

Beyond Epidemiology and Economics. The Shutdown's Devastating Impacts on Education, Health, Family, Religion, Civil Society ...

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Since the Covid-19 shutdown began, the media has framed it as a shutdown of the economy, making resistance to it appear to be about putting profit over life. This is not an accurate description of the shutdown. The shutdown policy is currently disrupting or transforming all of our major social institutions: government, education, health, economics, religion and family. These institutions form the basis of our society, as they provide for our individual and collective needs. Yet each is undergoing massive changes:

1. Government: the disruption of elections from the national to the local level.
2. Education: the disruption of the socialization and education of all of our children; and the preparation of our young adults for professional life.
3. Health: the disruption of ordinary health services from vision, dentistry, and non-Covid needs (cancer, heart disease, diabetes), to the public health oversight of domestic violence and child abuse.
4. Economics: the disruption of the basic processes of working and earning a living.
5. Religion: the disruption of the religious congregations that provide meaning, community and social support to millions.
6. Family: the disruption of parents' abilities to support their families, and to rely on public schools to educate and care for their children while they do so.

There is not a single social institution that has been left intact by those who are now determining our public policies. At what point do these disruptions, along with the incessant calls for a "new normal," become a subversion of the institutions we have built and upon which we rely? All this is happening without public discussion, much less consensus.

It is time to stop focusing on the official distraction of minutiae: masks, hand washing and six feet apart, and start seeing how the disruption of all major social institutions is impacting the lives of everyone in America. We came together as a nation to "flatten the curve," but

by now it is clear that, much like the Iraq War, there is no exit strategy. There will be no vaccine for this coronavirus anymore than there is for the common cold, another type of coronavirus. All such viruses mutate constantly. Humans will never be virus free. Death is, and always has been, a tragic part of human life. We have been made fearful of our own mortality.

Will we benefit as a society, by allowing the subversion of our social institutions in the name of fighting something with which we have always lived? What will be the outcome? Whose voices are determining this new normal? Epidemiologists have neither been elected, nor are they equipped to evaluate the complex social, psychological and political ramifications of the public policies with which they are being entrusted.

Science has taught us a great deal, but where are the national voices of psychologists describing the effects of long term stress as they see depression rise and an epidemic of suicides; of social workers commenting on increases in domestic and child abuse now going unreported and uninvestigated; of cardiologists informing about the dangers of sedentary isolation and unhealthy weight gain with the advocacy of bingeing on Netflix? Where are the pediatricians studying the brain altering effects of excessive screen time for young children or the gerontologists explaining the immunological effects of isolation on the otherwise healthy elderly? Why is epidemiology the only science weighing in on the health of our nation?

As an educator, I ask how we can utterly dismiss the education of our youth so easily. "Distance Learning" is an oxymoron for all except the most mature of young adults. We know that children who fall behind in skills by third grade have higher chances of dropping out of school and ending up in the prison pipeline. The United States already suffers from vast levels of inequality. Education is understood to be the only way out of poverty. I question whether epidemiologists should be allowed to dismiss the entire base of knowledge and laws put in place to safeguard the education of the next generation.

Why is the current disintegration of all social institutions being substituted for the judicious isolation and care of the sick? Who benefits from such large scale disruption of our entire society? The recent protests and riots have called to mind the critical year of 1968 in America and across the world. How many of us recall the 1968 pandemic that killed 100,000 Americans and one million people world wide? I can hear readers saying, "But we've already had 100,000 Americans die! This is worse!" I ask them to bear in mind the U.S. population in 1968 was a little over 200 million, as opposed to the current 330 million. When we reach 166,000 deaths we will have about the same per capita death rate in the US as the pandemic of 1968. Is our handling of this pandemic better? Will we be stronger when we emerge?

We have now seen massive gatherings of people across the United States and the world, breaking rules of distancing, isolation and masks. If we do not see equally massive increases in our hospitals within two weeks, will it affect the official narrative of our epidemiologists? Or will we be asked to continue sacrificing society as we know it?

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