake! It's fake, it's a simulated hearing, it's a simulated seeing, a simulated interaction. And it always leaves you thirsting for more, where the real world experience of interacting, chatting with your mates or new friends or people you're enjoying a conversation with, that satisfies that urge, it slakes that thirst in a way that the artificial world just can't. Promises to, and never delivers.

[Scrolling text]
48:16

Plugged in.

People describe how they felt about the dump phone experiment:

- It was good, but it was also frustrating. And I said in the interview before, before we all did this, that I would feel quite on edge, and I did, but for different reasons. Mainly because I just missed the tools that an iPhone or a smartphone brings. For example, Maps as well. I was completely lost in my everyday life, and I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing. One of the things with this study is that it's a study on the effects of social media on mental health and not smartphones. But whether the two things are the same, that's up for debate.

- I do think that the challenge of not being on any social media can be quite isolating. But I think on top of that, aspects of smartphones like accessing your email straightaway, WhatsApp straightaway, that's particularly isolating. I think the world has changed so much to how it used to be, and I've just grown up in this world where you need your phone 24/7 to have it, like you know, there.

- It actually made me feel less of a robot who just scrolls scrolls scrolls without knowing how much time has passed.

- I've still been struggling to sleep. Been writing down, like my thoughts each day, so I've just kind of briefly reading over those. Another thing that I noticed is that day to day I'm happier, just because I'm not comparing what I'm doing with what other people are doing. And I'm not trying to make what I'm doing look better than it is. So yeah, just, I think I'm a bit more, maybe a bit more confident becaus of that?

- I did five days without social media, and five days without social media for me is a big issue, do you know what I mean? To stop all social media platforms and to not be in the center of it all, all the commotion, all of what's going on. You know, not to be in the center of what's going on was so strange, do you know what I mean? [laughing] and it was one of them feelings where I felt a bit like I wasn't in the real world. And I know that social media isn't the real world and I understand that, but it really did have psychological effects on my brain. Also had effects on me as a human being altogether, really.
  50:59

Richard Grananon: What makes us want to do this sort of thing is we don't belong here, and we're trying to escape. And it's something to do with our sense of self, which is why narcissism is such a critical issue now. Because we have this inflamed and intoxicated and toxic sense of self that renders us predatory and exploitative of each other.

It has something to do with what we're doing with our conscious awareness as it relates to self. It's like an energetic system that's cannibalizing itself, it's turning back in on itself. It's not being used for anything, and I think we're just fundamentally uncomfortable in this level of reality, in this existence. We're not comfortable.

There's a cognitive dissonance. We know there's something missing, and it's an agitating and depressing feeling, and we're trying to ameliorate that feeling, we're trying to reduce it. People have always gambled, they've always drank alcohol, from the earliest times. The earliest drugs that go back in recorded history to the ancient Greeks. We were always trying to get high. We were always trying to escape. And if there weren't any drugs available, we would use massacres and we would use the religious cults that would hurt themselves, they'd cut themselves, they'd beat themselves for that endorphin release. Or they'd use sex, or they'd use fasting, or they'd use chanting, or they'd use dancing. We're all trying to escape this reality, because it is so unbearable to us.

Join us at pluggedinsocialmediadocumentary.com for advice and information.

♪ Watching someone else's dream ♪
♪ Watching someone else's dream ♪