

CUNY Ethics and Morality Essay Contest
Fall 2017 Essay Topic: Temperance

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Temperance: A Remedy to a Society of Work and Technology

It has been four years now since I last saw my mother's face. This year marks the fourth year that I left my mother in Africa to embark upon the journey called college. I am twenty-two years now, and my mother and I have long established a healthy relationship that I will forever cherish. Reflecting back to my teen years, I am heartsick to say this wasn't always the case. I am ashamed to admit that there was a time where I neglected the value of our relationship - a time where with the world's best optical lenses, I would still be blind to the pivotal roles and ripple effects that my mother had in my life. Sure we would always spend time together back home, however, I was never fully present, for although my body was physically there, I had mentally checked out of the mother and son hotel inn that she desperately tried to check us into.

As most teens would do, I would divert all my attention span to my phone, not realizing that with all the great things technology had done, technology and its alluring bright screens was now a device serving as a blockage between my mother and I. To make matters worse, as I arrived to the U.S, we would barely talk. I would blame the hectic work schedule that every American had to part take in, and a society of always being on

the run and never slowing down. It didn't take long but to realize that my constant focus and subtle addiction to my handheld device and restless work lifestyle was drastically affecting other relationships around me; and I quickly realized that the two key factors that deterred me from being fully grateful and nurturing to the relationship my mother and I had, also plagued others as well.

Work is part of our everyday routine as it's a means to survive. However, according to a study published by the Journal of Management, there are those who positively engage in their work, and there are others who are simply addicted to it.¹ The latter have "the compulsive and uncontrollable need to work incessantly," and this is known as workaholism, an expression which originally stemmed from the term alcoholism.² Workaholics have shown characteristics that are also displayed by those addicted to drugs and alcohol³; and studies have shown that workaholism affects thirty percent of our population.⁴ Drugs and alcohol are used as a coping mechanism for dilemmas that we do not want to deal with; and in today's society, we use work in that same manner, and bury ourselves in our workload to forget about our problems. Speaking from personal experience, I have used work, just as any other addiction, to cope with what I felt guilty about, the relationship between my mother and I. I believe that in dealing with addiction, amongst other things, often times self-control is a key antidote. Reflecting back to when I wasn't conscious of my addiction towards work, I furthermore believe that the deadliest addictions are the ones we are not aware of; and just as self-control is needed for addictions such as drugs and alcohol, I quickly realized that the virtue of temperance was needed for my subtle addiction towards work.

Following my discernment of the importance of temperance, I began to actively enforce it in my life. Unfortunately, my new quest was meet with a major obstacle. It seemed enforcing temperance and cutting back on work had left me with the feeling of not doing and being enough. It had left me feeling unimportant. Ironically, my feelings was bolstered by the research of Silvia Bellezza who found out that Americans have obtained an alternative status symbol: seeming busy. Her research had discovered that the American culture of always working was no coincidence, as in the U.S, we often think the more busier a person is, the higher their status.⁵ Fortuitously, everything practiced in moderation reaps good fruits, and so did my new found practice. Not only did my mother and I's relationship begin to blossom but I began to slow down and

¹ Harry Bradford, Why Being A Workaholic Is Awful For You And Everyone Around You(2004) retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/07/workaholic-bad_n_6093658.html

² Andreassen, Cecilie Schou, Workaholism: An Overview and Current Status of the Research(2014) retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4117275/>

³ Harry Bradford, Why Being A Workaholic Is Awful For You And Everyone Around You(2004) retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/07/workaholic-bad_n_6093658.html

⁴ Brandon Gaille, 23 Significant Workaholic Statistics(2017) retrieved from <https://brandongaille.com/21-significant-workaholic-statistics/>

⁵ Joe Pinsker, Ugh, I'm So Busy(2017) retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/03/busyness-status-symbol/518178/>

simply smell the roses - for we have become so absorbed in our fast-paced lives that we don't slow down to enjoy the simple things in life. Temperance in our society today can go a long way, especially when we take the things in society that we over indulge in such as work and technology, and practice moderation. In fact, in this fast-paced society, practicing temperance allowed me to slow down to appreciate what I really have and increase my overall health, as research have shown that workaholism is linked with a list of disorders such as sleep problems, heart disease, weight gain, high blood pressure, stress and even premature death.⁶

Technology has expedited the progression of our society, as we use technology to travel, communicate, do business and ultimately live a more comfortable life. After all, if it hadn't been for technology, I wouldn't be able to cultivate the relationship with my mother whom I so deeply love - yet with every ying comes a yang. According to research published in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 6% of the world population is addicted to the internet.⁷ That would be approximately 420 people in the world's population that is addicted to the internet, and in fact, those same authors of the research defined internet addiction as "a disorder of concern because the neural abnormalities (e.g., atrophies in dorsolateral prefrontal cortex) and cognitive dysfunctions (e.g., impaired working memory) associated with IA mimic those related to substance and behavioral addiction. Moreover, IA is often comorbid with mental disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and depression."⁸ Reflecting back to a life without temperance, I had used the internet so excessively that it led to my lack of attention in the midst of my mother. It had led to my constant need to connect to Wi-Fi rather than the ones around me, a dilemma I believe plagues our society. Today we are bombarded with high volumes of information coming from different angles such as tv, radio, websites, e-mail, print media and so forth. It has become so addictive to some that without temperance, the excess intake of information can lead to what Political Scientist Bertram Gross coined as "information overload." "Information overload occurs when the amount of input to a system exceeds its processing capacity."⁹ With that being said, when we are constantly being bombarded with too much information that our brain cannot handle, it will reap both individual and social consequences. In fact, psychologists from Leeds University discovered how some net users can establish overwhelming internet habits in order to replace real-life social interaction. As the study

⁶ Joe Pinsker, Ugh, I'm So Busy(2017) retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/03/busyness-status-symbol/518178/>

⁷ Ben Richmond, Study Says Six Percent of People Worldwide Are Addicted to the Internet(2014) retrieved from https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/78x7pz/six-percent-of-people-worldwide-are-addicted-to-the-internet

⁸ Maya Kosoff, Study: 420 Million People Around The World Are Addicted To The Internet(2014) retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/420-million-people-are-addicted-to-the-internet-study-2014-12>

⁹ Jorge Franganillo, Information Overload, Why It Matters and How to Combat It(2017) retrieved from <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/information-overload-why-it-matters-and-how-to-combat-it>

lead author, Catriona Morrison would assert: "This study reinforces the public speculation that over-engaging in websites that serve to replace normal social function might be linked to psychological disorders like depression and addiction."¹⁰ Essentially, without the virtue of temperance to properly restrain us for the overwhelming information of technology that is accessible to us, we fall into the trap of its alluring screens and disconnect from our love ones. Brian Solis said it best: "Information overload is a symptom of our desire to not focus on what's important in the moment. It is a choice."¹¹ Indeed it was as I practiced temperance, I began to focus less on photos, likes and Facebook friends and more on my self-image, love and my real life friends and family.

In all, temperance is needed in all aspects of life, especially in today's modern day and age. In my case, although my mother and I have been apart for almost four years now, I can't recall a time where our relationship have been more healthier; and it was all due to temperance which eradicated the deadly effects that work and technology had on my mother and I's relationship.

¹⁰ Reuters Staff, Study links excessive Internet use to depression(2010) retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-depression-internet/study-links-excessive-internet-use-to-depression-idUSTRE61200A20100203>

¹¹ Jorge Franganillo, Information Overload, Why It Matters and How to Combat It(2017) retrieved from <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/information-overload-why-it-matters-and-how-to-combat-it>