First Class:

A Journal of First-Year Composition
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EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

By Danielle St. Hilare

In the following pages you’ll find wonderful examples of many different kinds of writing: argumentative essays, literary and cultural analyses, and studies of problems facing our world today. While their topics and aims differ, they are alike in their excellence. These six essays were produced by students in Duquesne University’s First-Year Writing program, and they won top honors in our annual competition. Of the many essays submitted to this competition, these were the finest—and they truly are excellent examples of what motivated, talented, hard-working students can produce.

The faculty and graduate students of the English department teach the first-year writing classes (“Thinking and Writing Across the Curriculum” and “Imaginative Literature and Critical Writing”), but the students in the classes come from across the university. This year the prizewinners represent three of the University’s nine undergraduate schools: Business, Health Sciences, and Liberal Arts. Our goal for the first-year writing classes is to provide the space where Duquesne’s diverse students come together and have a common intellectual experience. The students here examine everything from the portrayal of Hollywood in the novel Day of the Locust and the film The Player, to the need for financial literacy among Duquesne students, to the impact of technology on our lives. Our students are engaging with the world, with creative texts, and with the conditions of their own lives. They are doing what students in a first-year writing class are supposed to do, and doing it impressively.

Although excellent, these essays are not perfect; I have declined to line-edit them because I want the Duquesne community to see what its first-year writers are actually doing—and to show our incoming freshmen what they can realistically aspire to produce. These essays show minds struggling with complicated issues; they are a snapshot of a process of thinking.

I’d like to thank all of the graduate students and faculty who undertook the task of judging these essays. This year, our judges were Ava Cipri, Jess McCort, Matt Ussia, Clint Benjamin, Lindsey Albracht, Jo Sullivan, and Michael Begnal. Thanks to all of them for their hard work, and particular thanks to Nora McBurney, Rob Hein, and Will Powell for their admirable administrative work. As ever, I’d also like to thank the Office of the Provost, whose support keeps this contest and journal going; Lia Morrison and the staff of the Public Affairs office, who design and produce this journal; and of course all of the magnificent instructors in the First-Year Writing program.
Students attend college to earn a degree and become successful in their desired field of study. In order to achieve this objective, they rely on a quality education that helps them reach their goals. Although many colleges and universities provide a satisfying education for students, they are not preparing them for what lies ahead of them financially. As this virtually non-existent instruction in financial literacy is a common problem for college students across the country, it is a problem among many students at Duquesne University as well. This not only affects undergraduate and graduate students at Duquesne, but it also indirectly affects other members of the institution including parents, school employees, and the Duquesne community. It is the University’s responsibility to fulfill their mission statement to “serve God by serving students-through a commitment to excellence in liberal and professional education” by providing their students with a quality education and experience for success in their field of study, but also including a background in financial literacy to assist students who lack knowledge about their loans and investing for their futures (Duquesne University 1). Through offering them the necessary recourse and opportunity, students will be well informed about achieving financial stability upon graduation. Incorporating financial coursework will benefit the university, students, and the communities that they impact.

First of all, adding financial literacy to the curriculum for a college education would provide students with vital information who lack knowledge about their loans, allowing them to avoid defaulting on their student loans. Incorporating financial coursework allows students to understand vital details such as: the interest rate formula, the grace period, the payback period, the monthly payment, and the amount of interest due. These essential fundamentals can help students avoid defaulting on loans and other consequences later on in life. In an interview with John Falleroni, the Associate Director of Financial Aid at Duquesne, stated that over 70 percent of students have taken out federal loans to attend the university (Personal Interview). Taking out a loan for college is not necessarily a bad thing, if an individual understands the details within the loan applications. However, in a survey (see appendix A) conducted on campus, only 51.4 percent of students said they knew the interest rate of their loans, while 40 percent claimed not to understand any details of their loans. If students do not know what the interest rate is, they can underestimate how much their payments will be each month and also fail to understand the total amount of interest they have to pay in addition to the principal amount. To further prove this amount of personal financial illiteracy on campus, 42.9 percent of students gave themselves a D as a grade for their knowledge on the financial literacy survey (Papiano). These shocking statistics proves that there is a low proficiency level of confidence in financial knowledge among students at the University; therefore, having a financial background as part of the curriculum would not only provide students with knowledge in recognizing the consequences in the loan applications, but also help prevent the unexpected consequences which may force one into a challenging financial situation.

This misunderstanding of financial literacy has forced students to default on their loans due to lack of knowledge of the severe consequences that can happen from falling behind on making payments.
The rate of students defaulting on their loans has dramatically increased among the college student population across the country. In 2006, the national average for students defaulting on their loans was 5.2 percent, and increased to 9.1 percent in 2010. This high increase of students defaulting on their loans proves that students nationwide are not educated enough in personal finances. Although Duquesne’s default rate was only 2.0 percent in 2010, the survey’s results reflect the students’ true understanding of their loans and that it is necessary to integrate financial literacy into the curriculum at Duquesne (Duquesne University 77). It is imperative that Duquesne provides students with financial literacy to help them understand the consequences of defaulting because it can cause serious financial situations including lower credit scores, decrease in pay, and eventually pay being garnished from their Social Security checks (Bidwell, par. 9). In a survey conducted on campus, 54.3 percent of students responded that they did not understand the consequences of falling behind on their monthly loan payments (Papiano). In an interview with freshman Josh Dalton, “I will have to learn about it when it [financial literacy] becomes an issue, like after graduation. I haven’t had the chance to learn more about my finances and loans” (Personal Interview). Students’ high uncertainty and full knowledge of the consequences would eventually cause students to default on their loans and become more financially stressed. Falling into default can take a toll on a college student, for example if their credit score is lowered, they will have a difficult time trying to get a loan for future purchases such as a car or a house. Requiring financial literacy as part of the school’s curriculum would provide students with cognizance of these particulars, thus preventing damage to students’ financial well-being.

Financial literacy should be part of Duquesne’s curriculum because students will have the background and knowledge to make wiser financial decisions with long-term investments, ultimately yielding them to become prosperous later on in life. Financial literacy would allow young people to be more proactive in planning their future as they save, invest, and contribute to retirement plans and compound interest accounts when they begin full-time employment upon graduation. According to Dr. Austin who is the Provost and President for Academic Affairs at Duquesne University believes that learning about long-term investments is important for students to understand. “Absolutely, this is critical,” he says:

For one thing, decisions that one makes early in life have tremendous potential to pay off later in life...Due to the impact of compound interest, every dollar you use sensibly before you are 30 or 40 is worth many times that amount when you reach your 60s or 70s. As you mature, it gets tougher and tougher to make the kinds of changes that can really affect one’s retirement savings, health care savings, etc. (Email Interview).

In addition to helping students become personally wealthy, the University itself could benefit from integrating financial literacy as well because if students have this background knowledge in college and consequently begin to make wise financial decisions, they would have significant financial resources at their disposal. As alumni of Duquesne, they would be able to provide more generous contributions to the University for years to come.

Although the financial aid office at Duquesne does provide some information for students, they could improve upon addressing the importance of understanding personal finances. The financial aid office does require students to fill out a brief quiz for students who take out loans before attending their freshman year, however it is the only required material for students to complete. Aside from the quiz, the financial aid office only offers students with two opportunities during their time at Duquesne with presentations about financial aid. The two presentations that students can receive information are during the open house programs and orientation week. These current attempts at supplying students with financial material are insufficient because open houses are only for prospective students and orientation is only for new incoming freshman. These events exclude the rest of the student body, as well as transfer students.
Since the presentations are only addressed during two brief time frames during freshman year, the rest of the students are unfamiliar with personal finance knowledge. In order to beware of the all of the information that is provided, students need to be reminded of its importance throughout their 4 years. The difference between the initial presentation at open houses and orientation week creates a wide gap spanning over a long period of time as students progress in their academic career, this is an inadequate way of providing students with such crucial information.

There are many different approaches Duquesne could utilize in order address the insufficient knowledge that students have about financial literacy. The first solution would be to require all enrolled students to take financial literacy coursework and meet with a financial aid counselor. This has been implemented at Huntington Junior College in West Virginia. These requirements resulted in students acquiring a stronger understanding of financial literacy as well as the default rate dropping from 30.2 percent to 12.8 percent in the first two years ("USA Funds Life Skills" 2). This proves that financial literacy programs play a vital role in students' higher educational experience. Experiencing a financial education class as part of curriculum benefits both the students and the University. The college was able to significantly improve their default rate and develop a better reputation for student loans. Even though this idea has had effects at a community college, where students have to often pay for school themselves, the results are still significant, and therefore could help Duquesne maintain their low rate on default loans and continue to support Duquesne’s stellar reputation.

Financial literacy would allow young people to be more proactive in planning their future as they save, invest, and contribute to retirement plans and compound interest accounts when they begin full-time employment upon graduation.

Another possible solution for integrating financial literacy at Duquesne would be to implement a program that is similar to one being taught at Syracuse University. The University integrated USA Funds Life Skills programs that support financial literacy through other channels for students to learn from. The material is being made available in sororities, fraternities, and residence halls. The “SummerStart” program is being administered which requires all incoming freshman to complete financial related materials from USA Fund Life Skills as well ("USA Funds Life Skills” 1). This could be executed very well at Duquesne since Greek life is big part of student life on campus. Students who are not in Greek life or involved in other clubs could rely on the residence hall association to provide financial literacy information to students. These suggestions would allow students to partake in learning about financial literacy related activities in comfortable environments around campus.

Duquesne has indicated that they have started to respond to this problem and there are some faculty members within the University who agree this issue should be addressed more aggressively. John Sucha is the manager of student accounts and student finance, who believes that a program similar to USA Life Skills programs should be integrated at the University for the students. He mentions that a “web based site with a lot of help videos of various topics,” would be one solution. “There is a lot of information to cover on the subject, so it needs to be something an individual can do in small pieces. Also, if instructors are available, I would like to see some group sessions offered where students could get their questions answered after listening to the presentation.” (Email Interview). These ideas of incorporating financial literacy at Duquesne is a great foundation to build upon, as well as considering adding the solutions mentioned.
In conclusion, the research collected at Duquesne advocates that there should be more done to educate their students for financial literacy. The minimal effort put forth by the University is not providing students with the information and knowledge they need for succeeding in their future. The administration at Duquesne has options and resources to fix the problem and more thoroughly and effectively fulfill their mission statement. If the University does not implement a solution to this problem in a timely manner, students will continue to be deprived of the essential and life changing knowledge of financial literacy.

Work Cited

Austin, Dr. Timothy. “Re: Questions Concerning Students' Personal Finances.” Message to Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs 4 Dec. 2013. E-mail


Dalton, Joshua. Personal Interview 9 Dec. 2013


Falleroni, John. Personal Interview 4 Dec. 2013


### Appendix A

1. What grade would you give yourself in terms of your knowledge about personal finance on a scale from A to F.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Are you holding any of the following types of jobs while attending college?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Type</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Job</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Do Not Have Any Job</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (Please Specify) Show Responses: 11.4% 4

3. Where do you think you have learned the most about managing your personal finances?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents or Guardians</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highschool</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Resources</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Above</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Do you use any of the following when purchasing items? (Check all that apply)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credit Card</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debit Card</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Are you currently taking out any type of loan to attend college?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Do you know any of the following details about your loans and/or credit cards?  
(Check off all that apply) If you know any items that are not listed below, please specify.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Interest Rate</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grace Period</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Payback Period</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Monthly Payment</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Amount of Interest Due</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principal amount</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Above</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Do you understand the consequences of falling behind in payments for credit cards and loans? If checked yes, please briefly explain your understanding.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Who is responsible for paying your college costs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents or guardians</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. If Duquesne administration was considering adding a financial literacy course to the curriculum, how would you side with this proposal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Which of the following worries you most about personal finance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not being able to pay my credit card debt.</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being able to repay my student loan debt.</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None – I do not have any financial worries.</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In life, there are always instances when we find ourselves unappreciative of the things that we are given. As a kid I would always get mad at my mom for not letting me eat sweets. The cookie jar was strategically placed on top of the highest shelf in the kitchen and one day, after hours of plotting, I ruled that getting to those cookies was impossible. I was so angry that I sat there and wished that I had a mom that would treat me with all the sweets that my heart desired. That night I went to bed with the thought of a better life filled with copious amounts of sugar. I woke up in bed with my mom, only it wasn’t her. Next to me lay this scary clown with teeth as sharp as razors. Before I could scream I found myself awake with my mom lying right next to me. I reached over and put my face on her swung my arms around her chest and shut my eyes knowing I was safe and allowed myself to appreciate what I had rather than what I believed I wanted. When the main character of Coraline finds herself dissatisfied with her life she creates a new life as her preferred reality, at first. In Neil Gaiman’s Coraline, the protagonist creates beauty from boredom with the formation of an alternate magical world that in the end makes her appreciate the life that she so badly wanted to change. This dark fantasy serves as a portal to the psychoanalytical thoughts that hide deep in the corners of her mind.

The entirety of the monotony that Coraline is suffering from throughout the book all starts because her family picks up and moves far away from the neighborhood she grew up in. This upheaval in her life leads to her constant feeling of boredom in their new house. In an interview by a woman named Mali Elfman, Gaiman describes the door from Coraline’s reality, links it to his childhood: “We lived in the servants quarters... Another family had the posh half of the house, but we had the good front room. But, the good front room had two doors, one of which had gone to the good half of the house and one of which went to the servants’ quarters” (Gaiman 2). Gaiman describes the door as an opportunity for him to expand upon it through his imagination. Because of her largely absent parents, Coraline is able to expand upon her imagination, like Gaiman. Within the beginning of the book, it becomes evident that Coraline gets very little attention from her parents. They offer her a lot of freedom, which translates in her head to being ignored. This can be seen with the mother’s response to Coraline: “I don’t really mind what you do,’ said Coraline’s mother, ‘as long as you don’t make a mess”’ (Gaiman 14). It is through being ignored however, that Coraline is able to create a portal into a new parallel world that represents her version of a better life. In an effort to find entertainment, Coraline went and counted all the doors in the house and that is when she found it: “The other, the big, carved, brown wooden door at the far corner of the drawing room, was locked” (Gaiman 18). This door was Coraline’s way of coping with the absence of a strong parental presence because she ultimately creates it to serve as a form of escape from her disappointing reality.

Coraline uses this creation of a parallel universe to understand better where she stands in her own household. Although this world ends up being a complete disaster, the journey that she goes through trying to correct her original mistake of entering it, is what helps her realize to appreciate her real
life. In a paper entitled “An Eye For An I: Neil Gaiman’s Coraline and Questions Of Identity,” the writer David Rudd addresses Coraline’s desire to figure out her place when he states, “As I shall suggest, Coraline is centrally concerned with how one negotiates one’s place in the world; how one is recognized in one’s own right rather than being either ignored on the one hand, or stifled on the other” (160). He notes Coraline’s constant dissatisfaction, pointing out that she discovers her place by experiencing both family situations in her reality and fantasy. In the real world, Coraline constantly craves attention from her parents, and when she doesn’t get it, her automatic response is to feel bored. This is visible in the scene of the book when she visits her dad in his office: “Coraline went to see her father. He had his back to the door as he typed. ‘Go away,’ he said cheerfully as she walked in. ‘I’m bored,’ she said. ‘Learn how to tap-dance,’ he suggested, without turning round. Coraline shook her head. ‘Why don’t you play with me?’ she asked” (Gaiman 37). In this, Coraline attempts to spend time with her father, but her desire is ultimately rejected and therefore she no longer knows what to do with her time. While her parents are ignoring her, it is hard for Coraline to find any form of enjoyment. On the other side of the spectrum, in her alternate universe, Coraline at first is overjoyed by the attention, but she soon realizes that her wish for a better life with more attentive parents was misguided. She becomes afraid of her new world and wants her old life back. The moment she becomes frightened is obvious: “You don’t frighten me,” said Coraline, although they did frighten her, very much. ‘I want my parents back.’ The world seemed to shimmer little at the edges. ‘Whatever would I have done with your old parents?’” (Gaiman 124). Although this is the world that Coraline wished for and entered willingly, she recognizes that her other parents cannot replace her real ones. She wished for this seemingly better world because all she really wants in her life is to gain a little bit of attention from her parents; without it she feels dissatisfied.

In Neil Gaiman’s Coraline, the protagonist creates beauty from boredom with the formation of an alternate magical world that in the end makes her appreciate the life that she so badly wanted to change.

As children, we all want things that we cannot have, and because Coraline’s mother does not shower her with affection, she not only wants to feel important, she also wants to have things go her way. This is something that is not accomplished in her real world and it becomes obvious when Coraline and her mother go shopping: “Coraline saw some Day-glo green gloves she liked a lot. Her mother refused to get them for her... ‘But Mum, everybody at school’s got grey blouses and everything. Nobody’s got green gloves. I could be the only one” (Gaiman 47). The gloves symbolize Coraline’s desire to stand out through her attempt to attain a uniform style unlike anyone else at her new school because she is unhappy with being ignored at home. There are always instances in life where we want something because we believe it’s beneficial to us; sometimes we are lucky and get them, while other times there is an obstacle in the way. When we are younger, that obstacle is usually our parents, and they bank their decisions on allowing their children to have this item depending on its practicality. The casualness with which Coraline’s mother ignores makes it seems as though she just said no so she would not have to deal with it. Christine Wilkie-Stibhs, in “Imaging Fear: Inside The Worlds Of Neil Gaiman (An Anti-Oedipal Reading),” argues that Coraline’s turn of events make her grow as a person:

Gaiman’s fictional worlds comprise a hyper reality of reflected and refracted images and spaces that deny readers a stable point of entry and engagement. For example, in Coraline, the lonely, bored, and ignored young girl protagonist, Coraline, negotiates numerous spaces and identities in her quest for parental attention and affection. (38)
Wilkie-Stubbs shows how Coraline’s adventure in her twisted version of a Wonderland leaves her with a craving for the real world, where she might not receive everything she wants. When Coraline arrives in her fantasy world, she is told to play in her room. Her room in the real world is not everything she desired for she just moved in, but in her alternate reality it has exactly what she wants inside. The room is filled with things that Coraline can play with: “books with pictures that writhed and crawled and shimmered; little dinosaur skulls that chattered their teeth as she passed. A whole toybox filled with wonderful toys. “This is more like it” (Gaiman 62). Her real mother did not really put in any effort into creating the perfect room for her daughter, and instead gave Coraline the freedom of setting it up herself. The other mother did the opposite and decorated the room with things that she believed Coraline would enjoy. Although Coraline liked her room in the other mother’s house, in the end she still found out she identified with her life in her real home. Although she at first believed it to be perfect, later, when she realized she missed her actual parents, Coraline began to realize she no longer preferred the imaginary world. It is through the role of the other mother that she is finally able to uncover her place in her household.

Dreams teach us what we should strive for, whereas nightmares allow us to appreciate our reality.

Every child, especially when they are younger, needs a certain amount of attention from their mother. I know when I was little I would always be around my mom and want her approval and involvement in everything I did. In Coraline’s life, things went a little differently. Her mother was not very attentive to or sensitive with Coraline, which made her create a second world as a coping mechanism. To help understand the role of a strong mother figure, Coraline, makes the “Other Mother” in her fantasy life. In Sawsers Parsons brings this concept into perspective through the analysis of the importance of a mother’s role in a child’s life: “Like many other literary works of fantasy, both traditional and contemporary, Gaiman deploys the trope of the evil, powerful ‘other’ mother as a vehicle through which the protagonists resolve questions of identity, one’s (gendered) place in the world, and the kinds of interpersonal relationships that are culturally sanctioned” (371). The Other mother represents a replacement of Coraline’s real mother because at this stage in her life she feels neglected and desires a stronger mother figure. The affection Coraline desires from her real parents is quickly fulfilled through her ‘other’ ones. This can be seen when Coraline first arrives in the new world, “It was the best chicken that Coraline had ever eaten. Her mother sometimes made chicken, but it was always out of packets, or frozen, and was very dry, and it never tasted of anything” (Gaiman 60). Her other mother spends time on the food for Coraline to make sure that it fits her needs perfectly, which is different than what her actual mother does. This wish goes awry quickly with the presence of this secondary mom: “But, it is because these mothers make such choices and embrace this empowered status that their relationships with their daughters are haunted by the specter of a too-powerful (phallic) mother who is the source of fear and anxiety for both the girl protagonists” (Parsons 372). Through the imaginary mother, Coraline is able to experience what it is like to have a very powerful and overbearing mother. She is given the opportunity to live her life in the alternate world with the other mother’s offer: “There’s only one little thing we’ll have to do, so you can stay here for ever and always.’ They went into the kitchen. On a china plate on the kitchen table were a spool of black cotton and a long silver needle and, beside them, two large black buttons” (Gaiman 92). When she is pressured into sewing buttons to her eyes she realizes that this overly present and almost invasive mother is not what she desires. The button eyes represent Coraline’s final step into leaving her real life behind, however when it all comes down to it she finally realizes that she values the independence her parents help create. In the end it is this other mother figure that makes Coraline realize she was wrong for not appreciating her old life.
There are so many different instances in life where we sit back and complain about the life we live because sometimes we don't have exactly what we want. In Coraline’s case, she does not have very strong parental figures in her life and constantly finds herself bored. The writer Richard Gooding deals with Coraline’s journey to self discovery in his essay ‘Something Very Old and Very Slow’: *Coraline, Uncanniness, and Narrative Form*:

In its more traditional manifestations, the form offers false assurances relating to moralizing and educational tendencies inherited from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century models of writing for children: the psychological work that takes place in the fantasy world reaches closure, the protagonist returns home, and the magical effects, no longer being necessary, are suspended. (404)

Gooding’s statement describes how Coraline finally figured out what she wanted in life through her other world. As she lives out her life in the fantasy realm, her reality begins to disappear when the other mother kidnaps Coraline’s parents. When her parents are completely absent from her life she is able to realize that she was wrong. This becomes obvious when Coraline is confronted by the other mother about her real parents:

> If they have left you, Coraline, it must be because they became bored with you, or tired. Now, I will never become bored with you, and I will never abandon you. You will always be safe here with me.”

The other mother’s wet-looking black hair drifted around her head, like the tentacles of a creature in the deep ocean. “They weren’t bored of me,” said Coraline. “You’re lying. You stole them.” (124-125)

This is the turning point for Coraline because she is able to finally understand that her parents actually do care about her, even though they may pay the closest attention. Once the other mother shows her a fake scene where her parents’ seem ambivalent towards her well-being, she soon sees that her original assumption was false. This becomes her driving force to defeat the other mother and get her old life back with her real parents. It takes a lot of effort for Coraline to get her parents back and it is through this final game where she must complete tasks to uncover the location of her parents that she is able to overcome her fear and make it back to her reality. When she finally wakes up in her real world, it is dinnertime, and her father made pizza. Her appreciation for his cooking and not the magnificent food that she got from the other mother can be seen through this scene: “Dinner that night was pizza, and even though it was home-made by her father (so the crust was alternately thick and doughy and raw, or too thin and burnt)...Coraline ate the entire slice she had been given” (Gaiman 276). Instead of complaining about her father’s cooking, which would have been routine, she eats it without any objection. This action shows how she has grown and learned to appreciate her life for what it is after the horrors she was exposed to in the alternate world she created.

When we sleep, we shut our eyes and drift off into a dreamland. Most of the time, these dreams are a better version of our reality because it is what we wish our current situation could be. However, it is the nightmares that we encounter that most often provide us a reality check. Dreams teach us what we should strive for, whereas nightmares allow us to appreciate our reality. In the book *Coraline*, Neil Gaiman uses the main character to show how a dream can turn so quickly into a nightmare through her creation of the alternate universe, thus making her grow through the realization to appreciate the life she was given. Even though, in life, we are presented with things that we do not like we must learn to appreciate things because in an instant, life as we know it could become much worse.
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The well-renowned dream of moving to California and making it big in Hollywood is a classic American dream. However, this dream is not all it seems. In fact, the Hollywood dream can be destructive, illusory, and unattainable. Hollywood is capable of changing people, and not necessarily for the better. In the novel *The Day of the Locust* and the film *The Player*, Nathanael West and Robert Altman respectively focus on the falsehood of the Hollywood dream. West characterizes Faye, Homer, and Harry as desperate for the seemingly promising lifestyle Hollywood supposedly offers in order to suggest that the Hollywood dream is impossible to achieve, while Altman develops the character of Griffin Mill by employing an eye-level camera angle to characterize him as a shallow producer who gets away with murder, utilizes framing in order to characterize Tom Oakley as an aspiring writer/director who succumbs to the pressures of Hollywood, and cohesively employs character placement and camera distance to characterize Bonnie Sherow as an underestimated woman who represents what Hollywood truly has to offer, all to demonstrate that the Hollywood lifestyle is deceptive and has the ability to change hopefuls into phonies. Though both examine the negative features of the Hollywood dream, West believes the Hollywood dream is impossible and people go to California to die, while Altman expresses that the Hollywood dream is possible for those who are shallow and that the famous can get away with anything, even murder.

West characterizes Faye as a young woman with a shallow personality who has expectations of stardom, which ultimately cause her downfall. In the novel, West includes a scene in which Faye describes her dream of becoming a famous actress. West writes Faye's dialogue as, “It's my life. It's the only thing in the world that I want,” then continues to explain, “If I'm not I'll commit suicide” (98). These two excerpts display Faye's materialistic qualities, as she believes that acting is her life and she possesses enough talent to deserve the fame. They also express her inexplicable yearning as a sort of desperateness, for which she is willing to die if she does not get what she wants. This correlates to West's phrase that he continually mentions throughout the novel, that people “come to California to die.” Because some people are undeniably this desperate, West demonstrates how easily these people can be fooled into Hollywood's allure of phony promises. Writer Leonard Wilcox shares his insight on West's portrayal of Faye in his article “West's *Day of the Locust* and Shepard's *Angel City*: Refiguring L.A. Noir.” Wilcox believes that “she identifies totally with the reified image of the star, an image which, however, remains forever out of reach” (63). This illuminates West's characterization of Faye Greener, who ends up broke, not a famous actress, and disappears by the end of the novel. Wilcox's description of Faye accurately reflects West's theme of the illusion of the Hollywood dream. It symbolically explains that no matter how much hope an aspiring star has for earning fame, he or she will desperately cling on to that hope even though the cold reality of Hollywood will fail to grant his or her wish(es). West includes Faye Greener to represent the naïve Hollywood dreamers and display that the Hollywood dream is unachievable, especially for the shallow and greedy.

Another character West includes is Homer Simpson, an introvert who dreams of finding true love and living a stress-free life in California, and fails at doing so, thus falling into the illusionary trap of the
west coast. After he moves to California, Homer spontaneously meets Faye Greener and immediately falls head-over-heels in love with her. In the scene where the two meet for the first time, West writes, “Just as he was about to sit down, she asked for something to drink. He poured her a glass of milk and stood watching her like a waiter. He was unaware of her rudeness” (95). This displays Homer’s strange attachment to people, especially women, he has an interest in pursuing. As the novel continues, Faye characteristically treats Homer with no respect and eventually leaves him, which in turn leaves Homer emotionally distressed. He goes to California to fall in love, but ends up alone, which emphasizes West’s portrayal of the Hollywood dream as an impossible evil. Literary critic George M. Pisk examines West’s characterization of Homer in his article, “The Graveyard of Dreams: A Study of Nathanael West’s Last Novel, ‘The Day of the Locust.’” He writes, “because of his peculiar psychological makeup, he will be destroyed by his dream as it approaches reality and centers on a specific woman. For Homer is unable to lust impersonally or half-heartedly” (Pisk 66). This demonstrates that Homer not only falls under the hypnotic spell of Hollywood, but he also falls for Faye Greener, who is much like Hollywood in the sense that she lures Homer in, then pushes him out to fend for himself at the end of the novel. Distinctive of a Hollywood hopeful, Homer continually allows himself to be treated poorly in hopes that something better is surely to come soon. Homer is just as naïve as Faye in the sense that he does not understand the illusory nature of Hollywood until it is too late. West’s characterization of Homer provides another example of Hollywood’s deceptive invitations that ultimately fail to deliver the ability to provide a promising life for these hopefuls.

Hollywood's enticing capabilities can consume peoples' lives and its fakery can also allow people to get away with almost anything.

West introduces the sickly, old Harry Greener as a prime example of a failure in the game to attain stardom in Hollywood. West reveals Harry’s backstory in the novel in order to explain how Harry becomes such an unhappy, poor man. West states, “He who had hoped to play Hamlet, Lear, Othello, must needs become the Co. in an act called Nat Plumstone & Co., light quips and breezy patter. He made them dog his dragging feet as, an aged and trembling old man...” (120–121). West contextually hints that Harry was once a young hopeful wanting to acquire fame, yet, by the end of his life, he still slaves away as a salesman at a homemade silver polish company in order to make the bare minimum to survive in Hollywood’s dog-eat-dog world. Though Harry is clearly out of luck, he continues to try and achieve his dream vicariously through his daughter, Faye. West’s characterization of Harry explains a different dream and personality that Hollywood’s illusions are clearly capable of destroying. Though Harry has been in search his whole life for fame, he never accomplishes his career aspirations. This destroys his positive perception on Hollywood, yet Harry knows he must finish his life struggling, just to try to provide for his daughter. In Pisk’s article, he also observes West’s characterization of Harry Greener and his dream, as he explains, “Harry’s sickness parallels the disintegration of his dream, as does his poverty...” (67–68). This quote accurately exposes that Hollywood’s illusions ultimately destroy Harry’s health and happiness. It also furthers West’s motif of the falsity and ephemeral quality of the Hollywood dream, in the sense that no matter how long a person may try to make it big in Hollywood, he or she will never get the rewards anticipated. Though the characters in the novel do not pay attention to Mr. Greener’s demise, West’s characterization of Harry acts as an evident model of the stereotypical hopeful who comes to California to die (literally).

In the film *The Player*, Altman develops the character of Griffin Mill, who is a shallow, selfish Hollywood studio executive whose obsession with Hollywood allows him to get away with treating people poorly, live his life like a movie, and even get away with murder. In one scene from the film, Griffin is at
a lunch meeting with his fellow studio members. At the meeting, Altman includes dialogue in which Griffin asks, “Can we talk about something other than Hollywood for a change?” (The Player). After he poses the question to the others at the table, there is an awkward silence, and then everyone at the table laughs and continues to gossip about movies and actors. Altman utilizes a camera angle that is at eye-level in order to make the scene more realistic, as if the audience is a part of the group at the lunch table. He does this in order to bring the personas of Hollywood's obsessive followers to life. Altman includes this scene to demonstrate Griffin's obsession (and the other people at the table for that matter) with Hollywood. Though Griffin may realize it, he fails to accept or act upon the fact that Hollywood consumes his life. It consumes his whole life so much that he ends up murdering an angered writer, but gets away with it at the end of the movie. Michael T. Schuyler, author of “Traffic Was a Bitch: Gender, Race, and Spectatorship in Robert Altman's 'The Player'” comments on Altman's execution of Griffin Mill’s character. He writes, “Griffin's notions of reality derive solely from the movies” (Schuyler 218). This quote expands on the fact that Griffin blurs the lines between fictional movies and the reality of his life. He is so obsessed with Hollywood that his life becomes a movie and unrealistically allows him to get away with murder. Altman's development of Griffin's character as a shallow movie producer who lives his life as if it were a movie expands upon the notion of Hollywood's ability to consume the lives of the shallow and greedy. Hollywood's enticing capabilities can consume peoples' lives and its fakery can also allow people to get away with almost anything.

Altman also introduces the character Tom Oakley as an aspiring movie writer who eventually submits to the false reality of Hollywood and its tendency to praise happy endings. Tom Oakley moves to California to make a pivotal impact on Hollywood movies. He writes a movie pitch in which there are no famous actors and there is no typical Hollywood happy ending (The Player). When he gives the movie pitch, Oakley's hands make a frame shape to which Altman directs the actual camera to frame around Oakley's hands. This filmic technique helps to provide a realistic and imaginative view of Oakley's movie idea. It also develops Oakley's character as a Hollywood hopeful who has an imaginative personality with the gullibility to be cast under the spell of Hollywood's illusory forces. When describing the ending of the movie to Griffin Mill, Tom Oakley explains, “That's the reality... the innocent die” (The Player). Though it seems as though Oakley will be able to change the movie scene in Hollywood, instead he transforms into a typical Hollywood writer when he decides to change the ending of his movie to a cheesy, happy ending. Through the character of Tom Oakley, Altman illustrates the reality of Hollywood hopefuls and what they can potentially turn into when they move to California. It emphasizes that the expectations of the Hollywood dream do not always turn into reality, especially in the way a person may have originally planned. Author Jack Boozer analyzes Altman's choice in character development towards the end of The Player in his article “Novelist-Screenwriter versus Auteur Desire: The Player.” He examines that “this is more than just a circular closure on the film's plot up to this point” (Boozer 82). Boozer's analysis of Tom Oakley's transformation as a character and as a screenwriter illuminates that the Hollywood dream is always going to take over. It is circular because Oakley originally strives to change the false depictions of life in Hollywood films, yet ends up falling under Hollywood's hypnotic spell and its admiration for happy endings. Altman includes Tom Oakley as a representative for those who come to Hollywood hoping to change the disingenuous town, but end up falling for the deceptive illusions and become the opposite of what they intended. This explains Hollywood's acceptance of achieving stardom through hypocrisy and phoniness.

Altman includes the character Bonnie Sherow as a representative of the truth behind Hollywood's seemingly glamorous appearance. Bonnie is a woman who tries to gain rank and executive power in the Hollywood workplace, but ultimately fails at doing so. She winds up getting fired from her job when
she tries to stand up for Tom Oakley’s original, grim ending of his movie *The Player*. Altman cohesively utilizes character placement and camera distance to express Bonnie’s demise at the end of the film. He places her on the steps so as to demonstrate her struggle and loss in the battle to live the glamorous Hollywood lifestyle. The camera’s far-away shot enhances the belittlement of Bonnie’s character, as she fails to achieve Hollywood’s promising lifestyle. Altman develops Bonnie’s character as the only example of a negative ending, while all the other characters all live “happily ever after.” This displays that even though Hollywood can provide a luxurious life for those consumed and transformed by the Hollywood system, it is not a guaranteed lifestyle, as Hollywood may deceptively display to hopefuls. In Schuyler’s article about the film, he writes extensively about Bonnie’s character. He believes that “we feel bad for Bonnie, but we don’t like her, for ultimately, she’s weak” (Schuyler 227). Schuyler’s commentary further explains Bonnie’s representation of the reality of the Hollywood dream in an audience perspective. Bonnie seems “weak” because she does not obtain the Hollywood dream, as she does not want the happy ending for the movie and gets fired. Getting fired is a realistic part of life, and this is not something that people necessarily enjoy to see happen. Altman’s development of Bonnie Sherow explains that people still want all the fame and wealth Hollywood supposedly offers, even though it is clear through Bonnie’s character that the Hollywood dream is not always possible, especially for those who refuse to give in to the pressures and illusions of the California dream.

Both Nathanael West and Robert Altman utilize characterization of a variety of characters in each of their works. When West introduces Faye and Altman introduces Griffin, they both characterize these figures as self-absorbed and both characters get away with treating people poorly throughout each story. However, West’s theme of the impossible Hollywood dream is evident, as Faye never achieves her dreams. On the other hand, Altman directs the film so the flawed Griffin has a happy ending, which illuminates Altman’s idea of Hollywood allowing happy endings, but only for the shallow. West includes Homer and Altman presents Tom Oakley, both of whom represent Hollywood hopefuls who succumb to Hollywood’s illusionary trap. Homer never attains his dreams of finding love, as West expands upon the theme of Hollywood’s inability to grant wishes for the weak-willed. Yet, Altman’s characterization of the ever-changeable Tom Oakley furthers his point that Hollywood is a powerful force that can provide a phony happiness for those who fall into the trap. West writes about Harry Greener and Altman directs and develops Bonnie’s character. Both are created to represent the truth of Hollywood’s seemingly promising lifestyle, yet deceptive and illusory capabilities. However, West’s rendering of Harry Greener explains that people go to California to die, as evidence through Greener’s death, whereas Altman’s characterization of Bonnie and her downfall explains that the Hollywood dream is unattainable for those who refuse to fall for the illusion of Hollywood’s glitz and glamour.

Nathanael West and Robert Altman both put forward fictional pieces that revolve around the theme of Hollywood’s falsehood. West characterizes Faye, Homer, and Harry as desperate for the fame and fortune Hollywood supposedly offers. Altman characterizes Griffin with an eye-level camera angle, Tom Oakley with the framing technique, and Bonnie with camera distance and character placement, all as separate representations of what the Hollywood dream can and cannot offer, and to whom it can and cannot offer. *The Day of the Locust* serves as a signal to enlighten aspiring stars or other naïve hopefuls that Hollywood is not all it seems and can, in fact, even be destructive, while *The Player* acts as an informative film to explain that Hollywood is filled with phony people who can get away with almost anything. West’s point is that Hollywood may seem like a paradise where people go to live, when in reality people go to California to suffer and die, yet Altman believes that Hollywood can be a place where dreams come true, but only under the spell of illusion and deception.


Living Connected to Oneself, Others, and One’s Cellphone—Yes, Maggie Jackson, It Is Possible

By Shannon Small, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts
Instructor: Dr. Matthew Ussia

My textbook and my phone sat side by side, staring me in the face. I had a choice to make, the same choice I must make every day: What are you going to do? Will you give in? I flipped my phone over as I usually did during my allotted study time, another victory. In fact, I thought, I didn’t need it at all today. Today, my phone would tell time and nothing else, just like an overlarge wrist watch. I was practically a pioneer, I mused, smiling to myself. An hour later, I closed my book with an enthusiastic flap and woke up my phone to check the time. Five new messages lit up my screen: one from my mother checking up on me, a hilarious .gif from my sister, and three messages in a group chat of high school friends at different colleges. I couldn’t in good conscience ignore them, right? Before I could convince myself otherwise, I was reading through my messages and snickering at an old inside joke. Surprisingly, I wasn’t disappointed in myself. My experiment had failed, but I realized there was no point in denying myself technology, of reverting and rejecting modernity. I could still engage in deep, personal thought and be greeted afterward by the comfort of my family and friends. Yes, they were miles away and all I had of them were pixels on a screen, but those were still their words, their thoughts, instantly. That is special.

And I am not sorry. One need not be a technological apologist. There is room for technology in life—as long as one finds balance and uses it appropriately. In her novel, Distracted, Maggie Jackson argues that society has lost said balance, that “in modern society, we’ve always floated in and out of each other’s lives...We are ghosts moving in and out of each other’s consciousness, often silently but sometimes with a shriek and a howl”(58). In other words, she believes technology destroys one’s ability to create a sense of self and strong bonds. Her depiction of people as “ghosts” implies they are barely present in their relationships with others. And while there is some truth to her view, it is polarized. Technology is not the soul sucking device she paints it to be: it may change one’s relationships with others, but it does not define them. True, technology challenges one to use social networking wisely and yes, some people do not pass that test. However, Jackson takes this idea too far. “Distracted” is overwrought with appeal to pathos and logical fallacies. Her blatant condemnation of technology and its role in modern life makes what could have been a solid argument offensive and reactionary.

Jackson’s overreaction to the digital age is understandable in some sense. Her nostalgic appeal to pathos clouds her societal view: the world she knew has changed and will not change back. Ergo, it must be wrong. While she claims to be attacking merely society’s attention deficit, her novel is a broader attack on modernity. Since many aspects of technology are central to modern life, this makes sense. For instance, she detests “our infatuation with nomadic life” and claims “places link us to history, literature, the murky depths of the human soul, and to others” (108-14). However, Jackson’s infatuation with nostalgia inhibits her from being realistic. Because of society’s “on-the-go” attitude, Jackson fears we have lost the feeling of connectedness a family meal provides. When shown a pre-packaged baked good, Jackson asks, “How much of my USDA daily recommended allowance of memories is in one serving?” (103). However, modern life does not always allow for family meals. To Jackson, rooting oneself is essential
to establishing a sense of self and maintaining relationships with others. Yet, this type of provincial lifestyle (while it is picturesque and evokes an emotional response) is simply not possible for everyone. It has no place for college age students living away from home, like myself, as well as for commuters and urban dwellers. It is this new, “nomadic” lifestyle that makes technology absolutely necessary. Not only is her idyllic world impossible, her diction is also highly emotionally charged, which makes it difficult to take her seriously. “The murky depths of the human soul”? Really?

Clearly from her view on sense of place, Jackson believes physical contact is necessary to maintain relationships. But when the tangible is unachievable, technology works. It may not be ideal, (as she is keen to point out) but communication through technology does have value. The examples Jackson presents in her novel, however, give the reader the impression that web-based networking is purely superficial. She portrays it as a way to create loose social ties instead of true bonds. As her evidence, Jackson cites a power-hungry teenage boy, Miguel De Los Santos, whose pastimes include breeding social insecurity by frequently changing his Top8 friends on MySpace depending on his mood (58-9). One should not be convinced that De Los Santos's behavior is the norm, as Jackson is employing the Straw Man fallacy to build her argument. Of course, anyone can see that De Los Santos misuses technology, but it is unfair and biased to suggest all teens use networking this way. In fact, MySpace has lost prevalence in today's society. According to the New York Times reports, “by 2011 many of its users had abandoned it, the founding team had departed and its owner, News Corporation, sold it for just $35 million.” Ergo, it is clear Jackson's example is quite outdated and does not fairly represent social norms.

...I realized there was no point in denying myself technology, of reverting and rejecting modernity. I could still engage in deep, personal thought and be greeted afterward by the comfort of my family and friends. Yes, they were miles away and all I had of them were pixels on a screen, but those were still their words, their thoughts, instantly. That is special.

Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are much more relevant examples, however. Granted, some teenagers may be overly concerned with the number of likes and followers they have, but that is not the sole purpose of social networking. Each networking platform has its own unique value. For the artistically inclined, Instagram offers young photographers an opportunity to share their work with the world. For college age students, Facebook bridges any distance, allowing one to check up on family and friends instantly. Social media is not purely focused on socializing, either. For instance, sites such as Linkdin provide an easy way to build business contacts and further one's career. To write off social connectivity as just “a numbers game,” for social climbers does not give credit to the possibilities technology offers (59). There will always be people like De Los Santos, but, if used correctly, social networking can connect us in ways never possible before.

Jackson would argue the opposite: that technology allows us to disconnect from others in ways the past never allowed. She believes the majority would prefer the easy way out, because, “with the virtual at hand, we needn't suffer the discomfort of looking one another in the eye and fumbling for the right words” (52). Yet, she is not giving credit to those who use technology to preserve ties with others instead of taking the easy way out. Not everyone engages in “virtual romances” like Willie, a 14 year old boy whose girlfriend he has never met but only spoken to over of the phone (53). By including this anecdote, Jackson implies this is the new norm for teenage relationships, which is an overgeneralization. Again,
Jackson provides an example that does not accurately portray societal norms. Sure, there are children and even adults who engage in online relationships, but they are outliers.

Conveniently, those who use technology to help foster true long distance relationships—face-to-face encounters and all—are not accounted for. Jackson only focuses on the negative. She suggests that because of our numerous yet loose social ties with others, “a quarter of Americans report having no close confidantes” (59). Yet, because of technology, this could not be further from the truth for me. As a college student whose friends are scattered throughout the country, I do not know how my relationships would survive without texting and FaceTime. Some days, when homesickness and isolation creep in, I am immensely thankful for technology. One quick text later and I can chat face-to-face with my best friends and it is just like old times, despite the distance. Although I am still physically alone, it certainly does not feel like it. While Jackson is right to point out the allure of misusing technology, one must keep in mind that technology need not be and should not be a crutch. It can, however, be a tool to connect us, as long as we find balance between digital and real life.

Herein lays the reason behind Jackson’s emotional appeals and fallacy: she fears loss of control. She fears that technology, already a significant part of life, will become life. Thus, she uses shocking examples possible along with emotional appeal to “scare us straight” so to speak. In her novel, she warns, “when we embrace the machine not as a tool but as part of us, we begin to lose the inner will and other means to connect with one another. We risk living in solitary glass cages, enchanted by shadows on the wall” (100). Losing the will to connect with others is a frightening prospect and valid concern. However, Jackson’s alarm is a bit preemptive. As mere children in this new technological era, we have been given unlimited power and freedom; of course we have to learn to wield it. It may take time for us to learn to implement technology appropriately in our daily lives, but we need not fear technology as a sinister force like Jackson suggests.

Painting technology as something out to get us, as something that only corrupts and “distracts” from the way life should be does not give enough credit to it as a useful tool in our lives. Jackson is right: technology can disconnect us. The new technological era could be the end of socialization as we know it. Will it be? Probably not. As Jackson herself points out, “George Kelly described how people shift and amend their ‘constructs,’ or frameworks for understanding: faced with new information, they either grapple with its implications, or turn away, clinging rigidly to old, unchanging readings of the world” (173). It is clear which train of thought Jackson chose. She does not understand that as addicting as technology can be, it is not all powerful. We still hold ownership of ourselves. We can still put our phones down and sometimes, it is okay if we choose not to.

Works Cited


Many girls consider college a time of new beginnings and sometimes, major transformations. Due to dichotomist thinking, women believe that they must choose either beauty or intellect because it seems as though it is impossible to have both. Some will choose to be the beauty on campus that every guy wants to date and every girl wants to be. Others will decide to delve into their studies, striving for excellence in their academics. For the girls who do not know which path to follow, this decision can be difficult. These girls, like most women in contemporary society, find value in both qualities and do not see one ranking above the other. Similar to this group of women, Flora Poste and Elfine Starkadder in *Cold Comfort Farm* and Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde* choose to follow the path of both intellect and beauty. *Cold Comfort Farm* and *Legally Blonde* present female characters who actively pursue both beauty and intellect to gain confidence, power and love. Even though society influences and motivates women to believe problematic dichotomist thinking, these women prove throughout the 20th century and into present day that it is possible to possess both qualities.

While these texts provide examples of women who reject the dichotomy, society attempts to make women believe they must choose either beauty or intellect because of many influences, one being a male’s opinion. Although the dichotomy began long before this time, in Stella Gibbons’ era, D. H. Lawrence was a driving force behind this mindset. According to Faye Hammill, “... he [Lawrence] attempted to elevate sexuality over intellectual activity” (843). Lawrence was an author who believed that women had no place in the intellectual world and only served as sexual objects. As time progressed, many men began to follow his beliefs. Men in this time period devalued women’s intelligence and viewed them as being incapable of holding such a power. According to Hammill, Lawrence believed that “chaos ...would ensue if women were given increased power” (843). He and his supporters mocked the idea of ambitious, powerful women. Because of this degradation, women, too, began to believe that they were incapable of intellectual behavior and power, and therefore pursued a life of solely beauty and sexuality.

*Cold Comfort Farm* provides many examples of men who force the beauty-over-intelligence mindset upon women. Gibbons illustrates D. H. Lawrence’s beliefs through the character of Mr. Mybug, who is incredibly sexist. His beliefs become exceptionally apparent to the reader in his remark to Flora that “[women’s] bodies matter more than [intellect]” (Gibbons 101). Mr. Mybug belittles women by suggesting that they are incapable of intelligence, mirroring a belief commonly held in his society regarding women. He states that “a woman’s success could only be estimated be the success of her sexual life” (Gibbons 122). Again, this remark suggests that women cannot be successful in life by using their minds, and therefore must use their bodies to progress. Mr. Mybug’s character speaks for all men in society that believe that women are objects of sex and do not hold a position in the intellectual world, suppressing women from their true potential.

Similarly, *Legally Blonde* includes male characters who discourage Elle from pursuing her intellect because of her overwhelming beauty and sexuality. During the application process, her father represses her dream by telling her that “law school is for people who are boring and ugly and serious and ...[you] are none of those things” (*Legally Blonde*). Her father groups these characteristics together to insinuate
that people who are bright must automatically be ugly as well. He thinks that because Elle is beautiful, she is incapable of being intelligent. Along with her father, her professor feeds into this mindset in an encounter with Elle in his office. While discussing her future career plans, he tries to make a pass at Elle, implying that women must use their sexuality in order to be successful in life as opposed to their mind (Legally Blonde). His actions parallel Mr. Mybug’s beliefs in Cold Comfort Farm. In order to be successful, women must be highly sexual. These characters provide a glimpse of men in society imposing their beliefs into the lives of women.

Although some women adapt to the beauty-over-intellect mindset through the duration of their lives because of male influence, many others will become cultured very early in life to this mindset through societal influences, such as fairytales. Fairytales teach young girls that in order to be successful in life, they must possess three character traits – beauty, delicateness, and submissiveness, none of which have anything to do with their mind (Lieberman 385). However, these stories do have a significant amount to say about the intellect. According to Marcia R. Lieberman, “... those women [in fairytales] who are either partially or thoroughly evil are generally shown as active, ambitious, strong-willed, and most often ugly” (392). Women who possess intellect are powerful and active because of the use of their minds. Fairytales portray women who use even a fraction of their mind as wicked and undesirable to everyone around them. These fairytales link together character traits that are irrelevant and unrelated, such as intelligent and ugly, but they encourage girls to believe as they grow older that they are connected (Lieberman 385). This connection influences girls from a young age to strive to be beautiful, and refrain from any and all intellectual behavior if they want to be desirable in life because according to fairytales, the two cannot mix.

The main character in Cold Comfort Farm, Flora Poste, is portrayed as a very beautiful woman through her descriptions and interactions with other characters. Flora demonstrates how beauty provides confidence and power, specifically power to influence other women despite society’s expectations. In Flora, Gibbons creates a very desirable character, a tall woman with dark golden hair who is “properly dressed” (Hammill 846). Through this description the reader gains a deep sense of Flora’s beauty and knowledge in fashion. Flora uses this knowledge to advise and teach other characters to accentuate their own beauty. During her first meeting with her cousin Elfine, Flora advises her to wear shades of blue because this clothing will look best with her features (Gibbons 61). Her descriptions to Elfine of different aspects of clothing, such as the cut and simplicity of the material, enhance her credibility in fashion. Flora does not take the time to get to know Elfine or anything about her personality, rather, she immediately focuses on her appearance and how to bring out her beauty. Flora’s infatuation with beauty and fashion suggests that society focuses solely on women’s beauty as well.

As time progresses, the reader learns that others appreciate Flora for her beauty too, as she attracts many men for her looks. During her encounters with one such man, Mr. Mybug, he must restrain himself from his strong urge to seduce Flora. Her beauty is so strong that at times even he is unable to control himself, and others must detain him, such as the guards at the Hawk-Monitor ball (Gibbons 159). This behavior suggests that beauty is extremely sought-after in society, showing that possessing beauty is essential for women’s empowerment. Gibbons creates an image that Flora’s beauty is powerfully irresistible. Flora exposes her beauty in her interactions with other characters, and their responses to her beauty provide her with confidence.

While Flora seems to be very in-touch with her beauty and sexuality, her interactions with others bring forth her discrete but very present intellect, providing her with an alternate form of power. Flora chooses to live at Cold Comfort Farm in order to gain material to write about in her future novel. Flora shows her intellect though her interactions with the other residents on the farm. In an attempt to
encourage him to leave the farm, Flora tries to convince her uncle Amos to travel the country to preach his passion for God's word (Gibbons 91). Because Amos sees this action as selfish and "puffing himself up," Flora strategically twists his logic in order to bring about her desired outcome: "... isn't that rather putting your own miserable soul before the glory of the Lord?" (Gibbons 91). Flora uses her intelligence to make Amos think that his lack of spreading God's word is selfish, which ultimately persuades him to travel at the end of the novel. Because society expects women to suppress their intellect, Flora must pretend that she is only beautiful and slyly persuade Amos. While Amos attempts to reject Flora's recommendation, she cunningly retaliates to show her intellect and position of power.

Ultimately, women have the final decision as to which traits they will choose to pursue, whether it be beauty, intellect, or a combination of both. However, in a society where a life of both characteristics is not only possible but encouraged, it can become a pressured decision.

Along with Amos, Flora's intellect makes a large impact on others at the farm. While visiting the hired girl, Meriam, Flora discusses Meriam's annual pregnancies. Meriam's sexual urges supersede her self-control, leaving her powerless to resist her sexuality with no escape. Flora instructs Meriam that "nothing will happen to [her], if only [she] uses [her] intelligence and sees that it doesn't" (Gibbons 69). Contrary to the way Meriam sees her problem, Flora assures her that her mind can control her body. Flora knows that women are able to use their minds to make decisions, which include taking precautions against pregnancy. Flora acknowledges that women have sexual needs; however, she insists that women have the capability to use their intellect to control them. She asserts that intellect is equally as strong, if not stronger, than sexuality. In a society that encourages female stereotypes, such as primarily following beauty and sexuality, Flora secretly uses her intellect to establish control and influence over residents on the farm. She balances both beauty and intellect and shows that it is possible to reject this dichotomy.

Another character in Cold Comfort Farm, Elfine, similarly demonstrates how women can gain beauty without forfeiting intellect. Flora converts Elfine into a beautiful girl acceptable to be married to a county man such as Richard Hawk-Monitor. Her transformation, which includes a new dress, haircut, and accessories, proves to be effective as she catches the eye of every guest upon her arrival at the ball. She is the quintessence of beauty. Gibbons devotes a large amount of time emphasizing the importance of Elfine's arrival, including the clichéd staircase entrance with every eye turning towards her (Gibbons 156), which again suggests how focused society is with women's beauty. Unraveling Elfine's character further, the reader discovers her secret passion of reading and writing poetry. According to Flora, in order for Elfine to win Dick's love, she must abandon this intellectual behavior. Flora explains to Elfine that “most young men are alarmed on hearing that a young woman writes poetry... such an admission is almost fatal” (Gibbons 136). Culture in the 1930s viewed a woman who was intelligent not as desirable, but the opposite. Flora argues that men view women who have an interest in intellectual topics, such as poetry, as unappealing and intimidating, and therefore unattractive. Despite her transformation into a beautiful woman, Elfine refuses to detach herself from the poetic persona which defines her. While defending her intellect against Flora's wishes, she says "I shall write [poetry] secretly, and publish it when I am fifty" (Gibbons 136). While her society's standards insist than a woman's intellect is unattractive, Elfine is rebellious and chooses to hold onto this piece of her identity while still achieving beauty. Along with achieving both qualities, Elfine also receives a proposal of love from Richard Hawk-Monitor. Her
transformation not only proves that it is possible for a woman to possess both of these attributes and receive love, but that in gaining one, it is not necessary to lose the other.

While *Cold Comfort Farm* disproves the dichotomy, the film *Legally Blonde* reverses the dichotomy to establish a new similarly flawed value system where intellect is treasured more than beauty. Elle Woods is a woman who’s overarching beauty and confidence initially defines her to her peers. The film introduces Elle to the audience solely with the image of beauty products on her dresser before showing her beauty routine: brushing her hair, painting her nails, and shaving her legs, etc. (*Legally Blonde*). Elle’s introduction reinforces the fact that her beauty is her defining characteristic. This presentation also causes the audience to believe that a woman’s beauty regime consumes her. Elle’s boyfriend, Warner, breaks up with Elle because “…[she] is too Marilyn” (*Legally Blonde*). This comment again emphasizes Elle’s beauty and suggests society’s association of women who focus solely on their beauty with Marilyn Monroe, a sex symbol in society, not known for her intellect. Following the break up with Warner, Elle chooses to walk home (*Legally Blonde*). After begging her multiple times to allow him to drive her home, Warner points out, knowing how important fashion is to her, that she will ruin her shoes by walking home (*Legally Blonde*). This comment demonstrates the cultural perception that women care primarily about their beauty, often putting fashion before all else, including their dignity. Elle’s overwhelming beauty, and the confidence that comes with it, demonstrates how a woman’s beauty can be beneficial yet can result in negative consequences with her peers.

As *Legally Blonde* progresses, Elle uncovers her hidden intelligence, as well as proves that beauty and intuition can complement each other. Elle’s break-up fuels her pursuit of a degree at Harvard Law School in order to win back Warner’s love and prove her intelligence. Following her first couple of successful months at Harvard, one of her professors takes on a murder case and chooses the top four interns, including Elle, to assist him (*Legally Blonde*). She combines her knowledge of beauty and intellect to bring forth a confession from a witness on the stand. The witness’ alibi is that she did not hear the gunshot because she was taking a shower after getting a perm on the day of the murder (*Legally Blonde*). However, Elle uses her knowledge about beauty to prove that this alibi is not plausible. She explains that getting hair wet after a perm will deactivate the chemicals; Elle knows that this woman did not shower because her perm is still intact (*Legally Blonde*). Elle’s knowledge of both fashion and law single-handedly wins the case and uncovers the real killer. Elle demonstrates not only that women are capable of possessing both beauty and intelligence, but also that the two characteristics can enhance each other.

While striving to be desirable and please society, women feel a need to impress their peers, which motivates their pursuit of beauty and/or intellect. However, women followed different avenues over the past century to obtain their desired outcome. In the early 20th century, most women followed the path that Flora follows to please one’s peers through beauty. Society, though primarily males, expected women to be beautiful and lack intelligence. During Elfine’s transformation, Flora advises her that “she must learn to laugh when a book or string quartet is mentioned, but to confess that she was not brainy” (Gibbons 130). Like most women in this time period, Elfine must be conversant and desirable to those around her, but she must suppress her intellect in order to make a good impression. She must be beautiful, but hide her knowledge.

However as time progresses, this one dimensional woman of beauty is proving to no longer be sufficient, as shown in Elle’s story. According to Nigella Lawson, “… it’s not enough to be good at one thing, you have to excel in all spheres” (27). Society is searching for women not only to be beautiful, but also to have the intelligence to support it. Now, more than ever, society pressures women to have both of these characteristics in order to be impressionable. For example, in the 2003 Miss America Pageant, two of the finalists were Harvard Law Graduates (Bowler). Both of these programs accept only the elite;
Harvard wants only the brightest students, and the Miss America Pageant wants only the most beautiful women on stage. Because these two women conquered both spheres, they proved to society that women are able to have it all (Bowler). Beauty alone could not have made the impression on society that these two women have made, proving that a combination of beauty and intellect is the strongest characteristic a women can possess.

Ultimately, women have the final decision as to which traits they will choose to pursue, whether it be beauty, intellect, or a combination of both. However, in a society where a life of both characteristics is not only possible but encouraged, it can become a pressured decision. Despite this pressure, the knowledge that different options are available can provide women with relief. Flora Poste, Elfine Starkadder, and Elle Woods provide examples of strong female characters who master both beauty and intellect, despite dominant male perspectives and societal influences. Their lives stand as models for women today, proving that regardless of what society expects, it is possible to be a beautiful intellectual and truly have it all.

Works Cited

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Cell phones, laptops, and high-definition televisions are nothing new to the current generation. In fact, technology is lurking around every corner these days. From automated vacuum cleaners to video game consoles, to GPS, and iDevices, technology’s prevalence has been well-noted by many. Several schools are now turning towards technological integration in the classroom to facilitate learning. School Districts such as Elizabeth Forward near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Ridley near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania have adopted the “iPad classroom,” where every student, kindergarten through twelfth grade, is provided with an iPad to enhance learning. It is evident that society is being impacted by technology, but is it possible that technology is actually hindering learning? According to Dr. Jay Giedd, a child psychologist, “[the] ease and immediacy of information, and the increasing propensity among teens toward multitasking, may promote ‘mile wide, inch deep’ thinking and a resistance to patience and persistence required for in-depth scholarship” (Giedd 102). Giedd, among many other psychologists, has evidence suggesting that technology is having a huge [negative] impact on the developing adolescent brain. Because technology is affecting the teenage brain, teachers and administrators alike in Pennsylvania should ease their reliance on technology and promote more creative thinking by engaging students in the classroom.

Educators should gear their teachings to foster growth in the classroom because adolescence is such a complex period of development where the brain, as well as the body, is undergoing many alterations. During the later pubescent years, the brain does not increase in size, rather, it grows more specialized (Giedd 106). Also, “the brain is especially susceptible and vulnerable to environmental input and to the formation of irreversible pathways and networks” (Choudhury 196). Suparna Choudhury, a professor at McGill University who studies cognitive neuroscience states that the human brain is “neuroplastic,” or easily shaped in response to environmental stimuli (Choudhury 194). As adolescents mature, their prefrontal cortex and frontal lobes continue to develop; it will take several years for this region of the brain to fully develop. Up until puberty, brain cells increase their connections as the brain grows larger. Then, during adolescence, unused neurons and connections are eliminated; the brain loses gray matter. “If a teen is doing music or sports or academics, those are the cells and connections that will be hardwired. If they’re lying on the couch or playing video games or watching MTV, those are the cells and connections that are going to survive” (Spinks). Teenagers are incapable of thinking rationally because their brains are not mature enough. For this reason, students must be encouraged by adult influences to engage in the coursework as well as in extra-curricular activities which are conducive to learning instead of playing games on devices, even if they are for educational purposes.
Susan Greenfield, a neuroscientist, states: “if we were to scan the brains of young people who spend a lot of time playing computer games...we would find that the prefrontal cortex is damaged, underdeveloped or underactive—just as it is in gamblers, schizophrenics, or the obese (qtd. in Giedd). Parents and teachers alike are feeding an epidemic. A study by Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan further claims “Internet use exacerbates existing natural cognitive deficits and proneness for instant gratification and risk orientation in adolescents, impairing social and reasoning abilities by stunting development of the prefrontal cortex” (qtd. in Choudhury). If the prefrontal cortex is in control of executive tasks such as judgment, reasoning, and emotions, then damage to this portion of the brain could lead to adolescence remaining in a child-like state, never able to attain the skills and functioning needed for adulthood.

One of the biggest downfalls to technology is what has been dubbed “mile wide, inch deep” thinking. Everybody has access to hundreds upon thousands of research documents and web pages, but there is little context to the information. Beth Stafford, a school counselor, makes a claim that students are having a lot of trouble validating their own arguments: “Academic research involves three steps: finding relevant information, assessing the quality of that information, then using appropriate information either to try to conclude something, uncover something, or to argue something. The Internet is useful for the first step, somewhat useful for the second, and not at all useful for the third” (qtd. in Brabazon). Essentially, the World Wide Web merely provides information. It does not teach how the information should be used. Jerrid Kruse, a student studying education at Drake University, explains why technology may be more harmful than we realize:
While the technical limitations might be easily addressed with technological improvements, the metaphysical and epistemic limitations require teachers and learners to wrestle with deeper issues, such as how using assistive mobile devices, such as an Apple iPhone or iPad, might change students’ conceptions of learning; how assistive mobile devices might undermine reflective thought; or how decisions regarding the use of assistive mobile devices might serve to maintain the status quo in education. (Kruse 44)

These devices are referred to as “assistive,” but technology is used in such a fashion that changes how one processes information.

While there is data pinpointing the ills of technology, some studies suggest that technology may bring more good than bad. Nick Sauers of Iowa State University believes that there are three primary benefits of classroom technology: access to information, collaboration, and engagement (Sauers 39). Smartphones and tablets are useful tools for quickly looking up information and communicating with others, whether peers or teachers, about school content. The Internet itself supports inquiry learning. “With the strategic use of computers, students can learn to locate their own resources, access content in flexible ways, and engage with a wide variety of information presented in multiple formats” (Castek 212). Using computers and other devices allows students to perform research themselves and offers the opportunity to expose students to a large array of sources with differing views on any given subject.

As an alumnus of Elizabeth Forward, I can attest to the fact that technology is more of a distraction than an aid.

Because there is such an extensive amount of research available, and much of the information is skewed, I decided to conduct my own study. I contacted several current students from high schools which have integrated technology in the classrooms, and asked if they found technology to impact the classroom positively or negatively. The results were overwhelmingly unanimous. All of the [40] students concluded that technology was a hindrance in the classroom and offered many opportunities for distractions (Studvick). Many of the students agreed that the idea of technological integration seemed positive because it could provide exposure to a plethora of information with differing views, but in practice, the wide array of high-tech gadgets proved ultimately useless. One freshman at Elizabeth Forward High School stated “It’s convenient to have access to a lot of information, but the only reason I use my iPad is to play games” (Studvick). A senior added, “More class time is wasted trying to get the technology to work in the first place. I think technology is beneficial as an addition, but we still need teachers” (Studvick). A sophomore from Ridley expressed, “I like being able to type on Word and look up information on my iPad, but it is really distracting. Even my graphing calculator has games on it” (Studvick). All of these devices are not filtered. The available games are providing more entertainment and taking away from the learning environment.

As an alumnus of Elizabeth Forward, I can attest to the fact that technology is more of a distraction than an aid. Many of the teachers are not properly trained in handling the equipment, and they are simply not capable of using it discriminatingly. Several teachers converted to technology and have completely disregarded other teaching methods. One, teacher, though, refused to rely on technology. (He did not even own a cell phone until 2013). I can affirm that his class was the most rewarding and beneficial to my future endeavors because he ensured that each and every student comprehended all of his [verbal] teachings. He constantly asked students to provide real-life examples rather than simply reading about a given topic, and he knew each person on an interpersonal level which made for a comfortable environment. Dr. Bundick, a professor of adolescent education at Duquesne University, claims that the idea that connectedness between the teacher and students is the most effective method for delivering information
Teachers should be staying in touch with students and actually explaining concepts rather than urging a reliance on high-tech gadgets. Elizabeth Forward’s library was recently renovated into a “multimedia” center where many books were given away to make space for the new computers, iPads, and big screen televisions. The library was no longer a safe haven for studying or a hideaway for academic students to further their knowledge, rather a gathering of computer addicts. This type of environment was not conducive to learning because there were no teachers to leverage the information students were granted access to. Mindlessly scrolling through data is not the same as comprehending real-life implications (Hawkins 71).

**While these devices are being integrated into the classroom to facilitate learning, teachers must still be present to educate students and help them fully understand the information they have access to.**

One might ask, “If students are able to learn everything online, then what is the purpose of schools?” According to B. R. McCandless, a school psychologist, “The maintenance-actualization task of the school is to help the child toward happiness, self-acceptance, realistic self-esteem, and pride in himself” (qtd. in Berzonsky). If the purpose of the school is to help the child, then why put them at risk? Money. After speaking to Dr. Bart Rocco, I learned that the school received around 2700 devices for $550,000 per year. While this price may seem outrageous, in the long run, it will supposedly be more cost-effective by offsetting the cost of textbooks and even ink and paper for the printers (Personal Interview). Are the savings really worth the cost of health? Many researchers actually think that there is no cost difference at all, and some feel that iPads are more expensive (Conor 4). “Lee Wilson, tech watcher and President & CEO of PCI Education, calculated that once you consider the training, network costs, and software costs, iPads cost school districts 552 percent more than those old-school textbooks” (quoted in Tyre). If iPads are equal to if not more expensive than traditional textbooks, and they can be damaging to health, then administration should ease their focus on technology and work towards building students’ self-esteem and pride.

With the prevalence of technology being inescapable, there seems to be only one solution to effectively manage this growing problem. Schools should mandate creative thinking in a less electronically-stimulating environment and focus on engaging with students. In a study by J. Brooks, he lists percentages that represent the average amount of information retained using various learning methods (“Teaching”):

1. Lecture = 5%
2. Reading = 10%
3. Audiovisual = 20%
4. Demonstration = 30%
5. Discussion Group = 50%
6. Practice by doing = 75%
7. Teach others / immediate use of learning = 90%

Many teachers spend countless hours creating PowerPoint presentations, and students spend just as much if not more time reading and educating themselves on certain topics. While the iPad may allow students to look up anything they may please, information is only retained when their knowledge is put into practice. Nearly every school mandates Internet use for research at the least, but no school mandates how much time is spent searching for resources. “Once a student is on the computer, it is easy for him or her to wander astray” (Personal Interview). Teachers need to focus less on technology and more on each student individually. This is not to say that all technology should be eliminated, but
it should work in accordance with teachers rather than instead of teachers. “Technology is beneficial when used appropriately to facilitate learning, but it most often becomes a distraction. When teachers utilize technology to further connect with students, such as ‘Poll Everywhere’ to gauge if the students are actually understanding information, then it is an irreplaceable tool” (Personal Interview). Unfortunately, many educators, even those who are not technologically savvy, rely on technology simply because it is the newest method. In reality, students need to be engaged in the topic at hand. Group discussions/work, regularly shifting teaching methods, and connecting content to relevant topics in pop culture and of the like are the most practical ways to teach.

Tara Brabazon, a professor of media in the United Kingdom as well as the director of the Popular Culture Collective at the University of Brighton, devoted a book, The University of Google, to exploring technology in the [college] classroom. She does not criticize technology, per se, but deprecates the consequences of funding technology instead of teachers (Brabazon 1). A primary focus of her book is discussing how Google has impacted student learning:

Google is an outstanding search engine, with problems that all search engines reveal. Their addition of Google Scholar and Google Book Search is important, even though many of the articles cannot be read in full text…But being able to digitize a book does not confirm that it will be read. Access does not confirm use…Finding a website does not equate with understanding it. (Brabazon 219)

While these devices are being integrated into the classroom to facilitate learning, teachers must still be present to educate students and help them fully understand the information they have access to. Think of what would happen if doctors were educated and trained using only technology. Publishing a book and creating an app on brain surgery does not mean that anyone can perform an operation.

Technology, even as early as the printing press, has been created with one goal in mind: facilitating a given aspect of life for the sake of convenience (sometimes for the better and other times for sheer laziness). Many parents purchase the latest gadgets for their children with the intention of bettering their futures. Tablets for research, laptops for homework, and iPhones for staying in touch. In reality, parents are seemingly coerced into buying these technologies because schools are becoming more and more dependent on such advancements. While technology is not “bad” necessarily, it must be used properly by teachers to engage students, not to replace traditional forms of learning. Technology can be an acceptable resource in the classroom, but only when teachers are guiding its use and continuing to promote non-technologically influenced creative thinking.

My brother, a freshman at Elizabeth Forward, came to visit me at school one weekend. With him came his iPad. I was eagerly looking forward to spending quality time with him, but this new toy was attached to him like a parasite. Rather than tour the city of Pittsburgh or experience college life, my brother opted to play “Flow” on his school-issued device. It occurred to me that my brother, amongst others within a similar age range, are actually deprived of culture and experience, even though iDevices are meant to provide more depth and understanding. The current generation will not be able to feel the pages of a book or have any need to go out and explore the world because they have hundreds upon thousands of resources readily at their disposal. The kids of today as well as of future generations are at risk for knowing nothing other than iDevices.
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