Deceleration:
How to Gain More by Doing Less

An Honors Thesis

By

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Abstract

So many aspects of our daily lives have sped up to an almost uncomfortable pace. People have trouble balancing their time and therefore miss out on some of the most important aspects of life. The Slow movement is about finding our own pace in a world that has gotten too fast for its own good. By setting our own paces, we are able to reduce the stress of everyday living and embrace the connections we are capable of making with the world around us. This piece overviews the risks of accelerated living and then provides possible solutions to these problems and suggestions to help us slow down. Also included is information about other aspects of the Slow movement such as Slow Food and Slow Cities.
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Writer’s Statement

I first read about the Slow movement about a year ago and have gradually incorporated different aspects of it into my life since then. I have experienced a dramatic change since I began to do so. One of my reasons for choosing to write about the Slow movement was that I wanted to learn more. I was hungry for all the information I could find and delighted thinking about the research I would get to do for this project. Since I knew that I would be working intensively with my topic, I wanted to make sure it was something that I cared about, something that was relevant to my life. The Slow movement was not only interesting to me but incredibly beneficial as well. From the time I first learned about it, I was passionate about learning more and using all that I learned to benefit my life.

Another reason I chose to write about the slow movement is because I would like to spread the word in any way I can. Since I have personally benefited from my knowledge of the movement, I would like to see other people benefit as well. I saw my thesis as a medium through which I could spread my knowledge of the movement to others and hopefully encourage people to find their own pace, just as I had been inspired to do. While most people have a vague notion that they may be rushing through life, and they spend too much time at work and not enough time with their families, they do not think there are any real solutions. I wanted to write this paper to explain that there are other options and that they are easier to achieve than we may initially think.
Superman is fast. He can do in seconds what takes the average person hours. He can circle around the world in the time it takes us to flip to the next page of his adventure. We are enthralled by his speed. Many of us wish that we were a little less like average people and a little more like Superman. But, the question that we usually do not ask is, why? Why would we need to be able to run across the country faster than a plane could take us? Why would we need to read Metamorphosis in less than ten seconds? Would our lives really improve if we could physically and mentally move as quickly as Superman? Perhaps we are, in fact, better off scuttling around at 5 miles an hour and really seeing the world around us rather than zipping off at 12,000 times that speed and blinking away the scenery. Maybe it would be better for us to curl up with Kafka and spend a rainy day enjoying his words instead of dedicating measly seconds to his work.

It seems like speed is a topic that is on everyone’s minds. Whether it is how fast we drive, how quickly we need to eat in order to make it back from our lunch breaks, or how far ahead we can get of the next person in line. Acceleration is something we covet in our society. As Benjamin Franklin once said, “Remember that time is money,” and of course, as all Americans know, money should not be wasted. Our culture has become obsessed with speeding things up, with getting ahead of the game. We have become so addicted to going fast that we refuse to consider slowing down as an option. It seems we have entered an age that is not about living, but instead, about productivity which we have been disillusioned to believe cannot be achieved without speed.

Fortunately, there are people in the world who are learning to live well without living fast, people who have taken every aspect of their lives and found a way to do each task at a comfortable pace while still being efficient. These people are perpetuating what
has come to be called the Slow movement, which is an attempt to find balance in a world that has gotten too fast for its own good, a movement that searches for the right speed in life. Critics often take the word “slow” too literally and are led to believe that followers of the movement simply want to do everything in slow motion. However, this is not at all true. The Slow movement simply inspires people to “live better in a fast-paced modern world” (Honore 15). Some of us are aware of our speedy ways, while others believe that all the acceleration that we endure today is completely necessary. The Slow movement is in place to remind people of the joy of simple living and to inspire people to reflect on the moment rather than just plotting how to fill the next one.

We need to recognize that it is acceptable not to be the first, the best, the most efficient. In his best-selling novel, In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed, Carl Honore reminds us that “evolution works on the principle of survival of the fittest, not the fastest,” and brings attention to the fact that, through our addiction to speed, we are “stretching ourselves to the breaking point” (Honore 4). The Slow movement suggests a way of living that is removed from the fast paced speed of our everyday lives. Living slow does not mean that you cannot do anything fast, but setting our own pace; if we want to go fast one day and slow the next, that is our choice. It is simply important to recognize that we are able to slow down and that even if the deceleration is just internal, it is still effective. We need to stop and take a look at the way we are living and then slow that down to a comfortable level. There are many aspects of fast living that are detrimental to our health and many of the solutions to these problems can be found in the Slow movement.
One of the casualties of fast living that does not often occur to us is the loss of connection we experience through acceleration. We are disconnected in every sense of the word. By spending all of our time at work, we are disconnected from our friends and family. By rushing through school, we become disconnected from our education. By rushing through meals and sex, we become disconnected from pleasure. By rushing through life, we become disconnected from ourselves. By living too fast, we run the risk of missing out on pleasure and on the complex connections that we can form with others, with ourselves, and with the universe, by simply slowing down. It sounds easy, but for most of us, it is difficult to take any time off.

Everyone is guilty of these types of disconnecting speed offenses. Whether it is the woman impatiently tapping her foot as she waits thirty seconds for the elevator, the man who reads the newspaper while watching his favorite sitcom, or those who insist on walking up the escalator because they do not have the patience to wait for the moving stairs to reach the top on their own. We have been conditioned to want to do more with the time we have. Perhaps, because we read the paper while keeping up-to-date on our shows, we feel that we are accomplishing more. However, by doing both things at once, it is likely that we are not fully present for either activity and are, therefore, not getting much out of them.

A great starting point for the discussion of speed is in the workplace. With a culture so focused on money and consumerism, work is an incredibly important part of the lives of most adults. However, overworking plays an equally large role. Juliet Schor, author of Overworked America, reports that “Americans are working harder, longer, and more according to someone else’s schedule than they did thirty years ago” (Samuelson
81). To be more precise, "the average worker puts in about a month's more time on the job (163 hours to be exact) every year" (Samuelson 81). Not only are we working longer hours, we are taking less time off. According to a survey published by Expedia.com, Americans get less time off compared to other countries, yet 31% of us do not even use all of the paid vacation time that is offered (Lopez 32). While we see going to work as making us more productive and more valuable to our places of business, in actuality going to work more is making us less productive.

In a Department of Labor Study conducted in 1980, it was concluded that most people do not work their preferred amount of hours. Employees who do work more hours than they would prefer tend to feel "overworked, and employees who feel overworked are more likely to make mistakes at work, feel angry at their employers, resent their coworkers, consider looking for a new job, and experience work-family conflict" (Reynolds 1179). Anyone who has ever been employed knows that when work piles up, it begins to take over our lives, and as that happens, we feel less like going to work in the morning. When we have a manageable amount of tasks in front of us, we are more likely to complete them successfully than if we have an unreasonable amount of work to do each day. The same is obviously true for university students.

Full-time students take four to six classes a semester. In addition to time spent in the classroom, it is recommended that students spend about an hour studying for every hour spent in class. School is more than enough work for students but in a lot of cases, they also take on part-time or full-time jobs in addition to their class load.

With the rising tuition costs, many students are forced to take on part-time or even full-time jobs just to make enough money to get by. According to a study done by the
economic consulting firm, Sebago Associates, 57% of all college students have jobs. Of these college students, one in ten are full-time students who hold full-time jobs. Working students are forced to fit in their hours before, in-between, and/or after classes (Lazarony). Basically these young adults are working two full-time jobs at once, but in some cases, students have to work in order to help pay for some of their college expenses. Whether it is books or groceries, the necessities of college cost money. We cannot blame students for taking on too much because in order to graduate in the desired amount of time, it is necessary to take a full course load, and in most cases, in order to pay for this course load, it is necessary to get a job.

Unfortunately, while trying to pay for college, employment begins to have a negative effect on the education of working students. In fact, of students who work thirty-five or more hours per week, 55% said that “work has a negative effect on their studies, 40% report that work limits their class schedule; 36% report it reduces their class choices; 30% report it limits the number of classes they take; and 26% report it limits access to the library” (Whitmore 7). Students who work full-time are also more likely to drop out of school completely (Whitmore 7). It is fair to say that overworking has a negative effect on student’s experience in school. However, working a lower number of hours, perhaps at an on-campus job that is easily accessible and therefore less stressful, can have positive impacts on student performance. By cutting back just about ten hours a week, from 35 hours to 25 hours, work begins to have a more positive impact on a student’s college experience. This is an annual decrease of about $2,250 which is not much compared to the salary earned by those completing college (Whitmore 9). By working just ten hours a week less, a student’s odds of graduating increase and their
stress level decreases. It seems almost too simple, yet so many college students are still putting too much on their plates.

Society forces students to take on a lot because there is always someone else taking on more and that someone will be your competition one day. We have been taught that in order to be successful, work and higher education are imperative. The result of this combination is a population of students who are stressed, unhealthy, and oftentimes desperate for some help. Exams, papers, and daily life combine to create a stressful and even harmful impact on students. Many rely on caffeine to get them through long hours of studying or long nights at work. However, more recently, students have turned to abusing prescription drugs as a way to make time for their obligations.

In July 2005, The New York Times ran an article entitled “The Adderall Advantage,” by Andrew Jacobs, which explored the use/abuse of prescription amphetamines at Columbia University. Jacobs states, “reliance on prescription stimulants to enhance performance has risen, becoming almost as commonplace as No-Doz, Red Bull and maybe even caffeine” (Jacobs 16). In fact about 20% of college students have used a prescription drug for a non-medical purpose such as writing a paper, studying, or taking an exam. Between 1992 and 2003, the number of teenagers who “admit to abusing prescription medications” has tripled, and within the general population, such abuse doubled within that period (Jacobs 16). One of the students he interviewed for this study was taking 30-milligrams of Adderall to help her study and stated that she did not think she could “keep a 3.9 average without this stuff” (Jacobs 16). It is obvious that a Columbia University student who maintains a 3.9 GPA is an intelligent individual and it seems surprising that someone of her intelligence would use
drugs, but this behavior is commonplace at universities because of the tremendous stress of doing everything at once and cramming as much as possible into our day-to-day lives.

Dr. Robert A. Winfield, the director of Health Services at the University of Michigan, recognizes the growing problem of abuse of A.D.H.D drugs. He sees a number of students who falsely claim to be afflicted with the disease in order to get a prescription. The abuse is so prevalent that about once a week, “a jittery, frightened, sleep-deprived student who has taken too many tablets for too many days” comes in to be treated for a medical problem (Jacobs 16). It is ingrained in students that it is necessary to do everything, do it now, and do it well. This is an overwhelming demand and it leads students to look for unhealthy alternatives because they believe that there is simply not enough time in the day for sleep. Besides the potential of dependence, Adderall’s side effects include “increased heart rate, agitation and the kind of paranoia and disorientation that results from amphetamine-induced insomnia” (Jacobs 16). We have been taught since we were children how important sleep is, but when life starts speeding up, something that takes up as much of our precious time as sleep does, becomes an unnecessary evil.

While lack of sleep leads to obvious health issues, there are more serious physical effects. The drug was actually banned in Canada because of “20 international reports of sudden deaths, heart-related deaths and strokes in children and adults” (Jacobs 16). While the American Food and Drug Administration took note of these reports, they took no action to ban the use of the drug in the U.S. We would like to think that if a medication was even potentially dangerous, it would be taken off the market, but unfortunately this is not the case with Adderall. In fact, it has gained a reputation of
being hip and is thought of less as a drug that is being abused and more as a safe study-aid to help speed up our lives.

College aged people are not the only ones who turn to drug use to support their need for speed. Cocaine is the "booster of choice among white-collar professionals" and its usage in the American workplace has increased 70% since 1998 (Honore 5). When we generally think of drug addicts, it is not the straight A student or the successful business man that comes to mind. We associate drug use with the disgruntled, yet in a society where it is to your extreme disadvantage to slow down, sleep gets pushed to the wayside. In fact the average American now gets 20% less sleep per night than he did a century ago and a study conducted by the US National Commission on Sleep Disorders blames half of all traffic accidents on tiredness (Gleick 122). It is astounding that we have let speed get us to a point where so many people are too tired to function without the use of chemical help and where people are a danger on the road because of their lack of sleep. While we commonly hear that there are not enough hours in the day, stealing hours from the night should not be an option.

Both full-time employees and students get caught up in the speed of working life. Whether it is in relation to studying or spending time at the office, overworking does not only leave us feeling stressed and without sleep but actually causes a variety of other harmful physical side effects. People suffering from stress related conditions fill the doctor's office on a daily basis. In fact, 75% of doctors' visits are related to an illness caused by stress (Hyla 24). We cannot continue to push our bodies beyond their limits without the risk of physical repercussions. When our bodies have had enough, they send us signs in the form of migraines, gastrointestinal problems, insomnia, and so on (Dahl
Although we should listen to these signs and slow down, we choose to medicate ourselves and return to work. Since “one in five Americans turns up for work when he should be...at home or visiting a doctor” we cannot be one of the four people who puts his health first or we risk falling behind the curve (Honore 6). This is a situation that everyone can relate to. We have all woken up in the morning with a headache, nausea, or any number of other ailments, but as we think about the day ahead, we feel that we would miss too much by staying in bed. We take a Tylenol and go on with our work day as if nothing was ever wrong in the first place. We feel that by going through our daily routines we will continue to ‘get ahead of the game.’ In actuality, we are simply ignoring our health problems as they continue to get worse.

Larry Dossey, an American physician, has been trying to express the gravity of the effects of fast living since 1982. He considers his desire to race against the clock an addiction and he believes it is part of his duty to prevent others from taking up a similar affliction. He coined the term “time sickness” to explain our obsession with the belief “that time is getting away, that there isn't enough of it, and that you must pedal faster and faster to keep up” (Dahl 17). Dossey began suffering from migraine headaches while he was in high school and the pain only got worse as he rushed through medical school and eventually pushed himself through a medical internship (Dahl 18). He came to work for the Dallas Diagnostic Association clinic which was located near “two major high-tech manufacturing centers, both full of time-racing engineers who ended up in Dossey’s office” (Dahl 18). They were all complaining about similar symptoms, migraines, chest pains, or sleep disorders. As he treated these patients, he began to see that their stress-related illnesses, from heart problems to nervous exhaustion, were the result of time-
sickness. Time-sickness is practically an epidemic today partially due to the “state-of-the-art weaponry” we have at our disposal (Dahl 17). With portable computers, Blackberrys, cell phones, and fax machines, we are able to do everything fast, which creates pressure for us to do everything now. However, time-sickness is not just about getting away from our computers or leaving our cell phones at home, it is about the way we live our lives in general. The difference between time-sick people and people who go fast is that when you remove stressful conditions, the time-sick “continue to race the clock;” they find it “antagonizing to wait because precious seconds are slipping away” (Dahl 17). The time-sick are those who continually press the button on the elevator, knowing quite well that it will not get them to the next floor any more quickly. They are those who continually look at their watch as they wait for a bus, regardless of the fact that the bus will not turn the corner any sooner. They do not just get anxious when the bus is two minutes late, they get angry.

We have all probably spent time pacing in front of our doors waiting for someone to pick us up, and we know that the wear we inflicted onto our carpet was in vain. Focusing our energy on time will not bring a car into our driveway or the elevator to our floor, yet we all do it. We fear losing precious time waiting if we cannot be doing something ‘productive’ while we do it. Perhaps we have all become a little bit time-sick.

There are those who are trying to draw attention to the negative side-effects of speedy living. There is a group of people trying to spread the word about slower living by starting the Take Back Your Time Initiative in North America. The group advocates simpler living where people give themselves more personal time. They hope to have legislation passed that assists with “paid family and medical leave, three weeks minimum
annual paid vacation and a cap on mandatory overtime” (Mand). The group also points out the difference between the American workday and the European workday by marking October 24th “Take Back Your Time Day.” It is on this day of the year that those living in Europe who have not taken any time off can take a nine week vacation, which would mean vacationing until the end of the year. Americans who acknowledge this day are encouraged to celebrate with “barbeques and family events” and to recognize that it is not just a day off but a day to form legitimate and meaningful connections (Mand). It is important to recognize that the proponents of the slow movement are not lazy people who just want to get off work, but they are people who want to be able to live at their own rate and enjoy the simple pleasures and connections that life has to offer.

So, it is quite clear that we go fast. It is also clear that going fast has caused a variety of physical, emotional, and psychological problems. There is no question that we have been trained to go fast, but there is also no question that we can and should challenge that training. We obviously cannot just quit our jobs and stop going to school in order to have the time to read Kafka and wait for elevators. However, we should not rule out the possibility of cutting back. People who “cut their work hours take a smaller hit financially than they expect” because spending less time at work means spending less money on things that go along with the workday such as “transportation, parking, eating out, coffee, convenience food, childcare, and laundry” (Honore 201). While so many people ignore the option of cutting back on work hours because they fear it will hurt their chances at a successful life, those who do it seem to be happy with the results. With more time to spend with family and even just more time to ourselves, having to work less can create an overall happier and more connected person. The stress caused by
overworking can be battled, and as long as we can decondition ourselves from the “time is money” mantra, we can begin to broaden our definition of the term ‘success’ to include more than just excessive financial wealth.

The same holds true for students juggling hectic schedules. On a daily basis, we hear the words, “I just do not have time to get everything done.” Usually this phrase becomes widespread around midterm or finals period when all the work that we have neglected is piling up and everything seems overwhelming. However, after the semester is over, not many students complain about failing all of their classes or getting fired from their jobs. The reason for this is that they did have the time and they did get everything done. The power of organization and departmentalization is strong when it comes to accomplishing multiple tasks. Just stepping outside of a life that is going too fast and allowing ourselves the time to breathe and really focus on what feels out of hand is enough to get started, and as we all know, getting started is half of the battle.

In some aspects of our lives the solutions are simple, such as cutting back to a reasonable amount of work or organizing our time to better allow for studying. However, sometimes we have no choice but to push through even the most hectic of schedules. In these cases there are other alternatives that will help us tolerate fast living more efficiently. For instance, yoga, meditation, and biofeedback are great ways to lessen the stress of fast living and to appreciate the benefits of slower living without dramatically altering our daily routines.

As our mind consistently tells our body to hurry up, the result is a physical tension which drains our energy and raises our stress level. This response is dangerous for our physical and mental well being. While many physicians easily tell their patients to relax
and to reduce the stress in their lives, oftentimes they do not go into detail about how
easily this task can actually be. Yoga is a wonderful method of restoring energy and
revitalizing the body. It is a way to force us to stop and catch our breath once in a while.

Modern yoga can often seem more like a workout than a period of rest, but
“restorative yoga practice is focused entirely on the art of resting” (Hanson 80).
Restorative yoga offers us the chance to experience deep relaxation without having to
worry about changing poses or straining our bodies into uncomfortable positions.
Through the practice of yoga, we simply allow ourselves to “surrender completely to the
moment” and let our bodies “soften and to open up” (Hanson 80). Some of the simplest
yet most calming tools of yoga take up hardly any time at all. For instance, we often
underestimate the power of just breathing.

Easing our minds by deep breathing and using the supportive postures of yoga can
calm down the nervous system and “override the fight-or-flight response” (Hanson 81).
Practicing yoga about ten to twenty minutes a day will yield the most effective outcome,
but even just five minutes can “open up the possibility of a cooler, calmer approach to
life” (Hanson 81). The whole point is just taking out a little time to do nothing. If we
begin to feel overburdened at work, calming ourselves down can be as simple as closing
our eyes, keeping our feet flat on the floor, and our hands folded in our laps. Taking a
few deep breaths, thus allowing the tension in our bodies to dissipate, and focusing all of
our attention inward while just allowing all the chaos around us to simply continue
without eliciting any reaction, even just for a few minutes, can make our days more
manageable and our stress levels lower, thus decreasing our risk for mental and physical
health problems (Hanson 83). Regardless of how busy we all claim to be, there is no one who cannot find twenty minutes in their day to close their eyes and just breathe.

Of course yoga can have effects on you other than just a quick pick me up in the middle of the day. In fact, it can have a tremendous physical impact on those dealing with cardiovascular problems. This is perfectly logical considering many heart problems are stress related and most likely caused by fast living, in one form or another, it only makes sense that the solution to these issues is slow living. Noel Bairey Merz, M.D. is the director of the Preventative and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center at Cedars Sinai. He and his colleagues recognized the “detrimental effects of stress on individuals, especially in the area of heart disease” and then began “implementing yoga therapy” over ten years ago (“Yoga” 12). It has become one of the primary therapies for stress management and complements their approach to medical care. Physicians are coming from around the world to view the effects of this 5,000-year-old discipline and realizing that it is more than just an exercise (“Yoga” 12). If yoga can unravel the effects of fast living imagine what it can do to prevent those effects in the first place.

Fortunately, even American workplaces have begun to recognize the benefits yoga has in combating harmful levels of stress. Although it is not as widespread as followers of the Slow movement would like it to be, yoga is growing in popularity in the workplace. Angela Calafiore is the founder of Serendipity Yoga in California and specializes in bringing yoga to “corporate settings, meetings, and trade shows” (Wiscombe 19). She stresses that anyone can do yoga by stating that it is an exercise for “workout warriors and for couch potatoes” (Wiscombe 19). After each session Calafiore uses the word “Namaste” to conclude her class. This means, “the divine in me bows to
the divine in you” and it “allows two individuals to come together energetically to a place of connection and timelessness, free from the bonds of ego-connection” (Palkhivala).

The meaning of this word embodies much of what the Slow movement is trying to get across, embracing the beauty of our inner selves and connecting that beauty with others. Remembering this lesson at the end of a stressful workday can be especially helpful.

One company that reaps the benefits of workplace yoga is Texas Instruments in Dallas where about 100 employees and members of their families practice yoga after hours every week. Texas Instruments employees “find that yoga is the one thing that allows them to release stress” (Wiscombe 19). Yoga helps employees release stress after work, but it also perpetuates a feeling of calm throughout the week. For instance, if we needed to go into an important meeting and we practiced yoga breathing and stretching beforehand we would be “calm, centered, focused, and grounded” since the exercises would make us less “reactionary” and more capable of controlling ourselves and our anxiety (Wiscombe 19). By offering the option of yoga instruction within the workplace, employers are encouraging the Slow movement and promoting better health all around. A healthy mind leads to a healthy body and being aware of the union of your mind and body is a great start on the path to slowing down.

Ironically, even yoga can fall victim to fast living. It is not at all uncommon for people to cause strain or other injury by rushing into positions when their body is not adequately stretched or otherwise prepared for them. In Boston, a yoga instructor who had apparently not incorporated the Slow movement into her life “broke a pupil’s pelvic bone by forcing her into the splits position” (Honore 9). A man who was practicing yoga at a Manhattan establishment tore a sensory nerve and now has a “permanent numb patch
in his right thigh” (Honore 9). These instances exemplify the danger that time-sickness can cause and shows how important it is to listen to the messages that our body is constantly attempting to send us.

While yoga is clearly slow, meditation takes slowness an even more extreme level. Without any movement and simple focus, meditation can make us more relaxed and even more productive. It can even provide relief from arthritis, depression, high blood pressure, all possible side-effects of fast living. Meditation is one of the ten most common forms of alternative therapies used by Americans in that 8% use it for health purposes (Thibodeaux 17). While this sounds like a modest beginning, for alternative therapy, these numbers are impressive, and they represent a big stride for the Slow movement.

Much like yoga, Transcendental Meditation is used to prevent and treat heart disease and is offered in companies as a measure of dealing with stress. Some insurance companies even pay for meditation because of its preventative effects on stress related disease (Thibodeaux 18). This is clearly a step in the right direction. The more people who recognize the healing effects meditation incites, the likelier it becomes that people will begin incorporating aspects of slow living into their everyday lives.

Also much like yoga, meditation is simple. It is basically composed of three essential components, “regulating breathing, relaxing the body, quieting the mind” (Thibodeaux 18). We continually create problems in our mind. Speed has a lot to do with this process in that we feel time is always running out and we do not have enough of it to solve all of our dilemmas. Constant to-do lists accompanied by appointments, messy homes, and never-ending amounts of work to be done combine to form a mind that
cannot naturally find peace. It is necessary that we find some sort of release, some form of slow activity in order to create a mind at ease.

David Lynch, filmmaker and avid meditation enthusiast, describes Transcendental Meditation in these words “you dive down into that ocean of pure consciousness. You splash into it. And it’s bliss. You can vibrate with bliss....You can catch ideas as a deeper level. And creativity really flows” (Thibodeaux 24). Assuming the average person can find bliss through meditation the way Lynch can, it is incredible that we do not spend hours focusing on meditation. It is difficult to imagine not striving for bliss in such a chaotic life, especially when meditation makes it so attainable.

Like every other aspect of our lives, meditation can be ruined by fast thinking. In an article entitled “Meditation Made Me Crazy” which was published in Natural Health, Hillari Dowdle describes the anxiety that filled her when she began learning about meditation. She explains her process of learning about mediation and her hesitance to actually meditate, and then when she finally began meditating she used practices “far too advanced for someone in her starter-spirituality phase to master” and was, therefore, “guaranteed to fail” (Dowdle 47). She even describes a fear of her own quiet thoughts. Eventually a Buddhist practitioner told her to simply sit still and count to forty-two just to get started and once she did, she realized how simple it was to meditate, therefore dissipating her fears and opening up a new, peaceful world to her (Dowdle 48). By applying what she knew about everyday life, Dowdle approached meditation with the same fast attitude she approached the rest of her life and then could not be calmed by her attempts because they were too advanced, too accelerated for her level. She could not accept that she had to start at the bottom, that there was no way to rush bliss. The fact
that she was even afraid of what she may think, if her mind was given the opportunity to wander, speaks volumes about the detrimental effects going fast can have on our lives, on our minds, and certainly exemplifies a disconnection of self that so many of us experience without even realizing it. Constantly trying to fit ourselves into society’s molds can have dramatic effects on our mind-body relationship and our awareness of ourselves.

A similar, although less common approach to the problems of fast living is biofeedback. Biofeedback exists in many forms and just about all of us have used some variety of it. For instance, if you take your temperature and learn whether you have a fever you are using biofeedback. Once you learn you have a fever you can do what you wish to correct the problem, such as take medication and get plenty of sleep. Psychiatrists use biofeedback “to help tense and anxious clients learn to relax” (Yancey 6). When hooked up to the biofeedback machine, patients are able to get a better idea of what is going on inside their bodies. For example, the machine picks up electrical signals in the muscles and then triggers a light bulb or sets of beeping noises when the muscles get tense. In order to make the light stop flashing or the noise to stop beeping, the patient must relax their muscles. Patients are taught some form of relaxation exercise or learn to “identify the circumstances that trigger their symptoms” and how to avoid stressful events or to better cope with the unavoidable events so that they can be effective in relieving tension in their muscles (Yancey 6). Biofeedback is an unusual treatment in that it relies a lot on the patient. If a person refuses to acknowledge the fact that working too much is causing them great stress and is the ultimate source of their migraine
headaches, then a constant flashing light is not going to get them to leave the office early or get to bed on time.

Like yoga and meditation, biofeedback is a treatment that works not only while it is being practiced but has lasting effects as well. If we learn to control our bodies while being monitored by the biofeedback machine, we will be able to control our bodies at all times. Even when there is no light flashing we would be able to recognize that we are allowing ourselves to get caught up in stress and will be able to physically slow ourselves down in order to cope with an external situation in a healthy manner.

Someone who uses yoga, meditation, biofeedback and other similar techniques to help gain control over a fast life is more likely to find the balance and their appropriate pace of living than someone who continually succumbs to the demands of fast living. However, this does not mean doing everything slow. Dr. Dean Ornish, president and director of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute in California, uses these practices to help cardiac patients and believes that time sickness should be treated like any other disease.

However, Ornish lives much like the rest of us do. As a doctor, he is essentially always on-call and is connected to his stresses through his cell phone, beeper, fax machine, and email at all times. He even admits to multitasking during his everyday activities, but he also practices mediation and yoga every day which he believes helps him “better appreciate his machine’s capabilities for connecting him with others” (Dahl 19). To describe why he believes this is acceptable behavior he refers to the old Zen proverb ‘Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.’ He believes a modern day version of this proverb would be ‘Before
enlightenment, use your fax machine and cellular phone. After enlightenment, use your fax machine and cellular phone’ (Dahl 19). This is what critics of the Slow movement do not seem to understand. The goal of the movement is not to become pre-industrial or to become disconnected with modern living; rather it is to reconnect to other people and to ourselves and learn how to slow our internal selves without having to make any changes to our surroundings with which we are uncomfortable. This new spin on the proverb perfectly exemplifies the balance that is bestowed upon followers of the Slow movement because in many respects, it is more of an internal sense than an external change.

While fast living in regards to the work we do is an incredibly important aspect of the Slow movement, Slow Food is an equally important element in the movement. Carlo Petrini, one of the “leading proponents of deceleration,” is the founder of Slow Food, which is the “international movement dedicated to the civilized notion that what we eat should be cultivated, cooked, and consumed in a relaxed place” (Honore 15). While critics are quick to judge this notion, Slow Food is more than just a way to get longer lunches. In fact, Petrini is not necessarily fighting for slow but is fighting for the right to “determine our own tempos” (Honore 16). Afterall, that is what the Slow movement is all about, finding our own speed, or lack thereof.

That perfect speed applies to everything: school, work, hobbies, habits, and even meals. Eating is obviously a crucial part of our daily lives and what we eat and how we eat says a lot about us as individuals and about America as a nation. By this point, we are all well aware of the ‘fast-food nation’ stigma America has acquired and the effects fast-food has had on American’s weight and overall health. It is difficult for younger generations to remember a time when there was no McDonald’s in a neighborhood and
no way to grab a restaurant lunch in less than five minutes. We have been rushing food and everything about the process of eating for years.

Speed was introduced to the kitchen around the time of the Industrial Revolution. Being able to serve and eat food quickly was a “sign of control and efficiency” and by the late 1920’s it was declared proper etiquette to end a dinner party after no longer than two and a half hours (Honore 54). While it is easy to blame our hasty eating habits on contemporary society, it seems as if the quickness with which we eat has been a long time coming.

For instance, in the early 50’s, “without a hint of sadness” Cosmopolitan magazine predicted that “one day every meal would be prepared in the microwave” and that, in order to remind ourselves of traditional cooking, we would spray the scent of “fresh bread, sizzling sausages, and roasted garlic” around the kitchen (Honore 54). This prophecy is a fairly accurate depiction of today’s kitchen, although we usually do not have the time to “bother with the fake smells” (Honore 54). Speedy cuisine has been a cultural ideal for longer than we would like to admit.

However, fast food as we know it today is a newer invention. In fact, it was not all that long ago that the McDonald brothers were running a successful drive-in restaurant that employed talented short order cooks and served food on glass dishes. Eventually, however, they got tired of paying for the skill of their cooks and of replacing broken dishes and decided to move on to a cheaper, faster alternative. In the beginning the restaurant used fresh meat and potatoes purchased from hundreds of local suppliers, but as the demand for speed grew, quality declined (Schlosser 29). Fresh food turned to frozen and the pace of the restaurant fit in well with the quickly emerging, speed
worshipping culture. The story of the McDonald brothers gives us insight into how we
came to be a fast-food nation and also exemplifies how the need for speed demands
quantity over quality.

Fast food has had a dramatic effect on our culture. Just about every American is
aware of the growing problem of obesity in adults and even in our children. People know
what obesity and a poor diet can do to someone’s physical state, yet there has not been
significant change in the right direction on this issue. Children of younger generations
are suffering the consequences of speedy eating, and in some cases, those consequences
include heart disease, diabetes, and even liver disease before even reaching adolescence.
There are cases of obese children who are under ten but whose internal health resembles
that of a thirty year old adult (Jerome 83). Children are innocent victims in the race
against the clock and without a major change in their way of living, their health will only
continue to deteriorate.

Without quoting statistics, everyone knows that fast food is bad for us. However,
we often focus on the quality of the food, the amount of fat, sodium, or carbohydrate the
food contains. We do not look beyond the calories or the grease with which fast food is
dripping long enough to recognize that the problems with fast eating do not end at obesity
and heart attacks. McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Taco Bell, and most other fast food restaurants
now offer healthier options such as salad, yogurt or fruit. We do not tend to see anything
wrong with going to the drive thru for a salad and a bottle of water because these are
healthy choices. The culprit we have been overlooking is the speed at which we are
eating the food we are purchasing.
Once we leave that drive-thru with our salad, we are likely to plop down at our desks and browse the internet as we munch away on our fresh, healthy lettuce. There is a good chance we will be watching television or chatting on our cell phones as we enjoy our fruity yogurt. Multitasking while we eat is not at all uncommon and neither is eating alone. Margaret Visser, author of “The Rituals of Dinner,” believes that people eat alone mainly because of the speed at which they can do it. Usually when we eat with friends the meal takes much longer than the five minutes it takes us to heat up yesterday’s leftovers and the length of those meals makes communal eating seem like a “formal, implacably structured, and time-consuming event” (Honore 55). In a society where everything is either fast and productive or slow and inefficient, it is difficult for us to sit down to a meal without other matters clouding our enjoyment.

Even if we do go out to eat with friends, we are often rushing through our meals as we think about what we need to do next and we can never quite stop multitasking. Restaurant owners say that oftentimes people pay the check while calling a cab at the same time (Honore 56). Even if we are in the company of someone else, we often still fail to make connections with them because we are too wrapped up in our own world of momentum.

James Beard, chef and food author often recognized as the father of American gastronomy, believed that “food is our common ground-a universal experience” (“Food”). The logic behind this quotation is clear, food is something that we all need to survive and something that is easy to share with others. Regardless of creed, color, or culture, food is something needed by absolutely everyone in the world, it is a universal tie, yet we have taken to eating in isolation instead of celebrating this world-wide
connection. By eating fast and eating alone, we are further disconnecting ourselves from the people in our lives. Hopefully Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, a legendary French gastronome, was incorrect when he said “The destiny of nations depends upon the manner in which they feed themselves” (“Food”).

The solution to fast food is, predictably enough, Slow Food. Ironically the Slow Food movement got its start with the same restaurant as fast food. McDonald's. The fast-food tycoon was preparing to build yet another restaurant, but this time they chose the wrong location. It was around 1986 that the franchise began plans to expand to an outlet near Piazza di Spagna in Rome. Petrini and followers “brandished bowls of penne as weapons of protest” and their demonstration was successful (“Slow”). Petrini, as stated earlier, went on to found the International Slow Food Movement which “runs counter to the fast food and fast life” (“Slow”). Slow Food really began to catch on in the 1990’s, and by 1995, the Movement grew from 20,000 official members to 65,000 members across 42 countries and has over 8,000 members in America alone (Honore 61).

One main belief of followers of the movement is in the right to pleasure. The Slow Food Manifesto states “A firm defense of quiet material pleasure is the only way to oppose the universal folly of Fast Life” (“Slow”). While pleasure is the root, there are many different aspects that come together to form the Slow Food movement.

Slow eating in literal terms, taking time on our meals while truly enjoying our food, is a basic point which we often overlook. Sitting down to a meal in the company of people is an excellent way to begin making connections. Even just clearing our minds of distractions using the mental control techniques discussed earlier, can assist us in being fully present at a meal and therefore enjoying it and connecting to people and pleasure.
While we are all busy, we can still afford to set aside an extra ten or twenty minutes a day to add to our meal times. The more time we allot to sitting down and relaxing at a meal, the less stressed we will be to rush through and finish eating.

Spreading the word about Slow Food is important, and activists “organize dinners, workshops, school visits and other events to promote the benefits of taking our time” (Honore 60). While education is obviously important, the Slow Food movement is pushing for more than just awareness of the pleasure of food. On the economic front, Slow Food supports foods that are endangered by connecting growers and teaching them how to get around the legalities of food production. In Italy, the home of Petrini and the heart of the movement, over 130 “dying delicacies have been saved” and similar “rescue operations” are in place in other countries as well, such as saving the Firiki apple and ladotiri cheese (Honore 61). Slow Food activists are helping to preserve the traditions we have developed through the food we eat.

Other facets of the movement’s goal are biodiversity and support of organic farming. Ecologically speaking, activists believe that the traditional method of farming is dangerous to the environment as it “pollutes the water table, kills off other plants, and exhausts the soil” (Honore 62). While, in theory, all organic farming sounds practical and easier, it does produce a more expensive product and therefore does not have as many supporters as do conventionally grown products. Biodiversity plays an important role in the food we eat. As we have hastened the processes of the food industry, we have introduced a sort of homogenization in the food we eat. It is easier and therefore faster, to produce food if it is all the same so farmers are forced to grow single breeds of foods. For instance, the number of varieties of artichokes grown in Italy has dramatically
dropped from “two hundred to about a dozen” (Honore 62). It is easier to destroy a food type that only has one strain than it is to wipe out hundreds of strains of the same food, and therefore, by homogenizing the food we grow, we are taking a risk at losing species of food all together.

In many cases, it seems as if, without realizing it, we have popularized the Slow Food movement. For instance, there are over fifteen thousand brewing companies in the United States that produce their beer through Slow Food methods, and they have found success and profit even in competition with big breweries like Budweiser and Miller (Honore 65). Also, organic diets have become trendy and being able to purchase organic food has become a sort of status symbol. People enjoy the slow activity of visiting farmer’s markets and have come to realize that the food purchased in a farmer’s market is often fresher and better tasting than that which is bought at the supermarket. Restaurants are also catching on to the trend and are using locally grown ingredients more often (Honore 67). Slow Food USA has about 12,000 members spread out in 140 chapters across the country. This is up from the mere 1,500 members the USA chapter had when it was founded in 2000 (Mand). Slowly but surely, people are starting to realize the benefits of taking a break from fast.

It is clear that eating can be a source of pleasure if it is done at the right speed. If we have been missing out on the pleasure of nourishment, what other pleasures are we rushing past the fun of? Just about everything we do has been turned up a notch on the speed scale, thus depleting the chance to make meaningful connections with ourselves and others and lowering the likelihood of us being able to savor the pleasure of our lives.
Take dating for instance. Traditionally, when two people meet and feel an attraction to one another, they spend time talking, getting to know each other, learning whether the other person is someone who has relationship potential. The whole process tends to take a lot of time, which is clearly not something we like giving up. Our solution to the time crunch is speed dating, a faster, easier way to form that connection we are looking for. A company called “8 Minute Dating” is the self-proclaimed ‘leader in speed dating’ and has hosted thousands of parties around the world with the guarantee of meeting someone. They host events in over 70 cities across the U.S. with the motto “A lot can happen in 8 minutes” (“Eight”). Perhaps they have never stopped to realize how much more can happen if you allow yourself more than eight minutes to get to know someone, or how much more meaningful a date can be if there is actually time to sit and eat a meal together.

Even driving, which can be a relaxing and stress-free experience if done correctly, has taken speed to a new and dangerous level. In 2001, “fourteen times more people were killed in automobile accidents than were killed in the September 11th terrorist attacks” in America alone (“Care”). We are all well aware that speeding contributes to automobile accidents and even worsens the injuries that result from accidents caused by other factors. Yet we all do it. Sometimes we are not even in a hurry, yet we press the pedal to the floor and dart around other cars just to make sure we are going fast enough to get to where we need to go. Other times, we are legitimately rushing, perhaps to make up for lost time stuck by a train or just to get to work on time. Regardless of the reasoning behind it, speed kills and it is unnecessary. Despite the commonly held belief, speeding is not a timesaver. For instance, it takes about “two-and-a-half minutes to drive two
miles at 50 mph...up the speed to a reckless 80 mph, and you arrive fifty-four seconds earlier" (Honore 100). On longer journeys, speeding does not actually save any time at all. Due to the “spread of synchronized traffic signals,” a driver who exceeds the speed limit is more likely to get stopped by red lights (Honore 100). Apparently, just feeling like we are going faster makes us happy, even if we are in fact slowing ourselves down or quite literally risking our lives to save those fifty-four measly seconds.

Regardless of the task, it has been established that we are likely to speed it up, in spite of the effects acceleration has on our health or on the amount of pleasure we get out of the activity. There are ways to establish our own speed by monitoring ourselves from the inside out, but there are also options for those who wish to embrace Slow on another level. In fact, there are places we can go to escape fast living all together and be allowed to live simply and at our own speed.

The Slow City movement was inspired by the Slow Food movement and was founded just eight years ago in 1999. Bra, a city of 28,000 located in northern Italy, was the first official Slow City. Bra has banned “cars, as well as supermarkets and lurid neon signs, from parts of its historic core” and is centered around small, family-run businesses, which, along with all other small shop in the city, are closed on Thursdays and Sundays (Honore “Slow”). The Slow City manifesto has over 50 objectives such as “cutting noise pollution and traffic, increasing green spaces and pedestrian zones, backing farmers who produce local delicacies and the shops and restaurants that sell them, and preserving local aesthetic traditions” (Honore “Slow”). Bra was the first of the sixty-five cities that have been initiated throughout countries such as Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom and there are currently over three hundred towns who are interested in joining (Knox 2).
Without even removing themselves from modern technology, inhabitants of Slow Cities are able to step back and enjoy every day living on many levels. They do not live in a mock pre-industrial society; they just live simply when appropriate. While there are no cities in America that are officially part of the Slow City register, there is hope.

In Gaithersburg, Maryland lies a neighborhood called Kentlands which is self defined as a “neo-traditional” community (“Kentlands”). Kentlands was designed to help people slow down, to “encourage them to walk, mingle and smell the roses” (Honore 113). Inhabitants of Kentlands are likely to be walking on the streets, talking to the neighbors, walking rather than driving to school or other obligations. The city is laid out so that you can get to Main Street, which is home to all the necessary grocery stores, restaurants, or small shops that you would need, in about five minutes (Honore 117). Due to the amount of time spent outside, people are able to really get to know their neighbors; they make real connections with the people around them.

The people of Kentlands appreciate the option of a slow lifestyle. When Wal-Mart attempted to move into the neighborhood in 1994, the community gathered and protested until the plans were cancelled and the mega-chain retreated. Residents fought and won a similar battle against a proposed fast-food chain in 1995 (“Kentlands”). Residents seem to be happy with their less traditional neighborhood, and while Kentlands is not officially registered in the Slow Cities movement, it is a good start for America.

In a country that is dedicated to speed, it is not surprising that the Slow movement is taking its time to move across America. One of the problems is that we fail to recognize our own acceleration and have come to define speed as a necessity for success. It will be difficult to break this belief, but through education about the movement there is
a good chance that people will begin to slow down their lives, even if it is in only the most subtle ways. We can start small, simply committing ourselves to walking in the evenings or devoting Saturday afternoons to activities we find relaxing. We can pick and choose the aspects of the Slow movement that suit our lives and ignore those we find invasive. The beauty of it is that finding our own speed is a personal journey and there are no rules; it is about whatever makes us feel good, wherever we are comfortable.

We need to remember that we can do more than just imagine a better life, than just make plans for days when we have more time. If we do not make the time we will never have it. If we do not take care of our minds and our bodies they will not be there to take care of for as long as we would like them to be. We cannot fear change; we must embrace it with open arms and allow the beauty of something new to revitalize us, to connect us in ways that we have forgotten exist. If we need a day off work it is imperative that we take it. If academic agendas are getting out of hand we need to turn to healthy methods of coping. We need to learn to allow our minds and bodies to communicate in order to maintain a healthier lifestyle. It is necessary for us to rediscover connection in all of its forms, to take time for family and friends, to take time for ourselves. Take time to eat. Take time to breathe. Take time to enjoy. Take time to live.

None of us will ever achieve Superman’s speed. We will never beat any super villains in a race around the world. We will never know what it feels like to break the sound barrier or to get through a book from the Canaan in less than five minutes. There is a good chance, however, that we will be able to savor a delicious meal with a stress-free mind and a healthy body. It is probable that we will spend quality time with the
people we cherish and that we will be able to take pleasure in long dates and long drives. If we so choose, we will be capable of adjusting the tempo of our lives to our most comfortable level, capable of focusing on living the best way we can within our small part of the world, which is quite a refreshing mindset. Namaste.
Afterward:

How the Slow Movement Applies to

My Life
There is a lot to take in regarding the Slow movement. Slowing down sounds so easy, but we all know it can be difficult. I think the most important aspect of the Slow movement is that we choose our own pace; we choose which rules we want to follow and which suggestions to completely disregard. Depending on your profession and lifestyle, some aspects may be more important than others. For instance, I have applied the Slow principles to my life regarding school and I have seen amazing results. By taking my time to work through projects, papers, and readings, I am able to enjoy each assignment more. The most incredible part of it is that I do not feel like I am losing time from other activities. I am simply narrowing my focus on each activity that I do, and rather than doing a lot as fast as I can, I do as much as I can as well as it can be done.

As someone who will be graduating in a few short weeks, I have spent time thinking about the workforce and feel these Slow principles will apply. My roommate is preparing to enter medical school in the fall and I cannot help but think about how important it will be for him to incorporate aspects of the Slow movement into his future practice. We have all been to a doctor’s office, and we know how frustrating it can be to spend hours in the waiting room and then mere moments in the exam room, but not only is this frustrating, it can also be dangerous as it could easily lead to misdiagnosis or mistreatment of patients. Therefore Slow is something we need to introduce into exam rooms.

Another popular profession among my friends is education. Ball State breeds a large number of teachers each and every year, but I wonder how many of them are taught about the Slow movement. Much like doctors, teachers are spending less time with the people they are there to serve: children. One of the reasons for this is that teachers, like
so many other professionals in America, are overburdened. Teachers have a lot of
demands outside of the classroom and the stress of constant motion and multitasking can
have a damaging effect on education. The classroom is another place in which Slow
needs to make an appearance.

Of course work is not the only aspect my future in which I plan on incorporating
the Slow movement. I hope to have a family, have children one day and I would like to
raise them in a Slow environment. Balancing work and family will obviously be difficult
and as a twenty-one-year-old student I have no experience that will prepare me for the
challenge, but I am aware of the risks going too fast can have on a family unit. It seems
to me that time is one of the best gifts we can give our children. Making time for play
and giving our undivided attention to children as they give us tedious accounts of their
days, rather than mentally rushing through the list of things you will be doing after your
child goes to bed, is a simple act that will not only make our children feel more attended
to but also make us appreciate them that much more. Just as I discussed earlier, the Slow
movement is all about making connections, and who better to connect with than your
own child.

There are so many aspects of the Slow movement that I find useful. Sometimes it
is nice just to take a step back and reflect, take time to understand and appreciate the
world around us. Other times I see the benefits of going slow in the improvements it has
made in my relationships with those I care about. People really can tell when you are
taking the time to listen to them, rather than just nodding when your mind is on other
things. I have come to realize that we have time. No matter how busy I am, how stressed
out I feel, I know that there is enough time to do everything and still relax. I have learned
how to control my stress level through the Slow movement and in a hectic life, this is one of the most valuable skills anyone can possess.
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