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

Keywords: discourse analysis, Turkle, positioning, membership categorization device, extreme case formulation, ideology, indexicality, acts and stances, intensive mothering

**MEDIATED MOTHERHOOD:  
DISCOURSE AND MATERNAL IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

by

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Thesis

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Master of Arts in Communication and Rhetorical Studies

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

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

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

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

- 75% of families own a mobile device (smartphone, tablet, etc., and this is compared to 52% in 2011)
- 72% of children 0-8 have used a device (compared to 38% in 2011)



- 86% of families with household incomes greater than \$75,000 have high-speed Internet access, compared to 46% of families with incomes less than \$30,000
- 75% of parents in the higher income bracket had downloaded educational apps for their children, compared to 35% in the lower bracket (Common Sense, 2013).

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

I am specifically interested in the ways in which mothers perceive and talk about the role of digital devices in family life. Currently, the conversation on digital parenting is influenced on the one hand by the work of experts such as Sherry Turkle. In January 2011, Turkle published *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. In this book, she contends that technology is luring us into relinquishing (face-to-face) interpersonal relationships for virtual ones, which offer “the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship” (Turkle, 2011, p. 1). Turkle finds us avoiding the telephone, substituting more distant, asynchronous channels of email and text (pp. 190, 207). She first defines, then explains, and finally warns against the effects of technology on human interaction, some of which are highlighted in this analysis.

In an April 2013 interview with Gayle King and Charlie Rose on CBS This Morning, Turkle outlines two points: first, cell phones provide a (false) sense of multitasking, with the result that we are not paying full attention to the task-at-hand. For example, we text, Turkle claims, while having breakfast with our family, or on the playground when we should be watching our children. Second, says Turkle, mediated communication allows users to construct a desired self (who we want to be). We thus reveal only that which we choose to reveal rather than who we really are. Essentially, Turkle contends, our electronic devices allow us to “hide from each other” (CBS, 2013).

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

To foreground the role of interaction in the construction, or the *co*-construction, of identity, this thesis draws on the theories and methods of discourse analysis. A discourse analytic perspective can shed light on the ways in which experts and mothers

alike communicate the impact of technology on family interaction and parenting practices, addressing such questions as, how do experts and parents assess and balance the potential benefits and drawbacks of technology, and what strategies do parents enact to manage technology use by family members, especially children? In other words, I consider how experts and parents discursively construct the family-technology relationship by analyzing how parents communicate about technology use (both their own and their children's), the emotional and practical elements of decision-making regarding technology and how these reveal ideologies about the impact of technology on parenting.

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

I discuss the context and format of the interview and online comments, specifically what strategies are deployed, for what purpose, and to what ends (what do they accomplish?). Specific attention is paid to how mothers use discourse to communicate their own, and their children's, uses of technology, and how all of this works to construct parental identities in interaction. With this, I hope to contribute to an existing body of work on parental identity in interaction, as well as technology and interaction, and finally to link the two by analyzing the discursive negotiation of identity in relation to technology and cultural expectations of motherhood in contemporary society.

To accomplish this, I ask the following questions: First, how does an expert construct the relationship between parenting and technology and what does this accomplish? What are the implications for parents? Second, how do mothers construct maternal identities for themselves as they discuss their own and their children's use of technology? Third, how is parental identity constructed and negotiated in online formats? My primary findings support a body of research that indicates a mention of parenting in general can be interpreted to implicate mothers specifically. As such, the conversation about the relationship between parenting and technology is constrained by cultural ideologies about maternal responsibility for the care of children and philosophies about the affordances of technology, and entangled with questions of access and class. All of this influences the ways in which both experts and parents negotiate their identities and work to position themselves as competent on each of these fronts.

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

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Background**

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

### **I. Identities in interaction.**

I begin with a perspective of social interaction as a site for continuous identity (re)construction. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) introduced a theatre metaphor to explain the ways in which interaction allows interlocutors to put a 'self' on stage (p. 107). (Turkle's recent contention that we use modern technology to display preferred identities in some ways echoes this theorizing.) Goffman's work on 'the presentation of self' describes the ways in which individuals' contributions to interaction work to control and manage the impressions of themselves and others. Summarizing and distilling work in the fields of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity is a discursively constructed, emergent product of interaction (p. 587). As these authors propose, "identity is the social positioning of self and other" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586). This is consistent with Ribeiro (2006), who finds that "conversational and social work is related to doing identity work," viewing interaction as the locus of "the performance of our social and discourse identities" (p. 50). Useful for the analyses presented in this thesis are those theories and concepts which help explain the role of interaction in identity construction, namely, positioning, the MIR Membership Categorization Device, and indexicality.

Davies & Harré (1990) define positioning as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 48). These story lines, or “autobiographical aspects of a conversation,” explain Davies & Harré (1990), reveal “how each conversant conceives of themselves and of the other participants” (p. 48). Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) find that when participants interact, they “position themselves and others as particular kinds of people” (p. 595). As Gordon (2015a) summarizes, “positioning theory provides a framework to explore selves as discursive constructions, and to investigate different aspects of identity, including the development and negotiation of these aspects” (p. 11).

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

examining categories in discourse constitutes an especially useful research focus (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594).

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

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

constituted and mediated by the relation of language to stances, [and] social acts...” (pp. 336-7).

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

## II. Ideology and Maternal Identities.

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

Taking a sociocultural approach to language and literacy, Gee (2008) finds that language “always comes fully attached to ‘other stuff’: to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes...” (p. 1). Meaning is attached to these (often) tacit cultural models which are “picked up from talk, interaction, and engagement with texts and media in society” (Gee, 2008, p. 25).



That is, interaction is a site for the creation and reification of particular ways of seeing and understanding the world. For this reason, Gee (2008) claims “that language is inextricably bound up with ideology and cannot be analyzed or understood apart from it” (p. 4).

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

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

In defining membership and “normalcy,” Discourses, then, also mark outsiders and opposition, since foregrounding certain beliefs and values necessarily also marginalizes others. In Johnstone's (2008) words, “‘Discourses’ in the plural are conventional ways of talking that create and perpetuate systems of ideology, sets of beliefs about how the world works and what is natural” (p. 29). She explains that every linguistic choice, from the production to the interpretation of discourse, reflects a kind of agenda or an ideology; a choice to see the world in one particular way (and thus not another) (Johnstone, 2008, p. 54).

Similarly, Ochs (1992) observes that “social groups organize and conceptualize men and women in culturally specific and meaningful ways” (p. 339). Comparing and contrasting the communicative practices of white middle class (WMC) American mothers and traditional Western Samoan mothers, Ochs (1992) proposes “a relation between the position and image of women in society and language use in caregiver-child interaction” (p. 346). Ochs (1992) points out that images of women and of mothering are linked; and further, that images of mothering are linked with caregiving, hence the universal woman-as-caregiver image (pp. 339, 337). Yet despite the fact that “mothering is a universal kinship role of women and in this role women have positions of control and power,” she finds that WMC mothers exhibit “a communicative strategy of high accommodation to young children” (Ochs, 1992, pp. 346-7).

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

Finally, Ochs (1992) concludes, these linguistic practices serve to not only illuminate but perpetuate the role (and therefore, status) of mothers in society, since images of WMC mothers are socialized through the dual communicative strategies of

“high accommodation to young children” and “minimiz[ing] their own importance” (p. 347). In other words, because WMC mothers downplay their contributions to interactions, they are rendered “invisible” and the recurrence of these socialization practices perpetually “lowers [their] position” (Ochs, 1992, p. 353). Thus, as these mother-child interactions serve to socialize children, they also create maternal identities that reflect cultural expectations about what it means to be a good mother, while simultaneously reifying these expectations.

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

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

*emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive*” and all of these point to ideologies of class and gender (p. 8).

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

Moving to the realm of everyday conversation, Kendall (2007) analyzes the discourse of two women from dual-income American families who recorded their own conversations for approximately one week; she finds that they negotiate both “parental and work-related identities through the positions they discursively take up themselves and make available to their husbands in relation to traditional and feminist discourses of work and family” (p. 124; note that Kendall uses “discourses” here to reflect ideologies, or Big-D Discourses as suggested by Gee [2008; 2013]). That is, in one sense, specifically when they describe their family roles, “the women position themselves and their husbands in non-traditional roles...” as “workers” and as “caregivers,” respectively

(Kendall, 2007, p. 154). On the other hand, in actual interactions where they enact family roles, by positioning their husbands as “breadwinners” and “secondary caregivers” and themselves as “primary caregivers,” “the women constitute their own and their husbands’ identities as caregivers asymmetrically” (Kendall, 2007, p. 124). As such, Kendall (2007) suggests that they “attach different meanings” to these roles, meanings consistent with traditional role sharing and Hays’ (1996) ideology of intensive mothering (Kendall, 2007, p. 154).

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

Discourse analysts have also examined how parental identities are tied to the identities of children. Gordon (2007) explores the ways performance of social acts and verbal display of stances reflect cultural expectations of motherhood, and create what Schiffrin (1996) calls maternal “self-portraits.” Analyzing talk about the (mis)behaviors of a toddler between a mother, her younger brother (who had babysat the child), and her husband, Gordon (2007) finds that the mother expresses feeling responsible for her

daughter's inappropriate behavior, and concern that it reflects poorly on her as a mother; sentiments not expressed by her husband (p. 82-3). In accounting for her daughter's shortcomings, the mother demonstrates the sociocultural constraints of motherhood. That is, she feels responsible and this feeling leads to a need to engage in what Goffman (1959) calls "impression management" or face the resulting humiliation (p. 96). This study once again highlights the mother-child identity connection found by Kendall (2007) and Johnston (2007).

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

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

Similarly, borrowing from Goffman (1959), Collett (2005) analogizes the construction of maternal identity with theatrical performance. She also builds on prior research on appearance and group membership, as well managing impressions through

the use of others as props, both of which mesh nicely with Goffman's (1959) theatre metaphor. Collett (2005) notes that while fathers play a pivotal role in children's development, it is mothers who are held responsible for "the way their children turn out" (p. 328). As such, children serve as props on the stage in which women present themselves as competent mothers, and on which they seek to negotiate and manage the impressions they create. Through analysis of an online playgroup and interviews with its members, Collett (2005) points to the fact that women use their children "to show themselves and others that they are good, capable mothers" (p. 343).

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

To summarize, the discourse of "mother as main parent"/"part-time father" is prevalent as revealed by scholarship in sociology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Even when the Discourse of egalitarian parenting is stated explicitly or implied

(in interaction or in print), analysis at the discourse level reveals a reality which, in practice, reflects more traditional role sharing ideologies, thus revealing that speakers do not (and in fact *cannot*) produce discourse that does not somehow reflect or counter a Discourse. Taken together, the body of literature reviewed here suggests that language and ideology are inherently bound up together in the realm of parenting.

### III. Technology and Family Interaction.

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

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



moot. Yet, the question of effects on family interaction becomes increasingly more salient.

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

Thus, one perspective on the assimilation of technology into everyday life is revealed by Blum-Kulka's (1997) distinction between "sociability" and "socialization." Discourse analysts and sociolinguists have identified family interaction generally, and family dinnertime especially, as important for the complementary goals of family sociability and child socialization. First, as a "sociable event," talk at family dinner is not directed toward a particular goal (i.e., teaching), but has as its focus building rapport (Blum-Kulka, 1997, 36). Citing Lakoff (1990), Blum-Kulka (1997) describes interactions of this type as "egalitarian and collaborative" (p. 35). On the other hand, the "socializing functions" of family dinner point to particular goals (i.e., teaching table manners), and as such may be less-than-egalitarian, or non-egalitarian and "not necessarily collaborative" (Blum-Kulka, 1997, pp. 35-6). In this aspect, children are invited and expected to participate, "but parents reserve the right and power to modify and withhold [this privilege]" (Blum-Kulka, 1997, p. 38). Technology could possibly be seen as hindering, and/or facilitating, family sociability and child socialization.

Reinforcing the importance of these complementary goals for the digital age, Turkle (2012) advocates making the dining room a “sacred space,” or “device-free zone” in order to “demonstrate the value of conversation to our children.” As Scelfo (2010) states, “there is little research on how parents’ constant use of... technology affects children, but experts say there is no question that engaged parenting... remains the bedrock of early childhood learning.”

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

While families’ technology use is well-documented and there are plenty of public opinions about this, there is an absence of studies considering how parents are discursively positioned in regards to their own, and their children’s exposure to technology. An exception is Pigeron (2012), who analyzed videotaped and audiotaped interviews with parents from 32 dual-earner families, and finds that parental discourse on children’s media use at home is influenced by a “collective cultural consensus” that media exposure is “not healthy” (p. 16). Laden with cultural ambivalence toward the negative effects of technology, the conversation about “about how to maintain a healthy media landscape within the home,” thus becomes a question of morality (Pigeron, 2012, p. 18).

Since media exposure is nearly unavoidable in an age where media competence is a necessary life skill, significant work was required on the part of parents in order to provide an accounting of children's media use that could be seen as "coherent with ideologies of a family's collective life and practices" (Pigeron, 2012, p. 28). In this "moral arena," parents enact strategies such as accounting for strict parenting practices, contrasting their practices with others', and blaming others for children's media exposure; engaging in what Pigeron (2012) calls "moral discourse" in order to discursively portray themselves as good parents (pp. 15-7).

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

### **Chapter 3: Data and Methods**

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

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

In the second analysis chapter (Chapter 5), I introduce and analyze textual data in the form of comments posted at *The New York Times*’ website. In the summer of 2010, *The Times* ran a series entitled, *Your Brain on Computers*. “The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In” was one installment in that series. Published in June of that year, the article references Turkle’s work as well as that of other experts and anecdotal accounts

of parents talking about their own technology use. In response to that article, 182 comments were posted. Turkle contributes 28 of these responses.

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

With respect to communication in online fora, Herring (2004, p. 338), quoting Kolko (1995), describes an approach to computer-mediated discourse analysis which builds on the premise that, “language is doing... on the Internet, where physical bodies (and their actions) are technically lacking.” Computer-mediated discourse analysis uses theories and methods of discourse analysis, while keeping in mind the affordances and limitations of digital contexts (Herring, 2004). Thus, I use computer-mediated discourse analysis to consider the online comments.

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

### **Introduction**

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

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

favor of these more distant, asynchronous channels of communication (Turkle, 2011, p. 207).

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

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

Any discussion of parenting in the digital age must first consider what it means to *be* a parent; that is, what responsibilities are attached to the role of parent? With this as a backdrop, I consider how an expert (Turkle) discursively constructs the parent-child-technology relationship by analyzing how she depicts talk about technology use (by both parents and their children); I demonstrate how this talk reveals ideologies about the impact of technology on parenting. In what follows, I first suggest that concept of positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) and the MIR Device (Sacks, 1989) serve as lenses

through which to view the interview. Building on work by Schiffrin (1996, 2000), I also consider how identities are constructed in narrative, such as the stories told by Turkle in the interview. I then analyze transcribed extracts of a televised interview with Turkle and Bill Moyers of PBS, with special attention devoted to segments in which Turkle refers specifically to the relationship between technology and family interaction.

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

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

### **Analysis**

Here, I present five extracts of an interview between PBS talk show host Bill Moyers and Sherry Turkle, author of *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. I apply positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) to demonstrate how positioning functions to socially construct the ‘role’ of



parenthood within what the authors refer to as “a subjective history with its attendant emotions and beliefs” (p. 52). That is, to position oneself as ‘parent’ (or I would suggest ‘good parent’) necessitates familiarity with “the multiple expectations and obligations of care for children that are entailed” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 52). In other words, positioning occurs in the shadow of culturally-established ideologies about responsible parenting. Sacks’ (1989) MIR Device also contributes to my analysis.

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

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

Thus while identity in interaction may be viewed as open-ended and ever-unfolding, with a limitless number of positions available to take up, in actual experience,

identity “can only be expressed and understood through the categories” that are made available in interaction (p. 46). I stress here how the discursive expression of identity is thus limited to recognizable categories in which the self may presently be positioned in a particular story line.

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

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

A related approach which incorporates both positioning and the MIR Device emphasizes the role of narrative in “the construction and display of our sense of who we are” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 168). Schiffrin (1996) finds, “the way we tell our stories also

reveals a self that exists within a cultural matrix of meaning, beliefs, and normative practices” (p. 170). This is relevant to the data presented here, as is Schiffrin’s (1996) observation, “stories about women in families offer a particularly interesting site for... analyses,” since “the family provides our first set of social relationships” and further, it “remains a traditional nexus of social life and cultural meaning for many women” (p. 170).

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

The first extract occurs near the beginning of the interview. Moyers has introduced the segment and his guest, Turkle, to the viewing audience. Figure 1 below shows the physical arrangement of the participants in the interview. Figure 2 shows Turkle talking; her book is shown to viewers at home. After introducing Turkle, Moyers previews the YouTube video, “I Forgot My Phone,” in which a young woman without a cell phone is ignored by those around her (since they are absorbed in their devices). Following its viewing, Moyers asks for Turkle’s thoughts. Note that her response proceeds inductively, from broad principles to a very specific conclusion: one with implications for parents and children.



Figure 1. Bill Moyers & Sherry Turkle.



Figure 2. Sherry Turkle. "Alone together."

**Extract 1: 02:36-03:29. "If you don't teach your children."**

- 8 BM: What are you thinking as you look at that?  
 9 ST: Well I call it "alone to↑gether." That we're-  
 10 we're moving to a space (.) wher:e we feel free  
 11 (.) to- to respo:nd to the three promises that  
 12 technology now makes us. That we can always  
 13 be heard (.) that we can be wherever we want to  
 14 be (.) and that we never have to be alone. And  
 15 that third ↑promise actually is terribly  
 16 important because I believe that the capacity  
 17 for solitude is terribly important to develop. I- I  
 18 → even believe that if you don't teach your  
 19 children to be alone (.) they'll only know how to  
 20 → be lonely. And by not developing this capacity  
 21 for solitude, we're not doing our children a  
 22 favor.

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

The presence of these possessive pronouns denotes ownership or responsibility for these children; responsibility that is traditionally (culturally) associated with

parents. Therefore, I suggest here that Turkle's response positions parents as responsible for teaching their children to be alone, or to develop *the capacity for solitude*. Interestingly, the fulfillment of these responsibilities constitutes doing children *a favor*, one which Turkle deems *terribly important*. I further suggest that in highlighting *the capacity for solitude* and assigning responsibility for its development in children to others ("you" and "we"), Turkle limits what positions parents may take up in the discourse surrounding technology and family interaction.

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

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



Figure 3. Turkle. “That’s very serious.”

**Extract 2: 17:06-17:47. “Children have to be taught.”**

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

As noted above, the mandate *children have to be taught* requires some inference regarding the category ‘children’ (as innocent or naïve, perhaps) and it is precisely these types of inferences which are informed by knowledge about membership in the category “child,” as suggested by Sacks (1989). The absence of an agent (by whom must children be taught?) requires additional inference, namely, that parents must do the teaching (and these inferences are, I point out, based on understandings of cultural ideologies about parenting). Sacks’ (1989) MIR Device is useful here in that it illuminates the inferences underlying this interaction specifically, and interaction in general. Children

are positioned as lacking knowledge or guidance, and parents as responsible for providing it, since, as Sacks (1989) finds, the “importance of such a phenomenon is that it’s not just one category’s view of another, but that knowledge is standardized across the categories” (p. 276). In other words, parents are expected to perform the “social act” (Ochs, 1992, 1993) of teaching.

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

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

**Table 1. Parallel themes from Extracts 1 and 2.**

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

The notion of parental responsibility implied in Extracts 1 and 2 is made explicit in the following extract. Whereas interpretation in the above extracts draws upon a shared cultural knowledge of the roles of “parent” and “child” to infer responsibility, Turkle explicates this assumption below. In fact, it is here, only moments before the conclusion of the interview, that she uses the word “parents” for the first and *only* time.

(It is perhaps noteworthy that she uses “mother” only once as well, as seen in line 58 of Extract 4, and does not use the word “father” at all).



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

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

- 512 BM: So do you have a couple of practical things that  
 513 you would suggest to people about how to use  
 514 this technology? Facebook ’n Twitter social  
 515 media (.) for happiness and meaning?  
 516 ST: → I’ve a lot of practical advice for par↑ents (.)  
 517 which is to create sacred spaces in your ho:me.  
 518 BM: By which you mean-  
 519 ST: Places that are device free. Kitchen dining  
 520 room and the car.  
 521 BM: Hm.  
 522 ST: You can't introduce this idea when your child is  
 523 ↑15 that the car is for chatt↑ing. From the very  
 524 beginning kitchen dining room and the car are  
 525 places where (1.0) we talk. And you ex↑plain to  
 526 your child, "This isn't a you know- this is  
 527 important to me (.) we're a family I need to talk  
 528 to you. I need to talk to you."

By performing the speech act of asking for advice for “people” (his viewers; lines 512-515), Moyers positions Turkle as an expert (one from whom advice is to be sought).

Turkle’s response, performing the speech act of giving advice, thus positions her as a particular kind of person; namely, the kind qualified to advise others, an authority. Yet



her response essentially fails to answer the question asked in three ways. In the first line of this extract, Moyers expresses his request in the plural form as *a couple of practical things*, yet Turkle supplies only one: *create sacred spaces in your home* (line 517). In so doing, she positions parents as the gatekeepers in the family regarding technology.

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

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

In Extract 4, Turkle presents a narrative as an example of what she calls *technological affordance and human vulnerability* (lines 55-56). Moyers has just posed the question, "Isn't every media revolution greeted with the kinds of concerns we've been expressing?" Though it begins with a hypothetical tone, note in line 63 that

Turkle seems to indicate this is her telling of an actual scenario; one in fact which bears striking similarity to the interview with Audrey reported in her book and referenced in the introduction to this chapter.



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



Figure 6. Turkle. “Go like that.”

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

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

Turkle's use of the indefinite article *a* in line 58 generalizes *mother* such that this narrative does not appear to be about one mother in particular, but a reference to a common scenario that indexes the broader ideology of high accommodation and child-centered parenting. It is interesting to note here that Turkle does not directly criticize the mother, rather she attributes blame for the mother's behavior to what she later describes as “technology's pull” (lines 101-2).

In fact, Turkle frequently employs this technology-as-drug metaphor throughout the interview, using terminology commonly associated with addictive substances, such as “stimulating” in line 36 (also “stimulation,” line 60; and “stimulated,” line 296), and claiming that technology “revs us up” (line 38), and “puts us neurochemically in a state” (lines 38-9). She later describes “the neurochemical hit of constant connection” (line 109), from which we “get a high” (line 112). In selecting this metaphor, Turkle displays a negative stance toward technology; yet stops short of criticizing those who use it, instead referring to them as “vulnerable” (lines 56-7, 59, 76, 316, and 465).

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

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

In the final extract, I highlight the ways extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) work to legitimize Turkle’s claims vis à vis parents’ responsibility toward their children. Pomerantz (1986) categorizes uses of extreme case formulations, or

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

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



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

**Extract 5: 14:36-15:23. “Everything bad and... everything good.”**

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

Here I break down the instances of extreme case formulations. In her first utterance (line 238), Turkle describes the current obsession with technology as *so bad*, an extreme case of “bad,” or “as bad as can be.” To demonstrate just how bad, Turkle presents her *best example* in line 240; that is, no other example illustrates her point more effectively. In lines 245 and 246, *know* and *we all know* represent layers of extreme case formulations. First, in contrast with “think” or “believe,” “know” represents an extreme case of certainty. *We all*, finds Pomerantz (1986), in referencing no one in particular, is a formulation of “everyone” (p. 224). A gloss of *we all know* (line 246) reads, “every single person is absolutely certain.” Use of the definite article “the” in *the thing* (describing dinner in line 246) invites an interpretation as not “some” thing, or “a” thing, but the “only” thing.

Perhaps the strongest example here, and one which Turkle emphasizes in line 250 is *everything*, as in *everything bad* and *everything good*. *Everything* here formulates a proportion of bad, or good, respectively, as “the whole, the complete, or the total set” (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 225). That is, not “some” bad or good, but every possible bad is avoided and every possible good achieved through family dinner. Finally, (and

perhaps to a lesser extent), *the growing up of a child* (line 251) may be viewed as encompassing the entire span of children's developmental years. The examples in this extract thus illustrate the ways in which extreme case formulations work to discursively legitimize claims. Turkle constructs parents as responsible for managing technology in the family, and technology as potentially very harmful to everyday family interactions and child development.

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

## **Discussion**

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

As Schiffrin (1996) finds, stories in general (and “mother/daughter stories” specifically) “offer especially good opportunities to examine the way narrative displays

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

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

As Gordon (2015a) explains, positioning theory “makes ties between the here-and-now of conversation, prior conversations, and broader ideologies” (p. 10). As Davies

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

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

A limitation here is that this is but one interview with one expert, and further, the voices of parents themselves are not represented. In addition, and as discussed previously, the discourse analyzed here leaves the audience question unanswered, yet seems to point to American middle class ideologies and practices. That is, the conversation about technology invokes questions about access. As Johnstone (2008) finds, those with access to technological resources “may be on average younger, wealthier, and better educated than the population as a whole” (p. 196). And this is relevant, since the generalizability of these findings may be limited in their scope. Future research might look at the conversation surrounding technology and parenting from other expert perspectives, and/or include those of parents to analyze the ways in which their individual voices either ratify or reject the current public discourse



surrounding the impact(s) of technology on family life. My next chapter turns to how parents do this in an online context.

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

### **Introduction**

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

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

In this chapter, I analyze comments posted on *The New York Times*’ website following an article entitled, “The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In.” The content of the article itself is certainly relevant to this analysis, but it is the comments which provide a glimpse into the discursive construction of parental identities in the digital age. Specifically, I show how posters discursively construct the identities of parents, and especially mothers, as requiring intensive engagement with children (following Hays, 1996); I also suggest that this kind of mothering, and maternal identity, has

socioeconomic class implications. That is, these expectations, and one's ability to "live up" to them, reflect values and privileges typically associated with the middle- or upper-classes. I thus illustrate how big-D Discourses are created in the little-d discourse of online comments, while also showing how little-d discourse reflects big-D Discourse. In what follows, I first introduce *The New York Times* comments which serve as the data for this analysis. I then present demographic information and a brief summary of relevant themes in the data, and contextualize these findings before turning to analysis.

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

In the third section, I apply research from sociology that examines legal, medical and media discourses of parental responsibility for child health and wellbeing. Examining parenting magazines, Sunderland (2006) finds that despite claims of "shared parenting" and attempts to address both fathers and mothers, fathers continue to be *underaddressed* in these media. Zivkovic et al.'s (2010) examination of both legal and

print media representations of child obesity in Australia finds that responsibility is indeed beset by gendered assumptions, and in these accounts “parent” is code for “mother.” These findings suggest that in many cases mothers are assumed to be primary parents who are ultimately responsible for children.

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

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

## Data



**Figure 8. Screenshot of article as published online.**

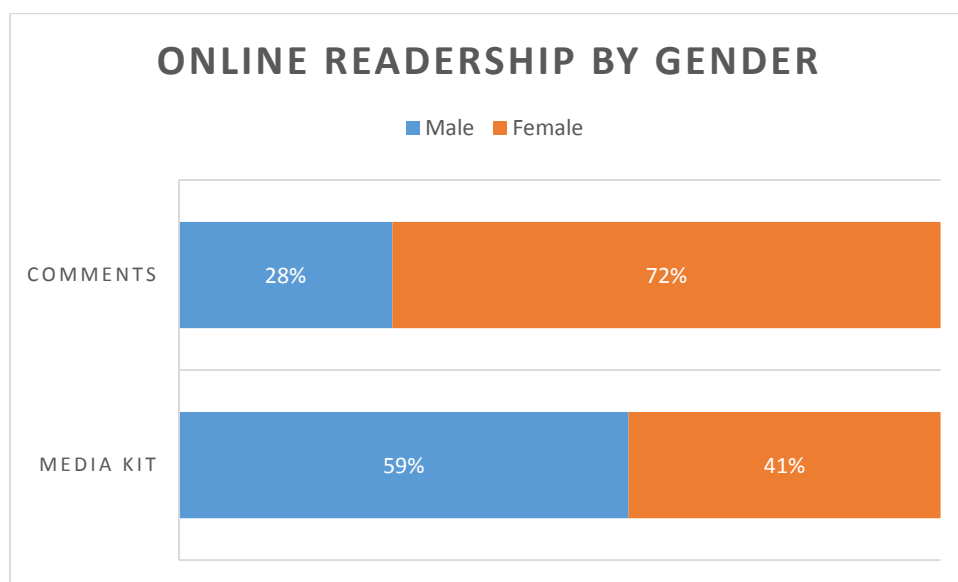
In June of 2010, *The New York Times* ran a series entitled, “Your Brain on Computers.” Seven articles comprise the series. In this chapter I focus on comments posted in response to one: “The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In” (Figure 8 is a screenshot of this article as I accessed in its online format).

As the title suggests, the article turns the spotlight from the effects of technology use on adolescents to “parents’ use of such technology – and its effect on their offspring” (Scelfo, 2010). The degree of connectivity made possible by smartphones and laptops is portrayed in the article as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, parents may be able to work from home resulting in a greater *quantity* of time with their children; on the other, constantly checking these devices constitutes a distraction, thus more time at home does not necessarily translate to more *quality* time in interaction. The article also explores quantity/quality time through the lens of socioeconomic status, asking whether “increased use of technology encroaches on the time that well-to-do families spend communicating with their children” (since these families are more likely to be able to afford both digital devices and a stay-at-home parent) (Scelfo, 2010).

Turkle, who is quoted in the piece, also participates in the forum, contributing 28 of the 182 comments following the article. The remaining 154 comments are contributed by 148 unique contributors (seven individuals post two responses). Examining usernames, pronoun use (“my husband”) and referring terms (“I am a SAHM” [Stay At Home Mom]) when present in each post, I was able to determine the gender of two-thirds (99) of the contributors. I then generalized these percentages to the remaining one-third. (This classification is not entirely unproblematic, as I make the following assumptions: referring terms “husband” and “wife” are taken to reference heterosexual relationships, and names commonly associated with certain genders were counted as that gender; for example “Michelle” and “Claire” were assumed to be women, while “Roger” and “David” were assumed to be men).

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

The chart below compares the article comments I examine to the information provided by the media kit.

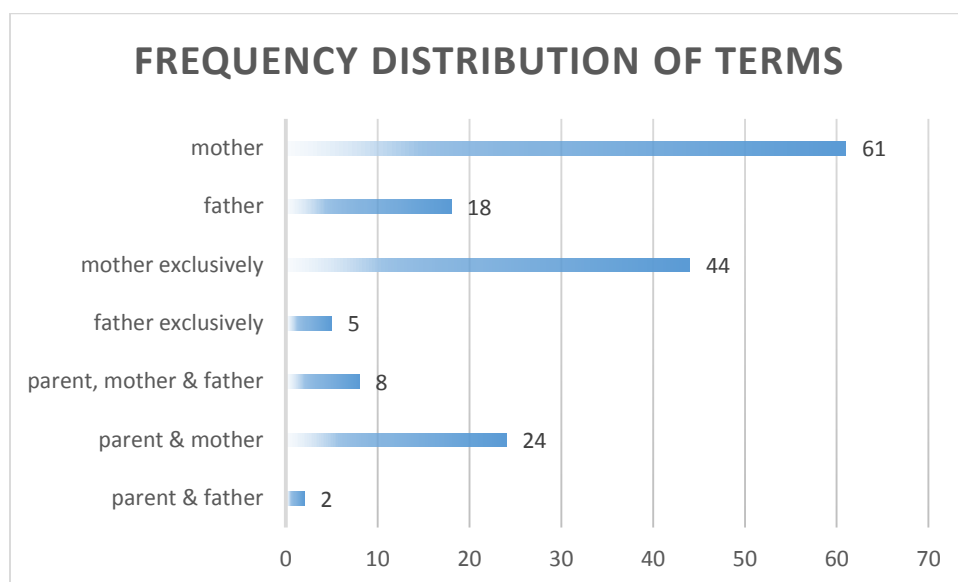


**Chart 1. *NY Times* Online Readership by Gender.**

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

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

The chart below illustrates these results. From it, an important theme emerges; namely, that in talk about parenting and childcare, it is often mom who is highlighted.



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

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

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



builds on this by demonstrating that “parenting” is not merely a stand-in for “mothering” generally, but *intensive mothering* specifically (Hays, 1996). Finally, this analysis culminates with a fifth section which foregrounds some of the ideologies, *cultural contradictions* (Hays, 1996) and *cultural deals* (Pugh, 2005) unique to motherhood in the digital age.

### **Analysis**

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

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

In what follows, I analyze four comments about strollers. Although these posters do not appear to be in conversation with one another (the first two have the same time stamp), repetition of this theme in the comments demonstrates how motherhood is indexed through the nonverbal act of pushing a child in a stroller. Talking on a cell phone while performing this act, however, is not consistent with the expectation for high accommodation described by Ochs (1992), thus constitutes a stance of disregard or disinterest toward the child. To adopt Gee’s (2013) terms, the observed little-d discourse does not match up with the Big-D Discourse regarding good mothering. In the post

shown below, kris brings up a concern about parents engaging with technology instead of children (Note that this and all other posts remain unaltered by me, with the exception of having added line numbers. The number at the beginning of the post indicates its ordering with the others that commented on the article.)

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<p>54. kris newmexico June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 12:10 pm</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6</p>	<p>I have wondered about the effect technology has had on parental interaction. One thing that bothers me is seeing parents pushing children in strollers while talking on cell phones. I always spent such time talking to my children while I pushed them along and then as they walked along. Those times were excellent opportunities for talking and encouraging children to talk. Talking on cell phones prevents that type of parent-child interaction.</p>
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This comment, and others examined in this section, makes parental identities in general, and maternal identities in particular, relevant, in part by naming those categories. Here “parents” and “children” are named in line 2. Since as Sacks (1989) states, “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of... categories,” naming these categories provokes readers to make inferences about individuals based on knowledge about the category (p. 272).

Further, the posters index maternal identity through mention of the act of pushing a stroller and foregrounding the expectation for displaying a stance of concern or interest by interacting with the child in the stroller. These times are described in line 5 as “excellent opportunities for talking and encouraging children to talk.” Stating, “I *always* spent such time talking to my children” (line 3, emphasis mine), this poster employs an extreme case formulation of frequency to establish the legitimacy of the claim while simultaneously distancing the poster from parents who talk on cell phones when pushing their children in strollers. Finally, in reporting being “bothered” in line 2, kris takes up an affective stance toward a parent performing this act without displaying the appropriate stance.

Similarly, in the first three lines of the next comment I examine, a poster who identifies herself as a “mom of 4” describes a “chatting” mother pushing a “silent child;” an act described as “missed opportunities for communication and conversation,” and a way to show children their value, since it “gives the child the sense that he matters to the parent” (line 5). Children should be “valued” by their parents (line 5-6), given the significance of “the ideologies of the sacred child and unselfish mothering” (Hays, 1996, p. 167).

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<p>64. happy and healthy oldster fort lauderdale June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 12:10 pm</p>	<p>1 In the park this morning, I saw a mom pushing her silent child in a stroller, 2 while chatting away non-stop on a cell phone. I was sad to see the missed 3 opportunities for communication and conversation. 4 A chat with a child is more than just a language and learning experience. It 5 gives the child the sense that he matters to the parent, that his parent values 6 him enough to spend time with him. Spending time with a child conveys 7 much more than words and ideas – it communicates values. How we choose 8 to spend our time reveals what we value in our lives. 9 mom of 4</p>
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As with the first comment, this poster names “mom,” “parent” and “child;” and these categories of membership permit, and perhaps even encourage, certain inferences to be made. In addition, since “any member of any category is presumptively a representative of that category,” the logic is both *deductive* and *inductive* (Sacks, 1989, p. 272). In other words, having knowledge about a particular category leads us to make inferences about individual members of a category. In the same way, knowledge about an individual member is used to augment existing knowledge about the category. All of this works here to underscore the expectation of interaction associated with the categories “mother” and “child;” an expectation which stands in stark contrast to the reality observed by this poster. Thus, in line 2, an affective stance, “sad,” is described.

The final two comments in this section also name “parents” and “mothers,” and link them with interacting with children in strollers. (I present them together, because they are quite similar to one another; they were not adjacent posts online).

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<u>105.</u> Mouse Woman Northwest Coast June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2010 2:43 pm	1 2 3	It makes me sad to see parents who take their child for an outing that consists of being isolated in a stroller while the parent talks on a cell phone. Some outing.
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<u>134.</u> KenM St. Louis, MO June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2010 5:48 pm	1 2 3 4 5 6	I see mothers with strollers more often than not talking on their cell phones instead of interacting with their child. That is special time that should be spent talking about the world and interacting. Turn off your phones and spend that time with your child! Talk about the birds, or an interesting plant or beautiful flower or a squirrel. That is magic time that you can never get back.
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Though brief, these comments demonstrate themes identified in the first two comments. In the first line of comment 105, Mouse Woman reports feeling “sad” upon witnessing a child “isolated in a stroller.” Naming the membership categories “parents” and “child” prompts associations with certain behaviors, such as the expectation for interaction during stroller time. The absence of parent-child interaction violates this expectation.

As KenM emphasizes in lines 2 and 5, stroller time is “special time” and even “magic time that you can never get back.” The use of “never” constitutes an extreme case formulation of time. The sense here is that time with a child is precious and irredeemable. As such, parents who do not take full advantage of the opportunity to interact with a child in a stroller are failing to adequately enact their parental identities: As Hays (1996) observes, membership in the category “mother” is time-consuming, since, “the logic that applies to appropriate child rearing... includes lavishing copious amounts of time [and] energy... on the child” (p. 8).

Through naming membership categories “parent,” “mother” and “child,” and linking the performance of parental identities with interacting with the child in the

stroller, these comments illuminate expectations for parental (and specifically maternal) responsibilities for the care of the “sacred child” (Hays, 1996, p. 54).

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

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

In highlighting (and criticizing) the behavior of mothers, comments in this section also serve to illustrate a conclusion reached by sociologists Sunderland (2006) and Zivkovic et al. (2010): in medical, legal and media representations of childcare, “parent” is frequently a stand-in for “mother.” (I examine this in more depth in the next section). Discourse analysts Kendall (2007) and Johnston (2007) also arrive at a similar conclusion: even between couples who adopt and express an egalitarian co-parenting philosophy or ideology, mothers continue to be positioned, and to position *themselves*, as primarily responsible for childcare. I show how the posters index identities through performing verbal acts such as criticizing and hypothesizing and through taking up affective stances toward the mothers of whom they speak. Applying Ochs’ (1993) framework, I demonstrate how the mothers described are not recognized as “good mothers”; this in turn has implications for the construction of a “good mother” identity.

In the comment below, “mother” is named as the guilty party. Further, CrusaderRabbit takes up a far more critical stance toward the mothers than the posters whose comments have been analyzed thus far. Affectively-loaded lexical items like “cringe” and “lonely” are used to describe the reaction to seeing a mother not giving her child attention, and how the child must feel as a result.

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8.	CrusaderRabbit Chicago, IL June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2010 8:06 am	1	I cringe every time I see a mother completely engrossed in a phone
		2	conversation while pushing a child in a stroller. Isn't there something she
		3	could be pointing out to her child instead? It's like the child isn't even there.
		4	What a lonely way to grow up. I bet they compensate for this inattention by
		5	buying the child stuff.

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

Beginning in the singular (“a mother” in line 1; “she” in line 2) yet concluding in the plural (“they,” line 4), this comment also demonstrates the relevance of the MIR Device. Here, knowledge about what one mother does is generalized to all mothers. In this case, one mother talking on a cell phone is discursively constructed as neither an innocent nor an isolated incident. Rather, the act of talking on cell phones while pushing children in strollers is generalized to all mothers and correlated with spoiling with material goods, since as CrusaderRabbit states in lines 4 and 5, “I bet *they* compensate for this inattention by buying the child stuff” (emphasis mine).

Turkle sometimes responded directly to criticisms of mothers and their mothering behaviors. In many cases, Turkle indexes expert identity by citing the findings of her research. In others she presents cautionary tales and defends her work against critics. Finally, and as is the case here, Turkle aligns herself with posters, using phrases such as, “I am sympathetic to this comment.” Here she responds to a prior comment about mothers paying attention to their phones while pushing a stroller. Note the affective stance descriptors in comment 45, and the ways Turkle works to both align with the reader regarding parenting and technology ideology and index her expert identity. I present these comments back-to-back, as they appeared online.

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45.	slartibartfast New York June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2010 10:40 am	1	This is, unfortunately, a common, and infuriating, occurrence in New York, I
		2	can't tell you how many times I've seen mothers gabbing on their cell
		3	phones, pushing one of those SUV strollers, empty, while their toddler
		4	struggles 6 or 8 feet behind, The obliviousness of the mother is obvious.
		5	Another charming sight is the mother with her headphones on who can't
		6	hear her child crying. Why do these people become parents?

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☞	Sherry Turkle Author, “Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other” June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2010 12:50 pm	1	In addition to the mothers pushing empty strollers problem, there is also the
		2	problem of mothers on the phone, with an ignored child in the stroller.
		3	Pushing a stroller is a social experience! My office, where I am now, faces a
		4	park. Parents are pushing children on swings while texting! Pushing swings
		5	is a social experience.

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Prevalent in the comments in this section are affective stances described in the harshest of terms. Here, slartibartfast performs the verbal acts of exaggerating (and thus misrepresenting) the pushing/talking behavior, criticizing and complaining. Strollers are compared to large cars (“SUV strollers,” line 3), the conversation is reduced to “gabbing” (line 2), and the behavior is described as “obliviousness” (line 4). All of this leads the poster to take up an affective stance of “infuriation” (line 1).

In her response to this post, Turkle explicitly classifies the pushing/talking act as a “problem” in line 1. Performing the act of labeling a behavior a “problem” indexes expert identity; specifically this act of labeling is linked with her expertise as a developmental psychologist. Her post also illuminates assumptions of childcare implicit in other responses. First, a relationship between cell phone use and childcare is constructed. Here, when the mother is on the phone, the child is “ignored” (line 2). Citing the work of other experts, Hays (1996) tells us that children are sacred and mothers are primarily responsible for their care (p. 54). Therefore, “good” mothers do not ignore their children, and in fact are consumed by their care. When, in line 3, Turkle exclaims, “Pushing a stroller is a social experience!” she reveals the assumption at the core of these comments: the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), an “emotionally absorbing, labor intensive” method of child rearing, which remains “the dominant ideology of socially appropriate child rearing” (p. 8-9).

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

The final posts in this section might be described as two of the most critical. In the first, mothers who text while pushing a child’s stroller are deemed unworthy to be mothers and told that they “should not have given birth” (comment 130, line 4). Note



how maternal identity is indexed in these comments through the performance of verbal acts and displays of stances.

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<u>130.</u> Const NY June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2010 5:20 pm	1 2 3 4	I can't tell you how many times I have watched a mother push her child's stroller down a busy Manhattan street while busily texting. If texting is more important than making sure your child does not come to some harm, maybe you should not have given birth.
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<u>144.</u> EtherNetzer Oakland June 11 <sup>th</sup> , 2010 12:22 am	1 2 3 4 5	Look around at moms pushing aircraft carrier prams containing large blobs of kids who should be walking and running and talking to the mom. But she is busy talking on a cell or texting furiously. The kids' face tell the story: "I'm forgotten..." When they get older, they will embrace their own technologies with the same addiction, then all will wonder what went wrong.
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To this point I have demonstrated that posters consistently link the act of pushing a stroller with displaying a stance of interest or concern for the child. In lines 3 and 4 of comment 130, this is amplified: Failure to display the desired stance is equated with a failure to protect the child, since “texting is more important than making sure your child does not come to some harm.” Given mom’s responsibility for the care and nurturing of children, this stance display is damaging to maternal identities. In lines 1 and 2 of post 144, the “large blobs of kids” are described as “forgotten” (line 4). In referring to children as “large blobs,” EtherNetzer suggests a link between technology use and obesity. Thus, talking on the phone while pushing a stroller is equated with child neglect, both socially and physically. In this comment, the behavior is not only criticized for its ill effects in the present, but is further theorized to have harmful consequences for the future, since as lines 4 and 5 state, these children inevitably “will embrace their own technologies with the same addiction,” while the rest of us “wonder what went wrong.”

In addition to the notion that “parent” is code for “mother,” and consistent with the findings of Ochs (1992) and Gordon (2007), these data seem to suggest that mothers (especially white American middle class) view themselves, and are viewed by others, as

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

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

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

That “parent” is code for “mother” notwithstanding, fathers are mentioned exclusively in five comments (once by Turkle and four times by readers). “Father” appears with “parent” and “mother” 8 times, and with “parent” twice. (This is but a

fraction of the number of references to “mother” or “parent” and “mother,” however. By contrast, “parent” and “mother” occur within the same comment approximately 24 times: three times as often as “parent” and both “mother” and “father” and twelve times more frequently than “parent” and “father”).

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

When “father” and “mother” are mentioned together, it is especially interesting to note that he is mentioned after mom, as in “moms or dads” or “mothers and fathers.” In some of the comments, the reference to “father” appears in parentheses after “mother,” and as such still seems to imply that his inclusion in the comment is an afterthought, or that his role is secondary to mom’s. In fact, writing, “Mothers (and fathers to be P.C.)” the author of comment 20 indexes this very notion, wherein dad is not only relegated to a parenthetical, but is included only for political correctness. It is comments such as these which portray a less-than-egalitarian co-parenting ideology.

The comments presented in this section highlight the mother-as-primary caregiver ideology. Note instances of “slippage” (Sunderland, 2006) wherein “parent” gives way to “mother” as the text progresses. Posters switch almost seamlessly between “parent” and “mother,” and when examples of “parenting” are provided, these examples refer to moms and duties traditionally associated with motherhood. Finally, when dad is mentioned (comment 71), it is to highlight this ideology precisely.

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

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<p>13. Barbara Central NJ June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 10:15 am</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14</p>	<p>The problem with judging based on 5 minutes of observation is that you really don't know what is going on. I frequently have to log onto work e-mail to compensate for the fact that I am running late , because sometimes kids throw fits when getting dressed because he wanted to wear the blue shirt that was 2 sizes too small, or have potty emergencies right before time to leave the house. And it is a universally understood (by moms) truth that when mom is on the phone any preschooler who was quietly playing with her puzzles a moment ago will either desperately need mom's attention or bolt from the room to take the chance to get into something while mom is distracted. 150 years ago moms did not ignore the chickens, or the bread that needed to be baked or the washing in order to give 100% attention to her little ones. It is only modern women who are expected to live in a child focused bubble 24 hours a day somehow managing to magically afford this luxury of free time on one income. Get real.</p>
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When in line 6, Barbara states, “it is a universally understood (by moms) truth,” she exposes the notion that “parent” is code for “mother.” This “truth,” after all, is not “universally understood” by parents collectively, but among mothers exclusively. It is, after all, “mom’s attention” that the preschooler “desperately” needs (line 8), moms “who are expected to live in a child focused bubble 24 hours a day,” and for whom “free time” is a “luxury” (lines 12-14). All of this is consistent with Hays’ (1996) contention

that “the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centered... emotionally absorbing [and] labor-intensive” (p. 8).

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

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<p>  Sherry Turkle            Author, “Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other”            June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010            12:50 pm         </p>	<p>           1 I see a very poignant theme in so many of these comments. As a mother            2 and a student of women's history, I am very sensitive to women not            3 wanting yet another reason to feel bad about themselves; one more item in            4 the litany of how women do things wrong.            5 This is a societal problem that is having a particular impact on parenting.            6 And actually, I think that mothers and children are in a very good position            7 to demonstrate a way of doing things that will make us all saner. If we can            8 set rules at home, it might inspire people to think that it is possible to            9 make rules for schools, classrooms, etc., that we will actually follow            10 because we believe them to be in our best interest         </p>
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Identifying herself “As a mother and a student of women’s history,” in lines 1 and 2, Turkle highlights both maternal and expert identities. Stating that she is “very sensitive” to maternal guilt resulting from self and societal blame, Turkle thus affirms shared identity. Note the use of the adjective “another” in the phrase “yet another reason to feel bad about themselves” in line 3. “Another” here indicates the preexistence of other reasons women (and mothers) experience “mom guilt,” and the challenge of parenting in the digital age constitutes “one more item in the litany of how woman do things wrong” (lines 3-4).

In fact, she continues, mothers are advised to set rules that will not only influence life at home, but environs such as the classroom, since others will also be inspired and follow suit. The end result is that the proverbial “weight of the world” rests upon mom’s shoulders. It is up to her, as Turkle says in line 7, “to demonstrate a way of doing things that will make us all saner.”

The third comment presented here makes explicit the premise that a reference to parents in general can often be taken to mean mothers in particular. Indeed, this reader also notes many of the cultural contradictions of motherhood asserted by Hays (1996), since, in any “image of appropriate child rearing it is critical that ... the *mother*, be the central caregiver” (p. 8).

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<p>71. C.A. Bethlehem, PA June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 12:10 pm</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8</p>	<p>It's interesting that this article purports to be about "parenting" issues but, at least anecdotally, focuses only on the conduct of mothers. I guess since, in the modern-day United States, fathers haven't stereotypically been expected to interact with their kids as much (or at least haven't been expected to be quite as attentive and nurturing as mothers have been), their use of technology at home is seen as excusable, while mothers are depicted as unfairly depriving their children of time/attention to which they are "entitled." The double standard strikes again!</p>
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This comment makes several points relevant to this analysis. First, in stating “that this article purports to be about ‘parenting’ issues but... focuses only on the conduct of mothers” in lines 1 and 2, C.A. articulates findings similar to that of Sunderland (2006) and Zivkovic, et al. (2010); in parenting and medical, legal and media representations of childcare (respectively), “parent” is code for “mother.” When documents do not evidence “slippage,” (Sunderland, 2006) from “parent” to “mother,” and the gender neutral “parent” is maintained more or less consistently throughout, appeals target mom and examples feature her. We see evidence of these here, both in *The NY Times* article, as this reader points out, and as demonstrated above, within these comments.

This poster also points to, or indexes, ideologies of intensive mothering as suggested by Hays (1996), since fathers are not “expected to interact with their kids as much,” or “be quite as attentive and nurturing as mothers have been” (lines 3-5); and because of this, technology use at home is “excusable” (line 6) for dads but unacceptable, perhaps even deplorable or reproachable, for moms.

Comments 76 and 121 bear striking resemblance to one another in evidencing parent-to-mother slippage. Note specifically pronoun use in comment 76 and adjective use in both comments.

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

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

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

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

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

... (comment continues)

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In line 4 of comment 76 above, Lynn Valerie states, “We are asked to be responsive, encouraging, calm and supportive,” and later in line 8 “how much the parenting years mean to us” (emphasis mine). Use of these pronouns prompts a search for a corresponding antecedent, which one might take to be parents, since “parenting” is mentioned in line 1, or perhaps the “mature adults” also mentioned in this sentence. In these cases, however, the pronoun-antecedent relationship seems less-than-clear, since

it is not usually parents in general who are traditionally “asked to be responsive, encouraging, calm and supportive,” but rather mothers specifically. In fact, (and consistent with comments in the first two sections), it is mothers who are criticized in lines 6 and 7 for the talking/pushing behavior. And, the meaning of the parenting years is correlated with the significance of “a good attachment to one’s mother” in line 9. Thus, each of these pronouns is followed by examples in which mom is the primary agent. In line 14-15, then, it is mom whose “active presence [is] a sign of security,” and it is she who is easily readable as “the first nurturer [and] also the baby’s first love object.”

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

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

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

Comments in the previous section demonstrate the “slippage” between “parent” and “mother” common in discourses of childcare. I build on this analysis below to show that “parent” is not only laden with gendered assumptions, but cultural contradictions (Hays, 1996). That is, comments in these posts index not just ‘mother’ but a certain *kind*



of mothering characterized as “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, p. 8).

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

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

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

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

Note in the comment below the reference to “quantity of time” versus “quality time.”

This seems, at least in part, to be a reference to the passage featured above, and as I will show, this theme is present throughout the comments. I have highlighted them using underlining.

14. Vicki  
Hackettstown, NJ  
June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
10:19 am

1 The "quantity" "Quality" issue regarding children has always puzzled me. A  
2 small child doesn't understand the difference. Small children need instant  
3 answers to their questions. That isn't the same as responding to whining,  
4 (my children were not allowed to whine, ever!) It is recognizing that  
5 children don't have an internal clock to let them put off answers. You can  
6 get a small child to stop nagging at you by answering their request  
7 immediately - yes or no often works well if consistent and appropriate.  
8 Older children are a different thing altogether, and can readily see the  
9 difference between quality and quantity. But children do learn from what  
10 they observe, much more than from what they are told. And, if they see their  
11 parents constantly fiddling with an electronic device, not responding to  
12 them or to each other in a meaningful way, then the children will also  
13 behave that way. No one likes to be ignored when they feel they have  
14 something important to say or discuss, The increasing addiction to the  
15 handheld devices is, I think far more dangerous to our mental health and  
16 relationships than television ever was because of its portability.

Comment 14 asserts that children do not distinguish between quantity of time and quality time. In lines 2 and 3, Vicki asserts that “small children need *instant* answers to their questions” (emphasis mine). And in lines 6 and 7, parents are encouraged to answer children’s requests “immediately.” This mother also exclaims that her “children were not allowed to whine, *ever!*” (line 4, emphasis mine). These first two extreme case formulations of time serve as “examples of sense-giving formulations” (p. 221). They establish how much waiting should be expected of children (none), or, how long parents should require their children to wait (they shouldn’t). The third formulation is a “Maximum Case” of time, and the sense provided here is that *any* amount of whining is too much, or unacceptable (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 221). As such, these formulations index the “emotionally absorbing, labor intensive” work of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996, p. 8), since presumably a good mother does not delay in responding to her children.

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

Extreme case formulations also appear in the comment below. As with the first comment presented in this section, they also point to a definition of “acceptable” parenting and “appropriate” parenting behaviors. This definition does not involve time

so much as attention, but likewise realizes the Discourse of intensive mothering/  
parenting.

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62. J  
Massachusetts  
June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
12:10 pm

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

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

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

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

First, J begins by citing the findings of an expert (and a “brilliant” one at that), indexing the notion that appropriate child rearing is “expert-guided” (Hays, 1996, p. 8). Access to and reliance upon these experts is associated with middle- and upper-class maternal ideologies (Hays, 1996; Gordon, 2015b). In addition, in pointing out that “when a parent is with a child, his/her attention should be *completely* present with that child” (lines 2-3, emphasis mine), J employs a maximum case formulation to provide the sense of how much attention a child deserves (all of it). As such, this comment also

reminds us that child rearing should be “child-centered,” “emotionally absorbing,” and “labor-intensive” (Hays, 1996, p. 8). Finally, in claiming that effective parenting is “*impossible* while engaged with a screen” in lines 16 and 17, (emphasis mine), this comment employs an extreme case formulation to illustrate the relationship between technology and parenting; namely, that the two are wholly incompatible.

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

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<p><u>118.</u> Matt San Diego June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 4:42 pm</p>	<p>1 All you parents who gripe about your children whining for attention will 2 yourself be whining twenty years from now that your grown children never 3 call (or text, or email). 4 Make the time you have together count, now, or regret it forever. "Nature's 5 first green is gold, Her hardest hue to hold . . ." Kids are pure gold -- your 6 electronic devices are junk in comparison.</p>
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In this post, we again see a maximum case formulation of time. As Pomerantz (1986) finds, “the sense provided... is that the amount of time is very long, too long, unacceptably long” (p. 221). This portrays the “punishment” parents will endure if they do not “make the time you have together count” (line 4). Next, in referring to kids as “pure gold” in line 5 and “electronic devices” as “junk” in line 6, this comment indexes the “special value” of children in the ideology of intensive mothering.

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

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

“You can’t really do both,” she added. “If I’m at all connected, it’s too tempting. I need to make a distinct choice” (Scelfo, 2010).

The posts that respond to this portion of the article are authored by the same user, and as such represent one of the few occurrences in which a user contributes two comments. (As previously mentioned, Turkle contributed 28 responses, and six other readers contributed two each). Note references to both “attention” and “time,” and the stances the poster who calls himself Nigel takes toward parents who do not focus the requisite amounts of these resources on their children. In lines 1-3 of post 139, Nigel is directly quoting the article. He then comments on the quotation in lines 4-7. His later post consists solely of commentary.

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<p><u>139.</u> Nigel NYC June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 12:22 am</p>	<p>1 "...a mother and blogger in Wilmette, Ill., said she had no idea how what she 2 calls her "addiction to e-mail and social media Web sites" was bothering her 3 children..."</p> <p>4 Do parents actually not know that children require a lot of attention? And 5 that the attention they pay their children is called "parenting"? And these 6 are the educated parents.</p> <p>7 Those poor children.</p>
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<p><u>146.</u> Nigel NYC June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 12:23 pm</p>	<p>1 Oh, by the way, to a small child, there is only quantity of time. The person 2 who spends the most time with the child is who they bond with, be it for 3 better or worse.</p> <p>4 'Quality time' is some made up concept to make working parents feel better.</p> <p>5 Sorry.</p>
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In line 4 of comment 139, parents are advised that “children require a lot of attention.” In line 5, this attention “is called ‘parenting.’” In other words, for Nigel “parenting” is defined as “paying a *lot* of attention to your children.” In comment 146, the quantity/quality argument is raised once again. This post states “to a small child, there is *only* quantity of time” (line 1, emphasis mine). Inclusion of the adjective “only” marks “quantity of time” as the exclusive, or sole, component of the argument, effectively rejecting the premise of “quality time.” This “quantity of time” is then correlated with bonding in line 2. This Nigel provides as evidence that “‘quality time’ is

some made up concept to make working parents feel better” (line 4). In other words, if you want to bond with your child, it does not matter what you do with them or how you spend your time together; it matters *only* that you devote your time to them. This is consistent with Hays’ (1996) contention that “appropriate child rearing” is indeed synonymous with “lavishing copious amounts of time [and] energy... on the child” (p. 8).

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

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

### **“Poor Rich Kids!” Parenting, Technology and *The Cultural Deal***

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

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

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

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

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

The question is: Will devices like smartphones change that? Smartphone users tend to have higher incomes; research from the Nielsen Company shows that they are twice as likely to make more than \$100,000 a year than the average mobile subscriber. If increased use of technology encroaches on the time that well-to-do

families spend communicating with their children, some could become the victims of successes originally thought to help them. (Scelfo, 2010).

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

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

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



To various degrees, these data represent, grapple with, and contest this theme. Comments below linguistically index (either by direct mention or allusion) white American middle class parenting values. Note in the comments below for example, the tensions that arise from questions of access (education, affluence, etc.).

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<p><u>18.</u> Retired teacher Austin, TX June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 10:21 am</p>	<p>1 Apparently distractions by electronic devices like smartphones are erasing 2 the advantages the more educated and affluent parents once gave to their 3 offspring. Instead of engaging their young children in conversations as they 4 go about daily activities these parents are talking on cell phones, reading 5 e-mails, texting, etc.  6 I'm glad we didn't have all this when I was a young parent. I wonder what 7 kind of parents my grandchildren will be?</p>
<hr/>	
<p>73. Elizabeth Shurman Kansas City June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 12:12 pm</p>	<p>1 It will be interesting to see if electronic devices used by affluent parents and 2 DVD players cranked in minivans bring affluent childrens' verbal skills 3 down. I also wonder about smaller family sizes-- a lot of my talking and 4 reading was with my two siblings. So my parents didn't have to be chatting 5 me up every second. They read their own books and had grown-up talks, 6 which actually inspired me to figure out what they were talking about.  7 <a href="http://Elizabetschurman.wordpress.com">Elizabetschurman.wordpress.com</a></p>

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Middle class privilege and values are evident in these comments when, for example, lines 1 and 2 in comment 18 state, “distractions by electronic devices like smartphones are erasing the advantages the more educated and affluent parents once gave to their offspring,” since ostensibly these parents are now too engrossed in technology to converse with their children. As an extreme case formulation, “erase” suggests that “the advantages” are not merely mitigated or reduced, but eliminated entirely. Comment 73 expresses a similar sentiment, (though in perhaps less extreme terms), pondering whether “devices used by affluent parents... bring affluent childrens’ (sic) verbal skills down.” Here, questions of education, wealth and access to technology assumed to be advantages of privilege are renounced as detrimental. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in this section, this perspective permeates these comments and prompts intriguing questions.

While some posters allude to the wealth and privilege one might expect from the demographics reported on *The New York Times*' website, a striking number appear to contest, or reject altogether, any assumption that access to technology equates to good parenting. The following post seems to reflect some diversity in *The NY Times*' online audience. Note how Pilgrim self-identifies in the first line as “a very low income, single parent w/o a cell or hand held device,” and further, how this disclosure is framed in the comment.

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<p><u>101.</u> Pilgrim Cape June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 2:42 pm</p>	<p>1 As a very low income, single parent w/o a cell or hand held device, I often 2 find myself interacting with other's children in public settings, because the 3 parents are sitting on the sidelines, paying no attention what so ever. They 4 put the 'I' in I-Pad. Perhaps technology is biting us in the butt. For some odd 5 reason I seem to find plenty of time for walks/talks, gardening, 6 camping/beach, etc. Driving while texting or talking on the phone is child 7 endangerment. And ignoring one's child while plugged in 24/7 is borderline 8 child neglect. 9 Parents, teach your children well by example, or payback's coming at you. 10 Do the right thing(s). My child has no access to electronic devices and I hear 11 from his teachers/others how engaging he is in conversation/personality. 12 Also to the commenter who challenges the tending chicken, breadbaking, 13 washing-these were moments to teach their young and engage them in life 14 skills necessary to survival. Does your offspring know how to bake bread or 15 even operate a washing machine? 16 Remember that parenting is the most important job you'll ever have.</p>
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In contrast with the typical middle-class readership of *The Times*, this poster claims “a very low income” in line 1. Rather than a mark of shame, however, this low income and resulting lack of hand held device is construed as advantageous, as s/he states in lines 10 and 11, “I hear from his teachers/others how engaging [my son] is in conversation/personality.” The implication here is that hand held devices inhibit these skills in those who possess and use them.

In lines 6 and 7, Pilgrim performs the act of making assertions: “Driving while texting or talking on the phone is child endangerment. And ignoring one’s child while plugged in 24/7 is borderline child neglect.” The poster also performs the act of issuing a

warning in line 9: “payback’s coming at you,” and finally the act of issuing imperatives: “Parents, teach your children well by example,” “Do the right thing(s),” and “Remember that parenting is the most important job you'll ever have” in lines 9, 10, and 16. Together these acts and stances index some kind of expert identity; though which type of expertise is not made explicit.

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

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<p><u>126.</u> CF Boston, MA June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 4:42 pm</p>	<p>1 'Victims of their success'? Poor rich kids! My daddy's iPhone is impeding 2 my vocabulary and social development, now I have an excuse to get on the 3 waiting list for the must-have-therapist on the UWS, and more reasons to 4 blame my parents when things don't go my way later in life. If farming out 5 child-rearing duties to nannies 5 days a week 9-5 isn't a worry, a few 6 minutes on the iPhone is ok, really.</p>
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CF sarcastically characterizes the “poor rich kids” whose “daddy's iPhone is impeding [their] vocabulary and social development,” who “now... have an excuse to get on the waiting list for the must-have-therapist on the UWS”, and finally who have “more reasons to blame [their] parents when things don’t go [their] way later in life” (lines 1-4). Class is indexed directly by the adjective “rich” in line 1, and alluded to in lines 2 and 3 by mention of an Upper West Side “must-have therapist” with a “waiting list.” Portraying wealthy parents who “farm out” their “child-rearing duties to nannies,” only later to be “blamed” by their children when “things don’t go [their] way in life,” CF adopts a negative stance toward privilege and the access it affords. In so doing, the poster also highlights the concern about technology and parenting.

The remaining comments I examine in this section (140 & 152) index affluence through direct mention as well as through allusion to therapists and nannies, both of which are assumed to be privileges of the wealthy. These privileges, however, are devalued significantly (even disdained and discredited altogether) by these posters.

<p><u>140.</u> Heidi Texas June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 12:22 am</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6</p>	<p>Do the techy parents who constantly blog and Twitter and Flickr and text only remember the milestones of their children through those tools? Do they remember the actual moment minus the technology?</p> <p>As for the socioeconomic question -- once you get into the wealth aspect, how many of those kids have/had direct interaction with their parents vs. hired attendants to begin with?</p>
<p><u>152.</u> jr nyc June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 10:49 am</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p>	<p>Regarding the part about the socio-economics of language development, has anyone taken a little stroll around Central Park around, say, mid-day on a weekday lately? I'm willing to bet all those young children sitting face-forward while their nannies are pushing them from behind with their forearms whilst texting are from those upper middle class families that seem to have the higher number of words in any given day. I would love to see a study of language development among nanny-raised children. Not bashing nannies here, but those ladies spend very much time with toddlers strapped to face-front strollers whilst chatting and texting away.</p>

Since children serve as props in parents' impression management (Collett, 2005), a direct attack on the identities of these "rich kids," here *simultaneously* constitutes an indirect attack on middle-class and wealthy parental identities. All of this is purportedly because, as is also claimed in comment 140, lines 4 through 6, "hired attendants" have more "direct interaction" with children of the wealthy than the parents themselves, and in comment 152, line 7, the "language development" of "nanny-raised children" is challenged. Here, parental identities of the privileged are attacked directly, since rather than interacting with their children, they use devices and relegate the child rearing to "hired attendants." As such, these comments constitute attacks on middle- and upper-class parental identities, first indirectly through the spoiled identities of their children and then directly through accusations of neglecting parental responsibilities. Finally,

(and bringing this analysis full circle), we see an example of toddlers being pushed in strollers “whilst [a caregiver is] chatting and texting away.”

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

## **Discussion**

Ochs (1992) finds that linguistic features index not gender specifically but social meaning, and that these meanings help “to constitute gender meanings” (p. 341). The link between language and gender, then, is “mediated,” or indirect (p. 341). In a similar way, I suggest that the link between behavior and maternal identity is also not direct, but rather, one of inference. Through analysis of a subset of comments posted in response to a *New York Times* article on technology and parenting, I first applied Ochs’ (1992, 1993) notion of indexicality to reveal how posters perform verbal acts and verbally display stances as they describe parents engaged in the act of pushing a stroller, and highlight their expectation that the parent should display a stance of high accommodation by interacting with the child in the stroller (regardless of, or perhaps in spite of, age or communicative ability).

Second, I extended Ochs' indexicality theorizing to include nonverbal acts and suggest that a "good mother" identity is indexed through a particular physical act (pushing a child in a stroller), which posters describe. Here, mothers who talk on cell phones while pushing children in strollers are viewed with disdain and shamed; since these fail to display the stance of interest or concern consistent with ("Big 'D' Discourse") white middle class American expectations, the posters take up negative stances toward them.

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

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

contrary, since intensive mothering is among other things, “financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, p. 8).

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

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

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

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

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

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

This analysis reveals how big-D Discourses influence little-d discourse about maternal identity and technology. That is, positionings of both expert identity and parental responsibility occur within broader ideologies of technology use, family interaction and childcare responsibilities. As an expert positions both herself and parents, she refers to ideologies about mothering in general, and intensive mothering



specifically. And as posters in an online forum take up this discourse, they use linguistic resources to perform certain acts and display certain stances that are socioculturally linked to identities. Here, maternal identity is indexed through the act of pushing a child in a stroller while displaying a stance of engagement by interacting with the child. Also useful for this analysis is the MIR Device proposed by Sacks (1989), since knowledge about membership in specific categories necessarily informs expectations about individual members. To take on the identity “mother,” I suggest, is to both understand, and be understood, in light of these expectations.

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

As Hays (1996) theorizes, the spheres of workplace and home have traditionally been separated not only physically but ideologically (p. 33). In the former, a marketplace logic is governed by rationality and efficiency, while in the latter, the logics of the sacred child and intensive mothering reign supreme. One “promise” of technology identified by Turkle in the Moyers interview is that “we can be wherever we want to be” (lines 13-4). Similarly, extending Pugh’s (2005) analysis of toy catalogs, I suggested that smartphones offer a similar “cultural deal:” an alluring resolution to the contradictory values of “market work and family work” (p. 746).

While it might be said that smartphones provide the means for mothers to reconcile the conflict between these “different logics,” what is demonstrated within this analysis, both of the interview and the online comments, however, stands in direct contrast to this ideal. Whereas once the rational logic could be physically located outside the home (in the workplace), technology invites this need for efficiency *into* the home. But with what gain? Or at what expense? Thus, rather than presenting a solution to the cultural contradictions of motherhood, smartphones perpetuate the demand of constant connection alongside an *illusion* of possibility. As such, these findings seem to point to the persistence of this conflict in the digital age. Of course, the accessibility of the intensive mothering “ideal” has never been universal. So too, access to technology (and to the “experts” who inform us of its appropriate uses) has been and will continue to be entangled with questions of race and class.

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

## Appendix A

### Transcript

BM: Bill Moyers, host, Moyers & company

ST: Sherry Turkle, MIT professor and author of *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Each Other*

Introduction: ((Moyers speaks to the camera/viewing audience)). Enough of politics, the debt and that spectacle in Washington. Let's change the subject. If you've ever lost your smartphone, as I have, you know it can feel like a death. The experience highlights just how our world has been engulfed by social media and how our technology has become a vital organ of our being. And it's happened so fast. Facebook is not quite 10 years old, Twitter is younger still. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg told a reporter that in 2016 -- just three years from now -- "people are going to be sharing eight to ten times as much stuff." Like anything hurtling us forward at breakneck speed, the advancements are great, and so are the dangers. For every Arab Spring or political movement using social media to foment change, there may also be campaigns of abuse and hate. For every Wikileaks and revealed secret, there's the encroachment on personal privacy by the NSA. For every new friend meeting through cyberspace, there's the risk of estrangement from the real world. Our devices change not only what we do but also who we are. So I've come to Sherry Turkle to try to explain how and why. She's a clinical psychologist who was one of the first to study the impact of computers on culture and society. A professor at MIT and Director of that school's Initiative on Technology and Self, she's written several important books based on deep research and hundreds of interviews with children and adults alike. Her most recent sums up her conclusions: *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*.

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

19 children to be alone (.) they'll only know how to  
 20 be lonely. And by not developing this capacity  
 21 for solitude (.) we're not doing our children a  
 22 favor.

23 BM: What do you mean?

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

32 BM: All right.

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

42 BM: °I mean° isn't every (.) media (.) revolution  
 43 greeted with the kinds of concerns we've been  
 44 expressing? Haven't we a- adults all through  
 45 history always said that this is how [the-  
 46 ST: [This is the  
 47 terrible one. Right.

48 ST: ↑ I- I face this question every day. Of- of- of-  
 49 wh- I ↑ welcome the internet (.) I welcome the  
 50 mobile- mobile technology. Um: I'm saying  
 51 there are certain ways we're using it (1.0) that  
 52 are not ah taking account (.) of how misusing it  
 53 (1.0) overusing it (.) can really threaten things  
 54 that we care about. >It's a question of<  
 55 technological affordance and human  
 56 vulnerability. This is a technology to which we  
 57 are particularly vulnerable in certain ways. Um  
 58 a mother ado:res being with her children. And  
 59 yet with ↑this technology she: is so vulnerable  
 60 to the stimulation of knowing what the next  
 61 message is on her cell phone that when she  
 62 picks her kid up at school and the kid comes in-  
 63 >(‘cause) I studied this< the kid comes in to the

64 car this is the gesture she makes to her child  
65 ((looks down at imaginary phone in left hand,  
66 shakes head 'no' while making a 'waving off'  
67 gesture with right arm outstretched.)) "Let me just  
68 finish this one- this one last email. Let me just  
69 get this one message." And does not make eye  
70 contact with the child as the child comes in. It's  
71 the- it's the desire to look at that one last  
72 message that causes her to go like that ((same  
73 waving off gesture repeated)) to her child. Now  
74 (.) that's not- that's not saying there's anything  
75 wro:ng with a cell phone. It's saying that we are  
76 so vulnerable to the seduction of who wants to  
77 reach us what sweetness is coming through the  
78 phone that we're really at a point where we  
79 turn awa:y from our kids.

80 BM: So what sweetness is that attractive?  
81 ST: The sweetness of something new that's coming  
82 into us on our phone. People talk to me about,  
83 you know, not being able to tolerate not  
84 knowing what that new thing that's coming in  
85 on the phone is. I mean, kids sit in class now  
86 and they, you know, the phone is in the bag or  
87 the phone is on the floor, and they check  
88 regularly what new texts are coming in.

89 BM: Do you have boundaries for them--  
90 ST: Every professor--  
91 BM: Do you push back?  
92 ST: Every professor knows this. Well, I had a- I had a thing  
93 in class where the kids, I was teaching a class  
94 on memoir at MIT, and it was about these kids'  
95 fantastic stories about their lives. And a group  
96 of the class came to me and said, "You know,  
97 we're texting in class. And, you know, we feel  
98 bad because the rest of the kids, I mean, they're  
99 talking about their lives." And I said, "Well, we  
100 have to discuss this as a class." And basically,  
101 they said, "We are not as strong as technology's  
102 pull."

103 BM: What did they mean by that?  
104 ST: They were not as strong.  
105 BM: They couldn't say no?  
106 ST: They could not say no. They could not say no to  
107 the feeling that somebody wanted them.  
108 Somebody was reaching out to them. The thrill that we get, the

109 neurochemical hit of constant connection is  
110 what we are -- is what we have now.

111 BM: The multitasking?

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

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

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

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

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

134 BM: And what was the critical factor in that?

135 ST: Because in the early days of the internet,  
136 people went online, in those days  
137 anonymously, and could create identities  
138 online that were very different from the  
139 identities they had in the real. And people were  
140 experimenting with gender with, you know, the  
141 shy would be less shy, and people, as I studied  
142 them online, were really using online identity  
143 to work through questions of kind of  
144 experimenting using the online world as a sort  
145 of identity workshop to play with questions of  
146 kind of experimenting, using the online world  
147 as a sort of identity workshop, to play with  
148 questions of who they were and to experiment  
149 with being a little bit different. And I thought  
150 that was very exciting. What I did not see, call  
151 me not prescient, was that my idea of how we  
152 would be thinking about identity had a model  
153 of a person at a computer playing with identity,

154 and then after you played with your identity at  
155 the computer, then you would get up from your  
156 computer, having experimented with identity,  
157 and you would go out to the world, into the  
158 world, and you would live your life having  
159 learned these lessons from your online identity.  
160 When the book was written, I looked around  
161 me, and there were already people in my  
162 environment using computers that they called  
163 the "wearable computers."

164 BM: Wearable?

165 ST: Wearable computers. They had antennae, they  
166 had keyboards in their pockets, they had  
167 glasses that were their screens, and they were  
168 wearing the web on them. In other words, they  
169 looked very science fiction. They basically had a  
170 portable phone. They were-- they could be--

171 BM: (They) were wearing it?

172 ST: on the web, they were wearing it. They could be  
173 on the web all the time.

174 BM: It was their uniform.

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

183 BM: But what's wrong with that? I ask that seriously  
184 because, you know--

185 ST: Well, that is--

186 BM: E. M. Forster said, "Only connect."

187 ST: That changed everything. Because people then,  
188 the kids in my class who were looking down at  
189 their phones through the entire lecture  
190 included, the people in church who text during  
191 services, who text during funerals included,  
192 everyone is always having their attention  
193 divided between the world of the people we're  
194 with and this other reality. We now walk  
195 around with our heads down. I walked over  
196 here this morning, everybody is like this. I--

197 BM: That's dangerous in New York City--

198 ST: It's dangerous. There's even a New Yorker

199 cover I think about a family, you know, who  
 200 are at the beach, and their heads are in their  
 201 phones. I mean, we are always equally in the  
 202 world of the machine, in the world that's in the  
 203 phone and in the rest of the world.

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

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

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

225 ST: [It's keepin' us-  
 226 it's keeping us more at the: >surface of things.<  
 227 I went to a dinner of a group of young people  
 228 (1.0) constant interruption.  
 229 Everybody has a ↑phone (.) phones are going  
 230 off constantly the average-the average teenage  
 231 girl is interrupted once every four or five  
 232 minutes by an incoming or an outgoing ↑text.  
 233 So five people out to dinner I mean it was a  
 234 constant interruption. And I'll say to them,  
 235 "How do you feel about the (.) interruptions?"  
 236 And they say, "What interruptions?" Because  
 237 they experience these interruptions as  
 238 con↑nection. Things have gotten so (.) ba:d that  
 239 the culture is starting to present things that  
 240 used to be dystopian as utopian. And my best  
 241 example is dinner. There's an ad for Facebook  
 242 um which- a dinner (.) a typical Norman  
 243 Rockwell dinner the type you were evoking.





289 and this is why it's a- it's a gift to them to say,  
 290 "Put down the device and let's talk." And so  
 291 what concerns me as a developmental  
 292 psychologist watching children grow in this  
 293 new world where being bo:red is something  
 294 that never has to be tolerated for a moment.  
 295 You can always go someplace where you're  
 296 stimulated stimulated stimulated um is that  
 297 people are losing that capacity. And that's very  
 298 serious.

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

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

317 BM: Goldilocks?

318 ST: The "Goldilocks Effect--"

319 BM: Goldilocks and the Three Bears?

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

325 BM: Everyone across the spectrum is talking about  
 326 technology overuse, including comedians. I  
 327 came across this moment on YouTube where  
 328 Louis C.K. is talking about his own kid. Here it  
 329 is.  
 330 ((YouTube video: Louis CK talks about parents  
 331 at a school dance))

332 BM: It's a funny video, but he isn't sure he likes  
 333 what's happening.

334 ST: Well, I mean, it -- I mean, there's so many  
335 things going on in this. I mean, we are living  
336 the kind of mediated, a mediated existence  
337 where, you know, capturing the event in order  
338 to then post it, really has become, has come to  
339 seem normal. So I call it, "I share therefore I  
340 am." I mean, it's kind of a way of living where  
341 you don't feel fully as though you're living if  
342 you haven't shared it in this new way. In other  
343 words, it's almost as though you don't have the  
344 feeling, or the feeling is -- you get the feeling,  
345 or the feeling begins to come to you. You feel  
346 more yourself, you begin to feel yourself as you  
347 mesh yourself with the means of  
348 communication.

349 BM: So sending is being?

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

357 BM: Walt Whitman should be around now, Song of  
358 Myself--

359 ST: Right, right.

360 BM: I mean, that's what society--

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

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

374 ST: Because the face, the presence of another  
375 person inhibits the worst in us. And the fact  
376 that we can behave as behind a veil brings out  
377 this side where you feel as though you're  
378 disinhibited. There's no--

379 BM: You're given permission.  
380 ST: You're given permission. You're given  
381 permission. People behave -- cyber bullying,  
382 people behave as though they're not speaking  
383 to another human being.  
384 BM: Did you see the recent story about the 12-year-  
385 old girl who took her life after being bullying--  
386 ST: Yes, yes.  
387 BM: Any take you can give us on that? Any insight  
388 you can share with us about how technology  
389 feeds something like that? She could've just  
390 turned off the phone, put down the phone.  
391 ST: No. No, she couldn't. Because the phone has  
392 become her lifeline too, to her social world. I  
393 think that's sort of what we're saying, is that  
394 being part of her social world meant keeping on  
395 the phone. These people got to her because she  
396 could not be part of being 12 years old in her  
397 high school.  
398 BM: You're so on that--  
399 ST: Without keeping on her phone.  
400 BM: There was a recent Pew research study that  
401 found teenagers are wary of excessive sharing  
402 on Facebook but continue to use it because  
403 they say it is crucial to their social life.  
404 ST: Absolutely, absolutely.  
405 BM: So it's not just the matter of unplugging. If they  
406 unplug, they're unplugging from their universe.  
407 ST: Yes. And there are many teenagers who I've  
408 studied who will unplug for a while, and then  
409 plug back in because that is where -- that is sort  
410 of where their social life is. That's where their --  
411 that's where they know where the parties are.  
412 That's where they know, that's where they find  
413 out where things are happening.  
414 BM: So this need for community that they now find  
415 technologically seems to me an extension of  
416 this powerful appetite that makes us human  
417 beings. But you say, I hear you saying, the  
418 machine threatens our humanity?  
419 ST: Well, I want to say I'm optimistic if it can be  
420 used in a way that connects us in ways that will  
421 make us more human, as that will bring the  
422 human community together. But let me just  
423 take politics. I was so optimistic and excited

424 about the connections that people could form  
 425 politically using the computer. And there has  
 426 been some fantastic things, obviously. But very  
 427 often, people feel as though they've politically  
 428 participated if they go on a website and they  
 429 check "like." They feel that that is belonging to  
 430 a -- making a political statement. Politics is  
 431 actually, I think, going into your community,  
 432 having a conversation, not to overuse the word,  
 433 disagreeing with somebody, putting yourself  
 434 into somebody else's head, often very hard.  
 435 Looking somebody in the eye, really doing the  
 436 hard work of empathy, something that you  
 437 don't learn by email. It's the last place to  
 438 develop empathic skills. So the question of  
 439 community and being part of a community is  
 440 either something that computers can help or  
 441 that computation can undermine, depending  
 442 on how we use it.

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

448 ST: It may--

449 BM: That they're being heard.

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

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

466 ST: And conversation with other people. That you  
 467 can't do it from your room, which so much of  
 468 the internet allows you to do. I mean, in

469 -education and in politics, I think we want to  
470 go to a place where we're looking to give things  
471 the complexity that they deserve.

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

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

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

512 BM: So do you have a couple of practical things that  
513 you would suggest to people about how to use

514           this technology? Facebook 'n Twitter social  
515           media (.) for happiness and meaning?  
516    ST:    I've a lot of practical advice for par↑ents (.)  
517           which is to create sacred spaces in your ho:me.  
518    BM:    By which you mean-  
519    ST:    Places that are device free. Kitchen dining  
520           room and the car.  
521    BM:    Hm.  
522    ST:    You can't introduce this idea when your child is  
523           ↑15 that the car is for chatt↑ing. From the very  
524           beginning kitchen dining room and the car are  
525           places where (1.0) we talk. And you ex↑plain to  
526           your child, "This isn't a you know- this is  
527           important to me (.) we're a family I need to talk  
528           to you. I need to talk to you."  
529    BM:    Sherry Turkle, I appreciate your coming to  
530           share your ideas with us.  
531    ST:    Thank you so much.

## Appendix B

### The New York Times comments

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READERS' COMMENTS

### The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In [Back to Article »](#)

By JULIE SCIELFO

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

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

Comments are no longer being accepted.

154 Readers' Comments

ALL COMMENTS | HIGHLIGHTS | READERS' RECOMMENDATIONS | REPLIES

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1 of 7 [NEXT](#)

- of  
california  
June 10th, 2010  
8:04 am

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

And this is considered a "troubling" incident? Does the nitpicking and guilt tripping of the modern parent never end?

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 109 Readers
- Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
10:58 am

The problem is not whether children are intolerant of any moments when they have their parents' full attention. This is, of course, something that children have to learn. What is a problem is a child has "learned" that parents' are systematically taken to "another place" by their connectivity devices. What you don't want is a child who from the beginning sees technology not as a tool but as the "competition."
- River  
Queens, NY  
June 10th, 2010  
8:04 am

Now we have another psychological feature to study. A lot of psychobabble goes on. I'd let the kids scream long enough, and then the parents would react, just as it has been for ages.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers
- sph  
Bangalore, India  
June 10th, 2010  
8:04 am

My wife and my daughter do not like me using my communicator. On weekends I just switch it off or put it into silent mode and throw it away. Monday morning hunt it down and start getting back on missed calls, emails. Nothing serious gets missed. Empirically observed. Relatives and close family friends call on landline if needed. My daughter would rather have me spending time focused on her or even do nothing (just hang out), but phone/laptop really irritate her. She's 6.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 79 Readers
- Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
11:02 am

This reader points to a constructive idea for handling this issue: the establishment of a "rule" about when phones are there and when not. You could have a "no phones" policy for a weekend. It could be for three evenings a week. It could be for one weekend day. What matters is that children see this as a device that makes demands on their parents (this is part of adult life) but not something that at any moment can take them away. The issue is not just calls, of course, but immersing oneself in e-mail and messages that tend to multiply when you answer them.
- Petrov  
Too close for comfort  
June 10th, 2010

'2009: Kim Sa-rang, a 3-month-old Korean child, died from malnutrition and neglect after both her parents spent hours each day in an internet cafe raising a virtual child on an online game, Prius Online.'

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8:05 am

(From Wikipedia's List of Unusual Deaths)

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 45 Readers

- 5 Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
11:02 am
- The Korean tragedy is not typical, but shows that games have a holding power that can take over people's sense of balance and good judgment. We need to acknowledge that we are vulnerable to becoming swept up in games, as well as in e-mail and messaging. Accepting our vulnerability will help us find ways to protect ourselves and our children.

- 5 BR  
Times Square  
June 10th, 2010  
8:05 am
- I'm trying to say something insightful here but I can't concentrate because my kid won't stop interrupting me.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 106 Readers

- 5 Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
11:03 am
- This answer is helpful because it uses humor to point out that parents and children have always been in an attentional dance. It is good for children to see parents involved in other things than their children. Children want to know that their parents have other things in their lives. It takes the pressure off. The child is not there to be the parents' amusement. But we have introduced something disruptive: a device, that from the child's point of view, can take a parent away from any conversation or activity, at any time, and that always seems to be given precedence. Children talk about looking up from scoring a point in basketball or lacrosse to see their father, in the stands, on the phone. They talk about sitting next to a parent watching a game on television while a father is texting and feeling nostalgic for the casual bunter they had when it felt they were there together. What is important is not to get defensive about our compelling devices. We are not going to throw them away. We are going to put them in their place.

- 5 Diane  
Bismarck, ND  
June 10th, 2010  
8:05 am
- That our children have to 'set-out' to gain our attention and interaction is distressing. However, I remember the same thing happening with my daughters thirty years ago when my phone calls (landlines, only) to my sisters ran longer than fifteen or twenty minutes.

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 14 Readers

- 7 bobo  
washington dc  
June 10th, 2010  
8:05 am
- I gave up on technology when I was riding the subway in DC one day. I looked around and I was the only person of the dozen passengers on the train not using a cellphone or other device. The next day, I cancelled my verizon phone contract. I've never regretted it since.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 62 Readers

- 5 Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
11:04 am
- Many people who grew up in a world where coffee shops, train stations, and train rides were places to strike up a conversation, say that the flight to the mobile device lessens their good feeling of living in a community. It also withdraws us from the street, a place that was a place of social life, often rich and vibrant. We live in the early days of the mobile culture. One hopes that we may "miss" each other, take stock and make the corrections.

- 5 CrusaderRabbit  
Chicago, IL  
June 10th, 2010
- I cringe every time I see a mother completely engrossed in a phone conversation while pushing a child in a stroller. Isn't there something she

8:06 am

could be pointing out to her child instead? It's like the child isn't even there. What a lonely way to grow up. I bet they compensate for this inattention by buying the child stuff.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 83 Readers

9. Anita  
Dallas  
June 10th, 2010  
8:05 am

Thanks for helping to fill up the space between the news and the editorials. Here is the crux: "There is little research on how parents' constant use of such technology affects children, but experts say there is no question that engaged parenting — talking and explaining things to children, and responding to their questions — remains the bedrock of early childhood learning." From Betty Draper with her cigarettes and afternoon wine to me with my laptop and Blackberry . . . ya think?

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 23 Readers

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

I share the frustration that that theme is not central to a larger research tradition, but it would be a mistake to conclude that there isn't something new and identifiable here. It used to be rude to interrupt a conversation to randomly talk to someone else. Now, we routinely interrupt our conversations to pick up other ones, giving the signal to those we care for that they can be put on "pause" for anything that comes over the device. We turn our friends, family, and particularly our children into "pausables." This is a problem.

10. hartman john  
Pacific Wonderland  
June 10th, 2010  
8:06 am

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 39 Readers

11. Elle Taylor  
Seneca, SC  
June 10th, 2010  
8:07 am

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

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

I've decided that since body language is 90% of communication, that our future ability to communicate is in great jeopardy. When we live our lives in short soundbites we will lose our ability to pick up cues like frowns or raised eyebrows or slumped posture (sadness). Constant technological communication is an ADDICTION - and not different from watching TV or gambling all day.

In my own life, I try to think of solutions - but then I hear another email come in. I am so curious that I can hardly resist peaking. But I have found that it takes courage to PUT LIMITS ON MY OWN BEHAVIOR and schedule activities that require leaving the technical devices out of sight and mind. It feels good to be wholly in sync with the person next to me. It feels good to read a book without interruption. It feels good to walk in the park without hearing a "ping" in my pocket. I'm not sure - because here I sit writing this comment to complete strangers without enjoying the beautiful morning in my garden. Oh, well -- gotta go.

Recommend Recommended by 234 Readers

- 8 Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
11:05 am
- I agree that some of the first things we have to do to get things right is to use the technologies as occasions to ask ourselves: What are our values? How do we want to live? What is important? If getting out in the stillness of nature is not important, a vibrating mobile phone will not help. If quiet time with a partner where you give each other space to not only share the "news of the day" but what was important about it is important, it should be a no laptop/no smartphone time.

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

12. Ir  
Maryland  
June 10th, 2010  
8:07 am
- The author of this article suggests that parents are on their smartphones because they feel pressure from work to be constantly available. I am sure that is true in some cases, but as a person who has many friends with small children, I can tell you that these parents are just as likely to be surfing Facebook or other leisure websites. To me, there is a big difference. Taking out 3 minutes to answer an essential work email is different than voluntarily ignoring your child to further your own internet social life.

Recommend Recommended by 156 Readers

- 8 Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
11:06 am
- My own investigations support this point. We are not captured by what is important. We are captured by the experience it gives us to feel captured. There would not be a problem if parents excused themselves for brief periods to attend to other things. The problem is that parents communicate that there is another reality, another place that they would rather be, and that, in fact, has their attention.

13. Barbara  
Central NJ  
June 10th, 2010  
10:15 am
- The problem with judging based on 5 minutes of observation is that you really don't know what is going on. I frequently have to log onto work e-mail to compensate for the fact that I am running late , because sometimes kids throw fits when getting dressed because he wanted to wear the blue shirt that was 2 sizes too small, or have potty emergencies right before time to leave the house. And it is a universally understood (by moms) truth that when mom is on the phone any preschooler who was quietly playing with her puzzles a moment ago will either desperately need mom's attention or bolt from the room to take the chance to get into something while mom is distracted. 150 years ago moms did not ignore the chickens, or the bread that needed to be baked or the washing in order to give 100% attention to her little ones. It is only modern women who are expected to live in a child focused bubble 24 hours a day somehow managing to magically afford this luxury of free time on one income. Get real.

Recommend Recommended by 72 Readers

- 8 Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:42 pm
- I am very sympathetic to this response. What I am hearing from children who find parents' practices upsetting is not the reality that there has to be e-mail, but that there seems to be no rules (of politeness, of acceptable boundaries, of "special time") that surround it. It probably is better practice to sit, uninterrupted, for a half-hour Disney cartoon, than to sit down for a "movie night" with your mobile device. I think the focus of conversations with parents should be on boundaries, not whether or not you can use your device.

14. Vicki  
Hackettstown, NJ  
June 10th, 2010  
10:19 am
- The "quantity" "Quality" issue regarding children has always puzzled me. A small child doesn't understand the difference. Small children need instant answers to their questions. That isn't the same as responding to whining, (my children were not allowed to whine, ever!) It is recognizing that children don't have an internal clock to let them put off answers. You can get a small child to stop nagging at you by answering their request immediately - yes or no often works well if consistent and appropriate. Older children are a different thing altogether, and can readily see the difference between quality and quantity. But children do learn from what they observe, much more than from what they are told. And, if they see their parents constantly fiddling

with an electronic device, not responding to them or to each other in a meaningful way, then the children will also behave that way. No one likes to be ignored when they feel they have something important to say or discuss. The increasing addiction to the handheld devices is, I think, far more dangerous to our mental health and relationships than television ever was because of its portability.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 39 Readers

**8** Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:42 pm

This response says something so important when it stresses the portability, the "always-on/always-on-you," quality of today's technology. It is not a bad thing to need to "excuse" oneself from a conversation, even from a dinner or a party in order to attend to something important. The danger here is how parents can now be in what has been called "continuous partial attention." There is also the issue (but perhaps this is for another time) of what we do to our ourselves when the best we can do is give partial attention to our own thoughts.

**15** vwoodruff  
seneca falls, new york  
June 10th, 2010  
10:19 am

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 21 Readers

**8** Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:43 pm

I, too, attended a memorial service where there was texting under the program, used as a kind of shielding device. We may need to look at what we are doing as a symptom. Have we retrained ourselves with technology to simply not be able to sit through a play, a memorial service, a concert? Do we not care? In either case, we need to take some kind of action. We will mean less to each other if we cannot care for each other in these simple ways.

**16** mlcc  
Washington, DC  
June 10th, 2010  
10:20 am

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 31 Readers

**17** pierce.moffett  
portland, or  
June 10th, 2010  
10:20 am

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 92 Readers

**8** Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:43 pm

I am very sympathetic to this comment, not an unusual one in my experience. The key here is that these devices do put us into a different "zone." Children understand this and this is why the devices are so

- Other  
June 10th, 2010  
12:43 pm
- disruptive. Children can tolerate a parent being busy. It is harder if you experience your parents as in a different zone. At the limit this can be frightening.
- 
18. Retired teacher  
Austin, Tx  
June 10th, 2010  
10:21 am
- Apparently distractions by electronic devices like smart phones are erasing the advantages the more educated and affluent parents once gave to their offspring. Instead of engaging their young children in conversations as they go about daily activities these parents are talking on cell phones, reading e-mails, texting, etc.
- I'm glad we didn't have all this when I was a young parent. I wonder what kind of parents my grandchildren will be?
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 12 Readers
- 
19. Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:46 pm
- This raises something very poignant. Some of the parents who get most "lost" in their phones, are the very parents who have done so much and sacrificed so much for their children's education. We hear a lot about the importance of families having "dinner" together. One of the most important things here is the conversation that takes place at dinner. The mobile revolution, as one of its unintended side effects, has undermined family conversation. A family can act here. Have dinner together three nights a week, even two. Or two nights and a weekend breakfast. If family members' schedules are very different, go for midnight pancakes once a week.
- What is important is that children grow up with the sense that there is a space for conversation
- 
19. CTreader  
stamford, ct  
June 10th, 2010  
10:21 am
- How about studying these people while they are at work to see how much time they engage in personal business? You hint at it. My own non-scientific impression is that they have their priorities all mixed up and confuse frantic activity with actual productivity. In the end, they're probably not very good at either task, but they sure give the impression of working hard.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 23 Readers
- 
20. JM  
Chicago  
June 10th, 2010  
10:22 am
- This study will be another reason for employers to discriminate against mothers in hiring and during employment. Mothers (and fathers to be P.C.) will be seen as less productive because they are drawn between their children and their mobile email device.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
21. Jill Mays  
Ridgfield, CT  
June 10th, 2010  
10:23 am
- A key factor in emotional connectivity is eye contact with your child. Even if the parent talks to the child while scrolling down the I-phone, a key element in the parent child relationship is missing. The ability to engage, focus and attend begin with eye contact. Increasing numbers of children struggle with attention and visual perception. Perhaps the of visual attention (in the car, while texting, etc) are contributors to this alarming trend. For more on the importance of visual attention, refer to [www.TheMotorStory.com](http://www.TheMotorStory.com).
- Jill Mays
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers
- 
22. Jimmianne, the spotted owl  
Sik Hope, NC  
June 10th, 2010  
10:23 am
- I started to write that parents should treat their children the way they treat their friends - who would go out with a friend and completely ignore them while texting? Unfortunately you see it all the time - couples, holding hands and each glued to a phone. And then there is the couple that wrote on facebook constantly during their honeymoon and another who facebooked the details of their first child's birth - except for the few moments when they were too distracted. The world changes, sadly.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 11 Readers
- 
23. ekeizer4  
Oregon  
June 10th, 2010  
10:23 am
- It's one thing for a parent to use his or her smartphone to conduct essential business or even keep up with long-lost friends, but I draw the line at randomly tossing one's 2 cents into the peanut gallery of the "comments" sections of -



Oh.

- 
- Recommend Recommended by 26 Readers
- 
24. Laura Hunt  
here there and  
everywhere  
June 10th, 2010  
10:25 am
- What is so damned important that these people have to be connected 24/7? Whatever happened to dinner with the family sans electronics? We are turning into a country of morons. On my way to work today some idiot in his car practically broadsided an 18 wheel semi while he was texting, incredible stupidity and it's only getting worse. Another example of idiocy, someone texting nearly got hit by a taxi while crossing 7th ave.
- Recommend Recommended by 56 Readers
- 
25. Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone  
Together: Why We  
Expect More of  
Technology and  
Less of Each  
Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:41 pm
- My personal favorite, in the spirit of "Is this a time to text, really?!!!!!!?" was being at a marathon in Florence and having a runner run by, texting. That was funny. Texting and driving is not funny at all. Many of the teens I interview complain that their parents text and drive. That is heartbreaking.
- 
25. CDS  
Tampa, Florida  
June 10th, 2010  
10:25 am
- More troubling was a bus ride from Philadelphia to Bethlehem where a mother put her earphones in her car and the rest of us on the bus had to hear her 3 or 4 year old son (who she put in another row) repeatedly call to her and ask her questions. She was oblivious but the rest of us felt badly for the child.
- Recommend Recommended by 26 Readers
- 
26. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)
- stacyesq  
Ohio  
June 10th, 2010  
10:27 am
- I don't have children, so I don't know if this is true or not, but it seems that parenting can be a very lonely undertaking. I can understand parents -- especially those who stay home to rear the child -- needing outside interaction. Obviously, though, parents should practice moderation and use good judgment.
- It also seems that parents can never win: if they pay constant attention to little Suzie, then they are raising a selfish, self-absorbed brat because Suzie was always the center of attention. If they pay attention to their phone sometimes instead of little Suzie, then they are raising a selfish, self-absorbed brat because Suzie will emulate those who raised her. I truly don't know why people even bother.
- Recommend Recommended by 44 Readers
- 
27. Hudson Valley  
Parent magazine  
Hudson Valley  
June 10th, 2010  
10:28 am
- How we use these newer technologies may not be entirely voluntary, as some studies are beginning to show. Many of us seem to be prone to some level of addiction to screens of any size. How do you know it's a problem? One answer is when it starts to encroach on the time spent with our kids. We are looking at the challenges technology presents to parents on a number of fronts at Hudson Valley Parent magazine.
- Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers
- 
28. Red  
NC  
June 10th, 2010  
10:28 am
- You can't really draw any conclusions about whether this was a "bad mommy" based on this one incident witnessed. Maybe the child had been bugging her for her attention every 3 seconds all day and she needed a couple of minutes to get something done. It's not bad to make a child wait occasionally for our attention. They need to learn the world does not constantly revolve around them. A nicer way to say it may have been "Mommy needs to do this right now; I'll talk to you in a minute, sweetie." But maybe the mom had already said that 10 times to no avail. Don't judge.
- Recommend Recommended by 17 Readers
- 
29. Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone  
Together: Why We  
Expect More of  
Technology and
- An important theme that comes up in many questions is one about not wanting to demonize a parent because they have other things they need to accomplish. I think it is important to stress that turning one's attention away

- Less of Each  
Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:47 pm
- from a child is not a problem. Having technology as a constant competitor, where the parent zones out, often to accomplish the trivial, and then having a child feel that this parent is unavailable because in another "zone" -- that is the problem.
- Parents need to divide their attention. We don't need to be defensive, but realize that many of us are in the grip of something new.
- 
29. MT  
Columbus, OH  
June 10th, 2010  
10:28 am
- Even my cat gets jealous when I spend too much time on the computer. He will rub his cheeks on the computer monitor to "mark it" and to show it the "affection" I am giving it versus him. If cats know this, then children definitely do. This hits home since my 1st child is only 2 months away. Seems like we need "Blackberry-aholics Anonymous" to get ramped up.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 16 Readers
- 
30. Terry  
Saratoga Springs  
June 10th, 2010  
10:29 am
- Hurray to Di in California! Exactly what I was going to contribute. My wife and I are currently in the toughest battle of our lives in trying to train our young ones that there are times when they simply have to wait. Whining, carrying on, and throwing a tantrum are just plain unacceptable if Mom or Dad is doing something legitimate that doesn't involve them. It hardly matters what the woman in the article was talking about, but what if she was making a doctor's appointment for her whining tot, or talking to a prospective employer to schedule a job interview? Should she put those functions on hold to respond to a child who has yet to learn that there is a world outside his sphere of reference? Sheesh.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 6 Readers
- 
31. Mary Ellen  
Rochester, NY  
June 10th, 2010  
10:29 am
- This is nothing new. I grew up in the 60's and 70's with parents who were (actually still are) addicted to television. I was not allowed to talk to my mother when I came home from school because "her story" (soap opera) broadcast from 3-4. I can count on one hand the number of times we did things together as a family. My brother and I turned out OK.
- Search the NY Times archives and you'll find articles about how "specialists in parent-child relations continue to decry 'the disruptive effects of television on family life'".
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 11 Readers
- 
- Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone  
Together: Why We  
Expect More of  
Technology and  
Less of Each  
Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:49 pm
- I think we need to strike a balance between an apocalyptic narrative and thinking that nothing has changed.
- I am struck in this answer by the rule the reader grew up with ("Don't bother me between 3 and 4 pm.") That was a rule, a constraint, a limit. The problem with what we have today is that there are no constraints. A mom and daughter decide to make a shopping trip together, and the mother "checks out" during this precious time into the world of the Blackberry. We have to be compassionate with the adults in the situation. We respond to the stimulation of the "ping" of the phone wanting more.
- But just because we are in a tough place here doesn't mean that we can't discipline ourselves to think of this as the "early days" of this technology. We can still make the mobile culture into something that serves our human purposes.
- 
32. Iracemoment  
PA  
June 10th, 2010  
10:31 am
- my husband has missed that walking in the door greeting (daddy daddy daddy!) after work for my children's entire lives bc he is on his phone, talking work, even after a 25 minute commute. they are 8 and 6. this shows no sign of stopping, even after (or in spite of) my annual pointing this out. on his deathbed perhaps he will reflect on this and regret it. the kids are now old enough to notice, tho they persist.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 9 Readers
- 
33. Theresa  
San Antonio  
June 10th, 2010  
10:31 am
- Isn't this basically about lack of self-control, expressed through use of technology? My mother does this--I'm 33 so it's not hurting me--but she also

has a history of questionable self-discipline in a lot of other areas of her life.

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 18 Readers

34. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

ruth  
CA  
June 10th, 2010  
10:31 am

My sister used to bite my mom to get her attention when she was reading the newspaper. That was a real newspaper. In 1979. As long as there have been children, parents have ignored them.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 45 Readers

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers

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

I'm hearing the song, "The Cat's in the Cradle" in the back of my mind.

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

My son has grown up just like me.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 26 Readers

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 16 Readers

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 8 Readers

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

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

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

39. meggiesulivan  
Boston  
June 10th, 2010  
10:33 am

Children should be able to feel that their parents are just as accessible (if not more so) than the gadget's accessibility to the parent. Imagine that your desire to check your blackberry is just as much the addiction your child has



for you. Respond in accordance.

- |     | Recommend   | Recommended by 1 Reader  |
|-----|---|--|
| 40. | Darkwing Duck<br>VA<br>June 10th, 2010<br>10:34 am          | <p>One positive aspect of social media is that it allows stay-at-home parents to have 'adult' conversations from time to time during the day. Among my highly educated peers, women who take a year off to spend at home with their kids consistently report wanting "nothing more" than a conversation that does not include babbling. Social media might let them have that.</p> <p>On the other hand, it also allows you to...yep...ignore your child.</p> <p>I think that Ellie has it right about limiting our own behavior. I am constantly frustrated by g-chatters who won't shut up (or ask...you just sent me this email, why aren't you on the chat?) or who don't quite understand that, indeed, my time spent online is like the rest of my time in my life -- scheduled, I'm a schedule person. And now, the schedule says...time for the gym.</p>   |
|     | Recommend   | Recommended by 7 Readers   |
| 41. | WM<br>Los Angeles CA<br>June 10th, 2010<br>10:38 am         | <p>Throughout history, there has always been parents that gratuitously ignore their children because [insert random reason here] -- If you have children, pay attention to them. Get your priorities straight. If you must occasionally be distracted, this should be fully and lovingly explained the minute your child is old enough to understand. In your quiet moments, assess the necessity of these distractions in your ability to be a good parent. Understand cause and effect.</p>  |
|     | Recommend   | Recommended by 8 Readers   |
| 42. | Jojo<br>DC<br>June 10th, 2010<br>10:38 am                   | <p>I talked to a visually impaired gentleman on the sidewalk the other day, and he told me that a monther once rammed her stroller into him and yelled: "Watch where you're going!"</p> <p>She was texting on her phone while pushing the stroller.</p>  |
|     | Recommend   | Recommended by 22 Readers  |
| 43. | ALB<br>Dutchess County<br>NY<br>June 10th, 2010<br>10:39 am | <p>I think all this being "connected" makes people feel popular, important, interesting, etc. But how could they be, when they don't DO anything! How interesting could their lives be when all they do is text, surf, FB &amp; twitter all day? What could they have to talk about? Their lives can't be all that interesting! Get a life, people!</p>  |
|     | Recommend   | Recommended by 31 Readers  |
| 44. | Donna A.<br>DeImser, NY<br>June 10th, 2010<br>10:40 am      | <p>I agree with the author that this is a big problem. I don't think there's anybody out there who hasn't come across the situation she spells out about the child being ignored while Mom or Dad is busy with some kind of electronic device. Some posts alluded to the fact that as adults we've always had something that took our attention away from our kids for short spurts of time, but I think these people are missing the point: it's not that kids are having to wait for short periods for their parents' attention. These kids are being ignored by the very people who are responsible for raising them, and the reason they're being ignored is because Mommy and Daddy can't prioritize.</p> <p>The article makes a very valid point: Our children look to us for interaction, especially in the early formative years. If they don't get the stimulus that they need, they will not flourish. Life is about choices. If you can't put your PDA, iTouch, Blackberry, iPad or any of a number of communication devices away for the good of your child, perhaps you need to rethink whether or not parenting is for you.</p> <p>Children require attention. They are not being "difficult" when they want to speak with you; they are doing what kids do at that age, interacting. PUT DOWN YOUR DEVICE and talk with them. Is there really an email or webpage that, if you don't check right now, will change your life dramatically? I don't think so.</p> <p>I see people walking in a virtual stupor while their fingers busily text. They</p> |

text while they're walking across a busy intersection, they text while holding a conversation (how rude), and really, is any of it more than just useless banter. Are these young kids texting something so important.

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

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 21 Readers

- 
45. [startbarfast](#)  
New York  
June 10th, 2010  
10:40 am
- This is, unfortunately, a common, and infuriating, occurrence in New York. I can't tell you how many times I've seen mothers gabbing on their cell phones, pushing one of those SUV strollers, empty, while their toddler struggles 6 or 8 feet behind. The obliviousness of the mother is obvious. Another charming sight is the mother with her headphones on who can't hear her child crying. Why do these people become parents?

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 57 Readers

- 
8. [Sherry Turkle](#)  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
12:50 pm
- In addition to the mothers pushing empty strollers problem, there is also the problem of mothers on the phone, with an ignored child in the stroller. Pushing a stroller is a social experience! My office, where I am now, faces a park. Parents are pushing children on swings while texting! Pushing swings is a social experience.

- 
46. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

[CJ](#)  
Midwest  
June 10th, 2010  
10:42 am

So we're becoming a society of anxious people (OMG! What if I miss a call/e-mail?)with short attention spans and the inability to concentrate past two paragraphs, symptoms of ADHD.

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 27 Readers

- 
47. [Amy](#)  
New Mexico  
June 10th, 2010  
10:42 am
- You know what? My husband and I work very hard to provide a lifestyle for our family that my son benefits greatly from, because it allows him to have a private-school education, swim lessons, soccer, birthday presents for friends' parties, etc. etc. Unfortunately, in this day and age, and in this economy, the price of that lifestyle is that sometimes Mommy has to take a phone call or answer an email from a client when it's not convenient for my son.
- I am really not sure why it is so terrible for parents not to spend every free second "engaging" with their children. My parents certainly did not spend every free second "engaged" with me when I was a child; I certainly remember quite a bit of TV and also phrases like "go outside and play, and don't come back until it's dark." (Back when parents could say that and still

be relatively certain the children would, in fact, come home at the end of the day.) We strictly limit TV. We spend a lot of time playing with and reading to our son every day. We eat dinner as a family every night. Now I have to feel guilty if I'm with him and I have to take a five-minute phone call? Give me a break.

Children have not ever been raised by parents who did nothing but sit and stare at the child, waiting on his/her every whim. Not ever, in the history of the world. I do agree some parents take the cell-phone thing too far - we have a rule that phones cannot be in-hand during meals, bedtime or bedtime. And I have gotten infuriated myself when, for example, we see parents with their kids at the park, and the parent is yakking away on a call the entire time instead of playing with their kid. That being said, let me give you an example. I try to pick up my son from school every day at 3:30, so he doesn't sit there until nearly dinnertime like so many of his peers. My clients' workdays don't stop at 3:30, however, and sometimes I have to take a call or send an email while I'm with my son in the afternoon - and sometimes he doesn't like it. But I learned pretty early on that I was not going to have my parents' undivided attention 24/7 and I survived just fine. I am not sure if the "experts" have noticed, but kids today seem extremely coddled and spoiled compared to how children were when I was growing up, or especially in my parents' generation. Studies of college student "millennials" are showing record-high levels of self-involvement and record-low levels of empathy. Let's please not do anything else to raise another generation of petulant, spoiled narcissists who think the world revolves around them.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 31 Readers

48. [MagesseT](#)  
Seattle area  
June 10th, 2010  
10:49 am
- Comment 25 - I agree; another bus ride across WA state, over Labor Day weekend several years ago; a mother and \*about\* 3 year old child got on the bus in the middle of the state. The kid (!) apparently left a stuffed animal in the bus station at Ellensburg, and whined, moaned and cried about it - all while the mother had earphones in and sound up loud enough that the closest other passengers could hear it. Her reply to the kid's complaints: "Well you shouldn't have forgotten it, the should you?"

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 8 Readers

49. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

[bw](#)  
New Hampshire  
June 10th, 2010  
12:03 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 13 Readers

50. [dan](#)  
mt  
June 10th, 2010  
12:06 pm
- Hang up the phone and listen to your kid. It doesn't make you smart to play with your smart phone; it makes you rude and clueless. You're not 007, you're someone's mom or dad.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 15 Readers

The New York Times

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

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## READERS' COMMENTS

The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In [Back to Article](#)

By JULIE SCELFO

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

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

Comments are no longer being accepted.

## 154 Readers' Comments

ALL COMMENTS | HIGHLIGHTS | READERS' RECOMMENDATIONS | REPLIES

Oldest | Newest

PREVIOUS | 3 of 7 | NEXT

## 51. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

Michela  
Riverside, CA  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm

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

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

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 14 Readers

52. sjc  
Burlington, VT  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm

Before cellphones, there were ipods. Before ipods, walkmen. Before walkmen, television. Before television, radio. Before radio, newspapers. Before newspapers, there were wolves and coyotes after our hen house.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

53. rdlugosz  
Phoenix AZ

Is anyone else concerned about children's images being posted by parents on

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- June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm
- social networks? There is lots of talk about definitions of privacy these days, but will those "cute" little children feel the same way about the use of their photographs when they hit their teens and twenties? I know this is a parent's right, but in times of divorce and differences of opinion, which parent's rights prevail? Does a child own their own "face" ?
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 11 Readers
- 
- Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010 5:07 pm
- This question is so important. I think that we will want a new look at privacy and the rights to our images. We are in the early days of figuring this out. The most important thing is to think of the digital culture we have made as one in its infancy.
- We tend to think that it is "mature" because we have been around it for so long, we have seen it grow up. But really, the basic questions are just coming up now, now that we have some experience with the Net, now that we have seen a generation grow up with the Net, and now that we are trying to parent on the Net.
- The rules are not written, the culture needs to be shaped.
- 
54. kris newmexico  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm
- I have wondered about the effect technology has had on parental interaction. One thing that bothers me is seeing parents pushing children in strollers while talking on cell phones. I always spent such time talking to my children while I pushed them along and then as they walked along. Those times were excellent opportunities for talking and encouraging the children to talk. Talking on cell phones prevents that type of parent-child interaction.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers
- 
55. TS-B Ohio  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm
- The problem is not the use of technology, the problem is people who don't want to be good parents.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 6 Readers
- 
58. Mama Rachel, MD  
Solana Beach, CA  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm
- As has been said, there have always been distracted parents who look for diversions from interacting with their kids. Electronic diversions may be more seductive, but that's the only difference I see.
- Interesting though, my two grown sons (21 and 23) are starting to limit their use of cell phones and social media because they see it interfering with human interaction in their own lives. One has cancelled his facebook acct., the other refuses to answer his cell if he's involved in a real-life activity (though he will return calls).
- I wonder how it will affect their friendships?
- <http://mamasoncall.com>
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 10 Readers
- 
- Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010 7:14 pm
- I do see in my research that it is young people who are starting to "push back." I think this is a very good sign. And I think it is one that is going to continue. There is push back on how much is time spent online, on texting, and very important: there are new questions about the regime of privacy in which they have been brought up.
- 
57. Andrea NYC  
June 10th, 2010 12:10 pm
- After hearing/reading about how important eye contact is for babies I am always so sad and concerned when I see both men & women focused on whatever device they have or alternatively, plugged into an mp3 player while supposedly "with" their children (or both). When I was a child if I was pestering my parents for something, they would momentarily stop, look me in the eyes, and say, "Mom's on the phone" or "Dad's talking to someone, you need to wait", that's a very different experience than being treated like a pesky fly that's being absent-mindedly flicked away. Last Labor Day weekend my husband and I were house and eat sitting for my sister and

spontaneously decided on a "media-free weekend" It was lovely, no TV, no radio, no computers, no music. We went for walks, talked, read books in companionable silence, cooked together, had meals outside and watched the birds, pattered around the garden...Utter bliss and highly recommended.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 16 Readers

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

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 9 Readers

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

Oh, do I ever agree with poster # 21. there simply is no substitute for face to face, eye contact communication. Brushing off children, especially children, leaves them with an impression that they're not that important. And, maybe, they're right. Maybe that text, that surfing, that cell call really is more important in some parents' opinions.

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 16 Readers

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

I also want to point out the following:

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 7 Readers

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

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

Magda Gerber, the brilliant educator for caregivers of infants and toddlers, said when a parent is with a child, his/her attention should be completely present with that child. Otherwise, the children should be in a safe place where they can play and entertain themselves (which creates good problem solving skills and self-sufficiency). Being physically present while emotionally unavailable is not good for the child. Children will practice behaviors, such as biting, to get attention, and then of course, these

behaviors are rewarded and reinforced with attention. Even if it's negative, the attention is better than nothing, but it sets up very negative patterns between child and adult.

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

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

- 
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 8 Readers
- 
63. ELBrooklyn  
Brooklyn  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm
- Sometimes I'm reading and I tell my nudy children "Let me just finish this paragraph" or page. Do I get scolded for this????
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers
- 
64. happy and healthy  
oldster  
fort lauderdale  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm
- In the park this morning, I saw a mom pushing her silent child in a stroller, while chatting away non-stop on a cell phone. I was sad to see the missed opportunities for communication and conversation.
- A chat with a child is more than just a language and learning experience. It gives the child the sense that he matters to the parent, that his parent values him enough to spend time with him. Spending time with a child conveys much more than words and ideas - it communicates values. How we choose to spend our time reveals what we value in our lives.
- mom of 4
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 20 Readers
- 
65. cindy  
TX  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm
- This is such a whiny, annoying article. NYT is such a scold on kids/family issues.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers
- 
66. sydferrell  
t or c  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm
- Soon Rosie the Robot will be doing a better job with the kids anyway.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers
- 
67. Bill  
Knoxville, TN  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm
- Laptops, smartphones, et al, don't turn the hearts of parents to their children and certainly don't turn the hearts of children to their parents. I have never seen a smartphone kindle affection between parent and child. It is human to human connectivity that kindles affection.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 7 Readers
- 
68. dave  
tucson  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm
- Cell phones are the cigarettes of the 21st century.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 19 Readers
- 
69. jmd  
Denver  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm
- I am a SAHM of a 7-month-old son. After singing Itsy-Bitsy Spider for the 30th time (complete with hand gestures) and watching him gnaw on his teething ring what seems like hours, I sometimes let my son play independently in a safe place while I look at a NY times article for 5 minutes or connect with friends on Facebook or set up a playdate via email. These breaks prevent me from feeling isolated and brain dead. The days are enjoyable, but can be long and hard. I refuse to feel guilty about "tuning out" for a couple of minutes every few hours.
- Of course, there are extreme cases and children are neglected when their parents tune out for too long. As in everything in life, moderation is key.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 9 Readers
- 
70. ck NY

Yorktown, NY  
June 10th, 2010  
12:10 pm

I'm with no. 46 who says "get a life" and others who say "turn the thing off." I would put in a plug (pun intended) for using technology to make possible MORE family time. What I mean is, the laptop and blackberry I use allow me some flexibility. I work alot but I can so things off site from work, in transit (hands free, using the carpeice.. hate seeing folks talking and driving and distracted running red lights).

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers

71. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 38 Readers

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 6 Readers

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

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

[Elizabethschurman.wordpress.com](http://Elizabethschurman.wordpress.com)

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 8 Readers

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

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

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

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

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

It's one thing when my younger friends stop mid-sentence to text - I'm resigned to the fact that they don't see it as being rude.



I now understand that unless your email can be answered with LOL, OMG or I'll get back 2 u - you'll probably have to request the answer 1 or 2 more times because the constant inflow of nonsense takes precedence over and drowns out communications that require a real response.

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 17 Readers

75. DickeyFuller  
DC  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- In DC, I see young parents wearing an iPod and earbuds walking their young children who are often in a stroller. How will they hear their children crying or calling for them?
- It used to be just young people crossing busy streets while texting, oblivious to other pedestrians and cars. Now it's middle aged people too. Everyone is missing out on what's going on around them.
- It's insane that otherwise intelligent people are spending their lives staring at a tiny little screen. Not that many years ago, we answered emails and voicemails a couple of times per day. When did the need for instantaneous response happen -- was it 9-11?
- I guess the really stupid members of our society will get run down by cars or fall into manholes. Or not be able to form relationships and thus not reproduce.
- It is survival of the fittest after all.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers

76. Lynn Valerio  
Great Falls, VA  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- Parenting is mostly a conscious choice. Once the baby is born, mature adults realize their own childhood is kaput and they have an obligation to someone who is totally dependent. Caring for a child is one of the privileges and joys of life. We are asked to be responsive, encouraging, calm and supportive most of the time, and yes, it is a very difficult job. Sadly, I too have seen mothers talking on their cellphones while out walking their little ones strapped into strollers.
- Those who know from experience how much the parenting years mean to us later, and how significant a good attachment to one's mother can be, realize these otherwise engaged parents are missing a rare moment when they could focus affection and attention on their child. Research shows that children thrive when they feel loved and secure. It is important for parents to interact directly, strengthen a child's communication skills by speaking to them, and offer your active presence as a sign of security. After all, the first nurturer is also the baby's first love object.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers

77. diane  
WI  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- Parents are, in effect, giving children the message that devices and virtual world are more important than being in relationship with a human being in a real-time world right in front of their noses.
- There's a simple phrase for this behavior: "checked out."

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 9 Readers

78. Caroline  
Burbank  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- Even when I was a manager of many people, I limited answering the telephone to MY schedule. Do this with your children: when they're at school, answer phone, use computer; during nap time, answer the phone/use computer. Otherwise, do stuff WITH the children: clean the house--together; read a book--together; plant a garden--together; make a meal--together; fold the laundry--together. And when they're in bed, share life with your spouse. Now that isn't hard, is it?

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

79. Madan Birla  
Collierville, TN  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- I facilitate 'Leading a Creative and Balanced life' for business executives. Yes, the 24/7 connectivity is a fact of life in today's world, the operative word is balance. The deepest human need is 'I matter.' By your presence and

sharing of yourself you convey to me that I matter. I use a quote, 'If you don't fully arrive in the present you miss your appointment with life.' If you are with loved ones at dinner or school play, be all there. Being physically there and mentally someplace else sends the message that whatever is on the other end is more important, similar to when I'm in a store talking to the business owner and he/she picks up the phone and proceeds to have a long phone conversation.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers

90. [claire](#)  
VA  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 10 Readers

81. [LS](#)  
New Jersey  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm

My 5 year-old daughter recently asked me to stop texting while we were having lunch because she wanted to talk to me. I hadn't even realized what I was doing - it had become second nature. Now I'm leaving my work blackberry at home and my phone in my purse. It's a relief - even my friends have commented how nice it is that I don't answer the phone in the middle of our face to face conversations! And really, there's nothing much more important than paying attention to what I'm doing and to whom I'm talking. Now I'm working on setting limits to my own computer time but am finding it hard not to "quickly" check my email. My daughter is helping me with that too - she tells me that it's nicer outside than on the computer and when I tell her I'll be just one more minute, she counts to 60 and says it's time to "x out".

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 16 Readers

82. [laq](#)  
New York  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 20 Readers

83. [Sherry Turkle](#)  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
5:08 pm

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

83. [Richard](#)  
Washington, DC  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm

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

Thirty years ago I would watch my sister in law engrossed in a conversation with another suburban mother, in her front yard, in the mall, anywhere really, with her young son at her side doing everything possible to get her attention, without success.

Mommy, mommy, mommy, mommy, mommy!

Some parents will seek distraction from their children and persist in ignoring them, no matter what the distraction might be.

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

- Recommend Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
84. Bradley Smith  
Brookline, MA  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- How is that a few characters on a lit screen, an arbitrary caller, etc. can be more compelling than the people you are currently with? Is it the case that people are simply addicted to being interrupted?
- Recommend Recommended by 17 Readers
- 
85. Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
5:08 pm
- People become "hooked" on the feeling of being wanted, needed, called upon. That there is something waiting "in the phone" that is not in the rest of their life. It is not just about addiction to a "device." It is about fantasies of what that device is going to deliver.
- 
85. Mai  
US  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- I disagree with "dl" from CA. Though the example isn't major, it does reflect a growing problem with computer addiction. When a child resorts to biting his or her mother to get her attention, that IS pretty bad. There are tons of blogs, boards and sites run by parents today and I am often amazed at how they can possibly write so much. I think the idea of having a no-computer zone is a great idea. It will be hard for addicts.
- Recommend Recommended by 7 Readers
- 
85. Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
5:08 pm
- No matter how apt the metaphor of addiction is (and it is tempting!), it does not get us on the right path. We are not going to give up our devices; we have to learn how to live with them in ways that suit our human purposes. I feel the conversation that needs to happen is how to find a way to be compassionate with ourselves about our misuse of technology, but learn to live with our devices.
- 
86. Erin  
Medford, Mass.  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- When I was a child my mother would immerse herself in books and it was hugely challenging to get her attention. She had 4 kids in 5 years and I think she was overwhelmed by the constant demands. I would have to scream "Mom!" while standing right next to her to get her to attention. She took care of us and loved us but being with kids constantly (she was a stay-at-home mom) can be a lethal combination of boredom and stress, as well as the good stuff.
- Recommend Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
87. MTL  
Vermont  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- At last someone brought this up! I get sick at heart when I see a parent walking along, holding the hand of a small child, and talking a mile a minute on their cell phone instead of talking to the child. The little ones grow up so fast-- how tragic.
- Recommend Recommended by 12 Readers
- 
88. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)
- FrenchPressMemo  
s  
Denver, Colorado  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm
- I am guilty of this and try to temper myself. When my husband does it, I see how disconnected from our daughter he gets and it is troublesome. The truth is that nothing at any point is more important than her and we need to find a way to separate from work. Most times, whatever email or text message or social media update we check can wait as tempted as we are to say that we "need" to check it right then.
- [www.frenchpressmemos.blogspot.com](http://www.frenchpressmemos.blogspot.com)
- Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers

## 68. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

perdita  
New York  
June 10th, 2010  
1:00 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 14 Readers

90. omio  
upstate ny  
June 10th, 2010  
2:39 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 13 Readers

91. Urbanranger  
NYC  
June 10th, 2010  
2:40 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

92. birde  
Lafayette, LA  
June 10th, 2010  
2:40 pm

I have to say it's not just children....as the spouse of someone who's addicted to his iphone, I have to say most evenings I resent the fact that I get ignored so that he can spend time with his phone. I know how I feel as an adult. I feel sorry for the 3 year old experiencing the same thing. It's not just the kids who are going to get screwed up with this.... given some time, watch entire families crumble.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

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

I think these parents are (a) addicts and narcissists and (b) teaching their children to be the same. i suggest the following exercise to these people: turn off all the gadgets for a weekend and watch yourself and your children already addicted jones (suffer withdrawal symptoms) for the weekend...this experience should tell you something. if it doesn't, then heaven help you. fascinating article and conversation. I'm going to read a book now.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers

94. BruceB  
Prescott, AZ  
June 10th, 2010  
2:40 pm

Hang up and thrive.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 7 Readers

95. CDO  
Tampa, FL  
June 10th, 2010  
2:40 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

96. Vitafan  
Phily  
June 10th, 2010  
2:41 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 12 Readers

Sherry Turkle  
Author: "Alone  
Together: Why We  
Expect More of  
Technology and

I am struck by how hard it is to not "blame the technology" for our own seduction. But the problem with putting the blame on the technology is that it is a dead end. We have to reassert control and make the technology serve

Less of Each  
Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
5:08 pm

our human purposes. That is our job and the job we have to teach our children. Saying that we are "addicted" goes nowhere. We are not going to give up this substance. We are simply going to have to put it in its place

97. Jack  
Los Angeles, CA  
June 10th, 2010  
2:41 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers

98. PacNWmom  
Vancouver, WA  
June 10th, 2010  
2:41 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 20 Readers

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

I am also concerned about the impact of distracted parents on infants. Infants need human faces and voices. They need human touch. Ignoring this reality is grave, truly grave.

## 99. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

D  
San Diego  
June 10th, 2010  
2:41 pm

Although I certainly appreciate the problem that some people (and their families) face in becoming "addicted" to their devices (I remember, too, the internet interventions of the 90s), I think that it's also important and fair to point out that these devices and the internet also extend our lives, allowing us to do things outside of an insular realm. I understand that doing this can make you insular to what is immediately in front of you but like all things: moderation.

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

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

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

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


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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 10 Readers

100. JF  
Port Angeles, WA  
USA  
June 10th, 2010  
2:42 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 25 Readers

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

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

## READERS' COMMENTS

The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In [Back to Article »](#)

By JULIE SCALFO

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

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

Comments are no longer being accepted.

## 154 Readers' Comments

ALL COMMENTS HIGHLIGHTS READERS' RECOMMENDATIONS REPLIES

Oldest | Newest

PREVIOUS 5 of 7 NEXT

101. Pilgrim  
Cape  
June 10th, 2010  
2:42 pm

As a very low income, single parent w/o a cell or hand held device, I often find myself interacting with other's children in public settings, because the parents are sitting on the sidelines, paying no attention what so ever. They put the 'I' in I-Pad. Perhaps technology is biting us in the butt. For some odd reason I seem to find plenty of time for walks/talks, gardening, camping/beach, etc. Driving while texting or talking on the phone is child endangerment. And ignoring one's child while plugged in 24/7 is borderline child neglect.

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 20 Readers

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 7 Readers

104. KJ  
portjeff  
June 10th, 2010  
2:43 pm

We make a point of noting (with sad disdain) families in public settings where children and adults are too busy on a screen to interact with each other...Cause or effect I am not sure, but show me a family where people are tuning each other out & sanctioning it, and I'll show you a family in trouble. None of us, not my husband, my 14 (!) and 7 year olds, or I use electronic devices in public...I consider it rude & the height of insularity -- look around! Talk to people! Observe life! Participate!

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- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers
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105. Mouse Woman  
Northwest Coast  
June 10th, 2010  
2:43 pm
- It makes me sad to see parents who take their child for an outing that consists of being isolated in a stroller while the parent talks on a cell phone. Some outing.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 14 Readers
- 
- Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
7:15 pm
- There are many cases where children tell me stories of parents ending family vacations because the Wi-Fi connection at the hotel wasn't good enough. These are the kinds of experiences that disturb children.
- 
106. Steven322  
NY  
June 10th, 2010  
2:43 pm
- Is that why that blond boy's hair is so long, because his mom is always texting?
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
107. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)
- Kimberly  
Memphis, TN  
June 10th, 2010  
2:43 pm
- Our family belongs in your smartphone demographic. We have multiple devices, a toddler and three pets vying for attention. The toddler wins most of the time, but not always. We love her, interact with her, read to her and play with her. But she needs to learn to share our time with the surrounding world.
- She definitely displays jealousy towards our computers - but it isn't a whole lot different than her jealousy towards the pets. She wants Mommy to play with her, not the kitty.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers
- 
108. Pilar  
Washington  
June 10th, 2010  
2:47 pm
- I have spent the last few months working from home, and have a laptop, Blackberry, and my landline to connect me. I also have 4 and 2 year old boys. What I do is multitask in the mornings, but make sure that if I have bursts where I need to focus on my work, I follow-it up with at least 15 minutes of direct attention to my children. If I can I'll spare 30 minutes. Once I've gotten the bulk of my work done in the morning, I shut down in the afternoon, and spend the next few hours tending to my children and getting things done around the house. I always try to include them in the daily tasks, like cleaning, dishes and laundry. There's always time reserved for fun and games, too. I'll often let them play alone for a while so I can get some additional work done, and then I sign off from work for the day until they are in bed and I can finish job duties. It's a huge juggling act and very tiring, but a routine I am grateful for because it allows me time with my children, while also maintaining a job that I love. At least until they are both in school and I can spend more dedicated hours on work. Although I have to say, the 9-5 routine in an office can't possibly be healthy for adults either.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 9 Readers
- 
- Sherry Turkle  
Author, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other"  
June 10th, 2010  
7:16 pm
- This is a very positive approach. Working at home does not mean that you are always available to your children. It should mean that you make clear the boundaries between work and your time with them. This can be tricky. Children loved that traditional moment of "Daddy's home!" or "Mommy's home!" that marked the beginning of family time. But it can be done.
- 
109. orgl  
Minneapolis  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm
- Seems like pretty skimpy qualitative evidence is being used to construct a "the sky is falling" POV on smartphones and parenting. Mobile devices are undeniably having a significant impact on how we connect, learn, socialize, and parent. The focus here is clearly on the potential for mobile devices to distract. This is fair -- I just wish that there was as much thought given to the potential of smartphones to add to family life and learning.



Personally, I think there's more promise in focusing on the opportunities that smart phones create for kids. Fast Company's POV is worth considering as a counterpoint to the Luddite leanings of this NYT article:

<http://www.fastcompany.com...>

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers

---

110. Ellen  
Louisville, KY  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

I don't even like to see people ignoring their DOGS while blathering/texting.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

---

111. MICHAEL  
Sequim, WA  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers

---

112. Nathan  
NYC  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

Maybe if Mommy and Daddy spent less time online trying to have affairs and more time with junior, junior wouldnt have so many learning disabilities.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

---

113. Elizabeth Sullivan  
San Francisco, CA  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

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114. Roger Barr  
Philadelphia  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

Last December, here in North Carolina, a mother and her 5-year old son were killed when she drove under the lowered crossbars at a railroad crossing. Her 3-month old daughter survived in the infant seat. The investigation revealed that the crossing lights and bells were working properly. Witnesses said that the woman was talking on her cell phone when she drove onto the tracks.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

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115. Laura Hunt  
here there and  
everywhere  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

I think one of the saddest things I've seen was when I was at a restaurant recently. A mother and daughter were having their meal and I had full view of them. Throuought the entire meal, including dessert, the daughter was texting. No exaggeration. THE girl was probably 15 or so. The mother kept quiet and picked at her food and ate in silence. I thought to myself how rude, then I thought why the hell didn't the mother take the damned thing away from her??? Again, what is so important that it can't wait or at least wait until you have a free moment? Someone said it earlier, cell phones are the new cigarettes.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

---

115. MikeMagan

Carmel, IN  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

how is this new? 85 years ago it was books, 60 years ago the radio, 30 years ago the TV 10 years ago internet/computers now it smartphones.

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers

117. Siobhan  
New York  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 4 Readers

118. Matt  
San Diego  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

119. Andrea  
France  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

120. Michael  
Queens County,  
New York State  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers

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

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

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

time now, just wait!

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

122. [Library Lady](#)  
Northern Virginia  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm
- There are a lot of mothers here saying that they need "zone out" time from their kids, and that's valid when you are talking about a break while your child is engaged in some activity of their own. Actually, I'd say it's a good thing--kids need to learn how to entertain themselves w/o their parent dancing attendance 24/7. And parents need downtime. But isn't that what naptime and bedtime is for?

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 7 Readers

123. [hen3ry](#)  
New York  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm
- I used to have a friend who would, when others were visiting her, take phone calls that were not emergencies. She would then stay on the phone for an hour while we waited on her. After realizing that she wasn't going to change for me, I changed. I would leave when I saw that the call was more engrossing to her than my presence.

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers

124. [Virginia Kelley](#)  
New York, NY  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm
- I noticed this some time ago - most of the people I know who answer phone calls or look at texts when we are together never resume the conversation we were having after they have finished responding to the interruption. Never "so please finish telling me about \_\_\_\_\_" or "Oh, I was going to go on to say \_\_\_\_\_."

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 6 Readers

125. [Spartuchis](#)  
Kew Gardens, NY  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm
- In the photograph, whatever the kid is doing with all those bugs looks like a lot of fun. Hell, I'd trade places with the obviously bored mother.

I like bugs, too.

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## READERS' COMMENTS

The Risks of Parenting While Plugged In [Back to Article »](#)

By JULIE SCELFO

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

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

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## 154 Readers' Comments

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126. CF  
Boston, MA  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm
- "Victims of their success"? Poor rich kids! My daddy's iPhone is impeding my vocabulary and social development, now I have an excuse to get on the waiting list for the must-have-therapist on the UWS, and more reasons to blame my parents when things don't go my way later in life. If farming out child-rearing duties to nannies 5 days a week 9-5 isn't a worry, a few minutes on the iPhone is ok, really.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers
- 
127. Barbyr  
Near Chicago  
June 10th, 2010  
4:42 pm
- I have no sympathy for those who have allowed machinery to enslave them. Can Skynet be far away?
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers
- 
128. Cally  
MA  
June 10th, 2010  
4:43 pm
- Using an electronic device in front of a living, breathing human being with whom you are conversing or socializing is rude. Period.
- Anyone who is rude to their own children doesn't deserve them.
- If it were poor people ignoring their children for the sake of checking iPhones, facebook, etc., we'd be calling social services on them.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 7 Readers
- 
129. j swift  
richmond, ca  
June 10th, 2010  
4:43 pm
- It is rather flip for some of the posters to disavow the premise of this article. Of course it is not the first time that "modern conveniences" have been upbraided for having unintended consequences but that is precisely the point. We need look (and forgive me for bringing this up) no further than the Gulf of Mexico to illustrate of what technology is capable.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
130. Const  
NY  
June 10th, 2010  
5:20 pm
- I can't tell you how many times I have watched a mother push her child's stroller down a busy Manhattan street while busily texting. If texting is more important than making sure your child does not come to some harm, maybe you should not have given birth.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
131. jrw123  
Earth
- Oh please. Is it really so different from our parents reading a newspaper or

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VIDEO

June 10th, 2010  
5:20 pm

watching television? Ridiculous.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers

132. A True  
Conservative  
NH  
June 10th, 2010  
5:20 pm

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

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

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers

133. BK  
Minnesota  
June 10th, 2010  
5:48 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 5 Readers

134. KenM  
St. Louis, MO  
June 10th, 2010  
5:48 pm

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

135. siglene  
scottland  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am

Hello,

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

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

Also it jogged my memory of a jaunt for a lovely Saturday lunch at a casual deli where I and my partner became infuriated with one another's assessment of what was happening at a table aside us ... a family arrives; a dad, a mum, a toddler with beginning vocab, a 7/8 month old and a grandma-ma. Buckle the toddler into the booster, kaplunk the car seat carrier holding baby onto the wooden table, the dad off to order, the grandma-ma seeming totally displaced [as it appeared she had just arrived for a visit and that this was an outing to be relished] and the mum evaporated into texting on a smartphone and scrolling on and on and on. Not looking up for a glance as to her surrounds.

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

moment.

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

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

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

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

kind wishes,  
Sigolene

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

136. lynninny  
NY  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- I have to agree with Lori, #24. I am a modern person who uses technology at work and home, but what is so amazingly important that people have to check some device constantly? For example, I have seen parents checking them during parent-teacher night presentations at my children's school (while teacher was speaking), a friend texting while our families with children were taking a hike through the woods, while walking, and yes, audience members using them during a music concert. I just don't see the need for this stuff. And it is rude, to boot.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers

137. ewstutbs  
Lexington, MA  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- I find it shocking and sad when mothers and fathers talk on Bluetooth-type devices while carrying small children and babies in their arms. It appears that they are speaking to the child, but it turns out they are talking to someone else, who is not visible. Aside from being incredibly rude to the baby, what lessons will the child receive about communication? Yes, I too believe that social disorders may well be the result of this behavior.

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers

138. David  
Marhatten  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- The article mentions parents texting while driving with their children in the car. Child development aside, any parent who texts while driving their children should count themselves lucky if they only kill themselves, and not their kids or someone else's kids.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers

139. Nigel  
NYC  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- "...a mother and blogger in Wilmette, Ill., said she had no idea how what she calls her "addiction to e-mail and social media Web sites" was bothering her children..."

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

Those poor children.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

140. Heidi  
Texas
- Do the techy parents who constantly blog and Twitter and Flickr and text

- June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- only remember the milestones of their children through those tools? Do they remember the actual moment minus the technology?
- As for the socioeconomic question -- once you get into the wealth aspect, how many of those kids have/had direct interaction with their parents vs. hired attendants to begin with?
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers
- 
141. RM  
seattle, Wa  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- I find the opening example silly. Two and a half year olds exhibit that behavior whether or not the parent is using an electronic device. You'll get the 'mama, mama, hi mama! hi mama, mama, mama, hi mama, hi mama, mama MAMA, MAMA, HI MOM' potentially at any time. In fact it happened to me today, and I was not texting (I am not a texter), nor using any other electronic device. Two and a half year olds like to be the center of the universe. It is healthy for them to learn that they don't demand their parents' undivided attention at will and to help them develop a sense that other people do in fact exist.
- Now that isn't to say that there may be parents out there who are far too plugged into their electronic devices, all day, and need to quit and give their children their true attention at least at some points during the day but the article gives the wrong impression. It is okay, actually healthy and important, to learn that their parents are not their play things.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
142. davidlocker  
Siddell, LA  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- Personal technology is presenting us with a social dividing line in society. Those that can empathize and those that can not. It tells a sad story of ourselves.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
143. GVG  
California  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- Look at the data, see that the men talk to the children almost half as much as the women do! Interesting.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers
- 
144. EtherNetzer  
Oakland  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- Look around at moms pushing aircraft carrier prams containing large blobs of kids who should be walking and running and talking to the mom. But she is busy talking on a cell or texting furiously. The kid's face tell the story: "I'm forgotten..." When they get older, they will embrace their own technologies with the same addiction, then all will wonder what went wrong.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers
- 
145. KP  
Oregon  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- It's funny to me that it is recommended to read a book with a child on your lap. I was always jealous of the way my father disappeared into books all the time. It's just the toys that change.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
146. Nigel  
NYC  
June 11th, 2010  
12:22 am
- Oh, by the way, to a small child, there is only quantity of time. The person who spends the most time with the child is who they bond with, be it for better or worse.
- 'Quality time' is some made up concept to make working parents feel better.
- Sorry.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
147. R Penmark  
Colorado  
June 11th, 2010  
12:23 am
- Mothers tuning out their kids is nothing new. I'm 58 years old and remember my mother constantly doing it to me and my brothers and sisters. It was an art form with her. You could be yelling at the top of your lungs for her attention and she wouldn't hear it.
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers

## 148. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

Cathy  
MA  
June 11th, 2010  
10:47 am

To jmw123 from Toronto:  
Yes, this is quite different from a parent reading a newspaper or watching a TV in front of a child.

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

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

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 9 Readers

149. B.  
NZ  
June 11th, 2010  
10:48 am

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

1) On an Amtrack train I observed a mother (at least I presume she was the child's mother) talk non stop on her cellphone for well over 20 minutes. At one stage her son (he looked to be around 8) tried to get her attention and he was immediately shushed up. After about a minute he gave up with a sad look on his face. This clearly wasn't a one off incident for this poor little boy, and his mother was a lot more interested in the phone call than him, judging by her laughter.

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

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader

## 150. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

Catherine  
Fitzpatrick  
New York  
June 11th, 2010  
10:49 am

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

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

All day long at the park, small children tug at their nannies -- minorities from other countries or this country, brought in to take care of the children of affluent mothers at work -- trying to get their attention. These low-paid babysitters chat on their cell phones or gossip with other nannies, not engaging with the children, who have even, touchingly, learned to speak foreign languages to try to get their caregivers' attention. They are ignored, even yelled at, and sometimes neglected dangerously. They wander, cry, tug, whine, sit in boredom for hours, no one reading to them, no one interacting, nothing. All day.



In a daycare setting, they may have more adults actually trained to interact with them. But increasingly, the menu includes a video, a TV show, a Smartboard with the Internet, or computer stations in which learning games are played.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[Recommend](#) Recommended by 11 Readers

- 
- [151](#) Dalestegis  
Nashville, TN  
June 11th, 2010  
10:49 am
- People walking with their eyes riveted to their smartphone screen just look stupid... They need to learn how to behave in public .
- 
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
- [152](#) jr  
nyc  
June 11th, 2010  
10:49 am
- Regarding the part about the socio-economics of language development, has anyone taken a little stroll around Central Park around, say, mid-day on a weekday lately? I'm willing to bet all those young children sitting face-forward while their nannies are pushing them from behind with their forearms whilst texting are from those upper/middle class families that seem to have the higher number of words in any given day. I would love to see a study of language development among nanny-raised children. Not bashing nannies here, but those ladies spend very much time with toddlers strapped to face-front strollers whilst chatting and texting away.
- 
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 1 Reader
- 
- [153](#) Tim Smith  
Bangor, Maine  
June 11th, 2010  
10:49 am
- We are just too self-absorbed. We are addicted to hearing our marvelous voices talking brilliance and seeing our words in text - just like this little forum right here - suddenly we're published and famous. I hope it is still ourselves who decide how important the gadgets are. Who's in control? Are there little people installed in these gadgets sneaking into our brains and taking over our minds? Somehow this has to be Obama's fault.
- 
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers
- 
- [154](#) Susana  
Okemos, Michigan  
June 11th, 2010  
10:49 am
- Since the telegraph, "electronic distractions" have existed in a home. Today, those "distractions" are more portable; not limited to one location. As a parent of four children who has a strong interest in technology, I want to believe I use technology efficiently and yet there are times when I have felt I could have spent less time "connected". Finding the perfect balance is the challenge.
- 
- [Recommend](#) Recommended by 0 Readers

## Appendix C

### TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

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

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

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## MELISSA VAILLANCOURT

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### EDUCATION

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Syracuse University

School of Visual and Performing Arts

**M.A. in Communication & Rhetorical Studies**

**August 2015**

Thesis: Mediated Motherhood: Parenting in the Digital Age

Advisor: Cynthia Gordon

Research Interests: Language and Social Interaction, Discourse Analysis,

Family Interaction, Technology and Interpersonal Communication,

Institutional Discourse, Embodied Interaction

Awards & Recognition: Graduate Teaching Assistant Award,

Department Nominee for Outstanding Teaching Assistant

G.P.A.: 4.0

Syracuse University

The Maxwell School

**C.A.S. in Conflict Resolution**

**August 2015**

Research Interests: Conflict Theory, Conflict Transformation,

Institutional Conflict, Facilitating Group Conflict,

Interpersonal Conflict

G.P.A.: 4.0

State University of New York at Oswego

**B.A. in Broadcasting & Mass Communication**

**December 2005**

Concentration: Public Relations

Summa Cum Laude

G.P.A.: 3.89

### RELEVANT GRADUATE COURSEWORK

---

Syracuse University

**Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies**

CRS 600 Communication, Media & Politics in DC

CRS 600 Discourse and Social Institutions

CRS 600 Talk and the Body (audit)

CRS 601 Proseminar in Social Communication

CRS 690 Independent Study: Discourse, Technology and Family Interaction

**The Maxwell School**

**PARCC (Program for the Advancement of Conflict and Collaboration)**

SOS 601 Fundamentals of Conflict Studies

SOS 624 Conflict Resolution in Groups

## RELEVANT TRAINING

---

Syracuse University

**Future Professoriate Program**

Certificate in University Teaching

Diversity in the Classroom, Politics in the Academy, Creating a Teaching Portfolio, Launching Research Projects

**The Maxwell School PARCC/CMC (Conflict Management Center)**

Basic Conflict Skills Training

Interest-based Problem Solving

Culture & Conflict

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

---

Syracuse University

**Instructor of Record: CRS 325 Presentational Speaking**

**August 2014 – May 2015**

Develop lectures, activities, discussions, projects, rubrics, quizzes and final exam for four stand-alone sections (two per semester).

Guide students in preparing proposals and outlines for informative, Persuasive and epideictic speeches. Assist students in conducting Research and reducing speaking anxiety. Provide rehearsal and delivery strategies. Develop rapport with students and work to foster an atmosphere where students can become adept speakers.

**Recitation Instructor/**

**Graduate Teaching Assistant: CRS 225 Public Advocacy**

**August 2013 – May 2014**

Developed and graded recitation materials for four recitation sections. Designed activities, discussions, projects and quizzes aimed at applying concepts of media literacy introduced in course lectures.

Jefferson Community College

**Interim Instructor for Speech/Academic Advisor for Liberal Arts**

**April – May 2010,**

**April – May 2011**

Assumed teaching and advising load for professor during medical leave. Taught two sections of STA 101 Fundamentals of Oral

Communication and three sections of STA 151 Public Speaking, including all lectures, projects, activities and grading. Advised individual students for fall registration; processed enrollment for advisees.

**Adjunct Instructor: STA 101 Fundamentals of Oral Communication, STA 151 Public Speaking, STA 161 Interpersonal Communication**

**August 2002 – May 2008**

Created syllabi, lectures, class activities and assignments for communication courses. Graded student speeches, quizzes and exams.



## RELATED EXPERIENCE

---

Jefferson Community College

**Academic Advisor**

**October 2007 – present**

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

Fort Drum Mountaineer

**Staff Writer**

**December 2008 – July 2009**

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

## SERVICE AND VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

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Syracuse University

**Panel Judge, White-Denison Presentational Speaking Competition**

**August 2013 – May 2015**

Evaluate undergraduate speeches in preliminary and semi-final rounds of annual campus-wide competition.

**Presenter, Conflict, Culture & Communication**

**January 2015**

Provided basic conflict resolution skills workshop for OCC Residence Hall Director and staff.

**Small Group Facilitator, Listening Meeting on Sexual Assault**

**October 2014**

Oversaw and recorded discussions, encouraged participation from all group members, and reported top ideas to larger group.

Jefferson Community College

**Trustee, Alumni Board of Directors**

**August 2009 – August 2011**

Assisted in planning reunion, networking and fundraising events for the alumni association.

**Member, Mayor's Ball Planning Committee**

**May 2007 – May 2010**

Proposed, planned and executed college's annual fundraising gala. Contacted donors and sponsors, suggested and designed themes, assisted with décor and setup of event.

Depauville Free Library

**Trustee, Board of Directors**

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

**July 2009 – July 2011**