

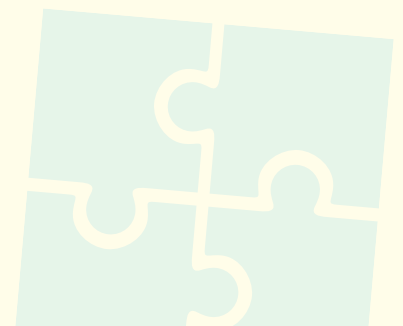
Chapter 15

Exploring Cyber Psychology



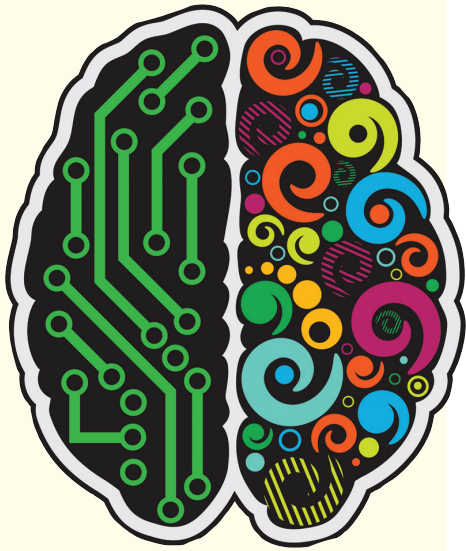
Overview

How do humans interact with technology? What effects do those interactions have on humans? The emerging field of cyber psychology explores these questions. In this chapter, you will examine overuse of technology, which has many adverse effects on humans, and investigate the more subtle ways in which the future is being shaped by technology. Included is a discussion of the benefits of unplugging, or disconnecting, from technology, as well as techniques to help you in your quest to find a good balance between plugged and unplugged time.



Key Terms

- Cyber psychology
- Internet addiction
- Technology dependence
- Unplugging



▲ **Cyber psychology is the study of how the human brain interacts with technology.**

Cyber Psychology

Cyber psychology, one of the newest terms coined to describe the increasing importance of digital tools in our lives, is the study of how humans interact with technology and the effects on humans of those interactions. With the invention of the Internet, the field of cyber psychology has grown rapidly. **Cyber psychology attempts to answer questions such as those listed below:**

- How is **mental health** influenced by technology?
- How does technology influence **self-image and identity**?
- In what ways does technology shape behavior, language, **thought processes**, problem-solving skills, and perceptions?

Fundamental issues of cyber psychology include many facets of human experience, from how we behave online to the words we use when communicating with others in cyberspace. **Common topics studied by researchers in the field of cyber psychology include those listed below:**

- Online identity
- Relationships
- Internet use
- Behavior
- Critical thinking



Our dependence on the Internet for knowledge is changing how we think.



Overuse of Technology

One topic examined by cyber psychology researchers is our overuse of technology. How many hours a day do you spend interacting with technology? Technology is now a part of our daily lives. Many of us spend a great deal of time playing video games, watching television, and surfing the Web. But is all this screen time good for us? What do experts have to say about our use of technology? Many have warned that we spend too much time interacting with technology. **Some psychologists argue that excessive use of technology can lead to the issues discussed below:**

- **Internet Addiction**

Spending hours connected to the Internet each day can lead to **Internet addiction**, resulting in depression, isolation, shifts in mood, and lack of social skills.

- **Health Concerns**

As more and more people spend more of their time connected to technology, they spend less time exercising, being outdoors, and participating in activities, such as taking walks or riding bikes. Experts argue that too much technology use can lead not only to mental health concerns such as addiction, but also to physical health concerns, such as obesity, eyestrain, and sleep and eating disorders.

- **Technology Dependence**

As Internet use soars, many people depend on the Web to solve all their problems for them, a condition known as **technology dependence**. Not sure what the weather will be like today? Instead of looking out the window, people check weather websites. Not sure what topic to choose for your next school paper? Instead of thinking about topics they are interested in, students use online search engines to pull up possibilities. Need the answer to a math problem? Instead of calculating the answer themselves, people go to a website devoted to answering questions and ask. Our dependence on the Internet for knowledge is shifting how we think, how we problem-solve, and how we respond to questions.

Fact!



Did You Know?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under age two not be exposed to television or other entertainment media. The AAP also recommends that older children and teenagers spend no more than two hours per day watching television, playing video games, surfing the Web, and/or engaging with other entertainment media.

Source: *The American Academy of Pediatrics*

Fact!



Did You Know?

A 2014 study found that 25% of people who owned cell phones and who were married or were in a committed relationship felt that their spouse or partner sometimes was distracted by his or her phone when they were together.

Source: *Pew Research Internet Project*

The Future of Human Interactions

Another topic examined by cyber psychology researchers is how our constant access to the Internet, including social networking sites such as Facebook, is changing the landscape of human interactions, our culture, and the world.

While the consequences of overusing technology seem understandable, there are also more subtle ways in which the future is being shaped by technology:

1 Communication

Can you imagine a time in which communicating with a friend in another state meant writing a letter and sending it through the U.S. mail? While we still can write and send letters today, most people rely on technology as their primary communication tool. Additionally, digital communication is changing the structure of our language. From abbreviated words in text messages to fragmented sentences in social networking posts, technology is shaping the way we speak, write, and communicate.

2 Social Interaction

Some people argue that the digital age has dramatically altered social interactions. Rather than being more connected to people, researchers are concerned that we are actually more disconnected, because we have far fewer face-to-face encounters.

3 Relationships

Rather than spending time chatting with a friend in person, we may use a brief text to deliver a message. However, the lack of face-to-face communication is redefining what a personal relationship looks like.

Some people argue that the digital age has dramatically altered social interactions. ►





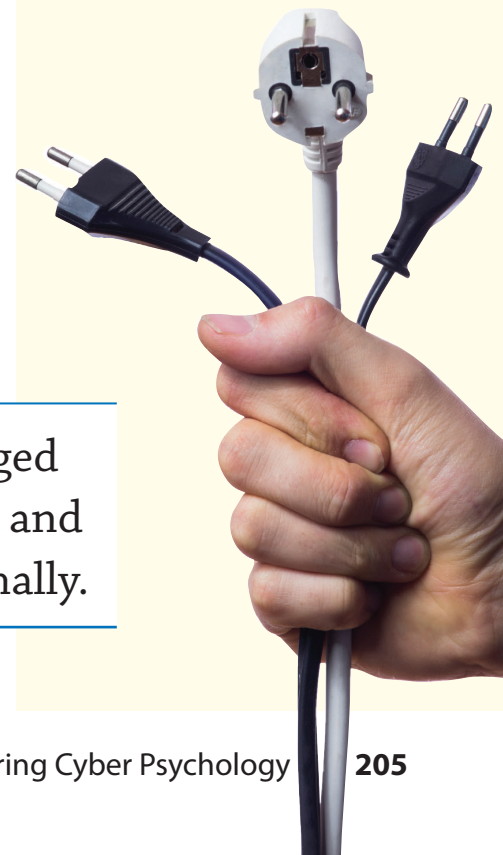
The Benefits of Unplugging

What does it mean to become unplugged from technology? **Unplugging** means disconnecting from technology, or taking a break from all things digital (mobile devices, television, media players, video games, and any other technology-based tools you commonly use). Cyber psychology researchers agree that people need plenty of unplugged time in order for their brains and their bodies to function normally.

Some of the many mental, emotional, and physical benefits of unplugging are listed below:

- **Strengthen meaningful relationships.**
When you spend less time with technology, you spend more face-to-face time with friends and family. By talking instead of texting, you strengthen your family bonds and friendships. A happy face emoticon is no substitute for a real smile.
- **Be more productive.**
Some experts say that we try too hard to multitask, believing that it is the best way to be efficient. Most people use technology to multitask. However, when people are idle and not using technology is when they have their best and most creative ideas.
- **Feel happier.**
Several studies have shown that people often feel unhappy after using social media. This is because one of social media's unintended effects is that it's become yet another way for people to compare themselves unfavorably to others. They see what other people are doing, and they feel that their lives don't measure up. When people minimize their time on social media, they feel less jealous and lonely and have fewer fears that they are missing out on good times. In short, they are happier.

We need plenty of unplugged time in order for our brains and our bodies to function normally.





Look up and engage with the people around you. That, after all, is what life is really about.

The National Day of Unplugging happens every year on the first Friday in March. Find out more at:

nationaldayofunplugging.com

How to Unplug

Perhaps you want to disconnect from technology on occasion, but you are not sure how to begin. **The tips below will help you on your journey to reaching a healthy balance between plugged and unplugged time:**

1 Schedule time away from technology.

Rather than saying you will cut back on computer use, try scheduling designated times throughout the week in which you plan on not using technology.

2 Pay attention to your behavior.

Make changes if needed. For example, if you realize you spend five hours on the computer after school every day, and you're not happy with that behavior, what can you do differently to change it?

3 Find other, more fulfilling ways to occupy your time.

Besides using technology, what other activities do you enjoy? Perhaps you're interested in joining a sports team or volunteering in your community. Try reading, writing, creating art, or playing an instrument. Hang out with your friends and the kids in your neighborhood—and find something else to do besides playing video games. You won't regret it.

4 Don't take technology with you.

Try leaving technology at home when you go for a bike ride, visit a friend's house, or go on vacation. If you don't have the technology with you, you won't be tempted to use it.

5 Vow to unplug when you are with others.

Don't check your mobile device at the dinner table. Don't text while you're having a face-to-face conversation with a friend. Instead of spending all your time looking down at a screen, look up and engage with the people around you. That, after all, is what life is really about.

Chapter 15 Assessment



What Do You Think?

Write a two-paragraph reflection on what you believe are the positive and negative impacts of technology use. Your paragraphs should answer the following questions:

- 1 What are positive and negative aspects of technology use?
- 2 In what ways do you use technology? Do you think that you overuse technology? Why or why not?
- 3 How does spending time on social media platforms make you feel? Why?
- 4 Have you ever deliberately unplugged from technology for a set period of time? If so, what happened? How did you feel about your break from technology?
- 5 If you haven't tried unplugging, what do you think would happen if you did? How do you think you would feel?

Challenge: What Would You Do?

In this chapter, you learned about cyber psychology and how technology has affected human interactions. Now, apply what you have learned. Read the scenarios below and write one paragraph for each, explaining what you would do if faced with a similar situation. Use what you have learned in this chapter to justify your reasoning.

1 Amare notices that when he plays video games with his friend Hannah, she never wants to stop. Usually, after an hour or so, he will want to do something else, and he'll go home. When he texts Hannah hours later, he usually finds that she is still playing. Amare is worried that Hannah is addicted to video games.

If you were Amare, what would you do?

2 Audrey likes to stay up late watching television and surfing the Web. She has trouble getting up for school in the morning, and she often falls asleep in class. Lately, she has noticed that she also feels depressed and irritable. Audrey wants to get enough rest and feel happier, but she really likes her late-night technology binges.

If you were Audrey, what would you do?



Extension Activities

Activity 1 Multiple Choice

Read the questions below. Use what you have learned in this chapter to help you choose the correct answer.

- 1 What is cyber psychology?
 - A. The study of behavior in school and work
 - B. The combination of all psychology fields
 - C. The study of how humans interact with technology and the effects on humans of those interactions
- 2 What does cyber psychology examine?
 - A. Online identity, Internet use, and behavior
 - B. Opinions, facts, and assumptions
 - C. Study habits and school performance
- 3 Which is a benefit of unplugging from technology?
 - A. It creates and strengthens meaningful relationships.
 - B. It creates more time to check emails and communicate with friends online.
 - C. It makes you less productive.
- 4 What aspects of life is technology changing?
 - A. Relationships, grades, and after-school activities
 - B. Communications, social interactions, and relationships
 - C. Social interactions, communications, and grades
- 5 What is dependence on technology?
 - A. Not using the Internet to answer questions
 - B. Using the Internet to play games
 - C. Relying on technology to solve our problems



Activity 2 Key Terms

For each term, write a definition in your own words.

Cyber psychology	Internet addiction	Unplugging
Technology dependence		

Activity 3 Editorial Column

Imagine you are writing an editorial column that will run in next week's online edition of your school's newspaper. Everyone in school reads the news online, so your audience will be teachers, principals, students, and parents. It's important to think carefully about what you write and how you convey your ideas, because your audience has diverse opinions on technology use.

Present and defend your position on technology use in approximately one typed, double-spaced page. Address questions such as the following in your editorial column:

- Is it important to be unplugged? Why or why not?
- How are we influenced by technology use?
- In what ways will technology impact our lives in the future?
- Are these changes positive or negative? Why?

For examples of editorial columns, review the following websites:

- NYTimes.com (*The New York Times*)
- WashingtonPost.com (*The Washington Post*)
- Online.wsj.com (*The Wall Street Journal*)



Hands-On

Unplugged Challenge

Are you up for a challenge? Unplug yourself for one day from all things digital, and see what happens. Unplugging means disconnecting yourself from video games, computers, cell phones, televisions, tablets, media players, and any other technology-based tools. No cheating!

Record your experiences throughout the day in a notebook with pen or pencil. Then, write a one-page reflection on what your unplugged experience was like by answering the questions below. Write at least three paragraphs, and make sure to note how you feel during your unplugged experience.

- 1 How long did you go unplugged?
- 2 How much free time did you find you had when you weren't spending it interacting with technology?
- 3 What devices did you unplug from?
- 4 How did you spend your time while disconnected?
- 5 What was it like being disconnected? Did you enjoy it? Hate it? Did you feel free?
- 6 Did you spend more time with family and friends while you were unplugged?
- 7 What have you learned about your interactions with technology?