

## Chapter 6

# Guardians: The Technological Resistance Fighters

I feel that there's a need, there's definite need for all this modern technology. There's a need for it but I think it's just like many, many things it's overdone. I think it's absolutely mind-boggling ridiculous that cars now have TVs in them [...] I believe a happy life is a life of moderation. Yes, use a computer, use a cell phone. The cell phone is wonderful because you can be in the grocery store and realize that "oh gosh do I need that?" And you could call home and say, "can you look in the cupboard and see if I need such and such or" or you can call somebody and say, "I'm running late. I got caught in traffic." But you go to the mall and you see people walking around and they're just talking on the cell phones. Talk, talk, talk on the cell phone. I thought you went to the mall to go shopping. So, I think that people go overboard on all that stuff. (Margaret)

Gluttony. Laziness. Waste. Excess. Morality. Boundaries. Control.

Guardians are deeply concerned about the impact of technology on our societies. ICTs are not seen as negative, but rather seen as enabling individuals to wallow in negative traits we all possess: laziness, gluttony, waste, and self-isolation.

Guardians believe that individuals need to set strict boundaries, carefully controlling their ICT use. While deeply concerned about issues such as information security, privacy, and media bias, they use a mixture of ICTs in their everyday lives. Guardians tend to not differentiate between kinds of ICTs in their potential to cause moral decay nor do they make distinctions based on the relative age(s) of the ICT(s). Abuse of the telephone is no different than abuse of the computer in Guardians' minds: both can be used in ways that impact our safety and privacy, and cause harm to people and society.

Guardians are introduced to ICTs by family members and through work. They heavily regulate their own technological use (setting time limits, for instance) and tend to hide all ICTs in their homes to prevent "mindless" or unintentional use. Guardians often have been shaped by extremely traumatic experiences with technology in their early to mid-adulthood.

## Formative Experiences

Guardians can have very nostalgic views of ICTs from their youth, much like Traditionalists. Unlike Traditionalists, however, these views are seen in strict contrast with the current time period. Guardians believe that ICT use in the past was heavily self-regulated by individuals. The use of ICTs in the present day regularly isolates, separates, and enables negative traits, such as laziness. Margaret, whom we heard from at the beginning of the chapter, shares how media consumption and ICT use were family focused and social when she was a child:

Back then, we watched TV as a family. We sat down after supper with a bowl of popcorn and you watched TV. I can remember long before we had a TV, we used to go to the movies. And we had a little movie theater that was within walking distance of our house and my mother loved movies. And so, many a night after dinner, we would go to the movies. We'd go to the movie as a family. Then on Saturdays, as long as we had our chores done, as long as our rooms were picked up and we had helped mom do whatever we were supposed to, Saturday afternoons was the movies. And it was a social thing. Everybody was at the movies on Saturday afternoon. It was where you met up with all the kids that you went to school with, and it was a social thing. (Margaret)

Margaret loved going to the movies with her family and became a lifelong movie lover, like her mother. She often spoke wistfully about her childhood experience with the television and the movie theater. In this and other recollections, however, she makes it clear that her nostalgic memories are in strict contrast to the ICT use patterns of today:

I think the TV now, at least my experience with TV; even back when I still watched it once in a while, it was more like you're doing your own thing. It wasn't a social thing anymore. It's isolating. The television has sucked people into thinking they need, I need this, I need that. It's become more and more "let's get our Christmas shopping done in September!" Let's almost forget about Thanksgiving, that Thanksgiving even exists anymore. Other than it's Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving. Let's just run out and buy a whole bunch of stuff that nobody needs. "Oh, I want that." "Where can I get one of those?" What for? TV glamorizes everything: violence, waste, excess. (Margaret)

"Back then" (during Margaret's childhood) television and the movies were time-defined events (such as watching a single program after dinner), family-focused (with the entire family watching one program or movie together), and social (with interaction among family and friends). "Now" television (and other

ICT use) is often time-undefined (with some people turning on the television as soon as they get home or leaving it on all day), individual (with individual members of a family consuming different media), and isolating (everyone using their own devices, people being manipulated to gluttonous consumption, and programs glamorizing violence). Guardians often see a decay in the moral compass of society and they believe that ICTs, if their use is not strictly controlled by the individual, facilitate such decay. Guardians have experienced a highly traumatic, transformative experience with ICTs that occurred before or during their mid-life. These experiences, such as job loss or divorce, are coupled with the use of ICTs in a way that harmed the Guardian. For instance, George felt his lack of IT skills was one of the reasons why he was encouraged to leave the workforce, retiring earlier than he originally had planned. Oftentimes, these traumatic experiences have been tied to the introduction of new ICTs into the Guardians life, be it in their work or families.

## **Introduction to ICTs**

Some Guardians were first introduced to ICTs in work, while others were primarily introduced by family members. However, unlike other types, the introduction of new ICTs into a Guardian's life often was coupled with many negative consequences or correlated with traumatic concurrent events. Margaret shares how the introduction of the computer in her workplace impacted her:

When I left work I had a computer on my desk. Everybody had a computer on their desk. When I first went [back] to work in 1980 the computers that we had were the computers where you only had incoming information. I don't know how to explain it any other way. But we had no input. It was information that came to us. Most of us in the office when we got "the new computers" were panic stricken. (Margaret)

Margaret was "panicked" when new PCs were introduced to her office. She feared using the computer: that she could break the technology or that she would not know how to complete a task. She and a friend took computer classes together to help her overcome her fears. Other Guardians were not introduced to computer technology in the workplace. Natalie and George were white-collared professionals (Natalie was co-owner of a biological testing company; George was a Vice President in pharmaceuticals). Both avoided computer use due to their positions in their respective companies. (Dan, a Practicalist, discussed in Chapter 3, was in a similar situation.)

Computers, early in their introduction, were seen as secretarial work by many white-collared professionals (Mandel, 1967), and both Natalie and George shared this sentiment. As Natalie expressed, when it came to computers: "I had my secretary do it. We had a secretary — that was what she was there for. I didn't need to know what she did — we could hire it." George shared if he

needed something from the computer, “I just had my secretary do it.” Much of his work involved using reports that were often prepared by others, including computer technicians, and he shared his work philosophy on computer use had been: “I wasn’t running down saying how does this computer work or why do you do this – it’s like I didn’t care – that wasn’t my job.”

In mid-life, Natalie’s marriage slowly began to sour and she suspected her husband was committing fraud in their shared business. As co-owner, Natalie was extremely concerned that she could be held liable for her husband’s deceit. She became determined to learn to use the computer – to investigate her husband’s business dealings – secretly. With the help of her cousin, she installed a key stroke tracker on her husband’s computer. The key stroke tracker not only confirmed her suspicions that her husband was defrauding the business but also indicated that he was romantically and sexually involved with other women:

I didn’t use a computer until 1999, when I wanted to find out if my husband was cheating the business and if he was cheating on me. So, my cousin would talk to me over the phone: “Now you do that, now you do that.” I was scared to death of breaking the thing. It was a step-by-step-by-step-by-step thing. Because I couldn’t just jump in and start clicking on stuff! Installing the tracking software gave me some confidence, I got some experience. I was forced to do things. I went into hackers’ chat rooms looking for a key stroke tracking program. I called one kid – he was a college student. He had a key stroke tracking program out there. I downloaded it, but I couldn’t use it, because you had to know how to use a computer. So, I called him after I asked him for his phone number. I said, “I couldn’t install your program I’m not – I’m not computer literate – I’m a housewife. I’m not a computer operator” so he put together a program that was simple. And it did its own thing. Just for someone who didn’t know how to run a computer. I used that and it worked. That’s how I found out that my husband had a girlfriend – he emailed her so I wouldn’t know. (Natalie)

Natalie’s first set of experiences using a computer was extremely traumatic; eventually what she found from her installation of the key stroke tracker led to her divorce and loss of her business. She recognized the computer was not the source of the trauma (in fact, Natalie felt quite empowered and confident after she learned a bit of computer knowledge). Rather, this technological learning experience became closely associated with the traumatic experience of losing her life partner and work.

Traumatic past experiences with ICTs have led Guardians to be cautious about adopting new technologies for fear of potential consequences. Many of their new ICTs tend to be gifts from family and friends. Some of these gifts are welcomed, but many are not. Margaret shared that when she retired from her position as an

administrative assistant in a financial firm, her work colleagues bought her a cell phone, although they had originally proposed buying her a computer:

Actually, the only reason why I had a cell phone when I retired is that people at work asked my kids “What could we get her?” Could they get me a computer? My daughter said “no, no, no. No don’t get her computer. She won’t use it. Get her cell phone. If you have any money left over, get her a nice phone, and just pay part of the plan.” (Margaret)

Margaret, as she shared, would not have used a computer if her workplace had bought her one when she retired. She was leaving work, in part, because of her traumatic experiences with computer technology. Instead, she was gifted a simple cell phone; which she felt was a more useful and appropriate gift as she had fewer negative experiences with the cell phone. (Margaret purchased her own computer under the guidance of a neighbor several years after retirement.) Since Guardians concerns focus on ICTs being used in inappropriate ways, they tend not to have issues with receiving ICT gifts that match their values. For instance, Jackie was concerned about the influence of corporations on society, including issues such as monopolization and price gouging. Her now-deceased partner had purchased her an Apple laptop, after several bad experiences with Microsoft in the workplace:

My husband knew I always wanted an Apple computer because I heard if you’re into photography or any of the arts that’s the computer to use. Now I had never used it or knew anything about it. I just had too many people tell me that was user-friendly and I hated Microsoft. Quite frankly, I hated it. It used to do whatever it felt like doing not what I felt like doing. But I love my Apple! It was a wonderful gift! (Jackie)

Guardians can be cautiously accepting of technology, particularly if they are convinced that it is secure. But they are very careful about ensuring they use these devices appropriately in ways that are non-damaging to society.

The only ICT which drew universal heavy criticism (and was seen as overall a waste of time) was video gaming. Most technologies, however, occupied a middle ground: if an individual could prevent becoming engrossed in using an ICT, prevent themselves from losing basic manners, and maintain a balanced life, the ICT was seen as potentially good for the individual. Guardians tend to view their own use as appropriate and examples of “good” (as opposed to “bad”) technology use, because they carefully self-regulate and set limits.

## **ICT Use**

Guardians carefully structure their ICT use around face-to-face (non-virtual) time with friends and family. They view such face-to-face interaction as being

critically important; believing that using ICTs to communicate devalues relationships. In their minds, all people should set and keep goals for incorporating as much non-virtual communication into their lives as possible:

Technology is often easier than spending time with someone in person. You don't have to put up with bad characteristics and bad habits. I work at having face-to-face time. I make sure I see all my friends face to face, I don't just live in the virtual world. (Natalie)

Guardians, like Natalie, often view choosing digital or virtual communication as shirking away from the work of maintaining a face-to-face relationship. Keeping "virtual" relationships is, to a Guardian, the "lazy" way of maintaining friendships. Jackie shared this preference for physical face-to-face relationships as well:

I prefer to meet people face to face. I preferred to meet you [the researcher] face to face. I can judge people better face-to-face than over the phone or online. You're a real person. I'd much prefer to spend a half an hour with a friend and see them than spend an hour with them on the phone. (Jackie)

Guardians place a high value on physical presence in their relationships, which stands in contrast to the other types we have discussed. Many Enthusiasts, such as Alice and Fred, had "virtual" friends they had met on messaging boards. Guardians would likely dismiss these virtual relationships as being "less real" or of lesser value than those that were based on physical contact. Socializers, such as Gwen, viewed their ICT use as strengthening and deepening their relationships. Guardians would suggest technology use instead separated and weakened their relationships. Traditionalists, with their heavy ICT consumption, such as Mindy Jean, showed a strong preference for using a phone over email, believing email lacked important social cues. Guardians would suggest that phone and email both lacked social cues and that spending more than a few minutes on the phone with a person was gluttonous.

Guardians limit how many life contexts they use technologies in. They own a device or application for a specific purpose and they carefully regulate their use to ensure it remains on target. Most Guardians could easily identify how they used various ICTs, be they cell phones, televisions, or computers. Natalie shares how her cell phone is used primarily for emergencies, while Jackie shared how she used her computer to check news and communicate via email:

I think the cell phone is a great thing. Especially in the case of emergency when you have to get a hold of somebody. It leaves you free to perform some task without having to worry about missing a phone call. It gives you little bit of freedom. (Natalie)

What is important to me is to check the news every single day. I don't have a TV and I don't ever intend to have another TV.

Therefore, I need to know what's going on. I need to know what's going on in this world as far as news. That is important to me. I feel like I'm lost when I don't. So, I use the computer for my news. News and I do my emails. I check those during the day. That's important to me because that's one of my primary ways of communication with the outside world from home, as I don't like to talk on the phone. I also use the computer to work with my pictures. It's all leisure stuff. (Jackie)

For Guardians, their use is specific, targeted, and regulated. At first glance, this seems eerily similar to Practicalists, who also target their use toward function. However, there are some very important differences. Guardians focus on regulating their use of ICTs to prevent bad habits and traits from being exposed, such as being “sucked in” to watching too much television or spending all day on the computer. Their primary concern with keeping their use targeted to specific purposes and tasks is to prevent absorption and isolation, potentially negative consequences of ICT use. Practicalists target their use toward function and completing a task, viewing the ICT as a tool to get a job done. An example of this difference is that Guardians see the television as a device that “sucks” away valuable family time, while Practicalists view the television as a potential tool of leisure to be used during family time.

Guardians are concerned about watching too much television, spending too much time on the phone, and texting too often. ICT use is viewed as coming at the expense of other, more worthy and important activities:

Cell phones can be as annoying as all hell because people don't use them as they should. People get those things stuck in their ear [wireless ear pieces] and they're talking with no notice of where they are. People have forgotten about courtesy. I was with a friend yesterday and she was texting. And, of course, the phone kept ringing, and she wouldn't turn it off because she's got family members that might be trying to get to her. So, you couldn't even carry on a conversation. This thing kept making this noise – it got to be an annoyance. In church yesterday, two phones went off. There is a time and place for these things, and it isn't church. (Natalie)

For Guardians, the people directly in your presence require more thought than people who might contact you from afar. As Natalie suggests, Guardians believe that there are appropriate uses of cell phones – but church (as an example) – is not one of them. ICTs were particularly seen to pose a potentially damaging risk to young people. Margaret shares that while ICTs are needed, they are often overused:

I feel that in life to today there is a definite need for all this modern technology. There's a need for but I think it's just like many,

many things it's overdone. "It's a beautiful day outside." I used to say that to my grandson when he used to come over. When he was 10, 11, 12 years old, I'd say "it's a beautiful day go on ride your bike. Go ride your bike go out and play. You're not going to sit in here and play that video game all day. If it's raining you can go play your videogame." But there are other things to do. Go out and look at the trees. I think it's absolutely mind-boggling ridiculous that cars now have TVs in them. Look out the window. Enjoy the view, see what you're seeing in the car. It's removing them from a part of life that I think is important. I think it's important to sit down and have a conversation with mom and dad. And talk to grandma and grandpa if you're lucky enough to have grandma and grandpa. (Margaret)

Overuse of technology is seen as removing the individual from the real and important world, the world that, in Guardians' minds, teaches life lessons and forges relationships. Guardians tend to be particularly concerned about children's overexposure to the virtual world, as children have not learned their own self-regulation, as Margaret speaks about. Guardians carefully self-regulate their own use, including how much they use specific ICTs (often setting a time limit):

I'm not saying that you have to have your nose in a book all the time, but you don't have to have your nose in front of the computer all the time either. I believe a happy life is a life of moderation. Yes, use a computer, use a cell phone. The cell phones wonderful because you can be in the grocery store and realize that "oh gosh do I need that?" And you could call home and say, "can you look in the cupboard and see if I need such and such or" or you can call somebody and say, "I'm running late. I got caught in traffic." But you go to the mall and you see people walking around and they're just talking on the cell phones. Talk, talk, and talk on the cell phone. I thought you went to the mall to go shopping. So, I think that people go overboard on all that stuff. (Margaret)

Guardians believe that technologies are a part of everyday life; but they are *just a part*. As Margaret suggests, technologies have very well-defined uses in life and are convenient (hence why Guardians use them), but they are just "a part" of what should be a diverse life of moderation. If a Guardian feels an ICT is too burdensome to use, leading to an overabundance of waste or decay of morals, they will often choose to stop using that ICT form altogether. Jackie shares how she stopped using her television after her partner's death:

I used to have a TV. What I found was that we had two TVs. My husband had his and I had mine because we had different things

that we wanted to watch. Again, I don't like wasting my time so why would I watch something that he wanted to see but I didn't? So, we had two TVs, and I would watch my TV upstairs when I went to bed, it was in the bedroom [...] After a while I found there was nothing I was interested in. All the shows are low quality and the news lies about everything. I won't have a liar in my home [...] Quite frankly I think society as a whole spends way too much time on TV. They should really turn the TV off and do other things. So, when my husband passed I just didn't see any need for anymore. And I had stopped watching a lot of it. I'd go for walks with my dog. I'd read. I'd visit with friends. (Jackie)

Jackie had carefully regulated her own television use by shutting it off and "doing other things." She merely, at best, tolerated using the device, finding no joy in its use. Keeping a television after her partner died made little sense: she no longer watched it and she felt that the content (particularly, the news) was filled with bias. She did not want to welcome such media into her home and when she downsized to a small apartment she did not bring the television.

George, a Guardian, was married to Mindy Jean, a Traditionalist we met in the previous chapter. When he was working full time, he was effectively out of the house five to six days a week for 10 hours or more; which meant that there was little conflict over ICT use and non-use in their marriage. When George retired, Mindy Jean's love of her traditional forms of media often upset him, as he suddenly was exposed to her nearly constant habits of having the television or radio on. As a Guardian, he preferred to limit his time-consuming media or using technology. Being married to a Traditionalist, this was not possible. Mindy Jean quickly became tired of him being critical of her technology use, so she encouraged George to find part-time employment. George quickly took a position with a big box retailer. This allowed Mindy Jean to consume and use her traditional media and devices while George was out of the house, but also allowed George to restrict his exposure to unwanted ICT usage.

For Guardians, their use of ICTs is carefully regulated and guarded. Technologies are not viewed in terms of what they can facilitate (such as tasks or relationships) but on how they can damage or destroy. Guardians place ICTs in their homes in arrangements that discourage their use, reflecting their desire to carefully self-regulate.

## **ICT Display**

Guardians' homes are notable, not because of the ICTs that are visible, but because of the ones that are not. Their homes are remarkably devoid of ICTs in the main living areas. Restricting easy access to technology is a way that Guardians prevent overuse and regulate and control their own technology habits.

Margaret lived in a ranch home with a finished basement. She spent most of her indoor time on the main floor, which was ICT-free, with the exception of her cell phone and a television in the smallest guest room. Visitors could easily spend a week or more without encountering a television, radio, or computer. Margaret prided herself on her ICT-free living room (Figure 7), which she felt facilitated playing piano music, reading and, most importantly, conversation.

Entering Margaret's home, one immediately sees her technology-free living room. Contrast this with an Enthusiast's home, such as Alice's: when one entered, one immediately saw Alice's television, stereo, and laptop. For Guardians, such as Margaret, restricting the positions of ICTs prevents their overuse and, therefore, helps Guardians self-regulate:

I'm not a big TV fan. I think it's become such a way of life; it's the first thing people do when they walk in the door is either turn on the computer or turn on the television. And it's not like, "how was your day in school today?" "Gee it really smells good in here it looks like you made something nice for supper." Boom, the TV's turned on when they come in the house. Sometimes I think with some people it's just like background noise. But the TVs got to be on or life's not going to be complete. I had an elderly gentleman come here for Thanksgiving. And he came in and he said "oh, this is wonderful, a real living room, no TV. And I said "oh, there's a TV back there in the den." But that is where the TV belongs. (Margaret)



Figure 7. Margaret's ICT-free Living Room.

Margaret is quite proud of her ICT-free living room, and how having such a space prevents her from automatically turning on the television, while promoting the face-to-face relationship building that Guardians find so important. While Traditionalists place the ICTs they love in the center of their rooms and Practicalists place ICTs in rooms based on their function; Guardians hide all ICT forms and place them in difficult to reach locations to restrict their use. Margaret kept her computer, a flat screen television, and a stereo in her finished basement. While the finished basement was quite nice, it was removed from her main living floor and, as a result, she only went to the basement when she wanted to use technologies. Such placement prevented her from “mindlessly” turning the television or radio on for “background noise.”

Guardians would often say “electronics shouldn’t be in bedrooms” (Jackie) or “a living room shouldn’t have a TV in it” (Margaret). In their considerations of where to place an ICT, the focus is not centered on where ICTs *belong* in the home, but rather where they *do not belong*. Guardians work extremely hard to keep their ICT-free spaces devoid of technology, even if it means that their partner or other individuals find their own ICT use restricted. Margaret, for instance, had a boyfriend who enjoyed watching “mindless TV” (Margaret). She placed a small cathode ray tube (CRT) television in the smallest spare bedroom on the main floor for her boyfriend to watch:

My boyfriend has his own TV [on the main floor] that he will watch all his news programs on. He’d be watching mindless TV, because he’s the type that when he walks in the door, he turns the TV on. If he wants to watch TV he has to watch it on his own TV. I don’t want to see it. (Margaret)

Margaret placed her boyfriend’s television in a very awkward spot in a cramped bedroom (Figure 8), restricting his use. The only way to view the television was sitting on the end of the single guest bed, which provided no back support, and likely became uncomfortable quite quickly.

Margaret, who strictly limited her own television viewing to a single DVD movie per week, had a large flat screen LCD television in her finished basement. Her boyfriend, who did not restrict his use, had a much smaller CRT television placed in an awkward corner in the tiniest room in the house. Such placement of these two televisions juxtaposes the differences these individuals have in their ability to self-regulate. Margaret was able to self-regulate her own use of the television, so she rewarded herself with a pleasant viewing experience: a large television in a comfortable room. Her boyfriend, incapable of such strict regulation, was offered a small television and an uncomfortable viewing area. If her boyfriend could not regulate his own use, Margaret would regulate his use for him.

Guardians, however, do not always have the luxury of hiding their ICTs. Margaret had the space to place her technologies on a separate floor and in a spare bedroom. Jackie did not. She had recently been widowed by her partner of



Figure 8. Margaret's Boyfriend's Television.

over 10 years. When she was young, she had moved her family from their north-eastern US city to Canada to escape a financially abusive ex-husband. She only returned to the US city to be close to family and friends when he passed away, several decades later. After she returned she met her partner, whom she called her husband (although they chose not to get legally married). Jackie did not have a private retirement account, as she had predominantly worked in retail and low-level secretarial positions. As a result of her having spent so many years outside of the United States, her work history did not qualify her for Social Security benefits (the US pension system for those age 65 and older).<sup>1</sup> This left Jackie in her early seventies without any retirement income.

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<sup>1</sup>Since Jackie had not been married for 10 years or more, she also did not qualify for Social Security marriage benefits. Marriage benefits allow a person to either choose to collect their own Social Security pension, or an amount equal to half of their spouses (or former spouses) Social Security pension; whichever is greater. However, to qualify, one must have been married to their spouse for a period of 10 years or greater, even if they have since divorced. Since Jackie had worked out of the country for several decades and had never been legally married the minimum ten years, she did not qualify for any Social Security benefits, either on her own or under the marriage benefits clause (Social Security Act, 2018; United States Social Security Administration, 2018).

Jackie was financially at risk. She had inherited her partner's estate, which she sold to cancel debt and raise money. She made her living by working odd jobs, often in retail, which were difficult to find because "no one wants to hire an old person" (Jackie). She had realized that she would no longer be able to afford to rent her small one-bedroom apartment and decided to buy a pop-up trailer to live in. She planned to head south, where she could live in a relatively inexpensive camp ground for US\$50 a week. When I interviewed her, she was selling her last few items (furniture and home goods) to fund her journey. As a result, her living room had been overrun by boxes of items and furniture she was attempting to sell. The only rooms left in her apartment free of these items were the bathroom, a small kitchen, and bedroom. The few ICTs Jackie owned, mainly a digital camera, laptop computer, and a telephone, had to be kept in her bedroom. The placement of these ICTs directly in her living space caused her quite a bit of stress and worry:

This [bedroom] is my living area. So, I don't really like my computer in the area that I'm living in – I don't like it where I'm sleeping because electronics just interferes with everything. I've read many places it's not good to sleep in or near these types of things. I read that you sleep better if you don't have it near you. I just read that you shouldn't have your cell phone near your bed when you're sleeping. You shouldn't even be holding your cell phone for that long of the time against your head, because people are coming down with brain cancer because they talk on the cell phone. I'm conscious of that kind of stuff. I'm conscious of health. I know all about it and I do things to avoid the problem. The computer's convenient because it's right here so I use it a lot. While we were talking I heard a click and then I knew I had an email. So sometimes I hear that [click] and I'll check to see what it is. I'm more likely to stop what I'm doing and check my email because it's right here and I can hear when I get one. (Jackie)

For Jackie, the placement of her computer in her bedroom meant she checked her email more often and was more likely to interrupt other activities to do so. As a Guardian, this often upset her. She felt that her future situation in the trailer would likely be better, as she would no longer have internet, and would no longer hear notifications from her email. She would instead rely on the nearby public library for internet service, which would allow her to isolate her use of her laptop to only times when she visited.

Natalie, after her divorce from her husband due to his infidelity, became a hoarder. When her former husband and son moved out of their shared home and ended all contact, she responded by slowly filling up their rooms with items. After filling up their rooms, she proceeded to fill the upstairs hallway, the stairs, and later her dining and living room. These rooms were unnavigable, lacking even pathways, as they were piled with boxes and furniture to the ceilings. She

moved her bed into her family room which adjoined the kitchen, placing her computer on her former kitchen table (she stood to eat), and her television in a corner of the family room. Natalie stated that she had “no need for a table because I have no family.”

Natalie’s television was placed in the family room across from her bed. She commented that if she could, she would find some other place for her computer and television, such that she didn’t need to be “surrounded” by them, but that she had no other space in her home.

George felt he had little control over how the ICTs were placed in his home. He relayed, “I’m married. My wife decides where everything goes in this house, not me.” So while Mindy Jean, his wife, proudly displayed her traditional forms of ICTs all over the house, George felt he had little choice in their placements. However, George deeply disliked her watching soap operas, so when he was home, Mindy Jean retired to the upstairs bedroom to watch them, a compromise they had reached.

Guardians resist using ICTs in ways that they view as negatively impacting society, their relationships, and themselves. This includes resisting societal expectations to have technologies scattered throughout their home and resisting what they believe is societal pressure to constantly be using ICTs.

## **ICT Meaning**

Guardians often can point to one or several extremely traumatic experiences with ICTs that shaped their perspectives on technology. These are life-changing events in which ICTs are seen as playing a significant role, such as technologies impacting job loss or divorce. Margaret experienced the slow reduction of her career due to technological intervention and Natalie the dissolution of her marriage and abandonment of her family. These traumatic experiences tend to occur before or during mid-adulthood.

For Margaret, the workplace introduction of newer forms of ICTs, most notably the television and the computer, shifted her job at a major financial firm from an enjoyable position to one of drudgery. Margaret went from being an “assistant sale representative” where she had power to act on client requests, to “just being a secretary” who had little social interaction and little autonomy. While her title at the financial firm stayed the same, every technological introduction in her workplace represented a decrease in her interaction with others and a slashing of the most enjoyable parts of her position:

I was the sales assistant to the manager of the branch and part of my job was to talk to people until [the manager] was ready to see them because he might have somebody else in his office. So, I developed a very good rapport with people and sometimes they’d say, “Well we don’t really need to see him anyway, this is what we want to do” and it would be taken care of by me. But

then there became a time after everything became computerized that I was, more or less, told by somebody higher up than my boss: “You’re spending way too much time with people, just get the order, get whatever it is that they want, and then get them out of here.”

Margaret’s work once involved a high amount of interaction with clients. As the person at the front desk, she was responsible for speaking with them while they waited to see her supervisor and could even help clients to make their trades. However, after the introduction of the computer, a higher supervisor told her she was spending too much of her time interacting with clients; instead, she should take their order and have them leave. As a Guardian, who deeply valued face-to-face interaction, this ran against many of her core values. The organization made other significant technological changes that impacted the office and her position:

We used to have an old ticker tape up in front of our office. On a daily basis we might have 30 or 40 people that would come in every single day to watch the ticker tape. Some of them would just sit up there, have their coffee, check the ticker tape, maybe put in an order here and there, but it was like a gathering place. Well, then they [the management] took the ticker tape out because it wasn’t generating any business according to the higher ups. They didn’t understand that it was a community gathering place and it did bring in business. So, then they put in a TV after they took out the ticker and some people came in to watch the ticker tape go on the bottom of the TV, and eventually the higher ups took that out too.

Margaret’s workplace first took out the relatively less-invasive information technology of the ticker tape, replacing it with a television. Upon removal of the television, her office no longer was a gathering place, and no longer encouraged non-virtual interaction. Without clients stopping by the office to visit, Margaret lost the face-to-face client interaction that made her job worthwhile. Her organization also decided that the vast majority of communication would be done only through email and not on the phone or in meetings:

Then after a while I was told “you can’t be giving out quotes over the phone unless they have an account here, or unless they’ve done business within such a period of time.” It went from being kind of like a semi-family friendly place to work to being just a place to work where there was more stress [...] Once we got email, it was just [an unwritten policy of] “send me an email” rather than calling. Then people just became just an email rather than a person.

Unlike Socializers, who view modern forms of ICTs as drawing them closer to others, for Guardians, the introduction of ICTs into relationships degrades them. Margaret shared that she felt that the atmosphere of her office had changed and that the increasing introductions of ICTs set employees against technology:

So, we lost that personal contact and that's the thing I don't like about it. Now I know that's not all the computer's fault, but it was just a whole mindset of instead of that one-on-one human contact being the priority – the computer was the priority. It's cold, it's sterile, there's no feeling of camaraderie. It became man against the machine. I'm not against progress you know, we need to have progress, but I think it's just gone too far. (Margaret)

Traumatic experiences that shape Guardians are not limited to the work environment but can also be of a personal nature. Natalie shared how she felt technology played a major role in the loss of her family, creating distance between her and her husband and son:

There were two men [my husband and son] so two TVs in our house. So, I'd be upstairs sewing or listening to the radio or music on a tape that I had. They wouldn't let me watch anything I wanted to watch. They'd watch TV for eight hours a night and wouldn't talk to me. I can remember when we got our cabin. The cabin was to get my son out of the city – out of the suburbs. We went up there and we only got one channel on TV. So, my husband and son would drive seven miles to a convenience store and rent DVDs – a video. They wanted a dish on the roof and I put my foot down and said “No, this place is for us, not for TV.” We bought that place to be a family and save our marriage, not to sit there mesmerized by some mindless program. I had my sewing machine, and their TV went in the next room. For some strange reason my sewing machine made snow on the TV. So, when they were there I couldn't sew. So, I was glad when they weren't there – all they did when they were there was watch TV and not talk to me anyway. At least when I was alone I could sew. Because what's more important – you sit there and watch TV or you spend time with your family? (Natalie)

For Natalie, the television resulted in her family life being disrupted. In their home, she found that her husband and son watched television programs that she did not enjoy. Often, her husband and son watched different programs simultaneously on different devices, placing distance between them as a family. When Natalie and her husband's marriage began to collapse, they decided to buy a cabin a few hours travel away. The purpose of the cabin was to be able to spend

time together as a family, away from the distractions and influences of “city life,” in an attempt to heal their marriage. When her husband and son wanted to have a dish installed to watch television, she refused, and they chose instead to rent videos against her wishes. Her family failed to connect, even when they went to the lengths of buying property and taking vacations to do so.

Since the one activity that Natalie greatly enjoyed, sewing, interfered with her husband’s and son’s use of the television, they eventually told Natalie she could no longer sew when they were present. Essentially, in her mind, her husband and son chose television watching over spending time with her and even prohibited her from partaking in her hobbies.

Natalie’s experiences with technology went even deeper, however. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, she first learned to use a computer when she became convinced her husband was defrauding their shared business. However, she had attempted to learn to use a computer previously, and she asked her son for lessons:

I asked my son to teach me to use the computer, but he said I was too stupid to learn. So, after my husband and son moved out I was free to use the computer, the TV [...]. I finally got to use these things! Because they had monopolized everything – that is all they cared about – the TV and the computer – not me! (Natalie)

One can imagine the hurt that Natalie felt, as a mother, to be told by her own son that she was simply “too stupid” to learn to use a technology. For Natalie, technology use represented the traumatic experiences in the breakup of her family. The television separated her from her husband and son; the computer hid her husband’s extramarital affair and business impropriety; and her own son berated her over her lack of technological knowledge. Natalie felt that her husband and son loved their ICTs more than her. Eventually, she would become estranged from her son, having not spoken to him in nearly a decade when we met.

Guardians also have concerns about how ICTs are used by organizations and governments, believing many institutions are using technology nefariously:

I think that there’s a lot of abuse on the Internet and it’s coming from big companies. That’s the worst part. We all know that the population has a certain amount of criminals in it. But you don’t expect big corporations to be part of those criminals. And they are more and more. I could go on; we’d be here for 10 hours [...] if I went into all of it! [Laughs.] My computer is what allows me to be aware of this manipulation by the big companies, because I won’t watch TV. TV is just a bunch of brainwashing. The TV lies, and I abhor lies. Those TV news people will actually lie. They literally look into the camera and lie. (Jackie)

Jackie, and all Guardians, see good in the respective ICTs they use: the internet has a purpose for researching the truth and learning the latest news. However, these devices can also be used for negative purposes: from removing people from present relationships to outright lying to, manipulating, and misleading people (such as the television). For Guardians, ICTs represent a sort of Pandora's Box: they hold both good and evil and, unfortunately, they feel that society prefers to delve into the evil and use ICTs for negative purposes. *It is not the device that is negative, but how it is used.*

Guardians have strong beliefs that much of society lacks strong morals and good boundaries with regard to ICT use. They see many individuals struggling with how to effectively integrate technologies into their lifestyles in balanced ways. Instead, many are overcome by their absorption into the virtual world, leading to a displacement of their "real" (physical and face-to-face) relationships:

I see these technologies as taking up a lot of time that could be spent actually living rather than watching. Especially things like 3D where you participate in a world that is generated instead of the real world. To me it's a copout. It's also very "one-manship;" it doesn't include other people. It's very isolating. They're replacing human relationships with technology. It's easier to do that than talk to someone. Talking to someone takes work. Using the technology is more convenient. It's always available. You don't have to work at relationships. Just push a button. (Natalie)

Considering the extremely traumatic experiences Guardians have often had with ICTs in their work or personal lives, it is not surprising that they view using ICTs as an easy alternative to maintaining face-to-face relationships. It was easier for Margaret's workplace to treat her as "just a secretary" and have her send emails than to have her (from the organization's point of view) "waste" time establishing relationships. For Natalie, it was easier for her husband and son to watch television and play videogames than to work on repairing their family life.

For Guardians, it is important to set strict boundaries to prevent being absorbed into the virtual world, or to prevent taking a "copout" (Natalie) from the "real" one. Guardians talk at length about the importance of setting these boundaries around their own use, but they also believe all society should set better boundaries:

There are other things to do besides technology. There is the old adage that there's a time and place for everything. It's just like everything else. It's kind of like when kids are little and you set boundaries on dinner time. If I make something new, you have to try it. If you don't like it, fine, I won't make it anymore. But we got to have something where we have a balanced meal. We will sit down and eat dinner together. You're not going to go in the

den with your little plate so you can watch some television show. We're going to sit down and have a family dinner, because this is our time to share. This is our time to discuss what you did today. This is our time to get together and socialize. It's not going to be just come in, grab a bite to eat, something, whatever is in the refrigerator, and then go lounging in front of the TV until bedtime. That's not going to happen. I see young families today that use a certain amount of constructive discipline and I see that they do much better with their children than the ones that just let them do whatever they want to do. Control the family. But it's not just technology – it's just life. (Margaret)

Margaret's dinnertime analogy reflects Guardians' views that ICTs are best used in moderation. New technologies should be tried (much like when your mother makes a new dish); however, their use must also be moderated (much like how parents set rules on eating at the table). Teaching children moderation in all parts of life is important to Guardians. Technologies are very much like unhealthy snacks: having a few in moderation is fine, but being gluttonous is unhealthy.

In an increasingly technological society, Guardians view their resistance to inappropriate ICT use as activism. As activists, they avoid purchasing or using ICTs which they believe violate their privacy or encourage corporate greed, believing that their actions can help to create a subculture of positive ICT use. Guardians view wasteful ICT behaviors as similar to other wasteful behaviors in our societies, such as food waste:

Really, I find it offensive when I see the waste. I grew up in the Depression and the War and I find it offensive that people today don't understand want versus need. I go to people's houses and they are wasting food... and I see people waste technology too. Sometimes I'll see someone with a smartphone and I think "gee I wonder if I should really get one of those" and I go, "no, because you would never use it to the capacity, you don't need it and you don't really want it, and if you think you want it it's only because somebody else is telling you should want it." People don't understand the difference between a want and a need anymore, and all this technology stuff does is cause unrest. The companies make you want it. People are wasteful throwing all their old technology away. All they want is new, new, new. (Margaret)

As a child of the Depression, Margaret often grew up without basic necessities, including food, and has a strong distaste for waste as a result. She sees many modern families who are wasteful in general, not only with food, but also with technology. She moderates her own behavior, choosing to not purchase devices that she knows she cannot fully use, much like she does not prepare or

buy food she knows she will not eat. She resists being influenced by commercials and the media, which she believes tries to convince her to consume more technology. Understanding the difference between a “want” versus a “need” is a fundamental skill that she feels society has become inept at, and this includes understanding “want” versus “need” when it comes to purchasing technology.

Guardians believe technological boycotting helps prevent organizations, the government, and corporations from abusing individuals socially or financially. Jackie spoke about how corporations often take advantage of individuals and how she actively resists patronizing these organizations:

I was angry when I found out my MP3 player wouldn't work because it was too old and they wanted me to buy a new one. It was only a few years old! I was literally angry. When I'm angry I fight back by not buying the products anymore. That's the way I fight back for everything I don't like. I don't go to banks I don't like. I cut the credit cards of banks that have given me a bad deal. I resist. That's what I'm doing, I'm resisting, I'm boycotting. That's what I do when they make me angry. I choose, and I tell everyone I know my experience. So that they also are aware, because that's the only way you're ever going to be effective is that if enough people know it something will happen. If enough people do it something will happen. A company will change. (Jackie)

When Jackie speaks about her experiences with her music player, she couches them in her general purchasing behavior. It is not simply ICTs and their use that are negatively influencing society, but rather it is general trends in organizational practices that leave individuals open to the risks of being given a “bad deal” (Jackie). You will notice that she is actively resisting falling prey to these larger trends, seeing herself as a “fighter” and a “resister.”

Whereas Enthusiasts are activists for encouraging ICT use, Guardians are activists for balanced and critical ICT use. Both Margaret and Jackie sought to influence those around them to carefully consider their ICT use and purchasing. Despite Guardians' beliefs that they are resisting inappropriate ways of using technology they often feel isolated and disconnected, misunderstood by the general population:

I feel like I live in a different era than everyone else. I am content with what I have. I just sometimes think that the younger generation has so much input into their lives that they don't get a chance to just sit down and enjoy life. I'm not a negative person, I just feel so strongly that life is not compromises. Life is so much better if everything is done in moderation. I'm not knocking the wonder of the computers or all the modern technology that we're so lucky to have! I'm just saying that I think it's become an

obsession with a lot of people. But other people think I'm just strange. (Margaret)

Margaret expresses that she often feels out of place in modern society, a feeling shared by many Guardians. Guardians' feelings toward ICTs are often harshly dismissed by society at large.

## **Guardians: The Technological Resistance Fighters**

Guardians have a deep concern over how ICTs are used in everyday life. While they often use a plethora of technologies, their use of these ICTs is very restricted in terms of both the functions and the amount of time they use them. Guardians actively resist using ICTs in ways they view as negative for society. They view themselves as activists fighting for balance in an increasingly technological environment, as resistance fighters in a digital world. Key points about Guardians include:

- Guardians can often point to one, or a series of, very salient life-changing traumatic experiences with ICTs.
- They believe that technologies should be used in moderation and this use should be carefully controlled. Guardians carefully control and restrict their own use.
- In their homes, Guardians prefer to hide ICTs, placing them outside of the main living areas.
- Guardians do not see ICTs themselves as negative, but rather that technological use brings risks of becoming gluttonous, isolated, and lazy.
- To appeal to a Guardian, technologies must be private, controllable, and secure as Guardians are highly sensitive to privacy and information security risks.

These five user types demonstrate five distinct patterns of domestication in the use, meaning, and display of ICTs. Enthusiasts love ICTs as fun toys, Practicalists see ICTs as tools, and Socializers see ICTs as connectors. Traditionalists love older forms of ICTs but reject newer forms, while Guardians view all ICTs with suspicion. An overview and summary of the ICT User Typology follows in Chapter 7.