January 2015

Mediated Motherhood: Discourse and Maternal Identity in the Digital Age

Melissa A. Vaillancourt
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: http://surface.syr.edu/etd
Part of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SURFACE at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations - ALL by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
Abstract: The ubiquity of the smartphone is both celebrated and contested, since the possibility of constant connectivity is seen as simultaneously inviting and exciting on the one hand, and demanding and burdensome on the other. This thesis uses discourse analysis to analyze a television interview and an online comment forum to shed light on the ways in which experts and mothers talk about the impacts of technology on family interaction and parenting practices. I consider how both experts and parents discursively construct the family-technology relationship by analyzing how parents communicate about technology use (both their own and their children’s), the emotional and practical elements of decision-making regarding technology and how these reveal ideologies about the impact of technology on parenting. My primary findings support a body of research that indicates that a mention of parenting in general can be interpreted to implicate mothers specifically. As such, the conversation about the relationship between parenting and technology is constrained by cultural ideologies about maternal responsibility for the care of children and philosophies about the affordances of technology, and entangled with questions of access and class. All of this influences how experts and parents negotiate their identities and work to position themselves as competent on each of these fronts.

Keywords: discourse analysis, Turkle, positioning, membership categorization device, extreme case formulation, ideology, indexicality, acts and stances, intensive mothering
MEDIATED MOTHERHOOD: 
DISCOURSE AND MATERNAL IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by

Melissa Vaillancourt

B.A., Oswego State University, 1995
M.A., Syracuse University, 2015
C.A.S., Syracuse University, 2015

Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication and Rhetorical Studies

Syracuse University
August 2015
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr. Cynthia Gordon, without whose guidance and support, this thesis might have remained a dream unrealized. While I am proud of this work, I know that it is a reflection of your investment in, and commitment to, my scholarship. For this, I offer my heartfelt thanks.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Jeffrey Good, Dr. Anne Demo and Dr. Melissa Luke for dedicating time and energy to my growth as a student and to the development of this thesis.

Finally, I recognize that this thesis would not have been possible without my husband Marco, who throughout this process remained an endless source of encouragement. Words are an inadequate expression of my gratitude; nevertheless, I offer these to each of you for your contributions to this accomplishment.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iv

List of Illustrative Materials vi

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background 6

Chapter 3: Data and Methods 21

Chapter 4: “Children Have to Be Taught:” An Expert’s Positioning of Parental Responsibility and Child Technology Use 23

Chapter 5: “Turn off your phones and spend that time with your child!” Maternal Responsibility in the Digital Age !43

Chapter 6: Discussion 81

Appendices 84

References 133

Vita 136
List of Illustrative Materials

Figures
1. Bill Moyers & Sherry Turkle  
2. Sherry Turkle/Alone Together  
3. Turkle. “That’s very serious.”  
5. Turkle. “This is the gesture.”  
6. Turkle. “Go like that.”  
7. Moyers & Turkle. “And you know.”  
8. Screenshot of article as published online

Table
1. Parallel themes from Extracts 1 and 2

Charts
1. NY Times Online Readership by Gender  
2. Frequency Distribution of Terms
Chapter 1: Introduction

A mother collects iPads from her 4- and 7-year old children following dinner at a restaurant. She wonders if using the devices to occupy them is “bad.” She worries “that it is setting them up to think it’s O.K. to use electronics at the dinner table in the future” (Bilton, 2013). Indeed, there is no shortage of evidence – anecdotal, empirical, and statistical – to suggest that she is not alone in experiencing this apprehension. Scientists find that learning processes are inhibited by the constant stimulation of technology (Richtel, 2010a), and express concern about these effects on developing brains, which “can become more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks – and less able to sustain attention” (Richtel, 2010b). Statistically, the data show the degree to which both adults and children alike are grappling with the effects of technology on everyday life. In May 2010, The New York Times polled 855 adults and found:

- 33% could not imagine living without a computer (interestingly, the poll also found that computer dependence is positively correlated with higher education and affluence),
- 40% check work email after hours or on vacation,
- 14% see less of their spouse, and
- 10% spend less time with their children under the age of 18 due to device use. (Connolly, 2010).

Common Sense Media conducted two national random sample surveys of 1,463 parents of children ages 8 and under, first in 2011 and then again in 2013, with the express purpose of documenting “how children’s media environments and behaviors have changed” (Common Sense, 2013, p. 7). These surveys found:

- 75% of families own a mobile device (smartphone, tablet, etc., and this is compared to 52% in 2011)
- 72% of children 0-8 have used a device (compared to 38% in 2011)
• 86% of families with household incomes greater than $75,000 have high-speed Internet access, compared to 46% of families with incomes less than $30,000
• 75% of parents in the higher income bracket had downloaded educational apps for their children, compared to 35% in the lower bracket (Common Sense, 2013).

As Common Sense (2013) concludes, “The past two years have seen an explosion in the use of mobile media platforms and applications ("apps") among young children,” noting "one of the concerns about the increasing presence of media in children’s homes is the degree to which media may detract from face-to-face family time" (pp. 20, 26). Finally, these data link technology and class, since income predicts both access to the Internet and the types of applications downloaded. Making sense of the conversation surrounding the relationship between technology and family interaction is precisely the aim of this thesis.

I am specifically interested in the ways in which mothers perceive and talk about the role of digital devices in family life. Currently, the conversation on digital parenting is influenced on the one hand by the work of experts such as Sherry Turkle. In January 2011, Turkle published Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other. In this book, she contends that technology is luring us into relinquishing (face-to-face) interpersonal relationships for virtual ones, which offer “the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship” (Turkle, 2011, p. 1). Turkle finds us avoiding the telephone, substituting more distant, asynchronous channels of email and text (pp. 190, 207). She first defines, then explains, and finally warns against the effects of technology on human interaction, some of which are highlighted in this analysis.
In an April 2013 interview with Gayle King and Charlie Rose on CBS This Morning, Turkle outlines two points: first, cell phones provide a (false) sense of multitasking, with the result that we are not paying full attention to the task-at-hand. For example, we text, Turkle claims, while having breakfast with our family, or on the playground when we should be watching our children. Second, says Turkle, mediated communication allows users to construct a desired self (who we want to be). We thus reveal only that which we choose to reveal rather than who we really are. Essentially, Turkle contends, our electronic devices allow us to “hide from each other” (CBS, 2013).

On the other hand, some have expressed the view that technology enhances family interaction. For example, in an interview on Sirius XM Satellite Radio, Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (D-FL) contends that technology has made her “a better mom” since it allows her “to be a lot more connected.” Similarly, Jeana Lee Tahnk, a high-tech PR consultant who writes about technology and parenting for Mashable.com and Parenting Magazine, calls her smartphone a “savior,” since it has made her “life as a parent so much easier,” as well as “more organized and efficient.” I do not make an argument either for or against “digital parenting,” but rather through analysis of both video and textual data, I illuminate the practices of interaction which allow mothers to socially construct their identities in the shadow of these powerful and public ideologies; I also highlight the ways in which their individual voices either ratify or reject the current public discourse surrounding the impact(s) of technology on family life.

To foreground the role of interaction in the construction, or the co-construction, of identity, this thesis draws on the theories and methods of discourse analysis. A discourse analytic perspective can shed light on the ways in which experts and mothers
alike communicate the impact of technology on family interaction and parenting practices, addressing such questions as, how do experts and parents assess and balance the potential benefits and drawbacks of technology, and what strategies do parents enact to manage technology use by family members, especially children? In other words, I consider how experts and parents discursively construct the family-technology relationship by analyzing how parents communicate about technology use (both their own and their children’s), the emotional and practical elements of decision-making regarding technology and how these reveal ideologies about the impact of technology on parenting.

The data for this thesis are drawn from two contexts. The first is an interview of Sherry Turkle by Bill Moyers of PBS. Here, I focus on segments in which Turkle refers specifically to the relationship between technology and family interaction. I then introduce textual data in the form of comments posted in response to a New York Times article entitled, "The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In." The article references Turkle’s work, and she also participates in the comment forum.

I discuss the context and format of the interview and online comments, specifically what strategies are deployed, for what purpose, and to what ends (what do they accomplish?). Specific attention is paid to how mothers use discourse to communicate their own, and their children’s, uses of technology, and how all of this works to construct parental identities in interaction. With this, I hope to contribute to an existing body of work on parental identity in interaction, as well as technology and interaction, and finally to link the two by analyzing the discursive negotiation of identity in relation to technology and cultural expectations of motherhood in contemporary society.
To accomplish this, I ask the following questions: First, how does an expert construct the relationship between parenting and technology and what does this accomplish? What are the implications for parents? Second, how do mothers construct maternal identities for themselves as they discuss their own and their children’s use of technology? Third, how is parental identity constructed and negotiated in online formats? My primary findings support a body of research that indicates a mention of parenting in general can be interpreted to implicate mothers specifically. As such, the conversation about the relationship between parenting and technology is constrained by cultural ideologies about maternal responsibility for the care of children and philosophies about the affordances of technology, and entangled with questions of access and class. All of this influences the ways in which both experts and parents negotiate their identities and work to position themselves as competent on each of these fronts.

In what follows, I first provide theoretical background on discourse analysis. I then introduce my data in more detail. My analyses are presented in two chapters, one on the interview data and one on the online discussion data. In the conclusion, I summarize my observations and explain how they contribute to our understanding of the construction of parental (and maternal) identities in interaction in the digital age.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Background

In this chapter, I review work in three main areas that provide the theoretical foundation for this thesis: Research on how identities are constructed in social interaction, work examining maternal identity construction in particular, and scholarship investigating technology in family interaction.

I. Identities in interaction.

I begin with a perspective of social interaction as a site for continuous identity (re)construction. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) introduced a theatre metaphor to explain the ways in which interaction allows interlocutors to put a ‘self’ on stage (p. 107). (Turkle’s recent contention that we use modern technology to display preferred identities in some ways echoes this theorizing.) Goffman’s work on ‘the presentation of self’ describes the ways in which individuals’ contributions to interaction work to control and manage the impressions of themselves and others. Summarizing and distilling work in the fields of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity is a discursively constructed, emergent product of interaction (p. 587). As these authors propose, “identity is the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586). This is consistent with Ribeiro (2006), who finds that “conversational and social work is related to doing identity work,” viewing interaction as the locus of “the performance of our social and discourse identities” (p. 50). Useful for the analyses presented in this thesis are those theories and concepts which help explain the role of interaction in identity construction, namely, positioning, the MIR Membership Categorization Device, and indexicality.
Davies & Harré (1990) define positioning as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 48). These story lines, or “autobiographical aspects of a conversation,” explain Davies & Harré (1990), reveal “how each conversant conceives of themselves and of the other participants” (p. 48). Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) find that when participants interact, they “position themselves and others as particular kinds of people” (p. 595). As Gordon (2015a) summarizes, “positioning theory provides a framework to explore selves as discursive constructions, and to investigate different aspects of identity, including the development and negotiation of these aspects” (p. 11).

Another means of considering identity work in interaction is Sacks’ (1989) MIR Membership Categorization Device (hereafter, the MIR Device). Noting the prominence of certain types of questions in first conversations, Sacks (1989) proposed this device to describe the ways people responded to these questions (p. 271). He first identified category sets, or sets “made up of a group of categories” (Sacks, 1989, p. 271). The sets, Sacks (1989) claims, are ‘which’–type sets, since “each set’s categories classify membership in a population” (thus the “M” in MIR). He also points out that the categories are ‘inference rich’; (the “I” in MIR), or that we store information about individuals in categories, and this knowledge then informs topics of conversation. Finally, members of these categories represent that category (the “R” in MIR), and whatever knowledge about that category that is stored and drawn upon (Sacks, 1989, p. 272). Reinforcing this notion, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) find that overt mention of “referential identity categories” is one way identities are constituted in discourse (p. 594). Since, as the authors find, “labeling and categorization are social actions,”
examining categories in discourse constitutes an especially useful research focus (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594).

One pair of categories that has been considered by discourse analysts is parent-child. For example, Schiffrin (2000), analyzing mother/daughter discourse in narratives about the Holocaust, finds that “stories are a resource through which we develop and present a self as a psychological entity firmly located within a social and cultural world” (p. 1). Narratives, in essence, create “story worlds,” in which relationships between self and other “can be situated, displayed, and evaluated” (Schiffrin, 2000, p. 1). Schiffrin (2000) further states that “the parent/child relationship... is generally believed to be a basic defining relationship in one’s life,” specifically recognizing “matrifocal families as the basic nexus of identity” (p. 7).

Analyzing gender hierarchies and social behavior in America and Western Samoa, Ochs (1993) observes “that speakers attempt to establish the social identities of themselves and others through verbally performing certain social acts and verbally displaying certain stances” (p. 288). Yet the link between language and social identity, Ochs (1993) finds, “is not direct” (p. 289). Social meaning, then, according to Ochs, “is not usually explicitly encoded,” but rather inferred (p. 289). The degree of accuracy of these inferences necessarily draws upon shared “cultural and linguistic conventions” through which acts and stances are not only interpreted, but associated with particular identities (Ochs, 1993, p. 290). (And all of this is consistent with Sacks’ [1989] observations about the MIR Device.) Narrowing this perspective from social identity in general to maternal identities in particular, Ochs (1992) summarizes, “the relation between language and gender is not a simple straightforward” one, but rather, “is
constituted and mediated by the relation of language to stances, [and] social acts...” (pp. 336-7).

In summary, discourse analysts have identified positioning theory, membership categorization, and indexicality as useful notions for the exploration of identities. Using these notions, they have examined a range of identities related to ethnicity, profession, nationality, and so on. Most relevant for my purposes are studies that have focused on maternal identities.

II. **Ideology and Maternal Identities.**

I turn now from identity in interaction to specific identities: those of mothers. Maternal identities are constructed in cultural contexts, and these contexts are rife with ideologies about motherhood. To adopt Davies and Harré’s (1990) terminology, mothers are expected to take up certain positions in particular story lines. In mainstream American culture, a pivotal position is being highly attentive to one’s child, as this section will show. I begin here with Gee’s (2008) distinction between Discourse and discourse, then turn to findings from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and sociology which focus on the relationship between maternal discourse and ideologies about motherhood and demonstrate how maternal and child identities are intertwined in everyday talk.

Taking a sociocultural approach to language and literacy, Gee (2008) finds that language “always comes fully attached to ‘other stuff’: to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes...” (p. 1). Meaning is attached to these (often) tacit cultural models which are “picked up from talk, interaction, and engagement with texts and media in society” (Gee, 2008, p. 25).
That is, interaction is a site for the creation and reification of particular ways of seeing and understanding the world. For this reason, Gee (2008) claims “that language is inextricably bound up with ideology and cannot be analyzed or understood apart from it” (p. 4).

In considering how to analyze how humans "act out distinctive identities and activities," Gee (2013) differentiates between 'Discourse' (capital 'D') and 'discourse' (lowercase 'd'). These so-named "Big 'D' Discourses" refer to the ways group social conventions "allow people to enact specific identities and activities," while "little 'd' discourse," Gee (2013) suggests, refers to "any stretch of language in use." Thus, in order to be recognized as having a particular identity, we are socialized to speak, act and interact in specific ways. In other words, in producing “discourse,” speakers construct and refer to “Discourses” that are associated with identities. This is because, as Gee (2008) points out “Discourses are inherently ‘ideological’” (p. 161). He continues,

> They crucially involve a set of values and viewpoints about the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods, at the very least about who is an insider and who isn’t, often who is ‘normal’ and who isn’t, and often, too, many other things as well. (Gee, 2008, p. 161).

In defining membership and “normalcy,” Discourses, then, also mark outsiders and opposition, since foregrounding certain beliefs and values necessarily also marginalizes others. In Johnstone’s (2008) words, “‘Discourses’ in the plural are conventional ways of talking that create and perpetuate systems of ideology, sets of beliefs about how the world works and what is natural” (p. 29). She explains that every linguistic choice, from the production to the interpretation of discourse, reflects a kind of agenda or an ideology; a choice to see the world in one particular way (and thus not another) (Johnstone, 2008, p. 54).
Similarly, Ochs (1992) observes that “social groups organize and conceptualize men and women in culturally specific and meaningful ways” (p. 339). Comparing and contrasting the communicative practices of white middle class (WMC) American mothers and traditional Western Samoan mothers, Ochs (1992) proposes “a relation between the position and image of women in society and language use in caregiver-child interaction” (p. 346). Ochs (1992) points out that images of women and of mothering are linked; and further, that images of mothering are linked with caregiving, hence the universal woman-as-caregiver image (pp. 339, 337). Yet despite the fact that “mothering is a universal kinship role of women and in this role women have positions of control and power,” she finds that WMC mothers exhibit “a communicative strategy of high accommodation to young children” (Ochs, 1992, pp. 346-7).

This strategy is marked by the use of a simplified register, shorter sentences, slower pace, and repetition, among other features (Ochs, 1992, pp. 348-9). In what Ochs (1992) calls “the mainstream American caregiving role,” WMC mothers (as good caregivers) “will either intervene or assist the child in carrying out her or his desired activity,” providing “dramatic scaffolding” for the production and interpretation of children’s messages (pp. 350, 352). All of this, Ochs (1992) observes, differs greatly from American Samoan mothers, who expect their children “to be communicatively accommodating to caregivers” (p. 347). Contrary to WMC children, young Samoan children are socialized “to attend carefully to the non-simplified speech and actions of others” (Ochs, 1992, pp. 350-1).

Finally, Ochs (1992) concludes, these linguistic practices serve to not only illuminate but perpetuate the role (and therefore, status) of mothers in society, since images of WMC mothers are socialized through the dual communicative strategies of
“high accommodation to young children” and “minimiz[ing] their own importance” (p. 347). In other words, because WMC mothers downplay their contributions to interactions, they are rendered “invisible” and the recurrence of these socialization practices perpetually “lowers [their] position” (Ochs, 1992, p. 353). Thus, as these mother-child interactions serve to socialize children, they also create maternal identities that reflect cultural expectations about what it means to be a good mother, while simultaneously reifying these expectations.

Ochs’ findings have interesting links to work by sociologist Sharon Hays. Finding that “image[s] of appropriate child rearing” indicate mother as “central caregiver,” that mothers must put children’s emotional and intellectual needs above their own, and finally that children “have a special value” and “deserve special treatment,” Hays (1996) suggests the term intensive mothering, and maintains that “the ideology of intensive mothering is... the dominant ideology of socially appropriate child rearing in the contemporary United States” (pp. 8-9).

Hays (1996) traces the advent of the perspective of child rearing as a science for which mothers had to be trained (p. 39). For this training, she would, of course, have to rely on the experts; experts whose manuals addressed mothers exclusively, and specifically, mothers who cared for their children on a full-time basis (Hays, 1996, p. 54). Laden with assumptions of access to resources (i.e., time and money), this ideology both appeals to, and is appealing to, white American middle-class values, exerting pressure on working class and poor mothers to adopt “more intensive (middle-class) methods,” and to look to wealthier (and ostensibly better educated), women for child rearing advice and examples (Hays, 1996, p. 92). As Hays (1996) summarizes, “The methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centered, expert-guided,
emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” and all of these point to ideologies of class and gender (p. 8).

Similarly, Pugh (2005) analyzes toy catalogs to uncover the “modern dilemmas of motherhood:” or, the “clashing ideals” of professional employment and family responsibilities which “compete for allegiance in the same person” (p. 730). Pugh (2005) determines that toy marketers target “the anxieties and hopes of mothers” in order to convince them to buy into what she terms “the cultural deal” (p. 730). That is, toy catalogs promote consumption (or, “buying the right toys”) as a form of compromise which allows mothers to fulfill their role as nurturer (and thus maintain the identity ‘good mother’) without actually having to be present (Pugh, 2005, 735). Finally, by targeting households with incomes exceeding $80,000, the marketing in these catalogs engenders assumptions of access, thus “the marketing of good mothering,” Pugh (2005) finds, is synonymous with “good middle-class mothering” (p. 735, emphasis mine). As such, Pugh (2005) concludes, these catalogs perpetuate the very powerful ideological clashes and contradictions they profess to solve.

Moving to the realm of everyday conversation, Kendall (2007) analyzes the discourse of two women from dual-income American families who recorded their own conversations for approximately one week; she finds that they negotiate both “parental and work-related identities through the positions they discursively take up themselves and make available to their husbands in relation to traditional and feminist discourses of work and family” (p. 124; note that Kendall uses “discourses” here to reflect ideologies, or Big-D Discourses as suggested by Gee [2008; 2013]). That is, in one sense, specifically when they describe their family roles, “the women position themselves and their husbands in non-traditional roles...” as “workers” and as “caregivers,” respectively
(Kendall, 2007, p. 154). On the other hand, in actual interactions where they enact family roles, by positioning their husbands as “breadwinners” and “secondary caregivers” and themselves as “primary caregivers,” “the women constitute their own and their husbands’ identities as caregivers asymmetrically” (Kendall, 2007, p. 124). As such, Kendall (2007) suggests that they “attach different meanings” to these roles, meanings consistent with traditional role sharing and Hays’ (1996) ideology of intensive mothering (Kendall, 2007, p. 154).

In a related vein, Johnston (2007) examines the interactions of one of the couples whose discourse Kendall studied to reveal “how each partner contributes to positioning the other as the primary decision maker” in domains of childcare and household finances (p. 166). Johnston (2007), drawing on Erickson and Shultz’ (1982) concept of academic advisor as gatekeeper in an institutional setting, applies a gatekeeping metaphor to describe who is positioned as the responsible party (p. 191). Introducing the term “parental gatekeeping,” Johnston (2007) portrays how one couple discursively positions the mother “as gatekeeper of caregiving, the primary decision maker in caring for their daughter,” and the father “as financial gatekeeper, the primary decision maker in managing their money” (p. 165). Thus, like Kendall, she finds the mother acting as the primary parent in actual interactions.

Discourse analysts have also examined how parental identities are tied to the identities of children. Gordon (2007) explores the ways performance of social acts and verbal display of stances reflect cultural expectations of motherhood, and create what Schiffrin (1996) calls maternal “self-portraits.” Analyzing talk about the (mis)behaviors of a toddler between a mother, her younger brother (who had babysat the child), and her husband, Gordon (2007) finds that the mother expresses feeling responsible for her
daughter’s inappropriate behavior, and concern that it reflects poorly on her as a mother; sentiments not expressed by her husband (p. 82-3). In accounting for her daughter’s shortcomings, the mother demonstrates the sociocultural constraints of motherhood. That is, she feels responsible and this feeling leads to a need to engage in what Goffman (1959) calls “impression management” or face the resulting humiliation (p. 96). This study once again highlights the mother-child identity connection found by Kendall (2007) and Johnston (2007).

Citing Schiffrin (1996) and Ochs (1993), Gordon (2007) links language use and identity; that is, inference and interpretation depend upon a level of “joint understanding” or shared “sociolinguistic knowledge” (p. 75). These cultural expectations and shared knowledge are necessarily influenced by a society which both formally and informally links parental performance with child behavior (p. 77). Gordon (2007) also demonstrates how a mother takes a stance as one who is very involved in her daughter’s life, a stance that is consistent with societal expectations of motherhood.

In a study in an institutional context, Adelsward and Nilholm (2000) analyze a teacher-parent-pupil conference for a child with Down Syndrome and find that identity work is not only an individual presentation but a relationship presentation (p. 545). The child’s identities as pupil and daughter imply certain other identities, namely, teacher and mother, and this is meaningful in that “to help one’s daughter present her identity in a favorable way is to simultaneously display the identity of a good mother” (Adelsward & Nilholm, 2000, p. 545).

Similarly, borrowing from Goffman (1959), Collett (2005) analogizes the construction of maternal identity with theatrical performance. She also builds on prior research on appearance and group membership, as well managing impressions through
the use of others as props, both of which mesh nicely with Goffman’s (1959) theatre metaphor. Collett (2005) notes that while fathers play a pivotal role in children’s development, it is mothers who are held responsible for "the way their children turn out" (p. 328). As such, children serve as props on the stage in which women present themselves as competent mothers, and on which they seek to negotiate and manage the impressions they create. Through analysis of an online playgroup and interviews with its members, Collett (2005) points to the fact that women use their children "to show themselves and others that they are good, capable mothers" (p. 343).

Not only do women tend to assume themselves to be responsible for their children’s appearance and behavior, but media discourse also tends to target mothers. For example, analyzing medical, legal and media representations of childhood obesity, Zivkovic, Warin, Davies and Moore (2010) uncover “gendered assumptions embedded in [these] discourses;” and further “argue that it is mothers, and not fathers, who are deemed to be primarily culpable, both legally and morally” (p. 377). In fact, when it comes to media discussions surrounding the health of children, “mothers are consistently singled out” and “parents’ often serves as a euphemism for mothers” (Zivkovic et al., 2010, p. 383). Sampling advice features in parenting magazines, Sunderland (2006) finds evidence of gendered stereotypes and “slippage” wherein supposed ‘gender neutral’ features in reality focused solely on moms, subsequently backgrounding fathers (p. 509). “The magazines’ notion of the real addressee, and parent,” Sunderland (2006) concludes, is mother (p. 525).

To summarize, the discourse of “mother as main parent”/”part-time father” is prevalent as revealed by scholarship in sociology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Even when the Discourse of egalitarian parenting is stated explicitly or implied
(in interaction or in print), analysis at the discourse level reveals a reality which, in practice, reflects more traditional role sharing ideologies, thus revealing that speakers do not (and in fact cannot) produce discourse that does not somehow reflect or counter a Discourse. Taken together, the body of literature reviewed here suggests that language and ideology are inherently bound up together in the realm of parenting.

III. Technology and Family Interaction.

Technology brings a new complexity to ideologies about parenting (and, for that matter, about language). Nearly a decade before smartphones became ubiquitous household devices, Lindlof (1992) advocated for research into “the interpersonal contexts in which computing is learned and used in the home,” and “how computer products becoming meaningful for family members” (p. 291). Studying ten families who owned a home computer and had at least one child who used the computer, Lindlof (1992) sought to determine “how social actors try to portray themselves as adequate computer users and also as adequate in their family roles” (as though these are contradictory objectives) (p. 293). This suggests an inherent “difficulty of accommodating technology within the family’s moral and interpersonal logics” (Lindlof, 1992, p. 293).

Families that owned home computers were inevitably faced with the question of where to locate it physically. While many families initially cited “space requirements” as the reason for the computer’s location, further questioning revealed another reason: “social-interactional requirements” (Lindlof, 1992, p. 297). With the always-with-you, always on mobile technologies, the question of the physical location of devices seems
moot. Yet, the question of effects on family interaction becomes increasingly more salient.

While there is no shortage of quantitative data to document the advent, prevalence, and effects of mediated communication on family interaction, research applying a discourse analytic approach is notably sparse. Themes which emerge from a review of the literature focus on two primary topics: effects and access. That is, what influences is technology taken to exert on family communicative practices (and how are they viewed?) and, what affordances of class (assumptions of access) are invoked in conversations about technological devices?

Thus, one perspective on the assimilation of technology into everyday life is revealed by Blum-Kulka’s (1997) distinction between “sociability” and “socialization.” Discourse analysts and sociolinguists have identified family interaction generally, and family dinnertime especially, as important for the complementary goals of family sociability and child socialization. First, as a “sociable event,” talk at family dinner is not directed toward a particular goal (i.e., teaching), but has as its focus building rapport (Blum-Kulka, 1997, 36). Citing Lakoff (1990), Blum-Kulka (1997) describes interactions of this type as “egalitarian and collaborative” (p. 35). On the other hand, the “socializing functions” of family dinner point to particular goals (i.e., teaching table manners), and as such may be less-than-egalitarian, or non-egalitarian and “not necessarily collaborative” (Blum-Kulka, 1997, pp. 35-6). In this aspect, children are invited and expected to participate, “but parents reserve the right and power to modify and withhold [this privilege]” (Blum-Kulka, 1997, p. 38). Technology could possibly be seen as hindering, and/or facilitating, family sociability and child socialization.
Reinforcing the importance of these complementary goals for the digital age, Turkle (2012) advocates making the dining room a “sacred space,” or “device-free zone” in order to “demonstrate the value of conversation to our children.” As Scelfo (2010) states, “there is little research on how parents’ constant use of... technology affects children, but experts say there is no question that engaged parenting... remains the bedrock of early childhood learning.”

In addition to questions of effects, the cost of acquiring technological devices begs questions of access and class. It is interesting to note here that all families in Lindlof’s (1992) study (referenced above) were white, middle- to upper-class. More recently, Johnstone (2008) finds that “people with the skill, inclination, and technological resources to blog or instant-message may be on average younger, wealthier, and better educated than the population as a whole” (p. 196). Similarly, Hays (1996) and Pugh (2005) point to the costs of “good,” middle-class intensive mothering, having access to the “experts” and being able to buy the “right toys.”

While families’ technology use is well-documented and there are plenty of public opinions about this, there is an absence of studies considering how parents are discursively positioned in regards to their own, and their children’s exposure to technology. An exception is Pigeron (2012), who analyzed videotaped and audiotaped interviews with parents from 32 dual-earner families, and finds that parental discourse on children’s media use at home is influenced by a “collective cultural consensus” that media exposure is “not healthy” (p. 16). Laden with cultural ambivalence toward the negative effects of technology, the conversation about “about how to maintain a healthy media landscape within the home,” thus becomes a question of morality (Pigeron, 2012, p. 18).
Since media exposure is nearly unavoidable in an age where media competence is a necessary life skill, significant work was required on the part of parents in order to provide an accounting of children’s media use that could be seen as “coherent with ideologies of a family’s collective life and practices” (Pigeron, 2012, p. 28). In this “moral arena,” parents enact strategies such as accounting for strict parenting practices, contrasting their practices with others’, and blaming others for children’s media exposure; engaging in what Pigeron (2012) calls “moral discourse” in order to discursively portray themselves as good parents (pp. 15-7).

In summary, the studies reviewed in this section shed light on intersections between (maternal) identities, parenting practices, and technology. They complement studies reviewed in this chapter’s previous sections by demonstrating how the negotiation of parental (and maternal) identities is complicated by cultural ideologies about responsibility for the care of children and competing (and even conflicting) definitions of precisely what such care entails when it comes to technology use.
Chapter 3: Data and Methods

Foregrounding the role of interaction in the construction, or the co-construction, of identity, discourse analysis is a useful tool “to reflect on and interrogate some of our cultural models germane to language, literacy, learning, and people in society” (Gee, 2008, p. 30). As a method, discourse analysis proceeds inductively, “work[ing] outward from texts to an understanding of their contexts” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 30).

In the first analysis chapter (Chapter 4), I use discourse analysis to analyze a publicly available, video-recorded interview conducted by well-known American journalist Bill Moyers, which I transcribed using conversation analytic conventions developed by Jefferson (1984). Though I viewed the interview online at Moyers’ website, it was originally broadcast in October 2013 on the PBS program Moyers & Company. It is approximately 30 minutes in length and features Sherry Turkle, whom Moyers introduces as “a clinical psychologist who was one of the first to study the impact of computers on culture and society. A professor at MIT and Director of that school’s Initiative on Technology and Self, she’s written several important books based on deep research and hundreds of interviews with children and adults alike” (Moyers, 2013). Moyers and his guest Turkle discuss her book Alone Together and the implications of her findings. Especially relevant to this project are references Turkle makes to family interaction, and how parental identities are constructed in relation to technology use.

In the second analysis chapter (Chapter 5), I introduce and analyze textual data in the form of comments posted at The New York Times’ website. In the summer of 2010, The Times ran a series entitled, Your Brain on Computers. “The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In” was one installment in that series. Published in June of that year, the article references Turkle’s work as well as that of other experts and anecdotal accounts
of parents talking about their own technology use. In response to that article, 182
comments were posted. Turkle contributes 28 of these responses.

With more than 28 million unique visitors each month, NYTimes.com claims to
be the “# 1 individual newspaper site in the U.S.” and invites visitors to the site to
“become part of one of the most engaged, loyal community of readers on the Web” (The
New York Times, 2014). (While these data may be said to reflect the diverse
perspectives of a broad readership, online audience demographics will be presented and
explained in detail in the introduction to Chapter 5). As such, these comments permit a
computer-mediated discourse approach to the construction of identity in interaction;
and equally as important, they combine the “expert” perspective of the previous chapter
with that of parents (specifically mothers) to reveal how each of these functions in the
discursive construction of maternal identities in the digital age.

With respect to communication in online fora, Herring (2004, p. 338), quoting
Kolko (1995), describes an approach to computer-mediated discourse analysis which
builds on the premise that, “language is doing... on the Internet, where physical bodies
(and their actions) are technically lacking.” Computer-mediated discourse analysis uses
theories and methods of discourse analysis, while keeping in mind the affordances and
limitations of digital contexts (Herring, 2004). Thus, I use computer-mediated
discourse analysis to consider the online comments.
Chapter 4: “Children Have to Be Taught:” An Expert’s Positioning of Parental Responsibility and Child Technology Use

Introduction

For Pew Research, Keeter and Taylor (2009) find that Millennials “are the first generation in human history who regard behaviors like tweeting and texting, along with websites like Facebook, YouTube, Google and Wikipedia, not as astonishing innovations of the digital era, but as everyday parts of their social lives.” Studying computer-mediated communication, Susan Herring (2008), traces the integration of television “from popular introduction to widespread taken-for-grantedness,” and uses this timeline to predict that “the Internet could attain this [taken for granted] status by 2015” (p. 84). The smartphone traces a similar trajectory from luxury to ubiquity in the twenty years since its advent: 74% of adults ages 30 to 49 now own smartphones, and that statistic climbs to 83% for adults ages 18 to 29 (Pew, 2014).

In January 2011, developmental psychologist and MIT Professor Sherry Turkle published Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other. In it, she contends that technology is luring us into relinquishing (face-to-face) interpersonal relationships for virtual ones, which offer “the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship,” (Turkle, 2011, p. 1). Recognizing that there has always been a desire to connect with those who are not, or cannot be, physically present, Turkle (2011) follows the trajectory of what she calls “the domain of connectivity” (p. 207). Ironically, she observes, in this quest to connect, we continue to substitute personal means for impersonal. The telephone was replaced by voicemail, voicemail by e-mail and finally, e-mail by text. She now finds us avoiding the telephone altogether in
favor of these more distant, asynchronous channels of communication (Turkle, 2011, p. 207).

Further, she concludes that this phenomenon is not unique to a particular age group or generation. For example, one teenager in particular, a 16-year old girl Turkle (2011) calls Audrey, describes her mother as “engrossed with the phone,” to the extent that when her mother picks her up from school or sports practice, Audrey “sit[s] in the car and wait[s] in silence” until her mother is finished texting (pp. 189-90). (Turkle relates this narrative in the interview which I analyze in this chapter). On her part, however, Audrey also confesses to texting when with friends, and doing “everything she can to avoid a call” (Turkle, 2011, p. 190).

In anticipation of, and following the release of Alone Together, Turkle has appeared in numerous television and radio interviews in which she both describes and warns against the effects of technology on human interaction in general, and family interaction specifically. This in some way echoes earlier concerns about technology and family life, such as when, decades ago, the television was dubbed “the electronic babysitter” (a term which persists today and has since come to include other devices). One such interview will be the focus of this analysis.

Any discussion of parenting in the digital age must first consider what it means to be a parent; that is, what responsibilities are attached to the role of parent? With this as a backdrop, I consider how an expert (Turkle) discursively constructs the parent-child-technology relationship by analyzing how she depicts talk about technology use (by both parents and their children); I demonstrate how this talk reveals ideologies about the impact of technology on parenting. In what follows, I first suggest that concept of positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) and the MIR Device (Sacks, 1989) serve as lenses
through which to view the interview. Building on work by Schiffrin (1996, 2000), I also consider how identities are constructed in narrative, such as the stories told by Turkle in the interview. I then analyze transcribed extracts of a televised interview with Turkle and Bill Moyers of PBS, with special attention devoted to segments in which Turkle refers specifically to the relationship between technology and family interaction.

Taking a perspective that discourse both shapes, and is shaped by, the context in which it occurs, my analysis sheds light on how an expert uses language to construct the potential drawbacks of technology in family life, and to identify strategies parents should use to manage technology use by family members, especially children. Specifically, I show how—via positioning, the MIR Device, what Pomerantz (1986) calls Extreme Case formulations, and narratives (Schiffrin, 1996; 2000)—both expert and parental identities are constructed in talk.

With this, I hope to contribute to the existing body of work on parental identity construction in interaction, as well as technology and interaction, and finally to link the two by illuminating the discursive negotiation of identity in relation to technology and cultural expectations of motherhood in contemporary society. In doing so, I demonstrate how an expert constructs the relationship between parenting and technology, what this accomplishes and with what implications for parents.

**Analysis**

Here, I present five extracts of an interview between PBS talk show host Bill Moyers and Sherry Turkle, author of *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. I apply positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) to demonstrate how positioning functions to socially construct the ‘role’ of
parenthood within what the authors refer to as “a subjective history with its attendant emotions and beliefs” (p. 52). That is, to position oneself as ‘parent’ (or I would suggest ‘good parent’) necessitates familiarity with “the multiple expectations and obligations of care for children that are entailed” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 52). In other words, positioning occurs in the shadow of culturally-established ideologies about responsible parenting. Sacks’ (1989) MIR Device also contributes to my analysis.

Following Davies and Harré (1990, p. 52), the traditional, dramaturgical metaphor for the social construction of identity in interaction assigns participants predetermined parts whose lines have already been written. Viewing the self “as a choosing subject,” however, Davies and Harré (1990) suggest that positioning explains how participants locate themselves “in conversations according to those narrative forms with which [they] are familiar” (p. 52), which they call “story lines” (p. 48). Relevant to this analysis is the concept of “interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). The particular “story” limits which positions are made available to participants (p. 52).

Using the “role” of mother as example, Davies and Harré (1990) explain how positioning relates to “personal understandings and sets of emotions” on the one hand, and “knowledge of social structures” on the other (p. 52). These “personal understandings” and “knowledge(s)” are informed by experiences, or “narratives that we have lived out in relation to particular mothers” (p. 52). So position is both locally and culturally informed in that participants in interaction draw upon all of these resources “in constructing the present moment” (p. 44).

Thus while identity in interaction may be viewed as open-ended and ever-unfolding, with a limitless number of positions available to take up, in actual experience,
identity “can only be expressed and understood through the categories” that are made available in interaction (p. 46). I stress here how the discursive expression of identity is thus limited to recognizable categories in which the self may presently be positioned in a particular story line.

This is consistent with Sacks’ (1989) contention regarding the MIR Device “that there is a class of category sets” that “have common properties” (p. 271). Knowledge of the properties of these categories informs inferences about individual members of such categories. Likewise, since individuals serve to represent these categories of which they are members, knowledge about the individual translates to knowledge about the category. In addition to “making new knowledge,” as Sacks (1989) points out, the MIR Device also functions as a social control device (p. 273). That is, the notion of membership is a locally and personally relevant construct. Members of society in general and of these categories in particular perform “routine monitoring in terms of these categories” to acquire knowledge both about their own categories and others. All of this is relevant to this analysis, since these generalizations are powerful and at times, less-than-conscious (p. 274).

Indeed these categories exert a powerful and pervasive force on both interaction and the construction of identity. The MIR Device not only sheds light on how individuals view others, but how they view themselves; it also highlights what assumptions and generalizations they can be observed to be making about the groups of which they are, and are not, members.

A related approach which incorporates both positioning and the MIR Device emphasizes the role of narrative in “the construction and display of our sense of who we are” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 168). Schiffrin (1996) finds, “the way we tell our stories also
reveals a self that exists within a cultural matrix of meaning, beliefs, and normative practices” (p. 170). This is relevant to the data presented here, as is Schiffrin’s (1996) observation, “stories about women in families offer a particularly interesting site for... analyses,” since “the family provides our first set of social relationships” and further, it “remains a traditional nexus of social life and cultural meaning for many women” (p. 170).

The extract below of the Moyers-Turkle interview is used to demonstrate precisely how (in what ways) positioning, the MIR Device and narrative function to discursively construct parent and child identities with respect to technology and family interaction, and position both in ways that may be recognized as consistent with cultural ideologies about responsibilities for the care of children.

The first extract occurs near the beginning of the interview. Moyers has introduced the segment and his guest, Turkle, to the viewing audience. Figure 1 below shows the physical arrangement of the participants in the interview. Figure 2 shows Turkle talking; her book is shown to viewers at home. After introducing Turkle, Moyers previews the YouTube video, “I Forgot My Phone,” in which a young woman without a cell phone is ignored by those around her (since they are absorbed in their devices). Following its viewing, Moyers asks for Turkle’s thoughts. Note that her response proceeds inductively, from broad principles to a very specific conclusion: one with implications for parents and children.
Extract 1: 02:36-03:29. “If you don’t teach your children.”

BM: What are you thinking as you look at that?

ST: Well I call it "alone together." That we're-moving to a space where we feel free

(…) to respond to the three promises that technology now makes us. That we can always

be heard (…) that we can be wherever we want to be (…) and that we never have to be alone. And

that third promise actually is terribly important because I believe that the capacity

for solitude is terribly important to develop. I-I even believe that if you don’t teach your

children to be alone (…) they’ll only know how to be lonely. And by not developing this capacity

for solitude, we’re not doing our children a favor.

Here Turkle begins to build her case for the importance of developing what she calls the capacity for solitude. In her response, Turkle constructs this capacity as ‘developed’ or learned (not innate). And, Turkle not only emphasizes the importance of, but assigns responsibility for, developing this capacity in children: She uses the verb develop in line 17 with no stated subject, and teach in line 18 with the generalized referring term you. Thus, in both instances the subject, parents, is left to inference. Note the choice of pronoun in reference to children in lines 18 and 19 (your children) and again in line 21 (our children).

The presence of these possessive pronouns denotes ownership or responsibility for these children; responsibility that is traditionally (culturally) associated with
parents. Therefore, I suggest here that Turkle’s response positions parents as responsible for teaching their children to be alone, or to develop the capacity for solitude. Interestingly, the fulfillment of these responsibilities constitutes doing children a favor, one which Turkle deems terribly important. I further suggest that in highlighting the capacity for solitude and assigning responsibility for its development in children to others (“you” and “we”), Turkle limits what positions parents may take up in the discourse surrounding technology and family interaction.

Though the following extract appears nearly 14 minutes later in the interview, it bears striking similarity to Extract 1, above. Here, Turkle has just described “Dinner,” a television commercial for the Facebook Home app, which was designed to provide Android users with “an immersive Facebook experience featuring full-screen photos, status updates, and notifications” (Constine, 2013). The commercial aired nationally, and is also shown in the interview while she is speaking. In it, a teenager uses her smartphone to visit the site at dinner with her extended family. As she does, images from her phone come to life in the room, and she is able to escape what Turkle calls “the boring bits of human conversation” (line 280).

Once again, positioning theory is useful in illuminating cultural ideologies of parental responsibility vis à vis children, though once again this is not fully articulated. Thus, I shift the focus slightly from parental identities to those of children. That is, to fit into the category ‘child’ is to have to be taught (line 288). As such, the label ‘child’ functions as what Sacks (1989) terms an MIR Device. By linking children and teaching, Turkle once again implies, but does not state directly, the role of parents in this process. Figure 3 shows Turkle speaking near the end of Extract 2.
Figure 3. Turkle. “That’s very serious.”

Extract 2: 17:06-17:47. “Children have to be taught.”
286    ... And you have
287    to sort of work with somebody and get- this is
288     → conversation. And children have to be taught
289     → and this is why it's a- it's a gift to them to say,
290     "Put down the device and let's talk." And so
291     what concerns me as a developmental
292     psychologist watching children grow in this
293     new world where being bo:red is something
294     that never has to be tolerated for a moment.
295     You can always go someplace where you're
296     stimulated stimulated stimulated um is that
297     → people are losing that capacity. And that's very
298     serious.

As noted above, the mandate children have to be taught requires some inference regarding the category ‘children’ (as innocent or naïve, perhaps) and it is precisely these types of inferences which are informed by knowledge about membership in the category “child,” as suggested by Sacks (1989). The absence of an agent (by whom must children be taught?) requires additional inference, namely, that parents must do the teaching (and these inferences are, I point out, based on understandings of cultural ideologies about parenting). Sacks’ (1989) MIR Device is useful here in that it illuminates the inferences underlying this interaction specifically, and interaction in general. Children
are positioned as lacking knowledge or guidance, and parents as responsible for providing it, since, as Sacks (1989) finds, the “importance of such a phenomenon is that it’s not just one category’s view of another, but that knowledge is standardized across the categories” (p. 276). In other words, parents are expected to perform the “social act” (Ochs, 1992, 1993) of teaching.

Having thus identified similarities between Extracts 1 and 2, I present below a summary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract 1</th>
<th>Extract 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Line(s)</td>
<td>Line(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-7 &amp; 20-1</td>
<td>293, 297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the capacity for solitude”</td>
<td>“being bored” “that capacity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“teach your children” (active voice)</td>
<td>“children have to be taught” (passive voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“doing our children a favor”</td>
<td>“it’s a gift to them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>297-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“terribly important” (evaluative)</td>
<td>“very serious” (evaluative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Parallel themes from Extracts 1 and 2.

These extracts evidence thematic parallels, as Table 1 demonstrates. “The capacity for solitude” is mentioned twice in full in the first extract and referenced as “that capacity” and used synonymously with “being bored” in the second. Turkle makes the MIR Devices “parent” and “child” relevant by highlighting responsibilities for each, namely, for “teaching” and “being taught.” This responsibility is then endowed with special value, as “a favor” and “a gift,” and deemed “important” and “serious.”

The notion of parental responsibility implied in Extracts 1 and 2 is made explicit in the following extract. Whereas interpretation in the above extracts draws upon a shared cultural knowledge of the roles of “parent” and “child” to infer responsibility, Turkle explicates this assumption below. In fact, it is here, only moments before the conclusion of the interview, that she uses the word “parents” for the first and only time.
(It is perhaps noteworthy that she uses “mother” only once as well, as seen in line 58 of Extract 4, and does not use the word “father” at all).

Figure 4. Turkle. “Kitchen, dining room, and the car.”

Extract 3: 30:05-30:43. “I’ve a lot of practical advice for parents.”

512 BM: So do you have a couple of practical things that you would suggest to people about how to use this technology? Facebook ‘n Twitter social media (.) for happiness and meaning?

516 ST: → I’ve a lot of practical advice for par†ents (.) which is to create sacred spaces in your ho:me.

518 BM: By which you mean-

519 ST: Places that are device free. Kitchen dining room and the car.

521 BM: Hm.

522 ST: You can’t introduce this idea when your child is 15 that the car is for chatt†ing. From the very beginning kitchen dining room and the car are places where (1.0) we talk. And you ex†plain to your child, “This isn’t a you know- this is important to me (.) we’re a family I need to talk to you. I need to talk to you.”

By performing the speech act of asking for advice for “people” (his viewers; lines 512-515), Moyers positions Turkle as an expert (one from whom advice is to be sought). Turkle’s response, performing the speech act of giving advice, thus positions her as a particular kind of person; namely, the kind qualified to advise others, an authority. Yet
her response essentially fails to answer the question asked in three ways. In the first line of this extract, Moyers expresses his request in the plural form as *a couple of practical things*, yet Turkle supplies only one: *create sacred spaces in your home* (line 517). In so doing, she positions parents as the gatekeepers in the family regarding technology.

Next, employing the indirect object *to people* in line 513, Moyers articulates the intended audience for this advice, a general audience. As mentioned previously, and of special interest to this analysis is line 516, wherein Turkle articulates the intended recipient of her advice: parents. The responsibility for creating sacred spaces (spaces where children might develop the capacity for solitude and for being bored) is explicitly assigned to parents. Finally, Moyers qualifies the type of advice he is asking for as *how to use this technology... for happiness and meaning* (lines 513-515). But Turkle’s response does not address either of these. In fact, no advice is given on how to use technology, but rather, to avoid it in the *kitchen, dining room and the car*, all deemed *sacred spaces* that should be *device free* (lines 517-520).

I have thus demonstrated how positioning and the MIR Device function in these first three extracts to discursively construct the identities “parent” and “child,” and how these positionings occur within broader ideologies of technology use, family interaction and childcare responsibilities. Next, I present two final extracts in which narrative and extreme case formulations work to similarly position parents, specifically mothers, in ideologically recognizable ways.

In Extract 4, Turkle presents a narrative as an example of what she calls *technological affordance and human vulnerability* (lines 55-56). Moyers has just posed the question, “Isn’t every media revolution greeted with the kinds of concerns we’ve been expressing?” Though it begins with a hypothetical tone, note in in line 63 that
Turkle seems to indicate this is her telling of an actual scenario; one in fact which bears striking similarity to the interview with Audrey reported in her book and referenced in the introduction to this chapter.

Figure 5. Turkle. “This is the gesture.”

Figure 6. Turkle. “Go like that.”

Extract 4: **05:31-06:20. “The desire to look at that one last message.”**

| 58 | ST: | Um a mother adores being with her children. And |
| 59 | yet with this technology she: is so vulnerable |
| 60 | to the stimulation of knowing what the next |
| 61 | message is on her cell phone that when she |
| 62 | picks her kid up at school and the kid comes in- |
| 63 | (cause) I studied this< the kid comes in to the |
| 64 | car this is the gesture she makes to her child |
| 65 | ((looks down at imaginary phone in left hand, |
| 66 | shakes head ‘no’ while making a ‘waving off’ |
| 67 | gesture with right arm outstretched.)) "Let me just |
| 68 | finish this one- this one last email. Let me just |
| 69 | get this one message." And does not make eye |
| 70 | contact with the child as the child comes in. It's |
| 71 | the- it’s the desire to look at that one last |
| 72 | message that causes her to go like that ((same |
| 73 | waving off gesture repeated)) to her child. |

Turkle’s use of the indefinite article *a* in line 58 generalizes *mother* such that this narrative does not appear to be about one mother in particular, but a reference to a common scenario that indexes the broader ideology of high accommodation and child-centered parenting. It is interesting to note here that Turkle does not directly criticize the mother, rather she attributes blame for the mother’s behavior to what she later describes as “technology’s pull” (lines 101-2).
In fact, Turkle frequently employs this technology-as-drug metaphor throughout the interview, using terminology commonly associated with addictive substances, such as “stimulating” in line 36 (also “stimulation,” line 60; and “stimulated,” line 296), and claiming that technology “revs us up” (line 38), and “puts us neurochemically in a state” (lines 38-9). She later describes “the neurochemical hit of constant connection” (line 109), from which we “get a high” (line 112). In selecting this metaphor, Turkle displays a negative stance toward technology; yet stops short of criticizing those who use it, instead referring to them as “vulnerable” (lines 56-7, 59, 76, 316, and 465).

Stating, it is the message that causes her to go like that, in line 72, Turkle establishes a causal connection, one which as Schiffrin (2000) finds, constitutes a “delicate minimization of parental–and especially maternal–responsibility” (p. 13). Here, the relationship between narrative, positioning and ideology is put on display. As Davies and Harré (1990) state, “positions may be seen... in terms of known ‘roles’ (actual or metaphorical), or in terms of known characters in shared story lines” (p. 49). The ‘role’ of mother carries with it an implicit (though at times explicit) set of expectations or assumptions about responsibility.

In constructing an identity of a mother who succumbs to the stimulation of knowing (line 60) and does not make eye contact with her child (lines 69-70), Turkle’s narrative here illuminates the implicit assumption that mothers who adore their children (as indeed all mothers should) behave accordingly by disregarding their devices and performing their adoration through attentive behavior and eye contact.

In the final extract, I highlight the ways extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) work to legitimize Turkle’s claims vis à vis parents’ responsibility toward their children. Pomerantz (1986) categorizes uses of extreme case formulations, or
descriptions employing extreme terms such as “completely,” “perfectly,” or “every” (p. 219). These uses are, defending against or countering challenges, proposing objectivity (as opposed to “a product of the interaction or the circumstances”), and proposing “that some behavior is not wrong, or is right, by virtue of its status as frequently occurring or commonly done” (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 220). For example, Pomerantz notes that a woman seeking restitution for a dress damaged by a dry cleaner describes the dress (when she dropped it off) as “brand new” (p. 221). In this case, “‘Brand new’ is an extreme case of ‘new’ – it is as new as it can be” (Pomerantz, 1996, p. 221). As such, individuals use extreme case formulations to discursively construct the legitimacy of their claims, (and thereby of themselves as speakers).

Here, Moyers and Turkle are discussing the effects of what she calls experiencing interruptions as connection. Arrows highlight several instances of extreme case formulations in this extract; these contribute to highlighting how harmful technologies can be for families and children.

Figure 7. Moyers & Turkle. “And you know.”

238 ST:→ Things have gotten so (.) ba:d that
239 → the culture is starting to present things that
240 → used to be dystopian as utopian. And my best
241 example is dinner. There's an ad for Facebook
242 um which- a dinner (.) a typical Norman
243 Rockwell dinner the type you were evoking.
244 ↑Big family and extended family is at dinner.
245 → And you- you know this is going to be good
246 → because dinner is the thing that we all know
247 → protects against juvenile delinquency people
248 → stay in schoo:l if they have dinner with their
249 families. It protects against you know
250 → everything ba:d and it encourages everything
251 → good in the growing up of a child.

Here I break down the instances of extreme case formulations. In her first utterance (line 238), Turkle describes the current obsession with technology as so bad, an extreme case of “bad,” or “as bad as can be.” To demonstrate just how bad, Turkle presents her best example in line 240; that is, no other example illustrates her point more effectively.

In lines 245 and 246, know and we all know represent layers of extreme case formulations. First, in contrast with “think” or “believe,” “know” represents an extreme case of certainty. We all, finds Pomerantz (1986), in referencing no one in particular, is a formulation of “everyone” (p. 224). A gloss of we all know (line 246) reads, “every single person is absolutely certain.” Use of the definite article “the” in the thing (describing dinner in line 246) invites an interpretation as not “some” thing, or “a” thing, but the “only” thing.

Perhaps the strongest example here, and one which Turkle emphasizes in line 250 is everything, as in everything bad and everything good. Everything here formulates a proportion of bad, or good, respectively, as “the whole, the complete, or the total set” (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 225). That is, not “some” bad or good, but every possible bad is avoided and every possible good achieved through family dinner. Finally, (and
perhaps to a lesser extent), *the growing up of a child* (line 251) may be viewed as encompassing the entire span of children’s developmental years. The examples in this extract thus illustrate the ways in which extreme case formulations work to discursively legitimize claims. Turkle constructs parents as responsible for managing technology in the family, and technology as potentially very harmful to everyday family interactions and child development.

Taken together, these extracts provide a glimpse into the way an expert constructs the relationship between technology and family interaction. In ways both implicit and explicit, Turkle positions parents as responsible for the socialization of children. As such, she depicts the relationship between technology and child-centered, high accommodation parenting as a tenuous one at best.

**Discussion**

In this chapter, I have analyzed discourse surrounding the relationship between technology and family interaction, specifically the way an expert perceives and talks about the role of technology in family life, in order to reveal how all of this points to ideologies about parenting. This analysis contributes to the study of identities in interaction in the following ways: first, it contributes to work on constructing parental (with some attention to maternal) identities within cultural ideologies of parenting. Second, it fills a gap in research on parenting ideologies, parental identities and family interaction in the digital age, specifically as it refers to the discursive construction of the impact(s) of technology on family life.

As Schiffrin (1996) finds, stories in general (and “mother/daughter stories” specifically) “offer especially good opportunities to examine the way narrative displays
self and identity” (p. 171). These narratives are always “situated in prior discourse” (Schiffrin, 1996, 181; as Gee [2008] might contend, Discourse). Thus when participants interact, they “position themselves and others as particular kinds of people,” within the story lines of which they find themselves a part (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 595). This is accomplished, in part, by calling on “cultural stereotypes... as a resource” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 50). Relevant to this analysis is Ochs’ (1992) conclusion “that images of women are linked to images of mothering and that such images are socialized through communicative practices associated with caregiving” (p. 337). In American society (specifically white middle class), these caregiving practices are characterized by “a communicative strategy of high accommodation to young children” (pp. 346-7), technology is construed as preventing this accommodation. As Pigeron (2012) asks, “is there such a thing as being ‘too involved’ when you deal with your children’s well-being?” (p. 27). Indeed, it appears that there is not. As such, childcare practices are “embedded in a particularly negatively-valenced media ideology” (Pigeron, 2012, p. 27).

My analysis of this interview between Bill Moyers and Sherry Turkle suggests that in establishing and consistently referring to a link between children and teaching, and by (implicitly or explicitly) assigning responsibility to others (“you,” “we,” “parents,” “mother”), Turkle both points to and reifies recognizable parenting and maternal ideologies. This reveals the ways that, as Gee (2008; 2013) and Johnstone (2008) remind us, every utterance reflects an ideology, while also highlighting ideologies about parental identities in particular. Narrative, the MIR Device, and extreme case formulations contribute to such ideological constructs.

As Gordon (2015a) explains, positioning theory “makes ties between the here-and-now of conversation, prior conversations, and broader ideologies” (p. 10). As Davies
and Harré (1990) find, these ideologies “are coercive to the extent that to be recognizably and acceptably a person we must operate within their terms” (p. 52). Examining how (personal) narratives and (external/structural) story lines intersect and/or overlap such that certain positions are made available while others are not thus reveals how choices in interaction are limited by “the roles that are recognizably allocated” (p. 52-3). Positions Turkle makes readily available for parents are teacher of children, as well as gatekeeper of technology for the family. (They are also positioned as potential “addicts” of technology, but that is a topic for another study).

This analysis contributes to our understanding of positioning theory and ideology in discourse by illuminating the ways in which ideologies serve to limit the positions parents may take up in the discourse surrounding technology and family interaction, and how all of this affects how to ‘do’ being a good parent in the age of technology.

A limitation here is that this is but one interview with one expert, and further, the voices of parents themselves are not represented. In addition, and as discussed previously, the discourse analyzed here leaves the audience question unanswered, yet seems to point to American middle class ideologies and practices. That is, the conversation about technology invokes questions about access. As Johnstone (2008) finds, those with access to technological resources “may be on average younger, wealthier, and better educated than the population as a whole” (p. 196). And this is relevant, since the generalizability of these findings may be limited in their scope. Future research might look at the conversation surrounding technology and parenting from other expert perspectives, and/or include those of parents to analyze the ways in which their individual voices either ratify or reject the current public discourse.
surrounding the impact(s) of technology on family life. My next chapter turns to how parents do this in an online context.
Chapter 5: “Turn off your phones and spend that time with your child!”
Maternal Responsibility in the Digital Age

Introduction

The word “mother” likely conjures different images for different people. The impression experienced by this word is influenced by many factors, both individually experienced and culturally socialized. Given the diversity of these experiences, it is interesting then, to note common images and themes as they appear in discourse about mothers.

Gee’s (2013) differentiation between "Big 'D' Discourses," which refer to the ways group social conventions "allow people to enact specific identities and activities," and "little 'd' discourse," which refers to "any stretch of language in use" contributes to the analysis of the ways humans "act out distinctive identities and activities." In order to be recognized as having a particular identity, we are socialized to speak, act and interact in specific ways. In other words, in producing “discourse,” speakers construct and refer to “Discourses” that are associated with identities, and my analysis reveals the ways in which these discourses and Discourses intersect and overlap, and how all of this challenges notions of parenting, mothering, childcare and technology in the digital age.

In this chapter, I analyze comments posted on The New York Times’ website following an article entitled, “The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In.” The content of the article itself is certainly relevant to this analysis, but it is the comments which provide a glimpse into the discursive construction of parental identities in the digital age. Specifically, I show how posters discursively construct the identities of parents, and especially mothers, as requiring intensive engagement with children (following Hays, 1996); I also suggest that this kind of mothering, and maternal identity, has
socioeconomic class implications. That is, these expectations, and one’s ability to “live up” to them, reflect values and privileges typically associated with the middle- or upper-classes. I thus illustrate how big-D Discourses are created in the little-d discourse of online comments, while also showing how little-d discourse reflects big-D Discourse. In what follows, I first introduce The New York Times comments which serve as the data for this analysis. I then present demographic information and a brief summary of relevant themes in the data, and contextualize these findings before turning to analysis.

The analysis presented in this chapter is divided into five sections. In the first two sections, I apply Ochs’ (1992, 1993) theory of indexicality, in particular how social acts and stances accomplish indexing of identities, to a subset of comments about technology use in one parenting context: pushing a child in a stroller while talking on a cell phone. The posters perform verbal acts and display negative affective stances toward the parents (and mothers) who do this. I also extend this notion of acts and stances to include nonverbal acts, and to the stances of the mothers described in the comments. Thus, through analysis of a subset of these comments, I demonstrate how the act of pushing a stroller and displaying a stance of interest and concern by interacting with the child in the stroller are linked with the identity of “good mother.” In other words, a “good mother” is one who uses stroller time as a time for conversation and interaction with the child.

In the third section, I apply research from sociology that examines legal, medical and media discourses of parental responsibility for child health and wellbeing. Examining parenting magazines, Sunderland (2006) finds that despite claims of “shared parenting” and attempts to address both fathers and mothers, fathers continue to be underaddressed in these media. Zivkovic et al.’s (2010) examination of both legal and
print media representations of child obesity in Australia finds that responsibility is indeed beset by gendered assumptions, and in these accounts “parent” is code for “mother.” These findings suggest that in many cases mothers are assumed to be primary parents who are ultimately responsible for children.

In the fourth section, I build on previous sections to demonstrate that mothering as indexed by the acts and stances contained within these analyses, and alluded to in references to parenting in general, in many cases actually refers to a particular type of mothering theorized by Hays (1996). The cultural contradictions of motherhood (Hays, 1996) reflect the tension between seemingly incompatible logics: the logic of the marketplace and its emphasis on rational efficiency, and the logic of intensive mothering and its emphasis on tirelessly selfless sacrifice by mothers on behalf of their sacred children. As I will demonstrate, these tensions, and thus the ideology of intensive mothering, permeate these comments.

The fifth and final section concludes this analysis by examining references (both direct and indirect) to class, wealth, and socioeconomic status. Any conversation about technology is also a conversation about access to resources; this is an access that may be viewed as a privilege by some and as a right by others. Pugh (2005), examining marketing in toy catalogs, finds that marketers target women (specifically middle class women) as “default buyers,” since they are viewed as primary caregivers (p. 734; this is suggestive of Johnston’s [2007] research on gatekeeping in the family). In raising guilt and then offering “consumption as the honorable solution,” these catalogs offer what Pugh (2005) calls “the cultural deal” (p. 739). Indeed, these comments are rife with contentions about access to technology and all that it entails.
Data

In June of 2010, *The New York Times* ran a series entitled, “Your Brain on Computers.” Seven articles comprise the series. In this chapter I focus on comments posted in response to one: “The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In” (Figure 8 is a screenshot of this article as I accessed in its online format).

Figure 8. Screenshot of article as published online.

As the title suggests, the article turns the spotlight from the effects of technology use on adolescents to “parents' use of such technology – and its effect on their offspring” (Scelfo, 2010). The degree of connectivity made possible by smartphones and laptops is portrayed in the article as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, parents may be able to work from home resulting in a greater *quantity* of time with their children; on the other, constantly checking these devices constitutes a distraction, thus more time at home does not necessarily translate to more *quality* time in interaction. The article also explores quantity/quality time through the lens of socioeconomic status, asking whether “increased use of technology encroaches on the time that well-to-do families spend communicating with their children” (since these families are more likely to be able to afford both digital devices and a stay-at-home parent) (Scelfo, 2010).
Turkle, who is quoted in the piece, also participates in the forum, contributing 28 of the 182 comments following the article. The remaining 154 comments are contributed by 148 unique contributors (seven individuals post two responses). Examining usernames, pronoun use (‘my husband”) and referring terms (“I am a SAHM" [Stay At Home Mom]) when present in each post, I was able to determine the gender of two-thirds (99) of the contributors. I then generalized these percentages to the remaining one-third. (This classification is not entirely unproblematic, as I make the following assumptions: referring terms “husband” and “wife” are taken to reference heterosexual relationships, and names commonly associated with certain genders were counted as that gender; for example “Michelle” and “Claire” were assumed to be women, while “Roger” and “David” were assumed to be men).

It is interesting to note that these numbers, while perhaps inexact, differ significantly from the audience demographics reported in the paper’s Online Media Kit (2015), which claims a 59% male and 41% female readership (The New York Times). Noting this difference, I sought possible explanations and offer two here. First, the title of the article to which these comments respond contains the word “parenting.” As I shall demonstrate in my analysis, “parent” is code for “mother” (Sunderland, 2006; Zivkovic, et al., 2010; Gordon, 2015b). In addition, while the cover photo (shown above) depicts a father, mother and two children, in the opening narrative a specialist in early childhood development relates an incident in which a toddler attempts to bite his mother after repeated attempts to draw her attention from her smartphone. Given these, it may simply be that more women were drawn to the article and/or were sufficiently intrigued by its premise to post a response. Nevertheless, these data are useful in reinforcing the analysis presented here.
The chart below compares the article comments I examine to the information provided by the media kit.

![Chart 1. NY Times Online Readership by Gender.](image)

As can be seen, female readers seem to be the primary participants in the comment thread I analyze, though in general more men are reportedly readers of the newspaper.

I begin my inquiry into the discourse of the comments by presenting a brief analysis of the content of the comments to identify prevalent themes. As one might expect from the title of the article, there are many (196) references to “parent.” (This includes all singular, plural, and possessive forms, i.e., parents, parents’, parenting, etc. A similar logic was applied to counting references to “father,” and “mother,” in which forms of the title were also included, i.e., dad, daddy, mama, mom’s, etc.). Forms of “father” appear 24 times in 18 comments, “mother” appears 123 times in 61 posts. “Parent” and a reference to both “father” and “mother” appear in 8 comments. “Parent” and “father” appear together exclusively (with no reference to “mother”) twice, while “parent” and “mother” appear together exclusively 24 times. Finally, five comments reference “father” exclusively, and 44 reference “mother” exclusively.
The chart below illustrates these results. From it, an important theme emerges; namely, that in talk about parenting and childcare, it is often mom who is highlighted.

![FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF TERMS]

**Chart 2. Frequency Distribution of Terms.**

The focus on mothers in the comments reinforces previous findings regarding ideologies about parenting and parent-child relationships – mothers are viewed as being of primary importance.

As suggested by the title of *The New York Times* article, of particular interest to the author is the relationship between parenting and technology. As I will demonstrate in my analysis, it quickly becomes apparent that “parenting” is actually code for “mothering.” Indeed it is not only the story which highlights cell phone/device use of mothers specifically (as opposed to parents in general), but this theme is evident in the comments as well. In the first two sections, posters link specific acts and stances with parenthood; specifically, the act of a mother pushing a stroller while displaying a stance of interest by interacting with the child in the stroller. Comments in the third section begin by referring to a purportedly gender neutral “parent” but thereafter switch to mothers, in referring terms, examples, and in some cases, both. The fourth section
builds on this by demonstrating that “parenting” is not merely a stand-in for “mothering” generally, but intensive mothering specifically (Hays, 1996). Finally, this analysis culminates with a fifth section which foregrounds some of the ideologies, cultural contradictions (Hays, 1996) and cultural deals (Pugh, 2005) unique to motherhood in the digital age.

**Analysis**

**“Isolated in a Stroller:” Stroller Time an Opportunity for Socializing**

In this first section, I extend Ochs’ (1993) notion of “verbal acts” – which she views as fundamental to constructing identities in interaction by accomplishing indexing -- to consider nonverbal acts. Specifically, I show how parenting is constructed as involving attending to the child while engaging in a specific nonverbal act: More than a dozen posts following this article contained some reference to parents (namely mothers) pushing children in strollers while talking on cell phones, and it is precisely this subset which I consider in the first two sections. It is interesting to note here that the article does not mention strollers at all.

In what follows, I analyze four comments about strollers. Although these posters do not appear to be in conversation with one another (the first two have the same time stamp), repetition of this theme in the comments demonstrates how motherhood is indexed through the nonverbal act of pushing a child in a stroller. Talking on a cell phone while performing this act, however, is not consistent with the expectation for high accommodation described by Ochs (1992), thus constitutes a stance of disregard or disinterest toward the child. To adopt Gee’s (2013) terms, the observed little-d discourse does not match up with the Big-D Discourse regarding good mothering. In the post
shown below, kris brings up a concern about parents engaging with technology instead of children (Note that this and all other posts remain unaltered by me, with the exception of having added line numbers. The number at the beginning of the post indicates its ordering with the others that commented on the article.)

| 1 | I have wondered about the effect technology has had on parental interaction. |
| 2 | One thing that bothers me is seeing parents pushing children in strollers while talking on cell phones. I always spent such time talking to my children while I pushed them along and then as they walked along. Those times were excellent opportunities for talking and encouraging children to talk. |
| 5 | Talking on cell phones prevents that type of parent-child interaction. |

This comment, and others examined in this section, makes parental identities in general, and maternal identities in particular, relevant, in part by naming those categories. Here “parents” and “children” are named in line 2. Since as Sacks (1989) states, “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of... categories,” naming these categories provokes readers to make inferences about individuals based on knowledge about the category (p. 272).

Further, the posters index maternal identity through mention of the act of pushing a stroller and foregrounding the expectation for displaying a stance of concern or interest by interacting with the child in the stroller. These times are described in line 5 as “excellent opportunities for talking and encouraging children to talk.” Stating, “I always spent such time talking to my children” (line 3, emphasis mine), this poster employs an extreme case formulation of frequency to establish the legitimacy of the claim while simultaneously distancing the poster from parents who talk on cell phones when pushing their children in strollers. Finally, in reporting being “bothered” in line 2, kris takes up an affective stance toward a parent performing this act without displaying the appropriate stance.
Similarly, in the first three lines of the next comment I examine, a poster who identifies herself as a “mom of 4” describes a “chatting” mother pushing a “silent child;” an act described as “missed opportunities for communication and conversation,” and a way to show children their value, since it “gives the child the sense that he matters to the parent” (line 5). Children should be “valued” by their parents (line 5-6), given the significance of “the ideologies of the sacred child and unselfish mothering” (Hays, 1996, p. 167).

---

64. happy and healthy oldster
fort lauderdale
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
mom of 4

| 1 | In the park this morning, I saw a mom pushing her silent child in a stroller, |
| 2 | while chatting away non-stop on a cell phone. I was sad to see the missed |
| 3 | opportunities for communication and conversation. |
| 4 | A chat with a child is more than just a language and learning experience. It |
| 5 | gives the child the sense that he matters to the parent, that his parent values |
| 6 | him enough to spend time with him. Spending time with a child conveys |
| 7 | much more than words and ideas – it communicates values. How we choose |
| 8 | to spend our time reveals what we value in our lives. |
| 9 | |

As with the first comment, this poster names “mom,” “parent” and “child;” and these categories of membership permit, and perhaps even encourage, certain inferences to be made. In addition, since “any member of any category is presumptively a representative of that category,” the logic is both deductive and inductive (Sacks, 1989, p. 272). In other words, having knowledge about a particular category leads us to make inferences about individual members of a category. In the same way, knowledge about an individual member is used to augment existing knowledge about the category. All of this works here to underscore the expectation of interaction associated with the categories “mother” and “child;” an expectation which stands in stark contrast to the reality observed by this poster. Thus, in line 2, an affective stance, “sad,” is described.
The final two comments in this section also name “parents” and “mothers,” and link them with interacting with children in strollers. (I present them together, because they are quite similar to one another; they were not adjacent posts online).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **105.** Mouse Woman  
Northwest Coast  
June 10th, 2010  
2:43 pm | 1 It makes me sad to see parents who take their child for an outing that consists of being isolated in a stroller while the parent talks on a cell phone.  
2 Some outing. |

Though brief, these comments demonstrate themes identified in the first two comments. In the first line of comment 105, Mouse Woman reports feeling “sad” upon witnessing a child “isolated in a stroller.” Naming the membership categories “parents” and “child” prompts associations with certain behaviors, such as the expectation for interaction during stroller time. The absence of parent-child interaction violates this expectation.

As KenM emphasizes in lines 2 and 5, stroller time is “special time” and even “magic time that you can never get back.” The use of “never” constitutes an extreme case formulation of time. The sense here is that time with a child is precious and irredeemable. As such, parents who do not take full advantage of the opportunity to interact with a child in a stroller are failing to adequately enact their parental identities:

As Hays (1996) observes, membership in the category “mother” is time-consuming, since, “the logic that applies to appropriate child rearing... includes lavishing copious amounts of time [and] energy... on the child” (p. 8).

Through naming membership categories “parent,” “mother” and “child,” and linking the performance of parental identities with interacting with the child in the
stroller, these comments illuminate expectations for parental (and specifically maternal) responsibilities for the care of the “sacred child” (Hays, 1996, p. 54).

“Pushing a Stroller is a Social Experience!” Maternal Responsibility for Child Socialization

The acts and stances highlighted above that index maternal identity (specifically that of “good mother”) are made even more explicit in the comments presented below. While comments in the first section mention both “parent” and “mother” equally, note that in the comments below, ‘mother’ is mentioned exclusively. Here, posters go beyond the notion of “missed opportunities” to theorizing about the types of mothers who, though they perform the act of pushing strollers, do not display the expected stance by interacting with the child. Further, they speculate about the negative effects of such behavior.

In highlighting (and criticizing) the behavior of mothers, comments in this section also serve to illustrate a conclusion reached by sociologists Sunderland (2006) and Zivkovic et al. (2010): in medical, legal and media representations of childcare, “parent” is frequently a stand-in for “mother.” (I examine this in more depth in the next section). Discourse analysts Kendall (2007) and Johnston (2007) also arrive at a similar conclusion: even between couples who adopt and express an egalitarian co-parenting philosophy or ideology, mothers continue to be positioned, and to position themselves, as primarily responsible for childcare. I show how the posters index identities through performing verbal acts such as criticizing and hypothesizing and through taking up affective stances toward the mothers of whom they speak. Applying Ochs’ (1993) framework, I demonstrate how the mothers described are not recognized as “good mothers”; this in turn has implications for the construction of a “good mother” identity.
In the comment below, “mother” is named as the guilty party. Further, CrusaderRabbit takes up a far more critical stance toward the mothers than the posters whose comments have been analyzed thus far. Affectively-loaded lexical items like “cringe” and “lonely” are used to describe the reaction to seeing a mother not giving her child attention, and how the child must feel as a result.

I cringe every time I see a mother completely engrossed in a phone conversation while pushing a child in a stroller. Isn’t there something she could be pointing out to her child instead? It’s like the child isn’t even there. What a lonely way to grow up. I bet they compensate for this inattention by buying the child stuff.

In line 3 of this comment, CrusaderRabbit performs the act of criticizing, observing, “It’s like the child isn’t even there.” Given that mothers (specifically in white American middle class culture) are traditionally expected to exhibit relentlessly nurturing behavior, any accusation of child neglect, however implicit, constitutes a particularly scathing critique. While posters in the first section of this analysis took up affective stances such as “bother” and “sadness,” the affective stance taken up by this poster (“cringe,” line 1) is much more severe.

Beginning in the singular ("a mother" in line 1; "she" in line 2) yet concluding in the plural ("they," line 4), this comment also demonstrates the relevance of the MIR Device. Here, knowledge about what one mother does is generalized to all mothers. In this case, one mother talking on a cell phone is discursively constructed as neither an innocent nor an isolated incident. Rather, the act of talking on cell phones while pushing children in strollers is generalized to all mothers and correlated with spoiling with material goods, since as CrusaderRabbit states in lines 4 and 5, “I bet they compensate for this inattention by buying the child stuff” (emphasis mine).
Turkle sometimes responded directly to criticisms of mothers and their mothering behaviors. In many cases, Turkle indexes expert identity by citing the findings of her research. In others she presents cautionary tales and defends her work against critics. Finally, and as is the case here, Turkle aligns herself with posters, using phrases such as, “I am sympathetic to this comment.” Here she responds to a prior comment about mothers paying attention to their phones while pushing a stroller. Note the affective stance descriptors in comment 45, and the ways Turkle works to both align with the reader regarding parenting and technology ideology and index her expert identity. I present these comments back-to-back, as they appeared online.

Prevalent in the comments in this section are affective stances described in the harshest of terms. Here, slartibartfast performs the verbal acts of exaggerating (and thus misrepresenting) the pushing/talking behavior, criticizing and complaining. Strollers are compared to large cars (“SUV strollers,” line 3), the conversation is reduced to “gabbing” (line 2), and the behavior is described as “obliviousness” (line 4). All of this leads the poster to take up an affective stance of “infuriation” (line 1).
In her response to this post, Turkle explicitly classifies the pushing/talking act as a “problem” in line 1. Performing the act of labeling a behavior a “problem” indexes expert identity; specifically this act of labeling is linked with her expertise as a developmental psychologist. Her post also illuminates assumptions of childcare implicit in other responses. First, a relationship between cell phone use and childcare is constructed. Here, when the mother is on the phone, the child is “ignored” (line 2). Citing the work of other experts, Hays (1996) tells us that children are sacred and mothers are primarily responsible for their care (p. 54). Therefore, “good” mothers do not ignore their children, and in fact are consumed by their care. When, in line 3, Turkle exclaims, “Pushing a stroller is a social experience!” she reveals the assumption at the core of these comments: the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), an “emotionally absorbing, labor intensive” method of child rearing, which remains “the dominant ideology of socially appropriate child rearing” (p. 8-9).

In addition to being mom’s responsibility, this “social experience,” or sociability (in Blum-Kulka’s terms), of children takes a specific form in white American middle class culture. The findings here thus are reminiscent of Ochs (1992), in the sense that she found that contrary to the non-accommodating strategies employed by mothers in Western Samoa, American mothers exhibit an extensively simplified “communicative strategy of high accommodation to young children” (p. 346-7). It is precisely these behaviors posters in these sections find lacking in the mothers they observe.

The final posts in this section might be described as two of the most critical. In the first, mothers who text while pushing a child’s stroller are deemed unworthy to be mothers and told that they “should not have given birth” (comment 130, line 4). Note
how maternal identity is indexed in these comments through the performance of verbal acts and displays of stances.

To this point I have demonstrated that posters consistently link the act of pushing a stroller with displaying a stance of interest or concern for the child. In lines 3 and 4 of comment 130, this is amplified: Failure to display the desired stance is equated with a failure to protect the child, since “texting is more important than making sure your child does not come to some harm.” Given mom’s responsibility for the care and nurturing of children, this stance display is damaging to maternal identities. In lines 1 and 2 of post 144, the “large blobs of kids” are described as “forgotten” (line 4). In referring to children as “large blobs,” EtherNetzer suggests a link between technology use and obesity. Thus, talking on the phone while pushing a stroller is equated with child neglect, both socially and physically. In this comment, the behavior is not only criticized for its ill effects in the present, but is further theorized to have harmful consequences for the future, since as lines 4 and 5 state, these children inevitably “will embrace their own technologies with the same addiction,” while the rest of us “wonder what went wrong.”

In addition to the notion that “parent” is code for “mother,” and consistent with the findings of Ochs (1992) and Gordon (2007), these data seem to suggest that mothers (especially white American middle class) view themselves, and are viewed by others, as
responsible for children’s socialization, both verbal and behavioral. As Zivkovic et al. (2010) point out, with respect to dietary habits, children learn from their parents’ poor choices or are “allowed” to become obese, and obesity in children “is tantamount to the rise of a generation of obese adults” (p. 385). Likewise, in these comments, children are assumed to learn, or be “allowed” to become technology addicts and parents, specifically mothers, are implicated. Thus, accompanying the responsibility of verbal and behavioral socialization, health, and wellbeing of children is the awareness that children, even to adulthood, serve as “props” on the stage upon which mothers present themselves (and their identities) for public scrutiny (Collett, 2005, p. 332). As such, they continue to bear witness to a mother’s success (or failure) as a parent. Indeed, in these comments, identities of mothers are constructed in the worst possible light with the worst possible effects.

“Universally Understood (by moms)”: “Parent” is Code for “Mother”

Taken together, comments in the following section represent a theme present not only in this dataset, but in a wide array of parenting literature. As previewed earlier, from news media (Zivkovic et al., 2010), to parenting magazines (Sunderland, 2006), to toy catalogs (Pugh, 2005), when it comes to children’s health and wellbeing, it is mom who emerges as the responsible party. Discourse analysts (Gordon, 2007; Kendall, 2007; Johnston, 2007) have also demonstrated that in everyday interaction, mothers discursively position themselves as primarily responsible for caring for children.

That “parent” is code for “mother” notwithstanding, fathers are mentioned exclusively in five comments (once by Turkle and four times by readers). “Father” appears with “parent” and “mother” 8 times, and with “parent” twice. (This is but a
fraction of the number of references to “mother” or “parent” and “mother,” however. By contrast, “parent” and “mother” occur within the same comment approximately 24 times: three times as often as “parent” and both “mother” and “father” and twelve times more frequently than “parent” and “father”).

As an example, Turkle’s fourth comment represents one of two occurrences of “parent” and any form of “father.” In this comment, Turkle presents two narratives in which a father is distracted by his phone; one during his child’s sports game and the other, while watching television with his child. In comment 32, a reader laments that her husband is missing out on the excited greetings of his children at the end of the workday because he is still on his phone as he enters the home. Finally, in comment 126 (also analyzed later in section 5), a hypothetical dad is portrayed as provider of the iPhone which the reader blames for “impeding [children’s] social development.” Thus, even when dad is mentioned, he conforms to very narrow and widely-held stereotypes about father-as-childcare-helper and as “breadwinner,” as identified by Kendall (2007) in her analysis of little-d discourse of two American families (p. 125).

When “father” and “mother” are mentioned together, it is especially interesting to note that he is mentioned after mom, as in “moms or dads” or “mothers and fathers.” In some of the comments, the reference to “father” appears in parentheses after “mother,” and as such still seems to imply that his inclusion in the comment is an afterthought, or that his role is secondary to mom’s. In fact, writing, “Mothers (and fathers to be P.C.)” the author of comment 20 indexes this very notion, wherein dad is not only relegated to a parenthetical, but is included only for political correctness. It is comments such as these which portray a less-than-egalitarian co-parenting ideology.
The comments presented in this section highlight the mother-as-primary caregiver ideology. Note instances of “slippage” (Sunderland, 2006) wherein “parent” gives way to “mother” as the text progresses. Posters switch almost seamlessly between “parent” and “mother,” and when examples of “parenting” are provided, these examples refer to moms and duties traditionally associated with motherhood. Finally, when dad is mentioned (comment 71), it is to highlight this ideology precisely.

Below, a poster who calls herself Barbara counters the premise of the article, and of many of the comments, relaying her own experience as an alternative interpretation of the relationship between technology and child rearing. Though she begins by using the first person singular pronoun “I” (as one might expect), she then generalizes her experiences to “moms:” but only to moms and not to parents in general.

---

13. Barbara Central NJ June 10th, 2010 10:15 am

1. The problem with judging based on 5 minutes of observation is that you really don’t know what is going on. I frequently have to log onto work e-mail to compensate for the fact that I am running late, because sometimes kids throw fits when getting dressed because he wanted to wear the blue shirt that was 2 sizes too small, or have potty emergencies right before time to leave the house. And it is a universally understood (by moms) truth that when mom is on the phone any preschooler who was quietly playing with her puzzles a moment ago will either desperately need mom’s attention or bolt from the room to take the chance to get into something while mom is distracted. 150 years ago moms did not ignore the chickens, or the bread that needed to be baked or the washing in order to give 100% attention to her little ones. It is only modern women who are expected to live in a child focused bubble 24 hours a day somehow managing to magically afford this luxury of free time on one income. Get real.

---

When in line 6, Barbara states, “it is a universally understood (by moms) truth,” she exposes the notion that “parent” is code for “mother.” This “truth,” after all, is not “universally understood” by parents collectively, but among mothers exclusively. It is, after all, “mom’s attention” that the preschooler “desperately” needs (line 8), moms “who are expected to live in a child focused bubble 24 hours a day,” and for whom “free time” is a “luxury” (lines 12-14). All of this is consistent with Hays’ (1996) contention
that “the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centered...
emotionally absorbing [and] labor-intensive” (p. 8).

Turkle also takes up this argument when she asserts that mothers in particular
are in a position to impact the “societal problem” of distracted parenting in line 5 of the
comment below. Note that she both positions herself as an expert and aligns herself with
mothers in this post.

Identifying herself “As a mother and a student of women’s history,” in lines 1 and 2,
Turkle highlights both maternal and expert identities. Stating that she is “very sensitive”
to maternal guilt resulting from self and societal blame, Turkle thus affirms shared
identity. Note the use of the adjective “another” in the phrase “yet another reason to feel
bad about themselves” in line 3. “Another” here indicates the preexistence of other
reasons women (and mothers) experience “mom guilt,” and the challenge of parenting
in the digital age constitutes “one more item in the litany of how woman do things
wrong” (lines 3-4).

In fact, she continues, mothers are advised to set rules that will not only influence
life at home, but environs such as the classroom, since others will also be inspired and
follow suit. The end result is that the proverbial “weight of the world” rests upon mom’s
shoulders. It is up to her, as Turkle says in line 7, “to demonstrate a way of doing things
that will make us all saner.”
The third comment presented here makes explicit the premise that a reference to parents in general can often be taken to mean mothers in particular. Indeed, this reader also notes many of the cultural contradictions of motherhood asserted by Hays (1996), since, in any “image of appropriate child rearing it is critical that ... the mother, be the central caregiver” (p. 8).

This comment makes several points relevant to this analysis. First, in stating “that this article purports to be about ‘parenting’ issues but... focuses only on the conduct of mothers” in lines 1 and 2, C.A. articulates findings similar to that of Sunderland (2006) and Zivkovic, et al. (2010); in parenting and medical, legal and media representations of childcare (respectively), “parent” is code for “mother.” When documents do not evidence “slippage,” (Sunderland, 2006) from “parent” to “mother,” and the gender neutral “parent” is maintained more or less consistently throughout, appeals target mom and examples feature her. We see evidence of these here, both in The NY Times article, as this reader points out, and as demonstrated above, within these comments.

This poster also points to, or indexes, ideologies of intensive mothering as suggested by Hays (1996), since fathers are not “expected to interact with their kids as much,” or “be quite as attentive and nurturing as mothers have been” (lines 3-5); and because of this, technology use at home is “excusable” (line 6) for dads but unacceptable, perhaps even deplorable or reproachable, for moms.
Comments 76 and 121 bear striking resemblance to one another in evidencing parent-to-mother slippage. Note specifically pronoun use in comment 76 and adjective use in both comments.

76. Lynn Valerie
Great Falls, VA
June 10th, 2010 1:00 pm

1 Parenting is mostly a conscious choice, Once the baby is born, mature adults realize their own childhood is kaput and they have an obligation to someone who is totally dependent. Caring for a child is one of the privileges and joys of life. We are asked to be responsive, encouraging, calm and supportive most of the time, and yes, it is a very difficult job. Sadly, I too have seen mothers talking on their cellphones while out walking their little ones strapped into strollers.

8 Those who know from experience how much the parenting years mean to us later, and how significant a good attachment to one’s mother can be, realize these otherwise engaged parents are missing a rare moment when they could focus affection and attention on their child. Research shows that children thrive when they feel loved and secure. It is important for parents to interact directly, strengthen a child’s communication skills by speaking to them, and offer your active presence as a sign of security. After all, the first nurturer is also the baby’s first love object.

121. Marilyn Heins, MD
Tucson, Arizona
June 10th, 2010 4:42 pm

1 Children need three things from parents: affection, acceptance, and attention, I avoid the term “quality time” as I am never sure how it bring defined and use “attentive” or “focused” time instead. Most of the time we parents spend with our children is described beautifully by Barbara Kingsolver (in a short story called, interestingly, "Quality Time”), "parenting is something that happens mostly while you are thinking about something else." And she’s right. Children need and value this kind of time with their parents that I call it present-but-not-interacting time and it actually comprises most of the time we spend with our children. Mommy is doing the laundry or working at the computer while the child plays in the same room. You talk to each other now and then but you aren’t focusing on the child, You may take a break to go give the child a big hug or the child may look up and ask you, "Mommy who made the world? At moments like this you shift into attentive time mode. These focused interactions may be brief but they are vital to the child.

... (comment continues)

In line 4 of comment 76 above, Lynn Valerie states, “We are asked to be responsive, encouraging, calm and supportive,” and later in line 8 “how much the parenting years mean to us” (emphasis mine). Use of these pronouns prompts a search for a corresponding antecedent, which one might take to be parents, since “parenting” is mentioned in line 1, or perhaps the “mature adults” also mentioned in this sentence. In these cases, however, the pronoun-antecedent relationship seems less-than-clear, since
it is not usually parents in general who are traditionally “asked to be responsive, encouraging, calm and supportive,” but rather mothers specifically. In fact, (and consistent with comments in the first two sections), it is mothers who are criticized in lines 6 and 7 for the talking/pushing behavior. And, the meaning of the parenting years is correlated with the significance of “a good attachment to one’s mother” in line 9. Thus, each of these pronouns is followed by examples in which mom is the primary agent. In line 14-15, then, it is mom whose “active presence [is] a sign of security,” and it is she who is easily readable as “the first nurturer [and] also the baby’s first love object.”

Comment 121 begins by using “parents” in lines 1 and 4, and “parenting” in line 5. In line 9, however, “mommy” is introduced and thereafter referred to either by this title (which appears again in line 13) or with the pronoun “you” (lines 11, 12 and twice in line 13). It is mommy with the child as the child plays in lines 9 and 10, and further, who is expected to respond attentively when the child looks up from playing to ask, “Mommy who made the world?” (line 13, emphasis mine).

Comments in this section thus illustrate a well-documented theme in parenting research: in discourses of responsibility for child health and wellbeing, a mention of “parent” can usually be interpreted “mother.” This seems to hold regarding technology and children.

“Quality Time’ is Some Made up Concept:” The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood

Comments in the previous section demonstrate the “slippage” between “parent” and “mother” common in discourses of childcare. I build on this analysis below to show that “parent” is not only laden with gendered assumptions, but cultural contradictions (Hays, 1996). That is, comments in these posts index not just ‘mother’ but a certain kind
of mothering characterized as “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, p. 8).

Several of these comments reference a portion of the article. I present here the relevant passage:

Not all child-development experts think smartphone and laptop use by parents is necessarily a bad thing, of course. Parents have always had to divide their attention, and researchers point out that there’s a difference between quantity and quality when it comes to conversations between parents and children.

“It sort of comes back to quality time, and distracted time is not high-quality time, whether parents are checking the newspaper or their BlackBerry,” said Frederick J. Zimmerman, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Public Health who has studied how television can distract parents. He also noted that smartphones and laptops may enable some parents to spend more time at home, which may, in turn, result in more, rather than less, quality time overall. (Scelfo, 2010).

Comments in this section linguistically highlight the intensive mother ideology through the use of extreme case formulations regarding timing of a mother’s response to a child.

14. Vicki Hackettstown, NJ June 10th, 2010 10:19 am

The "quantity" "Quality" issue regarding children has always puzzled me. A small child doesn’t understand the difference. Small children need instant answers to their questions. That isn’t the same as responding to whining, (my children were not allowed to whine, ever!) It is recognizing that children don’t have an internal clock to let them put off answers. You can get a small child to stop nagging at you by answering their request immediately - yes or no often works well if consistent and appropriate.

Older children are a different thing altogether, and can readily see the difference between quality and quantity. But children do learn from what they observe, much more than from what they are told. And, if they see their parents constantly fiddling with an electronic device, not responding to them or to each other in a meaningful way, then the children will also behave that way. No one likes to be ignored when they feel they have something important to say or discuss, The increasing addiction to the handheld devices is, I think far more dangerous to our mental health and relationships than television ever was because of its portability.
Comment 14 asserts that children do not distinguish between quantity of time and quality time. In lines 2 and 3, Vicki asserts that “small children need instant answers to their questions” (emphasis mine). And in lines 6 and 7, parents are encouraged to answer children’s requests “immediately.” This mother also exclaims that her “children were not allowed to whine, ever!” (line 4, emphasis mine). These first two extreme case formulations of time serve as “examples of sense-giving formulations” (p. 221). They establish how much waiting should be expected of children (none), or, how long parents should require their children to wait (they shouldn’t). The third formulation is a “Maximum Case” of time, and the sense provided here is that any amount of whining is too much, or unacceptable (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 221). As such, these formulations index the “emotionally absorbing, labor intensive” work of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996, p. 8), since presumably a good mother does not delay in responding to her children.

Similarly, Hays (1996) finds that even in a modern American society concerned (or consumed) with rational efficiency, mothers “consider it important to be consciously and constantly attentive to the child’s wishes” (p. 6). This expectation of attentiveness is embedded in an assumption that the mother has the time available to be always present and instantly attentive: Parents who don’t respond right away can cause their children to feel “ignored” (line 13), and Vicki suggests this may negatively impact a child’s mental health (lines 14-16, “The increasing addiction to the handheld devices is, I think far more dangerous to our mental health and relationships than television ever was because of its portability”).

Extreme case formulations also appear in the comment below. As with the first comment presented in this section, they also point to a definition of “acceptable” parenting and “appropriate” parenting behaviors. This definition does not involve time
so much as attention, but likewise realizes the Discourse of intensive mothering/parenting.

Magda Gerber, the brilliant educator for caregivers of infants and toddlers, said when a parent is with a child, his/her attention should be completely present with that child. Otherwise, the children should be in a safe place where they can play and entertain themselves (which creates good problem solving skills and self-sufficiency). Being physically present while emotionally unavailable is not good for the child, Children will practice behaviors, such as biting, to get attention, and then of course, these behaviors are rewarded and reinforced with attention. Even if it’s negative, the attention is better than nothing, but it sets up very negative patterns between child and adult.

Glowing screens are addictive, whether they be computer screens or television screens. I believe it’s because they are like fires, which our ancestors had to keep going to survive. But screens do not enhance family life and responsible parents will close them so they can have meaningful relationships with their children.

To be an effective parent one has to parent and that’s impossible while engaged with a screen.

Many of the tenets of intensive mothering are embedded in comment 62; yet it represents a rare example wherein use of the gender neutral “parent” is maintained consistently throughout the post. In fact, the poster, J, is particularly precise, using both masculine and feminine forms of the possessive pronoun “his/her” in line 2. Despite the fact that moms are not singled out, and there is no evidence of slippage, this post evidences many of the ideologies or Discourses realized elsewhere in the comments.

First, J begins by citing the findings of an expert (and a “brilliant” one at that), indexing the notion that appropriate child rearing is “expert-guided” (Hays, 1996, p. 8). Access to and reliance upon these experts is associated with middle- and upper-class maternal ideologies (Hays, 1996; Gordon, 2015b). In addition, in pointing out that “when a parent is with a child, his/her attention should be completely present with that child” (lines 2-3, emphasis mine), J employs a maximum case formulation to provide the sense of how much attention a child deserves (all of it). As such, this comment also
reminds us that child rearing should be “child-centered,” “emotionally absorbing,” and “labor-intensive” (Hays, 1996, p. 8). Finally, in claiming that effective parenting is “impossible while engaged with a screen” in lines 16 and 17, (emphasis mine), this comment employs an extreme case formulation to illustrate the relationship between technology and parenting; namely, that the two are wholly incompatible.

In the comment presented below, Matt employs several extreme case formulations that point to the assumption at the heart of the intensive mothering ideology: the logic of the sacred child (Hays, 1996).

In this post, we again see a maximum case formulation of time. As Pomerantz (1986) finds, “the sense provided... is that the amount of time is very long, too long, unacceptably long” (p. 221). This portrays the “punishment” parents will endure if they do not “make the time you have together count” (line 4). Next, in referring to kids as “pure gold” in line 5 and “electronic devices” as “junk” in line 6, this comment indexes the “special value” of children in the ideology of intensive mothering.

The comments that follow appear to reference not only the portion of the article excerpted above, but another portion as well. I include it below:

Meredith Sinclair, a mother and blogger in Wilmette, Ill., said she had no idea how what she calls her “addiction to e-mail and social media Web sites” was bothering her children until she established an e-mail and Internet ban between 4 and 8 p.m., and her children responded with glee. “When I told them, my 12-year-old, Maxwell, was like, ‘Yes!’ ” Ms. Sinclair said.

“You can’t really do both,” she added. “If I’m at all connected, it’s too tempting. I need to make a distinct choice” (Scelfo, 2010).
The posts that respond to this portion of the article are authored by the same user, and as such represent one of the few occurrences in which a user contributes two comments. (As previously mentioned, Turkle contributed 28 responses, and six other readers contributed two each). Note references to both “attention” and “time,” and the stances the poster who calls himself Nigel takes toward parents who do not focus the requisite amounts of these resources on their children. In lines 1-3 of post 139, Nigel is directly quoting the article. He then comments on the quotation in lines 4-7. His later post consists solely of commentary.

139. Nigel  
NYC  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am

1 “...a mother and blogger in Wilmette, Ill., said she had no idea how what she calls her "addiction to e-mail and social media Web sites" was bothering her children...”
2 Do parents actually not know that children require a lot of attention? And that the attention they pay their children is called "parenting"? And these are the educated parents.
3 Those poor children.

146. Nigel  
NYC  
June 11th, 2010  
12:23 pm

1 Oh, by the way, to a small child, there is only quantity of time. The person who spends the most time with the child is who they bond with, be it for better or worse.
2 'Quality time' is some made up concept to make working parents feel better.
3 Sorry.

In line 4 of comment 139, parents are advised that “children require a lot of attention.” In line 5, this attention “is called ‘parenting.’” In other words, for Nigel “parenting” is defined as “paying a lot of attention to your children.” In comment 146, the quantity/quality argument is raised once again. This post states “to a small child, there is only quantity of time” (line 1, emphasis mine). Inclusion of the adjective “only” marks “quantity of time” as the exclusive, or sole, component of the argument, effectively rejecting the premise of “quality time.” This “quantity of time” is then correlated with bonding in line 2. This Nigel provides as evidence that “‘quality time’ is
some made up concept to make working parents feel better” (line 4). In other words, if you want to bond with your child, it does not matter what you do with them or how you spend your time together; it matters only that you devote your time to them. This is consistent with Hays’ (1996) contention that “appropriate child rearing” is indeed synonymous with “lavishing copious amounts of time [and] energy... on the child” (p. 8).

This poster in particular takes up affective stances toward the parents and children he describes. In lines 4-6 of comment 139, he laments that “the educated parents” do not actually know how much attention their children require. (A more cynical reading of these lines might yield a sense of annoyance or exasperation). He further expresses sorrow for the “poor children” of such parents in line 7. Finally, concluding his second comment with “sorry” (line 5), he identifies those parents who only spend “quality time” with their kids as not living up to parenting ideals (as in “sorry, that’s not enough – you still fail as a parent”).

In summary of this section’s analysis, if the cultural contradictions of motherhood (Hays, 1996) already pose significant challenges to mothers, technology appears to have done little in addressing them. In fact, rather than making life easier and more efficient, smartphones, in these comments, complicate discourses of “doing” motherhood in the digital age, since conversations about the privileges and responsibilities of parenthood in general and motherhood specifically, already fraught with assumptions of gender, race and class now become even more entangled with questions of access. It is precisely this aspect of technology and parenthood which I consider in the section that follows.
“Poor Rich Kids!” Parenting, Technology and The Cultural Deal

In this final section of analysis, I present six comments which foreground class, wealth and socioeconomic status. To this point, I have demonstrated that a reference to “parent” can be taken to mean “mother.” And further, that the image of “mother” invoked in discourses of children’s health and wellbeing is entangled with contradicting (and gendered) assumptions of care. I move now to my final section, in which I show how all of this is further complicated by questions of class and privilege.

Pugh (2005) finds that consumption represents a “cultural deal that allows [mothers] to be concerted cultivators of their children while they are absent” (p. 743). As such, consumption offers a solution to the internal (not to mention logistical) dilemma faced by many working mothers. In this light, smartphones may be viewed as delivering on the promise of physical proximity to children while attending to multiple and competing bids for mom’s attention. As we shall see in the comments in this section, this constitutes an equally problematic scenario.

On some level or another, all of the posters whose comments I analyze in this section appear to be referencing this portion of the article:

Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley’s landmark 1995 book, “Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children,” shows that parents who supply a language-rich environment for their children help them develop a wide vocabulary, and that helps them learn to read.

The book connects language use at home with socioeconomic status. According to its findings, children in higher socioeconomic homes hear an average of 2,153 words an hour, whereas those in working-class households hear only about 1,251; children in the study whose parents were on welfare heard an average of 616 words an hour.

The question is: Will devices like smartphones change that? Smartphone users tend to have higher incomes; research from the Nielsen Company shows that they are twice as likely to make more than $100,000 a year than the average mobile subscriber. If increased use of technology encroaches on the time that well-to-do
families spend communicating with their children, some could become the victims of successes originally thought to help them. (Scelfo, 2010).

Although it is not possible to obtain precise demographic information for this group of posters specifically, it is useful here to consider characteristics of The NY Times readership in general. The NYTimes.com audience is reported to have a median household income just over $158,000 and a principal home value just over $400,000. Readers are likely to be over 35 years of age, have graduated college and hold a professional, managerial or chief officer position (NY Times).

References to middle-class lifestyles include a family vacation in which three generations were present (comment 11), and a poster who states that she and her husband work “very hard to provide a lifestyle that [their] son benefits greatly from,” a lifestyle which includes “a private-school education, swim lessons, soccer, birthday presents for friends’ parties, etc. etc.” (comment 47). Finally, a few comments reference waiting in the carpool line to pick up a child from school. (And this seems to indicate that the poster is a stay-at-home-mom and does not have to work outside the home, or that she enjoys a certain amount of flexibility in her schedule if she is employed, and finally that her child does not ride a bus).

This is useful to contextualize the analysis here, since these posters may be said to represent a particular perspective on parenting, one consistent with Hays’ (1996) argument that the dominant ideology of intensive mothering “advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children” (p. x). The luxuries of “time, energy, and money” are arguably resources afforded the middle- and upper-classes, since the “toiling mothers” of the poor and working classes ostensibly have “scant time to be gentle nurturers” (Hays, 1996, p. 35).
To various degrees, these data represent, grapple with, and contest this theme.

Comments below linguistically index (either by direct mention or allusion) white American middle class parenting values. Note in the comments below for example, the tensions that arise from questions of access (education, affluence, etc.).

Middle class privilege and values are evident in these comments when, for example, lines 1 and 2 in comment 18 state, “distractions by electronic devices like smartphones are erasing the advantages the more educated and affluent parents once gave to their offspring,” since ostensibly these parents are now too engrossed in technology to converse with their children. As an extreme case formulation, “erase” suggests that “the advantages” are not merely mitigated or reduced, but eliminated entirely. Comment 73 expresses a similar sentiment, (though in perhaps less extreme terms), pondering whether “devices used by affluent parents... bring affluent childrens’ (sic) verbal skills down.” Here, questions of education, wealth and access to technology assumed to be advantages of privilege are renounced as detrimental. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in this section, this perspective permeates these comments and prompts intriguing questions.
While some posters allude to the wealth and privilege one might expect from the demographics reported on The New York Times’ website, a striking number appear to contest, or reject altogether, any assumption that access to technology equates to good parenting. The following post seems to reflect some diversity in The NY Times’ online audience. Note how Pilgrim self-identifies in the first line as “a very low income, single parent w/o a cell or hand held device,” and further, how this disclosure is framed in the comment.

101. Pilgrim
Cape
June 10th, 2010
2:42 pm
1. As a very low income, single parent w/o a cell or hand held device, I often find myself interacting with other’s children in public settings, because the parents are sitting on the sidelines, paying no attention what so ever. They put the ‘I’ in I-Pad. Perhaps technology is biting us in the butt. For some odd reason I seem to find plenty of time for walks/talks, gardening, camping/beach, etc. Driving while texting or talking on the phone is child endangerment. And ignoring one’s child while plugged in 24/7 is borderline child neglect.
2. Parents, teach your children well by example, or payback’s coming at you.
3. Do the right thing(s). My child has no access to electronic devices and I hear from his teachers/others how engaging he is in conversation/personality.
4. Also to the commenter who challenges the tending chicken, bread baking, washing-these were moments to teach their young and engage them in life skills necessary to survival. Does your offspring know how to bake bread or even operate a washing machine?
5. Remember that parenting is the most important job you’ll ever have.

In contrast with the typical middle-class readership of The Times, this poster claims “a very low income” in line 1. Rather than a mark of shame, however, this low income and resulting lack of hand held device is construed as advantageous, as s/he states in lines 10 and 11, “I hear from his teachers/others how engaging [my son] is in conversation/personality.” The implication here is that hand held devices inhibit these skills in those who possess and use them.

In lines 6 and 7, Pilgrim performs the act of making assertions: “Driving while texting or talking on the phone is child endangerment. And ignoring one’s child while plugged in 24/7 is borderline child neglect.” The poster also performs the act of issuing a
warning in line 9: “payback’s coming at you,” and finally the act of issuing imperatives: “Parents, teach your children well by example,” “Do the right thing(s),” and “Remember that parenting is the most important job you’ll ever have” in lines 9, 10, and 16. Together these acts and stances index some kind of expert identity; though which type of expertise is not made explicit.

The following comment evidences a very sarcastic tone while addressing class and technology. Following a quote from the article, CF proceeds to ridicule the premise of the passage excerpted above, taking on the voice of a hypothetical child who lives in New York City’s Upper West Side (UWS).

| 126. CF       | 1  "Victims of their success”? Poor rich kids! My daddy’s iPhone is impeding        |
| Boston, MA   | 2 my vocabulary and social development, now I have an excuse to get on the          |
| June 10th, 2010 | 3 waiting list for the must-have-therapist on the UWS, and more reasons to          |
| 4:42 pm      | 4 blame my parents when things don’t go my way later in life. If farming out        |
|              | 5 child-rearing duties to nannies 5 days a week 9-5 isn’t a worry, a few            |
|              | 6 minutes on the iPhone is ok, really.                                             |

CF sarcastically characterizes the “poor rich kids” whose “daddy’s iPhone is impeding [their] vocabulary and social development,” who “now... have an excuse to get on the waiting list for the must-have-therapist on the UWS”, and finally who have “more reasons to blame [their] parents when things don’t go [their] way later in life” (lines 1-4). Class is indexed directly by the adjective “rich” in line 1, and alluded to in lines 2 and 3 by mention of an Upper West Side “must-have therapist” with a “waiting list.” Portraying wealthy parents who “farm out” their “child-rearing duties to nannies,” only later to be “blamed” by their children when “things don’t go [their] way in life,” CF adopts a negative stance toward privilege and the access it affords. In so doing, the poster also highlights the concern about technology and parenting.
The remaining comments I examine in this section (140 & 152) index affluence through direct mention as well as through allusion to therapists and nannies, both of which are assumed to be privileges of the wealthy. These privileges, however, are devalued significantly (even disdained and discredited altogether) by these posters.

---

140. Heidi  
Texas  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am

Do the techy parents who constantly blog and Twitter and Flickr and text only remember the milestones of their children through those tools? Do they remember the actual moment minus the technology?  
As for the socioeconomic question -- once you get into the wealth aspect, how many of those kids have/had direct interaction with their parents vs. hired attendants to begin with?

---

152. jr  
nyc  
June 11th, 2010  
10:49 am

Regarding the part about the socio-economics of language development, has anyone taken a little stroll around Central Park around, say, mid-day on a weekday lately? I’m willing to bet all those young children sitting face-forward while their nannies are pushing them from behind with their forearms whilst texting are from those upper middle class families that seem to have the higher number of words in any given day. I would love to see a study of language development among nanny-raised children. Not bashing nannies here, but those ladies spend very much time with toddlers strapped to face-front strollers whilst chatting and texting away.

---

Since children serve as props in parents’ impression management (Collett, 2005), a direct attack on the identities of these “rich kids,” here simultaneously constitutes an indirect attack on middle-class and wealthy parental identities. All of this is purportedly because, as is also claimed in comment 140, lines 4 through 6, “hired attendants” have more “direct interaction” with children of the wealthy than the parents themselves, and in comment 152, line 7, the “language development” of “nanny-raised children” is challenged. Here, parental identities of the privileged are attacked directly, since rather than interacting with their children, they use devices and relegate the child rearing to “hired attendants.” As such, these comments constitute attacks on middle- and upper-class parental identities, first indirectly through the spoiled identities of their children and then directly through accusations of neglecting parental responsibilities. Finally,
(and bringing this analysis full circle), we see an example of toddlers being pushed in strollers “whilst [a caregiver is] chatting and texting away.”

Thus, in this final section, questions of affordances and access to technology assumed to privilege the middle class and the wealthy are discursively rendered complex by the question of effects. In each comment, access and use of technology is causally linked with “erasing the advantages” of education and affluence, and “bring[ing] affluent children’s verbal skills down.” In summary, the advantages of privilege are leveled by the critique that a generation of self-centered parents who “put the 'I' in I-Pad” (comment 101, line 4) are sidelining their children, and neglecting their parental responsibilities.

Discussion

Ochs (1992) finds that linguistic features index not gender specifically but social meaning, and that these meanings help “to constitute gender meanings” (p. 341). The link between language and gender, then, is “mediated,” or indirect (p. 341). In a similar way, I suggest that the link between behavior and maternal identity is also not direct, but rather, one of inference. Through analysis of a subset of comments posted in response to a New York Times article on technology and parenting, I first applied Ochs’ (1992, 1993) notion of indexicality to reveal how posters perform verbal acts and verbally display stances as they describe parents engaged in the act of pushing a stroller, and highlight their expectation that the parent should display a stance of high accommodation by interacting with the child in the stroller (regardless of, or perhaps in spite of, age or communicative ability).
Second, I extended Ochs’ indexicality theorizing to include nonverbal acts and suggest that a “good mother” identity is indexed through a particular physical act (pushing a child in a stroller), which posters describe. Here, mothers who talk on cell phones while pushing children in strollers are viewed with disdain and shamed; since these fail to display the stance of interest or concern consistent with ("Big 'D' Discourse") white middle class American expectations, the posters take up negative stances toward them.

Third, because these acts and stances are shown to index maternal identities, I moved to demonstrate how any mention of “parenting” can be taken to mean “mothering.” Indeed in these comments, gendered assumptions of childcare are evident in both quantitative (the number of times “mother” versus “father” is mentioned, for example) and qualitative perspectives (the discourse analysis of select comments). Posts that begin by addressing or referring to “parents” shift seamlessly (and often inconspicuously) to “mother,” (evidencing what Sunderland (2006) calls “slippage”) and even in instances where posters maintain the gender neutral form throughout, examples still refer to mom or address her specifically.

Fourth, I demonstrated that the notion of “mother” invoked in modern discourses of childcare is indeed not without gendered assumptions. Posts in this forum certainly reflect the ideology of intensive mothering specifically (Hays, 1996); that is, that motherhood is a construct of cultural contradictions in which women must reconcile the competing logics of the marketplace and the home. In the former, rationality and efficiency are the keys to success and that success may be measured in monetary gain. In the latter, selflessness and nurturing are paramount. Success here, if it can be measured at all, is certainly not measured by monetary means. In fact, to the
contrary, since intensive mothering is among other things, “financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, p. 8).

It is precisely this notion of cost which I consider in the final section of my analysis. Comments analyzed here are those which take issue with class, wealth and access, commonly assumed to bestow certain advantages. In these comments, technology is represented as undermining these privileges, thus ideologies of wealth and consumption are contested in discourses about parenting and technology. That is, for all of its affordances, technology does not seem to alleviate, and in fact, only seems to further complicate ideologies of appropriate parenting.

My analysis draws on concepts of acts, stances, and indexing; to accomplish these, I showed that posters used a range of linguistic strategies, primary among them uses of lexical items, including pronouns, verbs (that depict or accomplish acts), adjectives (that help create stances), and various ways of accomplishing extreme case formulations. I thus demonstrate the ways in which contributors to an online forum index maternal identity and the ideology of intensive mothering, and contrary to assumptions about privilege and access, discursively represent consumption as a less-than-“honorable solution” (Pugh, 2005) to the challenges of parenting in the digital age.
Chapter 6: Discussion

The ubiquity of the smartphone is both celebrated and contested, since the possibility of constant connectivity is seen as simultaneously inviting and exciting on the one hand, and demanding and burdensome on the other. I sought here not to argue for one point of view in favor of the other, but rather to apply theories and concepts of discourse analysis to interactions on this very topic on a television talk show and then in an online comment forum.

I began by asking how an expert constructs the relationship between parenting and technology and with a focus on the implications for parents. Second, I asked how mothers construct maternal identities for themselves as they discuss their own and their children’s use of technology. And finally, I sought to illuminate how parental identity is constructed and negotiated in online formats.

This analysis contributes to the study of identities in interaction in the following ways. First, it contributes to work on constructing maternal identities in both face-to-face and online contexts. In addition, it fills a gap in research on maternal identity and family interaction in the digital age, specifically as it refers to the discursive construction of the impact(s) of technology on family life. This is important because it sheds light on the practices of interaction which allow parents (and mothers specifically) to construct and negotiate their identities with respect to family technology use.

This analysis reveals how big-D Discourses influence little-d discourse about maternal identity and technology. That is, positionings of both expert identity and parental responsibility occur within broader ideologies of technology use, family interaction and childcare responsibilities. As an expert positions both herself and parents, she refers to ideologies about mothering in general, and intensive mothering
specifically. And as posters in an online forum take up this discourse, they use linguistic resources to perform certain acts and display certain stances that are socioculturally linked to identities. Here, maternal identity is indexed through the act of pushing a child in a stroller while displaying a stance of engagement by interacting with the child. Also useful for this analysis is the MIR Device proposed by Sacks (1989), since knowledge about membership in specific categories necessarily informs expectations about individual members. To take on the identity “mother,” I suggest, is to both understand, and be understood, in light of these expectations.

This is consistent with Ochs’ (1992) conclusion “that images of women are linked to images of mothering and that such images are socialized through communicative practices associated with caregiving” (p. 337). Finding that these images differ culturally, Ochs (1992) observes that the child-centered practices employed by American (specifically white middle class) mothers are evidence of “a communicative strategy of high accommodation to young children” (p. 346-7). While Ochs conducted her research decades ago, this expectation seems to persist.

As Hays (1996) theorizes, the spheres of workplace and home have traditionally been separated not only physically but ideologically (p. 33). In the former, a marketplace logic is governed by rationality and efficiency, while in the latter, the logics of the sacred child and intensive mothering reign supreme. One “promise” of technology identified by Turkle in the Moyers interview is that “we can be wherever we want to be” (lines 13-4). Similarly, extending Pugh’s (2005) analysis of toy catalogs, I suggested that smartphones offer a similar “cultural deal:” an alluring resolution to the contradictory values of “market work and family work” (p. 746).
While it might be said that smartphones provide the means for mothers to reconcile the conflict between these “different logics,” what is demonstrated within this analysis, both of the interview and the online comments, however, stands in direct contrast to this ideal. Whereas once the rational logic could be physically located outside the home (in the workplace), technology invites this need for efficiency into the home. But with what gain? Or at what expense? Thus, rather than presenting a solution to the cultural contradictions of motherhood, smartphones perpetuate the demand of constant connection alongside an illusion of possibility. As such, these findings seem to point to the persistence of this conflict in the digital age. Of course, the accessibility of the intensive mothering “ideal” has never been universal. So too, access to technology (and to the “experts” who inform us of its appropriate uses) has been and will continue to be entangled with questions of race and class.

Given the prominence of the image of active mother-child engagement in "Big 'D' Discourse" about motherhood, one theme emerges: maternal identity is inextricably intertwined with the identity of the child. Maternal responsibility for children’s health and wellbeing, then, remains a complex web of assumptions of gender, race and class in the digital age. Everyday discourse of various types – not only face-to-face conversations in homes, but also, as I have shown, televised interviews and online discussions – reconstruct and reinforce this complex web.
Appendix A

Transcript

BM:  Bill Moyers, host, Moyers & company
ST:  Sherry Turkle, MIT professor and author of *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Each Other*

Introduction: ([Moyers speaks to the camera/viewing audience]). Enough of politics, the debt and that spectacle in Washington. Let’s change the subject. If you’ve ever lost your smartphone, as I have, you know it can feel like a death. The experience highlights just how our world has been engulfed by social media and how our technology has become a vital organ of our being. And it’s happened so fast. Facebook is not quite 10 years old, Twitter is younger still. Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg told a reporter that in 2016 -- just three years from now -- “people are going to be sharing eight to ten times as much stuff.” Like anything hurtling us forward at breakneck speed, the advancements are great, and so are the dangers. For every Arab Spring or political movement using social media to foment change, there may also be campaigns of abuse and hate. For every Wikileaks and revealed secret, there’s the encroachment on personal privacy by the NSA. For every new friend meeting through cyberspace, there’s the risk of estrangement from the real world. Our devices change not only what we do but also who we are. So I’ve come to Sherry Turkle to try to explain how and why.

She’s a clinical psychologist who was one of the first to study the impact of computers on culture and society. A professor at MIT and Director of that school’s Initiative on Technology and Self, she’s written several important books based on deep research and hundreds of interviews with children and adults alike. Her most recent sums up her conclusions: *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.*

1  BM:  Sherry Turkle, welcome.
2  ST:  Pleasure to be here.
3  BM:  I saw a video the other day that I want to share
4  with you. It's now been seen 25 million [times= 
5  ST:  [Yes.                     
6  BM:  =on YouTube. Here it is.
7  ((YouTube video “I Forgot My Phone”))
8  BM:  What are you thinking as you look at that?
9  ST:  Well I call it "alone to↑gether." That we're-
10  we're moving to a space (.) where:e we feel free
11  (.) to- to respo:nd to the three promises that 
12  technology now makes us. That we can always
13  be heard (.) that we can be wherever we want to
14  be (. ) and that we never have to be alone. And
15  that third ↑promise actually is terribly
16  important because I believe that the capacity
17  for solitude is terribly important to develop. I- I
18  even believe that if you don't teach your
children to be alone. They'll only know how to be lonely. And by not developing this capacity for solitude, we're not doing our children a favor.

BM: What do you mean?

ST: Well, there are many things that we're doing that are having bad effects on our kids because we're really not looking at the implications of immersing ourselves in mobile technology to the degree that we have. Um-and what it's doing to, not just our children, but to our family lives, to our social life, to our political life. I'll give you a good example.

BM: All right.

ST: John McCain recently, under the pressure of the discussion of the Syrian crisis, said that was boring. And he needed to go to something that was more stimulating. And so he went to a game. And what that showed is that what we're going to is something that revs us up and puts us, we know, neurochemically in a state where we're less able to come back and be part of the give and take of human conversation.

BM: "I mean" isn't every media revolution greeted with the kinds of concerns we've been expressing? Haven't we adults all through history always said that this is how [the-]

ST: [This is the terrible one. Right.

ST: I face this question every day. Of- of-wh- I welcome the internet. I welcome the mobile- mobile technology. Um: I'm saying there are certain ways we're using it (1.0) that are not ah taking account of how misusing it (1.0) overusing it (.) can really threaten things that we care about. >It's a question of< technological affordance and human vulnerability. This is a technology to which we are particularly vulnerable in certain ways. Um a mother adores being with her children. And yet with this technology she is so vulnerable to the stimulation of knowing what the next message is on her cell phone that when she picks her kid up at school and the kid comes in-

>('cause) I studied this< the kid comes in to the
car this is the gesture she makes to her child
((looks down at imaginary phone in left hand, shakes head 'no' while making a 'waving off' gesture with right arm outstretched.)) "Let me just finish this one- this one last email. Let me just get this one message." And does not make eye contact with the child as the child comes in. It's the- it's the desire to look at that one last message that causes her to go like that ((same waving off gesture repeated)) to her child. Now (. ) that's not- that's not saying there's anything wrong with a cell phone. It's saying that we are so vulnerable to the seduction of who wants to reach us what sweetness is coming through the phone that we're really at a point where we turn away from our kids.

BM: So what sweetness is that attractive?

ST: The sweetness of something new that's coming into us on our phone. People talk to me about, you know, not being able to tolerate not knowing what that new thing that's coming in on the phone is. I mean, kids sit in class now and they, you know, the phone is in the bag or the phone is on the floor, and they check regularly what new texts are coming in.

BM: Do you have boundaries for them--

ST: Every professor--

BM: Do you push back?

ST: Every professor knows this. Well, I had a- I had a thing in class where the kids, I was teaching a class on memoir at MIT, and it was about these kids' fantastic stories about their lives. And a group of the class came to me and said, "You know, we're texting in class. And, you know, we feel bad because the rest of the kids, I mean, they're talking about their lives." And I said, "Well, we have to discuss this as a class." And basically, they said, "We are not as strong as technology's pull."

BM: What did they mean by that?

ST: They were not as strong.

BM: They couldn't say no?

ST: They could not say no. They could not say no to the feeling that somebody wanted them.

Somebody was reaching out to them. The thrill that we get, the
neurochemical hit of constant connection is what we are -- is what we have now.

BM: The multitasking?

ST: It is -- we definitely get a high from multitasking.

BM: Are our brains programmed to do four to six things at the same time?

ST: No. There's really no such thing as multitasking. Studies show decisively that um your- your behavior, your performance degrades for every new task you multitask. So when you add a new task, your performance degrades in all of the tasks you're doing. But there's a catch. You think you're doing better in each of the tasks you're doing. So multitasking, which we hyped and hyped as kind of-- this is what this technology allowed for us, is actually the first thing that we need to address in order to do serious work.

BM: Well, you have helped me to understand a puzzle because in your earlier book, “Life on the Screen,” you were optimistic. You thought all of this technology was truly promising.

ST: Well, I mean, I've had an evolution in my thinking.

BM: And what was the critical factor in that?

ST: Because in the early days of the internet, people went online, in those days anonymously, and could create identities online that were very different from the identities they had in the real. And people were experimenting with gender with, you know, the shy would be less shy, and people, as I studied them online, were really using online identity to work through questions of kind of experimenting using the online world as a sort of identity workshop to play with questions of kind of experimenting, using the online world as a sort of identity workshop, to play with questions of who they were and to experiment with being a little bit different. And I thought that was very exciting. What I did not see, call me not prescient, was that my idea of how we would be thinking about identity had a model of a person at a computer playing with identity,
and then after you played with your identity at the computer, then you would get up from your computer, having experimented with identity, and you would go out to the world, into the world, and you would live your life having learned these lessons from your online identity. When the book was written, I looked around me, and there were already people in my environment using computers that they called the "wearable computers."

BM: Wearable?
ST: Wearable computers. They had antennae, they had keyboards in their pockets, they had glasses that were their screens, and they were wearing the web on them. In other words, they looked very science fiction. They basically had a portable phone. They were— they could be—

BM: (They) were wearing it?
ST: on the web, they were wearing it. They could be on the web all the time.

BM: It was their uniform.
ST: It was their uniform. They could be on the web all the time. And that meant once you had this device with you all the time, you didn't have this division of time at the computer or not with the computer. You had this always on, always-on-you device, and you had the possibility of being always, always in this world of the web.

BM: But what's wrong with that? I ask that seriously because, you know—
ST: Well, that is—
BM: E. M. Forster said, "Only connect."
ST: That changed everything. Because people then, the kids in my class who were looking down at their phones through the entire lecture included, the people in church who text during services, who text during funerals included, everyone is always having their attention divided between the world of the people we're with and this other reality. We now walk around with our heads down. I walked over here this morning, everybody is like this. I—

BM: That's dangerous in New York City—
ST: It's dangerous. There's even a New Yorker
cover I think about a family, you know, who
are at the beach, and their heads are in their
phones. I mean, we are always equally in the
world of the machine, in the world that's in the
phone and in the rest of the world.

BM: That New Yorker cover's a long way from the
covers we used to see on "The Saturday
Evening Post," particularly in Norman
Rockwell's famous depiction of Thanksgiving
dinner around the table, serving the turkey
with all the kids and grandparents entering
into the conversation--

ST: Right, right. If I came into this conversation
and just put my iPhone down and we started to
talk, what we would discuss in this
corveration would radically change. Because
you'd feel, and you'd be right to feel, that I'm,
you know, partly waiting to be interrupted by
all the things people, experiences, emotions,
connections that are here. And that changes
what people will talk about, the amount of –
investment they'll make in the conversation,
the nature of the degree of emotional content
they will put into a conversation.

BM: What is this doing (. ) to us as human beings?
The fact that we're constantly [at--

ST: [It's keepin' us-
it's keeping us more at the: >surface of things.<
I went to a dinner of a group of young people
constant interruption.
Everybody has a ↑phone (. ) phones are going
off constantly the average-the average teenage
girl is interrupted once every four or five
minutes by an incoming or an outgoing ↑text.
So five people out to dinner I mean it was a
constant interruption. And I'll say to them,
"How do you feel about the (. ) interruptions?"
And they say, "What interruptions?" Because
they experience these interruptions as
connection. Things have gotten so (. ) ba:d that
the culture is starting to present things that
used to be dystopian as utopian. And my best
eample is dinner. There's an ad for Facebook
um which- a dinner (. ) a typical Norman
Rockwell dinner the type you were evoking.
Big family and extended family is at dinner. And you know this is going to be good because dinner is the thing that we all know protects against juvenile delinquency people stay in school if they have dinner with their families. It protects against you know everything bad and it encourages everything good in the growing up of a child.

BM: There are studies that confirm [that?]

ST: [Studies confirm DINNER with your family just have dinner with your children. So we know this is going to be good. And this family’s having dinner. And then all of a sudden, one of the members of the family let’s call her "Aunty" starts to get boring. (Facebook ad plays here)) And a young girl let’s say a 19-year-old girl- we’ve hit a "boring bit." And this girl is not going to take a "boring bit." And she takes out her phone and on her phone she goes to Facebook. And from her phone comes out snowball fights! and football games! and ballet things! all the things that are on her phone come out of her phone. And she’s not at the dinner anymore. She’s into this other world of Facebook all the "boring bits" are gone Facebook and all the things that are on her Facebook are now at the dinner on the table surrounded- she’s surrounded by this other world. She’s smiling she’s happy. And so I me- essentially Facebook has taken out an ad against conversation at family dinner. The big issue is whether or not we’re moving to a culture where people can no longer tolerate what I’m calling the "boring bits.”

BM: The boring=

ST: =The “boring bits” of human conversation. I call it a "flight from conversation." Because we’ve become increasingly intolerant of the way in which we stumble and make mistakes and kind of have to backtrack particularly when we’re talking about things that are complicated and ha:rd. And you have to sort of work with somebody and get- this is conversation. And children have to be taught
and this is why it's a- it's a gift to them to say, "Put down the device and let's talk." And so what concerns me as a developmental psychologist watching children grow in this new world where being bored is something that never has to be tolerated for a moment. You can always go someplace where you're stimulated stimulated stimulated um is that people are losing that capacity. And that's very serious.

BM: What is it about face-to-face conversation you think people don't like?

ST: Well, I once asked a 16-year-old who was talking about how much he doesn't like conversation. He actually had just said to me, "Someday, someday soon, but certainly not how, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation." And I said, "What's wrong with conversation?" And he said, "It takes place in real time and you can't control what you're going to say." And this is crucial for what digital technology has given us that has made conversation seem like something that we can avoid. Let's say the old kind of conversation, which is open-ended, which is that when you type or use digital media, you can edit, you can correct, you can get it right, you feel less vulnerable. I call it the "Goldilocks Effect."

BM: Goldilocks?

ST: The "Goldilocks Effect--"

BM: Goldilocks and the Three Bears?

ST: Right. We want to be in touch with more and more people, carefully kept at bay. Not too close, not too far, just right, edited, made – with our communications edited, made perfect. Goldilocks.

BM: Everyone across the spectrum is talking about technology overuse, including comedians. I came across this moment on YouTube where Louis C.K. is talking about his own kid. Here it is.

((YouTube video: Louis CK talks about parents at a school dance))

BM: It's a funny video, but he isn't sure he likes what's happening.
Well, I mean, it -- I mean, there's so many things going on in this. I mean, we are living the kind of mediated, a mediated existence where, you know, capturing the event in order to then post it, really has become, has come to seem normal. So I call it, "I share therefore I am." I mean, it's kind of a way of living where you don't feel fully as though you're living if you haven't shared it in this new way. In other words, it's almost as though you don't have the feeling, or the feeling is -- you get the feeling, or the feeling begins to come to you. You feel more yourself, you begin to feel yourself as you mesh yourself with the means of communication.

Sending is being. It's starting to be that sending is being. And I think that this has a, potentially a downside, because, you know, you begin to not have as much a feeling of autonomy and sense of self if your way of thinking about yourself is so tied into sharing and texting and being enmeshed that way.

Walt Whitman should be around now, Song of Myself--

Right, right.

I mean, that's what society--

No, it really is a different way of seeing the self. And again, I come back to the importance of solitude, the sense that people need to learn how to gather themselves and be alone and experience solitude, which is different from loneliness. Because the way things are now, you know, people think that loneliness is a problem that needs to be solved and that only technology can solve.

What about technology's ability to enable us to be mean and malicious from a distance without any possibility of retaliation? Why do people behave so differently on social media?

Because the face, the presence of another person inhibits the worst in us. And the fact that we can behave as behind a veil brings out this side where you feel as though you're disinhibited. There's no--
BM: You're given permission.
ST: You're given permission. You're given permission. People behave -- cyber bullying, people behave as though they're not speaking to another human being.
BM: Did you see the recent story about the 12-year-old girl who took her life after being bullying--
ST: Yes, yes.
BM: Any take you can give us on that? Any insight you can share with us about how technology feeds something like that? She could've just turned off the phone, put down the phone.
ST: No. No, she couldn't. Because the phone has become her lifeline too, to her social world. I think that's sort of what we're saying, is that being part of her social world meant keeping on the phone. These people got to her because she could not be part of being 12 years old in her high school.
BM: You're so on that--
ST: Without keeping on her phone.
BM: There was a recent Pew research study that found teenagers are wary of excessive sharing on Facebook but continue to use it because they say it is crucial to their social life.
ST: Absolutely, absolutely.
BM: So it's not just the matter of unplugging. If they unplug, they're unplugging from their universe.
ST: Yes. And there are many teenagers who I've studied who will unplug for a while, and then plug back in because that is where -- that is sort of where their social life is. That's where their -- that's where they know where the parties are. That's where they know, that's where they find out where things are happening.
BM: So this need for community that they now find technologically seems to me an extension of this powerful appetite that makes us human beings. But you say, I hear you saying, the machine threatens our humanity?
ST: Well, I want to say I'm optimistic if it can be used in a way that connects us in ways that will make us more human, as that will bring the human community together. But let me just take politics. I was so optimistic and excited
about the connections that people could form politically using the computer. And there has been some fantastic things, obviously. But very often, people feel as though they've politically participated if they go on a website and they check "like." They feel that that is belonging to a -- making a political statement. Politics is actually, I think, going into your community, having a conversation, not to overuse the word, disagreeing with somebody, putting yourself into somebody else's head, often very hard. Looking somebody in the eye, really doing the hard work of empathy, something that you don't learn by email. It's the last place to develop empathic skills. So the question of community and being part of a community is either something that computers can help or that computation can undermine, depending on how we use it.

BM: Have you found that people feel empowered when they can tweet or Facebook their opinions? I've found that there's a sense of response people get to their postings of their opinions that make them feel better.

ST: It may--

BM: That they're being heard.

ST: The feeling of always being heard is great and empowering, but again, the paradox, it can take people away from really doing something, from real action. I call this "moments of more and lives of less." In other words, you have these moments when you feel as though you're doing more, and you feel empowered, but actually, you haven't engaged with the world. So you feel great, you've tweeted an opinion, you feel, "I'm in the world," but actually, joining a political group, learning something, taking some kind of action in the world, in the real world on the street in your community, would actually be a moment of more.

BM: But that requires negotiation, compromise, even vulnerability.

ST: And conversation with other people. That you can't do it from your room, which so much of the internet allows you to do. I mean, in
-education and in politics, I think we want to
go to a place where we’re looking to give things
the complexity that they deserve.

BM: But many elite institutions are pressing the
case for online education.

ST: Yes. And this is something that I think is very,
very interesting now. It’s good for certain kinds
of content. It’s good for places that couldn’t
possibly get this education. But I think that the
great education happens when there’s really a
conversation that mixes content, the passion of
the instructor, and the conversation with a
student who’s physically there with the
instructor. As a professor, the teaching of the
content happens through the weaving of my
passion for my subject with delivering the
content. I don’t want them to come in for a
discussion after they’ve been alone in their
room learning this stuff. I want to be with them
while they’re learning.

ST: So I’m willing to go along with this, if this is for
people who don’t have access to the ideal. And
this is the best they can have. But in technology
so often, we use the argument that there’s
something that’s better than nothing. And in all
of a sudden, it becomes better than anything.
So this thing, this online education, starts out
that it’s better than nothing, because all these
people in third-world, this is the only thing
they can have. So it’s better than nothing. And
then all of a sudden, it’s better than anything.
It’s better than anything MIT can provide for
our own students, and it begins to creep in. I
mean, sell it to other universities in the United
States because it’s better than what they can
provide. And all of a sudden, it starts to be a
model for education. And that’s when I think
we need to sort of take a breath. My attitude
toward so much about technology is really just
take a breath and just approach it and say, "Do
you really want to say that flipping the
classroom is really the best model for
everything we’re doing?" I’m not so sure.

BM: So do you have a couple of practical things that
you would suggest to people about how to use
this technology? Facebook ‘n Twitter social media (.) for happiness and meaning?

ST: I’ve a lot of practical advice for parents (.) which is to create sacred spaces in your ho:me.

BM: By which you mean-

ST: Places that are device free. Kitchen dining room and the car.

BM: Hm.

ST: You can't introduce this idea when your child is 15 that the car is for chatt:ing. From the very beginning kitchen dining room and the car are places where we talk. And you ex:plain to your child, "This isn't a you know- this is important to me (.) we're a family I need to talk to you. I need to talk to you."

BM: Sherry Turkle, I appreciate your coming to share your ideas with us.

ST: Thank you so much.
Appendix B
The New York Times comments

The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In

The problem is not whether children are inebriated by moments when they have their parents' full attention. This is, of course, something that children have to learn. What is the problem is that a child has "learned" that parents are systematically taken to "another place" by their connectivity devices. What you don't want is a child who from the beginning sees technology not as a tool but as the competition.

Sherry Turkle

The New York Times comments

The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In

Parents' use of smartphones and laptops — and its effect on their children — is becoming a source of concern to many.

Sherry Turkle, author of "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other," published early next year, will answer readers' questions here throughout the day.

Comments are no longer being accepted.

154 Readers' Comments

1. di california
   June 10th, 2010
   8:04 am
   A mother made a child wait a minute or two for her attention because she was doing something not directly involving him. She even let him fuss for a moment rather than instantly reward his whining.

   And this is considered a "troubling" incident? Does the nip-picking and guilt-tripping of the modern parent ever end?

   Recommend

2. River
   Queens, NY
   June 10th, 2010
   10:59 am
   Now we have another psychological feature to study. A lot of psychobabble goes on. I'd let the kids scream long enough, and then the parents would react - just as it has been for ages.

   Recommend

3. pph
   Bangalore, India
   June 10th, 2010
   6:04 am
   My wife and my daughter do not like me using my communicator. On weekends I just switch it off or put it into silent mode and throw it away.

   Monday morning hunt it down and start getting back on missed calls, emails. Nothing serious gets missed. Empirically observed. Relatives and close family friends call on landline if needed. My daughter would rather have me spending time focused on her or even do nothing (just hang out), but phone/laptop really irritate her. She's 6.

   Recommend

4. Sherry Turkle
   Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"
   June 10th, 2010
   11:02 am
   This reader points to a constructive idea for handling this issue: the establishment of a "rule" about when phones are there and when not. You could have a "no phones" policy for a weekend. It could be for three evenings a week. It could be for one weekend day. What matters is that children see this as a device that makes demands on their parents (this is part of adult life) but not something that at any moment can take them away. The issue is not just calls, of course, but imprinting oneself in e-mail and messages that tend to multiply when you answer them.

   Recommend

5. Petry
   Tuscany, Italy
   June 10th, 2010
   5:03 pm
   '2009: Kim So-yeon, 23-month-old Korean child, died from malnutrition and neglect after both her parents spent hours each day in an internet cafe raising a virtual child on an online game, 'Prios Online.'
8:05 am

(From Wikipedia's List of Unusual Deaths)

The Korean tragedy is not typical, but shows that games have a need to acknowledge that we are vulnerable to being swept up in games, as well as in e-mail and messaging. Accepting our vulnerability will help us find ways to protect ourselves and our children.

5
Times Square
June 10th, 2010
8:05 am

I'm trying to say something insightful here but I can't concentrate because my kid won't stop interrupting me.

Recommend
Recommended by 108 Readers

6
Sherry Turkle
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"
June 10th, 2010
11:02 am

This answer is helpful because it uses humor to point out that parents and children have always been in an attentional dance. It is good for children to see parents involved in other things than their children. Children want to know that their parents have other things in their lives. It takes the pressure off. The child is not there to be the parents' amusement. But we have introduced something disruptive: a device, that from the child's point of view, can take parent away from any conversation or activity, at any time, and that always seems to be given precedence. Children talk about looking up from scoring a point in basketball or lacrosse to see their father, in the stands, on the phone. They talk about sitting next to a parent watching a game on television while a father is texting and feeling nostalgic for the casual banter they had when it felt they were there together. What is important is not to get defensive about our compelling devices. We are not going to throw them away. We are going to put them in their place.

Diane
Baltimore, MD
June 10th, 2010
8:05 am

That our children have to "sit out" to gain our attention and interruption is distressing. However, I remember the same thing happening with my daughters thirty years ago when my phone calls (landlines, only) to my sisters ran longer than fifteen or twenty minutes.

Now I would like to see a similar study relating to the use of the baby car seats that are required in cars. Too often I see these contraptions unbuckled and used as a carrier which in turn become just another piece of luggage that is piled down on any surface. The baby who has been shaken awake by the jostling back and forth in the walk from the car falls asleep again and is left in place. How much of that most important close, body-to-body contact is lost in the early years of life? And how does that 'neglect' affect a child's development?'

Thank you for this opportunity to express an opinion on these subjects.
Diane

Recommend
Recommended by 14 Readers

7
bbbo
Washington, DC
June 10th, 2010
8:10 am

I gave up on technology when I was riding the subway in DC one day. I looked around and I was the only person of the dozen passengers on the train not using a cell phone or other device. The next day, I canceled my Verizon phone contract. I've never regretted it since.

Recommend
Recommended by 62 Readers

Sherry Turkle
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"
June 10th, 2010
11:04 am

Many people who grew up in a world where coffee shops, train stations, and train rides were places to strike up a conversation, say that the flight to the mobile device lessens their good feeling of living in a community. It also withdraws us from the street, a place that was a place of social life, often rich and vibrant. We live in the early days of the mobile culture. One hopes that we may "miss" each other, take stock and make the corrections.

I cringe every time I see a mother completely engrossed in a phone conversation while pushing a child in a stroller. Isn't there something she
I share the frustration that that theme is not central to a larger research tradition, but it would be a mistake to conclude that there isn’t something new and identifiable here. It used to be rude to interrupt a conversation to randomly talk to someone else. Now, we routinely interrupt our conversations to pick up other ones, giving the signal to those we care for that they can be put on “pause” for anything that comes over the device. We turn our friends, family, and particularly our children into “pausables.” This is a problem.

Bad parenting knows no boundaries. These so-called adults are anything but. Just like wife-beaters raise the next generation of wife-beaten, these parents are raising the next generation of distracted electronic gadget freaks who are too distracted to be of much use. It doesn’t bode well for society.

Having just returned from a family vacation, I can say that this problem crosses all generations. My granddaughter was texting her boyfriend, my adult kids were attached to work and friends, all of us hid our technical devices with us. Playing with the baby was continually interrupted as adults were distracted by incoming messages. It is interesting that we cannot stay in the present with people or our current surroundings. It is a new and very frightening human behavior that has the potential to destroy the normal flow of life – conversation, observation, emotional connections.

In my own “retired” life, I’m not sure what to do. My retired husband is on his computer from morning until late night. The silence is the house is often deafening while he communicates with old friends, plays games, or surfs the Internet. I’m trying to remember how we lived before computers and other forms of instant communication. I recall that we actually talked to each other without blinking down, we spoke in paragraphs instead of short “just a minute” or “oh” (not really listening, just waiting to return to what is really important - the next message from someone else who is not actually present). It’s the NEW problem in OLD AGE.

I’ve decided that since body language is 50% of communication, that our future ability to communicate is in great jeopardy. When we live our lives in short soundbites, we lose our ability to pick up cues like frowns or raised eyebrows or slumped posture (seductive). Constant technological communication is an ADDICTION - and not different from watching TV or gambling all day.

In my own life, I try to think of solutions - but then I hear another email come in. I am so curious that I can hardly resist peeking. But I have found that it takes courage to PUT LIMITS ON MY OWN BEHAVIOR and schedule activities that require leaving the technical devices out of sight and mind. It feels good to be wholly in sync with the person next to me. It feels good to read a book without interruption. It feels good to walk in the park without hearing a “ping” in my pocket. I’m not sure - because here I sit writing this comment to complete strangers without enjoying the beautiful morning in my garden. Oh, well – gotta go.
I agree that some of the first things we have to do to get things right is to use the technologies as occasions to ask ourselves: What are our values? How do we want to live? What is important? If getting out in the stillness of nature is not important, a vibrating mobile phone will not help. If quiet time with a partner where you give each other space to not only share the "news of the day" but what was important about it is important, it should be a no laptop/no smartphone time.

These devices challenge us to redefine what our values are. Some of the first things we will do will just look like reclaiming common sense. Gradually, I believe that we will right the balance in the culture.

The author of this article suggests that parents are on their smartphones because they feel pressure from work to be constantly available. I am sure that is true in some cases, but as a person who has many friends with small children, I can tell you that these parents are just as likely to be surfing Facebook or other leisure websites. To me, there is a big difference. Taking out 5 minutes to answer an essential work email is different than voluntarily ignoring your child to further your own internet social life.

My own investigations support this point. We are not captured by what is important. We are captured by the experience it gives us to feel captured. There would not be a problem if parents excused themselves for brief periods to attend to other things. The problem is that parents communicate that there is another reality, another place that they would rather be, and that, in fact, has their attention.

The problem with judging based on 5 minutes of observation is that you really don't know what is going on. I frequently have to log onto work e-mail to compensate for the fact that I am running late, because sometimes kids throw fits when getting dressed because he wanted to wear the blue shirt that was 2 sizes too small, or have petty emergencies right before time to leave the house. And it is a universally understood (by moms) truth that when mom is on the phone any pre-schoolers who was quietly playing with her puzzle a moment ago will either desperately need mom's attention or bolt from the room to take the chance to get into something while mom is distracted. 100 years ago moms did not ignore the dinchens, or the bread that needed to be baked or the washing in order to give 100% attention to her little ones. It is only modern women who are expected to live in a child focused bubble 24 hours a day somehow managing to magically afford this luxury of free time on one income. Get real.

I am very sympathetic to this response. What I am hearing from children who find parents’ practices upsetting is not the reality that there has to be e-mail, but that there seems to be no rules (of politeness, of acceptable boundaries, of "special time") that surround it. It probably is better practice to sit, uninterrupted, for a half-hour Disney cartoon, than to sit down for a "movie night" with your mobile device. I think the focus of conversations with parents should be on boundaries, not whether or not you can use your device.

The "quantity" "Quality" issue regarding children has always puzzled me. A small child doesn’t understand the difference. Small children need instant answers to their questions. That isn’t the same as responding to whining, (my children were not allowed to whine, ever!) It is recognizing that children don’t have an internal clock to let them put off answers. You can get a small child to stop nagging at you by answering their request immediately - yes or no often works well if consistent and appropriate. Older children are a different thing altogether, and can readily see the difference between quality and quantity. But children do learn from what they observe, much more than from what they are told. And, if they see their parents constantly flitting...
with an electronic device, not responding to them or to each other in a meaningful way, then the children will also behave that way. No one likes to be ignored when they feel they have something important to say or discuss.

The increasing addiction to the handheld devices is, I think, far more dangerous to our mental health and relationships than television ever was because of its portability.

---

Sherry Turkle

Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"

June 10th, 2010
12:42 pm

This response says something so important when it stresses the portability, the "always-on/always-on-you," quality of today's technology. It is not a bad thing to need to "excuse" oneself from a conversation, even from a dinner or a party in order to attend to something important. The danger here is how parents can now be in what has been called "continuous partial attention."

There is also the issue (but perhaps this is for another time) of what we do to our own minds when the best we can do is give partial attention to our own thoughts.

---

woodnuff

seneca falls, ny

June 10th, 2010
10:19 am

I think technology at funerals. The should have read the several men in their 50s and 60s in the row in front of me started to play with their blackberries during the service. And their women companions did nothing. I always speak out when someone starts to use a technological device in front of me while we are in conversation. Unfortunately, children do not have humor, verbal agility, and the power of shame in their arsenal to teach offending adults, whether young or old, that respect, courtesy, and face-to-face attentiveness are really the keys to effective interpersonal communication, not typing away with head cast down, on a little black device.

---

Sherry Turkle

Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"

June 10th, 2010
12:43 pm

When I first came back to work from maternity leave, I didn’t have any particular rule regarding use of my Blackberry (which receives my work email) around my baby daughter. I was amazed to discover the degree to which I was able to zone her out if a compelling work email came in, regardless of what activity I was in the middle of with her. I soon imposed a rule -- no Bb use in front of my daughter. If there’s a truly essential work need -- such as an occasional after-hours crisis that requires email exchange -- I make sure my husband is in a position to focus on my daughter’s needs and activities, and I leave the room to handle it. I just wasn’t acceptable to me that my daughter, now a toddler, might have to compete with a little black gadget for her mom’s attention. I have never once regretted this rule.

---

mike

Washington, DC

June 10th, 2010
10:20 am

When I first came back to work from maternity leave, I didn’t have any particular rule regarding use of my Blackberry (which receives my work email) around my baby daughter. I was amazed to discover the degree to which I was able to zone her out if a compelling work email came in, regardless of what activity I was in the middle of with her. I soon imposed a rule -- no Bb use in front of my daughter. If there’s a truly essential work need -- such as an occasional after-hours crisis that requires email exchange -- I make sure my husband is in a position to focus on my daughter’s needs and activities, and I leave the room to handle it. It just wasn’t acceptable to me that my daughter, now a toddler, might have to compete with a little black gadget for her mom’s attention. I have never once regretted this rule.

---

Jill

Portland, OR

June 10th, 2010
10:20 am

My wife had a Blackberry, and now has an iphone, and I wish I could throw them both in the garbage. She is constantly taking it out to peek at the screen and furtively tapping out messages, and she is totally zoned out while she is interacting with it. I do worry about the safety of my 5 year old daughter sometimes, and going out to dinner means watching the two of them play with their phones. Last year she was so absorbed with her iphone while we were supposed to be on vacation that we had probably the biggest fight of our entire lives and came the closest to getting a divorce as we’ve ever come. I think there are some people who just can’t handle the demands these things make on their attention.

---

Sherry Turkle

Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"

June 10th, 2010
12:42 pm

I am very sympathetic to this comment, not an unusual one in my experience. The key here is that these devices do put us into a different "zone." Children understand this and this is why the devices are so...
disruptive. Children can tolerate a parent being busy. It is harder if you experience your parents as in a different zone. At the limit this can be frightening.

Apparent distractions by electronic devices like smart phones are erasing the advantages the more educated and affluent parents once gave to their offspring. Instead of engaging their young children in conversations as they go about daily activities these parents are talking on cell phones, reading e-mails, texting, etc.

I'm glad we didn't have all this when I was a young parent. I wonder what kind of parents my grandchildren will be?

Sherry Yurkle
Author, “Aspen Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other”
June 10th, 2010
12:46 pm

This raises something very poignant. Some of the parents who get most “lost” in their phones, are the very parents who have done so much and sacrificed so much for their children’s education. We hear a lot about the importance of families having “dinner” together. One of the most important things here is the conversation that takes place at dinner. The mobile revolution, as one of its unintended side effects, has undermined family conversation. A family can eat here. Have dinner together three nights a week, even two. Or two nights and a weekend breakfast. If family members’ schedules are very different, go for midnight pancakes once a week.

What is important is that children grow up with the sense that there is a space for conversation.

How about studying these people while they are at work to see how much time they engage in personal business? You hint at it. My own non-scientific impression is that they have their priorities all mixed up and confuse frantic activity with actual productivity. In the end, they’re probably not very good at either task, but they sure give the impression of working hard.

CReader
stamford, ct
June 10th, 2010
10:21 am

This study will be another reason for employers to discriminate against mothers in hiring and during employment. Mothers (and fathers to be P.C.) will be seen as less productive because they are drawn between their children and their mobile email device.

JN
Chicago
June 10th, 2010
10:22 am

A key factor in emotional connectivity is eye contact with your child. Even if the parent talks to the child while scrolling down the I-phone, a key element in the parent child relationship is missing. The ability to engage, focus and attend begins with eye contact. Increasing numbers of children struggle with attention and visual perception. Perhaps the of visual attention (in the ear, while texting, etc.) are contributory to this alarming trend. For more on the importance of visual attention, refer to www.TheMotorStory.com.

Jill Mays
Ridgefield, CT
June 10th, 2010
10:23 am

I started to write that parents should treat their children the way they treat their friends - who would go out with a friend and completely ignore them while texting? Unfortunately you see it all the time - couples, holding hands and each glued to a phone. And then there is the couple that wrote on facebook constantly during their honeymoon and another who facebooked the details of their first child’s birth - except for the few moments when they were too distracted. The world changes, sadly.

Jimmie Mae, be spotted somewhere, NC
June 10th, 2010
10:23 am

ekizer4
Oregon
June 10th, 2010
10:23 am

It’s one thing for a parent to use his or her smartphone to conduct essential business or even keep up with long-lost friends, but I draw the line at randomly text messaging aunts into the peanut gallery of the “comments” sections of
Oh,

Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:41 pm

What is so damned important that these people have to be connected 24/7? Whatever happened to dinner with the family sans electronics? We are turning into a country of morons. On my way to work today some idiot in his car practically broadsided an 18 wheeler while he was texting. Incredible stupidity and it's only getting worse. Another example of idiocy, someone texting near a taxi while crossing 7th ave.

Recommend  Recommended by 56 Readers

Sherry Turkle  
June 10th, 2010  
10:20 am

My personal favorite, in the spirit of "Is this a time to text? really?????" was being at a marathon in Florence and having a runner run by, texting. That was funny. Texting and driving is not funny at all. Many of the teens I interview complain that their parents text and drive. That is heartbreaking.

Recommend  Recommended by 26 Readers

CDS  
Tampa, Florida  
June 10th, 2010  
10:20 am

More troubling was a bus ride from Philadelphia to Bethlehem where a mother put her headphones in her car and the rest of us on the bus had to hear her 3 or 4 year old son (who she put in another row) repeatedly call to her and ask her questions. She was oblivious but the rest of us felt badly for the child.

Recommend  Recommended by 26 Readers

staysesq  
Ohio  
June 10th, 2010  
10:17 am

I don't have children, so I don't know if this is true or not, but it seems that parenting can be a very lonely undertaking. I can understand parents -- especially those who stay home to raise the child -- needing outside interaction. Obviously, though, parents should practice moderation and use good judgment.

It also seems that parents can never win; if they pay constant attention to little Susie, then they are raising a selfish, self-absorbed brat because Susie was always the center of attention. If they pay attention to their phone sometimes instead of little Susie, then they are raising a selfish, self-absorbed brat because Susie will emulate those who raised her. I truly don't know why people even bother.

Recommend  Recommended by 44 Readers

Hudson Valley  
Parent magazine  
June 10th, 2010  
10:26 am

How we use these new technologies may not be entirely voluntary, as some studies are beginning to show. Many of us seem to be prone to some level of addiction to screens of any size. How do you know it's a problem? One answer is when it starts to encroach on the time spent with our kids. We are looking at the challenges technology presents to parents on a number of fronts at Hudson Valley Parent magazine.

Recommend  Recommended by 4 Readers

Rae  
NC  
June 10th, 2010  
10:29 am

You can't really draw any conclusions about whether this was a "bad mommy" based on this one incident witnessed. Maybe the child had been begging her for her attention every 5 seconds all day and she needed a couple of minutes to get something done. It's not bad to make a child wait occasionally for our attention. They need to learn the world does not constantly revolve around them. A nicer way to say it may have been "Mommy needs to do this right now. I'll talk to you in a minute, sweetie." But maybe the mom had already said that 10 times to no avail. Don't judge.

Recommend  Recommended by 17 Readers

Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and
from a child is not a problem. Having technology as a constant competitor, where the parent zones out, often to accomplish the trivial, and then having a child feel that this parent is unavailable because in another “zone” -- that is the problem.

Parents need to divide their attention. We don’t need to be defensive, but realize that many of us are in the grip of something new.

Even my cat gets jealous when I spend too much time on the computer. He will rub his cheeks on the computer monitor to “mark” it and to show it the “affection” I am giving it versus him. If cats know this, then children definitely do this. This is how IT since my first child is only 2 months away. Seems like we need “Blackberry-aholics Anonymous” to get ramped up.

Hurray to Di in California! Exactly what I was going to contribute. My wife and I are currently in the toughest battle of our lives in trying to train our young ones that there are times when they simply have to wait. Whining, carrying on, and throwing a tantrum are just plain unacceptable if Mom or Dad is doing something legitimate that doesn’t involve them. It hardly matters what the woman in the article was talking about, but what if she was making a doctor’s appointment for her whining tot, or talking to a prospective employer to schedule a job interview? Should she put those functions on hold to respond to a child who has yet to learn that there is a world outside his sphere of reference?... Sisheh.

This is nothing new. I grew up in the 60’s and 70’s with parents who were (actually still are) addicted to television. I was not allowed to talk to my mother when I came home from school because “her story” (soap opera) broadcast from 3-4. I can count on one hand the number of times we did things together as a family. My brother and I turned out OK.

Search the NY Times archives and you’ll find articles about how “specialists in parent-child relations continue to decry the disruptive effects of television on family life”.

I think we need to strike a balance between an apocalyptic narrative and thinking that nothing has changed.

I am stuck in this answer by the role the reader grew up with (“Don’t bother me between 3 and 4 pm.”) That was a rule, a constraint, a limit. The problem with what we have today is that there are no constraints. A mom and daughter decide to make a shopping trip together, and the mother “checks out” during this precious time into the world of the Blackberry. We have to be compassionate with the adults in the situation. We respond to the stimulation of the “ping” of the phone wanting more.

But just because we are in a tough place here doesn’t mean that we can’t discipline ourselves to think of this as the “easy days” of this technology. We can still make the mobile culture into something that serves our human purposes.

my husband has missed that walking in the door greeting (daddy daddy daddy!) after work for my children’s entire lives be: he is on his phone, talking work, even after a 35 minute commute. they are 8 and 6. this shows no sign of stopping, even after (or in spite of) my annual pointing this out. on his deathbed perhaps he will reflect on this and regret it, the kids are now old enough to notice, the they penalize.

Isn’t this basically about lack of self-control, expressed through use of technology? My mother does this... I’m 30 so it’s not hurting me—but she also
has a history of questionable self-discipline in a lot of other areas of her life.

I spend all day plugged in at work, but I almost never turn the computer on at home. The more people know I’m available, the more available they will demand that I be, so I don’t want to set up an unpleasant situation for myself. Unless you’re an ER doctor, a first responder, or a plumber, most “emergencies” can wait until morning.

34. HIGHLIGHT (WHAT’s IN IT?)

Run
CA
June 10th, 2010
10:31 am

My sister used to bite my mom to get her attention when she was reading the newspaper. That was a real newspaper. In 1977. As long as there have been children, parents have ignored them.

35. OH
Boston
June 10th, 2010
10:32 am

It’s a little extreme to think that this trend is the end of society as we know it (as some commenters have suggested). It’s just “the next big drama” to be feared about. I’m sure the same was said when TV became widely available, or even landline phones. The same thing happens now like it did then – the weaker will give in, the stronger will resist. The parents who are already doing a sub-par job of it will sink even deeper, while the ones in control of themselves will get over it quickly and shrug it off as just another fashion trend. The people who are likely to ignore their child because of a TV show or a landline call or Cosmos are probably the same who are likely to ignore their child because of Facebook. So, please, recognize this difference and don’t put all of us in the same basket of doom.

36. Lelani Karp
Los Angeles
June 10th, 2010
12:33 am

I’m hearing the song, “The Cat’s in the Cradle” in the back of my mind.

At the age of 5 my son drew a very round pink pig and titled it, “MY MOM THE COMPUTER HOG ONLY ONLY.” These days I have to dance and holler to get him to look up from his massive member online role playing game (or whatever it’s called) to call him to supper.

My son has grown up just like me.

37. Hudson Valley
Parent magazine
Hudson Valley
June 10th, 2010
10:33 am

This should have a name. How about TDD, for Technology Distraction Disorder?

38. As Times Go By
New Jersey
June 10th, 2010
12:33 am

Ah, another way to be a bad parent, that I, thankfully, missed. My son is in his 20s now, and already has enough things to reproach me with. Moms, it is your right to feel forever guilty, and here is a NEW way.

39. Sherry Turkle
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"
June 10th, 2010
12:50 pm

I see a very poignant theme in so many of these comments. As a mother and a student of women’s history, I am very sensitive to women not wanting yet another reason to feel bad about themselves; one more item in the litany of how women do things wrong.

This is a societal problem that is having a particular impact on parenting. And actually, I think that mothers and children are in a very good position to demonstrate a way of doing things that will make us all sinner. If we can set rules at home, it might inspire people to think that is is possible to make rules for schools, classrooms, etc. that we will actually follow because we believe them to be in our best interest.

39. meggyesullivan
Boston
June 10th, 2010
12:33 am

Children should be able to feel that there parents are just as accessible (if not more so) than the gadget’s accessibility to the parent. Imagine that your desire to check your blackberry is just as much the addiction your child has
for you. Respond in accordance.

40. Daring Dog
VA
June 10th, 2010
16:34 am
One positive aspect of social media is that it allows stay-at-home parents to have 'adult' conversations from time to time during the day. Among my highly educated peers, women who take a year off to spend at home with their kids consistently report wanting "nothing more" than a conversation that does not include babbling. Social media might let them have that.

On the other hand, it also allows you to...yes...ignore your child.

I think that Ellie has it right about limiting our own behavior. I am constantly frustrated by g-chatters who won't shut up (or ask...you just sent me this email, why aren't you on the chat?) or who don't quite understand that, indeed, *my* time spent online is like the rest of my time in my life -- scheduled. I'm a schedule person. And now, the schedule says...time for the gym.

41. VM
Los Angeles CA
June 10th, 2010
10:58 am
Throughout history, there has always been parents that gratuitously ignore their children because [insert random reason here] -- If you have children, pay attention to them. Get your priorities straight. If you must occasionally be distracted, this should be fully and lovingly explained the minute your child is old enough to understand. In your quiet moments, assess the necessity of these distractions in your ability to be a good parent. Understand cause and effect.

42. Jap
DC
June 10th, 2010
10:25 am
I talked to a visually impaired gentleman on the sidewalk the other day, and he told me that a monther once ranned her stroller into him and yelled: "Watch where you're going!"
She was texting on her phone while pushing the stroller.

43. ALB
Dutchess County
NY
June 10th, 2010
10:39 am
I think all this being "connected" makes people feel popular, important, interesting, etc. But how could they be, when they don't DO anything! How interesting could their lives be when all they do is text, surf, FB & twitter all day? What could they have to talk about? Their lives can't be all that interesting! Get a life, people!

44. Donna A.
Demar, NY
June 10th, 2010
10:40 am
I agree with the author that this is a big problem. I don't think there's nobody out there who hasn't come across the situation she spells out about the child being ignored while Mom or Dad is busy with some kind of electronic device. Some posts alluded to the fact that as adults we've always had something that took our attention away from our kids for short spurs of time, but I think these people are missing the point: it's not that kids are having to wait for short periods for their parents' attention. These kids are being ignored by the very people who are responsible for raising them, and the reason they're being ignored is because Mommy and Daddy can't prioritize.

The article makes a very valid point: Our children look to us for interaction, especially in the early formative years. If they don't get the stimulus that they need, they will not flourish. Life is about choices. If you can't put your MD, iPhone, Blackberry, iPad or any of a number of communication devices away for the good of your child, perhaps you need to rethink whether or not parenting is for you.

Children require attention. They are not being "difficult" when they want to speak with you; they are doing what kids do at that age, interacting. PUT DOWN YOUR DEVICE and talk with them. Is there really an email or webpage that, if you don't check right now, will change your life dramatically? I don't think so.

I see people walking in a virtual stupor while their fingers busily text. They
text while they’re walking across a busy intersection, they text while holding a conversation (how rude), and really, is any of it more than just useless boster. Are those young kids texting something so important.

I know this form a communication is here to stay; I like it just as much as the next person. But I know when to leave the device in my pocketbook, I know it’s not safe to drive and text; some people haven’t learned this lesson. I know not to text while speaking face to face with someone, because it’s RUDE!

Somebody needs to write a book on electronic media courtesy. Then we have to find a way to enforce it, especially in the workplace. Texting should be outlawed during work...it’s such a distraction.

Sorry, I didn’t mean to pontificate so. It’s just really a sore subject and nobody has set down any rules.

Who is speaking on behalf of these kids whose parents are choosing communication media over them? It’s ridiculous that this article even had to be written.

---

**Sherry Turkle**

Sherry Turkle

Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"

June 10th, 2010

12:50 pm

This is, unfortunately, a common, and infuriating, occurrence in New York. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen mothers pushing their child on a cell phone, pushing one of those SUV strollers, empty, while their toddler struggles 6 or 8 feet behind. The obliviousness of the mother is obvious. Another charming sight is the mother with her headphones on who can’t hear her child crying. Why do these people become parents?

---

**CJ**

CJ

Midwest

June 10th, 2010

10:42 am

Younger users are engaging in rude, boorish behavior as they post nasty (and even damaging) comments about others and, increasingly, are unable to spell, write a coherent sentence, communicate face to face, or engage in any type of meaningful social discourse. So there go our social skills.

Underlying all this is the need to consider every message, regardless of source, as "urgent," leading to an epidemic of obsessive/compulsive behavior in other areas of our lives. Is it any wonder so many Americans are on prescription drugs?

It’s time to sever these electronic umbilical cords and, as the youngsters used to say, "Get a life!"

---

**Amy**

Amy

New Mexico

June 10th, 2010

10:42 am

You know what? My husband and I work very hard to provide a lifestyle for our family that my son benefits greatly from, because it allows him to have a private-school education, swim lessons, soccer, birthday presents for friends’ parties, etc. etc. Unfortunately, in this day and age, and in this economy, the price of that lifestyle is that sometimes Mommy has to take a phone call or answer an email from a client when it’s not convenient for my son.

I am really not sure why it is so terrible for parents not to spend every free second "engaging" with their children. My parents certainly did not spend every free second "engaged" with me when I was a child; I certainly remember quite a bit of TV and also phrase like "go outside and play, and don’t come back until it’s dark." (Talk when parents could say that and still
be relatively certain the children would, in fact, come home at the end of the day. We strictly limit TV. We spend a lot of time playing with and reading to our son every day. We eat dinner as a family every night. Now I have to feel guilty if I’m with him and I have to take a five-minute phone call! Give me a break.

Children have not ever been raised by parents who did nothing but sit and stare at the child, waiting on his/her every whim. Not ever, in the history of the world. I disagree some parents take the cell-phone thing too far—we have a rule that phones cannot be in-hand during meals, bedtime or bath time. And I have gotten infuriated myself when, for example, we see parents with their kids at the park, and the parent is yakking away on a cell the entire time instead of playing with their kid. That being said, let me give you an example. I try to pick up my son from school every day at 3:30, so he doesn’t sit there until nearly dinner time like so many of his peers. My clients’ workdays don’t stop at 3:30, however, and sometimes I have to take a call or send an email while I’m with my son in the afternoon—and sometimes he doesn’t like it. But I learned pretty early on that I was not going to have my parents’ undivided attention 24/7 and I survived just fine.

I am not sure if the “experts” have noticed, but kids today seem extremely coddled and spoiled compared to how children were when I was growing up, or especially in my parents’ generation. Studies of college student “millenials” are showing record-high levels of self-involvement and record-low levels of empathy. Let’s please not do anything else to raise another generation of petulant, spoiled narcissists who think the world revolves around them.

---

48. MagassetT

Seattle area
June 10th, 2010
10:49 am

Comment 25 - I agree; another bus ride across WA state, over Labor Day weekend several years ago; a mother and “about” 1 year old child got on the bus in the middle of the state. The kid (1) apparently left a stuffed animal in the bus station at Ellensburg, and whined, moaned and cried about it—all while the mother had earphones in and turned up loud enough that the closest other passengers could hear it. Her reply to the kid’s complaints: “Well you shouldn’t have forgotten it, the should you?”

ONE: I was appalled because a 3 year old child, traveling, would forget their HEAD if it wasn’t attached; and TWO: the mother was blissfully ignorant of the irritation of the rest of us passengers for the 3 to 4 hours we were TRAPPED in their environs. UGH! NEVER again have I take the ‘hound—sorry!

49. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

by New Hampshire
June 10th, 2010
12:05 pm

I agree with di’s post. I am a committed parent but not a relentlessly attentive one. This is for my own sanity as well as that of my kids. The article seems to underscore an unhappy truth that many stay-at-home moms realized a long time ago: hanging out with your children can be boring.

50. don mt

June 10th, 2010
12:36 pm

Hang up the phone and listen to your kid. It doesn’t make you smart to play with your smartphone; it makes you rude and clueless. You’re not 007, you’re someone’s mom or dad.

---
The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In

by JULIE OELLO

Parents' use of smartphones and laptops — and its effect on their children — is becoming a source of concern to researchers.

Sherry Turkle, author of "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other," to be published early next year, will answer readers' questions here throughout the day.

Comments are no longer being accepted.

154 Readers' Comments

I have a few things to say about this, some of which have been covered in the comments above.

1. Remember the helicopter parent phenomenon? Yeah. First we pay too much attention to our kids, now we don't pay enough attention. Just another thing for the media to make us feel guilty about (meanwhile they are the ones pushing smart phones down our throats).

2. There is no data on how smart phones affect parent-child communication. This article is purely speculation. Give me a good, randomized trial study and I'll...well I'll probably find something else to critique about it. But at least there will be data.

3. Related: one person watching in horror as a mother "ignores" her son does not a distantstras and is In fact, highly judgmental. That person in the elevator had no idea how much or how little attention the mom was paying to the kid on a regular basis. As we all know, 2 year olds can be demanding little monsters and say "More, More!" over and over without having anything really to say.

4. Do I think I spend too much time on my smart phone? Hell, yes. I'd like to see a study about parental communication and smart phones, as well as parent-child communication. But I am also a semi-distracted parent by nature. If it wasn't the smart phone it would be something else for me (a book, the lint on the carpet, etc.). That's just who I am. An actual STUDY that I read said it's the quality of the time that you give to your kid that counts, not the quantity of the time. And I feel that I give my kid good quality time so that I can justify a little me time on the smart phone.

52
Burlington, VT
June 19th, 2010
12:10 pm

Before cell phones, there were ipods. Before ipods, walkmen. Before walkmen, television. Before television, radios. Before radios, newspapers. Before newspapers, there were wolves and coyotes after our hen house.

Recommended by 14 Readers

53
Phoenix, AZ

Is anyone else concerned about children's images being posted by parents on...
social networks? There is lots of talk about definitions of privacy these days, but will those "cute" little children feel the same way about the use of their phonographs when they hit their teens and twenties? I know this is a parent's right, but in times of divorce and differences of opinion, which parent's rights prevail? Does a child own their own "face"?

**Sherry Turkle**  
Author, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other*  
June 10th, 2010 5:07 pm

This question is so important. I think that we will want a new look at privacy and the rights to our images. We are in the early days of figuring this out. The most important thing is to think of the digital culture we have made as a part of its infancy.

We tend to think that it is "natural" because we have been around it for so long, we have seen it grow up. But really, the basic questions are just coming up now, now that we have some experience with the Net, now that we have seen a generation grow up with the Net, and now that we are trying to parent on the Net.

The rules are not written, the culture needs to be shaped.

**Kid mexmex**  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm

I have wondered about the effect technology has had on parental interaction. One thing that bothers me is seeing parents pushing children in strollers while talking on cell phones. I always spent such time talking to my children while I pushed them along and then as they walked along, those times were excellent opportunities for talking and encouraging the children to talk. Talking on cell phones prevents that type of parent-child interaction.

**Y.o**  
Cho  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm

The problem is not the use of technology, the problem is people who don't want to be good parents.

**Mena Raciel, MD**  
Solana Beach, CA  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm

As has been said, there have always been distracted parents who look for diversions from interacting with their kids. Electronic diversions may be more seductive, but that's the only difference I see.

Interesting though, my two grown sons (21 and 23) are starting to limit their use of cell phones and social media because they see it interfering with human interaction in their own lives. One has cancelled his Facebook account, the other refuses to answer his cell if he's involved in a real-life activity (though he will return calls).

I wonder how it will affect their friends?

http://mamasoncall.com

**Sherry Turkle**  
Author, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other*  
June 10th, 2010 7:14 pm

I do see in my research that it is young people who are starting to "push back." I think this is a very good sign. And I think it is one that is going to continue. There is push-back on how much is time spent online, on texting, and very important, there are new questions about the regime of privacy in which they have been brought up.

**Andrea NYC**  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm

After hearing/reading about how important eye contact is for babies I am always so sad and concerned when I see both men & women focused on whatever device they have or alternatively, plugged into an mp3 player while supposedly "waxing" their childrens (or both). When I was a child if I was pestering my parents for something, they would momentarily stop, look me in the eyes, and say, "Mom's on the phone" or "Dad's talking to someone, you need to wait," that's a very different experience than being treated like a pesky fly that's being absent-mindedly flicked away... Last Labor Day weekend my husband and I were house and cat sitting for my sister and
spontaneously decided on a "media-free weekend." It was lovely, no TV, no radio, no computers, no music. We went for walks, talked, read books in companionable silence, cooked together, had meals outside and watched the birds, chattered around the garden... Utter bliss and highly recommended.

58. Bob Lab
USA
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm

I work in a research-dominated field involving computers and mathematics; I am always working, always having to be in touch via phone or e-mail with collaborators, etc.

However, my time with my son is my time with my son. I have set the rules that before 8am, he has my attention, and from 6pm until he sleeps, he has my attention. I go back to work, swatting e-mails and doing work when he goes to sleep or before he wakes up. I sadly do have to work on weekend day, but I have established with my colleagues that I take one day off, no e-mails, no connectivity.

In my experience, I have met one or two people who are so important that they must work 7 days a week; everyone else needs to come to terms with the fact that they are not that important, and the world will continue to spin on its axis if they don't do work on Sundays.

59. Patrick
Ashland, Oregon
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm

Oh, do I ever agree with poster #21. There simply is no substitute for face to face, eye contact communication. It leaves children, especially children, with an impression that they're not that important. And, maybe, they're right. Maybe that's the way it is, but surfing, that cell call really is more important in some parents' opinions.

However, get ready. If you constantly ignore those (at times) nagging, irritating, demanding little ones now, they will ignore their parents when they hit age 12 or 13. Then, the parents will become the irritating, nagging, demanding ones.

60. Bob Lab
USA
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm

I also want to point out the following:

Before I had kids, I used to interact with distant friends through social media outlets such as Facebook, spend time looking at youtube videos, or comment more (rarely) on Timesarticles.

Now, my friends (without kids) will ask, "Did you see that video I sent you," to which my answer is more often, "No." When I have the time to get work done, I can no longer waste it on internet distractions. To me, that has been one of the more valuable lessons of having a child: I do not waste as much time as I used to, and I'm constantly striving to be more efficient, so I can maximize time with kids and time doing work while still having time to rest and exercise for myself.

Most of us somehow were able to survive pre-cell phones and pre-internet. If we all try hard enough, I bet we could do it again.

61. a
santa monica, ca
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm

If the writer knew the difference between coincidence and cause, she'd have nothing to write about.

62. j
Massachusetts
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm

Magda Gerber, the brilliant educator for caregivers of infants and toddlers, said when a parent is with a child, his/her attention should be completely present with that child. Otherwise, the child/children should be in a safe place where they can play and entertain themselves (which creates good problem solving skills and self-sufficiency). Being physically present while emotionally unavailable is not good for the child. Children will practice behaviors, such as biting, to get attention, and then of course, these
behaviors are rewarded and reinforced with attention. Even if it’s negative, the attention is better than nothing, but it sets up very negative patterns between child and adult.

Glowing screens are addictive, whether they be computer screens or television screens. I believe it’s because they are like fires, which our ancestors had to keep going to survive. But screens do not enhance family life and responsible parents will close them so they can have meaningful relationships with their children.

To be an effective parent one has to parent and that’s impossible while engaged with a screen.

69. Elbrooklyn
Brooklyn
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
Sometimes I'm reading and I tell my bratty children "Let me just finish this paragraph" or page. Do I get scolded for this????

Recommend Recommended by 6 Readers

64. happy and healthy older
For Lauderdale
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
In the park this morning, I saw a mom pushing her silent child in a stroller, while chatting away non-stop on a cell phone. I was sad to see the missed opportunities for communication and conversation.

A chat with a child is more than just a language and learning experience. It gives the child the sense that he matters to the parent, that his parent values him enough to spend time with him. Spending time with a child conveys much more than words and ideas - it communicates values. How we choose to spend our time reveals what we value in our lives.

Mom of 4

Recommend Recommended by 20 Readers

65. Cindy
TX
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
This is such a whiny, annoying article. NYT is such a scold on kids/family issues.

Recommend Recommended by 5 Readers

66. systemat I
1 of n
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
Soon Rosie the Robot will be doing a better job with the kids anyway.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

67. Bill
Knoxville, TN
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
Laptops, smartphones, etc., don’t turn the hearts of parents to their children and certainly don't turn the hearts of children to their parents. I have never seen a smartphone kindle affection between parent and child. It is human to human connectivity that kindles affection.

Recommend Recommended by 7 Readers

68. Dave
Tucson
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
Cell phones are the cigarettes of the 21st century.

Recommend Recommended by 10 Readers

69. Jim
Denver
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm
I am a SAHM of a 7-month-old son. After singing Inj-Bijg Spider for the 30th time (complete with hand gestures) and watching him gnaw on his teething ring what seems like hours, I sometimes let my son play independently in a safe place while I look at a NY Times article for 5 minutes or connect with friends on Facebook or set up a playdate via email. These breaks prevent me from feeling isolated and brain dead. The days are enjoyable, but can be long and hard. I refuse to feel guilty about "tuning out" for a couple of minutes every few hours.

Of course, there are extreme cases and children are neglected when their parents tune out for too long. As in everything in life, moderation is key.

Recommend Recommended by 9 Readers

70. ox NY
I'm with no. 48 who says "get a life" and others who say "turn the thing off." I would put in a plug (pun intended) for using technology to make possible MORE family time. What I mean by the laptop and blackberry I use allow me some flexibility. I work alot but I can so things off site from work, in transit (handsfree, using the earpiece.. hate seeing false talking and driving and distracted running red lights).

The key is to use when it makes sense to be productive and then, turn it off! There are no calls or texting at our dinner table. No cell phones during weekend activities together (It's in the car, in case we need it but not on.) Be productive and tune in, then turn it off and have some family time. A much better balance.

**Recommend**  Recommended by 3 Readers

---

**71.** **HIGHLIGHT! (What's this?)**

C.A.
Bethlehem PA
June 10th, 2010
12:10 pm

It's interesting that this article purports to be about "parenting" issues but, at least anecdotally, focuses only on the conduct of mothers. I guess since, in the modern-day United States, fathers haven't stereotypically been expected to interact with their kids as much (or at least haven't been expected to be quite as attentive and nurturing as mothers have been), their use of technology at home is seen as excusable, while mothers are depicted as unfairly depriving their children of time/attention to which they are "entitled." The double standard strikes again.

**Recommend**  Recommended by 28 Readers

---

**72.** Jonathan
New Jersey
June 10th, 2010
12:11 pm

Ignoring a child repeatedly will result in the child adopting similar behavior, both to the parent and to others. This does not mean that a parent needs to capitulate to a child's whining. However, there is a great difference between ignoring a child or telling that child politely, but firmly, that you are busy at the moment and that he or she needs to wait a minute.

**Recommend**  Recommended by 6 Readers

---

**73.** Elizabeth Schuman
Kansas City
June 10th, 2010
12:12 pm

It will be interesting to see if electronic devices used by affluent parents and DVD players cranked in minivans bring affluent children's verbal skills down. I also wonder about smaller family sizes-- a lot of my talking and reading was with my two siblings. So my parents didn't have to be chatting me up every second. They read their own books and had grown-up talks, which actually inspired me to figure out what they were talking about.

Elizabethschuman.wordpress.com

**Recommend**  Recommended by 8 Readers

---

**74.** GoGo
Nevada, PA
June 10th, 2010
12:20 pm

Over the last year I have been really jolted by the way that parents have been using their smartphones while not only ignoring their children, but putting children at risk.

In the car line at school there are very few moms not talking/texting in their cars - fine when the children aren't yet exiting the building. But seriously, once the school doors open and the kids are being moved into cars and cars are pulling off - STOP with the crackberry!!!

I have actually asked a number of my friends what they are doing - it isn't work and it isn't important. It's FB updates and the like. It does seem to be a generational thing.

I was so shocked when a dear friend (kind, smart, wonderful) mentioned to me that while driving not only her child, but other people's children, that she was texting. I told her that I couldn't believe she would do that while driving on busy roads - she admitted that she never really thought about it - it was a wake up call.

It's one thing when my younger friends stop mid-sentence to text - I'm resigned to the fact that they don't see it as being rude.
I now understand that unless your email can be answered with LOL, OMG or I'll get back to you you'll probably have to request the answer in a more timely fashion because the constant inflow of emails takes precedence over and downs cut communications that require a real response.

But I will never understand how parents endanger not only their own children, but the safety of others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommend</th>
<th>Recommended by 17 Readers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **75. Dolly Fuller**  
DC  
June 10th, 2010  
1:03 pm | In DC, I see young parents wearing on iPods and earbuds walking their young children who are often in a stroller. How will they hear their children crying or calling for them?  
It used to be just young people crossing busy streets while texting, oblivious to other pedestrians and cars. Now it's middle aged people too. Everyone is missing out on what's going on around them.  
It's insane that otherwise intelligent people are spending their lives staring at a tiny little screen. Not that many years ago, we wrote emails and voice mails a couple of times per day. When did the need for instantaneous response happen?  
I guess the really stupid members of our society will get run down by cars or fall into manholes. Or not be able to form relationships and thus not reproduce.  
It is survival of the fittest after all. |
| **76. Lynn Valenta**  
Great Falls, VA  
June 10th, 2010  
1:03 pm | Parenting is usually a conscious choice. Once the baby is born, mature adults realize their own childhood is forever and they have an obligation to someone who is totally dependent. Caring for a child is one of the privileges and joys of life. We are asked to be responsive, encouraging, calm and supportive most of the time, only is it a very difficult job. Sadly, I too have seen parents walking on their cellphones while out walking their little ones strapped into strollers.  
Those who know from experience how much the parenting years mean to us later, and how significant a good relationship to one's mother can be, realize these otherwise engaged parents are missing a rare moment when they could focus affection and attention on their child. Research shows that children thrive when they feel loved and secure. It is important for parents to interact directly, strengthen a child's communication skills by speaking to them, and offer your active presence as a sign of security. After all, the first nurturer is also the baby's first love object. |
| **77. Dario**  
June 10th, 2010  
1:03 pm | Parents are, in effect, giving children the message that the digital world is more important than being in relationship with a human being in a real-time world right in front of their noses.  
There's a simple phrase for this behavior: "checked out." |
| **78. Caroline Schubert**  
June 10th, 2010  
1:03 pm | Even when I was a manager of many people, I limited answering the telephone to MY schedule. Do this with your children when they're at school, answer phone, use computer, during bedtime; answer the phone/computer. Otherwise, do stuff WITH the children from the house—together; read a book—together; plant a garden—together; make a meal—together; fold the laundry—together. And when they're in bed, share life with your spouse. Now that isn't hard, is it? |
| **79. Medina Bia Bia**  
Huntington, TN  
June 10th, 2010  
1:03 pm | I facilitate "Leading a Creative and Balanced Life" for business executives. You, the 24/7 connectivity is a fact of life in today's world, the operative word is balance. The deepest human need is 1 matter. By your presence and |
Sherry Turkle

Regarding post #47: Not to pick on anyone but...

Children have the inborn capacity for empathy but it must be fostered. So how are children to learn empathy if not from their parents? Empathy necessitates the thinking of and extending oneself beyond one's own comfort level; it involves the ability to place oneself in another's shoes. How is a parent, who ignores the child while spending exorbitant amounts of time on media, being empathetic to that child's needs? Not wants, but genuine needs?

Attentive, sensitive parents raise empathetic children who, in turn, become empathetic adults.

My 5 year-old daughter recently asked me to stop texting while we were having lunch because she wanted to talk to me. I hadn't even realized what I was doing - it had become second nature. Now I'm leaving my work blackberry at home and my phone in my purse. It's a relief - even my friends have commented how nice it is that I don't answer the phone in the middle of our face to face conversations! And really, there's nothing much more important than paying attention to what I'm doing and to whom I'm talking. Now I'm working on setting limits to my own computer time but am finding it hard not to "quickly" check my email. My daughter is helping me with that too - she tells me that it's nicer outside than on the computer and when I tell her I'll be just one more minute, she counts to 66 and says it's time to "x out".

 Seriously though, I do find that all the mobile devices are getting in the way of not just parenting but with connecting. More and more often we will be at dinner and see a family all on their mobile devices, staring down, not talking. I can't imagine that this is good for family communication and feelings of being valued. It's time to unplug and reconnect.

The parents who text while driving (over the protests of the kids in the car) should have their driver's licences and their children removed.

I have to agree on parents texting and driving. Children don't know how to make their parents stop. Children feel powerless. Parents, when you talk to them about this, feel ashamed, but many persist in the behavior. And demonstrating that behavior to a child, or showing that you are "powerless" to stop, is very dangerous.

This behavior of mother ignoring a child has nothing at all to do with cell phones or texting devices, etc.

Thirty years ago I would watch my sister in law engrossed in a conversation with another suburban mother, in her front yard, in the mall, anywhere really, with her young son at her side doing everything possible to get her attention, without success. Mommy, mommy, mommy, mommy! Some parents will seek distraction from their children and persist in ignoring them, no matter what the distraction might be.

I think my nephew did actually bite my sister in law.
116

Sherry Turkle
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"
June 10th, 2010 5:08 pm

People become "hooked" on the feeling of being wanted, needed, called upon. That there is something waiting "in the phone" that is not in the rest of their life. It is not just about addiction to a "device." It is about fantasies of what that device is going to deliver.

I disagree with "q" from CA. Though the example isn't major, it does reflect a growing problem with computer addiction. When a child resorts to luring his or her mother to get her attention, that is pretty bad. There are tons of blogs, boards and sites run by parents today and I am often amazed at how they can possibly write so much. I think the idea of having a no-computer zone is a great idea. It will be hard for addicts.

No matter how apt the metaphor of addiction is (and it is tempting!), it does not get us on the right path. We are not going to give up our devices; we have to learn how to live with them in ways that suit our human purposes. I feel the conversation that needs to happen is how to find a way to be companionate with ourselves about our misuse of technology, but learn to live with our devices.

When I was a child my mother would immerse herself in books and it was hugely challenging to get her attention. She had 4 kids in 5 years and I think she was overwhelmed by the constant demands. I would have to scream "Mom!" while standing right next to her to get her to attention. She took care of us and loved us but being with kids constantly (she was a stay-at-home mom) can be a lethal combination of boredom and stress, as well as the good stuff.

At last someone brought this up! I get sick at heart when I see a parent walking along, holding the hand of a small child, and talking a mile a minute on their cell phone instead of talking to the child. The little ones grow up so fast—how tragic.

I am guilty of this and try to temper myself. When my husband does it, I see how disconnected from our daughter he gets and it is troubling. The truth is that nothing at any point is more important than her and we need to find a way to separate from work. Most times, whatever email or text message or social media update we check can wait as tempted as we are to say that we "need" to check it right then.

www.frenchpressmemos.blogspot.com

86. MTL
Vermont
June 10th, 2010 10:00 pm

87. HIGHLIGHT? (What's this?)

FrenchPressMemo
Denver, Colorado
June 10th, 2010 1:30 pm

88. Recommend
Recommended by 1 Reader

86. Sherry Turkle
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"
June 10th, 2010 5:08 pm

85. Mei
US
June 10th, 2010 1:20 pm

84. Bradley Smith
Brooklyn, NY
June 10th, 2010 1:00 pm

How is that a few characters on a lit screen, an arbitrary caller, etc. can be more compelling than the people you are currently with? Is it the case that people are simply addicted to being interrupted?

Recommend
Recommended by 17 Readers
HIGHLIGHT? (What's this?)

Sherry Turkle
New York
June 10th, 2010
1:00 pm

I’ve stopped judging mothers I see in public. I can’t possibly know whether the texting or cellphone-talking mom is doing something “frivolous,” such as texting a friend (who may be giving her valuable support in what to do when a tantrum hits), or making a doctor’s appointment, or whatever. It’s her business. Saves me angst, saves her angst.

Recommend Recommended by 14 Readers

antio
update by
June 10th, 2010
2:39 pm

I was running at my local park just this past Tuesday afternoon. I saw a mother sitting in the grass, obviously texting. She was oblivious to her toddler. As I approached, her toddler made his way to the bank of a stream. I had to yell at the mother to get him before he fell into the water. It would only have taken a few moments for the worst to have happened.

Recommend Recommended by 15 Readers

UrbanSantana
NYC
June 10th, 2010
2:40 pm

Oh, please. I recall a study entitled, “Risks of Parenting while listening to Rock ’n Roll.” The people that perform these studies are the new hyper-indulgent parenting contingent that sees any form of distraction from needy kids as a mental health crisis. Life and technology progresses—whether we like it or not. And our kids are going to survive a few lost moments of Sammy time. These studies nauseate me. I gotta rush, my Blackberry’s calling.

Recommend Recommended by 1 Reader

bride
Lafayette, LA
June 10th, 2010
2:40 pm

I have to say it’s not just children…or the spouse of someone who’s addicted to his phone, I have to say most evenings I resent the fact that I get ignored so that he can spend time with his phone. I know how I feel as an adult. I feel acroy for the 5 year old experiencing the same thing. It’s not just the kids who are going to get screwed up with this…given some time, watch entire families crumble.

Recommend Recommended by 5 Readers

susan101c
San Diego, CA
June 10th, 2010
2:40 pm

I think these parents are (a) addicts and narcissists and (b) teaching their children to be the same. I suggest the following exercise to those people: turn off all the gadgets for a weekend, and watch yourself and your children already addicted ones (suffer withdrawal symptoms) for the weekend…this experience should tell you something, if it doesn’t, then heaven help you.

Fascinating article and conversation. I’m going to read a book now.

Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers

Broc8
Princeton, NJ
June 10th, 2010
2:40 pm

Hang up and thrive.

Recommend Recommended by 7 Readers

COD
Tampa, FL
June 10th, 2010
2:40 pm

Those who have not, might want to see the movie "Idiocracy", or, the future that awaits humanity.

Recommend Recommended by 1 Reader

vivant
Philly
June 10th, 2010
2:41 pm

Out to dinner the other night. Sitting across from a family of four—mom, dad, two children; neither kids likely older than 5. Mom intermittently staring at her Iphone. Dad strained to watch NBA finals on the TV across the room near the bar. Both kids pushing buttons on little laptops with their ears draped by headphones that look like satellite dishes. One parent boggled at, now turned-off, and kids locked onto a cold, computer monitor. Was this supposed to be a "family dinner" scheduled to provide bonding time? Yes. I know, don’t blame the technology. But in 2010 it sure seems its ability to seduce is more powerful, its grip more tight.

Recommend Recommended by 12 Readers

Sherry Turkle
Author: "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and..."
our human purposes. That is our job and the job we have to teach our children. Saying that we are "addicted" goes nowhere. We are not going to give up this substance. We are simply going to have to put it in its place.

Our solution is to put the cell phone and Blackberry on silent mode in a basket on a shelf when we get home. The phone and Blackberry them can be checked after the kids go to bed, or early in the morning before they are up. Funny thing, it helps with marital communication too.

What really makes me sad - and worried - is when I see an infant trying to interact pre-verbally with a parent while the parent is talking on a cell phone. I keep wondering what the infant is taking away from the experience. Does it understand that the parent's words aren't connected in any way to it's attempts at communication? And if it does learn that its parent is, essentially, cutting off any attempt to communicate, will it simply stop trying? I fear we may see an even sharper rise in autistic behavior in the near future.

I am also concerned about the impact of distracted parents on infants. Infants need human faces and voices. They need human touch. Ignoring this reality is grave, truly grave.
Although I certainly appreciate the problem that some people (and their families) face in becoming “addicted” to their devices (I remember, too, the internet interventions of the 90s), I think that it’s also important and fair to point out that these devices and the internet also extend our lives, allowing us to do things outside of an insular realm. I understand that doing this can make you insular to what is immediately in front of you but like all things: moderation.

What this technology allows me to do as a SAHM raising 2 children under 5 is to have and share my life (and the lives of my husband and children) with our family and friends (all of who live elsewhere). Yes, we’ve made friends here, but you cannot make family and these technologies have allowed my mother to “see” her daughter in a ballet performance and my father-in-law can Skype with my son and read him a story!

I’m also in school, online, pursuing a Masters. Because of these technologies there are times that I have to say, just a minute, to reply to a post or send an email, but these technologies allow me to pursue a career and have a life while raising a family.

Please don’t be so quick to judge. I engage my children and set aside quality time where I am completely present. But I may also be talking with my mother while I wheel them in the stroller so that I can share my day with her. The stroller is the best place for me to talk on the phone, they are engaged with the view and I need some time too.

Of course there are stories are abuse. With all things, there will always be. But let’s try not to blame the mothers (or fathers) and expect them to be perfect right out of the chute. Most of us will figure it out and set some boundaries. For many of us, technology allows us to extend our identities and reach out beyond our immediate circles. Parenthood, in this time of the extended cyber village can be a great thing too.

p.s. Sherry I just read The Subjective Computer: A Study in the Psychology of Personal Computation for my Ethnography class this semester... perhaps us mothers are finding control, identity, and relief in the subjective computer?

---

Sherry Turkle
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"

When my boss keeps looking at her Blackberry (under the table) during staff meetings I feel like biting her leg too. I can well understand the little one's feelings!

---

The problem is not only texting in meetings. Students text during classes, do online shopping, check out Facebook. We wired those classes. We now have to ask ourselves "Why?" Some professors think that college students are grownups and can figure this out for themselves. Others think it is time to make some corrections.
The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In

By JULIE SCILFO

Parents' use of smartphones and laptops — and its effect on their children — is becoming a source of concern to researchers.

Sherry Turkle, author of "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other," to be published early next year, will answer readers' questions here throughout the day.

Comments are no longer being accepted.

156 Readers' Comments

Oldest | Newest

101 Pilgrim Caps
June 10th, 2010
2:42 pm

As a very low income, single parent w/o a cell or hand held device, I often find myself interacting with other children in public settings, because the parents are sitting on the sidelines, paying no attention what so ever. They put the 'I' in i-Pad. Perhaps technology is biting us in the butt. For some odd reason I seem to find plenty of time for walks/balls, gardening, camping/beach, etc. Driving while texting or talking on the phone is child endangerment. And ignoring one's child while plugged in 94/9 is borderline child neglect.

Parents, teach your children well by example, or payback's coming at you. Do the right thing(s). My child has no access to electronic devices and I hear from his teachers/ethers how engaging he is in conversation/personality. Also to the commentator who challenges the tending chicken, bread baking, washing; these were moments to teach their young and engage them in life skills necessary to survival. Does your offspring know how to bake bread or even operate a washing machine?

Remember that parenting is the most important job you'll ever have.

Recommend
Recommended by 20 Readers

102 Ray Espinhu VA
June 10th, 2010
2:42 pm

As the father of a baby girl I have to say I think its my ego that keeps me from staying connected when with my daughter.

If it's not important enough to call me then its not important enough to text back - that's my motto.

Recommend
Recommended by 2 Readers

103 Roger Barr Philadelphia
June 10th, 2010
2:43 pm

Texting while driving with a child in the car should be considered criminal child endangerment.

Recommend
Recommended by 7 Readers

104 KU
June 10th, 2010
2:43 pm

We make a point of noting (with sad disdain) families in public settings where children and adults are too busy on a screen to interact with each other...Cause or effect I am not sure, but show me a family where people are tuning each other out & sanctioning it, & I'll show you a family in trouble. None of us, not my husband, my 11 (!) and 7 year olds, or I use electronic devices in public...I consider it rude & the height of insularity -- look around. Talk to people! Observe life! Participate!

Recommend
Recommended by 7 Readers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sherry Turkle</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>It makes me sad to see parents who take their child for an outing that consists of being isolated in a stroller while the parent talks on a cell phone. Some outing.</td>
<td>June 10th, 2010 2:43 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry Turkle</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>There are many cases where children tell me stories of parents ending family vacations because the Wi-Fi connection at the hotel wasn’t good enough. These are the kinds of experiences that distress children.</td>
<td>June 10th, 2010 7:15 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve222</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is that why that blond boy's hair is so long, because his mom is always texting?</td>
<td>June 10th, 2010 2:43 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Our family belongs in your smartphone demographic. We have multiple devices, a toddler and three pets vying for attention. The toddler wins most of the time, but not always. We love her, internet with her, read to her and play with her. But she needs to learn to share our time with the surrounding world. She definitely displays jealousy towards our computers - but it isn't a whole lot different than her jealousy towards the pets. She wants Mommy to play with her, not the kitty.</td>
<td>June 10th, 2010 2:43 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilar</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I have spent the last few months working from home, and have a laptop, Blackberry, and my landline to connect me. I also have 4 and 2 year old boys. What I do is multitask in the mornings, but make sure that if I have bursts where I need to focus on my work, I follow it up with at least 15 minutes of direct attention to my children. If I can I'll spare 30 minutes. Once I've gotten the bulk of my work done in the morning, I shut down in the afternoon, and spend the next few hours tending to my children and getting things done around the house. I always try to include them in the daily tasks, like cleaning, dishes and laundry. There's always time reserved for fun and games, too. I'll often let them play alone for a while so I can get some additional work done, and then I sign off from work for the day until they are in bed and I can finish job duties. It's a huge juggling act and very tiring, but a routine I am grateful for because it allows me time with my children, while also maintaining a job that I love. At least until they are both in school and I can spend more dedicated hours on work. Although I have to say, the 9-5 routine in an office can't possibly be healthy for adults either.</td>
<td>June 10th, 2010 5:47 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry Turkle</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>This is a very positive approach. Working at home does not mean that you are always available to your children. It should mean that you make clear the boundaries between work and your time with them. This can be tricky. Children loved that traditional moment of &quot;Daddy's home!&quot; or &quot;Mommy's home!&quot; that marked the beginning of family time. But it can be done.</td>
<td>June 10th, 2010 7:18 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cgr</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Seems like pretty skimpy qualitative evidence is being used to construct a &quot;the sky is falling&quot; POV on smartphones and parenting. Mobile devices are undeniably having a significant impact on how we connect, learn, socialize, and parent. The focus here is clearly on the potential for mobile devices to distract. This is fair -- I just wish that there was as much thought given to the potential of smartphones to add to family life and learning.</td>
<td>June 10th, 2010 4:42 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personally, I think there’s more promise in focusing on the opportunities that smart phones create for kids. Fast Company’s POV is worth considering as a counterpoint to the Luoladi leanings of this NYT article

http://www.fastcompany.com...

My daughter can read in part because of her learning experiences on my smartphone — surely that’s got to count for something?

It’s not how her grandparents learned — but that doesn’t make it wrong. Just different.

I don’t even like to see people ignoring their DOGS while bickering/texting.

How about the telephone and its effect on the interaction of mothers and children and the conversations of two mothers with fussy children at the grocery? Me thinks that even when mothers are beating laundry on the river rocks that this goes on. How much of the time this happens is more important than the fact that it occurs. Balance is required but so difficult to achieve.

Maybe if Mommy and Daddy spent less time online trying to have affairs and more time with Junior, Junior wouldn’t have so many learning disabilities.

As a Mum with two young boys, I hear, “Mama? Mama? Mama?” I would estimate about 80-100 times an HOUR. I scored well on these interactive tests and can concentrate well as a psychotherapist and writer — I know my boys get lots of attention from me, their Dad, and friends and relatives. In fact, it is only a chance to check in via smart phone that ALLOWS me to be at a sports event and not at work. There is a whole new story that this article misses. And the thinking behind these tests is very shallow, one-dimensional and has an anti-parent bias. If our society cared and supported parents to not work so much, you’d see an increase in attention for kids immediately. Stop blaming parents and look to our capitalist culture!

Last December, here in North Carolina, a mother and her 3-year-old son were killed when she drove under the lowered crossbars at a railroad crossing. Her 3-month-old daughter survived in the infant seat. The investigation revealed that the crossing lights and bells were working properly. Witnesses said that the woman was talking on her cell phone when she drove onto the tracks.

I think one of the most intriguing things I’ve seen was when I was at a restaurant recently. A mother and daughter were having their meal and I had full view of them. Thoroughly the entire meal, including dessert, the daughter was texting. No exaggeration. The girl was probably 15 or so. The mother kept quiet and picked at her food and ate in silence. I thought to myself how rude, then I thought why the hell didn’t the mother take the damned thing away from her??? Again, what is so important that it can’t wait or at least wait until you have a free moment? Someone said it earlier, cell phones are the new cigarettes.
how is this new? 85 years ago it was books, 60 years ago the radio, 30 years ago the TV 10 years ago Internet/computers now it smartphones.

Most good parents listen to their children most of the time, but there are times when WE JUST WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE!!

If your spouse continually ignored you—and your attempts at conversation or requests for help—in favor of the computer or smartphone, and then reassured you that they would give you some “quality time” over the weekend, how would you react? And what kind of a spouse would you have?

All you parents who gripe about your children whining for attention will yourself be whining twenty years from now that your grown children never call (or text, or email).

Make the time you have together count, now, or regret it forever. “Nature’s first green is gold. Her hardest hue to hold...” Kids are pure gold—your electronic devices are junk in comparison.

Technology can be a good thing - in moderation. I think many parents are able to reconcile children and the usage of cellphones etc. I do a lot of work from home, so my children are pretty respectful of the time I spend on the phone or the computer. They understand that it enables Mommy to be home a lot more than if she had a regular office job - more time with them. There is a balance to be struck, parents just need to figure out what is best for them and their children.

It's not only electronic devices. If a parent is viewing television, having a direct conversation with another member of the family, reading or meditating, the child will want attention. Hanging onto mother’s leg as mom is preparing dinner—children thrive on attention and sometimes they don't receive it. Don't worry Mom, they'll grow up and be fine. Excellent article.

Children need three things from parents: affection, acceptance, and attention. I avoid the term “quality time” as I am never sure how it bring defined and use “attentive” or “focused” time instead. Most of the time we parents spend with our children is described beautifully by Barbara Kingsolver (in a short story called, Interestingly, “Quality Time”), “Parenting is something that happens mostly while you are thinking about something else.” And she’s right. Children need and value this kind of time with their parents that I call present-but-not-interacting time and it actually comprises most of the time we spend with our children. Mommy is doing the laundry or working at the computer while the child plays in the same room. You talk to each other now and then but you aren’t focusing on the child. You may take a break to give the child a big hug or the child may look up and ask you, “Mommy, why are you crying?” At moments like this you shift into attentive mode. These focused interactions may be brief but they are vital to the child.

Small children are social networking all the time. They are born with the ability to get the attention of adults and do their version of a “Tweet” to tell others what’s going on: I’m hungry! I’m well! I’m bored! The problem is that the immediacy of the text message or phone call trumps the child’s methods in the case of far too many parents. I applaud the ingenuity of the leg-biter but I am not surprised. When kids can’t get positive attention they will settle for the negative kind. The parent who says, “Just a minute!” too often runs the risk of creating a demanding but (or, even worse, a child who gives up trying to get parental attention). If you think your kid is giving you a hard
time now, just wait!

There are a lot of mothers here saying that they need "zone out" time from their kids, and that's valid when you are talking about a break while your child is engaged in some activity of their own. Actually, I'd say it's a good thing--kids need to learn how to entertain themselves w/o their parent. Dancing attendance 94%? And parents need downtime. But isn't that what naptime and bedtime is for?

When you are at the playground or at story hour, or some other activity that clearly is a time for interaction with your child, and instead you are busy updating your Facebook page or texting your friends, you are doing yourself and your child a disservice. You are missing out on some of the sweetest parts of being a parent--parts that will disappear in just a few short years.

If parenting is stillifying to the point where your IPad and your Crackleberry are more fascinating for hours on end than your child, perhaps it's time to examine your feelings about parenting. If you're that unhappy you're not going to raise a happy child. And if you don't build that relationship now, God help you when that child is a teenager!

I used to have a friend who would, when others were visiting her, take phone calls that were not emergencies. She would then stay on the phone for an hour while we waited on her. After realizing that she wasn't going to change for me, I changed. I would leave when I saw that the call was more engrossing to her than my presence.

What worries me about this new way to ignore people is that nothing receives the attention that it should. In other words a child could be trying to tell us something very important while we are surfing the web on our smartphone or reading an email that can wait because the web or the email is more interesting than our child. And, while that may be true, children need to be spoken to, they need to feel that they are important, and if the time you are doing this has been set aside as time to be with the child, your attention to the gadget gives him the idea that he can ignore you in favor of his gadget.

I suppose the real question is what are we teaching children about human interaction when we ignore others in favor of a cell phone, an IPod, or other electronic gadget. TV does the same thing but it's not as all encompassing as a video game or an IPod can be.

I noticed this some time ago - most of the people I know who answer phone calls or look at texts when we are together never resume the conversation we were having after they have finished responding to the interruption. Never "so please finish telling me about_____" or "Oh, I was going to go on to say _______."

To me it's more or less an annihilation of the connection. I hate it, and I limit my time with these people, since I can do so. What is it like for a child, and psychologically how is that taken in?

In the photograph, whatever the kid is doing with all those bugs looks like a lot of fun. Hell, I'd trade places with the obviously bored mother.

I like bugs, too.
The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In

By JULIE SCIFIO

Parents' use of smartphones and laptops — and its effect on their children — is becoming a source of concern to researchers.

Sherry Turkle, author of "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other," will answer readers' questions here throughout the day.

Comments are no longer being accepted.

154 Readers' Comments

126. CR
   Boston, MA
   June 10th, 2010
   4:42 pm
   "Victims of their access? Poor rich kid! My daddy's iPhone is impeding my vocabulary and social development, now I have an excuse to get on the waiting list for the must-have-therapy on the UWS, and more reasons to blame my parents when things don't go my way later in life. If farming out child-rearing duties to nannies 5 days a week 9-5 isn't a worry, a few minutes on the iPhone is, really.
   Recommend
   Recommended by 0 Readers

127. Barry
   Near Chicago
   June 10th, 2010
   4:42 pm
   I have no sympathy for those who have allowed machinery to enslave them.
   Recommend
   Recommended by 0 Readers

128. Cathy
   MA
   June 10th, 2010
   4:43 pm
   Using an electronic device in front of a living, breathing human being with whom you are conversing or socializing is rude. Period.
   Anyone who is rude to their own children doesn't deserve them.
   Recommend
   Recommended by 7 Readers

129. i swift
   Richmond, CA
   June 10th, 2010
   4:43 pm
   It is rather flip for some of the posters to disavow the premise of this article. Of course it is not the first time that "modern conveniences" have been upbraided for having unintended consequences but that is precisely the point. We need lock (and forgive me for bringing this up) no further than the Gulf of Mexico to illustrate of what technology is capable.
   Recommend
   Recommended by 1 Reader

130. Const
   NY
   June 10th, 2010
   5:20 pm
   I can't tell you how many times I have watched a mother push her child's stroller down a busy Manhattan street while busily texting. If texting is more important than making sure your child does not come to some harm, maybe you should not have given birth.
   Recommend
   Recommended by 1 Reader

131. jnw123
   Earth
   Oh please. Is it really so different from our parents reading a newspaper or...
132. A True Conservative

June 10th, 2010 6:20 pm

"A mother made a child wait a minute or two for her attention because she was doing something not directly involving him. She even let him fuss for a moment rather than instantly reward his whining."

Just, WOW! Talk about missing the forest for the trees!

The problem isn’t one of patience; the problem is one of benign neglect. Asking a child to wait, and teaching the child to wait, are surely important lessons. However, asking a child to wait a certain amount of time and not holding to the commitment that once the time is up the child would then get the attention, that’s a problem.

I believe there is an addiction or an obsessive compulsion at work here that many parents don’t want to acknowledge. Clearly there’s a line somewhere between giving in to a whiny toddler and ignoring the toddler for a too long period of time in order to satisfy a personal craving.

Do you understand that the line exists? Do you acknowledge it?

133. DR Minnesota

June 10th, 2010 6:48 pm

I’m not a parent who believes that you must devote constant attention to a child. Over-involvement is just as detrimental as under-involvement. However, the threat of shutting children out by over-use of smartphones or laptops, is a potential problem. It’s a way of escaping from the real world and the real world includes your children and significant other. You run a real risk when you shut them out.

134. KenM

St. Louis, MO

June 10th, 2010 5:48 pm

I see mothers with strollers more often than not talking on their cell phones instead of interacting with their child. That is special time that should be spent talking about the world and interacting. Turn off your phones and spend that time with your child! Talk about the birds, or an interesting plant or beautiful flower or a squirrel. That is magic time that you can never get back.

135. Signiaue scotland

June 11th, 2010 12:22 am

Hello,

As I read this this morning, I was satisfied that “competition” of the tech a parent is utilizing in the presence of a child was placed forward for discussion to the audience of the NYT.

It also jogged my memory that I did not include these aspects of the adult and child and tech in my list over on the comment section of "Your Brain on Computers, Hooked on Gadgets, and Paying a Mental Price" 6 June 2010. Because it has and is discussed as to the role I as a parent have with my teen.

I value my child's input.

Also it jogged my memory of a jaunt for a lovely Saturday lunch at a casual deli where I and my partner became infuriated with one mother’s assessment of what was happening at a table aside us . . . a family arrives; a dad, a mom, a toddler with beginning words, a 7/8 month old and a grandma-ma. Buckle the toddler into the booster, kaplunk the car seat carrier holding baby onto the wooden table, the dad off to order, the grandma-ma seeming totally displaced as it appeared she had just arrived for a visit and that this was an outing to be relished and the mum evaporated into texting on a smartphone and scrolling on and on and on.

Not looking up for a glance as to her surrounds.

My opinion, what happened to 20 minutes of sharing food, that ancient connective need of us humans, the phone could just be left for the brief
moment.

My partner's opinion, the mum had no other time for uninterrupted use of the smartphone.

I know parenting often feels breathless in time for one's self, but ....

Now what irks me to nearly becoming mad is people backing out of their parking spot with the mobile already at their ear. How has technology made us feel secure and safe that we can back out, place a call on a cell, watch for pedestrians, traffic, have passengers conversations in the auto, let alone music on or a dvd and be S.A.P.E ?

Don't misunderstand, I have to limit myself to tech, the monitors memorize me as to - Oh! The Places We Can Go. (Apology offered Dr. Suess) Yet, I believe with conviction I value the human sense more than the tech gadgets and this is what makes it all work in a conducive way for my life and my family's life. I hope in reflection of my life this will be considered as my having been wise.

kind wishes,
Sigolene

Recommender: Recommended by 1 Reader

126. Sydney
NY
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

I have to agree with Lori, #24. I am a modern person who uses technology at work and home, but what is so amazingly important that people have to check some device constantly? For example, I have seen parents checking them during parent-teacher night presentations at my children's school (while teacher was speaking), a friend texting while our families with children were taking a hike through the woods, while walking, and yes, audience members using them during a music concert. I just don't see the need for this stuff. And it is rude, to boot.

Recommender: Recommended by 2 Readers

127. esatllama
Lexington, VA
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

I find it shocking and sad when mothers and fathers talk on Bluetooth-type devices while carrying small children and babies in their arms. It appears that they are speaking to the child, but it turns out they are talking to someone else, who is not visible. Aside from being incredibly rude to the baby, what lessons will the child receive about communication? Yes, I too believe that social disorders may well be the result of this behavior.

Technology is here to stay, but we need to learn how to use it instead of letting it rule us.

Recommender: Recommended by 2 Readers

128. David
Manhattan
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

The article mentions parents texting while driving with their children in the car. Child development aside, any parent who texts while driving their children should count themselves lucky if they only kill themselves, and not their kids or someone else's kids.

Recommender: Recommended by 5 Readers

129. Nigel
NYC
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

"...a mother and blogger in Wilmette, Ill., said she had no idea what she calls her "addiction to e-mail and social media Web sites" was bothering her children..."

Do parents actually not know that children require a lot of attention? And that the attention they pay their children is called "parenting"? And these are the educated parents.

Those poor children.

Recommender: Recommended by 1 Reader

130. Heidi
Torr

Do the techy parents who constantly blog and Twitter and Flickr and text
only remember the milestones of their children through those tools? Do they remember the actual moment minus the technology?

As for the socioeconomic question — once you get into the wealth aspect, how many of those kids have/had direct interaction with their parents vs. hired attendants to begin with?

I find the opening example silly. Two and a half year old exhibit that behavior whether or not the parent is using an electronic device. You'll get 'mama, mama, hi mama! hi mama, mama, mama, hi mama, hi mama, mama MAMA, MAMA, HI MOM' potentially at any time. In fact it happened to me today, and I was not texting (I am not a texter), nor using any other electronic device. Two and a half year olds like to be the center of the universe. It is healthy for them to learn that they don't demand their parents undivided attention at will and to help them develop a sense that other people do in fact exist.

Now that isn't to say that there may be parents out there who are far too plugged into their electronic devices, all day, and need to quit and give their children their true attention at least at some points during the day but the article gives the wrong impression. It is okay, actually healthy and important, to learn that their parents are not their play things.

Personal technology is presenting as with a social dividing line in society. Those that can empathize and those that can not. It tells a sad story of ourselves.

Look at the data, see that the men talk to the children almost half as much as the women do! Interesting.

Look around at moms pushing aircraft carrier prams containing large blobs of kids who should be walking and running and talking to the mom. But she is busy talking on a cell or texting furiously. The kids face tell the story: 'I'm forgotten...'. When they got older, they will embrace their own technologies with the same addiction, then all will wonder what went wrong.

It's funny to me that it is recommended to read a book with a child on your lap. I was always jealous of the way my father disappeared into books all the time. It's just the toys that change.

Oh, by the way, to a small child, there is only quantity of time. The person who spends the most time with the child is who they bond with, be it for better or worse.

'Quality time' is some made up concept to make working parents feel better.

Sorry.

Mothers turning out their kids is nothing new. I'm 58 years old and remember my mother constantly doing it to me and my brothers and sisters. It was as art form with her. You could be yelling at the top of your lungs for her attention and she wouldn't hear it.

141. RM
waive, via
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

142. daviddoes
New Orleans, LA
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

143. GV0
California
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

144. Elkeisner
Oakland
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

145. HP
Oregon
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

146. Ngai
NYC
June 11th, 2010
12:22 am

147. P. Paik
Colorado
June 11th, 2010
12:23 am
To imvcj3 from Toronto:

Yes, this is quite different from a parent reading a newspaper or watching a TV in front of a child.

Has your newspaper or TV ever called you? Do they send you messages or texts that you feel compelled to answer no matter who is with you or what you are doing?

Did your parents take their TV or newspapers with them to playgrounds, baseball fields, restaurants, school events, dance recitals, libraries, shopping centers, concerts, movie theaters, museums, parties, graduations, family gatherings, holiday dinners, amusement parks, or church services? No.

Today's parents take their iPhones or Blackberries with them to all of these places, guaranteeing not only that they are interrupted but also that they will neglect both their children and other adults.

---

in 2007 I visited my friend in Los Angeles and immediately noticed the number of children being ignored while their parents took calls and sent text messages. I wouldn't care if the parents got off the phone after a couple of minutes, and neither would the child, but there were two incidents that I found particularly disturbing.

1) On an Amtrak train I observed a mother (at least I presume she was the child's mother) talk non-stop on her cellphone for over 50 minutes. At one stage her son (he looked to be around 8) tried to get her attention and he was immediately shushed up. After about a minute he gave up with a sad look on his face. This clearly wasn't a one-off incident for this poor little boy, and his mother was a lot more interested in the phone call than him, judging by her laughter.

2) I watched as a mother talking on her Blackberry failed to pay attention to what her child of around three was attempting to do with her baby (in a stroller and about a year old). The young child managed to somehow get the baby free and the baby wound up on the pavement. Luckily it wasn't hurt.

---

I think it's time to stop pretending that people read their email or chat online "for work" but recognize why they really do it: there is greater emotional satisfaction from this more emotional form of communication on this electronic interface, than there is in the more constrained and artificial offline communications we have in "real life". That's hard to admit, but it explains the sheer addiction of online life for many people. It feels more connected to them, and they don't want to connect to "meat-world" because it feels like the fake thing.

As a stay-at-home parent for a number of years, I've seen an awful sight: we are raising a generation of needy, disengaged and -- as they grow up, potentially unhinged -- human beings, little children who are often ignored and then set to play violent games for hours on end.

All day long at the park, small children tug at their nannies -- minorities from other countries or this country, brought in to take care of the children of affluent mothers at work -- trying to get their attention. These low-paid babysitters chat on their cell phones or gossip with other nannies, not engaging with the children who have even, touchingly, learned to speak foreign languages to try to get their caregivers' attention. They are ignored, even yelled at, and sometimes neglected dangerously. They wander, cry, tug, whine, sit in boredom for hours, no one reacting to them, no one interacting, nothing. All day.
In a daycare setting, they may have more adults actually trained to interact with them. But increasingly, the menu includes a video, a TV show, a
smartboard with the Internet, or computer stations in which learning games are played.

The nannies then bring the kids back home, place them in front of the TV or computer and finally, their stressed and fatigued parents return from work late. But they want to unwind after a day at work, and do so in the fulfilling way they can do that best, which is to get on the phone or small or a social media, where they are connected and wanted, and where little hands aren’t tugging on them to feed them or play with them. Their interactions are cursory — and then the children are plunged down in front of a TV or video to be amused, or increasingly, in front of an addictive and even violent video game — they are parked in their own rooms to be entertained by those engrossing games mainly to stop their incessant demands for engagement.

All evening long, the parents are online, centered on other people, looking up now and then only to interrupt fighting over a computer, if they are limited and siblings have to share, or telling a reluctant kid to do homework — which he will do with only half attention. Everyone is up too late — the hurry-up to get undone homework left all evening, the drama on Facebook — tired parents try to limit it, but the kids are under the covers on cell phones, texting, texting.

In the mornings, sometimes going out on errands or to a job, I see the kids on buses. Wary, stressed, texting, worried, anxious about their social standing. Clutches of them all texting together, sometimes to the person sitting right next to them. Parents, if present, are chatting or texting or browsing too, utterly oblivious of the stressed-out little cyber citizens right next to them without engagement.

The other day I passed a playground. For years, the playground would be filled with the sound of children yelling, laughing, singing, chanting jump-rope rhymes. It was a happy and fulfilling sound. There was life, movement. Today, I’m struck by a very stark sight. No one is moving. Instead, in clumps of 2 or 3, or often solo, children are squatting together down on the ground, staring at screens, texting. Or leaning against a tree, playing a game on a cell phone. No one is jumping or laughing. The only movement is of the flickering Pannvilles.

Yesterday, I saw a disturbing thing — a toddler, not even 18 months old, dutching a cell phone to her ear, babbling, as her mother tagged her along the street, also babbling distractedly into her own cell phone.

I think we are raising a nation of zombies. I think the consequences are untold.

Recommend  Recommended by 11 Readers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Recommend</th>
<th>Recommended by Readers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Daledega</td>
<td>Nashville, TN</td>
<td>June 11th, 2010</td>
<td>10:49 am</td>
<td>People walking with their eyes riveted to their smartphone screen just look stupid... They need to learn how to behave in public.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Jr</td>
<td>N. Dakota</td>
<td>June 11th, 2010</td>
<td>10:49 am</td>
<td>Regarding the part about the socio-economics of language development, has anyone taken a little stroll around Central Park around, say, mid-day on a weekday lately? I’m willing to bet all those young children sitting face-forward while their nannies are pushing them from behind with their forearms while texting are from those upper/middle class families that seem to have the higher number of words in any given day. I would love to see a study of language development among nursery-raped children. Not bashing nannies here, but those ladies spend very much time with toddlers strapped to face-front strollers whilst chatting and texting away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Tim Smith</td>
<td>Bangor, Maine</td>
<td>June 11th, 2010</td>
<td>10:49 am</td>
<td>We are just too self-absorbed. We are addicted to hearing our marvelous voices talking brilliance and seeing our words in text - just like this little forum right here - suddenly we're published and famous. I hope it is still ourselves who decide how important the gadgets are. Who's in control? Are there little people installed in these gadgets sneaking into our brains and taking over our minds? Somehow this has to be Obama's fault.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td>Swana</td>
<td>Owings, Michigan</td>
<td>June 11th, 2010</td>
<td>10:49 am</td>
<td>Since the telegraph, &quot;electronic distractions&quot; have existed in a home. Today, those &quot;distractions&quot; are more portable; not limited to one location. As a parent of four children who has a strong interest in technology, I want to believe I use technology efficiently and yet there are times when I have felt I could have spent less time &quot;connected&quot;. Finding the perfect balance is the challenge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

**TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS**

The transcription notation system employed for data segments is an adaptation of Gail Jefferson’s work (see Atkinson & Heritage (Eds.), 1984, pp. ix-xvi). The symbols may be described as follows:

- **Colon(s):** Extended or stretched sound, syllable, or word.
- **Underlining:** Vocalic emphasis.
- ** Micropause:** Brief pause of less than (0.2).
- **Timed Pause:** Intervals occurring within and between same or different speaker’s utterance.
- **Double Parentheses:** Scenic details.
- **Single Parentheses:** Transcriptionist doubt.
- **Period:** Falling vocal pitch.
- **Question Marks:** Rising vocal pitch.
- **Arrows:** Pitch resets; marked rising and falling shifts in intonation.
- **Degree Signs:** A passage of talk noticeably softer than surrounding talk.
- **Equal Signs:** Latching of contiguous utterances, with no interval or overlap.
- **Brackets:** Indicates beginnings and endings of speech overlap.
- **Double Brackets:** Simultaneous speech orientations to prior turn.
- **Exclamation Points:** Animated speech tone.
- **Hyphens:** Halting, abrupt cut off of sound or word.
- **Less Than/Greater Than Signs:** Portions of an utterance delivered at a pace noticeably quicker (> <) or slower (< >) than surrounding talk.
- **CAPS:** Extreme loudness compared with surrounding talk.
- **hhh .hhh:** Audible outbreaths, possibly laughter. The more h’s, the longer the aspiration.
- **ye(hh)s (hh):** Aspirations with periods indicate audible inbreaths (e.g., .hhh). H’s within (e.g., ye(hh)s) parentheses mark within-speech aspirations, possible laughter.
- **Lip Smack:** Often preceding an inbreath.
- **Laugh Syllable:** Relative closed or open position of laughter.
- **Smile Voice:** Words marked by chuckles and/or phrases hearable as laughed-through.


MELISSA VAILLANCOURT
315 Forsythe Street, Camillus, NY 13031 | 315.286.7870 | mavailla@syr.edu

EDUCATION
Syracuse University
School of Visual and Performing Arts

**M.A. in Communication & Rhetorical Studies**
Thesis: Mediated Motherhood: Parenting in the Digital Age
Advisor: Cynthia Gordon
Research Interests: Language and Social Interaction, Discourse Analysis,
Family Interaction, Technology and Interpersonal Communication,
Institutional Discourse, Embodied Interaction
Awards & Recognition: Graduate Teaching Assistant Award,
Department Nominee for Outstanding Teaching Assistant
G.P.A.: 4.0

Syracuse University
The Maxwell School

**C.A.S. in Conflict Resolution**
Research Interests: Conflict Theory, Conflict Transformation,
Institutional Conflict, Facilitating Group Conflict,
Interpersonal Conflict
G.P.A.: 4.0

State University of New York at Oswego

**B.A. in Broadcasting & Mass Communication**
Concentration: Public Relations
Summa Cum Laude
G.P.A.: 3.89

RELEVANT GRADUATE COURSEWORK
Syracuse University
Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies
CRS 600 Communication, Media & Politics in DC
CRS 600 Discourse and Social Institutions
CRS 600 Talk and the Body (audit)
CRS 601 Proseminar in Social Communication
CRS 690 Independent Study: Discourse, Technology and Family Interaction

The Maxwell School
PARCC (Program for the Advancement of Conflict and Collaboration)
SOS 601 Fundamentals of Conflict Studies
SOS 624 Conflict Resolution in Groups
RELEVANT TRAINING

Syracuse University

**Future Professoriate Program**
Certificate in University Teaching
Diversity in the Classroom, Politics in the Academy, Creating a Teaching Portfolio, Launching Research Projects

**The Maxwell School PARCC/CMC (Conflict Management Center)**
Basic Conflict Skills Training
Interest-based Problem Solving
Culture & Conflict

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Syracuse University

**Instructor of Record: CRS 325 Presentational Speaking**
August 2014 – May 2015
Develop lectures, activities, discussions, projects, rubrics, quizzes and final exam for four stand-alone sections (two per semester). Guide students in preparing proposals and outlines for informative, Persuasive and epideictic speeches. Assist students in conducting Research and reducing speaking anxiety. Provide rehearsal and delivery strategies. Develop rapport with students and work to foster an atmosphere where students can become adept speakers.

**Recitation Instructor/Graduate Teaching Assistant: CRS 225 Public Advocacy**
August 2013 – May 2014
Developed and graded recitation materials for four recitation sections. Designed activities, discussions, projects and quizzes aimed at applying concepts of media literacy introduced in course lectures.

Jefferson Community College

**Interim Instructor for Speech/Academic Advisor for Liberal Arts**
April – May 2010, April – May 2011
Assumed teaching and advising load for professor during medical leave. Taught two sections of STA 101 Fundamentals of Oral Communication and three sections of STA 151 Public Speaking, including all lectures, projects, activities and grading. Advised individual students for fall registration; processed enrollment for advisees.

**Adjunct Instructor: STA 101 Fundamentals of Oral Communication,**
**STA 151 Public Speaking, STA 161 Interpersonal Communication**
August 2002 – May 2008
Created syllabi, lectures, class activities and assignments for communication courses. Graded student speeches, quizzes and exams.
RELATED EXPERIENCE

Jefferson Community College

Academic Advisor
Provide academic advisement and career, personal and transfer counseling to new, transfer, returning and continuing students of all degree and certificate programs. Counsel students on selecting appropriate courses, setting realistic expectations, balancing education, employment, family and other responsibilities. Assist students in planning and revising the academic schedule. Understand college policies and procedures, financial aid guidelines and deadlines as they relate to registration. Keep abreast of updates to course prerequisites, program sequencing and degree requirements affecting advisement.

October 2007 – present

Fort Drum Mountaineer

Staff Writer
Pitched, developed, researched and wrote stories for weekly military newspaper. Photographed events, conducted interviews and cultivated relationships with Army officers, soldiers, family members and civilian employees of the military post. Collaborated with another writer to design and lay out each edition. Designed a new supplemental health and wellness section for the paper.

December 2008 – July 2009

SERVICE AND VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Syracuse University

Panel Judge, White-Denison Presentational Speaking Competition
Evaluate undergraduate speeches in preliminary and semi-final rounds of annual campus-wide competition.

August 2013 – May 2015

Presenter, Conflict, Culture & Communication
Provided basic conflict resolution skills workshop for OCC Residence Hall Director and staff.

January 2015

Small Group Facilitator, Listening Meeting on Sexual Assault
Oversaw and recorded discussions, encouraged participation from all group members, and reported top ideas to larger group.

October 2014

Jefferson Community College

Trustee, Alumni Board of Directors
Assisted in planning reunion, networking and fundraising events for the alumni association.

August 2009 – August 2011

Member, Mayor’s Ball Planning Committee
Proposed, planned and executed college’s annual fundraising gala. Contacted donors and sponsors, suggested and designed themes, assisted with décor and setup of event.

May 2007 – May 2010
Depauville Free Library

**Trustee, Board of Directors**

July 2009 – July 2011

Worked with fellow board members to manage the library’s budget, make purchasing decisions for the library’s collection, plan and host community events. Oversaw the search for a new librarian; advertising, reviewing resumes, selecting candidates for interview, designing interview questions, conducting interviews and candidate selection.