Technology and Its Distractions

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Have you ever been out in public and had the unfortunate experience of being next to

someone in a line, on a bus, plane or train and had to listen to him or her rudely yelling into their

cell phone to the person on the other end? Have you ever spent too much time on the computer

and neglected important tasks and work? Have you ever seen another get bullied or been bullied

yourself online? Have you ever slowed down on a street, to drive past flashing blue-red lights

and a car wrapped around a telephone poll?

I, myself, have witnessed these things or dealt with them first hand, on numerous

occasions. They all seem to have one thing in common…they have all resulted in negative

outcomes due to our society's extensive use of electronic devices and media. Technology is

everywhere we look and we are constantly be "wired in.*"* It seems as if these days people are so

focused with their devices, their networking, their text messaging, their instant social

gratification that they forget to live in reality. Not only do people not "stop to smell the roses"

when they are distracted by technology, what is worse is this distraction all leads to more

damaging affects.

Now, I would be a fool and a hypocrite to simplistically argue that technology is the

demise of the world, because I don't think that. I love technology. I have a Facebook and I use

emails and online sites for schoolwork regularly. I blog. Just yesterday I bought the DVD of the

Social Network, on Amazon. I think Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak are two of the coolest dudes

around. I can look up anything, any fact, and any tidbit of knowledge, at the drop of a hat with

my iPod. I used online resources to write this paper. I am typing this on my Mac laptop. Being able to do all of this is one of the most amazing aspects of living in our 21st century world.

Still, I have to bring attention to the seriously neglected negative impacts that technology is having on society. Not every thing is perfect and sometimes too much good can be a bad thing. Thousands are killed or injured each year in car crashes because someone was talking on the phone or messaging. Hundreds upon hundreds of kids and teens suffer every day from public humiliation, low self-esteem, and thoughts of suicide because of the faster medium of the Internet for bullying purposes. Every day, rude people are unconsciously utilizing technology at inappropriate times, ruining public spaces and diminishing the family dinner table, contributing to our lack of morals and manners. Internet sites and computer addictions are leading to little motivation and drive, and loss of creativity, social and literacy skills, is leading to the downfall of our society's competence and ability to attain jobs. Technology affects our world in harmful ways physically, emotionally/psychologically, culturally and even economically. While technology is a great resource, the use and potential distraction it causes in our everyday life is negatively impacting today's society.

In 2009, 5,474 people died in automobile accidents related to distracted driving because of technology ("Statistics…" 12).

The growing trend of dangerous and fatal car accidents reported each year have been due to the newer problems of distracted driving and texting while driving. While some may have an idea as to what distracted driving means, many fail to see the risks that make it so harmful. Distracted driving is any activity that is not driving, done while operating a moving vehicle ("Statistics…" 12). These tasks include cell phone use, using PDA for emails, GPS, changing the radio, reading, watching videos, texting and eating or drinking ("Statistics…" 12). Most of these distractions are technology based, with the worst determined to be texting while driving

("Statistics…" 12). According to "Statistics and Facts About Distracted Driving," the reason texting and driving is the worst form is because it is engaging all of the "three main types of distraction: visual, manual, and cognitive" ("Statistics…" 12). Visually, a person must shift their glance from the road to the text in their hand, in order to read it (Gardner 11). Manually, people take one or sometimes both hands off the wheel in order to hold/pick up the device and respond by texting back (Gardner 11). Cognitively, a person is turning most of their attention to comprehending the message and responding back rather than think of driving skills and road rules (Gardner 11).

Many studies and scholars are saying that texting or talking on the phone while driving is just as dangerous if not more so than drunk driving. Using brain imaging and machines for driving simulation, Professor Strayer of the University of Utah's Applied Cognition Laboratory, studied the affect of the technology use on the brain while driving (Hanes 11). The results were stunning. Of the participants, ranging in age and gender, 98% of them increased their risk of crashing by four times (Hanes 11). A person who is on the phone while driving has the same reaction time of a person who is intoxicated to the legal point of .08 BAC ("Statistics…" 12). In the article, "Wat 2 Do Abt Txt'n & Drv'n (aka: What to do About the Problem of Texting While Driving?)," Gardner writes that, "text messaging '... also had the longest duration of eyes off road time (4.6 seconds over a 6 second interval). This equates to a driver traveling the length of a football field at 55 mph without looking at the roadway'" (Gardner 11).

According to a 2009 AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety research study, on average, 21% of surveyed drivers admitted to texting or emailing while driving in the past (Gardner 11). Just between the ages of 16 and 19 alone, 51.4% of this new driver population answered in the survey that they emailed or texted while driving (Gardner 11). When asked, many of those who responded that they did use technology while driving, most didn't believe that it was such a huge

and dangerous risk (Gardner 11). According to "Statistics and Facts About Distracted Driving,"

in 2009, "5,474 people were killed in US roadways and an estimated additional 448,000 were

injured in motor vehicle crashes that were reported to have involved distracted driving"

("Statistics…" 12). Also, it was recorded that "20% of 1,517,000 injury crashes were reported to

have involved distracted driving" ("Statistics…" 12). The diversion technology creates for a

driver on the road, which is similar to drunk driving, leads to delayed reaction time, and results

in life altering accidents.

*In a sample research study of 2,000 random school age people from popular areas of the
US, 20% responded as considering suicide after cyberbullying, and 19% were recorded to
actually trying to do it (Hinduja 12).*

Emotionally and psychologically, technology has a great impact on ways of bullying. It

also poses a negative distraction and effect on its victim's self-esteem and ability to perform well

in school. Online bullying is a problem in our world today that is sometimes overlooked, but

should be given the utmost attention because of its damaging influence on kids and teens.

According to "Cyberbullying: An old problem in a new guise," by Dr. Marilyn Campbell for the

School of Learning and Professional Studies, bullying is "aggressive behavior that is repeated

overtime, is intentionally harmful and occurs without provocation" and cyberbullying includes

"using email, text, IM, chats, mobile phones, phone cameras and websites...(as a) medium for

bullying" (Campbell 11). This new phenomena is causing emotional harm and trauma to our

nation's youngest members (Campbell 11). Messages sent through text or social networking

sites, and specific hate websites against a person are just a few of the tormenting and humiliating

tactics bullies use to prey on their victim (Campbell 11). Another way is that the gossiping and

rumors are not just sent to the attacked, but can be sent to an entire grade or school if the bully

wanted it to (Campbell 11). According to Campbell, a research study by "Ybarra and Mitchell

(writers of the 2004 Journal of Child Psychology…) in the United States reported that 15% of their sample (in a case study) identified themselves as Internet bullies, while 7% said they had been targeted online" (Campbell 11).

Bullying has always existed, but now is faster and more damaging because of technology. In the past, bullying was more physical and only lasted between the hours of recess in the schoolyard with maybe a couple kids as witnesses. Now a bully can, anonymously if he choose, strike any time of day, leaving no relief to the victim of escaping it by going home (Campbell). Even worse, a "wider audience" of kids sees this occur because emails and messages can be forwarded to the whole class (Campbell 11). It is a psychological battle between the predator and the defenseless victim (Campbell 11). The bully spreads damaging lies about the attacked causing the latter to have lower self-esteem because of feelings of fear and self-devaluation (Campbell 11). Verbal abuse can be fleeting and forced out of a person's memory, whereas written word is more potent and slanderous (Campbell 11). Websites, wall pages and emails are more permanent. They can be read again and again, overanalyzed, fretted over, and after a certain point a person can start to believe the words. These humiliating statements now have a power over the victim. According to "Cyberbullying Research Summary," the most common form of victimizing, at 29.3% in the survey study, was "other students told lies or spread rumors and tried to make others dislike them." The second most common, making up 27.7% of the study's sample was "name-calling, making fun and teasing in a hurtful way" (Hinduja 12). Also, the Internet allows for anonymous communication by using screen names, which can lead to the victim's paranoia as to the person threatening them and a destructive sense of bravery for the bully (Campbell 11).

A cyberbully's affect on a victim can distract them with worry and fear causing problems with self-inflicting and poor learning. Distracted in school everyday, the victim becomes

powerless and paralyzed with fear of when the attacker will come back (Campbell 11). This continued tormenting causes the bullied to have low self-worth, and skip school more often, which leads to poorer grades (Campbell 11). In quite a few cases, it ends tragically with suicide or attempted suicide (Hinduja 12). In a sample research study of 2,000 random school age people from popular areas of the US, 20% responded as considering suicide after cyberbullying, and 19% were recorded to actually trying to do it (Hinduja 12). These are scary statistics when we are talking about kids and teens that have barely lived a decade or more, and are now willing to take their own life to stop being terrorized by another.

While walking down the hallway in Braunstein during the ten-minute class switch, it is crowded. I begin to approach a girl who has dropped nearly the entire contents of her backpack onto the floor. People pass by, tuned out of what is going on around them, using technology. Texters and iPod listeners galore step over her, pass right on by, without a second glance. The only person who stopped to help…was me.

An even more prevalent problem with today's society caused by the distraction of technology is the dilapidation of our manners and morals. People are so engrossed in their electronic devices that they fail to realize how rude they are being to those around them. In "Rudeness is running rampant in today's high tech society," an article by Richard Carter, it was stated best with, "the last thing we need today is more rude people, which,..(per) the dictionary, means 'discourteous' and 'lacking refinement or delicacy'" (Carter 11). According to CNN News, "a recent poll by market research company Synovate showed that 70% of 1,000 respondents observed manner-less technology use in others at least on a daily basis" (Cox 11). Another national poll that was done by the Associated Press stated that, "90% of the surveyed adults said Americans are more rude than 20 or 30 years ago" (Carter 11). It is not so much the fact that everyone is using technology; it is that people are using it inappropriately. Cell phones are being used during graduations, weddings, church and even funerals (Cox 11). People are not respecting that there is a time a place for using technology and there is a time and place for not.

On planes, trains, and buses it becomes extremely annoying when everyone can hear one person's loud cell phone conversation (Cox 11). No one wants really wants to hear why someone broke up with their boyfriend, or about the argument they had with their mother-in-law, or what they are picking up at the grocery store…words for word, detail by detail. In the same AP poll as mentioned earlier, 85% found that the increasingly irritating, loud, phone conversations are one of the worst habits, or "cell yell" as it is sometimes referred, and 82% of people "complained of others using rude or offensive language in public (Carter 11).

I come into my psychology class one day and sit down. Thirty or so people are already there. Not one person is sitting directly next to another, leaving lots of spaces, and no socializing. It is the quietest I have ever heard a classroom with that many people. I look around and people are on their laptops, looking down at their iPod touch, or have closed eyes with headphones in their ears. You could hear a pin drop.

Technology is one of the causes of diminishing interpersonal social spaces, such as, family dinner tables. Studies show that kids who grow up with family dinners are more personable, have better vocabulary/speaking skills, and mental health (Fritz 11). According to Dr Gregory Fritz of Brown University, "Children develop the ability to express their opinions, to listen carefully to others in the family, to solicit advice…For parents, regular family meals provide opportunities to inculcate values and model supportive interactions" (Fritz 11). When parents are too absorbed in their computer work, or watching a favorite program, and kids tune out while eating by listening to an iPod, no communication is had at the table or people eat in different rooms. According to those polled in an Associated Press study, 90% of them believe parents are to blame for not teaching their kids morals and lessons they need to know (Carter 11). Without this time of discussion, listening and praise, kids can grow up not learning the lessons they should from their parents. They grow up without good vocabulary and speaking abilities, which are key for interacting with others in the real world (Carter 11). Not learning manners

from their parents during family dinners is considered one of the causes of our rude generations and society today.

Technology is also distracting us from our work and school, giving us bad writing and reading proficiency. It is one of the factors in causing members of our society to not have the necessary skills for a good job. Technology is being linked to the rising illiteracy problem, poor grades, and lack of creativity and communication skills. The National Center for Education Statistics did a survey of 19,000 people 16 or older by testing their basic reading and analyzing skills (Romano 12). The results are shocking. "Only 31% of college graduates surveyed could read a complex book and extrapolate it." The head of the study, Mark Schneider, expressed his disappointment, for he said it was just basic reading skills not "Proust" (Romano 12). Today people are so busy with getting the quantity of messages out that they are neglecting the quality. They misspell, even with spell-check available, and they are surrounded by a blur of "brb" and "lol." This is having a negative affect on the way people write. Nowadays people send improper emails and job/college applications to institutions and teachers with horrible mistakes. Many times people cannot even write a proper paper or even sentence. Instead of sitting and reading classic literature, which is proven to develop writing and reading skills, people just hop online to Cliff Notes and read the summary. According to an article in the Washington Post, "few entering freshmen understand how to use basic library systems or enjoy reading for pleasure" (Romano 12). Personally, I find it to be depressing how many people I have heard do not take joy in reading a book for fun. In "Growing Up Digital, Wired for Distraction," it tells about society's constant use of computers and television. It is almost becoming addicting and the latest generation is more distracted than ever by unsupervised Internet time. Therefore, kids procrastinate, spending hours in front of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Hulu and blog sites. They neglect their homework and their grades suffer. The article tells of a study conducted by The

Kaiser Family Foundation that "found earlier this year that half of students from 8 to 18 are using the Internet, watching TV or using some other form of media either "most" (31 percent) or "some" (25 percent) of the time that they are doing homework" (Richtel 12). Even though there is a free spread of ideas and the ability to share your opinion without great judgment, the lack of face-to-face communication removes the element of inter-personal relations and social skills that are needed for the workplace (Matei 12). Psychologists who have been testing creativity in people for 50 years discovered a dramatic drop in creativity since 1990, due to what they believe is more time on the computer and less playing make-believe or outside (Shontell 12).

Technological distraction is creating people who enter the job application process with lack of skills they need to get hired. The lack of creativity is not a good thing for the work setting. Newsweek brought to attention that in "a recent IBM poll…1,500 CEOs listed creativity as the number one "leadership competency" of the future." This to employers is disheartening (Shontell 12). Also, those with diminished skills in writing and reading, in the aforementioned points of this paper, would probably have a hard time finding a solid job in which does not require these skills. In the Business Roundtable, held by the College Board with 120 corporations (who control 4 million workers) it was determined that "half of all of the companies take writing into consideration when hiring" and they believe "writing is a regular part of the job for two-thirds of all employees…in a professional setting, regardless of occupation" (Eatherington 11). The skills hindered by our technology use are essential to life and relations and communication of the work world.

In conclusion, technology offers many negative distractions that lead to the problems, which shape our everyday lives. Using cell phones, electronic devices and texting while driving, while a common practice, is a dangerous activity that removes one's focus, slows reaction time, and causes many car injuries and deaths. The fast-paced, new medium of continuous Internet

and messaging is damaging to victims by causing poor self-esteem, low grades, and higher suicide rates. Our society's over addiction to electronic tools is making us oblivious to the reality of the world and diminishing family time and dinners. Because of all this, rudeness is becoming prevalent in our actions in public, lack of decorum and our slipping standards in manners. Use of technology from a young age is creating a new generation of people who are deficient in necessary skills for the adult and work world. In reality, if we all just put down our devices for a short while and pulled our eyes away from our phones and television screens, we might, save some lives, treat everyone a little nicer, pay attention to the things that really matter, and succeed more in schoolwork and in life. In essence, if we used technology a little less, maybe…just maybe, the world might become a much better place.

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