Unplugging: A Phenomenological Study of the Perceived Holistic Health Benefits from Regular Digital Detox in the Context of Jewish Shabbat

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Abstract

The personal and business use of electronic/digital media (E/DM) has increased rapidly in the past few decades. Many research studies suggest a connection between this increased use and damage to mental and physical health. Few studies examine the potential benefits from decreased use, but non-scholarly sources encourage a practice of regularly unplugging from technology. Based in phenomenological inquiry, this study examines the lived experience of six adult Jewish women who unplug on a weekly basis as part of their observance of Jewish Shabbat. This study provides preliminary data on the benefits of this practice, using three arts-informed methods of data collection: storytelling, photography and collage. Results suggest that unplugging on a weekly basis provide holistic health benefits in the realms of mental, physical, spiritual, social and environmental health. Future research should include a larger, more varied population.
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Introduction

Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.
- Anne Lamott

Some would say that we have lost our human connection to each other and ourselves in spite of being electronically connected to everything and anything. Our modern life in the developed countries of the world can potentially keep us connected to the outside world at any time of any day. The work world intrudes via emails and cell phones during days off. We can communicate with friends and strangers around the world at any time via emails and social media. Entertainment is available on computers, iPads, iPods, video games and smartphones. Constant news feeds announce world events of all kinds. We are able to shop without leaving home and are tempted to do so from nonstop and omnipresent advertising.

As described in detail and cited in the extensive literature review of this investigation, many researchers have studied this increased overstimulation and information overload, and found many damaging effects on our physical and mental health as well as disruption of relationships and increased social isolation (Adamson & Frick, 2003; Anders & Frank, 2011; Andrews & Urbanska, 2009; Aronsson, Dallner, Aborg, 1994; Beranuy, Oberst, Carbonell & Chamarro, 2009; Bradley, 2000; Coleman, 1986; Digital Detox, 2015; Jenaro, Gomez-Vela, Gonzalez-Gil & Caballo, 2007; Johansson-Nordin, Heiden & Sandstrom, 2010; Klingberg, 2000; Lavie, 2005; Konrath, O’Brien & Hsing, 2011; Lussier, 2011; Matousek, 2011; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Brashears, 2006; Misra, Cheng & Genevie, 2014; & Nakazawa et al., 2002; Ophir, Nass
& Wagner, 2009; Park, 2013; Phillips, 2014; Ponkanen, Ahloniemi & Leppanen, 2011; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2014; Rubenstein, Meyer & Evans, 2001; Sana, Weston & Capeda, 2012; Sanbonmatsu, Strayer, Medeiros-Ward & Watson, 2013; Tarafdar, Ragu-Nathan & Ragu-Nathan, 2007; Thomee, 2010; Urbanello & Roosli, 2013; Worthen, 2012; Yen, Tang, Yen, Lin, Huang, Liu & Ko, 2009). In reviewing the literature on the health effects from overuse of technology, I came to believe that we need to find a way to take a break from this pseudo connection and return to human interactions without an electronic intermediary. The strategy I explore in this project is the practice of unplugging ourselves from electronic/digital media (E/DM) on a regular basis.

This practice of regular unplugging already exists in the observant Jewish community. For centuries, the Jewish religion has mandated a weekly day of rest (Shabbat) from work, with a law forbidding the use of electricity that causes observant Jews to unplug regularly from E/DM. This law is derived from the phrase “you shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day,” as translated from the original Hebrew in Exodus 35:1-3 (New International Version). In the twentieth century, when the use of electricity in homes became widespread, rabbinical rulers determined that the use of electricity on Shabbat would be considered to be kindling a fire (Nevins, 2012; Donin, 1992). As Nevins (2012) discusses, the Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards (CJLS) revisited this extension of biblical law and considered that the use of digital and electronic devices violated the Shabbat commandment to rest on that day. As Nevins (2012) points out, digital devices and electronic networks not only allow communication regarding work (forbidden on Shabbat), but also interfere with connection to real-life community.
Currently, there is a secular movement to regularly unplug from electronic media (also known as *digital detox*), as described by the online organization, Digital Detox (2015). The Oxford English Dictionary (2015) defines digital detox as “a period of time during which a person refrains from using electronic devices such as smartphones or computers, regarded as an opportunity to reduce stress or focus on social interaction in the physical world.”

Our contemporary work culture does not value taking a day of rest every week, taking lunch breaks or leaving the workplace on time, according to Honore (2004). Japan has recognized overworking as a cause of death and created a new word to describe this phenomenon: *Karoshi* (Nishiyama, 1997). Honore (2004) notes that many American companies demand long hours from their workers, and though our language, unlike Japanese, has no word to describe death from overwork, there are words, such as *workaholic*, and *Type A personality*, to describe people who are driven to spend most of their time working and trying to achieve success. Honore (2004) states that the Industrial Age promised to give us more time as machines took over the simpler tasks of our work, both at home and in the marketplace. Honore (2004) points out this new way of working started interfering with our personal life at the very start, and even in the early years of industrialization, factory work required long hours and allowed very few days off. While much has changed through the centuries, Honore (2004) describes stress as a common element of both ancient and modern times, though one difference is our modern reliance on technology both at home and work, often causing damage to our mental, social, or physical health.
The Jewish population has a built-in justification for taking a day of rest from work, as described earlier. Over the centuries, the philosophy and practice of this holy day has differed, but the emphasis has always been to make the Sabbath a day where all work-related activities cease. In this portion of the introduction, I am focusing on the way modern Jewish people observe the Sabbath laws. In agreement with the general use of the word *observant* to describe Jewish people who observe the Sabbath laws, I will use the same term. The Jewish population, according to tradition, calls the seventh day of the week, *Shabbat* in Hebrew, or *Shabbos* in Yiddish. In the remainder of this paper, I use the Hebrew term, *Shabbat*. The Jewish biblical and oral law (known as *Mishnah*) as well as cultural tradition regulates the observance of Shabbat. The biblical description of building the sanctuary lists 39 categories of work, and the repetition of the commandment to guard Shabbat is written immediately afterwards (Hertzberg, 1961). From this, the ancient rabbis inferred that the work that is forbidden during Shabbat is anything that resembles these 39 categories (*M. Shabbat*, 7:2 *Jerusalem Talmud*).

The portion of the law that is most relevant for the purpose of this research is the one forbidding the lighting of fire on Shabbat. As explained previously, the rabbinical authorities extended that law to forbid any modern activity that resembles lighting a fire. These authorities considered anything that runs on electricity to be a form of fire. Because of this law, people are unable to use computers, smartphones, televisions or radio, essentially causing a weekly digital detox in the observant Jewish population.

The secular movement does not currently use a unified term for their version of this avoidance, so in this thesis, I use the term *secular sabbath* and the phrase *digital detox*. Both the Jewish and secular communities insist that it is important to designate a
period of time to disconnect from the world of production in order to reconnect with families, friends, communities, and their true selves. The secular community is not an organized group, so it was difficult to recruit participants in the time allotted for this study. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to describe the experience of unplugging in the context of the Jewish Shabbat.

The next chapter is my review of literature relevant to the harmful effects of our overuse of E/DM, followed by descriptions of the modern experiences of the Jewish Shabbat and the secular digital detox movement. After the literature review, I present the personal, professional and theoretical lenses I bring as a researcher. Finally, I outline the methods I used to collect and analyze data, describe the results of the research, and conclude with an analysis and discussion of findings.
Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature relevant to the detrimental effects of our culture’s overuse of E/DM. I begin by reviewing existing research on the adverse effects of work-life imbalance. I then present descriptions of the Jewish Shabbat and secular Sabbath. Next, I summarize holistic health benefits (social, mental and physical) of celebrating a regular break from work or technology. Finally, I end with a summary and my research question.

Adverse effects of work-life imbalance

More men are killed by overwork than the importance of the world justifies.
-Rudyard Kipling

In this section, I begin with a general description of the stressors of contemporary work life. I then discuss the stressful expectations of the workplace. Finally, I present effects of the constant overuse of technology on our bodies and minds.

Stressors of contemporary work life. Murphy (1974) notes we experience our spare time in fragments. Work is to come before rest or fun. Murphy (1974) argues that in the indigenous cultures, work and leisure activities are intertwined and that work is not the goal of life. Researchers today report health problems from overwork that include “repetitive stress injuries, sleep deprivation, obesity, anxiety, depression, diabetes, heart disease and cancer” (Andrews & Urbanska, 2009, p. 72). Thomee (2010) notes that mental stress in the workplace is often caused by “technostress,” which is defined as “the stress of hardware or software problems and computer breakdowns” (p. 13). Tarafdar et al. (2007) add that constant changes and the need to update systems are overloading our memory. A new term, hurry sickness, describes the constant feeling of time pressure, the
urgency to hurry individual tasks, and the impatience with any delays (Segen Medical Dictionary, 2011). The idea of spare time has disappeared in a world where everything and everyone is available all the time. Dossey (1982) coins the term time-sickness to describe the feeling that there is not enough time to get everything done. The populace is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with this state of affairs and is more recently trading time for money (Schor, 1991). Since the 1990s, 28% of United States citizens have taken voluntary decreases in pay in order to have more free time (Andrews & Urbanska, 2009). A 2004 survey of workers in 257 countries done by Warwick University and Dartmouth College finds that 70% of respondents want a better work-life balance (Honore, 2004).

Honore (2004) notes that this work culture exists in most developed countries, with one in four Canadians working more than 50 hours a week, and one in five British workers in their 30s working 60 hours a week.

**Workplace expectations.** Demands for 24-hour, 7 days a week availability originate not only from work and social networks, but also from an individual’s own ambitions or desires (Machlowitz, 1980). This work ethic results in the feeling of always being on call by employers and makes it difficult for employees to separate work and private life. Unreturned calls or messages lead to feelings of guilt (Thomee, 2012). It is not just the physical separation from work that decreases stress, but the feeling of being separate psychologically (Park, Fritz & Jex, 2011).

Park (2013) argues that use of communication technologies such as email and mobile phones make it nearly impossible to separate from work life, and that being able to detach from work on days off is essential for our health. Expecting employees to check
emails during non-working time crosses boundaries and causes role stress and overload (Bradley, 2000; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2013; Tarafdar et al., 2007).

Lussier (2011) states that employers now consider multitasking to be a mandatory skill, even though studies on multitasking have found that our brains are not capable of focusing on more than one task at a time. Lussier (2011) also notes that a relationship has also been shown between multitasking and an inability to focus at all. Sanbonmatsu et al. (2013) and Ophir et al. (2009) report that a belief in one’s ability to multi-task was not a predictor of success in multitasking. Both studies find that people who thought they were proficient at multitasking did poorly when tested and people who continually multitasked rarely performed better. According to other researchers, the attempt to multitask by simultaneous use of electronic media increases distraction and stress (Klingberg, 2000; Lavie, 2005). The average employee checks 40 websites a day, switches activities 37 times an hour, and changes tasks every two minutes, but only two percent of individuals tested can actually multitask without a decline in performance according to Digital Detox (2015). One study shows that during multitasking, the subjects’ brains became so overloaded that they could not filter out irrelevant information (Rubenstein et al., 2001). In classrooms, Sana et al. (2012) report that students who multitask on their laptops negatively impact the academic performance of the rest of the students. Thomee (2012) finds an increase in depression and social anxiety among people who multitask frequently. According to Carr (2010), people multitask because our brains welcome interruptions due to our need to seek new information. Multitasking puts us in a state of vigilance (Phillips, 2014). This causes us to communicate in brief, simple statements instead of complex arguments (Ophir et al., 2009).
**Overuse of technology.** Thomee (2012) finds multiple health problems from intensive information and communication technology use. Thomee (2012) reports that the Swedish National Survey of Public Health in 2010 found that combined intensive computer and mobile phone use increased associations with mental health symptoms of various kinds. In this study, diminished mental well-being was reported by 29% of women and 13% of men in the 16-29 year-old age group. Specifically, 25% of the young women in the survey reported that they were stressed and had sleeping problems, and one out of ten young men perceived stress and 20% reported sleeping problems. Computer use at work, if repetitive and not creative, can be psychologically stressful, and physiologically stressful from prolonged sitting in non-ergonomic postures (Thomee, 2012). Researchers have also found a direct relationship between time spent on computers and physical and mental symptoms (Aronsson et al., 1994). Excessive time spent watching television has been implicated in increased health problems and even death. Anders and Frank (2011) find that every two hours spent watching television increased the risk of Type 2 diabetes by 20% in one study. Sixty-one of the subjects in the same study who watched the most television were more likely to die of diabetes in comparison to those who watched only one hour a day. Coleman (1986) finds that 95% of people use some type of electronics in the hour leading up to bedtime. Coleman (1986) argues that watching television before sleep affects long-term health. Digital Detox (2015) states that artificial light from screens increases alertness and suppresses the hormone melatonin by up to 22% negatively affecting sleep, performance and mood.

Thomee (2012) identifies frequent mobile phone use as a risk factor for sleep disturbances in men and symptoms of depression in both sexes. Other researchers suggest
that the mobile phone increases depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Jenaro et al., 2007; Yen et al., 2009). Beranuy et al. (2009) find increased psychological distress with increased use of mobile phones.

McPherson et al. (2006) find that the number of Americans who felt socially isolated tripled between the years 1985 and 2004. Carr (2010) notes that disconnecting from the Internet causes stress and makes people feel socially isolated because of a reliance on cyberspace for social interaction. Our view of the world is increasingly changed by our use of social media and search engines that present data to us based on our past use of these tools (Watson, 2014). Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock (2014) report that Facebook performed an experiment on users by showing some users’ happy posts and others’ only unhappy posts to see if it changed the mood of the targeted users, and this manipulation did change the mood of the users’ posts.

Yen et al. (2000) find that mobile phones lead to musculoskeletal symptoms from texting. Others observe headaches, earaches, decreased concentration and increased fatigue associated with overuse of mobile phones (Johansson et al., 2010). Urbanello and Roosli (2013) find that due to the frequent location update signals sent by a mobile phone, users are exposed to electromagnetic fields even when the phone is on standby mode. Even the simple act of texting while watching children on a playground has increased the number of playground accidents by 12% due to parents’ lack of attention (Worthen, 2012).

Infants deprived of eye contact, due to parental texting in public restaurants, show agitation at first and then withdrawal and depression (Adamson & Frick, 2003). This eye contact is crucial for the development of the part of the brain that allows us to process
other’s feelings and develop empathy (Matousek, 2011; Ponkanen et al., 2011). Eye contact is critical for developing healthy social interactions in life, according to Senju and Johnson (2011). Konrath et al. (2011) analyze 72 studies on empathy in college students and find a 40% decrease in the last 20 years, with the most rapid decrease in the last ten years. Konrath et al. (2011) study college students who spent most of their time communicating online and find decreased attachments in relationships due to the absence of models of behavior that are possible in face-to-face conversation.

According to Misra et al. (2014), even the presence of a silent mobile phone can inhibit communication. Przbylisi and Weinstein (2014) find that when a silent phone is present during face to face communication, the conversations are superficial. Studies of human communication find that we only express 7% of our communication in words, 38% by tone of voice, and 55% by body language (Mehrabian, 1981). Konrath et al. (2014) theorize that interacting online decreases the ability to empathize in face-to-face communication.

In the last decade, in response to this type of research, some companies have instituted changes in the way they require employees to use electronic communication. In 2004, Ernst and Young, an accounting firm, allowed employees to ignore email and voicemail on weekends (Honore, 2004). According to Unplugged Weekend (2015), employers in France have begun to forbid employees from answering emails on their days off. Also according to this same source, Daimler, the German carmaker deletes employees’ emails while they are on vacation, and Facebook, Apple, Square, Twitter, Google, Airbnb, and VMware have sent their people on tech-free retreats. Even the CEOs of such companies intentionally avoid electronic media on weekends, and Steve Jobs
limited his children’s use of high-tech tools. The Boston Consulting Group mandated time off from phones during which employees were expected to communicate in person with their teams (Perlow, 2012). Turkle (2015) describes actions of companies that try to counteract the overuse of online communication by holding technology-free meetings.

Humankind has always had tools to help us in our labor, but our new electronic tools can be intrusive and often require a great deal of our time to maintain and use them (Nevins, 2012). Observant Jews experience a reprieve from E/DM every Shabbat. In the next section, I present a detailed description of the Jewish Shabbat, with an emphasis on the law against using electricity.

**The Jewish Shabbat**

The categories of work prohibited on Shabbat as listed in the Mishnah include the prohibition against lighting a fire. This law pre-dates the invention of electricity, but after the use of electricity became widespread, the rabbis of all varieties of Judaism agreed that this new technology fell under the same category as fire because it emits sparks (Levin, 1987). This prohibition covers all appliances powered by electricity, and though one who observes the Jewish Shabbat can benefit from some electrical devices, they must not turn them on or off during the hours between sundown each Friday and one hour after sundown each Saturday, but one may turn on electric lights before Shabbat, and use them as long as they are left on the entire time (Citron, 2015). This would also apply to computer use if left on and used in a read-only mode. However, typing words onto a computer screen on Shabbat is controversial, including all use that would require typing into an address bar, or search engine, as well as writing emails or Facebook posts. This applies also to texting on a cell phone screen (Student, 2012).
In traditional interpretations of Jewish law, people’s lives are highly gendered. Specifically, women are exempt from *timebound* laws, according to the Talmud (Kiddushin, 29b). These laws describe rituals that need to be performed at assigned times of day, and women were unable to interrupt the care of children to perform these rituals. Over time, this legal opinion caused the segregation of men’s lives and women’s lives (Alexander, 2015). This segregation is most apparent on Shabbat, when the men are obligated to attend communal prayer (as they are each day of the week), while women are obligated to prepare for the 25 hours of Shabbat home life. This involves spending Thursday and most of Friday every week preparing meals that can be served on Friday night, and kept warm for meals on Saturday when the Jewish law forbids cooking. Once the Shabbat candles are lit, all weekday activities must cease (Bauer, 1991; Harris, 1985). As a result of the different culturally assigned roles, observant women are more likely to notice the difference between Shabbat and the rest of the week.

**The secular sabbath**

Increasingly, individuals are finding the need to create a period of time where they can be free of the demands of work, especially the use of communication technology (Phillips, 2011). Digital Detox (2015) collected statistics about the use of electronic media that led them to develop their mission to educate people on the responsible use of digital media. They do not advocate a permanent disconnection from technology, but encourage people to be more mindful of how they spend their time online. They see value in disconnecting from technology in order to reconnect with each other and their own thoughts, increasing mindful presence and a clearer sense of purpose. They do this by offering digital detox retreats, an adult summer camp, corporate programs, and speakers.
Digital Detox’s (2015) manifesto suggests technology be produced ethically, taking into account the value and cost to users. Dow (2013) implicates Facebook in increasing the feeling of loneliness.

Although they do not follow a religious tradition, many people consider themselves to be spiritual and express a need for time to experience their personal type of spirituality. A secular definition of a day of rest is “an intentional period of time set aside to restore equilibrium to the mind, spirit, and body where a person may…reflect on life’s personal and spiritual meaning” (Diddams, Surdyk, & Daniels, 2004, pp. 3-4).

Unplugged Weekend (2015) sponsors retreats and workshops to help people take a break from technology to reduce stress and focus on social interaction in the physical world.

Rains (2011) defines unplugged as staying off digital and electronic devices completely or only restricting the use of one or more of the following: email, social media, online research, text messaging, online chat, phone calls, television, and video games. After practicing this restriction, Rains (2011) states, one has to decide what to do instead, such as spend time outdoors. Rains (2011) stresses that preparation is key, especially making it possible to leave things unfinished at work and having some kind of plan for how to be contacted in an emergency. Because co-workers, bosses, and friends often expect constant availability, Rains (2011) notes that one must realize that there will be anxiety about what one is missing at first. This means that having an activity plan is key, but learning to exist for at least one day without being productive can become a refreshing break (Rains, 2011). Aron (1999) finds that when separating self from work activities, the key is that the separation must include mental separation, not just physical separation.
**Health benefits of unplugging on a regular basis**

In this section, I describe the health benefits of unplugging that are found in the literature. I begin with social health benefits, continue with mental health benefits, and conclude with physical health benefits.

**Social health benefits.** Unplugging in the context of Shabbat can affect social relationships by allowing time to socialize and connect on a deeper level in an unhurried manner with partners, family, friends, and neighbors (Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Frank, 1974; Goldberg, 1986; Gordis, 1982). Observing Shabbat with a community can increase a sense of belonging (Contrada & Ashmore, 1999; Elliott & Sherwin, 1997; Lee & Robbins, 1998). Wouk (1988) describes Shabbat as a time when everyone knew that both he and his wife were at home and not available for work. There was no interruption to their life together from the telephone, allowing them to spend time as a couple. Observing Shabbat can help us to deepen our relationships with family, friends and community (Goldberg, 1986).

Children who avoided E/DM for five days were more adept at reading emotional queues both in person and while watching actors on a video (Yalda et al., 2014). Larson (1997) notes the importance of solitude to our development. Buckner, Andrews-Hanna & Schacter (2008) review 30 years of research on the part of the brain which is active when people are allowed to have time alone without interruptions. As a result of their research, Buckner et al. (2008) postulate that constant interruption interferes with our ability to be aware of the emotions of other people and ourselves.

**Mental health benefits.** Dein and Loewenthal (2013) find that Orthodox Jews benefitted from unplugging from technology and having more time for uninterrupted
communication. Participants in this study also commented on the value of relaxing and taking a break from everyday concerns, which gave them the opportunity for self-reflection. People who are able to unplug from work activities when off the job experience lower levels of fatigue and job burnout, according to Park (2013). Park (2013) also notes that they have higher levels of positive emotions and life satisfaction than those who remain connected to work-related tasks and matters outside of normal work hours.

Kwall (2012) states that when we are well-rested, we are able to think more clearly and more imaginatively. Observing Shabbat can allow time for resting and for creativity. Gottlieb (1995) writes that celebrating a Sabbath can help us create a world that engages the imagination.

**Physical health benefits.** The need for rest is an important aspect of Sabbath (Goldberg, 1986; Masiane, 2011; Reed & Wallace, 2007). Reed and Wallace (2007) state that our hearts rest after every beat to both recover and refill in order to pump more blood through our bodies. They theorize that refraining from activity and alternating work with rest for a period is as important to our overall health as good nutrition. Plaskow (1991) notes that this cannot be said of observant Jewish women who do most of the preparation for Shabbat. If household chores are not equitably distributed, preparing for the Shabbat and cleaning up after a family meal can mean additional work for mothers (and daughters) in a household where chores are gender specific.

**Summary and research purpose**

Most of the research on the use of E/DM has studied the detrimental effects of overuse and not the benefits of limiting use. The research on our culture’s work
environment and expectations that I found in the literature have focused on the harm of having no boundary between work life and personal life, and not on the benefits of planned times of avoiding work-related activities. There is little research in the literature at this time about the new secular unplugging movement. Researchers have studied the observant Jewish population in general, but not the specific benefits of Shabbat. Because both of these communities practice an avoidance of E/DM on a regular basis, they are the perfect populations to study to discover what, if any, health benefits this practice can provide. Since the time allotted for this project was short, and the secular digital detoxers are not a homogenous group, I was not able to easily recruit people from this group. Due to this limitation, and due to my feminist philosophy and the gendered culture of observant Jewish life (Plaskow, 1991), I chose to study this planned and regular digital detox time period through the perceptions of Shabbat-observant Jewish women. My purpose is to describe women’s experience of unplugging in the context of the Jewish Shabbat. My research question is “Do women perceive any holistic health benefits from unplugging in the context of the Jewish Shabbat?”
Research Lenses

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the relevant research lenses that have influenced the development and implementation of this study. My preconceived ideas may have influenced the design of this study, and by revealing my awareness of the lenses through which I view the world, I hope to increase the reliability and validity of this study. As I catalog the lenses that influence my behavior as a researcher, I will explain how they have shaped this project. First I present the theoretical lenses that led me to design this study. Next, I describe relevant professional lenses that inform my way of viewing data and interacting with participants. Finally, I review the personal lenses that shape my interpretation of the results of this study.

Theoretical lenses

My constructivist and feminist critical theory paradigms inform my research in the following ways. Sexton (1997) defined the constructivist view stating, “The perspective of the observer and the object of observation are inseparable; the nature of meaning is relative” (p. 8). The work of anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, helps develop the understanding of social constructivism by taking into account not only the individual’s perception of reality but also the social practices and other aspects of an individual’s surrounding culture (Butler-Kisber, 2010). This view of reality, which I subscribe to, guided my choice to recruit participants from a single culture in an attempt to limit the variables in the qualitative data that I gathered. Social critical theory endeavors to uncover ways in which people are oppressed, to raise the awareness of this oppression, and to suggest ways to overcome this oppression (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).
My combined constructivist and feminist critical theory paradigm, with its relativist ontology and its subjective epistemology led me to the conclusion that phenomenological methods were most appropriate for this study. Phenomenology is the concept that reality is perceived individually (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This concept is in line with my constructivist paradigm. One portion of my data collection was in the form of interviews that elicit narratives of the participants’ Shabbat experiences. Dauite (2014) described this common practice of narrative explanation as the means by which we make sense out of our experiences. Through these narratives, I distilled a common essence of the experience of Shabbat and its effect on the holistic health of individuals.

This combined paradigm also informs how I have designed this study. For example, the constructivist viewpoint that reality is individually perceived influenced my choice to gather my data from individual responses to the experience of weekly digital detox. Expediency led me to choose the observant Jewish population to study, since the time allotted for this project was short, and this population is more homogenous and easier to find than participants in the new digital detox movement. Also, as I discuss in the section on my personal lenses, I have access to the Jewish population because I am a member.

Because I am positioned within a critical paradigm, I was not a neutral observer. I had the aim of uncovering technological oppression, which is what led me to design this study. I am also a feminist, which creates a bias toward telling women’s stories and investigating women’s lives. The part of me that is feminist decided that I would limit my research participants to women, since the Shabbat experience is influenced by the highly gendered social organization of Jewish culture (Plaskow, 1991). The critical theorist in
me recognizes the technological oppression our society exhibits toward all of us and I conducted this research with the agenda of uncovering and raising the awareness of this oppression.

One way of conducting a phenomenological study is to collect interviews. While discussing qualitative inquiry, Butler-Kisber (2010) states that interviewing helps the researcher gather data because we understand each other through the tool of language. Because this study concentrates on the individual perceptions of the participants concerning their own physical, mental and spiritual health, the source of data is each participant’s experience of their own consciousness. Butler-Kisber (2010) asserts that stories are the mechanism with which we describe our life experiences.

Three theoretical frameworks apply to this study. In this section, I begin with Gender Theory, which influenced my choice of participants. Next, I discuss Holism Theory which permeates the entire study. Finally, I explain how Dynamicist Theory led me to use arts-informed methods of data collection.

**Gender theory.** This theory recognizes that though we make choices in our daily lives, our locations in our particular societies determine and limit some of those choices (Feree, 2010). My lifelong feminism has convinced me that no matter where we live, our experiences and perceptions of the world are heavily influenced by our assigned gender. For example, the expected behaviors and roles during a Jewish Shabbat differ between observant men and observant women (Plaskow, 1991). According to Plaskow (1991), traditional Jewish women are expected to keep the Sabbath laws, but also to perform most of the preparation of meals and manage the care and activities of children in enforcing these laws. Because of this, women are not obligated to any time-bound
commandments, such as the community prayer that takes up most of the men’s time on Shabbat (Alexander, 2015). Women’s responsibilities are primarily in the home, and any Shabbat peace they may experience comes only after the extra work of preparation for the day (Plaskow, 1991). Because of this theory, I decided to limit my study to only one gender – female participants.

**Holism theory.** The second theory that permeates this project is Holism, which the Oxford English Online Dictionary (2016) defines as the idea that “parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole…which is regarded as greater than the sum of its parts.” As described by Young and Koopsen (2011), the holistic view of health is one that includes spiritual, physical and mental health. I consider holistic health to be a multifaceted concept and recognize that this definition artificially divides it into three parts. I expected to uncover health benefits of unplugging in these three dimensions of health, but I allowed participants to present their experience wholly without listing these dimensions discretely. As a result, participants revealed benefits from the other dimensions of holistic health, such as social and environmental health.

**Dynamicist theory.** A third theory that influenced my decision to use collage and photography as part of the data collection comes from cognitive science. This branch of science concerns itself with theorizing models of how our brains process information. Some cognitive science philosophers consider our minds to be similar to computers (Horst, 2013). Recent research in neuroscience has shown that our human way of thinking is not as linear as a computer’s way of processing, and that our use of symbols is individual and influenced by context (Sullivan, 2010). A new field of study in visual
cognition is still in the formative stages and one of the cognitive science theories that best
describes our ability to think in symbols is the dynamicist theory (Sullivan, 2010). This
theory postulates that our brain is a system that interacts constantly with its environment,
making meaning out of learned connections but also open to new meanings as internal
and external contexts change (Sullivan, 2010). In making collages and while taking
photographs, the participants intuitively chose images that were pleasing or interesting to
them. During the process of explaining their choices of images, they made new
connections between symbol and language and created new personal meanings that gave
insight into how observing Shabbat made them feel. This theory influenced my choice to
use images and the participants’ explanations as part of my data collection.

**Professional lenses**

I bring a variety of relevant professional experience to this project. Researchers
themselves are important instruments of data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002).
Therefore, I will describe my experiences in nursing and wellness coaching, and how
they influenced the research process.

**Registered nurse.** I have been a registered nurse since 1976, spending most of
these years in the highly technical field of Neonatal Intensive Care where it has been
difficult to attend to the emotional or spiritual needs of the parents of premature and
seriously ill babies. This experience has influenced my interest in this project by
increasing my desire to help people focus on these needs in order to feel more whole
during stressful periods of life. As an RN, I also have gained the ability to obtain useful
medical histories by the use of follow-up questions when answers to standard questions
are not clear. Because of this experience, I was able to notice gaps in the participants’
responses and could individualize the follow-up questions to obtain more detailed and meaningful answers.

In the course of my career as a neonatal intensive care nurse, I have become concerned that our culture is allowing the demands of machinery to take precedence over our humanity. When I first became a nurse, the medical community called a fetus born at 23 weeks’ gestation a miscarriage, and would not have attempted any medical intervention. In my early years of working in this field, we were not capable of keeping babies alive for very long if they were less than 36 weeks’ gestation. We now keep babies of 23 weeks’ gestation alive; however, over many decades as an RN, I have observed devastating medical outcomes, including death within a few months of such premature birth. These observations have led me to no longer agree with performing medical miracles just because we are capable of doing so, without considering the costs to the infant’s future quality of life and the life of the family. I do not value technological progress higher than human life. Because of this belief, I have chosen to investigate the potential health benefits of spending a regular period of time avoiding modern technology.

**Wellness coach.** In addition, I am certified in health and wellness coaching in the new client-led holistic paradigm, which helps me to interview people in a non-directive way. When I conducted the interviews, I used my expertise to collect information from the participants. In this training, I learned a new method for obtaining information about a client’s perception of their health. One phase of this style of inquiry is called the *discovery phase* in which the coach gently leads the clients with questions that elicit their perceptions of the quality of their current wellness (Moore & Tschannen-Moran, 2010).
This technique not only helped me ask questions about perceived health benefits from weekly digital detox but also trained me to listen deeply to participants’ stories and answers.

**Personal lenses**

My personal lenses also influenced the design and interpretation of this study. In this section, I describe how my conversion to Judaism, my life as a hippie, and my upbringing in a mixed-heritage family affected my research.

**Jewish convert.** As a convert to Judaism, I am an insider-outsider who understands the culture of observant Jewish women from my studies during the conversion process and from my experiences as a Jewish woman over the past 35 years. During my first 20 years as a Jew, I observed the Shabbat laws and spent Friday night through Saturday night without using television, telephones, or radios. I also did not discuss anything related to my work during the Shabbat hours, and spent my time with people who observed the same laws. My memory of those technologically quiet Shabbatot (the Hebrew plural of Shabbat) has influenced me to study the perceived health effects of disconnecting from the constant electronic connection that has become the new normal in our society.

**Back-to-the-land hippie.** I also spent five years as a “back to the land” hippie, living simply and with very few modern conveniences. I lived without the use of electricity on a daily basis, lighting my home with kerosene lamps and cooking on a wood-burning stove. I naively felt that limiting my modern conveniences to a truck, chain saw, and wood burning stove put me outside of the civilization that I despised at the time. I now view my passionate return to the land as simplistic, but I still have a deep suspicion
of relying too much on modern technology. In my free time, I have learned to hand quilt, embroider, and crochet. I also have learned how to weave and enjoy making cloth on my loom. Most of my meals follow the rules of the slow cooking movement, and are more likely to simmer on the back of the stove all day than in an electric slow cooker. My bread machine gathers dust as I knead dough by hand. I trust the less complicated life of my ancestors more than I trust the multitasking whirlwind we exist in now. In this study, I examine the experiences of participants who limit their use of electrically powered technology in their practice of Shabbat observance.

Although that life was very difficult, when I first returned to life in the modern cities, I was startled by the amount of noise and increased speed of life from the proliferation of technological gadgets. Over the intervening decades, I changed and became a heavy user of my smart phone and computer. However, I continue to try to limit my use of technology on Shabbat whenever possible. These experiences led to my study of the harmful effects of our society’s increasing use of E/DM. In addition, I have reviewed the recent development of what I call “a secular Sabbath” during which people spend time “unplugged” from phones, computers, televisions, and other electronic devices. This secular Sabbath shares some of the restrictions of a Jewish Shabbat, although for different spiritual reasons. These experiences and studies led to my selection of this research topic.

Mixed-ethnic heritage. The concept that all cultures are valid and need to be respected permeates all that I do on a daily basis, including work and school. I was influenced by being the daughter of a second-generation Greek woman who still views the world through the lens of Greek culture. My father’s heritage is from Germany and
the British Isles. My life was shaped by these dueling cultures. As a result, though I still
have an occasional surprisingly ethnocentric view of some things, I try to see the world
through as many viewpoints as possible. This multicultural worldview influences my
constructivist paradigm which permeates this project.

My job in a highly technological medical field, my training in wellness coaching,
my Jewish spiritual life, my past experience of living like a pioneer, my multicultural
heritage, and my renewed desire to experience the peace of some kind of Sabbath all
influence how I approached my research topic.
Method

The purpose of this chapter is to present the method I used to discover perceived holistic health benefits from avoiding E/DM on a regular basis. Since my constructivist paradigm emphasizes individual perception, this project is seated within the framework of a phenomenological culture of inquiry. In this culture of inquiry, the aim is to discover the essence of an event through perceptions of individuals who share that experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I chose to uncover these individual experiences through semi-structured interviews, collage inquiry, and photographic inquiry, because implicit assumptions can often be uncovered with non-linear and intuitive methods (Butler-Kisber, 2010). For this reason, this study combines verbal and symbolic exercises to help participants discover their perceptions of many dimensions of holistic health at a deeper level.

The remainder of this chapter presents the rationale for my culture of inquiry and selected method. I then describe instrumentation, sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and protection of human subjects. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this research design.

Rationale for the culture of inquiry and method

As shown in the research in the literature review, the overuse of E/DM is causing harm to our health, and our modern work culture is encouraging this overuse, creating an invisible oppression of all people who have access to this technology. As a constructivist social critic, I feel that uncovering individuals’ perceptions of an experience yields the best data to help initiate social change (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My feminist approach
causes me to focus on women’s experiences in particular, because women’s lives are still, to some extent, defined by cultural expectations.

I used a collage inquiry that included an intuitive voicing of the chosen images, a photographic inquiry that included participants’ rationales for choosing their photographic subjects, and a semi-structured interview that encouraged answers in the form of stories. All three of the instruments I chose are part of the culture of inquiry known as phenomenology, which focuses on individual experience and perception (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Phenomenology is particularly interested in “taken for granted assumptions through which people make sense of the world” (Yanow, 2006, p. 15). This culture of inquiry is the best for my project, because the focus of my research is the lived experience of my participants described from their individual perspectives. In addition, the last two artistic inquiries come from the arts-informed method, which uses the creation of images for the purpose of data collection (Sullivan, 2010).

In the course of this project, I asked the same question three different ways in an attempt to obtain the answer in three different forms. Since I am a lone researcher, this is the way in which I was able to test and retest. Triangulation, which is using more than one source of data to answer the question, is an established method of inquiry in the social sciences (Richards, 2005). I was unable to have interrater reliability with a fellow researcher, but I was able to have multiple answers from the same participant to provide similar reliability.
Instrumentation

In this section, I describe the instruments of data collection, including their validity and reliability. The utilized instruments include: myself, SoulCollage®, photographs, and an interview schedule.

Researcher as instrument. My training as a SoulCollage® facilitator, wellness coach, and RN strengthen my validity and reliability as a research instrument. As a SoulCollage® facilitator, I have successfully led workshops in person, using this method of intuitive art. In designing this study, I assumed that I would be able to instruct my participants in this type of collage-making and interpretation. This exercise allows the participant to speak as though they were one or more of the images in the card, and as a facilitator, I was prepared to guide without inserting my own interpretation of their chosen images. I initially chose to use SoulCollage®, a method devised by Frost in the course of her practice as a psychotherapist. This method, as practiced by trained facilitators is therapeutic, but not therapy (Frost, 2010; Taylor, 2012).

I included this exercise in order to elicit unconscious thoughts from my participants. Often when saying what they think the person in the collage would say, people voice their own feelings in an unguarded way.

When I conducted the interviews, I used my expertise as a wellness coach to collect information from the participants. This training specifically focused on gathering a client’s perceptions of their health and was helpful in this study, because the purpose of the research was to learn perceptions of holistic health benefits from regular unplugging. As an RN, I have had experience with obtaining personal information from patients and
assuring them that I would not share it without permission. This provided a safe space for the participants to speak about their personal practice of unplugging for Shabbat.

**SoulCollage®.** This form of collage is a non-verbal way of discovering unconscious feelings, which are especially valuable in research concerning spiritual health, one aspect of holistic health. My intention was to have the participants imagine what the person in their collage would say about their experience with unplugging. Unlike simple photographs, these collages were made of multiple images chosen and combined by the participants. Frost (2010) theorizes that the combination of collage making and intuitive voicing can reveal unconscious feelings and thoughts, and can access a deeper level than simple photos. As described in Frost (2010), the psychotherapy practice refined this method since the 1970s. Therefore, this method today is valid and reliable.

Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzauasis, and Grauer (2006) suggests that researchers who conduct arts-informed research change the commonly used term *rigor* with *vigor*. The visual arts have multiple meanings, depending on the viewer’s perceptions. In this study, I allowed the maker of collage and the photographer to assign the meaning she intended when creating her images.

**Photographs.** The third instrument to collect data was the collection of photographs taken or found by the participants. Maxwell and Miller (2008) theorize that photography can access and illustrate the viewpoint of the photographer, providing valid and reliable data. Because of this, I asked the participants to take photos (on a day other than Shabbat) that evoke for them the way they feel when unplugged from E/DM on a weekly basis.
Sperry (1968) discovered that the right hemisphere of the human brain processes images while being capable of only rudimentary language and the left hemisphere specializes in analysis and more advanced language tasks. Because of this division of labor in the human brain, according to Sperry’s (1968) theory, the individual participants’ photographs can provide information in a non-verbal way that accesses the right brain perception of experience. The left brain would become engaged when the participant explained their choice of subject and how it related to their feelings during their weekly practice of avoiding E/DM.

**Interview schedule.** The fourth instrument I used in this study was an interview schedule that included the narratives and explanations of the participants’ choices of images. Nelson (1998) described narrative as the essential way humans figure out what experience means. I used a semi-structured interview format in order to allow the participants to describe their experience of a regular time spent without using E/DM. Because of the population I chose, which avoids this type of technology as part of their cultural practice, I formatted the questions in such a way that the answers could be given in the form of a narrative. Narrative is the natural way humans present their experience of life, and the deeper meaning of answers to questions can be found in how the story is told (Daiute, 2014). The opening questions as well as a sample of follow up questions that emerged during the interviews, are included in Appendix A.

I was unable to find an interview that fit my need to ask about personal history of regular unplugging and eliciting explanations of chosen images. Consequently, I developed my own semi-structured interview of four primary questions with the option of adding follow-up questions if necessary. I planned to use this interview schedule in
person or online, depending on circumstances. In this way, I was able to gather valid and reliable data concerning the perceptions of each participant of their individual experiences of obeying this Shabbat prohibition.

The first interview question addressed how long had observed the Shabbat prohibition against direct use of electricity. The next questions asked them to tell stories about their experiences in the past, and another one about their current experiences. After the participants had told their stories, I asked them to explain why they had chosen the five photographs while we viewed them simultaneously online. The final part of the interview was a discussion of their collages as I attempted to lead them in an exercise from SoulCollage®. In this way, I collected data from the three arts-informed methods used in this study.

**Sampling**

In this section, I present my rationale for choosing my population sample and my method for selecting my participants. The life of an observant Jewish woman revolves around the needs of her children and the management of her home. She is not obligated to follow most time-bound commandments, with the exception of Shabbat candle lighting, because she is presumed to be on childcare duty for most of her life. Men are obligated to follow all time-bound commandments, especially those involving group prayer which takes men out of the home environment for most of Shabbat, while women are presumed to be on child-care duty for most of their lives (Eisenberg, 2004). Women are left in charge of Shabbat observance in the home, and training children in all the laws of Shabbat, including enforcement of the prohibition against turning E/DM devices on and off (Plaskow, 1991). Therefore, I chose Jewish women as my pool of recruits.
Participants were drawn from Conservative Jewish adult women who are shomer Shabbos, a term for people who observe the Shabbat laws. I chose this shomer Shabbos population because of the Shabbat law against using devices that are powered by electricity (Cooper, 1995). I used snowball sampling by asking people to pass on the information about my research to others who might fit the criteria for inclusion in my project. This method helps a researcher find people who are known to fit the requirements of a research purpose (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I created a flyer (Appendix B) that outlined the purpose of my research and gave a brief description of the three activities required of the participants. Then I gave or emailed this flyer to a few people I know peripherally from my synagogue attendance, along with a request for them to pass it along to any Shabbat observant women who might be interested in participating in this research study. A sample email is included in Appendix C. Some of the women I sent the email to are well connected within the Jewish community, which helped me to reach a large pool of volunteers.

My inclusion criteria were that my participants are adult Jewish women and that they follow the prohibition against using electricity on Shabbat.

In my initial screening, I received emails from 15 women who were interested in participating. I attempted to include only women who strictly avoid using E/DM on Shabbat, but I found that each woman made some kind of exception to this. In response to this finding, I chose to include women who made exceptions in ways that were focused on relationships, and not simply entertainment. For example, the women I included use their phones to keep in touch with aging parents, but not for Internet access. In addition, women with family members who did not follow this law chose to watch DVDs with
their families. Out of the 15 women who expressed interest, nine of them decided that they did not have time to participate in this study. All of the six remaining participants completed all of the activities.

**Data collection**

Once I recruited and enrolled a participant for the study, I sent an email with detailed instructions. These instructions included preparing one story of unplugging from a past Shabbat and one from a current Shabbat. I also instructed each participant to take or find five photographs illustrating their feelings while unplugged. I requested they send the photographs via a dedicated email account, which I had set up for this project. In addition, I gave detailed instructions for preparing a collage. The instructions were:

- Find an appealing image of a person in a magazine or online image.
- Print image from online source, if necessary.
- Cut image from context.
- Find an appealing background.
- Paste the image of the person onto the background.
- Email a photograph of this collage to me.

In my initial instructions, I had told the participants that we would schedule the interviews as soon as I had received all of the images from them. I also informed them that I would ask them during the course of the interview to tell me their stories about their experiences with unplugging.

I conducted a single interview with each participant that included the storytelling and the discussion of photographs and collages. There were two formats for these
interviews due to the geographical locations of five of the participants. For the one who lived in my city, I conducted the interview in person. This interview took place in a tea shop chosen by the participant. I obtained verbal permission to audiotape the interview before I turned on the recording device. I chose to audiotape this session in order to maintain eye contact and give my full attention to the participant’s words. By being fully present while she spoke, I was able to change my questions as needed.

The interviews with participants in other cities took place either through Facebook chat or Google Hangouts (a chat platform in Gmail). During the online interviews, I allowed the participants to answer each question with multiple messages. By avoiding sending a message until the participant had indicated that they were finished with their answer, I allowed the participants time to answer without interruption.

I began all interviews by asking how long they had observed the Shabbat prohibition against the direct use of electricity, particularly related to the use of E/DM. Follow up questions were variations of “Tell me a story from your experiences keeping Shabbat.” I requested a story about their experience in the past, and one story about their experience in the present. These follow-up questions invited a narrative that provided more personal descriptions of how the participant felt about following this particular Shabbat prohibition.

I then asked them to explain their choices of photographs. During the interview conducted in person, I accessed the private email on my telephone so we could both look at the photographs while the participant talked about each. During the online interviews, I uploaded each photograph so that we could both look at it while the participant typed her explanation. This procedure was the same when I asked each participant to talk about her
collage. When discussing their collages, I asked each participant to say what she imagined the person in her collage would say about unplugging. If that was difficult for the participant to do, then I asked her to simply explain her choice of images in the collage.

**Data analysis**

In this section, I describe how I performed thematic analysis of transcripts, photographs, and collages. After transcribing the audiotaped interview and printing out the text of the ones conducted online, I used qualitative analysis to search for recurring themes that related to my research question. Because of my personal belief that unplugging is a useful holistic health tool, I made sure to search for statements that refuted this idea. In this way, I attempted to challenge my interpretations of the data. I followed Patton’s (2002) process of inductive analysis and let the categories arise from the data instead of predetermining them.

I read through all the transcripts in Word documents in edit mode, marking passages by inserting comments and noting potential themes. Afterwards, I printed out hardcopies and used colored markers to highlight potential themes. When reading the hardcopies, I noticed additional themes that were not apparent online.

On a separate piece of paper, I performed a mind mapping exercise, again with colored markers, and repeated the exercise until I had reduced the number of themes. In this exercise, I wrote each theme and drew lines connecting it to any words or phrases related to that theme. After mapping each theme, I noticed repetition, if any, and merged similar ones.
I created a separate Word document for each theme that had emerged. I then copied and pasted relevant quotes from the transcripts for each theme. At this point, I printed out the Word documents and read them closely to make sure the chosen quotes indeed illustrated each theme. In doing so, I noted that some of the themes were not valid. For example, I had created a theme of “Walking,” but the quotes clarified the fact that the participants took walks for three different reasons: to spend time with friends, to immerse themselves in nature, and to take time alone to reflect. As a result, I distributed the quotes about walking into the appropriate themes of “Social Connection,” “Nature,” and “Self-Care.”

I then printed out the photographs and collages in order to physically arrange them into potential themes. The participants had interpreted their own photographs and collages, so I linked the images to quotes that illustrated the themes that had emerged in the interviews. For the most part, I found themes consistent with the participants’ statements about their photographs and collages. I also noted that half of the photographs and collages depicted scenes of nature. Sometimes a participant used her photograph or collage to simply say she liked to be in nature when unplugged. Other times, the photograph or collage was symbolic of an emotion, such as serenity, or concepts, such as community. Finally, I organized the photographs and collages that illustrated each theme and included a few representative examples in the Results chapter. Seven final themes emerged: mental relief, social connection, self-care, nature, spiritual community, stress, and spirituality.
Protection of human subjects and ethical considerations

In this section, I address the protection of human subjects in the areas of confidentiality and privacy. I also discuss ethical considerations of data protection and copyrights.

The main risk for participants of this study was potential lack of confidentiality. Participants were from the observant Jewish population, which presented unique ethical dilemmas. As a member of the Jewish population at large, I knew that being Jewish makes us members of a group similar to a small town. The possibility of all participants knowing each other and me personally was strong. Two of the participants were people I know. These women live in different towns and we have had limited contact for the past 20 years. I did not know the other participants who volunteered through the snowball method. I made sure to remind the participants at the start of each interview that they were under no obligation to answer any questions or make any statements that made them feel uncomfortable. I removed all identifying data, as far as possible, from any quotes included in the final thesis. For instance, I removed references to professions and names of family members. I further ensured confidentiality by using the encryption method of removing participants’ names and assigning unique identifying numbers to their quotes.

I also took several steps to maintain participants’ privacy. During the course of this project, I used a private email address dedicated for the use of participants in the study, including my advisor and myself. The inclusion of personal photographs could have presented a privacy problem. Some of the participants sent pictures of themselves conducting Shabbat activities. In order to maintain privacy, I did not share this type of photograph in this project, but have included the participants’ explanations and
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descriptions of the photographs in the analysis. The participants kept the original copies and I kept the photographs in the dedicated email account until the end of the project, at which time I deleted the entire account.

I typed all notes and transcriptions into a password-protected file on a private computer with the password known only to me. Furthermore, I myself performed the transcription of the in-person interview instead of outsourcing the audiotape in order to limit the access to the raw data. I destroyed the transcripts and audiotape with identifying data at the end of the project. I also set up a private Facebook page for the online interviews and deleted the page at the study’s completion.

One ethical consideration, along with the privacy issues I have addressed, was that of using copyrighted images from magazines or websites in the publication of my research. The University of Texas at Austin (2015) issued a fair-use guideline for the use of copyrighted images in dissertations. It was their opinion that permission for images is affected by the concept of *fair use*. They consider use of images without permission, when it is difficult or impossible to obtain, to be fair use in an educational document. The statute governing this use does not specify amounts, but applies a test to the proposed use that determines whether or not the use is for profit. Dissertations fall under the category of non-profit unless and until they are published in a book that is sold on the open market. Also according to The University of Texas at Austin (2015), The Center for Social Media and Washington School of Law at American University has provided a definition of fair use in the form of two questions to determine best practice:

Is the use you want to make of another's work transformative -- that is, does it add value to and repurpose the work for a new audience -- and is the amount of
material you want to use appropriate to achieve your transformative purpose?

According to this law school, the appropriate amount as referenced above is up to 10% of a total document. In my project, participants used images cut from magazines or gathered from a Google image search. They then combined these images into a collage, and thus transformed the material into new images. Therefore, my use of portions of potentially copyrighted images was permissible.

**Strengths and limitations**

In this section, I address the strengths and limitations of my research paradigms, culture of inquiry, instruments, and chosen population sample. In addition, I discuss the strengths and limitations of my status as a Jewish woman, lone researcher, and human.

My research purpose was to discover the perceived health benefits of a weekly practice of avoiding E/DM for 25 hours. I was interested in the holistic health dimensions of physical, mental and spiritual health. These dimensions are not easily measured by any quantitative method, especially if the desired data are in the form of perceptions. Therefore, the constructivist portion of my paradigm, which considers reality to be individually perceived, was a strong paradigm from which to approach this question. The limitation of my constructivist paradigm is that my project is not completely repeatable. Other similar studies can be performed with different individuals, but since the aim is to discover perceptions, the results may differ with each group of participants.

Additionally, I viewed the data through a feminist lens. I chose to recruit women for this study in the hope of bringing awareness to women and society at large about how abstaining from E/DM affects women’s lives. My social critical agenda is to expose the
oppression from the increasing intrusion of technology into our daily lives. My feminist social critical theory position risks contamination from my agenda, and I needed to be aware of that risk throughout the study. I was very careful during each interview not to interject my opinion on the value of unplugging by limiting my participation to the interview questions and avoiding any statements of my beliefs.

My phenomenological culture of inquiry and phenomenological method of interviewing allowed each participant to give individual answers, which is both a strength and a limitation. The strength of this culture and method is that they both value individual perceptions, which were the focus of my research. The limitation is that the results are dependent on the individuals involved. My sample size was limited to eight women, and thus my results were not intended to be generalizable.

Two of my instruments were arts-informed. This method used images created by the participants to help them access thoughts and feelings at a deeper level than can be accessed verbally. This strength is counterbalanced by the fact that interpretation of art is subjective, and the researcher may interpret the visual data differently. I remained alert to this possibility during this project in an attempt to avoid this problem. In addition, participants may have felt the need to give interpretations that they perceived the researcher wanted to hear, which was difficult to determine. Some participants may not have been able to adequately put into words the feelings that arose from making the collage or taking the photographs. This also was difficult for me to determine.

I conducted five of the interviews via a chat platform, either through Facebook or Google, because the participants lived in different parts of the country. Opdenakker (2006) studies online interviews and outlines possible advantages and disadvantages of
interviews conducted via instant messaging. This researcher notes the potential disadvantage due to absence of social queues is mitigated by the use of emoticons. A few disadvantages Opdenakker (2006) notes were that miscommunications would occur during times when both people type at the same time.

Both of the platforms I used show dotted lines whenever the other person is still typing, so I was able to wait until all indications of the participants’ typing disappeared before typing a follow-up question. Two researchers mention the main advantages of online interviews as being the ability to conduct interviews at any time and this type of interview generates its own transcription (Salmons, 2010; Kazmer & Xie, 2008). These researchers also note this style of interview is most effective when participants are capable typists. I found that all five participants typed rapidly with only a few typographical errors that did not make the transcript unintelligible.

My choice of observant Jewish women who obey the Shabbat prohibition of using E/DM from sundown every Friday until sundown every Saturday was expedient. Although their motivation for unplugging was from their religious tradition, they were easier to find in the short time allotted for this research project than those who unplug for secular reasons. However, Shabbat observance includes many restrictions and activities that may provide health benefits either singly or in combination. Therefore, it was not possible to isolate disconnection from E/DM as the only reason for health benefits.

My status as a Jewish woman was both a strength and a limitation. As an insider to this culture, I understand many things intuitively that an outsider might not perceive. While this is a strength, familiarity with this culture may have blinded me to pertinent data that an outsider would have noticed. Along with this limitation, my participants and I
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share a common culture. Participants may have withheld thoughts and feelings that they did not want others in the culture to know.

Audiotaping the face-to-face interview assured that the accuracy of that participant’s words was preserved, while online interviews generated their own transcriptions. My familiarity with the culture helped me in transcribing any culture-specific language. For example, there were occasional Yiddish or Hebrew phrases in the participants’ responses. One limitation of this method of data collection is that some people can be intimidated by the thought that they are being recorded and self-censor their words (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). I think this may have happened in my study as evidenced by occasional long pauses in the online interviews and the unfinished sentences in the in-person interview.

Because I was a lone researcher for this project, I attempted to use triangulation by asking my research question in three ways in order to obtain data from different approaches (Richards, 2005). I searched for phrases that would demonstrate the opposite of my belief in the health benefits of unplugging in order to make sure I had not found the answer I was looking for by ignoring data that refuted my belief.

Finally, I realize that using myself as the instrument that analyzed the data, instead of a computer program, made my analysis subject to the limitations of the human brain in terms of dispassionate observation. On the other hand, as a human being, I was able to identify and recognize subtle nuances of meaning.
Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of my research project. In the first section, I describe the participants and any relevant demographic data. Using quotes from the narratives, I share each participant’s observation of Shabbat. Although Shabbat observance includes many behaviors, this study focused only on their level of unplugging. Next, I address observational data obtained during interactions with the participants. Finally, using quotes and pictures from the data, I identify and present the seven major themes that emerged: mental relief, social connection, self-care, nature, spiritual community, stress, and spirituality.

Description of the participants

Six women participated in this study. One was a single, 20-year-old college student with no children. The others ranged from 49 to 58 years old and were all married. Each participant identified with the Conservative branch of Judaism, which is traditional and follows Jewish laws, especially those describing the observance of Shabbat. The length of time each participant has been unplugged for Shabbat varied between 17 years to lifelong. Because of the snowball method of sampling, there was no location requirement for participants. As a result, one participant lives in the Twin Cities in Minnesota and the rest live in five different states: Illinois, Ohio, Arizona, Massachusetts, and New York. The married participants have either no children, adult children, teenage children, or children in college. All participants spend substantial amounts of time online six days a week, and unplug as much as possible on Shabbat. Each one makes an exception or two to their unplugging, which I will illustrate with direct quotes. (Note: I
have not corrected the punctuation and capitalization of the quotes obtained via chat media.)

Each participant claimed to avoid using electronic media and phones during Shabbat, but most have made exceptions. Some of these are personal compromises, based on the differing levels of observance in their family. None of the participants use the computer on Shabbat for Internet activities, but some would use the computer to play a DVD that the family would watch together. Others would watch TV but avoided all other E/DM. One woman said,

> I will watch TV if it is a group thing usually, something that the family is doing together... We won't use phone. I do not listen to the radio on Shabbat. Definitely no computer for me on Shabbat, but also Internet in general.

Participants made other exceptions related to their stages of life, such as keeping track of teenagers or keeping in touch with elderly parents. One participant used the telephone on Shabbat to be in touch with important people in her life. She said,

> Recently, in the last couple of years, I’ve gone back to occasionally making a phone call on Shabbat. If my partner’s out of town, I’ll call her on Shabbat. There are a couple of friends who I’ll call. And my mom.

Each participant described a living situation in which their level of observance did not match that of their family. Most of the mismatch was between the participants who observe the ban on using electricity, and family members who do not, such as this woman who said, *I separate myself from the rest of the family, who is not unplugging, and I*
remain unplugged. In one case, the mismatch was between the participant who makes exceptions to the ban and a family member who does not. Some families have mixed levels of observance. For example, this participant said, *I'm the only one who doesn't use electricity...neither kid is shsh,[Shomer Shabbos, or Shabbat observant] and my husband checks his phone, but in the house we keep to the standard.* Another participant honored the prohibition against using E/DM on Shabbat, but her siblings did not. She explained that her siblings did not use this technology in front of their parents, but would use their telephones or computers in their rooms.

**Observational data**

According to the SoulCollage® method, I asked the participants to imagine what the image in their collage would say. None of them were able to do this. I explained this was a right-brained activity, but I encountered resistance to trying the interpretation. One participant stated, *I don't have a right brain.* In spite of the resistance to the SoulCollage® method of interpretation, their eloquent and personally meaningful statements occasionally surprised the participants. My training in SoulCollage® helped me to elicit some poetic responses, but, for the most part, the participants simply described what was in the pictures they had assembled rather than following my instructions for interpretation. Because they all performed the task in the same wrong way, I included these collages in the data set, but I viewed them instead as additional photographs.

In the chat interviews, the participants’ uses of language expressed enthusiasm for discussing this subject. All five thanked me for involving them in this project and noted that it gave them a chance to notice the benefits of their practice of regular unplugging.
Interviewing via this media did not provide direct non-verbal data, but participants extensively inserted emoticons indicating smiling or winking, and used the standard abbreviation for humor (LOL = laugh out loud). They occasionally began typing visible through the appearance of “… ” and then stopped in order to edit themselves. Sometimes there was a pause of three-to-five minutes between portions of their answers.

During the in-person interview, the participant smiled and laughed often. She maintained eye contact throughout except for during periods of thought between her statements. Occasionally she spoke in a string of unfinished introductory phrases, with short hesitations between each one. Each time she did this, she then spoke about an emotional aspect of her experience with unplugging. This behavior was similar to the online behavior of retyping answers before sending them during a chat.

For the photographic inquiry, participants took or found five photographs that illustrated how they felt while unplugged. Some participants took photographs as asked, while others chose images from online searches.

**Themes**

From the interviews and discussions of images, seven themes emerged: mental relief, social connection, self-care, nature, spiritual community, stress, and spirituality. I describe each of these themes individually, accompanied by relevant quotes and photographs in the following subsections.

**Mental relief.** The majority of statements by the participants expressed a feeling of peace and serenity. Six photos and two collages illustrated this feeling. One participant
stated that being unplugged regularly on Shabbat was *like a spa for your brain.* Two participants had experienced peace during an unplugged Shabbat in Jerusalem.

Participants repeatedly used common words, such as *peaceful, calm, relaxation, stillness,* and *relief.* Three women stressed they felt relief from knowing that no matter what they had left unfinished, there was nothing they could do about it after unplugging for Shabbat. One showed this with her choice of this picture, which she described as *stress from the week literally being exhaled from my body.*

Three of the photos show common places to relax: a bed, a cozy couch, and a rocking chair. One chose a picture of an orderly bedroom to illustrate how *Shabbat brings an order to time and the mind can be more calm and ordered.* Another chose a busy city for the background in her collage, explaining, *I find great peace and quiet walking the streets among the noise.* Two chose symbolic ways to illustrate the feeling of calm. One participant chose a photograph of a cocoon and explained this choice of a photo by saying:
The cocoon is sort of how I am during it (Shabbat), sheltered from the world, stillness, calm, quiet, all of these occur within after being unplugged on Shabbat. Afterwards, it is like coming out of a cocoon – not in a butterfly way, but in a way of I have been sheltered for this time, and now I am allowing the outer world in again.

This close-up photograph of a ribbed sweater demonstrates the mental peace one woman experiences. She explained it with this statement: *When I have been unplugged for awhile, I get a sense of internal alignment – usually there is a jumble of noises inside, but after the unplugged period I am quieter inside.*

Many participants emphasized the separation from the working world when unplugged for Shabbat. A sample of these statements shows the relief felt from taking time away from all types of work regularly. *Like a breath of fresh air, with no tethers to the day-to-day. I loved knowing that I had worked hard to get everything done ahead, and have all the meals organized.* One woman did not avoid thinking about work, but viewed the time spent away from her job as beneficial to her work production: *My work is a part of who I am, and I do still think about work on Shabbat…resting my work-brain will allow me to be more creative at work during the week.* Another participant viewed this time away from work as a reminder of the fact that work is not the main purpose of her life: *I consider being shomer Shabbat (Shabbat observant) a real blessing in my life. It keeps the hectic day-to-day lifestyle at bay and shows me that it isn’t the most important thing.* Most of the women expressed the fact that this break from weekday demands decreased stress: *I can be pretty harried and pulled in many directions*
the rest of the week - home, kids, husband, job, school(s) of the girls, etc. being unplugged allows me to not be in the tug of war of all of these stressors.

Frequently participants expressed the idea that unplugging for Shabbat enhanced a feeling of being mindful or present in the moment. They showed this in statements as well as in their photographs and collages. One woman said, *The effect (during a past Shabbat) was certainly one of focus. I could just be in the moment, and be there to enjoy her company and whatever was happening.* Another stated, *I would say that taking the break is a way to be more present in the moment. To stop listening to the noise of the news cycle and the stress that it produces.* Two collages illustrate this state of being. The first shows a person directly looking into the camera, and the participant described her as *kind of engaged with what’s going on.* The second includes an open hand in her collage, explaining, *The hand is open to receiving. Open to the world around.* Another woman chose to illustrate mindfulness with a photograph of bubbles. She explained this image by saying, *There is a lightness that comes with being unplugged... You can just kind of float and be in the moment.*

**Social connection.** Seven statements include having meals with friends and family as an essential part of an unplugged Shabbat. Three participants chose to include...
this concept with their choice of photos, and one included a shared meal in her collage. One participant pointed out the difference between having guests who unplugged for Shabbat and those who did not:

At a Shabbat lunch, everyone stays until way late in the afternoon. Sometimes in the winter, it’s almost until Shabbat is over! No one is that relaxed and “present” during the week: people are checking phones, or running to pick someone else up, or something.

All of the participants stress that being unplugged created time to spend with friends, which allowed for deeper conversations than their brief contacts during the work week. Some mentioned going for walks together, some described various activities listed below, and others simply described the joy of just being together. In the first category, three women shared pictures from Google image searches that show groups of happy people gathered around a festive meal. One woman summed up this idea by saying, the picture of food is for being sated through Shabbat – the centrality of eating together, being satisfied and giving thanks. Besides walking together, participants listed other group activities, such as swimming, singing, playing games, working puzzles, and having deep conversations. One woman described the joy of just being together with this statement: I miss my kids a lot on Shabbat. Our house is always filled with their friends on Shabbat when they are home...My husband and I love starting to read on Friday night after dinner and Shabbat afternoon.

Self-care. Along with social activities, the participants valued the time they were able to spend alone. The next category of statements describe the effect unplugging has on self-care. Many list the opportunity to take a nap, to take a walk alone, to read, or to just be alone to think. Two stress the lack of guilt over performing these “non-
productive” activities. One woman said: *Normally taking a nap or a walk during the day carries with it a level of guilt...I’m not doing whatever it is that’s on my to-do list. But on Shabbat, reading and napping and walking ARE my to-do list!* Another addressed her lack of guilt over not unplugging entirely. She stated:

> It’s nice to be at a point in my life where I am comfortable with the fact that I am not 100% about it. I truly do believe that the opportunity that Shabbat gives me to be reflective and take time out is part of what keeps me sane, but it’s not all-consuming either.

Sleep was a common activity that participants mentioned in the narratives and illustrated with pictures. Most participants sent pictures of beds or of themselves napping on a couch. Most pictures of beds are from Google image searches, but one shows a bed that had been slept in. One woman told of her irritation with the restrictions of Shabbat until *in high school, I discovered the beauty of The Nap!* Another said, *I am generally a bit of a night owl, but I still get up early (during the week). I appreciate Shabbat for taking time to catch up on sleep.*

Many of the women reported reading as an enjoyable activity during Shabbat. Some of the statements made it clear that reading during Shabbat is different than reading during the rest of the week. One woman said, *On Shabbat, the need to expand my brain or life experience through reading feels fulfilled. It's like filling up an engine to get ready for another week.* Some of the participants included photographs of themselves while
reading, which I did not include here due to privacy concerns. The following photos
taken by participants demonstrate the types of reading enjoyed while being unplugged,
from sacred literature to popular novels.
**Nature.** All of the participants made statements emphasizing the importance of being in nature, most of which were made in connection with photographs taken by them. In the collection of photographs and collages, images of nature appeared even when the participant used it to illustrate a feeling. In the narratives, many participants described spending a Shabbat by a lake, and five of the photographs are views of a lake such as this one:

Other statements and pictures show forests, beaches, and rocks in a brook. Each participant who shared pictures of nature spoke of feeling serene, calm, peaceful, reflective, and still. One woman depicted this feeling with this photo:
Two women spoke of the different senses of time they felt when unplugged. One described it as being able to check in with nature during that time. I can just be on the planet’s time...and tuned into the rhythm of nature. Another spoke of time spent unplugged as a time to connect with the world in a different way, on a planetary sense – nature sense. She illustrated this with this picture of a sunset.

**Spiritual community.** All six women included synagogue attendance as an essential part of Shabbat and spoke of this experience as being part of their community. One said, At synagogue I feel connected to my community, to my friends and to God (in that order). Another participant used New York City as the background in her collage, because there are lots of shuls (synagogues) to choose from. One woman spoke similarly about experiencing Shabbat in Jerusalem and New York City by saying, I’ve always been surrounded by many others who love doing the same thing. One participant once lived in a community where she spent Shabbat afternoon visiting and studying sacred texts with neighbors. Another who lived in a neighborhood of Conservative Jews who observed Shabbat described the sense of community this way: to some extent, all of us in the neighborhood who are shomer Shabbos [unplugged] share a fundamental experience
every 7th day. Really a communal experience! She illustrated this sense of community with this picture of penguins, which she chose, because It represents feeling like an individual and at the same time, being an integral part of a strong, ancient and healthy community. This is how I feel in Shabbat, especially in synagogue.

No participant used a photograph of a synagogue, but one included a picture taken of herself while praying. The two women who chose big cities for the background of their collages both emphasized feeling a part of the larger community where there were a lot of synagogues. One of the women felt a sense of community to the larger, historical Jewish community when she read sacred texts on Shabbat. She said, Being unplugged on Shabbat links me to my ancestors – as illustrated in the Torah, the siddur (prayerbook), I am choosing to link myself to the generations that have come before. Along with her previously shown picture of sacred books, she also chose to include a picture of a chain in her collage, which she explained by saying, I liked the idea of the chain, Shabbat links us across generations. Through history. Another woman described Shabbat as a taste of the future:

We get a taste of the Messianic time on Shabbat and it’s having a vision which gives us the strength to go through the rest of the week. And the more you have people around you who are doing the same thing, the more real the vision is. The more people around you who are observing Shabbat, they are supporting this vision of the future time.
All six participants stressed the importance of being part of a community and followed the same law against using electricity. Each one stated that if this weren’t a spiritual law and if they did not belong to a community with this shared behavior, they would not unplug on a regular basis.

**Stress.** Unlike most of the themes that were positive feelings, the next most prevalent was a sense of frustration or irritation with being unplugged during Shabbat. One woman indicated that she was tired of following this prohibition by saying, *Part of me is done with it. But I can’t see how changing (my practice of unplugging) would enhance my Shabbat.* Another spoke of the way observing Shabbat limited her time to accomplish tasks on the weekend: *Sometimes I think UGH! I only have ONE day to get stuff done! (Sunday).* The length of Shabbat during summer led others to say, *Summer Shabbatot are LOOOOOOng! and It’s pretty boring. Especially in the summer, and it gets a little old.* One woman, married to someone who owns a kosher business, worried that her Shabbat observation needed to be visible to the public, because *There is a community responsibility, and I sometimes feel like I do not fulfill the community’s vision of (his) wife...I worry sometimes that me being who I am may impact his business’ success.*

**Spiritual experience.** One picture and three collages show evidence of participants having a spiritual experience from unplugging on Shabbat. In one collage, a picture of an open door on a sunny day is accompanied by the words, *doorway to a taste of heaven.* One woman chose a picture of a chandelier *because of the light – sort of enlightened by unplugging.* In one picture of a bedroom, there is a design of ripples on the wall that the participant interpreted this way:
I can see it as the ripples of shabbat [sic] through the week and through life. After Shabbat we carry that calm, hopefully, with us. We think about prepping for shabbat [sic] earlier in the week. It ripples forward and back in our time/life/day/week.

The following two pictures from two different participants are similar:

One of these participants described this picture in these words: *That is to show the feeling I get when I bring in Shabbat – like a breath of fresh air. Like another Shabbat soul joining mine.*
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The other participant states that she chose the picture *because she looked so free* and because the picture *gave a sense of ahhhhhh* (as a pun on the word “awe”).

**Summary**

The seven themes that emerged during data analysis are mental relief, social connection, self-care, nature, spiritual community, stress, and spirituality. They describe the lived experience of the participants’ Shabbatot, specifically their feelings about the aspect of unplugging. Six out of the seven themes express positive benefits of this regular practice; one expressed a negative effect.
**Discussion**

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings of my research study. I start by discussing my findings, followed by implications of the results for holistic health, for community, and for future research. Finally, I end with a conclusion briefly summarizing my findings.

**Findings**

In this section, I present the themes that emerged from my study. These themes suggest that unplugging affects our physical and mental health, and enhances social connection. In addition, I discuss themes of connection with nature, spiritual experience, and spiritual community. Finally, I present the theme of stress that participants feel when unplugged.

**Mental relief.** Work has become stressful in the modern age due to the increased expectations of workplaces that workers be available during off-hours (Machlowitz, 1980; Thomee, 2012). Many of the participants made statements regarding mental relief, which focused on the feeling of being disconnected from all work and school pressures, because they conduct so much of work and school online. They described the experience of being offline regularly each week as a feeling of relief that due to their commitment to being unplugged on Shabbat, they were unable to work on any work projects. As a result, many mentioned that they were able to focus on the moment, which gave them a sense of peace.

Although I had asked the participants to reflect on their feeling of being unplugged, the practice of avoiding E/DM is only one aspect of Shabbat observance. The ancient Jewish law forbade lighting a fire, and rabbinical authorities expanded this
prohibition to include all devices that are powered by electricity, gas, or anything that included ignition. Because of this, Shabbat observance of this law includes prohibition of cooking, driving, vacuuming, or mowing a lawn, to name a few. It may be that some of the mental relief felt by the participants was also due to the prohibition on the use of electricity included driving or using any home appliances. This allowed them to feel free from chores at home as well as tasks related to work and school, as the selected quotes in the Results chapter demonstrated.

**Social connection.** The experience of Shabbat, which includes unplugging as a requirement, gave participants time to concentrate on family and friends. Participants discussed the increased opportunity to have meals with family and friends, uninterrupted by cell phones, emails, or television. They also mentioned going on walks with friends, with time for unhurried face-to-face conversation. They emphasized the pleasure of simply spending time with friends and family, whether in outdoor activities or singing together or playing board games.

The participants live near other Jewish people who follow the same Shabbat laws, making it easier to spend time with like-minded friends. As one participant mentioned, having people over for Shabbat who followed the laws was different from having people over who constantly checked cell phones during their visit. All participants are active members of synagogues, which also provided a community to spend time with during a part of the 25-hour Shabbat. Even if the other synagogue members did not follow the laws when at home, there were many opportunities for conversation during the long lunches after services. The social connections the participants enjoyed are with family and friends who are shomer Shabbos, like they are. It is possible that this would not be a
benefit if they lived far from other Jewish people. In that case, the result of this practice might be social isolation one day a week.

**Self-care.** All of the participants in my study mentioned the opportunity for long naps as a regular part of their unplugged Shabbat experience. Some of this time for naps might also be explained as being available due to the inability to cook, or perform other household chores that involved electric or gas appliances, as described above under the theme of mental relief.

Participants in this study mentioned that they enjoyed the opportunity to spend time alone, which included solo walks and time spent reading books. Some read spiritual literature, while others read widely in subjects that had nothing to do with work or school. The determination to avoid E/DM devices gave participants the opportunity to do what Turkle (2015) called *deep reading*, which requires long periods of intense focus on reading matter.

**Connection with nature.** I did not find any studies connecting overuse of technology with disconnection from nature. However, my participants emphasized that their time spent unplugged gave them more time to be outdoors. They mentioned that they felt more calm and peaceful when spending time near lakes and in forests. Without the connection to their cell phones, they spoke of feeling *tuned into the rhythm of nature*. Of the 45 photographs (some participants sent more than five photos to me) and five collages submitted by the participants, half of them were images of nature.

Participants mentioned taking long walks in three thematic categories: social connection, self-care, and nature. I chose to include these three different kinds of walks in separate themes due to the different nature of the walks. Unlike the walks that provided
time for conversation with friends and family, or the solo walks intended to create time for reflection, some Shabbat walks were for the sole purpose of being immersed in nature.

**Spiritual community.** According to the Shabbat prohibition against the use of electricity, the participants followed this spiritual law and explained that being unplugged for Shabbat made them feel part of the larger community of the Jewish people. One chose to illustrate this feeling with a picture of a group of penguins, because she simultaneously felt like an individual and part of a community. Two others included a background of a large city in their collages, stating that they knew they could find synagogues and groups of Jewish people who shared this Shabbat practice. All of the participants attended synagogue regularly and spent their Shabbat days with like-minded people who were unplugged. They described their immersion in their spiritual community as central to their practice of unplugging.

When asked if they would regularly unplug if this were not a spiritual law, every one of them said that though they knew the benefits of this practice, they would not be disciplined enough to consistently unplug weekly if it were not part of their religious practice. Most mentioned that part of the benefits they receive from unplugging come from being part of a larger community who disconnect from E/DM during the same 25-hour time period each week. Though they would like to think they would seek the mental benefits of this practice, they emphasized that receiving the spiritual and social benefits were more motivating.

**Spiritual experience.** Nothing in the literature addressed spiritual experiences of Shabbat in connection with unplugging. The participants who mentioned this aspect of
Shabbat explained that being unconnected to the everyday modern world made them feel connected to a feeling of enlightenment or *a taste of heaven*. This experience was different than the connection to spiritual community, which was described by one participant as *a feeling of connection to community, friends and God (in that order)*. The participants who felt a spiritual effect from unplugging described this as a solo experience, unconnected with synagogues or nature. The pictures the participants chose to illustrate this experience showed people alone in nature, as shown in the Results chapter. It was for this reason I think this effect is different from the theme of spiritual community, which is more centered around traditional Shabbat practices.

**Stress.** Not all of the effects of unplugging were positive. The restrictions of Shabbat occasionally caused stress to the participants. One spoke of the fact that her weekend time for running errands was limited to only one day, while another spoke of the frustration she felt having to leave tasks unfinished during her time spent offline. Because Jewish law measures Shabbat from sundown to sundown, summer causes Shabbat to be much longer than other times of year. As a result, half of the participants expressed feelings of frustration and boredom during summertime Shabbatot. Despite these stressors, the participants who experienced them quickly stated that they were not willing to give up the observance of Shabbat.

This theme illustrates the mixed effects of deliberately stepping away from modern life. Although this practice increases social connection and increases time for relaxing activities, the tasks of a modern workplace or school are not easy to leave unfinished for 25 or more hours each week.
Implications of this research

This study has implications for holistic health, community, and further research. In this section, I address each of these implications.

**Holistic health.** This research project uncovered holistic health benefits from the practice of regular unplugging from E/DM. Although the participants were Shabbat observant Jewish women, there were some benefits that were not specific to that community alone. Making a commitment to a practice of regularly unplugging is a free resource for enhancing health in more than one dimension. In assessing health holistically, mental and physical health are not the only aspects that are important. Social health is concerned with the strength of social connection, both with family and friends. Spiritual health deals with more than religious behavior or regular attendance of worship services. It also includes a spiritual connection to nature or time spent alone in meditation. Spending time in nature is also an aspect of environmental health. The themes uncovered in this research project suggest that making a commitment to spend time unplugged from constant cyber-connection allows time and energy for real life connections that affect many dimensions of holistic health.

The stress of modern life, with its increasing reliance on online activity, can be relieved with this simple tool. The theme of mental relief was the most mentioned by the participants in this study. When boundaries are drawn between work life and personal life, through disconnecting from computers and phones, individuals can experience relief from being constantly on-call to employers (Ophir, 2009).

Families who practice regular unplugging would be able to spend more time communicating with each other, thus strengthening their relationships. By being
unavailable to online connection, but open to face-to-face connection, individuals can strengthen their bonds with family and friends. Participants in this study emphasized the importance of sharing meals, outdoor activities, and conversations uninterrupted by phone calls and electronic noise of all kinds. In this atmosphere, social connections can become stronger (Turkle, 2015).

Connection with nature can also be more possible when individuals spend time outside without the distraction of phone calls or the constant possibility of Internet access on their smart phones. Walking alone in a forest or spending time with family and friends in an outdoor setting helps individuals become aware of their place in the world, as well as other benefits outlined by Schauer, Koch, Willey, and Lemieux (2016).

Community. Although the participants in my study were Jewish women who keep the Shabbat law regarding use of electricity, anyone can use this practice of disconnecting from E/DM on a regular basis. A weekly day of unplugging may prove too difficult for people who are not bound by Jewish law, but any period of time set aside would be helpful. Families could stop the use of E/DM for an hour each evening in order to reconnect with each other on a personal level, thus improving their social and relational health. People could spend their time in nature, either alone or with friends and family, without their cell phones in order to connect with each other and experience improved environmental health. Individuals and families could revisit group activities that do not require E/DM, such as board games, puzzles, reading out loud to each other, or taking time to do craft activities together. Even in the most overscheduled household, one meal a week could be designated technology-free to provide a chance for preparing a meal together and participating in conversation.
Further research. There was a small sample size in this study due to time constraints, but other researchers could perform further studies using larger populations. This study concentrated on Shabbat-observant Jewish women due to expediency, but other studies could include people who unplug regularly for secular reasons. Another type of study that would be useful would be an experimental one inviting people to try unplugging once a week for a period of time and journaling their experience. This data could be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. In an action study, entire communities could be invited to a world café to discuss and decide upon a community-wide practice of unplugging, followed by a period of time trying out this practice. Finally, researchers could revisit the studies that found detrimental effects from overuse of technology and design studies to examine if these effects could be reversed by regularly unplugging.

Conclusion

In this study, I examined the lived experience of Jewish women who regularly unplug during Shabbat and found a number of benefits to holistic health in more than one dimension. These dimensions of holistic health include mental, social, physical, spiritual, and environmental. The participants felt an overall sense of relief and decreased stress during the time they spent unplugged from E/DM whether work- or entertainment-related. The time usually spent connected to various forms of media became free for the participants to spend with family and community. This strengthened social connections, which are an important aspect of holistic health. All participants also spoke of using this free time to take care of themselves physically by catching up on sleep, or mentally by spending time reading. In addition, time alone allowed participants to experience spiritual effects, such as feeling *the addition of an extra soul, experiencing a taste of heaven*, or
living according to planetary time instead of productive time. The ability to spend time in
nature, alone or with friends, is an aspect of environmental health. All participants not
only spoke of the benefits of connecting with nature, they also used photographs of
nature to illustrate many of their statements about mental and spiritual health.

According to the literature search, this is the first study focusing on the benefits of
decreasing use of E/DM instead of the harmful effects of overuse. More research needs to
be done to quantify these holistic health benefits, and studying diverse populations would
provide generalizable data. I hope future researchers will perform further studies and pay
more attention to this practice of unplugging as a holistic health tool.


Phillips, G.M. (2014). Mobile users are more vigilant than situated users. *Human-Computer Interaction, 21,* 166-177. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-07227-2_17


improves preteen skills with nonverbal emotional cues. *Computers in Human Behavior, 39*, 387-92. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.036


Appendix A

Interview Questions

1) How long have you been avoiding technology as part of your Shabbat observance?

2) Tell me a story about a past Shabbat experience with unplugging.

3) Tell me a story about a current Shabbat experience, focused on the experience of unplugging.

4) We will look at your choice of photos and at your collage one at a time now. Please tell me why you chose these images to illustrate how you feel on Shabbat while being unplugged?

Is there anything you would like to add about your experience being unplugged on Shabbat before we finish this interview?
Shabbat-Related Research: Call for adult female volunteers

I am studying the potential health benefits of spending one day a week without electronic media. I want to gather the impressions of benefits from Shabbat observers who follow the particular prohibition of direct use of electricity on Shabbat.

I intend to gather these impressions in two sessions. One group activity will be simple collage making with provided materials that will include a group discussion of the finished collages. The other activity will be presenting photos in an individual session that illustrate feelings about this aspect of Shabbat. This will include an interview asking about personal experiences avoiding electronic media during Shabbat. These activities will take place in a public space, such as a library.

Would you be willing to take part in these activities? No personal information will be in the final publication. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

Irene Michaels
Unplug.Shabbat@gmail.com
Appendix C

Emails To Participants

1) Initial recruitment email:
Dear _____

I am in the research phase for my MA thesis in Holistic Health Studies and I'm studying the potential health benefits of spending one day a week without electronic media. My research question is "What is the experience of unplugging in the context of the Jewish Shabbat?" There are people who "unplug" for various periods of time and for various reasons, but I'm focusing on women who "unplug" as part of their Shabbat observance.

In particular, I want to gather the impressions of these perceived health benefits from Shabbat observers who avoid the use of telephones (including cell), computers (including iPads and e-readers), televisions, stereos, radios, iPods and other electronic media. Those who drive, cook, or use electricity for other purposes are not excluded from this study, because my focus is on purposeful disconnection from the modern digital world and electronic noise. However, those who use timers for E/DM devices will be excluded.

I intend to gather these impressions in two sessions:

- Simple, facilitated collage-making in a small group, with provided materials, which will include a group discussion of the finished collages. This will take approximately 2-3 hours and take place on a Sunday. (Jan 4, or Jan 31)

- Private interview, which includes a discussion of the five photographs that you will have been asked to take over the course of this project, a story about a typical Shabbat in the past and one about your present experience of Shabbat, focusing on the experience of unplugging. This will take approximately one hour.

Copies of collages and photos will be included in the presentation and publication of this project.

The scheduled Sundays for the group activity are January 3rd or 31st. Private interviews will be scheduled on non-Shabbat evenings: December 22nd - January 10th, and January 25 - February 2nd. There may be some daytime availability on these dates as well. These sessions will take place in a neutral, public space such as a library.

Do you know anyone that would be able to take part in these activities? All identifying information will be removed from the data to ensure confidentiality in the final thesis. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

If you know any Jewish women in the Twin Cities who might be interested in participating, please forward this email to them and provide me with their names and contact information. The timeframe for my research is quite compressed; therefore, please make a firm commitment in time to participate in January. I am attaching a flyer to include in emails to potential volunteers.

Thanks!
2) Modified instructions to chosen participants:

Dear _____

1 - Please take or choose 5 pictures that illustrate how you feel when unplugged on Shabbat and email them to me at Unplug.Shabbat@gmail.com.

   When I get back, we can talk about them via google chat if you have a gmail account, or FB chat, or even with a series of emails. I need to have a record, and so far haven't successfully recorded any phone conversations.

   Or we could Skype and I can record that on my phone's voice memo.

2 - Please think about some past Shabbat that is memorable for the feeling of being unplugged, and one more recent.

   I'll let you just tell the stories with minimal questions. Or you can type it up and email that too.

3 - As for the collage, here's the procedure:

   Look through your magazines and find a face or person, or even part of a person (see my example in the attachments) that appeals to you. Try to do this intuitively. Cut it completely out of context.

   Look again for interesting backgrounds: scenery, piles of towels, stars and planets, buildings, ANYthing. Place the face on them until it "looks right". Again, try to work intuitively.

   Cut the background into a 5x8 rectangle and glue the face where it seems to "belong"

   If you want to add an object and/or an animal, cut them out of context and place them on the 5x8 rectangle.

   Then take a picture and email it to me. We will talk about it during the interview. Thank you!