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Unit 8 Essay

In his book Hamlet's BlackBerry William Powers discusses something that many of us struggle with; finding a balance between using screens (computers, cell phones, T.V.) productively rather than obsessively. Many people depend on their screens to keep them updated, informed and connected to others. Many learning societies depend on screens to keep the learning society together and learning. Our class for instance could not exist without screens. The problem that Powers presents is that we are too updated, informed and connected and that our need to use our screens to keep us updated, informed and connected interferes with our personal happiness and our relationships with others.

Powers points out seven strategies that he believes can help people balance their screen time so that it is helpful and productive, but not overboard to the point of interfering with personal happiness or relationships. Powers offers ideas on how to help manage the balance of using screens together information and learn, without becoming screen dependent-as many of us have become. Many learning societies depend on screens to help connect the members so Powers strategies should be looked at as resources to members of some learning societies to help find balance.

Of the seven strategies Powers offers I think the one that is the most desirable for the learning society is Old Tools Ease Overload. The reason I believe that this is desirable is because Powers suggest using old tools even if there are new ones out there to use. Powers points out that just because a tool is new does not mean it is better. Powers writes, "Don't assume that the newest tools are the best choice for a given task" (p.216). For example, I think there is great value in having a verbal conversation with someone rather than a digital conversation. In a verbal conversation you can interject and ask questions quicker and get a response. In a digital conversation you may pose a question but might not get an answer. I also think that using old tools such as the library or a book to answer a question has a lot of value in it rather than just jumping on the internet to find the answer. At the library you may run into someone interested in the same thing and spark up a conversation leading to more learning as well as making a connection with another human. Old tools can help members of a learning society connect in a more real way. A large learning society in my life is the Masters program through MSU. This program is entirely online and I have never met a professor or another student that I have shared classes with. I have learned a lot from it and value all I have gained, but I find I do miss seeing and connecting with other students and at times I desperately have wished that I could meet my professors and engage in a verbal conversation with them. Talking on the phone or better yet, in person would make me feel more connected to both other humans and the program. I would like to use some old tools to enhance the program and my learning.

Of the seven strategies Powers offers I think the one that is the least desirable to the learning society is Distance. I find that so much of my learning and information I gather comes from the internet or interactions I have with others on the internet. I think that a lot of learning would be lost if distance was placed between the learner (in this case me) and screens. Of course, I know that Powers was not

suggesting distance all together, but rather in small chunks such as cutting out screens on the weekends or for the day. Little amounts of distance would not be bad, but I think that a learning society would suffer if there were concrete times of distance where the members could connect or interact. If I cut out screens on the weekend I would not be able to complete my masters program or connect with some other learning societies I am involved in. This is simply because during the week I have very little time that I can connect online because of my work and family obligations. I depend on my weekend screen time to complete many tasks I cannot get to during the week. I think that a better resource instead would be the Positive Rituals strategy that Powers suggest. In this suggestion Powers writes, "Another approach is to keep certain hours of the day screen-free: (p.217). This would be much more manageable for me and my life and my involvement in learning societies than totally shutting out screens for a day or more. Essentially I think I already exercise this strategy, but probably could do a better job at it.

Of the seven strategies Powers offers I believe the one that is most attainable for the learning society is Inner Space. Inner Space refers to devoting one's attention to only one thing at a time-or giving all of yourself to something rather than splitting it up between five different things at the same time. Powers offers this strategy with the idea of focusing on one person or thing at a time minus technology, but does say that it can be done while using screens. Powers writes,"..limit yourself to one screen activity at a time.."(p.214). For example, when I am working on this class I should only devote my attention to this class. I should not have my Facebook, work email, personal email or the People website open. By doing this I feel like I could get a lot more from this learning society. You are more likely to learn more and absorb more information when one thing has all of your attention. I believe that we all are capable of focusing on one thing at a time; we just need to retrain ourselves to slow down and do it! I live a busy life that includes a full time job, a family and a master's degree. I often am trying to juggle all three. I need to slow down and devote certain times to only one part of my life. For example, on the weekends while my son is napping I will focus on my masters classes, while I am at work I will only use screens for work related business no screen time for entertainment on my lunch break instead I will try to connect with another teacher and in the evenings I will devote time after my son goes to bed to only my husband-no TV, no computer. By training myself to slow down and give all my attention to one thing many things in my life will get more of me and in turn I will get more from them. Often at night time I am trying to focus on my husband, reading for a class, and getting ready for the following day. I need to do all these things, but I need to find a way to do them all separately, not all at the same time.

I stated earlier that I believed that the most desirable strategy for the learning society is Old Tools Ease Overload. This is also the strategy that I think is the least attainable as a resource for the learning society. The main reason I think this is because we all have crazy busy lives. I have a hard time finding time to have a phone conversation with my mom who lives five miles away. It would be really hard to have a phone conversation with a member of this class who has their own busy life, lives half way around the world and is in a different time zone (trust me I have tried it for other MSU classes and it has never worked!). The same holds true when I need to find something out. I love the library, I wish I could spend hours in the library but the library is twenty miles from my house and is only open certain hours. My computer is on my desk (both at home and at school) and the internet has no hours. I can

respond to a classmates post at 3 am and hear back from them the next afternoon when it fits into their busy schedule. When I am writing lesson plans at home I can use the internet for ideas because at school often other teachers are busy and don't have time to discuss what they have done in the past. The computer is always there making it the easy and convenient tool to rely on and in my crazy busy life I am always looking for a way to make it a little less crazy and busy, the computer can do that for me.

The strategies that Powers proposed are all great ideas for people to try. Some of Powers strategies may work for me while others won't and the ones that don't work for me may work for someone else. The point is to try and balance screen time with life so that we can get the most out of both our screen interactions, interactions with others and interactions with ourselves. When we optimize all of these interactions we will gain the most out of our lives and our learning societies.