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# When You Text Till You Drop

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I DON'T know about you, but I've always found the debate about what our mobile devices are doing to us — to our behaviors, our manners, our minds — at least as interesting as reports about what we're doing with these devices.

What about that gent who was talking loudly into his Android phone on the Metro-North train this morning? Was he really that obnoxious before we all went wireless — or did the device somehow change him? And what about all those young people who spend hours upon hours texting and sexting and Facebooking? What kinds of adults will they become?

Is the casual anonymity of Internet discussion turning us into boors? What did we once do with all the hours we now spend obsessively checking e-mail and texts? Smoke?

Larry D. Rosen, a California psychologist, is less concerned with techno-boorishness than with the very real possibility that all these new personal gadgets may be making some of us mentally ill — especially those who are prone to narcissism, for example, or to depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

In "iDisorder: Understanding Our Obsession With Technology and Overcoming Its Hold on Us" (Palgrave Macmillan), Dr. Rosen surveys the existing research, throws in a bit of his own and suggests ways that users of new technologies can avoid behavioral pitfalls.

As much as the topic interests me, I was initially skeptical of this book. For one thing, it's a little proud of itself. The word "iDisorder," which Dr. Rosen repeats throughout, suggests an author trying very hard to coin a term. He is among the few authors I've seen who refers to his own book as "groundbreaking."

Yet "iDisorder" is a pleasant surprise — lean, thoughtful, clearly written and full of ideas and data you'll want to throw into dinner-party conversation. Did you know that psychologists divide Twitter users into "informers," those who pass along interesting facts, and "meformers," those who pass along interesting facts about only themselves? Or that 70 percent of those who report heavily using mobile devices experience "phantom vibration syndrome," which is what happens when your pocket buzzes and there's no phone in your pocket? (I thought I was the only one.) Or that heavy use of Facebook has been

linked to mood swings among some teenagers? Researchers are calling this "Facebook depression." (And I thought that my children were just having a lot of bad days.)

One strength of "iDisorder" is Dr. Rosen's cleareyed view of technology and its uses. He doesn't oppose it. In fact, his view is quite the opposite. What we need, he says, is a sense of restorative balance and self-awareness. It is unavoidable that many of us will fall prey to an iDisorder, he says, but "it is not fatal and we are not doomed to spend time in a mental institution or a rehab center." By using a few simple strategies, he says, "we can safely emerge from our TechnoCocoons and rejoin the world of the healthy."

The book's chapters focus on mental health challenges linked to heavy technology use. They include how social media sites may spawn narcissism (no surprise there) and how constantly checking our wireless mobile devices (he calls them W.M.D.'s, a great acronym) can lead to obsessive-compulsive disorder. Others look at how technology addiction can lead to attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and at how all that medical data available online has created a class of people known as "cyberchondriacs." Perhaps most interesting of all, Dr. Rosen examines how the constant use of technology may be rewiring our brains. One study he cites calls the impact on memory the "Google effect," that is, an inability to remember facts brought on by the realization that they are all available in a few keystrokes via Google.

AT the end of each chapter, Dr. Rosen details a list of things that can be done to combat each techno-disorder. These tend to be a bit repetitive and common-sensical, but that doesn't make them any less useful. One often-suggested solution is to take a "tech break." In other words, if overusing your iPad is making you crazy, maybe you should stop using it so much. I know: duh. But still.

For those combating some form of techno-addiction, Dr. Rosen advises regularly stepping away from the computer for a few minutes and connecting with nature; just standing in your driveway and staring at the bushes, research shows, has a way of resetting our brains.

Parents will find this book particularly helpful. Dr. Rosen suggests a whole set of remedies for children's techno-addiction. Two popular methods are to make sure your child gets a full night's sleep, and to convene regular family dinners where technology is forbidden at the table. This is especially useful, it appears, in reintroducing children to normal interaction after hours spent in cyberconversation.

For those worried about their own heavy use of technology, or their family's, this book could be a helpful starting point for understanding the consequences, and for overcoming them.