

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: The Golden Thread: Exploring the Resistance to Digital Technologies and Digital Literacy Practices by Second-Generation Back-to-the-Landers

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This project looks at the resistance to digital technologies and digital literacy practices by families that deliberately choose to live without the technologies that many would consider essential to daily life. I examine this resistance, and study the ways that uses of digital technologies and digital composing processes are intertwined with identity.

In order to explore this topic, I conducted oral history interviews and used ethnographic observation to study twelve participants; members of seven different families, all from the state of Maine. My participants, all of whom self-identify as people who consciously do not use or limit their use of digital technologies, engaged with digital technologies to varying degrees, from members of a family who live “off the grid,” choosing to not use electricity, telephones, televisions, or the Internet, to a family that uses computers, the Internet and cell phones in the home, but limits the children’s use of these technologies. All of the participant families engage regularly in non-digital literacy practices, whether they be the playing of music, the sharing of recipes, or the contribution to or publication of a community newsletter. For all of the research

participants in this study, an identity formed by the rejection of digital or electronic technologies is important. Each participant represents him or herself as one who rejects or avoids digital technologies, even though my research reveals that digital technologies are, indeed, used in some way by most participants.

This is a study that is timely, as we are currently in an unprecedented age of digital technology use, and many people wonder about the effects of such immersion. Additionally, many families are trying to negotiate the extent to which the use of digital technologies is beneficial to their children, and the data gathered during this study speaks to this.