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'Zoom Fatigue' is an actual thing

By Brad Foster

We've all thought it, felt it, and dreaded more of the same but have we really understood that Zoom Fatigue is an actual thing and why it exists.

Academic Jeremy N. Bailenson from the Department of Communication at Stanford University in the U.S., last month (February 23, 2021) penned an article entitled *Nonverbal Overload: A Theoretical Argument for the Causes of Zoom Fatigue* in which he says Zoom Fatigue is real and can have a negative affect on people doing it for long periods of time.

Much of this focuses on the set-up of a Zoom call. While we are looking at other people (faces) on Zoom there is also a big image of ourselves. When we look at ourselves, apparently, we are constantly self-evaluating how we are looking and feeling. The invasion of our personal space through Zoom can actually make us lose focus.



“On Zoom, behaviour 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, co-workers, and even strangers,” he says.

He likens the experience to being in an elevator in close proximity to strangers who you wouldn't dare make continuous eye contact with before they told you to bugger off (well maybe).

“... with Zoom, all people get the front-on views of all other people nonstop. This is similar to being in a crowded subway car while being forced to stare at the person you are standing very close to, instead of looking down or at your phone.

“Anyone who speaks for a living understands the intensity of being stared at for hours at a time,” he says.

He also says that the face straight to camera focus on Zoom means that we miss out on non-verbal cues that have meaning.

“In a face-to-face conversation, people draw great meaning from head and eye movements, which help to signal turn-taking, agreement, and a host of affective cues.

“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 (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014).”

His observations should be music to the ears of those seeking a return to live events. Now all we have to do is get them happening.