Media Deprivation:

An experiment in silence

Jessica Klatt

Siena Heights University

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# A normal day in the life of…

 “BEEP! BEEP!” I instinctively roll towards my nightstand, arm outstretched feeling through the darkness until my fingers locate the source of such a horrid sound - my phone. It’s 5 am. I am still exhausted. I lug my body to the edge of the bed, throwing my feet off until they hit the floor, simultaneously grabbing my phone and unplugging it from the charging cable. Hunched over, begrudgingly allowing the day to invade my mind, I unlock my phone and spend 15-20 minutes surfing Facebook or Pinterest, looking for dinner ideas or responding to friends’ late night posts from the night before - one of my only connections to the outside world of my choosing.

 The day kicks off and I take my place in front of my computer for the next 8 hours at work. The giant TV screen mounted on the opposite wall from my desk spins through a predetermined cycle of news topics, weather, and what’s happening on campus. The motion demands my attention as the light scribes its message onto my ready retina. My daughter’s teacher inevitably posts communications to SeeSaw - an app I access through my smartphone - I am connected within an instant to my daughter’s smiling face while she shows off her recent artwork for the camera. While checking that, I notice that I have a new email, Amazon has delivered my package, my dad has sent me a text message, and new posts exist in my online courses. I am instantly sucked in upon unlocking my phone. All that exists between the entire world and myself is a thin piece of oleophobic glass.

In the evenings once we arrive home, I make dinner while my daughter plays her math game on the iPad. I thumb through her school binder and we read a quick story while dinner is in the oven. Seemingly in the same breath, we are getting around for bed, my hope that my daughter will fall fast asleep, allowing me a couple of hours *to myself.* That is not to fool anyone into thinking that time is actually *for me* as much as it is time alone to pack lunches and do my own homework.

# Day 1

 My alarm screams no differently on a day with technology versus without. It still demands my consciousness flow in through the crevices of my opening eyes. Much remains the same with the exception of checking social media until it is time to drive to work. I leave the radio off. Many times in my commute this morning I hit heavier-than-normal traffic and pine for the local traffic report, but refuse my arm to extend to the power button on the radio. I grow increasingly frustrated with the delays after sitting still for the past 20 minutes, not knowing *why* we aren’t moving. If only I could check my Map app to see if there is construction, I could at least find an alternative route away from the congestion. No! I remind myself that I am not using these amenities unless it is absolutely necessary and at the same time surprise myself with an explosive use of selective vocabulary as I am beginning to feel the anxiety that I may be late for work!

Work continues as normal and I find myself many times taking a break and reaching for my cell phone to check in with life. I think to myself: I should start counting the times I habitually reach out towards my phone.

 The ride home results in the same frustrations, wishing for a heads-up on traffic so as I may avoid those rude and in a hurry. The remainder of the night is no different - dinner, bedtime, lunches, homework.

# Day 2

The adjustment period to no radio on the way to work did not phase me this morning. I remembered the traffic back-up yesterday caused by construction, so I diverted my route to the back roads. The overall travel to work only took a few extra minutes versus had I taken the highway, but I avoided the frustration of sitting in stand-still traffic.

The semester just began on campus and inevitably the phone was ringing off the hook. I find myself frustrated with the phone and my computer. I have not been taking short breaks in between tasks, even using the restroom was put on hold. Normally, I would have allowed myself a few minutes to decompress and check the outside world through the window on my smartphone, however, I remained steadfast in my commitment to as much removal of technology as I possibly could in my situation.

This frustration, withdrawal I was suffering, remained with me until I was safely at home for the evening and routine took over. I was absolutely wiped out from the day, so I chose to make my *me time* into sleep time tonight.

# Day 3

Wake up. Shower. Get the kid around and dropped off at school. Drive to work. Do work. Drive to pick up kid and then home. Make dinner. Bedtime routine. My homework. Bed. The redundancy and lack of connection to anything outside of our monotonous routine is wearing on my brain. As bad as this is to say, my morning and midday surfing of social media, and listening to the radio are really the only way I am connecting to the outside world throughout the week. It is a depressing way to live, but I must hold on to this routine for just one more semester, I remind myself; graduation is right around the corner and this will all be worth it.

# Day 4

The day proceeded with little excitement yet again. Once my daughter was in bed, I decided tonight that I was going to take a break from school work. Any other day I would have sat down on the couch, pulled up a distant memory of the latest binge-worthy show on Hulu or Netflix, and completely shut myself down while mindlessly gawking at the beautiful people on the television screen. Instead, I decided to become reacquainted with my treadmill as well as lifting a few heavy things just to put them down. It was refreshing to sweat and give myself that challenge - much better than sitting on the couch, snacking in a zombie-like trance.

# Lessons learned

As a single mom, time is precious and I never seem to have quite enough. With each passing day, I have found some sort of technology that helps to keep us afloat in the draining sea of time my daughter and I swim through daily. In my greatest attempt to avoid these technologies throughout this experiment, I found my anxiety peaked in their immediate absence. As if there was a loss of some sort of control these devices allow me to maintain over my life and its direction. As an introvert I recognize that I require alone time and have actively sought it out in my journey while finishing my degree to maintain my sanity. I will agree that the art of introspection is one that requires time and is lost among the technologies of today. With the help of self-nurturing and counseling, over the past year I have learned to listen to my body, knowing when to disconnect, helping me to retain some semblance of peace in the times where responsibilities are suffocating.

To abandon many of these resources is an impossibility in this day and age for many of us. Critical lines of communication require me to actively monitor my smartphone. Each task at work is defined by the concept of online learning - our department at the hub of it all for our campus. Despite my rejection of listening to the radio on the way to and from work, I am still inundated with relevant information courtesy of the TV that exists in our lobby area.

Many of Edward Abbey’s closing thoughts in his book *Desert Solitaire* reverberated through my soul, but my I will end with my favorite and probably the most meaningful quote to me: “Balance, that's the secret. Moderate extremism. The best of both worlds” (1968). Moderate extremism. Difficultly smack-dab in the middle. Perfect.

# References

Abbey, E. (1968). *Desert solitaire* [Kindle edition]. Retrieved from https://amazon.com