

Spring 2015

Technology in Love: Stories of Change in Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Name: Zoe Vlastos Major: Neuroscience/Psychology

TECHNOLOGY IN LOVE: STORIES OF CHANGE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Advisor's Name: Dr. Passerini & Dr. Goodwin

Reader's Name: _____

This thesis is a digital storytelling project exploring the effects of technology on vulnerability, emotional intimacy, and deep connection in romantic relationships. Through the stories of people who have used online dating, been in long distance relationships, or both, it portrays a snapshot of romantic relationships in the digital age and examines how technology inhibits or enhances fundamental aspects of finding love. Furthermore, it teaches one something about technology in romantic relationships, what it means to love, and the nature of love. This project invites readers and listeners to ask questions of their own, to start conversations in their communities, and to ask, "In the age of technology, how ought we to love?" As a non-traditional thesis this project exists as a compilation of pieces, including an interactive website, a professional blog, a series of interviews, and a written reflection.

TECHNOLOGY IN LOVE:
STORIES OF CHANGE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

Zoe Vlastos

May 2014

APPROVAL PAGE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis project would not exist if I had not been touched by a great number of people through conversations, stories, encouragement, questioning, criticism, and love. I am forever grateful to Dr. Passerini who helped me write my first IRB proposal, provided constant supportive guidance, and believed in me and my project from start to finish; to Dr. Goodwin who pushed me to think more deeply and creatively and to strive for excellence; to Dr. Palmer who has pushed me throughout my college career to be exactly who I am and who gave me the first seed of this thesis project; to Dr. Howe, Dr. Bowie, and Martin Garnar who have supported me through the challenges of this non-traditional project; to my mother who listened to the tearful nights of frustration and heart aches as well as the joyful moments of discovery and passion; to the honors class of 2015 who have inspired me and helped me to grow with their brilliance and authenticity; to all the individuals who vulnerably shared their stories and changed me with their words; and to all of those who contributed through smiles, hugs, words, thoughts, and love. Thank you!

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Thesis Reflection

In the age of technology, how ought we to live in love?

The Background

If any one word can be used to describe this thesis project, it would have to be “evolving”. From my first thoughts about the importance of love and connection, to wondering how technology affects relationships, to concentrating on exploring vulnerability and emotional intimacy in online dating and long distance relationships, my questions have evolved. From literature reviews and psychological studies, to blog posts and website design, to focus groups and story collection, my research has evolved. From crying over lost data, perfectionism, and endless audio editing to shouting with joy at the moments of clarity, the powerful stories, and gains in self-trust, I have evolved. This evolution has not only taught me about vulnerability in romantic relationships mediated by technology, but it has also taught me about the power of story telling, the nature of love, and myself.

The original questions that motivated my thesis pertained to the use of technology in all relationships. I wondered how technology—held in children’s hands at the dinner table, comforting the lonely, detaching conversations, and providing instant gratification—changed our relationships with each other. Did technology help people stay more connected or push people apart? Did people think about the effect of technology in their relationship or simply allow it to enter their pockets and their lives without question? The questions kept coming, especially with so many kinds of relationships and technology. My professors and I knew that I would have to continually narrow my topic, and so the research began.

Listening to a TedTalk of Sherry Turkle, a professor of Science, Technology and Society at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, on a cold night in February sparked the first inspiration for this project. Her words pushed me to a dark movie theater where my fascination with love and my concern with the ubiquity of technology swirled together as I watched the movie *Her* by Spike Jonze. This captivating movie tells the story of a man who falls in love with his Operating System (OS), an advanced form of the Siri upon which many of us currently rely for driving directions and quick definitions. It brings up questions of what defines a romantic relationship, what artificial intelligence is, and where technology will take us next in the world of love. It provoked questions of whether reciprocity matters in love and what a relationship means if you never meet face-to-face. By the time I left the theater, my thesis, in the form of many many more (although slightly more focused) questions, had been born.

With the rapid advancement of technology, the ways in which we experience love are changing dramatically. Although social media and communication technology affect love in all its forms—familial, platonic, and romantic—it is particularly interesting to look at the way it affects romantic love and relationships. The advancement of technology has caused our relationships today to look entirely different from those of just twenty years ago. We can now maintain long distance relationships with greater facility using Facebook, phones, and Skype, we can stay in touch with a significant other throughout the day with text messages, and we can broadcast to the world the “status” of our relationship via Facebook. Daniel Jones, the editor of *The New York Times’ Modern Love Column*, sees romantic relationships changing greatly as social media and communication technology become part of our everyday lives. He discusses the increase in online relationships and the problems that arise when online intimacy does not translate into physical attraction (Jones, 2014). Many of the questions Jones now answers in his column pertain to the problems that arise as couples attempt to negotiate relationships intertwined with social media and communication technology. The landscape of love is changing.

Some argue that the use of texting, Snapchat, Skype, Facebook, Twitter and other forms of technological communication enable us to connect more to those we love. Amber Case, a cyborg anthropologist who studies the evolution of technology and humans, says that this is still human connection, only in a different way (TedxTalks, 2010). Stefana Broadband, a professor at the University College London, believes that

technology allows us to sustain intimacy as we use it to stay in contact with a loved one all day or see a significant other in a different country, connecting us more than we ever have before (Broadband, 2012). Social media and communication technology definitely make connection easier, but is this always for the best?

There also exists a potential dark side to the use of social media and communication technology use in romantic relationships. Sherry Turkle is concerned with the change in expectations that comes with the advancement of social media and communication technology, believing that we now expect more from our devices than we do from each other (Turkle, 2012). These forms of technology provide us with instant gratification, an easy way to avoid vulnerability and feeling alone, and much desired control. With social media and communication technology we can control our relationships by presenting only the image we wish others to see on social media, saying only the “right” thing over text, or simply turning off our ringer when we do not wish to have a conversation. No longer must we face the messy vulnerability that comes with relationships happening in real time. Instead, we can filter our lives and connections through the Internet and telephone signals. Turkle worries that we are losing our ability to deal with confrontation and compromise, two essentials of relationship building. Furthermore, she is concerned that we are losing a sense of self, as we forgo solitude to lean into the omnipresent stimulation, connection, and intimacy these forms of technology provide (Turkle, 2012). The research, concerns, and questions Turkle presents are reflected in the works of many popular writers and everyday conversations. These

anxieties are surfacing in blog posts, newspaper articles, magazine columns, and facebook statuses. While it can be argued that social media and communication technology are either positive or negative forces in romantic relationships, it is inescapably apparent that in either instance these forms of technology have a profound effect on the way we love.

Although I had narrowed my focus from investigating the effect of technology on all relationships to only romantic relationships, I realized that even more focus was needed and began to explore different aspects of relationships. I turned to Brene Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work, who studies shame and talks about the necessity of vulnerability in order to form any connection. She says that we must allow ourselves to be seen, fully and authentically, in order to connect deeply and find love. When we take off our masks and speak our truth, we allow others to know who we truly are. Brown found that those who live the most whole-heartedly are the ones who allow vulnerability into their lives (Brown, 2012). When we are vulnerable with another, we are rewarded with fulfillment, intimacy, and connection. Stepping into vulnerability is easier for some than others, especially when it comes to falling in love. I have seen many who slip easily into deep connection through vulnerable disclosure of their deepest selves, while others resist vulnerability at all cost with mental walls and emotional shields. Whatever the time and place, Brown and our own experiences tell us that vulnerability is necessary for emotional intimacy, deep connection, and love.

Nonetheless, we often shy away from being vulnerable. It is uncomfortable, it is scary, and it opens us up not only to feel great love but also great injury. It requires a trust we are often reluctant to give, either to others or ourselves. It is difficult to jump into a situation saying, "Let me bare to you my deepest self, my rawest being!" We often must make a conscious effort to allow vulnerability into our lives and our relationships. What happens when we add technology to this mix? Technology can be used as a shield to hide behind, sending a text message rather than opening up in person, or a way to deflect feeling uncomfortable face-to-face by being able to walk away from the phone, reply to the message later, or send an emoticon. Perhaps technology, especially in the form of cell phones, allows us to avoid the vulnerability, stepping behind a screen instead of stepping into connection. If we are able to skirt around vulnerability in our relationship, can we ever truly find love?

My Story

More than fourteen months of a romantic relationship and there were never fewer than 574 miles between our homes. Most of the time we dated 1,000 miles apart. We lived on extensive phone calls, Skype dates, and random text messages. We vacillated between months of missing each other and weekends of plane flights. Though he saw my face on average every other month, he knew me better than anyone else. I told him everything, whispered into a purple phone tucked beneath my dorm room pillow each night. He won my heart with good morning messages and late night video calls. With the physical aspect of our relationship removed, we dove deeply into emotional intimacy, deep trust, and forced commitment till the next airport rendezvous. Of course it was not all glowing connection and bubbly instant messaging; it was painful and eventually the distance forced us apart. Nonetheless, the questions stuck. Why did we connect so deeply spending most of our time in vastly different physical spaces? How did the technology-mediated communication create space for self-disclosure? What did the distance enhance or destroy?

As I continued to narrow my topic, these questions resurfaced. Do long distance couples experience more intimacy? Do the challenges actually create stronger relationships? How does the necessary technological communication affect romantic connection? Recent research helps to address my queries. The results of a diary study

published in the Journal of Communication suggests that long distance relationships foster greater intimacy than geographically close couples (Safford, 2010). The authors suggest increased self-disclosure and idealized perceptions of partners' disclosures affect this phenomenon. The communication between long distance couples accentuated intimacy, minimized differences, and did not avoid "taboo topics" such as discussion of the relationship. Furthermore, the medium seems to play a role in the strength of the effects (Safford, 2010). While it may seem counter intuitive that couples kept thousands of miles apart actually feel more connected, I can attest to the reality of these study findings.

A concern that technology could inhibit vulnerability, connection, and love was the initial motivation for this project, but my own past of a deeply connected and loving long distance relationship complicated the picture. Therefore, I wanted to explore whether one instance was truer than the other. Which did more people experience? How could technology inhibit vulnerability and yet help me to form such deep emotional intimacy?

The Project

With this new and complicated question in mind, I found myself investigating the effects of technology on romantic relationships. Through my reading (and movie watching) I had developed an inordinate amount of questions. Instead of looking for answers in the traditional way of literature searches, book reading, and analytical writing, I decided to construct a digital storytelling project to promote individual reflection and community discussion. I did not hope to find answers, but rather to paint a picture of the way things are in the age of technology through a collection of stories.

My interest in collecting stories comes from a Joan Didion quote saying, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (Didion, 2006). Stories, like love, are inextricably intertwined with our lives. Alister MacIntyre echoes this thought when he says, “man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.” (Sandel, 2007) Storytelling is an essential part of being human. We use stories to understand our lives, each other, and ourselves. We use stories to understand the ways we live and the ways we love. In order to get a picture and a further understanding of how social media and communication technology affect romantic relationships, I decided to collect stories.

I believe that discussion of this topic is extremely important because of the

individual and societal awareness conversation can provoke. Social media and communication technology have a way of worming their way into our lives without us knowing. They simply become a part (and often a central part) of our day-to-day lives without question. As more research is done on the powerful effects of technology on our lives, I believe it is extremely important to stay aware of our use of it. Therefore, the goals of this project became to simply collect stories of, and to talk about the use of, social media and communication technology in romantic relationships.

Without knowing it, I found myself walking the fine line between research and storytelling. I learned that navigation between these two overlapping magisteria is quite challenging. Growing up with a scientific background, research made me think of lab benches, pipettes, petri dishes, and microscopes. Even the questionnaires and assessments of psychological research seemed vastly different compared to my proposed plan. Stepping foot into the sociology department for the first time last winter to meet the professor who would become one of my thesis advisors, I began to learn about something I already knew set me on fire: ethnographic research. In his book, *The Ethnographic Interview*, James Spradley says, “Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The essential core of this activity aims to understand another way of life from the native point of view.” (Spradley, 1979) This speaks directly to my desire to hear individual experiences. As our culture changes with technological advances I hope to get the “point of view” of those who live it here and now at the beginning of the 21st century.

I had finally found the right method to explore my hoard of questions, though the goal of my project was still not to find answers. Yes, I wanted to explore my many questions by hearing stories from others. Yes, I hoped that by listening to these people's experiences I might be able to find understanding and insight...and in a way find *my own* answers, but I did not want to define answers, state conclusions, or tell people what the stories meant. At the beginning of this project, I wrote an IRB research proposal in which I stated explicitly that my thesis was *not* research. I realized that at times it would be unavoidable to see patterns or find similarities in stories, however the aim of the project was not to quantify or organize the results but rather simply to paint a picture of one point in time. I believe that the power of storytelling comes from the way others can relate to a story. I wanted to present the stories I collected so that others could interact with them, relate to them, learn from them, and find their own conclusions. Perhaps listening to one of the stories I collected would raise more questions for the listener or perhaps provide them their own answers. My hope was that in one way or another they would reflect on their own lives. I hoped to ask: Does technology play a role in your romantic relationship? Is it what you want it to be? Is it what your partner wants it to be? I hoped for discussion not only within couples but also within communities. I hoped that by portraying a snapshot of the way things are, I could help people to ask, "how ought we to live and love?"

Thus, the statement of my thesis project became: *this project will use a natural aspect of humanity, storytelling, to paint a portrait of romantic relationships in the age*

of technological advancement and to provoke deeper individual thought and community discussion of how we live and love and how we ought to live and love.

With an IRB proposal approved and a recorder in hand, I began my exploration. I ran three focus groups, which raised only more questions but also helped me to focus in on the ones most important to me. I began to make out the complexity of the topic as each individual described distinct experiences and opinions depending on the type of technology being discussed. I therefore refined my questions to focus on online dating and long distance relationships. I conducted a number of interviews before...I lost all my data! Senior year started with a devastating Iphone click that deleted all the audio I had collected up to that point. I cried, took a deep breath, backed up my remaining data, and began again. At least I had honed my interviewing skills! I created a website and began a blog, which I have updated with thoughts, research, and many more questions throughout the past year. I completed another 14 interviews with individuals who had used online dating, were in long distance relationships, or both. I coded my interviews for similar themes and developed even more questions. I then jumped onto the steep learning curve of audio editing, concentrating eight of my interviews into 5-15min chunks with over 100 hours spent connected to my computer's editing software via my ear buds. I considered converting a couple of the interviews into podcasts by adding music and my own commentary before realizing that that was much more than I could accomplish in one semester. To fully understand the online dating aspect of my project, I tried online dating myself and developed a psychology research study on how attractiveness and gender

affect perceptions of online daters. Throughout this process, I also had many wonderful conversations and heard many stories outside of my official interviews. At times I hated the project, and many tears were shed, but mostly I fell more and more in love with this opportunity for exploration of a topic that deeply intrigues me.

The Stories

Armed with a couple of dump trucks full of stories, data, conversations, tears, more stories, writing, blog posts, and passion, I returned to one of the questions that emerged from my spontaneous movie watching over a year ago: “Does it matter if the other person in a romantic relationship is real?” Since the main character in *Her*, Theodore Thombly, falls in love with a “being” whose realness we constantly question, one is forced to ask whether this love is legitimate. If Samantha, his OS, is not real, is the love he feels for her real? And if she does not love him (or cannot because she is just a computer program) does it matter? Theodore seems to need *to* love, and *feel* loved. Perhaps it does not matter so much if the love is reciprocal but only that he *believes* it to be so. Theodore is changed by his relationship with Samantha, he becomes more sociable, he goes out, and he sings. He comes alive. Love transforms him. And yet... is his relationship legitimate? Are his love and subsequent transformation false because the reciprocity of his love is questionable? After all, Theodore has no way of knowing if Samantha loves him back.

Why am I talking about a man in love with a machine? It doesn't have anything to do with our relationships today, does it? Actually, take a moment and ask: How many people do you know who have been in a long distance relationship? Or who have used

online dating? These relationships exist all around us. As Daniel Jones, Editor of The New York Times' *Modern Love* column, says,

“Other than the sci-fi wrinkle of the woman’s being a microchip, the couple’s ill-fated romance, which involves zero physical contact and relies on electronic communication for emotional sustenance, isn’t futuristic at all; thousands of people are having relationships like that right now. True, they involve a real human being at the other end of the line instead of an operating system, but otherwise it’s the same deal: The romances they pursue are emotionally rich but physically barren. And these kinds of relationships are surging in popularity.” (Jones, 2014)

In the long distance relationships, the online dating, the relationships begun online, we see the same phenomenon as that which seems so foreign in *Her*. We are not falling in love with the Siris on our phones even if we do talk to them, but the *type* of relationship that is seen between Samantha and Theodore in *Her* already exists. Yes, neither person lives through complex code, but the connection is the same: entirely mediated by technology. Jones points out that these relationships suffer in one regard with the physical aspect of the relationship being nonexistent, but gain in another way with great emotional intimacy. I therefore end up asking the same questions as I did after watching *Her* as well as new questions. I ask: Is the love felt by people in these types of relationships actually real? Is the love returned? Are the relationships and the love false? Are these people

living lies? And I also ask: How do these relationships contain such great emotional intimacy? How are these deep loving connections formed?

In looking for answers to my plethora of questions, the interview stories I collected surprised me. One young woman shared her story of falling in love online with a man who she never met and whose face she never saw. To many it may seem impossible for one to fall in love through only messages and phone calls, but this woman did. In her interview, she says, “I start having a real thing for him. Like even though I didn’t know what he looks like, but I felt like I actually loved him.” (Interview 015) She developed a deep friendship with this man and eventually they began to date online. Although it was unclear from her interview how she understood his feelings for her, she definitely loved him and told him so (in a message, of course). She felt love for him, but was it real? Was he real? She said, “I knew deep inside that he was real. Even though he gave me a fake profile picture.” (015) These two sentences seem to contradict one another with a “fake” picture on one hand and feeling that he was “real” on the other. He lied to her in multiple instances and eventually disappeared from her life entirely, but she still believes in him and the love she felt.

This young woman may never know if this man was real or not now that she has no connection with him at all, but it does not seem to matter to her. She says, “He was my first love, and before I met him I felt like I was nobody.” (015) In her interview, she told me that prior to meeting him she contemplated suicide, she did not see the worth in

living. However, finding this first love changed things for her. In her interview she says, “He was the one who brought me life...I’m saying that, without meeting him, I would probably be dead, a long time ago.” (015) She feels that he saved her life, he taught her to value living again. Knowing him, and loving him, transformed her. She now says, “I believe in true happiness and what I experience with him, it does exist. And so there’s no point of me ending my life anymore. I finally believe there’s always hope and true happiness and love.” This young woman’s entire outlook on life changed drastically through her relationship with a man she never met, who lied to her and one day suddenly disappeared into cyber space. Why does she believe he is real when really she has no proof? Because she feels the crucial shift he propelled in her life and that is all the proof she needs. Rather than dwell in the anger and hurt one might expect, she appreciates that their connection nurtured a transformation. What matters is that he was there for her in a time when she desperately needed someone to listen and to love. No matter who he was, he *did* change her life and, in her mind, he *did* save her life. This story tells me that while the realness of the person and the love may not be able to be determined, that is not what matters. The importance lies in the process of transformation that may occur.

Another young man I interviewed had a similar, yet unique, story. He met another young man online who he has not met face-to-face but who holds a very special place for him to this day. In his interview he says,

“I think that he was the boy who, like, taught me that I like boys... We haven’t talked for about a month now and I don’t really know why... but even if that was, like, the last time we talked I would still really like him because he filled that special place for me. Especially because I came from a town that was not going to give me that place, at all.” (Interview 014)

Online, this young man learned something essential about himself. He realized that he was gay. He implies that he was not going to be able to learn these things in his physical reality; he needed the space online to form and learn from this unique connection. Their relationship gave the man telling the story an opportunity to grow that he would have had trouble finding elsewhere. This contradicts Turkle’s worry that being online may lead to a decrease in self-knowledge. Furthermore, like the woman before, the fact that this man could disappear at any moment, that they might never talk again, and that his realness was unknown, was less important than the role he played. He “filled a special place” and that is what really mattered. What seems to actually matter is the transformation that can occur when people fall in love online.

Lives are changed through these online connections, whether real or not. Yet, I wonder how it happens. How do these transformations occur? How are these connections formed? The young man who found a special connection online spoke about the benefit of a non-physical relationship. He says,

“Nothing that we have ever done has been physical...I feel like probably any situation I have had that had the possibility of becoming a romantic relationship was like stunted by too early of physical contact. We didn’t have the opportunity so we could only talk about each other and ourselves. I think that being limited to only speaking has made me closer to [him] in a way that being physical with other people has not made me close to them.” (014)

In this case, emotional intimacy was greatly enhanced because the relationship was non-physical. Without the pressure to be physical, they had the space to become closer emotionally. Being online gave him the space to experiment, to see and be seen in a new way. He says, “I think that everyone would agree that it’s easier to say how you’re feeling when you aren’t looking in someone’s face. If you’re separated by hundreds of miles and the only thing connecting you is a cell phone connection, it’s so easy to be honest with someone.” (014) For him it was easier to step into vulnerability because he could not see the other man’s face. Being entirely honest and talking about how one feels can feel extremely vulnerable, yet, as Brown tells us, each is essential to a healthy, connected relationship. Speaking through technology helped this man to be vulnerable, which helped him to talk openly and feel extremely close to a man very far away. He says, “He was the first boy I told all of my big secrets to, which I feel is totally fine even though I’ve never met him because I do like him so much.” (014) Not only was a deep connection formed, but also a deep trust. Communicating through technology provided

space for these men to get to know each other, to share truthfully, and to trust one another.

Others also spoke of how their online connections formed. The young woman who fell in love online and felt that her life had been saved by the connection she formed spoke of similar concepts. She said, “I don’t know, I guess with technology and Internet it’s just so easy to just put yourself out there. I couldn’t do that with people face-to-face. But here you’re just talking to strangers. And in your head you keep thinking that’s nothings matter, you’re not going to see them.” (015) For her, the anonymity of technology allowed her to open up in ways that were uncomfortable in real life. She found a safe space online in which she could be vulnerable that at the time she could not find offline. By putting herself “out there,” as she could not “face-to-face,” this young woman was able to grow and to love. I originally thought that connecting through technology would inhibit vulnerability by providing a shield to hide behind and a way to avoid feeling vulnerable. However, these stories show the opposite. Technology seems to help some people be more vulnerable. It gives them a place to practice being open, being themselves, and being loving. Of course, I did hear stories of individuals who found technology to inhibit vulnerability and emotional intimacy in their relationships. These stories showed that, through technology, vulnerability and deep connection can be formed and in some cases dramatically change people’s lives.

Happily Ever After?

Mahatma Ghandi said, “Where there is love there is life.” Life and love are inextricably intertwined, inseparable. We all live, we all love. Love is everywhere. One of the largest quests in our lives is to find, experience, and build love. It may be a natural mating drive or an illumination of the soul, a mere social construct or a biological function; whatever this abstract power is, it prevails throughout all cultures, peoples and lives. Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist and research professor at Rutgers University and Chief Scientific Advisor of the dating website Chemistry.com, says that anthropologists have “never found a society without love.” Love truly is omnipresent. Fisher has done extensive research on love, finding certain chemicals in the brain when we are in love. She says, “romantic love is one of the most powerful sensations on earth” (Fisher, 2004). My interest in love and romantic relationships stemmed from my deep belief that love is one of the most essential and beautiful parts of humanity. Though most people may not center their belief systems on love as I do, we see a recurring theme of love across cultures and people. Technology may change the surface of love, we may meet in new ways, connect in new ways, fall in love in new ways, but love is still love. Stories of love will forever fuel our world with inspiration, mystery, and beauty.

These stories have shown me the complexity of love and that, truly, it is too magnificent to be fundamentally affected by technology. In some instances technology

gives us a shield to hide behind, an opportunity to present an unauthentic self, the ability to control our responses, a way to never feel alone, and the capability to skirt around uncomfortable conversations. In other situations technology gives us space to expose our deeper selves, to say the things too scary to say face-to-face, to foster love when miles separate the lovers, to allow chance online encounters to grow into marriages, to facilitate connection through daily messages of love, and to inspire new ways of saying I love you. Technology has become a part of humanity's daily living, and, as Amber Case argues, just another medium for connection. People, each markedly unique, will choose to use technology in different ways. For some it will help them love more deeply, for others it may separate them from love, and for some it may not change anything at all. The effects depend on the technology and the people, and, like love itself, on the time and the place. Ultimately, the technology just gives us different opportunities. In "real life" we still hide parts of ourselves, we still lie, we still meet randomly, we still choose some people (sometimes the wrong people) to trust and be vulnerable with, and we still fall in love. Technology does not change these things, but gives us new ways to do what we have already been doing. And like anything else, it is a choice. It is a choice to use technology how we desire to use it. Technology is a tool, so, I ask you...given the phone in your pocket, the laptop in your backpack, the voicemails and tweets and hashtags and likes awaiting you, given the technology in your life, how will *you* live and how will *you* love today?

In the end, what did I find? Did I get answers to all my questions? Did I come to fully understand the way technology affects romantic relationships? Of course not! But again, that was never the point. Yes, a part of me hoped to be able to definitely say “technology bad” or “technology good,” but a larger (and more realistic) part of me knew that was not possible or truly desirable. Ultimately, I hoped to collect snapshots of the love in this age of technology. I hoped to provoke thought, discussion, reflection, and personal growth. And I have. Even if I have not produced these effects in anyone else, I have done these things for myself. For the past fourteen months I have delved into this topic intellectually and emotionally, spending countless hours thinking about these questions. I have discussed these ideas not only in my focus groups and interviews but also in coffee shops, classes, late night conversations, and chance meetings with strangers. This project has taught me so much, not only about the nature of love, technology in love, and the beauty of stories, but also about myself, what I believe in, what I value, and where I am going. No, I did not find “answers,” but I did gain my own understanding of the way things are.

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APPENDIX A:

Website

<http://lovestorysnapshot.com>

APPENDIX B:

Interviews

Kaija and Kory on OKCupid: “I’m surprised I found someone I feel like is completely normal.”

Together this couple pieces together the story of how they met and fell in love, starting with the first messages they exchanged on OKCupid and their first date full of expectations, to finding love and moving in together. They discuss their different experiences using online dating, the stigma they confronted, the struggle of dissimilar technology use, and how technology plays a role in their lives and relationship today. Although they never expected to find someone so special online, the timing was just right! Was it chance? Or was it meant to be?

<https://soundcloud.com/zoev4/interview-006>

Ian and Amanda: "It was a match!"

From OkCupid to a Wedding: A success story of online dating. He had been using online dating for over a decade and she had just started, somehow they found each other!

<https://soundcloud.com/zoev4/interview-017-third-edit-story>

“I say it was coincidence, he says that it was fate.”

Although she started using online dating to make friends more than get into a relationship, that’s not what she found! Perhaps it was coincidence that he messaged her as she got on to delete her profile, or was it fate? This young woman discusses the world of online dating with emphasis on photos and physicality, and then talks about meeting her now fiancé from the first picture to the first date to buying a house together! Full of insight and surprises this story will definitely make you think.

<https://soundcloud.com/zoev4/interview-009>

"Without meeting him I would probably be dead, a long time ago."

This young woman's story depicts how a life can be completely changed by someone who has only been known over the Internet. After many difficult years, meeting and falling in love online taught this woman how to appreciate life again. Although heartbreaking, this story shows the power of human connection even via technological means.

<https://soundcloud.com/zoev4/without-meeting-him-i-would-probably-be-dead-a-long-time-ago#t=0:00>

"I wanted to see if it was real."

This story of a young man's experience of using online dating provides great insight. His story explores the utility of online dating for gay men, how a relationship can progress solely over technology, how one can fall in love with another's mind, and how a part of a relationship mediated by technology may not feel real.

<https://soundcloud.com/zoev4/i-wanted-to-see-if-it-was-real-1>

"There was an instant connection."

How does love begin and survive when the people in love are separated by many state lines? One woman's story of a long distance relationship.

<https://soundcloud.com/zoev4/there-was-an-instant-connection>

"I think that he was the boy who taught me that I like boys."

From a reaction to a Tumblr blog to a deep online connection, this young man learned about himself through his relationship online. He speaks about finding a space online that he would not have been able to find offline, and how their connection was formed.

<https://soundcloud.com/zoev4/i-think-that-he-was-the-boy-who-taught-me-that-i-like-boys-1>