

Humanistic Antidotes for a Social Media Technology Addicted Society

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Abstract

This article describes some of the serious growing concerns about the dangers of widespread social media technology addiction in U.S. society, and virtually all over the world. These concerns are especially prominent regarding the excessive use of social media technology by young people, as conveyed by the author through excerpts from various articles. Additionally, the author describes his own psychology teaching experiences at a university in Maine that illustrates through small group class discussions the concerns students have about the excessive use of social media technology, in the form of narrative research. Humanistic antidotes based upon Carl Rogers' initial formulation of humanistic psychology through engaging in genuine, caring, authentic relationships with others are given, in particular with college students in the context of humanistic education, as practiced by the author. Inclusive of taking time to express one's own deepest self inclinations, the author concludes with a positive vision of how the benefits of extensive information and communication through social media technology can be maintained while avoiding its negative dehumanizing addictive dangers.

Introduction

Sometimes I wonder about how Carl Rogers (1961) and Abraham Maslow (1962), the acknowledged founders of humanistic psychology, or Rollo May (1969), who was a predominant force in the promotion of existential psychology, would respond to the extreme level of how much our entire current U.S. society, including in particular young people, are immersed in their social media technologies. There has been an increasing alarm the past few years about the extent that especially young people in our U.S. society—and virtually all over the world—are becoming saturated with what has been referred to as “social media addiction” (Addiction.com Staff, 2012; Anderson, 2015; Augenbraun, 2014; Barnes, 2015; Golinkoff, 2015; Gordon, 2015; IANS, 2015; Johnson, 2015; McNamee, 2014; Paddock, 2013; Whiteman, 2014).¹ There has also been a growing movement to include a psychiatric disorder with the title of Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* (APA, 2013). Although Internet Addiction Disorder is still not officially listed as a psychiatric disorder in the DSM-V, the more narrowly defined Internet Gaming Addiction was added in May, 2013 (APA, 2013; Augenbraun, 2014).

I have seen firsthand how young people appear to be addicted to their social media technology from my teaching psychology at Husson University the past 4 years.

A number of my Husson University Human Growth & Development and Introduction to Psychology students frequently expressed in their essays and group discussions how people no longer know how to interact socially with each other, and how they are much more comfortable in their online Facebook, SnapChat, etc. relationships than in actually “talking” to people face-to-face. Yes a number of my students somehow “know” that there is something very wrong here, but I do not think they understand the full context of what has taken place in regard to mental health; i.e. the full context in regard to the interpersonal emphasis of having genuine, caring, authentic dialogue and relationships that is the essence of humanistic psychology as formulated by Carl Rogers (1961). From my experiences a few years ago as a community mental health worker, I focused upon how much this kind of authentic dialogue and relationships are needed by young people, in particular young people with mental health issues, in our society (Benjamin, 2011a).

However, I am afraid that we as a society are quickly moving past the point of being able to experience anything approaching this kind of humanistic relating, and virtually all the authors of the above articles on social media technology addiction share my fears.

To relate to people authentically and caringly, one needs to relate to one's self as well.

As conveyed by the above authors on social media technology addiction, there appears to be a widespread technological addiction that is taking over our whole society and much of our whole world. Media technology is in itself extremely impressive and useful, with extensive benefits to extend and expand information and communication. However, I think it is essential that people control technology, and not the other way around.

What I see all around me is the billionaire technology entrepreneurs and marketers successfully marketing their latest social media technology—especially to children and adolescents—to a point where our kids are growing up “vicariously,” i.e. being glued to their computer technology gadgets as their favorite way of passing time. Everything nowadays is quick, spontaneous, and “online.” Whatever happened to “existential depth or awe”? (Schneider, 2004). Going back a little further in time, I wonder what Nietzsche (1885/2012) or Kierkegaard (1843/2013) would say if they were able to see our current modern social media technology society.

In this article I will describe what I have learned in regard to college students' perceptions of some of the adverse effects of social media, from my psychology teaching experiences over the past few years at Husson University in Bangor, Maine. Although I did not initially set out to study this phenomenon, the accounts of some of my students' experiences with the disturbing addictive aspects of over-indulgence in social media that they have expressed in class discussions have had much impact upon me. I will relate some of these accounts from my students in this article, in the context of narrative research (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Bochner, 2014).

One of the humanistic antidotes I convey in this article, in the small context of my own college-level psychology teaching experiences, is simply to give my students the assignment of “talking” to each other, in small group discussions and whole class sharings related to the topics of the psychology courses I teach at Husson University. This aspect of “sitting and talking to each other” may sound very simple and natural, and in many ways it certainly is. However, given what I will be describing as my perspective of the social media technology addiction that so many young people are caught up in, I believe it is a significant event to have these young people actually put away their technology when they are in their classrooms and engage with each other in face-to-face personal/academic authentic discussions. It is this context of authentic engagement with each other and the intertwining of feelings and “felt concerns” with the intellect, that falls under the umbrella of humanistic education (Rogers, 1961, 1969)², that I think is essential to cultivate and develop to balance out the extreme social media technology world that we are all now living in.

Qualitative Research Methods: Narrative Research and Autoethnography

A significant focus of my article is on what I have learned about social media technology addiction from the informal reports conveyed by some of my Husson University psychology students in their small group class discussions. Consequently the dominant research methods utilized in this article is in the context of qualitative inquiry; in particular narrative research and autoethnography (Bochner, 2014; Chang, 2008; Chase, 2005; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, 2004, 2009; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1988; Robson, 2002; Wertz, 2011). As I mentioned in the Introduction, I did not initially set out to study this topic and therefore this is by no means a formal academic study. However, there is much overlap between what I learned from my students in their narrative reports, the narrative articles I have read on social media addiction, and the basic ingredients of narrative and autoethnographic research.

Autoethnography was developed in the last few decades of the 20th century, largely through the efforts of sociologist Carolyn Ellis (2004, 2009), and focuses upon the social dynamics and context that the researcher is investigating. However, unlike strict ethnographic research that does not include personal reflections of the researcher, autoethnography extends participant observation research through placing a significant reliance upon the feelings, thoughts, perspectives, experiences, reflections, insights, and personal stories of the researcher, and often involves a high level of personal vulnerability in terms of revealing emotional/private aspects of oneself (Benjamin, 2013; Bochner, 2014; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, 2004, 2009; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Thus in this article I will be describing my personal reflections and related experiences in the context of the narrative reports of my Husson University students regarding their experiences and perspectives concerning our society's excessive immersion in social media technology.

However, I will begin by briefly describing a recent personal experience I had with my significant other at a local Maine restaurant that I believe has some bearing on the social media technology issue that I am currently writing about.

Relevant Personal Experience at a Restaurant

A few months ago my significant other and I were having dinner at a local truck stop/family diner restaurant. The place was quite crowded with long tables of people noisily talking to each other, and it took a long time for our waitress to come over to us. My significant other in particular did not appreciate how noisy it was, and we were both mildly annoyed at how slow the service was. However, I then looked around me at all the people busily chatting away, and all of a sudden I realized that there did not appear to be one cell phone being used by any customer in the entire restaurant! Now this is 2015, and the restaurant is in the vicinity of Bangor, Maine—a fairly large city by Maine standards. I was especially sensitive to our society's generic cell phone environment from my teaching at Husson University in Bangor. Nearly all the students at Husson are continuously glued to their cell phones wherever they are—in their classrooms when they are able to (including surreptitiously using them inside their desk tables), in the cafeteria, walking to and from classes, etc.

After I conveyed my observations to my significant other, we both viewed all the noisy chatter in the restaurant in a different light. For we now realized that these people were actually “talking” to each other and enjoying being with each other. It felt like some kind of uncanny throwback to an earlier time before our modern computer age, when people actually conversed with each other instead of sitting next to each other and conversing on their social media cell phones. We no longer minded all the noisy chatter in the restaurant, and our waitress came over to us soon enough and apologized for the long delay.

College Education and Social Media Immersion

In my Husson University Human Growth & Development and Introduction to Psychology classes, I have increasingly structured my classes to maximize the amount of time my students are required to “talk” to each other, in small group discussions and whole class sharings. After a while this became fairly natural to my students, but in retrospect I can appreciate the atmosphere I created in my classroom in a similar way to how I appreciated my restaurant observations, as I described above. My students were required to put away their cell phones in my classroom (though I have no doubt that some of them managed to still surreptitiously use them) and literally as soon as class ended—as they were walking out the door—many of them were back in their online worlds.

As I initially entered the classroom, at least half of my students were busily engaged on their cell phones, and I always would begin class by telling them to put away their recreational technology devices. However, generally for at least one class each week my students would talk to each other, in the context of engaging in structured small group discussions, many of which were quite personally engaging and revealing. If this were the 1970s, when I was my students' age and in college, none of this would even be worth mentioning. For it was the sign of the times to “talk” to each other and question anything and everything about our society. Young people were immersed in everything from antiwar demonstrations to psychedelic drugs to free sex to women's liberation to Eastern religions (Taylor, 1999). But today young people are, generally speaking, much more focused on effectively taking their place in our extremely materialistic society. One striking research example of this is evidenced by the significant increase in freshmen college students, compared to a few decades ago, who rate being well off financially as extremely important and the significant decrease in freshmen college students who rate having a meaningful philosophy of life as extremely important (Pryor et. al, 2007). However, there are always exceptions to the rule, and one recent noteworthy exception is the Occupy movement, where for a relatively short period of time it felt to me like it was the 1970s again and young people “woke up” (Benjamin, 2011b, Chomsky, 2013).

“THE” Psychology and Technological Addiction

The status quo is quite powerful, and the forces that I believe are entrapping people now from cradle to grave are nothing less than what I consider to be our whole technologically addicted society and essentially world. But how can I have the gumption to think that I am right about our whole society suffering from technological addiction? Well I “feel” this when I am doing my pure mathematics—working on discovering some new truth in the sublime world of “my friends that don't exist”³.

I also feel this when I am working like the devil to master my piano songs to successfully accompany the singers in my theatre group, or to play the piano part of my Beethoven violin/piano sonata well enough to return for a week this summer to my very intensive adult chamber music school⁴. And I feel this right now as I am writing this essay. For if I were addicted to continuously engaging in social media interactions on Facebook or elsewhere in the cyber world, this would gradually replace the self immersion time I need to give myself in order to continue the development in my above three creative worlds. And if I were addicted to continuously engaging in social media interactions on Facebook, I believe this would also negatively infringe upon my ability to have quality time and continue to engage in my harmonious, intimate relationship with my significant other. Somehow my genuine self would gradually wear away, and it would be replaced by some kind of addictive personality who just could not get enough of what online relationships with others could offer it. But the scary part of all this is that I believe this is essentially what is overtaking our whole society—with young people at the forefront.

To feel—to care—to mull things over—to contemplate—to take time—what happens to all these qualities when one is in the whirlwind of spending virtually all of one's free time either surfing the web or in online interactions with people one has never met? I contend that the essential qualities of both humanistic and existential psychology are being lost as we progress through the 21st century, in the midst of all its staggering array of social media technology temptations. But let me reaffirm—it is not the technology itself that is at fault. It is the human temptation and potential for addiction, that is being used in exceptionally skillful and effective ways by our society's technology expert marketers, that I believe is the source of the problem. It feels like a runaway horse to me, with no way of it being stopped. It goes along with the climate debacle that spells disaster for the whole human race, once again with no apparent way of being stopped (Gore, 2007). The Occupy movement made a brave statement against corporate greed (Benjamin, 2011b, Chomsky, 2013), and I agree with the Occupy movement that it is precisely this greed that has caused many of the ills of our society. Essentially the greed that is the wheels of our super-capitalistic society serves only the prospect of making more money—not the well-being of our children or the propagation of the human species.

But if there is nothing that can be done about our technologically addicted society, then why am I writing this essay? Well—I am writing this essay because it is my basic nature to express what I think and feel—which is how I philosophize. I've mentioned how our social media technology addicted society goes against the essential cores of humanistic and existential psychology. I also believe it goes against the essential core of transpersonal psychology. For transpersonal psychology is engaged with the—for a lack of a better word—"spiritual" component of what it means to be human (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013). And I think that being authentically "spiritual"—or engaging in deep self explorations about life and existence—most definitely requires that one spend extended time with one's self, pondering all these mysterious elements of life and the world. Engaging in continuous online social interactions without taking sufficient time to experience being alone with one's own self on a regular basis, does not go along with this kind of deep self immersion that I think is at the core of transpersonal psychology. I would like to coin the acronym THE psychology, which stands for Transpersonal/Humanistic/Existential psychology. Using this acronym, one can summarize my main argument in this essay by saying that our technological addicted society is seriously undermining the ability of people to engage in the essential cores of THE psychology. And from my experiences of teaching psychology at the college level the past few years, this undermining is extremely obvious in the college classroom.

Anecdotal College Student Reports of Detrimental Aspects of Social Media

In the various small group discussions that have taken place in my Husson University psychology courses the past few years, there have been a few communications that I think are particularly revealing in regard to what can be construed as the over-indulgence and/or misuse of social media technology. To begin with, one of my Introduction to Psychology students described someone in his high school who was continuously engaged in online Facebook communications, presenting the image of someone who was exceedingly friendly, extroverted, and comfortable in various social situations. However, my student was quite surprised when he would see this same "online socially comfortable" person walk down the school corridor every day with his head down, avoiding any social contact with anyone and not even responding when people would say hello to him. This opens up the question of how could someone exhibit such completely opposite personality characteristics when interacting socially online with people compared to face-to-face social interactions? The answer was not difficult for my students to come up with, as they easily described how one puts on a façade or "persona" (Jung, 1961) when interacting socially online, which can be quite different from one's actual personality when dealing with people face-to-face.

Thus someone can learn to be very “popular” online while becoming less and less capable of relating to people face-to-face in any kind of meaningful way.

This kind of example of contrasting online and face-to-face personalities was repeated frequently in my Human Growth & Development classes. One anecdotal report this past semester that further reinforces this came from a student who described her 11-year-old sister as being on her cell phone virtually all the time, wherever she went and whatever she did. This included any kind of social outing, family dinner, athletic event, etc. But what particularly disturbed my student was the complete lack of interest and ability her sister had in being responsive to any face-to-face interaction that anyone tried to engage her in. My student’s sister would answer face-to-face questions with quick short Yes or No responses and immediately get back to her much more interesting online world in her cell phone. My student described how her personal relationship with her sister was now virtually nonexistent, and how her other family members felt the same way.

And once again we can ask: What exactly is going on here? Is “virtual reality” just another form of social reality? Although some of my students would say this is the case, the majority of them have become quite concerned that kids are growing up these days with an overindulgence of social media technology pervading every aspect of their lives.

Another example from my Human Growth & Development class this past semester strikingly demonstrates the phenomenon of people “hiding” in their online social media worlds rather than “talking” to people who are actually physically present. My student described the pattern of challenging communications her roommate would engage her in. As it turns out, her roommate would wait for my student to leave the room, and then immediately text her to convey whatever particular problem she was having concerning my student. This was her roommate’s way of avoiding the “messy” personal interactions that face-to-face communication with my student would involve, as it was so much easier and more “efficient” to just communicate these things in a text message since my student was not physically there to respond. Is there anything wrong with this? There certainly is, according to my student. It felt “inhuman” to her, and I must agree. Once again we see the phenomenon of people bypassing face-to-face relating, in particular when it involves some challenging communications, in favor of the easier and relatively non-personal form of an online text message.

The most recent example of what I have experienced as social media technology addiction occurred when students in my most past semester Husson Human Growth & Development class were giving their end of semester class project presentations.

As I mentioned above in a parenthetical remark, although I always told my students at the beginning of class to put away their recreational technology devices, I had no doubt that some students were using their cell phones surreptitiously inside their desks. In general this did not feel to me like it was worth making an issue of during my class lectures, as it involved just one or two students on an occasional basis, although I did confront some students when I saw them doing this when they were in their small group discussion.

However, when I was in the audience and observing two students blatantly using their cell phones inside their desks during a number of my students’ end of semester class presentations, I knew I needed to deal with the situation. I wrote notes to these students and made a general announcement about how rude and disrespectful this was at the beginning of our next class, which was the last class of the semester. This solved the problem on the surface, as no student dared to surreptitiously use his or her cell phone inside a desk during the class presentation in our last class. But this whole situation made quite the impression on me. For these same students who made such inappropriate use of their cell phones during our class previously had been quite vocal about the misuse of social media technology during our small group discussion related to this topic, quite recently. The last class presentation was fittingly on the topic of the benefits and dangers of social media technology, and I was glad that my class had ended with this topic. But it struck me very forcefully how young people in our society have become so far removed from anything approaching Carl Rogers’ (1961) humanistic way of people relating to each other.

There were a number of other examples described by many students in these small group class discussions the past few years that highlight the discrepancy between relating socially online and face-to-face. Some of these examples strike me as being quite bizarre, in spite of the fact that they are apparently becoming increasingly more “normal” in our social media technology society.

For instance: families living under the same roof and choosing to send each other text messages to communicate rather than actually “talk” to each other—including husbands and wives; students coming to class before the instructor arrives and silently being immersed in their social media world on their cell phones instead of talking to each other; young children sitting immobile in front of their computers to vicariously play their computer games or engage in their online social media communications instead of getting physical exercise playing with other children; college-age people spending 12 hours a day immersed in their social media technology, as disclosed by one of my Human Growth & Development discussion groups. The list goes on and on, and we haven’t even scratched the surface when it comes to how all this social media technology immersion relates to family interaction, childhood obesity, unstable financial security through internet marketing, car accidents due to the use of cell phones when driving, etc.

Excerpts from Research and Articles about Social Media Technology Addiction

The descriptions I have given from some of my Husson University small group discussions relating to the extreme immersion of social media technology in our society are actually quite similar to many of the experiences described in the articles I listed above on social media addiction. Some relevant excerpts of these articles are as follows¹.

Five years ago, Facebook was rarely mentioned in the context of a marriage ending. But now it has become commonplace for clients to cite social media use as a reason for divorce....A recent study by Oxford University of 24,000 married European couples found that the more they read about other people’s exciting lives on social media, the more likely they were to view their own with disappointment, leading to a poorer sex life....So foreplay, emotional touch, fondling and intense feelings count as much as a physical stimulant. With smartphones in the bedroom, the emotional togetherness that initiates sex is gone. (IANS, 2015, pp. 1-2)

A typical day for me starts out with me turning off the alarm on my smartphone and immediately taking instant messages, emails, status updates...you get the the picture. Every like, every personal message, even the fun of interacting with friends without having to actually, you know, be anywhere near them....we’re so involved in “connecting” that we seem to neglect really *connecting*—far-reaching, pervasive effects in the real world (that’s the stuff you see when you put your phone away from pretty much everything)...We’re becoming worse people; less rounded, more self-righteous, less understanding and doing it to ourselves. (Gordon, 2015, p. 11)

You can be connected to the world around you twenty-four hours a day, three hundred sixty-five days a year.... Over time though, this connection can slowly become a need....Having an online personality is easier for some people and their social and emotional needs are quickly fulfilled. The amount of time spent is rarely questioned and this is where the danger of a possible addiction can come into play. (Addiction.com Staff, 2012, p. 6).

Their analysis showed that cell phone use was negatively linked to GPA—the higher the cell phone use the lower the grades—and positively linked to anxiety—higher cell phone use was linked to higher anxiety. (Paddock, 2013, p. 2)

In our society, I occasionally feel as though we spend more time documenting our time spent hanging out by trying to get pictures and hashtags just right than we do actually talking and connecting with one another. We are rarely ever fully present in one place. We are out with our friends, but are more focused on finding the best lighting for our selfies than actually engaging in conversation. We are out to dinner, but instead of savoring every flavor, we are compulsively making sure to document it on SnapChat, Instagram, and Facebook. We feel compelled to show up for our audience. We are always connected, yet so fragmented. While becoming increasingly connected we are becoming disconnected from ourselves. Because of the social media epidemic, it is also my observation that time spent among friends is overshadowed by agendas. It often feels contrived and staged. Social media breeds and feeds shallow connections, and I find myself hungry fo deeper, more meaningful connections now more than ever. We are starving ourselves while gorging on our incessant compulsion to perform.

Worst of all, it is a viciously contagious epidemic....While at a coffee shop recently, I observed two girlfriends who snapped at least 30 pictures, in the span of about 30 minutes, all the while discussing their social media lives. During their hour of time together, I lost count of how many times I heard them reference Instagram, SnapChat, and Twitter, for it dominated 80 percent of their conversation. Most interestingly, they did not part ways without one of them compulsively burying her face in her phone and editing their new pictures. They were seated next to each other in silence, one staring at the other as she edited like a maniac. (Johnson, 2015, p. 12)

This is what I think is wrong with a social media obsessed world. We can't seem to enjoy something for what it is without wanting everyone to know we're enjoying it. We can't dance to the encore at our favorite band's concert because we're too busy capturing it for our snap story, to make sure that people know we're doing something exciting. We can't dig into a beautiful meal before snapping pictures of it first, to make sure that people know we are something delicious. We can't have a great hair day or wear something cute without taking a photo and sharing it, making sure people know we looked good that day. We can't just be. (Barnes, 2015, p. 10)

Luo says long-established protocols for talking therapies for addiction can be worthwhile components of a treatment plan for Internet addiction. For example, he notes cognitive therapy and motivational interviewing have been proven to be especially useful for changing unhealthy behaviors....Luo notes that potential treatments have to work in their own cultural contexts, and what works for one group may not work for another. The Daxing Internet Addiction Treatment Center in Beijing, China, for example, treats addicted teens with military-like exercise, and discipline, as well as medication and other therapies, which may not go over so well in other countries. (Augenbraun, 2014, pp. 3-4)

In India, the launch of the clinic appeared timely—in the same week the *Nimhans* newspapers were reporting a case of a 13-year-old who hanged herself after her mother removed her Facebook account....In Singapore, 87% of a population of 5.4 million own smartphones....China itself has over 300 Internet addiction centers. (McNamee, 2014, pp. 2, 4)

A related topic to what these excerpts powerfully convey as our society's dehumanizing social media technology addiction that I always include in my required psychology small group class discussions is something I will briefly discuss next: media violence.

Media Violence, Human Caring/Sensitivity, and Real World Violence

In an earlier article (Benjamin, 2012), I discussed the relationship of playing violent video games and watching media violence to real world violence. As I conveyed in my article, although there is much alarming research that demonstrates a high correlation between factors related to media violence and real world violence, there is also research that concludes there does not exist a significant correlation between these factors (Benjamin, 2012). In both my Human Growth & Development and Introduction to Psychology classes, the vast majority of my students do not think that playing violent video games or watching violence in the media in general leads to real world violence, in spite of the alarming research that their textbooks describe about this. What most of my students think is that the factor of parental involvement is the crucial issue; i.e. parents overseeing their children's watching violent television shows and playing violent video games, and explaining to their children that these recreational pastimes should not be reproduced in real life. I agree with my students that the parent involvement factor is significant in regard to the connection between media violence and real world violence, and I also have conveyed to them that the factor of mental disturbance is likely a very significant factor in regard to the above high correlation (Benjamin, 2012). However, I believe that the issue here goes much deeper and is related to the growing alarm that our society is becoming addicted to social media technology.

As many of my students expressed their concerns during our social media technology small group discussions, as described above, people nowadays "hide" behind their online Facebook, SnapChat, etc. social images, and are losing the ability to related to people face-to-face in personal and social ways (Barnes, 2015; Gordon, 2015; Johnson, 2015). As one of my Introduction to Psychology online CALCampus⁵ students described in her excellent end of semester paper, the factors of being personally detached from people and watching/participating in so much vicarious media violence may very well lessen the bonds between "make-believe" violence and real world violence. And I agree with my online student about this.

The further removed our society becomes from Carl Rogers' humanistic visions of people personally, caringly, and genuinely relating to each other, the easier it is for at least some people—and it may very well be especially some people with mental health disturbances—to commit real world violence. For the online images of people are being transformed from the real flesh and blood human beings that we all are, to nothing more than quick and spontaneous “virtual” interactions that are becoming increasingly devoid of any of the ingredients of THE (transpersonal, humanistic, existential) psychology that relate to depth and meaning of life.

My Personal Philosophy to Overcome Temptation of Technological Addiction

What are my own personal antidotes for living in this whirlwind instantaneous information overload technology society of ours while trying to retain my own essence? My own personal antidotes are the same as they virtually always have been—I absolutely need to continue doing what makes me who I am. This means I continue to do my own mathematics, play the piano, and philosophize (Benjamin, 2006). My three worlds of mathematics, piano, and psychology/philosophy have increasingly grown and extended from when I initially described them as part of my “natural dimension” (Benjamin, 2013). But this is a good thing, and I am happy to see myself extended through my mathematics publications, playing the piano in chamber music groups and with a theatre company, and publishing various essays in psychology and philosophy. And the balance to my own creative self development and pursuits is my harmonious intimate relationship with my significant other for over 10 years, which is also an essential part of what I originally envisioned as my “natural dimension” (Benjamin, 2013). This intimate relationship context for me is likewise developing and extending, as we have recently bought a house together and plan on getting married next year. And these are my own personal remedies for living in what I, in agreement with R. D. Laing (1967) and Eric Fromm (1955), consider to be our insane society (Benjamin, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is apparent that social media technology is a double-edged sword. Undoubtedly there are many significant advantages of being able to communicate and obtain information about virtually anything in the world very rapidly. However, there are alarming growing concerns about the harmful addictive aspects of this pervasive technology, as can be seen in the sample of excerpts from articles I have included above, from the above descriptions I have given of my own teaching experiences at a university in Maine, and from the movement to include technology addiction as a diagnostic category by the American Psychiatric Association to supplement the Internet Gaming Disorder that was included in 2013 in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA, 2013; Augenbraun, 2014).

However, there are also humanistic antidotes that I believe have the potential of at least minimizing the detrimental addictive effects of excessive social media technology use. The humanistic antidotes that I have described all fit into the guiding basic principles of Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology; i.e. engaging in genuine, caring, authentic relationships with others. More specifically, in the arena of humanistic education this means putting intention into ensuring that students engage with one another in face-to-face personal/academic meaningful discussions. In the arena of parenting—in particular parenting of teenagers and young adults—this means finding ways of maintaining the essential bonds of the parent/child relationship that involves two-way communication with a focus on caring, listening, and authenticity. And perhaps most important of all, it is essential that one maintains one's own authentic self; i.e. to engage oneself with one's deepest self expressions and yearnings, and perhaps have a sense of what one's “calling” in life is. I believe that if these humanistic antidotes were put into place on a widespread scale, then social media technology would not become a dangerous dehumanizing addiction, but rather would serve as a very useful device to rapidly acquire information and enhance communication all over the world without the accompanying detrimental effects that I have described in this article. Put more simply, we would control our social media technology, and not the other way around.

Notes

- 1) See my recent article *Do We Live in a Social Media Technology Addicted Society?* (Benjamin, 2015), which includes the article excerpts described in the present article.
- 2) Humanistic education is based upon the work of humanistic psychologists, in particular Abraham Maslow (1969) and Carl Rogers (1961, 1969), and involves empathy, caring about students, and genuineness on the part of the learning facilitator. The basic principles of humanistic education include choice and control, felt concern, the whole person, self evaluation, and the teacher as a facilitator. For more information about humanistic education, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanistic_education
- 3) See my essay *My Conception of Integral* (Benjamin, 2006), and my essay *On a Natural Dimension of Mathematics* in my book *The Creative Artist, Mental Disturbance, and Mental Health* (Benjamin, 2013).
- 4) My adult chamber music school is Kneisel Hall in Blue Hill, Maine; see www.kneiselhall.org As it turned out, due to a death in the family I did not participate in my adult chamber music week this summer, but I am planning on doing so again next summer.
- 5) For more information about CALCampus see www.calcampus.edu

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