Why am I so tired? How to use the Restoring Resourcefulness tools to relieve Zoom exhaustion

Vandana Verma Ph.D

We've all heard about it and most of us have experienced it. What is Zoom fatigue/exhaustion and what can we do to minimize it effects? Since the pandemic began many of us have used video conferencing to communicate, both at work and for many activities that we used to do in person. Excessive screen time and the energy needed to focus, results in depleted aliveness for many of us, who are spending all day online. Work-from-home meetings, children homeschooling, group and family chats, and countless other activities all together often mean there is no letup in screen time. Also, we tend to now participate in larger groups than usual, while having to concentrate for longer. This new model of living and working looks set to continue so it's essential we learn to adapt so that we don't continuously feel drained and exhausted. Focusing for long periods of time on one thing can lead to mental exhaustion, as we are forced to "pay attention" in a particular way.

Try this on: What happens when we are told to "Pay attention!" Do you subconsciously freeze and hold your breath? This actually makes it to harder remain engaged and attentive, as fear reduces our working memory abilities. Another reason for fatigue is that we are interacting mostly with our screens as the intermediary and substitute for an in-person connection. Many of us unconsciously use different ways of interacting in person, while online we are forced rely on mostly visual cues which can often be misinterpreted.

A recent Stanford study by Jeremy Bailson breaks down the reasons for zoom fatigue and why so many online meetings can be so draining:

He focuses on four possible explanations for Zoom Fatigue: They are:

1. excessive amounts of close-up eye gaze,
2. cognitive load
3. increased self-evaluation from staring at video of oneself,
4. constraints on physical mobility.

Cognitive load: Bailsen provides some interesting observations of non-verbal communication and its impacts on cognitive load (the amount of working memory we have access to):

"With in-person interactions (something which has been much reduced during the last year for most of us), nonverbal communication is instinctive. and each of us naturally makes and interprets gestures and nonverbal cues subconsciously. In the new environment of video chats, we have to work harder to send and receive those signals. Moreover, in Zoom, receivers are provided fewer cues than they typically get in face-to-face conversations". In the words of Katie Hendricks "In the absence of information, we make up stories". It seem that our unconscious brains do the same on zoom and we may interpret people's facial expressions or gestures differently while often interpreting them more negatively.

In your face! Bailsen also says "On Zoom, behavior ordinarily reserved for close relationships—such as long stretches of direct eye gaze and faces seen close up—has suddenly become the way we interact with casual acquaintances, coworkers, and even strangers. Think about that—in one-

on-one meetings conducted over Zoom, coworkers and friends are maintaining an interpersonal distance reserved for loved ones". In a more recent paper this exhaustion caused by being so close up as well as seeing oneself all the time was deemed worse for women, younger individuals and individuals of color than men.

We've all heard of the dangers of blue light on our eyes emitted by screens. Computer use strains our eyes as we tend to blink less while using computers (blinking is crucial for moistening the eyes) whilst using devices that have glare or reflection add to the overall tiredness we may feel.

Reduced movement:-

"In essence users are stuck in a very small physical cone, and most of the time this equates to sitting down and staring straight ahead," writes Bailenson. During face-to-face meetings people move. They pace, stand up and stretch, doodle on a notepad, get up to use a chalkboard, even walk over to the water cooler to refill their glass. There are a number of studies showing that locomotion and other movements cause better performance in meetings. For example, people who are walking, even when it is indoors, come up with more creative ideas than people who are sitting. Much of that work shows a causal relationship—for example, children who are required to gesture with their hands while learning math showed more learning retention compared to a control group. While Zoom doesn't technically prevent one from using gestures during the speech, being forced to sit in view of the camera certainly tampers down movement."

See if you can experiment with the following during your next meeting:

- Switch to speaker view rather than gallery – this will help your visual focus and attention on what's being said.
- If possible, move further away from the screen to keep your attention flowing and change your position slightly every 5 mins or so.
- Play with ways you absorb information – what kind of learner are you? Kinesthetic, audio, visual or a combination. If you are more of a kinesthetic learner, moving around as you listen in your space will help you retain information more easily.
- Does this need my visual and audio attention? Or just audio? Using all forms of paying attention can be draining, maintain visual focus for long periods of time is the most draining. If a meeting doesn't require video, think about creating an agreement to turn it off with your colleagues for some meetings. Using the "Hide self- view" function in some applications also may help decrease anxiety if that isn't possible.
- Introduce small (micro) movements whilst on a call– keeping some movement going allows you to keep your attention flowing to different places. Paying attention doesn't mean I have to keep still. There are different types of kinesthetic learning. We tend to think of attention as forward in direction, coming from myself to another person and back again. Attention is actually multi-directional and flows in different directions and even shapes.
- Practice Fear melters® while you give a presentation or during a meeting. – Recently I was in a meeting which from past experience I expected to be tense. I switched off my

video and spoke whilst doing the Sumo Fear Melter™ and Love Scoops, which allowed me to slow down my pace and get fully present. The result was an easy call with colleagues with zero drama, I felt so much more refreshed and resourced than I usually did after this weekly meeting. While we can't always switch off our video, it was a powerful demonstration of how our voices can also influence the space with how present we are.

- Play with loop of awareness – switch your attention lightly back and forth from yourself to the screen and notice the flow of aliveness. Circulating your attention allows you refresh yourself to minimize exhaustion. Switch your attention to another participant and "loop" with them. See if you notice any difference to your aliveness .

- Presencing - Take 3 breaths and change position. This is an easy one to practice while on video, even if you just shift in your chair a little. Long periods of time in front of devices mimics our fear postures (Closed, head forward and shallow breath) and start to affect our physiology and breathing. A study by Marten Bos and Amy Cuddy from 2013 found that compared to participants working on larger devices (e.g., an iMac), participants who worked on smaller devices (e.g., an iPad) behaved less assertively – waiting longer to interrupt an experimenter who had made them wait, or not interrupting at all. The smaller the device, the more closed our postures are, causing us to behave as if we are in fear.

- Attention - Try the free weekly call with Katie Hendricks that dives into all these skills more deeply. On the Love in Action call every Monday, Katie shares many practices and techniques for shifting "stuck" attention that can be used both on and off the computer to keep ourselves refreshed with a body-centered focus.

Presencing, Loop of Awareness and Fear Melters® are key skills from the Restoring Resourcefulness program. This program shares simple and powerful ways of befriending and releasing fear so that we can connect deeply with ourselves and others while favoring creative collaboration rather than conflict and adrenaline. We look forward to assisting you or your current community in integrating these practices so that you can move from reactive fear-based thinking to whole brain resourcefulness, and we can all continue to connect with ourselves and others in a healthy way, even through global events such the current pandemic. You can find out more at: https://foundationforconsciousliving.org/big_leap_home/restoring-resourcefulness/

References

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