Clare Oehler-O’Sullivan

Ms. Tanck

Rhet 105

21 February 2019

How about having an intimate date with someone across the country? In her essay, “I Had a Nice Time With You Tonight. On The App”, Jenna Wortham describes the ways in which she believes that social media has positively influenced her life. Throughout her essay, Wortham describes various dating websites where couples can meet, and the different ways people can stay in close contact through social media even though they are miles apart. For instance, she illustrates a typical date scene that many couples take part in, dinner and a movie. Then she ironically goes on to say that she has experienced this same evening over the phone with her boyfriend who lives 3,000 miles away. Wortham even confesses that she ‘has had some of [her] most emotionally intimate and honest conversations with friends and romantic partners on mobile devices’ (4). It is debatable whether it is best for people to be so intimate with others virtually, because they could be missing out on potential relationships with people physically present in their lives. Certainly, technology provides outside connections that have many benefits globally. However, when people misuse electronics and social media by separating themselves from their in-person acquaintances, they set themselves up for a distant, distracted, and potentially unsafe life.

Due to the widespread use of technology, the world today is a truly different place than it was just 10 years ago. To give a rough estimate of how much technology’s presence has increased in our daily lives, according to the US Census, 72% of households reported having access to the internet in 2011 in contrast to just 18% in 1998 (Drago). Furthermore, a study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that ‘people ages 8-18 spend more time on media than on any other activity – at an average of 7.5 hours a day’ (Drago). This rapid increase in the amount of time spent on media clearly leads to lost time in other vital areas of our lives.

For instance, walking the streets of Chicago, I see couples going for an evening stroll, not looking or talking to each other. Both deeply engaged in a virtual reality with some person thousands of miles away. Their eyes are glued to the screens of their smartphones. Their minds and hearts are miles away from the present moment. The virtual relationships that these people are enveloped in may consist of reactors to posts that whom the receiver has never even met, or friends located in other places who are also lost in the digital world. When the invention of the smartphone hit the market, people gained more connections with the outside world and lost intimate relations with the people physically close in proximity.

Although there are ways to build and strengthen relationships over texting, virtual connections can adversely impact real world face-to-face relationships. Thanks to technology, we are able to constantly and continuously communicate with whomever we please throughout the course of a day (Wortham 1). This is great for couples trying to keep in touch throughout a long-distance relationship. For instance, my boyfriend and I live three hours away and we spend a lot of time texting throughout the day. I really enjoy this time because it is very challenging to be apart. Texting really helps me keep in contact with him, but it will never be a truly replicate being together in person. Even when I am out with friends, I find myself constantly checking my phone for updates from him and to be quite honest I am unsure about how my friends feel about this. When the time I spend texting him throughout the day is taken away from relationships in the present moment, is it really a good thing? To be quite honest, it is not, because putting too much time into texting each day leads to missing out on the relationships with people in my physical life that I could be strengthening.

Likewise, overusing social media can have the same unfavorable effects as spending too much time texting. Personally, when I am out with my friends and I post a picture of us on Instagram, I am often inclined to keep checking my phone to watch the likes and comments roll in. Unfortunately, it can get to the point when I am paying more attention to the online friends than I am to the ones that I have the pleasure of hanging out with in person. Likewise, it can be devastating when all I want to do is have a heart to heart conversation with a friend and they just can’t seem to put their phone away. It even appears as though some people are as addicted to their online friends as others are addicted to cocaine. It is clear that technology has a detrimental impact on relationships as a Pew poll of 453 adults across the United States confirms that “nearly half of all respondents reported being distracted by their phones in the presence of a romantic partner” (GoodTherapy). Now, more couples than ever are going to therapy because their partners do not have the time for them anymore thanks to their virtual relationships. As smartphone addiction and virtual relationships are on the rise, real world friendships and romantic relationships are suffering.

Not only are people suffering in their relationships because of social media’s addictiveness, but now many teenagers are suffering within themselves from depression. Social media is a window of constant comparison between yourself and the most attractive 1% of the population. According to the Pittsburgh School of Medicine, there are significantly increased odds for depression among young adults who spend the most time on social media every day (GoodTherapy). Teenagers are already sensitive and hormonal; therefore, competing for popularity, likes, and followers can be very discouraging. Likewise, many people have a constant fear of missing out when they see updates pop up of their friends hanging out without them. Wouldn’t it just be better to not be made aware of these situations? Consequently, the sole purpose of many hangouts becomes taking pictures and trying to prove what a good time they are having and that others are missing out on. This obsession with virtual friends and popularity is detrimental to mental health. When social media is overused, it consumes our every thought and action.

The overuse of technology not only has detrimental impacts on teenagers and adults, but also on children. With the rise in electronic games comes the loss of the joy from playing with physical toys and other children. When I go over to my neighbor’s house to babysit, I am shocked by the lack of enthusiasm when I ask the 6- year old and 4- year old boys if they want to play a car game or a sport together. When I walk in, their parents have to remind them to say hi to me because their eyes are constantly glued to their iPads. Furthermore, because more and more apps are marketed as educational, parents are completely comfortable with this increase in the amount of time their children spend online (AAP News and Journals). This comfort leads to more and more hours of the day spent in the virtual world, and less spent interacting with people in the real world. Indeed, educational games can be great for children because they can instill the love of learning at an early age, but they also take time away from physical learning with their parents and other children. Likewise, when the majority of childhood learning is done online ‘sensorimotor activities (eg, manipulation, climbing, building) that support development of visual-motor skills important to later success in math and science’ (AAP News and Journals) may be compromised. As this new generation of youngsters has not grown up yet, we do not know all the long-term effects of having this surplus of screen time in their everyday lives. However, we do know that too much time spent online worsens vision, instills addiction, and decreases socialization. Moreover, this addiction to technological games leads children to have a loss of awareness for what is actually going on in the world around them.

Not only does technology instill obsession in children, but it also increases distraction in students. According to a survey across six US college campuses, the average respondent indicated that they used their cell-phone 11 times per day during class for non-academic purposes. Furthermore, over 80% of the respondents indicated that this behavior leads them to miss instruction from the teacher and pay less attention (University of Nebraska). The constant ability to check up on friends anytime and anywhere causes a major distraction in the classroom. In addition, at large universities students can check their phones as often as they want in lecture halls; their professors will not notice, and they won’t get caught. It is easy to get distracted by our smartphones when there are no immediate consequences. This misuse of electronics has detrimental impacts on focusing on schoolwork and the education system in general.

Another detriment of social media is the uncertainty that lies beyond the screen. First off, there is a lot of miscommunication that occurs through texting. It is never certain what someone’s tone is when they are texting. Some people use emojis to display their emotion, others don’t. For example, even I question whether someone is mad at me because they sent me a message saying, ‘Ok.’ rather than ‘Okay! ☺’ or because they left me ‘on read’ and didn’t reply. It is difficult to accurately read emotions in texts, which can lead to tension and arguments. Second, an even more troubling example of technological uncertainty lies within online dating websites. In her essay, Jenna Wortham is gung-ho over the idea of meeting someone online as she describes how she believes that ‘technology is where some of the most beautiful interactions happen and deepen’ (Wortham 4). However, there are many cases of online dating where the outcome is far from beautiful. According to BBC News, ‘the number of people reporting being raped on their first date with someone they met on a dating app has risen six-fold in five years.’ Date rape has increased rapidly as the use of online dating services increased because it is so easy to fake an identity online to lure someone in. It is nearly impossible to tell what someone’s true intentions are when all communication is electronic.

The way technology is programmed, it keeps its users addicted and always coming back for more. In Jenna Wortham’s article, she obsesses over how on her couples messaging site, ‘they often include cutesy features that let you add digital doodles to video messages or send virtual kisses or cartoon characters’ (Wortham 2). While she is correct in that this is all great for people in long distance relationships, these cutesy features make for more time spent oodling over technology and for more distractions from people physically present in your life. Furthermore, most people know that being zoned out from the real world and zoned into the digital world creates problems, they just don’t know what to do about it. For instance, as Jenna described her favorite pastime on weekends as a new couple messaging app, people ‘often furrowed their brows and asked [her] whether we really need another application to talk to people we are closest to’ (Wortham 3). This surplus of media in our everyday lives sure is a problem, but what is there to do about it?

In order to get the most out of the new technology springing up in our world is to limit time spent on it. For some addicts, this means giving up social media completely in order to be completely present in the physical world. However, for most it simply means that we should set limits for ourselves, such as using Instagram only 30 minutes a day or only on weekends. An app that I downloaded that is particularly helpful to me is Pocket Points. On that app, you set a timer for yourself to stay off your phone for a certain number of minutes or hours. If you reach your goal, you earn points towards coupons that you can use around campus. Another way to limit time on a certain app is to check your battery use percentages. Under the battery tab, you can see the exact amount of time you spent on each app during the past 24 hours and the past week. This is a great way to set goals and ensure that you’ve reached them, without having to put effort into watching the clock and timing yourself.

A general rule of thumb for electronic and social media use is to limit your time spent on it when you are in the presence of friends and family. For me personally, instead of spending so much time everyday texting my boyfriend and missing out on what is going on around me, I could simply choose to just call him every night before bed. It is important to limit your time on your phone when you are with friends so that you can enjoy their presence and they can enjoy yours. If you are unsure if you are spending too much time on your phone, just ask your friends if your phone usage bothers them! Another way to force yourself to be more engaged with those around you is to leave your phone at home. This is also a great way to see if you can really handle being away from your phone or if it is turning into an addiction.

All in all, Jenna Wortham shows us that technology can be great when it is used in the proper setting. Technology can improve global connections as well as long-distance relationships. It can also have educational benefits for children by associating learning with something fun, like a game. However, there are also many negative side effects from the overuse of technology that we need to remain vigilant of. These negative impacts include the loss in intimacy of relationships, self-comparison and depression, distraction for children, interruption in the classroom, miscommunication, and addiction. We must learn to limit our technology use to ensure that we are getting the most out of our physical lives, especially in the presence of others. If we are able to accomplish this, the benefits of technology will shine through and its drawbacks will be minimized.

Works Cited:

Drago, Emily. “The Effect of Technology on Face-to-Face Communication.” *Strategic Communications - Elon University*, 2015, [www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/research/vol6no1/02DragoEJSpring15.pdf](http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/research/vol6no1/02DragoEJSpring15.pdf).

McCoy, Bernard. “Digital Distractions in the Classroom: Student Classroom Use of Digital Devices for Non-Class Related Purposes.” *DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, Sept. 2013, digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1070&context=journalismfacpub.

Radesky, Jenny S., et al. “Mobile and Interactive Media Use by Young Children: The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown.” *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1 Jan. 2015, pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/135/1/1.

“Rise in First-Date Rape Claims Linked to Online Dating.” *BBC News*, BBC, 7 Feb. 2016, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-35513052](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-35513052).

Staff, GoodTherapy.org. “3 Ways Technology Can Negatively Impact Your Relationships.” *GoodTherapy.org - Find the Right Therapist*, GoodTherapy.org Therapy Blog, 12 Oct. 2017, [www.goodtherapy.org/blog/3-ways-technology-can-negatively-impact-your-relationships-0919167](http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/3-ways-technology-can-negatively-impact-your-relationships-0919167).

Wortham, Jenna. “I Had a Nice Time With You Tonight. On The App.” *The New York Times*, 5 Apr. 2014.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Your paper… | Not achieved | Attempted or partially achieved | Achieved consistently | Excellently done throughout |  |
| Effectively summarizes the essay to which you’re responding (15%) |  |  | 3.8 |  | .57 |
| Articulates your own position in response (15%) |  |  | 3.9 |  | .585 |
| Engages with the essay to make an original argument in support of your position (30%) |  |  |  | 4 | 1.2 |
| Considers a naysayer/ counterargument to your position (20%) |  |  | 3.8 |  | .76 |
| Uses citation, quotation, & summary appropriately & effectively (15%) |  |  |  | 4 | .6 |
| Is formatted correctly, including header info, page numbers, in-text citation, and Works Cited (5%) |  |  | 3.8 |  | .19 |
|  |  |  |  |  | 3.905 / 4 =  97.625% |