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Appreciating the Simple Moments More Than Onslaught of Technology

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Appreciating the Simple Moments More Than Onslaught of Technology

By Leandra Preston-Sidler
UCF Forum columnist
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I admit it. I'm addicted.

Social media, my phone, television, all things Internet — I would not want to live without them.

I turn 40 next month and I've had the luxury of: growing up *without* the Internet, reading physical books in the library that I found using a card catalog, remembering the first time I saw a man in the mall using a (giant) cell phone — and was fascinated — and could never conceive how the video chat I first witnessed on *The Jetsons* was possible.

I loved *The Jetsons*, by the way, and still think about the show when I see technology that never seemed imaginable. I now view my love for *The Jetsons* as a love for the possibilities their world represented, and I am still waiting for that machine that cooked food made to order, though today's microwave comes pretty close.

I am also equally into nature and the simple things in life such as sitting on the back porch looking at the sky and feeling the wind, walking on the beach, listening to music — and now, staring at my baby girl while she sleeps.

Looking at my daughter prompted me to write this column, as I realized one day when she was nursing that my reading the news on the phone was distracting her. She stopped eating and stared at my phone. I put it down and focused on her, but a minute or two later I found myself on my phone checking my Facebook.

She stopped eating and looked toward my phone again. “It’s the light,” I thought, and put it down. I had to actively focus on not picking it up again and recognized that I have an undeniable compulsion to look at my phone, to check my email, and perhaps most impulsively, to check my Facebook, even when I am doing something else that requires my mental focus, like writing.

But my baby changes every day and she requires my focus more than anything. So why would I spend these precious moments looking at my phone?

I like to think I’m a master multitasker but it has been proven that we actually do every individual thing worse when we multitask, even when we think we do better or “as good.” For example, when I transitioned from breastfeeding to using a bottle, I soon realized I wasn’t paying attention to her as much because the ease of using a bottle allowed more access to reading on my phone. I feel guilty admitting this, but acknowledging one’s problem is an important part of recovery, right? And I want to recover.

Sitting outside one night after she went to bed, just me and the stars, I had a chance to think. I had unintentionally left my phone upstairs and, too lazy to retrieve it on a night too beautiful to resist, I thought about things. I should vow not to look at my phone or watch television while I feed her, and make that our time — these beautiful private moments that are so fleeting, I will regret not giving them my full attention one day. I know I will.

I think about it in the middle of the night when she wakes up and I feed her in the dim light and silence, because I don’t want to create distraction or stimulation. I just watch her, so sweet and innocent, relatively unaffected by the media that will pollute her life every second of her existence before she knows it. Images that tell her how to look, television shows that hold her attention more than I will, the Internet I will ground her from using one day, and the cell phone that I will pry out of her little hands during dinner.

I know it is coming. I know this is her world and I am introducing her to it far too young. She already loves television though I strictly limit it and try to be conscientious of what she watches. I researched the impact of television on infant minds, but as a busy working mom with a husband who works just as much, you do what you've got to do.

Even if she doesn't get her *Yo Gabba Gabba* television time, she pays far too much attention when I am watching television. She is also captivated by the computer. Whether it's the light or color or a window into her future life, it simultaneously worries and amuses me. "Look at her look at the screen! She is so smart!"

As someone who researches digital media and identity, I overthink this, but recognize it warrants my thinking. How is her brain development affected by her exposure to media so young? Is it impairing or preparing her for a life immersed in it? Is her brain wired differently from the start because of some evolutionary advancement (or devolvement) based on our mediated culture? And do I need to seek help for my own preoccupation with media or am I just a savvy product of my own cultural moment?

Media is a crucial part of my life beyond the entertainment realm.

I don't just teach, I teach online. I am not just writing a dissertation, I am doing so in a program devoted to the convergence of texts and technologies where my research focuses on social media. So I am seriously immersed in digital media.

But my daughter doesn't have to be.

Not yet anyway — not if I can help it.

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