Culminating Projects in English

Department of English

5-2019

Using Literature to Teach about Technology and Social Manipulation in Society

Ashley Croteau

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/engl_etds

Using Literature to Teach about Technology and Social Manipulation in Society

by

Ashley Croteau

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in

English Studies

May 2019

Committee Members:
Constance Perry, Chairperson
Sharon Cogdill
Michael Dando

Abstract

This paper explores three dystopian novels: *Fahrenheit 451* (1950) by Ray Bradbury, *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers, and *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) by Katie Williams to bring to light how dystopian novels foreshadow technological control over people. The novels and characters within the texts are analyzed to show how each author warns readers in distinctive ways about the dangers of allowing technology to consume their lives. Additionally, this paper also investigates how a secondary education teacher could go about teaching their students these lessons, after exploring the novels in this study.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

When a person looks up the word technology in the dictionary, they will soon discover that the word has several definitions. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, technology can be defined as "The practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area", "A capability given by the practical application of knowledge", "A manner of accomplishing a task especially using technical processes, methods, or knowledge" and finally, "The specialized aspects of a particular field of endeavor". Additionally, technology can take many forms. For example, pencils or eyeglasses can be seen as technology due to these objects assisting people in accomplishing tasks. However, one of the most popular uses of the word technology in today's society is using it to reference communication technologies, such as computers, iPads, smartphones, and laptops. These technological devices are used to access the Internet, communicate with others via messaging systems, and assist people in accomplishing tasks, such as writing, reading, and learning. Throughout this paper, I will be referring to technology many times. When writing about or using the word 'technology' in this paper, I will be referring to the communication technologies listed above, those that are used for online assistance, messaging communication, and web-based programs.

For most of the American population owning a smartphone and other forms of technology (laptops, iPads, tablets), access to the internet and other communication methods is right at their fingertips daily. As a middle school teacher, I have observed the social drawbacks of technology, specifically smartphones, tablets, and computers/laptops, among the emotionally immature and vulnerable student population I aim to educate. One example of this is how I see students' self-esteem negatively affected by the use of social media. I

overhear many students talk about how they need to look good constantly for pictures because they might show up on social media, such as Instagram, or that they are nervous about their classmates posting pictures of them online without their consent. It would seems as if Foucault's Panopticon theory has been reimagined through the use of social media, as if social media itself is always watching them. A second example of how I see technology impacting my students is through cyber bullying, which is bullying over the Internet. Twenty-first century students are no longer able to leave their conflicts with classmates at school. Now, their conflicts present themselves when students arrive home at night because of being harassed or bullied over social media. As a teacher, I notice students carry these social media conflicts with them to school, and sometimes, end up in the principal's office due to a conflict that started over social media the previous night. Lastly, I notice it negatively affect my student's ability to work hard on a task and stay persistent. With the ability to get their questions answered at the press of a few buttons, students are affecting their ability to keep working at a problem in school because they are used to answers coming at them so quickly. This issue presents itself mostly because students are so connected to their technology. It has become automatic for them to check their devices, specifically cell phones, so that even though we have a no cell phone policy at our middle school, students risk getting into trouble just to check social media at their lockers. The purpose of my research for this project is to look at how a teacher might approach educating students on this topic through dystopian literature, which has been known to forecast negative effects of technology on society in older, as well as newer dystopian novels. Additionally, teaching students to be self-aware, and thinking about their use of technology

would help them to understand how they can be in control of their technology, and not the other way around.

Background and History

As a full time teacher in a public middle school, I have seen first hand how technology has caused damage in my students' lives. I see it negatively affect my students' self-image, communication skills, and interaction with others. I have noticed technology, mostly smartphones, cause much destruction in the lives of my students due to bullying on social media, such as Instagram. Because of this, I was interested to see just how negatively impacted our lives, especially teens' lives are becoming due to being so engrossed in their technology. Furthermore, schools are beginning to encourage the use of technology in the classrooms. Many schools are becoming one-to-one, where each student receives their own tablet or Chromebook/laptop to use at school and at home. With so much technology and Internet at their fingertips, it begs the question, how destructive and corrupt is society becoming due to everyday technology use? By looking at certain dystopian works, we can learn how to become more self-aware of technology use due to character downfalls from excessive technology use. Additionally, by examining how dystopian literature addresses vulnerable people's self-image, and how it illustrates the diminishment of communication skills, we can better understand the warnings of technology obsession in our society, and heed them if possible.

Justification of the Problem

This problem is important to research because it may seem as if our society is starting to be "taken over" by technology. Everywhere we go, every direction we turn, we run into some type of technology. Many new advances in technology, such as self-checkout stations

at stores, have taken away the ability and need to properly communicate with others in our world. More and more teenagers are using text messaging systems and social media to interact with friends, instead of speaking with them over the phone or face-to-face. This has negatively affected the way they live their lives due to their lack of effective communication skills. Additionally, through the use of social media, teenagers are beginning to form negative images of themselves due to competing with enhanced imagery being posted on sites, such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram. Cyber, or online, bullying has also risen in the past ten years due to the commonality of technology use in teens. Finally, many dystopian novels, such as *Fahrenheit 451* (1950) by Ray Bradbury, *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers, and *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) by Katie Williams, foreshadow technology corruption in society, so learning from dystopian novels would be a beneficial way of teaching teens how balancing the use of technology can be a good practice, not a negative one. New insights from my research will be how to approach the topic of technology use in the classroom and how to teach students, through the use of dystopian novels about technology corruption in society, that technology can be beneficial, but it must be balanced unless we want it to dominate our emotional lives. Also, I will provide new insights into how dystopian novels have forecast the negative impact of technology on our society, and how people in society, especially young people, teens, and young adults, has been negatively impacted by this.

Dystopian Fiction

The three novels I will be analyzing are characterized as dystopian fiction. The society in these novels, classified as a dystopian society, is defined as: "A futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society

are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system" ("Dystopias"). Most dystopian works include a society that holds the illusion of perfection, but that illustrates a world that is being oppressed by certain controls, such as corporate, bureaucratic, technological, and/or philosophical/religious controls ("Dystopias"). My research will consist of looking specifically at how dystopian literature forecasts how society is controlled by technological controls. Dystopian fiction has been around dating back to the 19th century. It has always been used as a vessel for social commentary, many times arguing that society is being overpowered by social constructs, such as the government or technology control. Many dystopian novels highlight fears that, if actions and behaviors are continued, these social constructs will make society unhappy and result in negative effects. According to Philip Stoner:

> While *The Giver* was the first popular young adult dystopian novel, it has certainly not been the last. Since its publication the genre has become almost exclusively aimed at young adults. There are many reasons that this shift in theme and intended audience has taken place. A primary reason, as addressed above, has been the ending of the Cold War and the removal of that constant reminder of totalitarianism and utopian ideals that it embodied. As this primary influence of the dystopian genre disappeared, many younger writers began to redefine it for a new generation. In this shift dystopian authors have redefined the purpose of dystopia and modified some of its most classic tropes.

Additionally, Stoner states, "Furthermore, the warnings that classic dystopian fiction had about the potential destructive power of technology is all the more relevant to a young generation that is surrounded, informed, and in many ways dependent on technology". Overall, although dystopian literature has been around for several years, it has exploded in popularity over the past twenty-five years, and continues to be popular for teenagers and young adults.

The three dystopian novels I will be writing about in this paper foreshadow how technology can become dangerous and controlling tools if humans allow it to be. The first novel included was written in 1950 and the last was written in 2018, putting an almost seventy year difference between the two. However, despite this large gap, the technologies in these novels nevertheless control the characters in the same way, and are the cause of much physical, psychological, and social destruction of characters. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the society in the novel is obsessed with radios and television sets. In *The Circle*, there are many forms of newer technologies, such as drones for spying, laptops/computers, various digital tracking systems, and surveillance cameras, to name a few. Lastly, in *Tell the Machine Goodnight*, the author invents a technological machine called Apricity, which is used to make people in the society happy. Although all three novels include very different examples of technologies, all forms allow the characters to live in a world that is outside of reality. Furthermore, all three authors use the different means of technology to show the danger of how it can alter the way in which the characters live, and cause much distress to their lives. The authors warn readers about how technology can control a person and get in the way of reality.

Literature Selection Defense

A *.Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury illustrates how society's immersion in technology can be detrimental to their social and emotional well being. While the dystopian society within the novel becomes engrossed with televisions and radios, the world of learning, knowledge, and reading begins to diminish in flames. People in the society are no longer interested in interacting or discussing with one another. Additionally, it is a canonical classic work and is appropriate for a middle and high school audience.

B. *The Circle* by Dave Eggers is a recent dystopian novel for adults. While the entire novel would not be appropriate for a middle and high school audience due to language and sexual scenes, many parts of the novel could be read and discussed in schools. The novel includes many new technological inventions, as well as new social media outlets used by characters, some of which has become common in our own society today. This novel directly shows how a dystopian novel can foreshadow technology invasion in our society and how it can be negative to a person's self-esteem.

C. *Tell the Machine Goodnight* by Katie Williams is also a recent novel written for adults. This novel was a finalist for the 2018 Kirkus Prize, which is one of the richest literary awards in the world, with a prize of $50,000 given annually to authors of fiction, nonfiction, and young readers' literature. This novel is for adults due to language and content. However, teachers would be able to have students read many parts of it and discuss how humans can quickly lost power over their technology if they are not careful. Additionally, a class may have discussions surrounding technology negatively affecting human relationships and ways of communicating.

Chapter II: Psychological and Sociological
Effects of Technology on Teenagers

After almost two decades have passed in the 21st century, technology, especially

those with which we communicate like smartphones, laptops, and tablets, have become an

essential and common tool among all Americans. Children are beginning to gain access to

communicative technologies, especially smartphones and iPads, at progressively younger

ages. Thus, most American children and teenagers not only have access to the internet, but

they also have the means to communicate to others via social media sites like Facebook,

Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. According to a 2018 study conducted by Common

Sense Media, a leading independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive

in a world of media and technology, they found that "The proportion of teens with a

smartphone has more than doubled since 2012, from 41 percent up to 89 percent. Even

among 13- to-14-year-olds, 84 percent now have a smartphone, and 93 percent have some

type of mobile device such as a tablet ("Social Media" 3). This study was the second

Common Sense has conducted, the first being in 2012. "Wave one of the study was

conducted among a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 13- to 17-year-olds",

and "Wave two was conducted in March and April of 2018, among a separate sample of

1,141 13- to 17-year-olds, and offers an up-to-date snapshot of social media use among

today's teens" ("Social Media" 1). This first finding alone supports the exponential growth of

technology, most specifically smartphones and tablets, in American society, especially

among teenagers. Common Sense Media's study also provides data on how often teenagers

are on their devices daily. After interviewing the teenagers in this study, they found that

"Nearly half (47 percent) of teens who have a smartphone say they are 'addicted' to it"

("Social Media" 29). Additionally, they found that "Eight in 10 teens (81 percent) use social media (sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, or Facebook), ranging from 70 percent of 13- to 14-year-olds up to 89 percent of 15- to17-year-olds" ("Social Media" 15). Amongst these teens, "Nearly three out of four teens (73 percent) use ("check") social media daily, including 'almost constantly' (16 percent); 'hourly' (27 percent); daily but less than hourly (30 percent)" ("Social Media" 15). As far as texting is concerned, teens seem to be just as consumed with that as they are with social media. The study also found that "Teens are even more frequent texters than they are social media users. One in five (21 percent) say they text 'almost constantly,' and another 27 percent say they do so 'a few times an hour'. All told, 80 percent of teens are daily texters, up from 68 percent in 2012" ("Social Media" 16). These statistics and findings show that the majority of American teenagers not only have access to smartphones or other similar devices, but also that they are using them frequently for communication via texting and social media sites. With the rise in American teens having access to these types of devices, it is important to know just how they are affecting them, especially if the effects are negative.

According to Common Sense Media's study, "Among all teens, about a third (32 percent) say they consider social media to be either 'extremely' (9 percent) or 'very' (23 percent) important in their lives" ("Social Media" 21). After learning just how addicted to their technology and social media American teenagers are, it becomes necessary to look at how it may be affecting their self-esteem. With how often they are on social media, one would assume that teenagers would be affected by it. In their article, Common Sense Media includes a short excerpt written by Harold S. Koplewicz, M.D., who is the president of the Child Mind Institute. Dr. Koplewicz writes:

When we look at how social media behaviors correlate to mental health symptoms, we see that more time spent using social media is tied to an increase in mental health symptoms. Eighth-graders who spend 10 or more hours a week on social media are 56 percent more likely to report being unhappy than those who spend less time. We also see that higher emotional investment in social media is strongly correlated with higher levels of anxiety. ("Social Media" vii)

Furthermore, Jean Twenge, Ph.D. states in her article "Mental Health Issues Increased Significantly in Young Adults Over Last Decade" that "'Cultural trends in the last 10 years may have had a larger effect on mood disorders and suicide-related outcomes among younger generations compared with older generations'". The article goes on to say that Twenge "believes this trend may be partially due to increased use of electronic communication and digital media, which may have changed modes of social interaction enough to affect mood disorders". This finding shows just how detrimental social media can be to the minds of teenagers. With social media usage being at an all time high in recent years, and continuing to increase, it is important to understand just how greatly it is impacting the self-esteem of American teenagers. It should not come as a surprise that teenagers use social media for negative means of communication. Common Sense Media classifies this as "Digital Drama." In their study, they found that "Many teens say they've had to take a break from their devices at some point just to give themselves some space from 'digital drama'. Of those with a smartphone, 61 percent have done so" ("Social Media" 26). This finding shows how negative social media communications can become to teenagers. With so much drama and negativity online, teenagers are becoming anxious and depressed, causing them to completely

take breaks from their smartphones to escape this world. However, it is clear that while

teens are taking breaks from the drama, they are also continuing to use social media,

despite the negativity they experience. Even more alarming is what Common

Sense Media discovered about America's most vulnerable teenagers:

> Teens who are at the low end of the social-emotional well-being scale are
>
> much more likely to say they feel bad about themselves when nobody
>
> comments on or likes their posts. Relatedly, they are also more likely to have
>
> deleted posts that didn't' get enough likes. And these teens are more than
>
> twice as likely to say they sometimes feel left out or excluded after seeing
>
> photos on social media of their friends together at something they weren't
>
> invited to. ("Social Media" 43)

These results show how negative social media can be to teenagers who already have a low

self-esteem. With so many pressures to feel liked and valued, it seems as if social media

heightens these pressures, causing many teens to feel unworthy and unloved.

In addition to social media resulting in lowering teenager's self-esteem, cyberbullying

is another harmful effect of social media, which has also increased over the past decade.

Cyberbullying is defined as:

> Bullying that takes place over devices like phones, tablets, and computers. It
>
> can happen in social media, texts, or gaming, where people can view,
>
> participate in, or share content. It includes repeatedly sending, posting,
>
> or sharing negative, harmful, or mean content about someone else, on
>
> purpose. It can include sharing private information about someone else to
>
> cause embarrassment or humiliation. ("Social Media" 34)

While conducting their study, Common Sense Media was curious about the amount of hate speech and cyberbullying that teens experience online. Their results concluded that, "A total of just under two-thirds (64 percent) of teen social media users say they encounter any such content in social media at least 'sometimes,' including 21 percent who say they do so 'often'" ("Social Media" 33). Furthermore, they found that "More than one in 10 teens (13 percent) say they have 'ever' been cyberbullied, including 9 percent who say this has happened to them either 'many' or 'a few' times. Similarly, 9 percent of teens say they have been cyberbullied in a way they consider at least 'somewhat' serious ("Social Media" 7). What these results show is that teenagers are being exposed to negative comments and posts all the time on social media, which could be affecting their mental wellbeing. We have all heard the horror stories of teenagers committing suicide over cyberbully-related incidents. This study shows that the amount of teens being bullied is high, and therefore, cyberbullying is dangerous to their emotional wellbeing.

In addition to teenagers being negatively affected by technology and social media in regards to their mental health, they are also affected in another area of life as well. Because American teens are so addicted to their devices, they are becoming distracted from important aspects of life, such as creating and maintaining meaningful relationships, and the increase of knowledge through schoolwork. Common Sense Media's study found that face-to-face interacting between teenagers is drastically decreasing as the years progress. Teens no longer prefer speaking to friends and family in person, but do so through their devices. The study discovered that "The proportion of teens who say their favorite way to communicate with their friends is 'in person' has dropped from nearly half (49 percent) in 2012 to less than a

third (32 percent) today" ("Social Media" 5). Moreover, they found that teens perceive

their interpersonal losses due to absorption in their devices:

>Teens are more likely to say they're distracted from personal relationships by
>
>social media today than they were in 2012; Fifty-four percent of teens agree
>
>that using social media 'often distracts me when I should be paying attention
>
>to the people I'm with'; and 42 percent agree that the time they spend using
>
>social media 'has taken away from time I could be spending with friends in
>
>person'. ("Social Media" 5)

This finding shows the increase in digital and online communication within the past few

years has grown greatly, and teens are no longer apt to speak with or hang out with friends in

person. In fact, they prefer not to. When reading this, it is alarming to think about the

possible negative implications of this. Without important in-person interactions, teenagers are

not able to foster meaningful relationships, learn social cues, and develop age appropriate

verbal and nonverbal language. Similarly, the article "Age, Period, and Cohort Trends in

Mood Disorder Indicators and Suicide-Related Outcomes in a Nationally Representative

Dataset" supports this, saying, "Individuals who spend more time on social media and less

time with others face-to-face report lower well-being and are more likely to be

depressed" (Twenge et al.). Teenagers also agree with technology distracts them from

schoolwork as well. "Many teen social media users say that social media often distracts them

from other important things; Fifty-seven percent agree that using social media often distracts

them when they should be doing homework" ("Social Media" 6). This illustrates how social

media and technology are negatively impacting a teen's ability to learn and practice skills

needed for learning. Without practicing school related concepts and skills at home, teachers

are struggling to help their students in the classroom. More and more middle and high school teachers are finding that technology is interfering with homework completion, which in turn results in poor performance on tests. Many teachers, as well as parents, would agree that American teenagers must learn how to self regulate their technology use, and also be aware of how their technology and social media use are negatively affecting many aspects of their lives. Common Sense Media's study concluded that "35 percent say they [teens] do have a problem unplugging" (29), and it is disrupting their lives because of this. Furthermore, the study also found that "A significant number of teens say they 'hardly ever' or 'never' turn off their devices in these situations: when going to sleep, having meals with other people, visiting family, doing homework, or hanging out with friends" ("Social Media" 30). Additionally, the lack of 'unplugging' or turning off their phone at night has resulted in many teens losing sleep. "Twenty-nine percent of teen cellphone owners are woken up by their phones during the night at least 'some' nights" (30). This evidence highlights the need for teenagers to be taught how to take a break from their devices and regulate their own use. Even though many teens know they have a problem with social media and technology usage, they still do not have the knowledge to put into place a reliable plan that will help them successfully take breaks from it. Therefore, it is important that parents and teachers not only teach teens how to regulate their use of technology, but more importantly to teach them why.

So why should teachers spend time in the classroom discussing technology use with their students and how to regulate? Common Sense Media's study provides an adequate answer to this question. "More than two-thirds (68 percent) [of teens questioned], regardless of whether they use social media themselves, agree with the statement 'social media has a

negative impact on many people my age,' including 20 percent who 'strongly' agree"

("Social Media" 6). This finding shows the teens themselves are aware that technology and

social media do have a negative impact on their lives. However, they might not understand

why, how, or what to do about it. After reading and analyzing dystopian novels,

specifically *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Circle*, and *Tell the Machine Goodnight*, students will begin

to realize the negative effect technology can have on their lives. By examining the characters

in the novels and making connections to their own lives, students will begin to comprehend

just how controlling technology and social media can be, compromising their wellbeing. As

Harold S. Koplewicz M.D. states in his letter included in the Common Sense Media study,

"If we do our job as parents and educators, we can steer at-risk children toward beneficial

online experiences and help them reap the rewards of this new way of communicating"

("Social Media" vii). Jean Twenge also supports teaching teenagers to regulate their use of

technology, saying, "'Overall, make sure digital media use doesn't interfere with activities

more beneficial to mental health such as face-to-face social interaction, exercise and sleep'"

(Twenge).

Chapter III: Taking the Flame to Technology in *Fahrenheit 451*

Even though the novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1950) by Ray Bradbury was written over sixty years ago, the lessons and warnings Bradbury gives his readers are still real in today's society. *Fahrenheit 451* is a canonical work of literature that would be appropriate to read either in its entirety, or in shorter excerpts to both middle and high school aged students. While reading the novel, teachers can stop frequently to discuss with students the progression of technological control on the character's lives. Eventually, students will begin to understand how the technology in the novel begins to take over many aspects of their lives, such as their relationships with other characters, the way they see the world around them, and the way in which they function in society. I believe having rich discussions with students about how they see technology getting in the way of their own relationships will help students understand that their technology is becoming more invasive than they think. Additionally, even though the technology in this novel (televisions and radios) are somewhat outdated compared to what 21st century students use nowadays, I believe students will still comprehend how Bradbury warns our society of the dangers associated with too much technology use. In my own classroom, I have noticed technology, especially gaming on laptops and smartphones, has caused students to fail classes or perform poorly on practice assignments or tests. Comparing this behavior to that of the people in the society in *Fahrenheit 451*, who prefer watching television over reading and therefore learning is no longer valued, would be greatly beneficial because it would allow students to see how invasive technology can be to their overall learning and obtaining of knowledge. After finishing the novel, teachers can brainstorm with students ways in which they can regulate

their technology use more so that they are enjoying it, but also not allowing it to hinder their intellectual growth.

Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* tells the story of a community obsessed with watching their parlor walls (televisions) and listening to their seashell radios. The main character, Guy Montag, is a "fireman" who is no longer in charge of putting fires out, but starting them. Because of the society banning books and all literature, anyone found reading one is reported, and fireman burn down their homes, along with any books inside. Guy Montag and his wife Mildred, along with the rest of their community, find entertainment, family bonds, and comfort from the technology in their lives. Instead of reading and learning, people immerse themselves in their parlor walls and seashell radios. However, Guy's way of life quickly alters when his interesting, yet peculiar neighbor Clarisse McClellan begins talking with him about her family and way of life. Unlike the rest of the community, Clarisse and her family do not spend much time absorbed in technology, and the subject of their conversations is intellectual and historical. After spending many walks with Clarisse, Guy begins to question his life, and the life of his community. Eventually Guy comes to realize that the source of his society's unhappiness is mostly due to it's preoccupation with technology, but breaking through this unhappiness is not as simple as it sounds. In his novel, Bradbury highlights a world that is transfixed and driven by technology, mainly radios, called seashells, and televisions, or 'parlor walls'. The people who live in this society are obsessed with it, seeking comfort from these things daily. Because of technology's grasp on the people of this society, books, learning, and knowledge fall to the wayside. Through this, Bradbury warns that a society that is engrossed with technology can become isolated from other people, nature, and knowledge.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury illustrates how obsession with technology can cause people to become isolated from other human beings, resulting in poor relationships and overall, unhappiness due to this lack of human connection. The most impactful example of this is seen in the main character, Guy Montag, and his wife Mildred's relationship. According to Loren Logsdon's article titled "Ray Bradbury's Tale of Two Cities: An Essential Message for a Technologically Dominated Society," "Montag and Mildred are married, but their relationship seems to lack any semblance of the love that most married people share. There is no felt experience of sharing or emotional intimacy" (95). While marriage is supposed to be a lifelong friendship between the married couple, Guy and Mildred are not truly friends; this is due mainly to Mildred's obsession with her wall televisions and her seashell radios. Mildred, being the society's idea of compliant, is completely transfixed with her televisions and radio, to the point where her life revolves around them. This is seen in one of the first descriptions given of her by Guy as he is coming home from work late at night:

> Without turning on the light he imagined how this room would look. His wife stretched on the bed, uncovered and cold, like a body displayed on the lid of a tomb, her eyes fixed to the ceiling by invisible threads of steel, immovable. And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind…Every night the waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning. There had been no night in the last two years that Mildred had not swum that sea, had not gladly gone down in it for the third time. (12)

This first detailed description of Mildred shows how attached to her technology she truly is. As Guy observes, Mildred cannot part from her Seashell radio, even at night. Additionally, she loses sleep because of this addiction, which causes her to take sleeping pills. Unfortunately, this loss of sleep and dependence on sleeping medication causes Mildred to overdose and almost die. Again, this is seen right away in the beginning of the novel when Guy describes the scene:

> Her face was like a snow-covered island upon which rain might fall, but it felt no rain; over which clouds might pass their moving shadows, but she felt no shadow. There was only the singing of the thimble-wasps in her tamped-shut ears, and her eyes all glass, and breath going in and out, softly, faintly, in and out her nostrils, and her not caring whether it came or went, went or came. The object he had sent tumbling with his foot now glinted under the edge of his own bed. The small crystal bottle of sleeping tablets which earlier today had been filled with thirty capsules and which now lay uncapped and empty in the light of the tiny flare. (13)

In the beginning of his novel, Bradbury shows how attached Mildred is to her technology and how it has affected her life. He then goes on to show readers the deep divide between Mildred and Guy that is caused by this obsession with technology.

After reading just a few of the first interactions between Guy and Mildred, it becomes clear to readers that technology negatively impacts their ability to communicate, and foster a lasting, loving relationship with each other. Due to Mildred's reliance on technology for 'happiness', Guy finds it difficult to connect with her. This is first seen after Mildred overdoses on sleeping pills and Guy thinks,

The bloodstream in this woman was new and it seemed to have done a new

thing to her. Her cheeks were very pink and her lips were very fresh and full

of color and they looked soft and relaxed. Someone else's blood there. If only

someone else's flesh and brain and memory. If only they could have taken her

mind along to the dry cleaner's and emptied the pockets and steamed and

cleansed it and reblocked it and brought it back in the morning. If only…

(16)

This quotation illustrates Guy's discontent with his wife. Even when she is in a fragile state,

Guy wishes she would be replaced with another person. Additionally, his use of the words

"This Woman" to refer to her also shows his disconnect from her as a person and his spouse.

This displeasure is also seen later on in the novel when Guy is lying next to Mildred before

falling asleep for the night:

He fell into bed and his wife cried out, startled. He lay far across the room

from her, on a winter island separated by an empty sea. She talked to him for

what seemed a long while and she talked about this and she talked about that

and it was only words, like the words he had heard once in a nursery at a

friend's house…But Montag said nothing… (41-42)

He then goes on to ponder:

Wasn't there an old joke about the wife who talked so much on the telephone

that her desperate husband ran out to the nearest store and telephoned her to

ask what was for dinner? Well, then, why didn't he buy himself an audio-

Seashell broadcasting station and talk to his wife late at night, murmur,

whisper, shout, scream, yell? But what would he whisper, what would he

yell? What could he say? (42)

This quote shows Guy's realization that technology is interfering with his wife's life, and

therefore, his own as well. She is unable to communicate with her husband due to being so

engrossed in her technology. Guy does not even know what to talk to her about because they

simply do not have anything in common. While Mildred finds comfort in her radio and

television, Guy does not. Thus, their relationship and marriage fall apart, resulting in both of

them being unhappy. Guy points out this unhappiness, thinking, "He was not happy. He was

not happy. He said the words to himself. He recognized this as the true state of affairs. He

wore his happiness like a mask…" (12). Through these quotes, it is clear that the cause of

Guy and Mildred's unhappiness and failing relationship is due to technology's invasion in

their lives.

Another example of technology isolating people from others, and thus, preventing

characters from communicating and forming relationships is the community that Guy lives

in. Guy's neighbors and the other people who live in the community are so engrossed in their

televisions and radios that they do not take the time to simply talk to one another, and

therefore, everyone is a stranger to each other. Guy points this out right away in the

beginning of the novel, thinking, "There are too many of us, he thought. There are billions of

us and that's too many. Nobody knows anyone. Strangers come and violate you. Strangers

come and cut your heart out. Strangers come and take your blood" (16). From the very

beginning of the story, it is clear that Guy lives in a society of strangers, who are isolated by

each other due to technology. Clarisse McClellan, Guy's neighbor, further explains this.

Clarisse and her family, which constitutes her uncle and parents, unlike the rest of the

neighborhood, are not obsessed with technology. They value reading, even though it is forbidden, learning, and talking with one another. They are outcasts in their society because of this. When Clarisse begins to talk with Guy, she points out that everyone in their society seems to be distant, strangers to one another. In speaking with Guy one day, she says,

>You're not like the others. I've seen a few; I *know*. When I talk, you look at me. When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that. The others would walk off and leave me talking. Or threaten me. No one has time any more for anyone else" (23).

Shortly after telling Guy this, she also states, "People don't talk about anything. (31) Furthermore, when Guy first begins to speak with Clarisse, their meeting shocks him. This is mostly due to the fact that Guy has not had a real conversation with another human being in a long time. He points this out by thinking, "What a strange meeting on a strange night. He remembered nothing like it save one afternoon a year ago when he had met an old man in the park and *they* had talked…" (10). Both Guy and Clarisse realize that the people in their society do not know how to connect and communicate with others because of them being obsessed with their technology. In noticing the lack of community in her neighborhood, Clarisse also points out to Guy that houses no longer have porches for sitting and talking with other people:

>'No front porches. My uncle says there used to be front porches. And people sat there sometimes at night, talking when they wanted to talk, rocking, and not talking when they didn't want to talk. Sometimes they just sat there and thought about things, turned things over. My uncle says the architects got rid of the front porches because they didn't look well. But my uncle says that was

merely rationalizing it; the real reason, hidden underneath, might be they

didn't want people sitting like that, doing nothing, rocking, talking; that was

the wrong *kind* of social life'. (63)

In saying this, Clarisse illustrates how the community used to be compared to how they have

evolved. While the community used to talk to one another and thus, develop relationships,

now, they do not, mostly due to their entrapment in their technology. Later on in the story,

Guy further emphasizes this change in society by saying, "'Nobody listens any more. I can't

talk to the walls because they're yelling at *me*. I can't talk to my wife; she listens to the *walls*.

I just want someone to hear what I have to say. And maybe if I talk long enough, it'll make

sense'" (82). This remark from Guy shows his thirst for connection with another person. He

not only needs to feel connected with his wife, but with others as well. However, with his

society being so enthralled with their television walls, no one has time to talk, let alone listen.

Logsdon highlights this by saying, "The lack of connection...illustrate why television can be

a dangerous influence on human beings" (101). He goes on to say that, "Unconnected

imagery (or 'television tricks') coming at us at alarming speed and the disregard for cause-

effect and the noise make life seem like a centrifuge where we touch nothing-there is no

sense of connection, no grounding in life" (101). The technology in Guy's society stifles the

people's deep need for connection and love. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the

third pillar states that humans need to feel a sense of belonging and love, which consists of

intimate relationships and friendships. Guy's community is clearly lacking this important

need, but due to technology's grip on them, they are not able to break out of their trance.

Logsdon emphasizes this further by saying,

Life is not to be driven into narrow areas of experience, and happiness

cannot be captured by a machine, by efficiency and technique…To live

fully, one must participate directly in the Creation, live in the middle of it all,

and recognize that happiness is defined in terms of human dreams and human

relationships. (Logsdon)

While it is clear that technology isolates Guy and Clarisse's society from other

people, Bradbury also gives readers evidence that, once technology is no longer relied upon

for entertainment and satisfaction, real relationships can occur. This is seen through Guy's

relationship with Clarisse, both of whom are not attached to technology. As the two

characters begin to form a closer relationship through talking, Guy relaxes and begins to feel

more at ease with himself. In one conversation he has with Clarisse, she points this out to

him, saying, "'Your laugh sounds much nicer than it did'". When Guy responds, "'Does

it?'", she says, "'Much more relaxed'" (29). This exchange between the two characters shows

that through real communication and friendship, people become fulfilled. Additionally, when

Clarisse and her family are discovered as having books by the government and taken away,

Guy misses her friendship tremendously:

And then, Clarisse was gone. He didn't know what there was about the

afternoon, but it was not seeing her somewhere in the world. The lawn was

empty, the trees empty, the street empty, and while at first he did not even

know he missed her or was even looking for her, the fact was that by the time

he reached the subway, there were vague stirrings of dis-ease in him.

Something was the matter, his routine had been disturbed. A simple routine,

true, established in a short few days, and yet?...He almost turned back to make

the walk again, to give her time to appear. He was certain if he tried the

same route, everything would work out fine. But it was late, and the arrival

of his train put a stop to his plan. (32)

This quote shows the strong friendship Clarisse and Guy formed, even in just a short while.

Clearly, his relationship with Clarisse is stronger than that with his wife, mainly due to the

simple fact that he is able to talk to Clarisse because she is not distracted by and engrossed in

technology like Mildred is. Through these examples, Bradbury argues that technology can

carve a deep divide between people and prevent relationships from growing. If people

become obsessed with technology, friendships and the basic human need to belong are

almost impossible to create.

In his novel, Bradbury also shows how technology can isolate people from nature and

their surroundings. This is seen mostly through Guy Montag's character. Logsdon supports

this saying, "Montag is oblivious of nature, of the rain, the moonlight, and the flowers. The

city has managed to control nature, and human beings live in mediated environments that

have excluded nature…" (Logsdon). Guy has no connection, love, or awareness of nature

until he is removed from his technology-obsessed society when he escapes at the end. In the

beginning of the novel, Clarisse, who has a love and awareness of nature because of not

being entrapped in technology, declares, "'the rain feels good. I love to walk in it'", to which

Guy replies, "'I don't think I'd like that'" (21). Clarisse goes on to ask him if he has ever

tried it, and he replies, "'I never have'" (21). Later in the conversation, Clarisse brings the

subject of rain up again, saying, "'…I like to put my head back, like this, and let the rain fall

in my mouth. It tastes just like wine. Have you ever tried it?'" (23). Again, Guy responds

'no'. While Clarisse has a love and an awareness of her surroundings, including the nature

around her, Guy does not. Clarisse's respect for nature can also be seen when she states, "'The psychiatrist wants to know why I go out and hike around in the forests and watch the birds and collect butterflies. I'll show you my collection someday'" (23). While Clarisse enjoys the beauty of nature around her due to not being obsessed with technology, Guy has yet to experience these wonders because of his entrapment in his society. According to Logsdon, "…the advanced technology has obliterated any meaningful connection with nature" (Logsdon). Not until Guy is able to remove himself from his technology-obsessed city does he start to realize and enjoy the beauty of nature surrounding him:

> They were gone. The Hound was gone. Now there was only the cold river and
> Montag floating in a sudden peacefulness, away from the city and the lights
> and the chase, away from everything…He was moving from an unreality that
> was frightening into a reality that was unreal because it was new. (140)

Guy goes on to explain this new reality:

> The black land slid by and he was going into the country among the hills. For
> the first time in a dozen years the stars were coming out above him, in great
> processions of wheeling fire. He saw a great juggernaut of stars form in the
> sky and threaten to roll over and crush him. He floated on his back when the
> valise filled and sank; the river was mild and leisurely…The river was very
> real; it held him comfortably and gave him the time at last, the leisure, to
> consider this month, this year, and a lifetime of years. (140)

Not only does he take in the strange, new sights, but he also begins to enjoy the smells:

> There must have been a billion leaves on the land; he waded in them, a dry
> river smelling of hot cloves and warm dust. And the other smells! There was a

smell like a cut potato from all the land, raw and cold and white from having

the moon on it most of the night. Here was a smell like pickles from a bottle

and a smell like parsley on the table at home…He stood breathing, and the

more he breathed the land in, the more he was filled up with all the details of

the land. He was not empty. There was more than enough here to fill him.

There would always be more than enough. (140)

This new reality begins to take hold of Guy because he now feels like he has the freedom to truly enjoy his surroundings. His mind is no longer controlled by his technology-obsessed society, and he is able to slow down and think on his own. Furthermore, Guy comes to realize this difference in his awareness of nature, thinking,

He remembered a farm he had visited when he was very young, one of the

rare few times he discovered that somewhere behind the seven veils of

unreality, beyond the walls of parlors and beyond the tin moat of the

city, cows chewed grass and pigs sat in warm ponds at noon and dogs barked

after white sheep on a hill. (142)

Guy describes a rare time in his life when he was aware of nature, which helps him to realize how much he has missed by living in his controlling community. In short, "Technology has removed human beings from any meaningful connection with the earth; the city, in its dedication to technology, has flown too high, losing contact with the earth…" (Logsdon). By showing the growth of Guy's awareness and appreciation of nature, Bradbury warns readers not to become so engrossed with technology that they forget to enjoy the beauty that is nature around them. He also cautions that a society controlled by their technology can result in its people not becoming aware of their surroundings, which can be dangerous.

Another warning Bradbury gives readers in his book is how preoccupation with technology can prevent people from learning and being aware of their history. In a recent interview, Bradbury comments on his intent behind exploring the intrusion of technology with learning new knowledge, saying, "I was considering the whole social atmosphere: the impact of TV and radio and the lack of education. I could see the coming event of schoolteachers not teaching reading anymore" (182). In saying this, Bradbury highlights his fear of technology getting in the way of learning. Through Guy Montag's own unawareness of knowledge and his society's history, Bradbury shows how technology can isolate people from important information. Logsdon states, "The rituals are primarily negative ones-the ritualized but empty conversations of the parlor walls and the destruction of books by the firemen…The people who live in the city have no knowledge of the past and obviously little knowledge of the present" (Logsdon). Guy, being oblivious to his society's history, relies on his boss Beatty to fill him in. This is seen when Beatty comes over to Guy's house and proceeds to inform Guy about why firemen burn books for a living, a history Guy is totally unaware of. Beatty tells Guy,

> 'Every fireman, sooner or later, hits this. They only need understanding, to
>
> know how the wheels run. Need to know the history of our
>
> profession. They don't feed it to rookies like they used to. Damn
>
> shame…Only fire chiefs remember it now…I'll let you in on it'. (53-54)

Not only does Beatty need to inform Guy about the history of the fireman's profession, but he also goes into great detail about the history of their society, which Guy is completely blind to: "'School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually gradually neglected, finally almost completely

ignored (55). This lack of knowledge is widespread throughout Guy's community and can

be largely blamed on his society's attachment to their televisions and radios. Additionally,

Guy points out in the beginning of the story that large jets are frequently seen in the skies,

hinting at a war:

> As he stood there the sky over the house screamed. There was a tremendous
>
> ripping sound as if two giant hands had torn ten thousand miles of black lines
>
> down the seam. Montag was cut in half. He felt his chest chopped down and
>
> split apart. The jet bombers going over, going over, going over, one two, one
>
> two, one two, six of them, nine of them, twelve of them, one and one and one
>
> and another and another and another, did all the screaming for him…The
>
> house shook. The flare went out in his hand. (13-14)

However, it is clear throughout the novel that Guy is not knowledgeable about why these jets

frequent the skies and what is causing a war to break out. By the end of the story, Guy

is shocked to witness the jets dropping bombs on his city, all the while, not knowing why

they are doing it:

> And the war began and ended in that instant…The bombardment was to all
>
> intents and purposes finished once the jets had sighted their target, alerted
>
> their bombardier at five thousand miles an hour; as quick as the whisper of a
>
> scythe the war was finished. Once the bomb release was yanked, it was over.
>
> (158)

Guy's lack of knowledge about the jets and the war his society is in shows readers how

technology can prevent a person from spending time learning about their society and history.

By not being aware of why his society is at war, Guy is helpless, like most of the citizens, in

preventing or stopping it. Therefore, he and others are not able to contribute intellectually

to their society. In their article "The Critique of Technology in 20th Century Philosophy and

Dystopias", Zoltán Kádár and János I. Tóth illustrate this by saying:

> In Ray Bradbury's dystopia, the machine age produces intellectual indolence
>
> that leads the population into the swamp of fearful political correctness which
>
> paralyses every progressive action. All that remains is aggressive
>
> consumerism, gadgets, illiteracy and synthetic happiness. (57)

This point is shown in Bradbury's characters due to the fact that citizens in Guy's world

cannot think critically and learn about their own surroundings. They are so engrossed in their

technology, which results in intellectual passivity. Bradbury emphasizes this in his interview,

stating, "The average TV commercial of sixty seconds has one hundred and twenty half-

second clips in it, or one-third of a second. We bombard people with sensation. That

substitutes for thinking" (184).

   While Bradbury gives readers many examples of how technology isolates people

from important experiences, such as other people, nature, and knowledge, he also gives

readers a glimpse of what a person's life could be like if they did not allow technology to

control them. Clarisse McClellan and her family are the opposite of others in their society.

Clarisse herself points this out to Guy in one of their early conversations in the book when

she states, "'I rarely watch the 'parlor walls'…'" (9). Additionally, after Guy sees all of her

house lights on and inquires about the strangeness of that, Clarisse responds by saying, "'Oh,

just my mother and father and uncle sitting around, talking. It's like being a pedestrian, only

rarer'" (9). This first look into Clarisse and her family's lives shows readers how different

they truly are than other citizens in Guy's society. While most people are absorbed in their

televisions, or 'parlor walls', Clarisse and her family are not. Because of this, they are able to foster healthy, meaningful relationships with each other, and they are truly happy. This is seen when Guy looks in their house from the street:

> Laughter blew across the moon-colored lawn from the house of Clarisse and her father and mother and the uncle who smiled so quietly and so earnestly. Above all, their laughter was relaxed and hearty and not forced in any way, coming from the house that was so brightly lit this late at night while all the other houses were kept to themselves in darkness. Montag heard the voices talking, talking, talking, giving, talking, weaving, reweaving their hypnotic web. (17)

This small, yet powerful peek inside the McClellan's home shows readers how important talking and spending quality time with other people is to developing healthy relationships. Furthermore, as a result of Clarisse and her family not being controlled by technology, they are also intelligent. Guy reveals this when he states to Clarisse, "'How odd. How strange. And my wife thirty and yet you seem so much older at times. I can't get over it'" (23). Additionally, Clarisse mentions that her classmates are unable to learn and think because of their community being engrossed in technology and not education. This is seen when she describes her school to Guy:

> 'An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don't; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film teacher. That's not social to me at all'. (29-30)

In saying this, Clarisse emphasizes that children in her society are not allowed to learn or ask questions. Emrah Atasoy supports this by saying:

> …The system does not enable children to ask questions because they are only given the answers, which does not permit intellectual sophistication. If the children lack the ability to ask questions, the potentiality for the thorough progress of the society does not exist, which leads to a society with submissive, uncritical individuals since questioning is a prerequisite for developments, socially, culturally and intellectually. (406)

Because Clarisse and her family spend more time reading and learning than invested in their technology, their ability to think critically about the world around them is significantly higher than that of other people in their community. Technology, and their obsession with it, interferes with children and adults in the city, causing their thinking to be reduced to simplistic thoughts. Atasoy furthers this argument, stating, "Monotype individuals are shaped through discarding books and the maltreatment of technology" (Atasoy). However, the simple fact that Clarisse and her family can think critically shocks, and eventually motivates Guy to escape his city, which is so enthralled with and controlled by technology. Through the use of the McClellan family, Bradbury illustrates to readers that by not being attached to technology and letting it control them, loving relationships, and increased intellectual ability will occur. Tragically, this family seems to be an anachronism in the society and gets purged from it. Therefore, their disappearance serves as a warning about this technological totalitarianism.

Although technology can be used for useful things, such as communicating, gaining new information, and sharing photographs and thoughts with others, Bradbury warns that

anyone who becomes too attached to their technology will eventually come to be unhappy and foster poor relationships with the people in their lives. Through his character's lives in *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury also foreshadows how people can become disconnected with nature, history, and knowledge if technology becomes the main focus in anyone's life. Logsdon highlights this point by declaring, "The unnamed city in *Fahrenheit 451* represents the undesirable future that we must avoid, a future characterized by efficiency, a vast spiritual emptiness, and human beings who are isolated from nature and from meaningful contact with each other" (Logsdon).

**Chapter IV: "Secrets are Lies": Dave Eggers Warns of
Technology's Totalitarian Power in *The Circle***

There are many themes present in the novel *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers that

I believe would be beneficial for teachers to analyze with students, including middle and high

school students. By analyzing the characters and their engrossment with technology in this

novel, teachers can help students to better understand how technology and social media use

can overwhelm their lives and cause them to feel unnecessary pressure to be perfect.

Although staying off of technology and social media completely is almost impossible in

today's world, it is important for students, even at the middle school level, to understand how

technology can be invasive in their lives. By knowing this information, students can be more

self aware of their use of technology, especially their smartphones. Also, by taking a closer

look at the characters in *The Circle*, most specifically Mae, students will begin to understand

the trap she began to fall into because technology became her world. I believe teachers can

have rich discussions with students surrounding the use of technology in this novel and how

it negatively affects Mae and other characters in the story. By identifying how it is negative

for them, students could then brainstorm ways in which technology may be invasive in their

own lives. This discussion then becomes a learning and teaching opportunity in the

classroom because students will begin to see first hand how their own technology and social

media use might be excessive. Students could then begin to problem solve how they can

become more careful about their obsession with technology and social media use in the

future.

With technology being the forefront of human communication today, many people

wonder how much control it can eventually have on their lives. Even while teenagers are

constantly consumed with their smartphones, computers, iPads, or video games, adults are

also finding that their technology has a firm grip on them. It may seem easy to scoff at

the idea of technology being controlling or taking control over a human life, but the truth is,

or so Dave Eggers shows in his novel *The Circle*, that people are finding it increasingly

hard to monitor and ethically evaluate their use of social media and other

technology. Through his novel, Dave Eggers illustrates the dark side of technology use by

highlighting how controlling and dehumanizing it can become if society allows it to run their

lives.

In *The Circle*, Dave Eggers creates a company that revolves around technology.

The Circle Corporation, formed by the three 'Wise Men', Eamon Bailey, Tom Stenton, and

Ty Gospodinov, is seen as the future of the world due to its intelligent technological

inventions, at least according to the society in the novel. The company began with an online

social media platform, called TruYou, which is described as, "One account, one identity, one

password, one payment system, per person. There were no more passwords, no multiple

identities" (21). After this, the company begins to thrive and continues creating other ways of

solving problems in life with technology. SeeChange allows surveillance cameras to be

placed everywhere around the world, TruYouth helps locate lost children by

placing digital trackers in their bones, LuvLuv allows people to find someone they are

interested in dating and track their life up to that point via the internet, and PastPerfect allows

a person to track their ancestors and learn where they came from. Even though the company

is already very successful, it continues to create new, innovative ways that technology can

make life easier. Enter Mae Holland, the main character. Mae gets a lucky break from her

dismal job when her best friend, Annie, who is a valued employee of The Circle, gets her a

job at the popular company. In the beginning of the novel, Mae is anxious to soak in everything The Circle has to offer, including all of the gadgets, screens, and protocols the company mandates she uses. However, over time, readers begin to see just how controlled the employees of this company are by the very thing that gave the company its success, technology. Mae eventually becomes caught up in the exciting life of a "Circler" and welcomes any new challenges the company gives her, including wearing a full time camera around her neck for the world to see everything that she does, which comes to include stalking a former boyfriend and prompting him to choose suicide over intrusion into his privacy. Through all of this, Eggers sends an urgent warning to his readers that technology, and social media through it, can be dangerous and controlling if people allow it to be.

One way Eggers forecasts the controlling nature of technology in society is through the employees of The Circle Corporation. As a "Circler," Mae and her coworkers are required to work with many different forms of technology. One of these pieces of technology is a health bracelet that Mae, and all other Circlers are required to wear on their wrist at all times. This bracelet is provided by the company's doctor, who explains to Mae that, "It will collect data on your heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol, heat flux, caloric intake, sleep durations, sleep quality, digestive efficiency, on and on…" (155). The doctor also goes on to explain that these results are always being recorded in the company's online database, so that all employees are being monitored for efficient health reasons (156). However, Mae experiences some downfalls with this technology. Her physician warns her that her exercise has slackened, not surprising with the demands of her desk job. Also, since her health data ends up on the internet, amateurs start intrusively warning her about her diet, for

example. And the most common piece of technology they work with is a computer. At first,

Mae begins her job at Customer Experience (CE), with two laptops at her desk. One is for

answering and responding to customer requests. The second is for communicating with other

employees via an instant messaging system. While training her, Jared, Mae's coworker, goes

into detail about this (52). Not long after Mae begins working, she receives yet another screen

at her desk. This screen allows Mae and her coworkers to communicate and share images

through the company's social media page. This is described by Mae's coworker Gina: "'So

your second screen will continue to be the way you'll stay in touch with your team. That will

be exclusively for CE business. Your third screen is for your social participation, in the

company Circle and your wider Circle'" (96). By the end of the novel, Mae accumulates nine

screens total at her workstation, the norm for employees at the company (327). While readers

may be shocked by the amount of screens surrounding Circlers, most Circle employees,

including Mae, find them comforting because their professional screen time is mostly

straightforward tasks in contrast to the drama and uncertainty of real life. This is seen in the

novel when Mae goes back to her workstation:

> …There were now nine screens, and the CEs were encouraged to be delving
>
> far deeper with their clients…Mae found that she appreciated the rhythm of it,
>
> the almost meditative quality of doing something she knew in her bones, and
>
> she found herself being drawn to CE at times of stress or calamity. (327)

Additionally, Mae begins to feel attached to her computers and other work technology.

Wayne A. Hunt points out, "…Most predictably of all, her [Mae's] sense of self-identity is

finally incorporated into the technology that envelops her" (414). These screens are used for

many things, including work. However, most of them are used for the many different social

media pages all Circlers are required to create and maintain. One of the social media

accounts Mae and her fellow coworkers must have is a Zing account. While setting up

Mae's account, Gina, a technology specialist at The Circle corporation, explains the process

of posting to Mae, saying, "'…I connected your Zing account with the total Circle

community, so you just got 10,041 new followers! Pretty cool. In terms of your own zinging,

we'd expect about ten or so a day, but that's sort of a minimum. I'm sure you'll have more to

say than that…'" (98). As the novel goes on, Mae begins to feel more pressure to post to

these social sites, increasing her 'PartiRank', or popularity, in the company, and become an

elite employee through her ability to perform socially through her social feeds. This is seen in

the book when Mae describes feeling guilty about not posting and, determined to improve

herself, she takes to her social accounts fervently:

> Mae looked at the time. It was six o'clock. She had plenty of hours to
>
> improve, there and then, so she embarked on a flurry of activity, sending four
>
> zings and thirty-two comments and eighty-eight smiles. In an hour,
>
> her PartiRank rose to 7,288. Breaking 7,000 was more difficult, but by eight
>
> o'clock, after joining a posting in eleven discussion groups, sending another
>
> twelve zings, one of them rated in the top 5,000 globally for that hour, and
>
> signing up sixty-seven more feeds, she'd done it. She was at 6,872, and turned
>
> to her InnerCircle social feed…By 10:16 her rank was 5,342, and again, the
>
> plateau—this time at 5,000—was hard to overcome. (191)

Eventually, when Mae does go to bed at around midnight, she cannot fall asleep and

continues to try to raise her PariRank:

> Now, thinking about how much better she could do, she logged on again,
> this time on her tablet, and pledged to work till two in the morning. She was
> determined to break 3,000. And she did so, though it was 3:19 a.m. when it
> happened. Finally, not quite exhausted but knowing she needed rest, she
> tucked herself in and turned off the lights. (192)

This scene in the novel shows the pressure and guilt Mae constantly feels while working at
The Circle Corporation due to the company's constant need to know what they are doing.
Further, we can see how her life is becoming a collection of supposedly meaningful statistics.
Alex Clark further highlights this pressure in his article "Social anxiety: How Facebook and
Twitter are Reshaping the Novel," saying about the Circle Corporation, "You are granted
membership of this society only if your 'participation ranking' holds up. To withhold
information of even the most trivial variety is to be selfish..." (50). This quote illustrates the
high expectations The Circle company has on it's employees to share everything about their
lives. Additionally, social media, through the use of technology, begins to become a deep
impediment in Mae's life. It begins to interfere with her daily life, such as sleep. With the
incessant need to feel accepted by her peers and the Circlers around her, Mae is controlled by
the technology that constantly surrounds her.

Moreover, Mercer, Mae's ex boyfriend, points out her obsession with statistical
feedback to her one evening after she tries to market and monetize his art online while her
parents are trying to have a family dinner. When confronting her, he says:

> 'I mean, all this stuff you're involved in, it's all gossip. It's people talking
> about each other behind their backs. That's the vast majority of this social
> media, all these reviews, all these comments. Your tools have elevated gossip,

hearsay and conjecture to the level of valid, mainstream communication'.

(133)

He goes on to emphasize the society's unhealthy enthrallment with technology and social media, stating, "'There's this new neediness—it pervades everything…The tools you guys create actually *manufacture* unnaturally extreme social needs. No one needs the level of contact you're purveying. It improves nothing. It's not nourishing'" (134). Mercer's counterpoint in the novel shows readers not only how obsessed Mae has become with her life online, but also how today's society is becoming like this as well. Mercer illustrates that living a life online and being obsessed with what others think of you through online social media accounts is unfulfilling and unnatural. Through Mae, Eggers shows the dark side of social media and the controlling nature of technology. The need for humans to feel accepted and loved amongst their peers is strong, and because of this, keeping up with social media is a necessity for most. Mae is an extreme example of how Eggers sees social media taking over the people in our society. With almost everyone having access to technology, it is getting increasingly difficult for people in our society to regulate their use of social media through technology. Eggers warns his readers not to allow the pressures of posting online to control their lives.

Throughout this novel, Eggers also cautions about the negative self-esteem effects technology and social media can have on a person. In the story, Mae eventually agrees to go 'transparent', which means she agrees to wear a camera full time so that people online can view her life at all times. Because this camera is connected to her online social media account, she is able to get instant feedback regarding her looks, actions, and behaviors, as well of those of others. Throughout the middle and end of the novel, readers begin to see how

this negatively affects Mae's self-esteem. This is seen largely at the end of the novel when

all of The Circle employees take a survey that is public to everyone, including those

watching through Mae's camera. The last survey question read: *"Is Mae Holland awesome*

or what?" (408). Mae takes the results hard:

> The vote was 97 percent to 3, smiles to frowns, indicating that
>
> overwhelmingly, her fellow Circlers found her awesome…And she knew she
>
> should feel good about 97 percent of the campus finding her awesome. But as
>
> she left the hall, and made her way across campus, she could only think of the
>
> 3 percent who did not find her awesome. She did the math. If there were now
>
> 12,318 Circlers…and every one of them had voted, that meant that 369 people
>
> had frowned at her, thought she was something other than awesome. (408-
>
> 409)

Through Mae's internal dialogue, it is clear that she is having a hard time getting over the

fact that others in the company do not like her, despite the fact that the overwhelming

majority do find her awesome. She goes on to describe her feelings about seeing these

results:

> She felt numb. She felt naked. She walked through the health club, glancing at
>
> the bodies sweating, stepping on and off machines, and she wondered who
>
> among them had frowned at her. Three hundred and sixty-eight people loathed
>
> her. She was devastated…She was being stabbed. She had been stabbed. Who
>
> were these people? What had she done to them? They didn't know her. Or did
>
> they? And what kind of community members would send a frown to someone

like Mae…She felt full of holes, as if every one of them had shot her, from

behind, cowards filling her with holes. She could barely stand. (409)

It is clear through Mae's reaction that the pressures of feeling liked and accepted among her

fellow Circle workers have harmed Mae's self-esteem. While it is impossible to please

everyone in society and have everyone like you, Mae does not seem to grasp that. Because of

her life being broadcasted to the whole world, and therefore making her feel important and

valued, she simply cannot handle finding out that actually, some people do not think she is

awesome. She even takes this further by having another interior dialogue with herself:

"You're hurt by these 368 people. This was the truth. She was hurt by them, by the 368 votes

to kill her. Every one of them preferred her dead" (414). Mae's negative self-talk and

extreme emotions towards the situation illustrate just how dangerous social media, which is

public knowledge, can be to a person's self-image. Through this example, Eggers emphasizes

the dark side of people broadcasting their lives for all to see, especially through the use of

social media accounts. By illustrating Mae's negativity, Eggers highlights his fears that

people in society also fall into this deep hole when they are captivated by social media

accounts. Furthermore, what people post on social media is not always true to who that

person is. Clark furthers this argument, stating, "We manipulate what people know about our

lives and how it simultaneously reveals so much and so little of the 'real' us" (Clark 51).

What is important about this is that while many people post comments, pictures, or videos of

themselves to social media, as does Mae and her fellow Circlers, outside viewers are not

getting the real picture of who that person is. However, this simply does not matter to the

viewer. In their mind, they strive to be better than that person, feeling unnecessary pressure

to be liked and seen in a positive light. This social stress causes a social media user to feel as

if everyone around them must like and value them, which is what readers see in Mae. "In Egger's vision, the scariest thing about the modern world is our own compulsion to trade our privacy, dignity, and quietude for a fleeting feeling of connectedness" (Stevenson), and Eggers shows readers why it is important to exercise prudence when navigating social media through technology. Eggers supports this as well in an interview about his novel, saying, "It was a sense of near-constant social obligation, with fairly high costs for being absent for an hour. In the absence of the 'like' there is the implicit 'don't like,' and that becomes a source of angst and want" (Thompson 66). In saying this, Eggers emphasizes the anxiety and stress that comes along with social media.

In *The Circle*, Eggers also warns that technology can become a vehicle for the loss of privacy among citizens in society. He first hints at this with the company's invention of SeeChange, or small, surreptitiously planned surveillance cameras. One of the company's CEOs, Eamon Bailey, describes the incredible ability of a SeeChange camera and its future influence on society, saying,

> 'Instead of searching the web, only to find some edited video with terrible quality, now you go to SeeChange, you type in Myanmar. Or you type in your high school boyfriend's name. Chances are there's someone who's set up a camera nearby, right? Why shouldn't your curiosity about the world be rewarded? You want to see Fiji but can't get there? SeeChange. You want to check on your kid at school? SeeChange. This is ultimate transparency. No filter. See everything. Always...We will become all-seeing, all-knowing'. (69-71)

This description sounds good to the employees who work at The Circle, they cheer and clap away at Bailey's enthusiastic pitch. And while some readers may think this is an interesting concept, it is also frightening to think about a device that is so secretive that they can be placed all around a home, neighborhood, city, state, country, and the world without many people even knowing they are there. Eggers furthers his warning by highlighting other normal practices in the company that completely intrude on an individual's privacy. Employees are constantly tracked in the building via their health wristbands, and can be found at all times on the company computer tracking systems. Additionally, all Circlers have access to the 'cloud', which is an online database where all employee files are stored. Any information or data on anyone's computer, tablet, phone, and health band is automatically saved to the cloud, which can be accessed by all Circle employees. And finally, Mae eventually goes transparent in the story, which allows the whole world to view her life through the lens around her neck. In doing so, she accidentally interrupts her parents in a sex act, which then gets shared with the company's huge database and beyond. Mae's betrayal of her family cannot be modified or taken down, according to company policy. Furthermore, the novel ends with Mae and The Circle Corporation CEO's trying to get all citizens in society to be transparent as well. While at first readers might be accepting of these interferences—after all, it is just the Circlers integrating them into their lives—eventually it is clear that technologies such as these can eventually become widespread. By the end of the novel, Eggers illustrates the dangers of allowing unchecked, unfiltered technology capitalized by a corporation like his imaginary Circle. Eggers also shows how technology and social media eventually impedes on a person's privacy. Eggers himself, in an interview about his novel, states, "…The surveillance aspect—the inability, increasingly, for us to opt out of being

watched. I feel pretty strongly that a citizen under surveillance is not free. We have

passively acquiesced to this'" (Thompson 66). Thomas Horan, in his article "State and

Corporate Dystopianism in Nineteen Eighty-Four and Dave Eggers's The Circle," also argues

that constant surveillance in Egger's novel is a problem, stating, "…in *The Circle* it is the

corporation that menaces human freedom" (Horan 56). He continues this point, saying, "A

lack of privacy constitutes a lack of freedom…surveillance and control over information are

at the heart of the totalitarian nightmare" (61). While it may seem innocent or expeditious at

first, eventually unchecked and unmediated technology, like Mae's and her fellow Circlers',

will find a way to interfere with all of life's happenings. If this happens, basic human

freedoms, such as the freedom of privacy, will eventually become obsolete. If society

continues to allow technology and social media to impinge on personal life, eventually

nothing will be private, and everyone will demand to know everything about everybody, as

well as demand that everyone have a technological, and virtual presence; at least that is what

Eggers tries to caution against in this novel.

In contrast to Mae, her fellow Circlers, and two of the Circle's three founders, Eamon

Bailey and Tom Stenton, Eggers includes another counterpoint to highlight society's

obsession with technology and warning behind this engrossment. Ty Gospodinov, The

Circle's first Wise Man, shows great interest in Mae throughout the novel. However, readers

do not discover his true identity until the end of the story when he tries to convince Mae that

the Circle corporation has exceeded his true purpose in creating the company. Ty explains

that he only created the company as a convenience tool for people to use, saying,

> '…I didn't intend any of this to happen…I was trying to make the web more
>
> civil. I was trying to make it more elegant. I got rid of anonymity. I combined

a thousand disparate elements into one unified system. But I didn't picture a

world where Circle membership was mandatory, where all government and

all life was channeled through one network'. (485)

He goes on to warn Mae about the Circle company becoming complete, meaning every

citizen in society will be required to have a Circle account and be transparent:

'There will be more Mercers. So many more. So many people who don't want

to be found but who will be. So many people who wanted no part of all this.

That's what's new. There used to be the option of opting out. But now that's

over…It's a totalitarian nightmare…Everyone will be tracked, cradle to grave,

with no possibility of escape'. (486)

By creating the character of Ty and showing his opposition to the Circle company's mission,

Eggers voices his owns concerns through Ty. In pointing out to Mae the dangers of everyone

knowing everything about everybody, Ty vocalizes the warning Eggers tries to convey

through his novel. While technology can be a useful tool in our society, it should not be used

in excess, and people should not allow it to control them.

Throughout his book *The Circle*, Eggers includes subtle at first, then not subtle hints

about the overwhelming effects technology can have on human beings. He begins by

showing how technology, and social media via use of technology can impede and cause

disturbances in Circle employee's lives, especially Mae's. Then, he branches outward,

highlighting the psychological trap that technology can and will lure people into if they allow

it to become a constant factor in their life. Although the novel is a work of fiction, the issues

surrounding technology are a very real possibility in society's future. Ray Moynihan

emphasizes this by saying, "Part of the power of *The Circle* is the way its science fiction

blends seamlessly with the facts of contemporary existence, where the present seemingly disappears into a perpetual future of ceaseless technological change" (1). Moynihan and Eggers agree that while Mae and The Circle Corporation are imaginary, the world in which they live may become real if society is not educated and ethical about the pitfalls of the use and scope of technology.

Chapter V: Technology's Stranglehold on Happiness
in *Tell the Machine Goodnight*

After reading and analyzing the novel *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) by Katie

Williams, I believe it would be a useful novel for teachers to use when talking with students

about technology use in their lives. Although this novel does contain adult content, such as

vulgar language and sexual references, many excerpts could be used to show students the

dangers of allowing technology to intrude in their lives. By examining certain characters in

the story, teachers can emphasize William's warnings that if students allow technology to

control them, their self-esteem, relationships with other people, and the decisions they make

can and will be negatively affected. After analyzing the parts in the novel, as I have done

below, students should begin to understand how obsessions with technology can be

dangerous if they are not aware of their excessive use of it daily. Overall, I feel teachers can

illustrate valuable life lessons and extract powerful themes from *Tell the Machine*

Goodnight that will show students the importance of monitoring their own technology

habits.

The novel *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) by Katie Williams, published by

Penguin Group, includes a wide variety of characters that foreshadow life in the not so far

off future. The novel forecasts what life could be like in the year 2035 if society is not

careful with their reliance on technology. According to Jason Sheehan, a National Public

Radio book reviewer, the novel is "A panopticon view into a near future completely altered

by the addition of one fundamentally disrupting technology" (Sheehan). In her novel,

Williams shows many examples of how technology can be detrimental to a person's life if

not handled carefully; technologies such as phones, iPads, computers, and social media

outlets. In *Tell the Machine Goodnight*, Williams shows readers the dangers that reliance on technological devices can have on a person's self-esteem, their relations with others, and their decision making.

Tell the Machine Goodnight tells the story of Pearl, a divorced mother of a teenage son battling an eating disorder. Pearl works for a company that sells people 'happiness', or so they claim. The key to happiness just takes a quick swab of spit inserted into a special machine called Apricity, and soon, Pearl hands out a contentment report stating what the person needs to do in order to be happy. The novel states that "Apricity tested what the company called *deep happiness*; its recommendations did not speak to the daily annoyances of an empty stomach or a traffic jam, but to the depths of self and soul" (67). Additionally, the company's slogan reads, *Happiness is Apricity* (87). In the world of Pearl, life is almost as ordinary as it is today. However, as a Contentment Technician for the Apricity Corporation, her job is to give customers what they want, how to make themselves happy. The novel describes the Apricity assessment process as noninvasive; "The only item that the machine needed to form its recommendations was a swab of skin cells from the inside of the cheek" (67). Although this may sound nice, the Apricity soon begins to grab hold of Pearl and she becomes obsessed with the machine. While she battles with her excessive need for her Apricity machine, her son, Rhett, battles an eating disorder and his strange, nonexistent relationship with his mother. Eventually, readers begin to see how the Apricity, as well as other technology in the novel, greatly affect the lives and relationships of the characters in a negative way.

In her novel, Williams illustrates that technology, especially social media through the use of phones, tablets, and computers, assists in creating negative self-esteem issues in

people who rely too heavily on it's usage. This is first seen in Saffron (Saff) Jones, a

seventeen year old girl who is immersed in the online world, as most teens would be in the

year 2035, especially if society progresses at the rate it is now. As a teenager, Saff longs to

be accepted and liked by her peers, especially when she goes to a private school and only has

eleven classmates in her graduating class. Rhett, one of her classmates describes it as, "When

you have a class of twelve people, there really aren't enough of you to divide up into

cliques...mostly everyone hangs out with everyone else. There is one role, though, one rule:

Ellie is always the leader" (37). Although this sounds good, it is clear in the novel

that Saff feels as if she must impress her classmates, especially Ellie, even going so far as to

join in on a game Ellie created called Scapegoat, which is described as "*...the scapegoat had*

to take everyone else's abuse without comment or complaint. For that one week, ten were

free to vent all their anger, frustration, pain, whatever..." (35). However, like many teens

today, Saff takes it a step too far when she volunteers to take a drug called Zombie. Rhett

explains this drug by saying, "*...'zom,' short for 'zombie,' so named for the drug's effects of*

short-term memory loss paired with extreme suggestibility. Basically, if you're on zom, you'll

do whatever anyone tells you to and you won't remember any of it afterward..." (28). Rhett

goes on to say that "*While on zom, Saff was told to strip naked and recite conjugations of the*

French verbs...She was told to shave off her left eyebrow and to ingest half a bar of lemon

soap" (29). Although she wakes up coherent the next morning, unfortunately Saff's night

on zom was recorded by a classmate on their phone and uploaded to her Facebook account

where it acquired 114 dislikes, and 585 likes (29). Because of many people viewing this

video, they begin to view Saff in a negative way. Saff describes this by stating:

'It's not the soap...though I still gag every time I have to wash my hands.

It's not the stupid eyebrow...It's not even that I was naked. It's that everyone

saw me. All the seniors. All the *middle graders*. The teachers. My friends'

parents. My parents' friends. When they look at me now...well, mostly

they *won't* look at me. That, or they look at me really intensely, and I can

practically hear them thinking to themselves, *I'm looking her in the eye. I'm*

looking her in the eye.' (40)

By saying this, it is clear that Saff suffers negative consequences due to her binge

on zom being posted all over social media. In illustrating Saff's mistake, Williams shows

readers the negative effects social media can have on teenagers, especially their self-esteem

and image. In a world where teenagers feel the need to be constantly connected to others via

the internet and social media, Williams warns teenagers and readers alike that monitoring

your behavior in public is needed now more than ever due to the constant threat of being

taped or photographed and the results plastered on popular social media sites for all to see.

Furthermore, not only can anything be posted, but also deleting videos and images from the

internet is extremely complicated, and next to impossible.

In the novel, Williams also warns of the dangers that too much reliance on technology

can have on a person's relationship with other people. There are many characters in the book

that suffer from poor communication and relationship skills due to being consumed with

the Apricity machine. This is seen first and foremost in the main character, Pearl, and her

son, Rhett. Pearl, who works for the Apricity Corporation, loves her son and wants him to get

better from the eating disorder that is consuming his life. However, instead of trying to

connect with him on a deeper level and talk with him about it, she relies so heavily on her

machine to try to make him better. Although Rhett refuses the use of the Apricity, Pearl

truly feels it will cure him and strives to convince him of this. Eventually, not being able to

contain herself, Pearl damages her son's trust and secretly does the unthinkable. The novel

shows this by stating, "It had been five weeks since Pearl had drugged her son and stolen a

sample of his cells to run through the Apricity machine" (83), showing that Pearl was not

only desperate to use the machine she trusts so much to cure her son, but she was also willing

to damage her relationship with her son to use the machine. Eventually Pearl uses

Rhett's Apricity results to make him "better", starting with ruining inanimate objects, such as

destroying a blouse with an "accidental" protein shake spill, then gradually causing harm to

larger things, such as spiders, or goldfish (84-86). Pearl even purchases a large lizard for

Rhett and forces him to feed it baby mice, because that is what the Apricity said to do. Soon

after, Rhett's health begins to improve. Pearl notices, thinking:

> At Rhett's next weigh-in, he was up 1.4 pounds. He'd started listening to
>
> music while doing his homework. He'd been out with friends twice in the past
>
> week. The other night at dinner, he'd reached over to Pearl's plate and
>
> plucked up a cube of potato. Pearl had kept her eyes fixed on the tabletop, but
>
> she could hear it, the near-silent sound as he chewed and swallowed. She
>
> imagined the starches and the sugars of that little cube softening, dissolving,
>
> feeding him. (96)

Seeing this hopeful change, Pearl begins to feel happy that her secret plan to help Rhett is

working. However, it becomes clear shortly after this that Rhett is curing himself, showing

readers the machine is not the cure, but rather human relationship and communication with

friends is.

Having dropped out of school due to his eating disorder, Rhett lost many of his friends. However, when he decides to go back to school, he begins to pick up where he left off with many of his companions. This is first seen when he is talking with his friend Saff. Rhett thinks, "So many people have asked me why I refused to eat, my parents, my doctors, my therapists, my nurses, Josiah, and that's just naming the headliners. But Saff doesn't ask me why. I mean, she *does*, but she asks it in a way that I can understand" (58). When Saff says, "'Come on: motive?'", Rhett thinks, "And I do something all the Apricities in the world could never have predicted. I go ahead and answer her." He then replies to Saff, "'It felt strong. Denying myself something I needed to feel strong. Not giving in when I was hungry felt strong...I think it's that I wanted to be what's essential. I wanted to be, like, pure'" (58). When Saff smiles at him, he thinks, "And I want to tell her that her smile is what's essential, that her smile is what's pure" (58). By showing readers this interaction between Saff and Rhett, Williams emphasizes that human connection and positive human relationships are what a person truly needs to feel better. While Pearl relies too heavily on her Apricity machine to make Rhett better, she does not focus on forming a communicative and positive relationship with her son. Additionally, she is so engrossed in Rhett's secret Apricity report and following it, that she does not notice what is truly helping Rhett out of his disorder. Pearl's relationship with Rhett is clearly damaged by her obsession with her machine. In writing Rhett as a foil character to Pearl, Williams emphasizes human-to-human relationships are key to happiness, something technology cannot give a person. Williams shows readers that if Pearl had spent more time communicating with her son and less time focusing on her Apricity machine, she would have possibly been able to help him faster and more productively.

In addition to Pearl trying to help her son through the use of the Apricity machine, Pearl also lacks judgment when it comes to her own use of the machine, which causes her much unhappiness in life. In relying so heavily on the contentment plan the Apricity gave her, she lacks communication with Rhett, as well as others around her. One example of this is when Pearl focuses so heavily on building her models of prehistoric trilobites because she believes this will make her happy. The novel states:

> To pass the hour until dinner, Pearl got out her latest modeling kit. The kits had been on Apricity's contentment plan for her. She was nearly done with her latest, a trilobite from the Devonian period…When it came to her models, Pearl didn't skimp or rush…Once again, Apricity had been correct in its assessment. Pearl felt near enough to happiness in that moment when she sliced open the cellophane of a new kit and inhaled the sharp smell of its artifice. (9-10)

However, while Pearl is obsessing over her models and indulging in temporary happiness, she misses many opportunities to make real connections with Rhett. Furthermore, Pearl's reliance on the Apricity machine goes beyond just using its results for happiness. Pearl also uses it as a companion. This is seen when she speaks to her Apricity in the novel:

> Pearl couldn't identify precisely when she'd begun talking to her Apricity. Sometime in the past year, after Rhett left for college...When Pearl returned home in the evening she would slide the machine from its case, set it out on the kitchen table, and talk with it while she prepared dinner…After dinner was made and eaten, the machine would take its place on the couch cushion next to hers, where they would count out the hours until bedtime…At the end of

the end of the day, the machine would come to rest on the nightstand, where,

if she wished, Pearl could turn her head and see it, a sleek rectangle, distinct

in the dim light. She did not go so far as to tell the machine goodnight. (253-

254)

Pearl struggles in all of her relationships, not just with Rhett. This is due mostly to her

unhealthy attachment to her Apricity. In using Pearl as an example, Williams cautions of the

dangers of relying on machines for human interaction, which results in poor communication

skills and relationships with others. By Pearl talking to her Apricity, and responding as it as

well, Williams shows readers how one can deprive themselves of social interaction with other

human beings when relying too heavily on technology.

Williams also incorporates another character in her novel that, like Pearl, turns to

technology for help with life's tribulations. Valeria (Val), Pearl's ex-husband's wife, turns to

Virtual Reality (VR) games to escape the troubles in her life, a copying strategy she has

employed since she was a child. Her relationship with her mother was one of strain and

distrust. Val describes her mother by saying:

My mother's headaches increased with my age…She never directly said that I

was the cause of her headaches, but I knew. If I brought her tea, she would

wince each step closer I took, and though she would accept the mug from my

hand, she would raise it to her mouth and watch me over its edge, never taking

a sip. She feared I would poison her…I know now that my mother was ill in

her head, and not with headaches. (161-162)

Because Val's relationship with her mother was strained due to her mother's mental illness, she could never talk with her mother or form a loving relationship with her. Eventually, the VR game became her escape from life. Val describes this by saying:

> I'd play *Amusement*, keeping the sound down low so my mother could rest. Then one day the rasp of her slippers coming down the hall, stopping behind me. I didn't dare turn around for fear that the sight of my face would pain her. I held myself very still and kept playing the game. (162)

Eventually, her mother begins to play with her. However, it is clear that Val's relationship with her mother did not improve, and Val's consistent longing to play VR games to escape the troubles of her life grew into her adult life and filters into her unhealthy marriage with Elliot. This is seen when she plays *Amusement* with Elliot. As she is playing, she is reminded of her mother, and her attempts to have a real conversation with Elliot about it. However, it is evident that Val has not spoken about this with Elliot, showing her lack of communication with her husband. The novel describes this scene:

> It is easier to tell him with the mask over my face. "We'd play the game after I got home from school."
>
> "What? Who?"
>
> "My mother and I."
>
> "You don't talk about your parents."
>
> "I am now." (164)

By Elliot saying that Val does not talk about her parents, this shows her lack of communication with him and her evident need to find solitude in technology, instead of healing herself through human interaction. Val eventually divorces Elliot later on in the

novel, which emphasizes Williams' argument that relying on technology for constant companionship and help does not result in happier relationships, but in failed ones. Val's character is an example of the dangers of turning to technology for help, when the true assistance should come from talking and interacting with other people.

While Williams emphasizes the negative effects that reliance on technology can have on a person's self-esteem and relationship with others, she also incorporates many examples of how technology can also effect a person's decisions in life. This is seen in a small way in the character of Elliot. A starving artist looking for his next big idea, Elliot comes up with what he believes is a brilliant idea for an art gallery he will be in; he decides to use stranger's Apricity readings to showcase and act out at the gallery. However, Elliot's decision to make himself look happy by use of the Apricity machine clearly turns out poorly for him. The first recommendation on a stranger's contentment plan is to eat honey (113). In following this request, he vomits frequently at his show. The novel describes this:

> Elliot was on his sixth bowl of honey when he began to vomit…When his retching finally ceased, Elliot wiped his mouth and straightened to find the entire room of gallery-goers staring at him…Elliot told himself that he felt no shame at being watched while puking. After all, this was the point. Of the piece. Of art in general. That one should stop and look at it. (111)

When he is gearing up for the second show, following the Apricity's recommendation to "Wrap yourself in softest fabric" (128), Elliot tells another character that, "'the idea is to make myself sick on happiness…And call it art'" (129). By Elliot saying this, he is showing readers how a person who relies too much on technology can make decisions that negatively affect their life. Elliot's reliance on Apricity's ability to make him happy, and

possibly some money from his art show, illustrates just how absurd turning to technology

to make a person happy truly is.

On a much larger scale, this theme is also reflected in another one of Williams'

characters, Carter. Carter is Pearl's boss at the Apricity Corporation she works for. As one

would expect, Carter believes in Apricity, but resists the happiness plan that Apricity

 consistently gives him because he simply does not want to do it. When reading this, one

would think that maybe Carter is the only sensible character in the book, someone who

realizes how ridiculous the Apricity concept truly is. However, this feeling quickly vanishes

after Carter encounters Thomas Igniss, a manager at a different Apricity branch. Thomas

creates a new Apricity machine that does much more than just instruct someone how to be

happy, it tells them how to be powerful. Learning of this, Carter finds himself completely on

board with this initiative, and begins to swab his mouth to figure out what he needs to do in

order to become powerful at the branch he manages. His first recommendation listed

is, "Remove all chairs from your office except your own" (69). Quickly putting this plan into

action, Carter describes how it works:

> At first it was difficult to carry out the machine's plan. Carter had always
>
> striven to be well liked. But that hadn't worked, had it? ...By the next week,
>
> Carter noticed a change. No more covert tapping on screens during the
>
> Monday meetings, no faint sniggers from the workpod he'd just visited;
>
> instead, dropped eyes and reports handed in on time. The chair directive was
>
> simple. It was elegant. It was managerial jujitsu. (70-71)

 Carter's second tactic given by the new Apricity machine is, "Tell your employees what

color they're wearing" (71). While following this plan, Carter thinks, "And once again, and

as ever, Thomas Igniss was right. The color directive turned out to be even more effective than removing the chairs. Carter did exactly what the machine instructed" (73). Carter's last recommendation is to "Randomize employee lunch breaks" (75), which he follows strictly. Despite Carter feeling as if he is gaining power and admiration amongst his employees, the opposite is occurring. Eventually, Carter gets a message from the VP of the company to speak with him about some concerns with his managerial style (76) and he is demoted to a technician position. Carter is a clear example of how relying on technology to control a person's life can negatively effect decisions they make, and therefore cause harm to that person. Carter relies on the Apricity machine to make him powerful, even when the recommendations sounded absurd to him. Through Carter's example, Williams further emphasizes the dangers of too much reliance on technology in a person's life. While technology can be a necessary tool, people should not be so quick to turn to it for life's answers and for the solving of life's problems. As Williams addresses in her novel and through her characters, heavy reliance on technology to give answers and solve issues can only get a person so far before it becomes a problem in that person's life.

As technology begins to become more widespread in society, people's reliance on it for happiness and connectivity also begins to increase. After examining William's novel *Tell the Machine Goodnight*, it is clear that technology can become a controlling tool if people allow it to be. Just as Pearl, Elliot, Val, and Carter become obsessed and transfixed by their technology, to the point where it begins to control their own lives and negatively affect their relationships with other people, so too will people in American society realize these same mistakes if they are not careful. In writing her novel and through the mistakes her characters make, Williams urges readers to heed her warnings about the destructive nature of

technology. While technology can be a useful tool, Williams emphasizes to readers that becoming so engrossed in technology will only lead to unhappiness and poor relationships with others in their lives. As Williams suggests in her title, it is important that Americans learn to tell their machines goodnight.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

After reading and analyzing the three novels above, and doing extensive research regarding the harmful effects of too much technology and social media use by teenagers, I conclude that it would be greatly beneficial for teachers to use the novels as a teaching tool for students. When reading and learning about the characters in these three novels, students will begin to see the destructive nature technology can have on their lives if they allow it to. The characters in these novels make many mistakes surrounding technology. They either put the technology before others, allow social media to control their lives and shape their view of themselves, or they are so engrossed with their technology that they fail to understand the importance of other beautiful things around them, such as nature.

Works Cited

Atasoy, Emrah. "Impediment to Knowledge and Imagination in Ray Bradbury's Dystopian Novel,

    Fahrenheit 451." *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi,* Vol. 55, no. 1,

    2017. Accessed 29 October 2018.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. The Random House Publishing Group, 1950. Print.

Clark, Alex. "Social Anxiety-How Facebook and Twitter are Reshaping the Novel." *New Statesman*

    Ltd., 2014. Accessed 1 October 2018.

"Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics." *ReadWriteThink.org*, 2006. Accessed 05 November

    2018.

Eggers, Dave. *The Circle*. Vintage Books, 2013. Print.

Horan, Thomas. "State and Corporate Dystopianism in Nineteen Eighty-Four and Dave Eggers's

    The Circle." *Palgrave Studies in Utopianism*. Grey House Publishing, 2016. Accessed 20

    February 2019.

Hunt, Wayne. "Privacy and the Creative Imagination in the Age of Data Surveillance." *Queen's*

    Quarterly, vol. 121, no. 3, Oct. 2014, pp. 412–21. Accessed 20 February 2019.

Kádár, Zoltán, and János I. Tóth. "The Critique of Technology in 20th Century Philosophy and

    Dystopias." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2013. Accessed 3 October 2018.

Logsdon, Loren. "Ray Bradbury's Tale of Two Cities: An Essential Message for a Technologically

    Dominated Society." *MidAmerica*, 2009. Accessed 29 October 2018.

Moynihan, Ray. "Privacy is theft—sharing is caring." *BMJ*, vol. 348, 2014.

Sheehan, Jason. "Tell The Machine' Is A Lucid Dream Of Sci-Fi Perfection." *NPR*, 21 June 2018.

"Social Media, Social Life: Teens Reveal Their Experiences." *Common Sense Media: Ratings,*

    Reviews, and Advice, 10 Sept. 2018. Accessed 05 March 2019.

Stevenson, Seth. "Google is Watching: Dave Eggers's Sly Novel Takes on the Tech

Giants." *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Accessed 20 February 2019.

Stoner, Philip. "Dystopian Literature: Evolution of Dystopian Literature From We to the Hunger

Games." *Mississippi University for Women*. Accessed 5 November 2018.

Thompson, Clive. "Too Much Information: Novelist Dave Eggers and filmmaker James Ponsoldt

Probe Technology's Dark Side." *Mother Jones*, 2017. Accessed 22 February 2019.

Twenge, Jean. "Mental Health Issues Increased Significantly in Young Adults Over Last

Decade." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 2019. Accessed 05 March 2019.

Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. "Age, Period, and Cohort

Trends in Mood Disorder Indicators and Suicide-Related Outcomes in a Nationally

Representative Dataset, 2005–2017." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 2019. Accessed 05

March 2019.

Williams, Katie. *Tell the Machine Goodnight*. Penguin Group, 2018. Print.