Media Resistance:
Opportunities for Practice Theory and New Media Research

LOUISE WOODSTOCK
Ursinus College, USA

Based on in-depth qualitative interviews, this essay offers a portrait of media resisters—individuals who intentionally and significantly limit their media use and who have largely fallen outside the purview of communication research. I argue that attention to media resistance expands and enhances practice theory and research on new media use. Practice theory broadens by the acknowledgement that media resistance constitutes a significant set of behavioral responses to living in a media-saturated world. Similarly, recognition of the media resistance phenomenon can help address the pro-innovation bias of new media research. Media resisters articulate reasons for resistance that include (a) asserting boundaries between public and private life, (b) acting on concerns that technologies designed to facilitate human connection often undermine it, and (c) focusing on immediate experiences and thereby cultivating presence.

Keywords: media resistance, media refusal, practice theory, audience studies, new media, digital media, social media

Introduction: Media Resistance

A June 2011 report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that users of social networking sites are "more trusting, have more close friends, are more politically engaged, and get more support from their friends" (Hampton, Sessions, Rainie, & Purcel, 2011). This places Pew in the good company of scholars who, over the decades, have argued that use of new communication technologies positively correlates with desirable characteristics. It has always been perceived as advantageous to be an "innovator" or an "early adopter," just as being a "laggard" or a "luddite" carries negative charge (Rogers, 2003). Historically, extending the pro-innovation bias that characterizes diffusion research, most scholarship on new communication technologies has assumed that more access and use is necessarily better. More expansively, new communication technologies have, historically and today, been welcomed with utopian visions of world peace, true participatory democracy, and equal access to education (Morozov, 2010; Wu, 2010; Zittrain, 2008). Within the public sphere and within advertising in particular, the association of communication technologies with affluence and coolness clearly marks new media users as well educated and hip (Frank, 1977).

Louise Woodstock: louise@musser.us
Date submitted: 2013–08–05

With these rosy associations, why would anyone *not* want to adopt and use technologies assumed to facilitate communication? In February 2013, Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project reported that 61% of Facebook users have taken a multi-week break from Facebook for reasons ranging from busyness to lack of interest (Rainie, Smith, & Duggan, 2013), a finding that begs for further consideration, especially when coupled with those cited above. Why would social media users "drop out" or take breaks if they perceived the noted benefits? The pro-innovation bias is understandable when researchers aim to illuminate and address disuse associated with disenfranchisement, class, race, gender, and nationality. However, it has caused communication scholars, with a few exceptions, to largely ignore people who avoid media not for the typical "digital divide" reasons, but *by choice* and *for considered reasons.*

Based on qualitative interviews,[1] this essay profiles "media resisters" and investigates practices of and reasons for resistance. Resisters make what may initially appear as individual, idiosyncratic choices to not adopt, to eliminate, or to significantly limit use of televisions, mobile phones, and the Internet (in particular social networking), but when considered collectively, their practices constitute a social critique of media use.[2] They choose means of variously filtering news, popular entertainment culture, and advertising. They engage in these practices for many reasons, but I will focus on three dominant ones here: (a) to assert boundaries between public and private life, (b) to address their concern that rather than extend connection, text messaging, mobile phones, and e-mail actually make interpersonal communication more tenuous, and (c) to focus on immediate experiences and cultivate presence. Concerns about distraction, frivolity, and multitasking are subsumed within these categories.

Listening to media resisters, an admitted minority, is important for the same reasons we value other minority groups and perspectives: They generate alternatives, they teach us about different ways of living, they remind us about the rapidity with which ways of communicating are changing and the inherent losses (as well as benefits) of those shifts. Resisters often articulate feeling out of step with the culture they see manifested in new communication technologies. As "outsiders within," their perspectives enrich social ideas about communication technologies, generating a "strong objectivity," the idea within standpoint theory that incorporation of marginal perspectives allows for more objective accounts of reality (Harding, 1991). That said, many people who do *not* resist media also suffer from the same sense of inundation, or what Couldry (2012) called supersaturation, "the unstable, nonequilibrium state when social life is filled with media contents at every level" (p. 5), and express the same desire for better balance that resisters do. In this way, resisters' experiences and practices suggest tactics employable by others (Certeau, 1988). Resisters acknowledge that their tactics are imperfect and require discipline, but with practice, they become habituated and easier to maintain.

The pages that follow (a) contextualize the term "media resistance," (b) briefly introduce the larger project upon which this analysis is based, (c) argue that media resistance fruitfully extends practice

---

[1] Names of all interviewees have been changed.

[2] E-mail and computers are too essential to interviewees' professional and personal lives to dispense with, although some report practices of limiting their use, which include using away messages and not checking work e-mail at home.

theory and usefully complicates research on media use, and (d) demonstrate that media resisters articulate sensible reasons for their practices of media resistance. I conclude by considering the implications of media resisters' critique that communication technologies are transfiguring communication in problematic, paradoxical ways.

Media Resistance Contextualized

For more than 10 years (Rauch, 2011), there has been a significant conversation across realms of culture about a set of practices variously called slow media, media Sabbaths, media detox, media fasting, or unplugging—a literature ripe with food, drug, and addiction metaphors. In concert with the slow food movement, slow media involves a preference for "heirloom" communication technologies, while the other practices usually entail avoiding media—either content or technologies—for some period of time. Parenting books now coach parents on how to rear children in the digital age (Garner, 2013), new technologies and applications are developed to manage our media flow and encourage productivity (Burkeman, 2013), and corporations are instituting policies that mandate or encourage employees to forge time away from digital distractions (Kang, 2012; Knowledge@Wharton, 2012; Mohn, 2012). A Google search for "media fasting" reveals self-help advice on detaching from communication technologies, as well as the numerous college communication courses now requiring students to do without some form of media for short amounts of time. These practices assume that, like detoxing from sugar, our systems will recalibrate, become more attuned, and we will consume more measured doses of media, or at least gain greater self-awareness of the impact, often construed as negative, of a life infused by real-time media.

Wide ranging public figures have advocated time away from digital devices. Delivering Boston University's 2012 commencement address, Google Chairman Eric Schmidt advised graduates, "Remember to take at least one hour a day and turn that thing off. Do the math, 1/24th. Go dark. Shut it down. Learn where the OFF button is" (Schmidt, 2012).[3] Comedian Louis CK stated that he will not allow his daughters to have smart phones because they decrease empathy and curtail the necessary experience of the universal human condition of sadness (Horn, 2013). Author Jonthan Safran Foer (2013) argues that communication technologies are diminished substitutes that we have sadly come to prefer because they enable us to avoid contact:

> Shooting off an e-mail is easier, still, because one can hide behind the absence of vocal inflection, and of course there's no chance of accidentally catching someone. And texting is even easier, as the expectation for articulateness is further reduced, and another shell is offered to hide in. Each step "forward" has made it easier, just a little, to avoid the emotional work of being present, to convey information rather than humanity. (para. 11)

Foer laments that we ourselves become diminished substitutes, less attentive and compassionate to others.

---

[3] Schmidt's commencement address led to substantial coverage of the Internet company's HR policies.

In sum, this conversation suggests a growing zeitgeist around the concept of controlling and limiting media use. In her piece that chronicles the growing journalistic interest in slow media), Rauch (2011) calls this a "sub-cultural movement". Blogs and newspaper articles may help lend legitimacy and even cultural capital to slow media.[4] The proponents of slow media that Rauch examines produced yet more media to espouse their views. In contrast, informants in the present study, other than within families, do not speak of themselves as belonging to a greater group or movement, nor do they report publicizing their media avoidance practices. As one interviewee says, "My self-identification [as a media resister] was prompted by my sense that I am unlike everyone else in these ways." In fact, some feel marginalized, some do not share popular cultural references or interests, and some feel unsettled by the increasingly normative behaviors that favor interrupting face to face interaction to attend to texts, e-mails, Facebook and so on. Still, the benefits of resistance, as will be discussed in the following pages, include a greater sense of calm, purpose, and balance, and may prove persuasive to increasing numbers, thereby creating a more real possibility for resisters to identify as members of a larger social group or movement.

I propose the term "media resister" intentionally as it connotes informants' purposeful, considered stance and their sense that media constitute an oppressive onslaught to be held in abeyance. Resistance exists on a complicated continuum of attitudes toward and behaviors of media use, with lack of critical thinking about use and full acceptance of all technologies on one extreme and a completely critical mindset and concomitant disuse of all technologies on the other (Wyatt, Thomas, & Terranova, 2002). Very few people occupy either extreme position. Resisters, holding critical attitudes toward media, and intentionally disengaging from use, occupy locations toward the continuum's latter end.

Several scholars have helped shape the concept of active resistance to communication technologies at work here. Bauer (1995), studying resistance to nuclear power, information technology, and biotechnology, claims that resistance is "a signal that something is going wrong" (p.3) and a "refusal to comply with some demand" (p.13). Media resisters feel that something is wrong, both personally and collectively, and argue that communication technologies exacerbate our "hive mind." Also, the demand of constant connectivity has become normative and refusing to comply can constitute a defiant act—a willful inactivity (Bauer, p.19). Kline's concept of resistance is based on analysis of U.S. rural farmers' resistance to the telephone and electrification from 1900–1960. He defines resistance as a social interaction among producers, mediators and users that results in sociotechnical change (Kline, 2003, p. 52). Wyatt's (2003) analysis of Internet nonusers reminds us that not all nonusers suffer from lack of access, that some nonuse is voluntary and does not reflect inequality or disadvantage, while also critiquing the normative assumption that use is always better than nonuse. Boyd (2008) noted a small youth demographic of "conscious objectors"—young people who resist social networking, not because they do not have access or their parents have banned their participation, but because they do not support the corporate system, feel socially marginalized, or feel it is uncool. Foot (2014) identified an increase in what she calls "pushback"

---

[4] There has been press attention devoted to people unplugging from Facebook, for example (Guynn & Faughnder, 2012), as explored by Portwood-Stacer (2012). Blogs such as Unplug and Reconnect herald the benefits of simplifying one's relationship with media (http://unplugreconnect.com).

to social media in 2009–2011, arguing that this nascent movement framed its concerns around work, politics, and personal and relational issues.

Still, media studies, with its historical focus on media production, texts, and consumption, has yet to adequately account for the careful negotiation played by many to avoid or limit media engagement. Media resisters hold an unusual relationship to the "third person effect." This effect holds that many individuals, when asked if they are influenced by media, deny that they are, while willingly conceding that more vulnerable others are impacted (Davison, 1983; Perloff, 1993). In contrast, however, media resisters recognize themselves as the third person and say, yes, media influences me and not always for the good. For many, this prompts self-reflection about media practices and content, as well as intentional actions to control and limit media engagement. As active, selective makers of meaning, media resisters may ignore particular types of media content (such as news or popular culture), or they may refuse to adopt one new media technology but not others. And like most of us, they are not necessarily consistent. Some interviewees have lived for years without television or refused to get cell phones, but most withdraw for a time, get drawn back in, and then again reassert limits. For many, determination and intentionality are required to resist media technologies and content. While our culture may be "media saturated," as individuals we are not similarly saturated in any predictable uniform way—an observation akin to Bird's— that we experience media in "non-predictable and non-uniform ways" (Bird, 2003, p. 2).

Media resistance is a complicated act, marked by optimism and pessimism in equal measure. Media resistance reminds us that at its heart, communication is about social communion—a social good that resisters deeply value. However, they question media and associated technologies as the means by which social communion is best achieved, raising the long debated question of whether communication technologies cultivate or compromise social cohesion.

Description of the Research Project and Method

The preliminary findings and discussion offered here are drawn from an ongoing project on media resistance, defined broadly to include resistance to news (Woodstock, 2013), popular culture, commercialism, and communication technologies. The research aims (a) to understand the practices and perspectives of people who limit their media use, (b) to analyze the social dialogue in the popular press about media inundation and responses to it, (c) to historically contextualize contemporary media resistance, and (d) to consider how the phenomenon of media resistance informs several areas of media theory. This article emphasizes the first and fourth dimensions of the larger project. While Rauch (2011), Portwood-Stacer (2012), and Foot (2014) have conducted textual analyses, this study draws centrally on qualitative interview data.

Interviewees responded to calls for people "who are intentionally and significantly limiting media use" and thus were selected based on *their* conception of limiting media use. This approach is purposefully broad for two reasons. First, as Gitlin (2007) and Couldry (2012) have argued, media culture is highly interwoven into our daily lives. I am interested in understanding how informants experience the hybrid, converged nature of media and how this might inform why and how they limit their use. Therefore, I did not want to identify or distinguish between types of technologies or content. Second, had I constructed a

definition of media resistance and then selected interviewees based upon it, I would have missed interesting and relevant information about resistance, as conceptualized and practiced by resisters themselves. In the collective sense, this broad call and the multiple ways in which it was interpreted by informants helped me to conceptualize media resistance as a continuum of resistance in terms of degree, duration, and types of content and technology. While I am continuing to conduct interviews as part of a larger project, the research reported here has reached what Glaser and Strauss call "theoretical saturation," an exhaustive sense that all themes and conceptual categories have been identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Study participants, referred to by pseudonym, are identified through social networks and notices placed in community spaces such a grocery shops and churches. Thus far, 36 interviews have been completed. Interviews typically run about 60–90 minutes, starting either by informants describing how they typically encounter, use, and avoid media of all sorts, or by informants explaining how they "intentionally and significantly limit media use." The interview then focuses on those areas or types of resistance informants identify. I have found that these areas reflect three broad categories: news and politics, mediated interpersonal communication technologies, and popular and commercial culture (especially as delivered over commercial television). Interviews are conducted both in person and by phone.

As noted, the participants in this study are not disengaged from media due to economic disadvantage. All interviewees are employed, retired, students, or stay-at-home mothers with adequate income to afford most communication technologies and access deemed "normal" among middle class and affluent Americans. Highly educated people (all but two have college degrees or higher), they are generally media savvy and relatively comfortable with technologies. None said they avoided media due to technological incompetence or insecurity. While some did express concern about the cost of media, the savings accrued were deemed a benefit, not a primary motivator for avoidance. Participants are diverse in terms of gender, age, race, and sexual orientation. Most are working professionals who must engage with communication technologies and stay generally informed about political and social life to remain professionally vital, so their ability and desire to limit media engagement is often curtailed to nonwork hours. The collective profile of interviewees raises questions about class and media. The informants in this study have the luxury to control and limit their interactions with media.

Media Resistance Extends Practice Theory as a Vital Response to Media Inundation

Media resistance intersects neatly with practice theory, extending the theory into the realm of "not-doing" (Mullaney, 2006). Postill (2010) usefully maps the history and thought of practice theory, acknowledging that it is not a cohesive notion, but a "loosely defined" set of texts by philosophers and social and cultural theorists who all explore a practice approach to social life as a way of accounting for structure and agency.

Michel de Certeau (1988) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977) emphasized that our understanding of individuals, groups, social structures, and power is best informed by close attention to both fleeting and structured patterns of activity. Certeau studied the rote, even unconscious behaviors that we engage in

daily (The Practice of Everyday Life, 1988). Certeau's project engaged how we navigate and negotiate the social world by engaging in "tactics," ways that individuals assert themselves in relationship to the structuring forces in society. Certeau called these structuring forces "strategies." The pervasive, dominant media environment against which media resisters position themselves constitutes a *strategy*, while the resisters employ *tactics* to avoid media, but are structurally limited in their ability to do so. Still, media resisters have the social and cultural capital to limit and control media (Bourdieu, 1977; Portwood-Stacer, 2012).

Drawing on Certeau and Bourdieu, media theorists increasingly acknowledge the almost seamless integration of media into most moments of our lived experience (Bird, 2003; Gitlin, 2007; Silverstone, 1999). Roger Silverstone claims:

> The media have given us the words to speak and ideas to utter, not as some disembodied force operating against us as we go about our daily business, but as part of a reality in which we participate, in which we share, and which we sustain on a daily basis through our daily talk, our daily interactions. (1999, p. 6)

Media, as conceptualized by Silverstone, has the structuring influence of Certeau's strategies. The fact that even most self-identified media resisters are daily media users seems to endorse this. At the same time, media resisters intentionally "push back," to use Foot's (2014) expression, against the ways in which media are anchored into culture. Recognizing the deep integration of media into our lived experiences dovetails with a theoretical and methodological focus on media as practice, a research approach that:

> decentres media research from the study of media texts or production structures . . . and redirects it onto the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media. (Couldry, 2004, p. 117)

Practices, embodied sets of activities that people perform (Postill, 2010), must include media avoidance and resistance. Limiting engagement with dominant systems of communication, which are now digital and mobile, contests normative ways of constructing mediated social interaction and asks for alternatives, not to reject dominant systems outright but to sustain a rich multiplicity of forms of social interaction. Here biodiversity might serve as a metaphor for the communication environment. Just as environmental change has threatened many life forms, so too do digital and mobile media threaten slower, more deliberate, more reflective modes that media resisters maintain.

Media resisters pose questions about how communication technologies shape them and their interactions with others, questions such as, how do we communicate kindly and fairly? What are our communicative responsibilities to be present and responsive? What constitutes presence and responsive in the digital era? Many resisters argue that communication technologies, intended to make connection more fluid and mobile, also contribute to our sense of distraction and lack of focus, thereby making it more difficult to be fully with the people around us. This in turn motivates their practices of limiting, for example, mobile phone use.

Media Resistance Addresses Pro-innovation Bias in Media Research

The framework of new media use (and nonuse) is enhanced when perspectives of media resisters are incorporated; doing so can help correct the historical blind spot in media research around media resistance. By all measures, Internet use is widespread. In 2011, the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 79% of Americans use the Internet. Of those, 47% of them use at least one social networking site (Hampton et. al., 2011). Still, while media resisters exist on the far end of the use-nonuse continuum, and therefore occupy a relatively small portion of that continuum, everyone needs to manage new communication technologies and the experiences of media resisters illuminate that fact.

There is a cultural belief that it is inherently better to be a new media user than to be a nonuser, and that we should strive to eradicate the barriers that impede use, a perspective that often frames the research completed on media usage (Wyatt, 2003). Adopting new technologies has long been associated with social and environmental progress (Slack & Wise, 2005; Wyatt, 2003; Wyatt, Thomas, & Terranova, 2002). Thus, when researchers design their studies with the default assumption that disuse is a problem to be fixed, they may be limited in their ability to fully capture and analyze the phenomenon of disuse. The resistance phenomenon should correct the assumptions built into research design that most nonusers are fearful of the technology and that if only barriers were reduced, nonusers would quickly become users. The problem of the digital divide has long concerned scholars and activists (Mossberger, 2008; Norris, 2001), and as this remains a social problem, media resistance must be distinguished from lack of use due to disenfranchisement. Currently, media resistance is masked or subsumed under disenfranchisement. Statistics on nonusers capture the digital divide, but historically have had a harder time recognizing voluntary nonuse or intentional, limited use. For example, Pew's 2006 *The Ever-Shifting Internet Population* categorizes nonusers as follows: the "Truly Disconnected," the largest group of nonusers who have no direct or indirect use of the Internet, "Net Evaders," the second largest demographic, live with someone who has and uses the Internet but does not use it themselves, and "Net Dropouts," who were forced to leave the Internet because of technical issues, such as broken computers (Raine et al., 2003, p. 3). This Pew study also finds that slightly more than half of nonusers do not think they will ever use or return to the Internet, but these individuals are usually poorer, older, and more likely to be white, female, retired, and live in rural areas (Raine et al., 2003), demographic attributes not reflective of the media resisters profiled here.

Media Resistance in Practice

Nearly all interviewees in this study speak of the need to "manage" or "control" the technologies with which they engage, as Opal Marks did when speaking of her then recently acquired smartphone: "It's another thing that you need to manage, you know, to not let it overtake your life." With this recognition that media technologies require management, interviewees articulate the ways in which resist media technologies, and the many reasons why they do so. Among those considered here are the following: to assert boundaries between public and private life, to respond to the ways in which new communication technologies undermine human connection, and to focus on immediate experiences and cultivate presence. While in some cases only one quotation is provided to illustrate an argument due to space limitations, these themes were affirmed across many interviews.

Asserting Boundaries Between Public and Private Life

Castells (2004) made a broad claim when he wrote that "media . . . are the public space of our time" (p. 223), while Jenkins (2006) offered the concept of the "media manifold"—the intersecting range of media delivery systems, from which resisters feel it is difficult to break free. In response, media resisters attempt to maintain public spaces in which focused interpersonal communication is possible, while also speaking of the need for unmediated *private* space. For many interviewees, struggles around mediated interpersonal communication and the gadgets that make it possible are located on the boundaries between personal/private life and professional/public life.

Carol is an upper middle class woman in her early 30s with two preschool-aged children. She lives in an East Coast metropolitan area, works in the city, and is a senior VP at a public relations firm:

> I feel totally saturated. I feel like we are so plugged in all the time that to carve out unplugged time, you have to be aggressive. Say, "I don't have an iPhone. I don't carry my BlackBerry on the weekend, talk to me on Monday." . . . I have found that when I'm sick, I have to really say, "I'm not going to be on e-mail today, I'm that kind of sick." So, there are gradations of sick that you have to establish because of technological availability. So there is the, "I'm not feeling well, I'm taking a sick day, but go ahead and e-mail me all day" versus the sick day where I say, "I'm not available. I'll see you tomorrow." And I think that's not really very acceptable.

In such work environments, people have little chance to detach from work related stressors. Carol's concerns, like those of other interviewees, belie the further decay of delineations between work and everything else, which of course is part of a long history (Hochschild, 2001).

While resisters in general are technologically sophisticated and quite able to use new technologies with relative ease, some do also share a concern about the capacities of new technologies to track our use and to collect personal information. This was the reason Desiree Alvarez stopped using Facebook:

> Desiree: For me, it was about disengaging. Actually, it was about a number of things. One, I just became more aware that I wasn't fully in control or even fully aware of how my information was being used.
> Interviewer: What is it about the exposure or lack of privacy that worries you?
> Desiree: The most compact way to say it is I worry about what I don't know. So for example, Yahoo mail has been trying to match Google by adding social networking capabilities and so I noticed now they have these things like status updates. And it was giving me updates on someone I didn't actually know, someone I had e-mailed through Craigslist. And I was like, "Why am I getting updates about someone I don't actually know?!" And I didn't even realize that I hadn't set my privacy settings. And then I was like, "Who is getting updates about me?!" I don't actually know what is happening. And I feel like I can't know what is happening and so it makes me wary.

Asserting boundaries between work and home life or between known and unknown people relates to an even broader issue of control in resisters' lives. Many feel that undesired media messages enter into their sphere and minds. Rebecca Sawyer, a research librarian, says:

> You never know what is going to hit you. TV especially, but even searching on the web, or getting an e-mail, like, oh, it's junk, or I don't want to hear from that person. So when it is in my own space of my house, I want to control it.

For Rebecca, it is uncertainty about the types of content she will encounter or from whom the messages are coming that increases her sense of distraction and discomfort. Also, she does not know when to expect incoming messages, thereby extending her distraction to include offline time. Media resisters report that new communication technologies compromise their ability to control their environments and their thoughts. Resisters acknowledge that public spaces are shot through with advertising, and so it is in their private spheres that they attempt to restore a sense of calm and quiet.

Avoiding Technologies Thought to Compromise Communication

Media resisters have developed ideas and concerns about communication technologies that often run counter to dominant, normative assumptions that communication technologies connect people. Interviewees claim that mobile phones (integrating texting, social networking, e-mail, and calls) in particular weaken our commitments to each other. Plans can be changed on a minute-by-minute basis, and when copresent, the phone is often given preference. Interviewees report being interrupted or ignored as the person with whom they were speaking responded to the phone. This is a nearly universal experience among those with mobile phones, but whereas it may now seem natural or socially acceptable to many, media resisters find it variously rude, troublesome, or sad. Phones, deemed "anti-social" by one interviewee, allow us to avoid social interaction in public by using an app or a GPS to answer a question rather than resorting to speaking to a person. Interviewees drew connections between phones and other technologies that facilitate social avoidance, such as computerized grocery checkout stations and gas pumps, and expressed worry that we are unlearning the skills of social interaction. As one interviewee states, "I think it makes life more sterile when you don't talk to people in public." Social networking strikes many interviewees as out of step with their ideas about what it means to meaningfully communicate. Texting is seen as a staccato form that is useful for only the most basic information exchange but when used for more complex or emotional exchanges, becomes a way of not fully committing to social interaction. As one informant says:

> It is the expectation that you can change your mind at the last minute and let me know. No, that is not the way we do it. We make plans and we show up. It [the smartphone] messes with human relationships. It seems to be advertising itself as increasing relationships, increasing connection, but it makes every plan more flexible, so you can be less committed to me – not just in terms of our plans, but in some fundamental way.

In these ways, informants echo critiques about media inundation and disconnection articulated in the trade press, like those of Jaron Lanier, a Silicon Valley darling turned critic of Web 2.0. Lanier (2010)

writes, "Anonymous blog comments, vapid video pranks, and lightweight mashups may seem trivial and harmless, but as a whole, this widespread practice of fragmentary, impersonal communication has demeaned interpersonal interaction" (p. 4). Similarly, writing in *The New York Times*, novelist Jonathan Safran Foer (2013) lamented the ways mobile phones distance us from each other in public space, how we devote more attention to our phones than each other. As we are shaped by our habits and practices with technologies, norms of human interaction are also transfigured. These experiences cumulatively contribute to resisters' argument that the ethics of contemporary communication are in peril. Speaking of texting, an interviewee says the following:

> Maria: I can communicate something to her without taking any risk whatsoever. I don't break into her life, I just put it out there, and so there is no encounter. Real communication happens with an encounter.

> Interviewer: What constitutes an encounter?

> Maria: An actual telephone conversation—I find that a true interpersonal encounter. I hear their voice, I learn from the voice. Face to face and small group encounters. I actually make a point of having an encounter with the person in the checkout line. I don't use the self check-out for this reason. I find opportunities for encounters. I work at the public library and I find I have real encounters there absolutely. An encounter has to involve a physical manifestation of the person.

Maria speaks to what Couldry (2012) called "the now familiar ambiguity of the internet: as a means for individual discovery, collective contact and guaranteed mutual surveillance" (p. 5), a feeling that we can watch and be watched without fully attending to one another, without an "encounter." Moreover, media resisters find the performativity of online interaction inherently false, a construction of self that lacks authenticity.

Resisters speak of the indeterminacy of some online communication. For instance, one interviewee remarks, "Posting a status update is strange because it is like broadcast, like, whom am I communicating with?" A consequence of the "always on" characteristic of new communication technologies is that we hold multiple conversations at the same time often stretching over hours or days. A conversation that, in person, might take only a few minutes may span days online. As soon as you send a message or respond to another's initiated conversation, you await a response. The waiting itself can lead to distraction and mild or acute anxiety, depending on the nature of the conversation. Interviewees identify the conundrum of the "nonresponse"—when our communication partner simply fails to respond at all or takes a long time to do so. There may be myriad reasons for that nonresponse.

Shaquelle Rice, a 40-year-old working mother, spoke at length about her harried life. For Shaquelle, communication technologies added rather than alleviated the burden of simply having too much to do. Miscommunication via e-mail is a "pet peeve" of Shaquelle's: "I'll send off an e-mail about my son's daycare and either I won't hear back or the response will not really answer my question." In face-to-face communication it would be unusual and signal a significant communication problem to receive a

nonresponse. If you speak in a way that implies a response is expected, then to either have your communication partner walk away or simply say nothing would be a major violation of communication norms. This is transfigured in mediated interpersonal communication where "nonresponsiveness" is more frequent. People are inundated with e-mails, IMs, texts, etc. and simply fail to get back to us sometimes. But there is also the nagging question of whether the nonresponse communicates something more than forgetfulness. Is the nonresponse accidental or purposeful? And if purposeful, what are we to assume it means? In these instances, mediated interpersonal communication becomes more tenuous and less certain as to its meaning. Resisters who articulated these complexities of "the nonresponse problem" suggested yet another reason to minimize mediated interpersonal communication.

Interviewees over 40 years of age reflected on the introduction of what are now considered old technologies, like the telephone answering machine, and suggested that as frequently as communication technologies are means of connection, they can also be a means of distancing. Interviewees spoke of their realization that they intentionally made calls to leave messages rather than actually converse. The answering machine raised questions, still pertinent today, of communication ethics. What are our communicative responsibilities to be present and responsive, rather than default to the most expeditious or attenuated means of interaction? Ling (2008) argues that new communication devices extend our ritual interactions and therefore enhance social interaction, but for interviewees, that social interaction is "a pretty poor substitute" as one informant put it. These concerns that new communication technologies interfere with human interaction as much as facilitate it, dovetail with media resisters' beliefs and experiences that limiting media exposure leads to a host of positive benefits.

Cultivating Immediate Experiences and the Sense of Real Presence

Interruptions, a sense of inundation, and lack of control of digital communication all compromise our ability to focus in myriad contexts and conditions (Carr, 2011). With minds trained toward interconnectivity, interviewees report engaging in a second order processing of immediate experience. For example, one may see a beautiful sunset and instead of simply observe it, we simultaneously formulate a Facebook status update, Tweet, or distribute a photograph via our phone. For many, this compromises a sense of singular committed engagement in the present. An avid blogger, Opal Marks, recognizes this when she says:

> So, sometimes you know when you get into that whole social media thing, you start to look at your life from the outside. So instead of being like, "Oh, this is really cool," you think, "Oh, this is really cool, this would be a great Facebook post and I'll just take a picture of it and upload it." You know, like, "Look at this great sandwich I am about to eat." But you can't eat it immediately and enjoy it. You have to stop and record it and write about it and then it's cold. You can't wait for 15 minutes till after you eat it to write about it, you have to do it before.

In Marks's sandwich metaphor, immediate experience becomes that cold sandwich, much less appetizing than when consumed without interruption.

Many resisters recognize that multitasking makes them harried. When they fail to devote concentrated time and energy to a single undertaking, whether it be working or enjoying family time, they feel torn between conflicting agendas. And yet despite this realization, people find it challenging to resist the technological lure. Resisters use the word "addict" or "addiction" multiple times when discussing e-mail use and computer use in general. Many also express their relationship to media use in terms of healthy and unhealthy eating, overconsumption, and dieting. Information overload occurs "when the amount of information available exceeds a person's ability to process it" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 190). With mobile smartphones, this information is accessible all the time, whenever we need it, while also giving us the capacity to create content and add to the ever growing amount of information (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Stald, 2008).

Commonly, interviewees express a desire to multitask less, as working mother Janice Thompson does:

> I used to pride myself on being a multitasker, and I am actually trying hard to be less so, and to just be very present in whatever I am doing in that moment. I am better and happier and more well when I am just doing what I am doing, whether it's, like, building with blocks or cooking dinner or doing my job.

Media resisters tend to be aware of the allocation of their resources, particularly the resources of time and attention. They share the sense that overallocation of time to technologies leaves them discombobulated or unbalanced. Janice Thompson claims that people tell her she is the most networked person they know. Extremely extraverted and gregarious, one would think that Janice would embrace online social networking rather than resist it, yet she says:

> The thing I strive for most in this life is balance, and already computers have a stranglehold on my time and my life, and I know myself – if I was on Facebook, I would get sucked in. Part of it is that it's also a tether to work. And another part of it is, like, I sometimes struggle with sleep and I really do believe that staring at that flickering screen is part of it. Whole evenings get sucked away with my husband on his iPod and me on the computer, and we won't interact with each other. And it just feels like things are out of order in that sense, too.

Here, Janice synthesizes a number of themes already discussed: boundaries between work and home life, multitasking, desire to connect with copresent others, time allocation, all with an eye toward cultivating balance in her daily life. Based on these statements, I asked Janice to elaborate on her methods for limiting media use. While she focused on television, her statement is interesting not because of the technological focus, but because of the positive intentionality conveyed: "So, it's not like the negatives of TV that make me choose not to have it, it's more just the positives of all the other things I want to spend time doing." Media resisters claim there are significant benefits to decreasing the role of media in their lives, including greater calm and focus, and it is something they wish for others. A grandmother said of her daughter and grandchild:

She uses the smart phone while she is nursing the baby. It really bothers me. I don't say it, but I think, "Could you please just be present with the baby? Just relax into it. Just be there for this baby."

Conclusion

To conclude, I return to the June 2011 Pew report that found that users of social networking sites are "more trusting, have more close friends, are more politically engaged, and get more support from their friends" (Hampton et al., 2011). Pew presented this finding as concrete evidence that, in fact, Facebook users *do* enjoy greater emotional support. An alternative interpretation of Pew's findings is that concepts of friendship and connection are altering—especially among Facebook users. "Emotional support" may have come to mean "liking" another's "status." Media resisters hold new communication technologies and their users responsible for weakening conceptions of communication and connection.

While this project considers why and how people are avoiding media, Turkle's *Alone Together* (2011) investigates the impacts of deep involvement with new communication technologies, yet the conclusions closely resonate. Turkle argued that our sense of self is increasingly fragile as we spend less time fully alone, unable to self-reflect, and come to depend on constant feedback to bolster our identity, while at the same time our social relationships are also fragile, nurtured by brief, attenuated, mediated interaction. This analysis is repeatedly affirmed by interviewees and motivates their decisions to avoid new communication technologies. Moreover, they report feeling a greater sense of wellbeing when media use is limited.

Due to busyness and changing norms around appropriate mediated means of contact (in which we use the phone less, texting and messaging more), we select the easiest, quickest ways to communicate with each other (Turkle, 2011)—a default communication behavior that media resisters critique. As we increasingly speak in attenuated ways, we either expect to say less important things to each other or we say important things in abbreviated—and, resisters argue, diminished—fashion. Arguably, as we avoid our emotions through mediated interpersonal communication, depersonalization of communication results and contributes to a degraded sense of emotional support. Granted, one could counter that if emotional support is perceived, then its benefits are likely to follow. Still, it is precisely a concern with changing norms of human interaction and of wanting deep and abiding interpersonal connections that motivates some media resisters.

On the whole, media resisters deeply value their friendships and care about their social and political worlds. Media resisters often embrace communication's connotations of deep connection, the very stuff that nurtures relationships and communities, but argue that either the online "information age" often takes communication back to its more unidirectional, simplistic meaning—the transmission of information (See Schramm, 1964)—or that online interaction is often compromised by misunderstanding or superficiality. The attenuated text message or the headlines of an online news source, while informative, do not generally accomplish the individual and social goods of generating harmony, a sense of wellbeing, or belonging. Some are weary of the oft-repeated hyperbolic claims that the Internet-powered communications revolution would "increase understanding, foster tolerance, and ultimately promote

worldwide peace," as Frances Cairncross predicted in the 1997 best-selling book, *The Death of Distance* (Morozov, 2010)*.*

Silverstone (1999) writes that "at the heart of the social discourses . . . is a process and practice of classification: the making of distinctions and judgments" (p. 12). This essay engages in the classification process of the practice of intentionally and significantly limiting media use by considering how resisters themselves classify their practices of and reasons for resistance and how media resistance adds to the conceptualization of practice theory and research on media use. The essay answers Couldry's (2012) call to "map the domain" of media practices by arguing that practices of resistance, such as refusing to answer e-mail at home or dispensing with one's mobile phone, are in fact media practices, a point Couldry notes when referring to such practices as "screening out" (pp. 44, 55).

The central contention here is that media resisters' practices are predicated on a considered critique of media and communication in early 21st century America that centers on how communication technologies are transfiguring human interaction in troublesome, paradoxical ways. They argue that technologies ostensibly designed to facilitate mobile, immediate, global connection often generate individual and social problems of distraction and miscommunication. When resisters take concrete steps to diminish the impact of media on their lives, they both acknowledge and challenge the reality that media are integrated into almost all the moments of our lives. Individualized, idiosyncratic practices of resistance are in fact social responses to living in a media-saturated world that work, through their opposition, to force consideration of normative media practices.

References

Bauer, M. (1995). Resistance to new technology and its effects on nuclear power, information technology, and biotechnology. In M. Bauer (Ed.), *Resistance to new technology: Nuclear power, information technology, and biotechnology* (pp. 1–41). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bird, S. E. (2003). *The audience in everyday life: Living in a media world.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

boyd, d. (2008). Why youth <3 social networking sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 119–142)*.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Burkeman, O. (2013, May 10). Conscious computing: How to take control of your life online*. The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/may/10/conscious-computing-twitter-facebook-google

Carr, N. (2011). *The shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Castells, M. (2004). Why networks matter. In H. McCarthy, P. Miller, & P. Skidmore (Eds.), *Network logic: Who governs in an interconnected world?* (pp. 221–224). London, UK: Demos.

Certeau, M. D. (1988). *The practice of everyday life.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Couldry, N. (2004). Theorising media as practice. *Social Semiotics, 14*(2), 115–132.

Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Davison, W. P. (1983). The third person effect in communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 47*(1), 1–15.

Foer, J. S. (2013, June 8). How not to be alone. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/opinion/sunday/how-not-to-be-alone.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&

Foot, K. (2014). The online emergence of pushback on social media in the United States: A historical discourse analysis. *International Journal of Communication, 8*, 1313–13-42.

Frank, T. (1977). *The conquest of cool: Business culture, counterculture, and the rise of hip consumerism.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Garner, D. (2013, August 18). Resisting the siren call of the screen*. The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/19/books/3-books-offer-ways-to-cut-the-cord-if-only-briefly.html

Gitlin, T. (2007). *Media unlimited: How the torrent of images and sounds overwhelms our lives.* New York, NY: Holt.

Guynn, J., & Faughnder, R. (2012, May 30). Some teens are not liking Facebook as much as older adults. *Los Angeles Times.* Retrieved from http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-facebook-teens-20120531,0,5676320.story

Hampton, K., Sessions Goulet, L., Rainie, L. K., & Purcel, K. (2011). Social networking sites and our lives: Summary of findings. Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks/Summary.aspx

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Hochschild, A. R. (2001). *The time bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work.* New York, NY: Holt.

Horn, L. (2013, September 20). Louis C.K.'s daughters can't have smartphones because of sadness*.* Retrieved from http://gizmodo.com/louis-c-k-s-daughters-cant-have-cell-phones-because-o-1355168031

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture.* New York, NY: New York University Press.

Kang, C. (2012, September 21). Firms tell employees: Avoid after-hours e-mail. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/after-hours-e-mail-companies-are-telling-employees-to-avoid-it/2012/09/21/a95f53b2-fdba-11e1-a31e-804fccb658f9_story.html

Kline, R. (2003). Resisting consumer technology in rural America: The telephone and electrification. In N. Oudshoorn, & T. Pinch (Eds.), *How users matter: The co-construction of users and technology* (pp. 51–66)*.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Knowledge@Wharton. (2012, February 16). Why companies should force employees to unplug. Retrieved from http://business.time.com/2012/02/16/should-companies-force-employees-to-unplug/

Lanier, J. (2010). *You are not a gadget.* New York, NY: Vintage.

Ling, R. (2008). *New tech, new ties: How mobile communication is reshaping social cohesion.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mohn, T. (2012, December 31). Silencing the smartphone*. The New York Times* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/01/business/some-companies-seek-to-wean-employees-from-their-smartphones.html?_r=1&

Morozov, E. (2010, May/June). Think again: The Internet. *Foreign Policy.* Retrieved from http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/26/think_again_the_internet

Mossberger, K. (2008). Toward digital citizenship: Addressing inequality in the information age. In A. Chadwick, & P. N. Howard (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of Internet politics* (pp. 173–185). New York, NY: Routledge.

Mullaney, J. L. (2006). *Everyone is not doing it: Abstinence and personal identity.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Paul, P. (2011, March 18). Don't call me, I won't call you. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/fashion/20Cultural.html?pagewanted=all

Perloff, R. M. (1993). Third-person effect research 1983–1992: A review and synthesis. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 5*(2), 167–184.

Portwood-Stacer, L. (2012). Media refusal and conspicuous nonconsumption: The performative and political dimensions of Facebook abstention. *New Media & Society, 0*(0), 1–17.

Postill, J. (2010). Introduction: Theorising media and practice. In B. Brachler, & J. Postill (Eds.), *Theorising media and practice* (pp. 1–34). Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books.

Raine, L., Madden, M., Boyce, A., Lenhart, A., Horrigan, J., & Allen, K. (2003). The ever-shifting Internet population: A new look at Internet access and the digitial divide. Pew Research Internet Project Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2003/04/16/the-ever-shifting-internet-population-a-new-look-at-internet-access-and-the-digital-divide

Rainie, L. K. (2011, June 16). *Social networking sites and our lives: Summary of findings.* Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/06/16/social-networking-sites-and-our-lives

Rainie, L., Smith, A., & Duggan, M. (2013). Coming and going on Facebook. Retrieved from http://pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2013/PIP_Coming_and_going_on_facebook.pdf

Rauch, J. (2011). The origin of slow media: Early diffusion of a cultural innovation through popular and press discourse, 2002–2010. *Transformations* (20). Retrieved from http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_20/article_01.shtml

Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusions of innovations* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.

Schmidt, E. (2012, May 20). Boston University 139th Commencement Address: Eric Schmidt. Retrieved from http://www.bu.edu/news/2012/05/20/boston-university-139th-commencement-address-eric-schmidt

Schramm, W. (1964). *Mass media and national development: The role of information in the developing countries*. Palo Alto, CA: Sanford University Press.

Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why study the media?* London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Slack, J. D., & Wise, J. M. (2005). *Culture and technology*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Stald, G. (2008). Mobile identity: Youth, identity, and mobile communication media. In D. Buckingham, *Youth identity and digital media* (pp. 143–164)*.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *The basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Woodstock, L. (2013). The news-democracy narrative and the unexpected benefits of limited news consumption: the case of news resisters. *Journalism.* Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/1464884913504260.

Wu, T. (2010). *The master switch: The rise and fall of information empires.* New York, NY: Knopf.

Wyatt, S. (2003). Non-users also matter: The construction of users and non-users of the Internet. In N. Oudshoorn, & T. Pinch (Eds.), *How users matter: The co-construction of users and technology.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wyatt, S., Thomas, G., & Terranova, T. (2002). They came, they surfed, they went back to the beach: Conceptualizing use and non-use of the Internet. In S. Woolgar (Ed.), *Virtual society?: Technology, cyberbole, reality* (pp. 23–40). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Zittrain, J. (2008). *The future of the Internet and how to stop it.* New Haven, CT: Yale.