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Fahrenheit 451 Essay

Technology has become such a ubiquitous entity that it's hard to believe it wasn't always around. Today, technology is used for everything, from entertainment to communication, and as some would argue...*control*? In his fictitious novel *Fahrenheit 451*, published just as technology was beginning to make its appearance in people's everyday lives, author Ray Bradbury foresaw a future where technology is omnipotent, and anything or anyone that defies it is ostracized. This grim vision of a technological takeover has the likely potential to come to fruition- however, it is ultimately up to mankind whether or not it does.

Evidence supporting the reality of Bradbury's fears is found everywhere. One of the themes in *Fahrenheit 451* is a dependency on technology. People who are viewed as 'normal' in the society are those like Mildred Montag, who inquires to her husband: "How long you figure before we save up and get the fourth wall torn out and a fourth wall-TV put in? It's only two-thousand dollars" (Bradbury 20). Mildred, with her three televisions, is *addicted* to technology, and is a representation for the average Fahrenheit-citizen. A dependency like Mildred's on different forms of modern technology has developed in the world today. According to a study conducted by the University of Melbourne in which 173 college students were tested for "problematic Internet and gambling behaviors," "About 5 percent of the students showed signs of gambling problems, but 10 percent of the students posted scores high enough to put them in the at-risk category for Internet 'addiction'" (Parker-Pope 1). This slowly-developing obsession with technologies doesn't come without a price, either. Not only does it detract "...from our time with

family and friends in the real world..." but it also "...can cause us to become more impatient, impulsive, forgetful and even more narcissistic" (Parker-Pope 1). There are even more adverse ramifications that result from dependence on technology; one of these is the widespread invasion of privacy.

Another epidemic foreseen by Bradbury was the current universality of technology. It has provided people with an easy way to access one another's personal information and track their activities. In *Fahrenheit 451*, this is represented by the Mechanical Hound. Today, it is seen in organizations as large as the government. In a recent case, a man named Edward Snowden was imprisoned on account of leaking Nation Security Agency data. In his searches, he uncovered "...a massive effort by the U.S National Security Agency to track cell phone calls and monitor the e-mail and Internet traffic of virtually all Americans" (Star and Yan 1). This startling discovery demonstrates how the widespread use of the technology has given the government the ability to spy on millions of innocent people. As Snowden puts it, "Even if you're not doing anything wrong you're being watched and recorded."

The government isn't the only one using technology to its advantage. The police are using millions in federal grants towards advanced surveillance systems. In Oakland, California, data will be gathered in the new system, "...data about the everyday movements and habits of law-abiding residents..." (Sengupta 1). According to Oakland city council member Libby Shaaf, the new technology would allow law enforcement to "paint a pretty detailed picture of someone's personal life, someone who may be innocent" (Sengupta 2). There has been much justified discontent over these systems and their sinister capabilities.

Even systems of education are utilizing technology as a window into people's lives. According to executive director at Kaplan Test Prep Christine Brown, "Students' social media and digital footprint can sometimes play a role in the admissions process..." (Singer 1). The widespread use of technology by colleges to secretly survey prospective students has been called the 'unspoken admissions test'.

Arguably, as much as modern technology like surveillance centers and social media usage can change our world, it can also improve it. When it comes to the much-debated effects of police surveillance, "Proponents of the Oakland initiative, formally known as the Domain Awareness Center, say it will help the police reduce the city's notoriously high crime rates" (Sengupta 1). Because of the system, *all* of the Oakland residents can be safer, and the authorities will be better able to perform their jobs. Colleges, who use information found online in regard to applicants, can use said information in a positive way, as well: "Some prospective students themselves ask an admissions official to look at blogs or videos they have posted; on other occasions, an admissions official might look up an obscure award or event mentioned by the applicant, for purposes of elucidation " (Singer 3). In this instance, the online findings are used to the student's advantage, and serve as a tool for the sharing of knowledge. No matter what the case, technology can play an important role in our ever-changing society.

There is no doubt that technology has transformed society; whether that transformation was good or not is the debate. On one hand, there are good aspects to modern technology, aspects that are not included in *Fahrenheit 451*, but that, today, carry just as much 'weight' as the negatives. These include the vast developments technology has led to in fields of science, medicine, and education, the ability for people to communicate with each other all over the

world, and the ability for one to access endless amounts of knowledge at the push of a button. The ideal situation would be for technology to remain more of a positive force than anything else. However, as seen in both the world today and in Ray Bradbury's writing, technology has power over people. If human beings cannot handle the responsibility that comes with technology usage, there is no guarantee that Bradbury's vision *won't* come to fruition.