

Smartphone Dis/Connect: FOMO

Student Name:

Partners:

While we may have some sense of how our lives are lived through our devices, we rarely take a moment to more closely consider the subtle impacts they have on the quality of our experience.

This contemplative exercise asks you to directly investigate some of these impacts and to reflect upon how they might affect your experience more generally, whether on your phone or off.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with contemplative practice, there are many techniques and objects but a very common one focuses on the breath as a basis. There is nothing inherently religious or philosophical about this exercise; instead, it simply employs the attentional faculty of mind to closely observe your experience.

So now, please close your eyes or relax your gaze down and take three deep breaths, pausing for a few moments at the top of each inhalation, and relaxing for a few moments into the space of every exhalation. Rest with your awareness as it tunes into the natural process of breathing. Whenever you notice that mind has been drawn off to some other object, which is natural as well, simply let go regardless of the content, take another deep breath, and begin focusing on the breath anew.

[Silent practice, 2–3 minutes].

Now, while maintaining a gentle awareness of the breath as an anchor for your experience, slowly and deliberately take out your device. Watch whatever thoughts and feelings arise as you reach for it, grasp it, remove it, activate the screen, and encounter the information displayed upon it. While taking note of the content of your experience, retain a sense of connection to the breath.

Now go into the settings on your device, turn on all alerts and notifications for all apps, and set the volume on the loudest level. Then place your device out of reach [direct according to seating circumstances in the room] and place your hands in your lap. Please remain still, keeping your hands in your lap; do not under any circumstances reach for or touch your phone.

Take a few more deep breaths, using it to maintain a sense of center while opening up awareness to the full range of experience. As alerts and notifications ring out, whether from your device or others', closely observe whatever thoughts and feelings arise in the mind and body while remaining completely still.

[Silent practice in the midst of alerts and notifications, 5–15 minutes]

Now, please take a final deep breath, allowing the mind to clear, then pick up your phone, set it to “airplane mode,” and put it away, preferably back in your bag and not in your pocket. Then, maintaining silence, respond in writing to the prompts on the back of this sheet:

Describe the physical sensations that arose in body during this exercise (changes in temperature, tension, breathing, heart rate, etc.). Did you correlate any physical sensations to the thoughts or emotions that arose?

Describe the thoughts that arose during this exercise, not just in terms of content but in terms of quality: were they slow or fast? Well-formulated or spontaneous and reactive? What kinds of thoughts arose?

Describe the emotions that arose during this exercise: what were the emotional tones of your experience? What caused those feelings to arise?

When directed, discuss your responses with one or more peers, remaining aware of those around you in order to ensure that everyone is included.

[Conclude with full group discussion:]

Given these new insights into the subtle effects of smartphone alerts and notifications, what would you change about your usage to lessen their negative impacts on your life and experience?