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ENG 181

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Final Portfolio

Dear Portfolio Assessment Committee,

Throughout my life I have been overly self-conscious and shy, which had overflowed into my academics. I was envious of those that enjoyed and excelled at writing, because I didn't have the confidence in my writing abilities to allow me to break out of my perfectionist attitude and enjoy writing. Often struggling to get my thoughts into words let alone cohesive written paragraphs, writing was time intensive and required an immense amount of tenacity to produce something I could be proud of. I was happy to read and analyze other's works all day, but when the time came to find my own voice, it was lost in a sea of jumbled thoughts. This caused me to enter my freshman writing class as apprehensive and uncomfortable, but with an open mind and the hope of changing my thoughts about writing. Throughout the semester I was able to build upon the feeble base I had entered with to create a solid foundation and the frameworks for success in my writing pursuits. Writing is really just an overarching progression of ideas from tiny sparking thoughts to fully-supported research arguments. This discovery allowed me to take my random jumbled thoughts, and wrestle them into a product that I could be proud of while gaining confidence in my writing abilities and embracing my writing style.

Over the course of the semester, I have learned to successfully write in various genres and modes as seen in the artifacts to follow. The blog posts, literary analysis letter, pecha kucha, paper proposal and annotated bibliography, and researched argument all serve a purpose to

writing and the overall progress I made throughout the semester, however, I am going to focus on blog post 5 and the final draft of the researched argument. I selected these two specifically because I wrote about the same topic across genres, starting with the spark of interest from the blog post that eventually morphed into the basis of my entire research paper. In my fifth blog post I wrote about how *Super Sad True Love Story* relates to an online article written by Melissa Nilles called “Technology is Destroying the Quality of Human Interaction.” The following excerpt clearly displays my skills in a broken down manner through short, informal aspects as a way to express ideas without worrying about organization.

“When Lenny and his two best friends, Noah and Vishnu, hang out they are focused mainly on their apparati, and teaching Lenny how to use the new functions while streaming the whole embarrassing moment live. From page 88 to 91, the lack of real conversation between the three friends is astounding. Their sole focus is on the ratings and how they are perceived by others through them. This is paralleled to our society’s focus on social media and the quantity of friends rather than the quality. As Nilles bluntly states, “technology seems to be subtly destroying the meaningfulness of interactions we have with others” and nothing can replace the face-to-face connection of body language, facial expressions, and the attention of another.”

I was able to maintain the ability to analyze different works and compare through synthesis of ideas while taking on a more relaxed tone. In this excerpt, I briefly summarized an incident, made quick commentary, and related it to Nilles’s article. The blog post’s purpose is to get your ideas onto paper while using broken down skills that can be used to build back up to a more formal assignment. In my researched argument, I proved that I can further build on the original ideas found in my blog posts, especially in “This “technological detachment” provides a sense of

isolation that is seen in *Super Sad True Love Story* (Nilles 1). The reliance on rankings and inability to make meaningful connections as a result forces conformity and restricts individual identity.” I adjusted the tone to be formal and used this to my advantage in additional support to my argument. The progression of ideas from informal to formal through opposing genres proves that I have learned to adapt my writing style and exude range and versatility.

Analysis of others’ arguments is something that has always come easily to me, but incorporating it into my own work as support for my argument is anything but a breeze. Throughout the semester I practiced it relentlessly, because it is integral in writing a solid argumentative paper. By the time I began to write my final draft for my researched argument, I realized how it was easily coming to me and others’ arguments were beginning to flow into my own writing with little hesitation.

“Materialism, encouraged by the use of the apparatus, is restricting identity and socioeconomic status by placing emphasis on appearance and possessions that fit within the pressures enforced by society. On page 38, Lenny, while looking for information about Eunice, comes across her and her sister’s purchases that are mostly comprised of boutiques in L.A. and New York, footwear, and expensive socks. During his analysis, he feels the need to save them from themselves and “the idiotic consumer culture that was bleeding them softly” (Shteyngart).”

In this passage from my researched argument, I effectively summarized the passage in a brief manner while using the information that I had analyzed as relatable to my topic to support my argument. The quote flows in the description as if it isn’t even there, which supports the summary before. The progress made towards the incorporation and challenging of others’

arguments has aided in my development as a critical thinker, reader, and writer by giving me the ability to support my own argument.

This freshman writing class has made me realize that writing truly is a process, because the idea for my researched argument came from a couple of my blog posts and progressed into a well-supported topic. As I read the novel *Super Sad True Love Story*, I annotated on sticky notes so that I could remember my thoughts and where they were. This progresses throughout the semester as I continue returning to notes I had made previously and adding to them while applying them to various writing assignments, such as blog posts, the literary analysis letter, all the way to my researched argument. In blog post 4, I compare the image of “Noise” in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness to a scene in *Super Sad True Love Story*, which is edited and used in my rough draft and my final draft for my researched argument. I often brainstormed in the documents I wrote my blog posts in, “Identity lost through the Noise? Dilution of identity-lack of privacy,” which serves as the beginning of more detailed plans for my paper. This is followed by the formation of those ideas in my rough draft.

“An immense amount of data is accessible in Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story*, and is responsible for the lack of privacy. There is a never-ending stream of information and data that is available through the apparatus, and is similar to the never-ending swarm of thoughts called “Noise” in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. In this novel, the society is infected with this germ that makes men’s thoughts able to be heard by everyone at all times. In both societies, everyone has access to all of the minute details and secrets about everyone else. There is no hiding in either society. In both of these situations, the disease and the technology cause the population to be in a daze, and control their lives.”

Editing for the final draft comes next, while maintaining the original ideas from my blog post.

“Through comparison to Patrick Ness’s *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, evidence of limited privacy is prevalent in *Super Sad True Love Story*. An immense amount of data is accessible in Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story*, and is responsible for the lack of privacy. A never-ending stream of information and data that is available through the apparatus and is similar to the never-ending swarm of thoughts called “Noise” in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. In the latter novel, the society is infected with a germ that makes men’s thoughts able to be heard by everyone at all times. In both societies, everyone has access to all of the minute details and secrets about everyone else. There is no hiding in either society. In both of these situations, the disease and the technology leaves the population in a daze and controls their lives.”

The blue highlighted portions are the ideas maintained from start to finish of the entire process for this small section. While the green highlights are the changes I made transitioning from rough draft to final draft. Through my writing, the process of forming thoughts into ideas into drafts, revising, editing, and reflecting are all evident and have progressed throughout the semester.

Reflecting back on my progress throughout the semester in writing, I feel accomplished in achieving my goals set on the very first day of class. I have gained necessary experience and now feel more comfortable when approaching a writing assignment that once seemed daunting. I believe in my abilities and know that the frameworks forged from this semester will carry me far.

Literary Analysis Letter

June 11

Dear Diary,

I don't know what to do about dad's problem. I feel like it's all my fault. I can't do anything for Mommy or Sally while I'm in Rome. He just keeps getting worse, and is actually getting away with it. All because I'm not there to stop it. I can't let this go on any longer. I just feel so guilty and confused. The past can't repeat itself. Back before we moved to New Jersey, things were so good. The overwhelming stress leads to the drinking that leads to the hitting, and mom only prays to Jesu, Sally is too wrapped up in her classes, so the vicious cycle continues without a barrier. It's all my fault, I shouldn't have gone so far away to Rome. I have to get on the next plane home. I can't handle staying at home with all of the pressure and expectations, but maybe New York would work out and I could go home on the weekends. Finding a place to stay will be the hardest part. I may have to be forced to stay with that old guy, Lenny. He's kind of sweet, which balances out his old, gross physique. His serious love for me would allow me to be myself around him, because there wouldn't be any uncertainty. It's kind of creepy how much he loves my freckles though.

I broke up with Ben. He was just too perfect, and I was just so undeserving of his attention. He is just so physically flawless with the intelligence to match that I just felt so intimidated. He made me feel so self-conscious, because really he deserves a model. I felt that I wasn't enough for him, and that he didn't approve of my body. I broke down in front of him one night in the ugliest bawling you've ever seen. I was just so confused about him and my family, and I just couldn't stop. He was probably thinking that he's had enough of my craziness anyways. I'm such a mess. I need to take control of my life, and get it together.

I'm seriously considering Lenny right now. He could actually take care of me, which I really need at this point. I'm not in love with him, so he makes me feel safe, because I know where I stand and there is no uncertainty. He's just really not my ideal, but I could get past that, due to his very apparent love for me. I just feel like I'm not getting everything that I could. What if I deserve better? I don't want to settle. I just don't know what to do. I mean this is the guy that I had to teach how to brush his teeth properly. There was one time that I had to re-button his out of style shirt while we were walking the streets in Rome, because the buttons were all off. He's just such a dork, and I just feel inclined to help him be less of a dork. That's a form of love right? Maybe I don't even know what love is. Or maybe my view of love is skewed. He is kind of beautiful in an unconventional way though. My Prof Margaux in Assertiveness Class would call him "a real human being." He is just so genuine and earnest. He is kind and sweet and caring, and maybe exactly what I need. I just can't help that I'm not attracted to him though. I like that I feel like I can pretend we are two different people, even if just for a moment. I just can't decide about him. I don't know what to do. How am I supposed to figure all of these problems out? I really just need someone to verbal with right now.

Reflection: The purpose was to provide a view of Eunice's thoughts and feelings of uncertainty, guilt, and self-consciousness in the most direct and reflective form as we get from Lenny through the diary entries. My goal was to leave the reader with increased understanding of Eunice's character. I began this by analyzing Eunice's character, Lenny's style of writing, the selected passage, and where in the passage I could bring out more of Eunice's personal feelings through a diary entry. Then, I combined all of these aspects to write the letter, pulling the message from pages 74 and 75 and switching the format of the letter to a diary entry with no intended audience.

I added in more of the emotional ties in Eunice's thought process, such as her confusion, struggles with responsibility, immaturity, desperation, and need to be taken care of. I believe that the strength of this letter would be the insight into all of the emotions coursing through Eunice's mind that she doesn't want to let out of her walls. The weakness would be the slight alteration of Eunice's level of word choice.

Pecha Kucha Presentation Script

1. Hello, I'm Savannah Ramsey and today I'm going to talk to you about music and its importance in the healing process. My artifact is an online ad promoting music therapy programs at a hospital in Barcelona, Spain sponsored by Fundacion Ilusiones.
2. Although some believe that music has no place in the medical industry, this ad effectively supports my view through thought-provoking imagery and pathos of the impact music can make in one's life, because it is universal, heavily tied to one's identity, and can provide connections emotionally, psychologically, and socially.
3. This ad heavily relies on pathos and powerful imagery of a young girl battling cancer to appeal to the audience's emotions and values to draw them into the power of music and the place it holds in healing. It is similar to the ASPCA's ads with Sarah McLachlan, where you feel compelled to cry and do anything you can to help.
4. The background of the ad is blue and white watercolor that represents innocence, purity, serenity, and calmness. This relates to the way that music has a calming effect and reduces stress through soothing rhythms and melodies such as lullabies that parents sing to their babies to get them to fall asleep.
5. By representing the young girl's hair beautifully billowing in the wind with music notes of different rhythms, the publisher is stating that music is a part of her identity physically through the assimilation of the music notes that blend into the imagery of the ad.
6. One of the less noticeable features of the ad is the small text, because the publisher didn't want to take away from the image and the effect that it has over the audience. The text doesn't have to be the focal point of the ad, because music is universal and connects people as a common language.
7. Music is found in all cultures across the globe, and could have possibly predated even spoken language. It is one of the few themes consistent in all societies. We are exposed to music as infants and it plays a strong role in developing each of our identities as we grow.
8. Music shapes a large part of our identity, because it is present and always changing throughout our lives. As we grow, our taste in music does too, because there is always something new being produced in the music industry that we can relate to or that we find catchy from Taylor Swift to Brad Paisley.
9. We can always find something to relate to in music, which is meaningful and provides an automatic connection to others. It is reassuring to know that someone else is going

through something similar and provides inspiration to carry on or advice on what worked for someone else.

10. Music is connected to memories, and provides specific meaning to who you are and where you came from based on your responses to melodic cues. Studies have shown that music can assist Alzheimer's patients remember specific events from their past.
11. Different pieces of music portray emotions as well as bring out emotions in their audience simply by altering the melodic structure. It has always astounded me how different combinations of frequencies of sound waves can make us feel such strong emotion and bring so many people together that have common interests and passions.
12. Many times patients with illnesses like cancer get depressed and lose sight of themselves. If patients don't have the will to live, then the treatments are worthless, which is where music comes in. It provides an outlet for their emotions and keeps them tied to others and the society around them.
13. These music therapy sessions aid in maintaining positivity in the patients, and allow them to focus on external sources as a sort of distraction from their daily battles. It keeps them grounded to their identity, so that they don't get lost in the treatment of their illness.
14. Studies have also been conducted that music with steady simple rhythms help patients with Parkinson's disease regain a steadiness in their gait and increase the pace at which they can maneuver across a room, even after the music halts.
15. There are those who say that music therapy doesn't have a place in a medical profession, but my perspective is such that music is necessary in the holistic healing of a person. This holistic healing is important, because focusing only on physical problems can be counterproductive if there is something internally obstructing the physical healing.
16. Music has the ability to change lives as it did for me. I entered percussion in 6th grade with very little self-confidence and as shy as could be. I wouldn't have been able to stand in front of you right now and speak clearly without shaking violently.
17. Yet, here I am, emerged after 7 years a confident, sassy leader of the front ensemble that has performed in front of hundreds of thousands of people and is a two-time Bands of America Grand Nationals Finalist and a participant of the 2013 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.
18. Music allowed me to express myself in a way that promoted growth, relieved stress, provided emotional strength, and gave me a support system that had the same interests and could relate with me on a deeper level through the endless shared hours of grueling practice to reach perfection.

19. Music knows no boundaries, because it crosses borders, age, language, gender, race, etc., which is exactly why it has so much impact on a person's well-being. There are just so many possible avenues that it could be helpful for.

20. Some say that this ad is too optimistic because music can't possibly cure, however, it clearly establishes its premises of musical importance not only in medicine, but society through pathos and powerful visuals that emulate the necessity of music and its applicability to all humans.

Blog Post 2

One of the more understated, but relevant elements of *Super Sad True Love Story* is materialism. On page 38, Lenny, while looking for information about Eunice, comes across her and her sister's purchases that are mostly comprised of boutiques in L.A. and New York, footwear, and expensive socks. During his analysis, he feels the need to save them from themselves and "the idiotic consumer culture that was bleeding them softly" (Shteyngart). Materialism also comes into play with the apparat models. You aren't cool or important if you don't have the newest model with all of the best functions as displayed when Lenny returns from Rome and is forced to get the most updated version in order to increase his status at work. The consumer approach of the apparat is similar to that of iPhones in the sense that the most recently released version shows status. This plays into the social hierarchy that controls their world, and is beginning to control ours. In our society, there is so much emphasis placed on how you look and what you have. Due to our judgmental nature, there is a lot riding on first impressions and appearance. As the saying goes, you must "dress to impress." To be someone of importance you have to look the part, which requires you to have money. This creates a socioeconomic issue that restricts those in the lower class from reaching higher levels in many industries, and results in a vicious cycle. The novel seems to comment on the societal obsession of consumer culture, and how this dangerous cycle is connected to the financial crisis of America.

Thoughts:

Maier declares that in *Super Sad True Love Story*, "they are measured according to their buying and spending power" there is so much emphasis placed on how you look and what you have, especially with the judgmental nature (2). Maier further states that, "in this new order the leaders will be the well-to-do ones" (2). To be someone of importance one has to look the part, which requires one to have money. This creates a socioeconomic issue that restricts those in the lower class from reaching higher levels in many industries. The resulting vicious cycle is that neither group end up with a true identity. The credit poles in *Super Sad True Love Story* line the streets, and tell one's credit score when he walks past. This invasion of privacy is restricting in the way that the credit score becomes one's life, since there is so much relying on it.

Blog Post 3

<http://osocio.org/message/music-also-cures/>

I was drawn to this artifact by the powerful imagery and the message that music can cure. As a musician and an aspiring doctor, this deeply connects with me. The strong images used provide so much hope and meaning, and caught my eye enough that I couldn't help but study it in more detail. The ad is focused on a young girl that has lost all of her hair due to treatments to fight her illness. She is smiling in spite of her trials, and is surrounded by blue and white watercolor that looks like the sky on a partially cloudy day. There are music notes of different rhythms overlaid that look like hair billowing in the wind. In the bottom corner it says "Music also cures." This ad is raising awareness that music therapy can aid in curing severe illness, which is directed towards the general public. It was published in February of 2007 online in Spain. The tone is positive, uplifting, and hopeful. The commanding imagery of a child battling cancer is a tough reality to face, and most people share the value of protecting children from harm. This ad really plays on emotion and pathos to bring across its message of music being therapeutic.

Blog Post 5

In the dystopian society of Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, technology is the main interface through which people interact. There is such limited face-to-face communication and interaction between the characters in this novel, because everyone is consumed by the encompassing world of the apparati. People rely so heavily on their apparati and the online connection that when all of the connections were cut, several young people committed suicide, because they "needed to be ranked, to know [their] place in this world" (Shteyngart 270). This reliance is not so farfetched from today's society. Nilles declares that technology, although it provides a miraculous way to stay in touch with friends long distance, is actually a hindrance in the way that it causes a disconnect from the world around us. This "technological detachment" is providing a sense of isolation that is seen in *Super Sad True Love Story* (Nilles 1). When Lenny and his two best friends, Noah and Vishnu, hang out they are focused mainly on their apparati, and teaching Lenny how to use the new functions while streaming the whole embarrassing moment live. From page 88 to 91, the lack of real conversation between the three friends is astounding. Their sole focus is on the ratings and how they are perceived by others through them. This is paralleled to our society's focus on social media and the quantity of friends rather than the quality. As Nilles bluntly states, "technology seems to be subtly destroying the meaningfulness of interactions we have with others" and nothing can replace the face-to-face connection of body language, facial expressions, and the attention of another.

Nilles, Melissa. "Technology is Destroying the Quality of Human Interaction." *The Bottom Line*. N.p., 24 Jan. 2012. Web. 5 Oct. 2015.

Blog Post 6

Jessica Hale's "Constructing Connectedness: Gender, Sexuality, and Race in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," argues that the homosocial relationships in *Frankenstein* make a statement of the inability of women to reach a certain level of intellectual and intimate connections with men in the nineteenth century. In the novel, male intimacy is the primary choice, and marriage is then seen as a secondary choice, which is used in exposing the strengths and inadequacies of the nuclear family. The homosocial desire found in Shelley's *Frankenstein* serves to define the separation of the domestic female role from the external male role that is prevalent in the nineteenth century.

Hale close reads the specific passage "I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to mine" to emphasize that the erotic desire is for a male companion and not a wife or sexual partner, even though the man Walton dreams of serves an unromantic purpose (Shelley 4).

A secondary source of "men who feel secure enough in their masculinity to display feelings of domestic affection... who seem perfectly balanced in their manliness which incorporates rather than categorically excludes the feminine" (Schoene-Harwood 16), which is utilized by Hale to create a "they say, I say" statement that expresses agreement to the feminine and nurturing qualities displayed, but disagrees with the incorporation rather than exclusion of the feminine. She uses it to support her argument and provide clarification and verification to her ideas.

One unfamiliar term that I came across in the same section was "mélange," which is used in a sentence describing the comparisons between Victor's homosocial desire for Clerval and his paternal desire for the child he created. I used contextual evidence to deduce that it meant a combination, and verified it by looking it up on dictionary.com, where the definition says a mixture, medley. The easiest way to track down a definition for an unfamiliar term is generally to use a dictionary, which have become very accessible due to the internet.

Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

Savannah Ramsey

Muddled Identities through Technology, Race, and Socio-economic Status in Gary Shteyngart's
Super Sad True Love Story

In Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), each of the main characters struggles to define his or her self in this slightly altered, futuristic society that's not far off from our own. In an attempt to answer the question, how do technology, race, and socio-economic status intertwine to restrain a sense of identity in the 21st century, I will use a literary criticism of identity in Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, to expand and refute off of Enikő Maior's argument. While also using Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and Frank Pasqual's "The Algorithmic Self" to provide points of comparison and support for my research towards the correlation between advances in technology and the decline in sense of identity. This rapidly progressive society faces an identity crisis that parallels the hardships of today's youth, and can be seen as a warning as to where our society is heading towards. Many say that internal factors decide one's identity, however, through their presence through technology, racial ties, or the socio-economic hierarchy, characters in Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* have to fight their way through the society to find their identity externally.

Annotated Bibliography

Jong, Erica. "The Search for Eternal Youth in a Yuan-Driven World." *Jewish Educational Ventures* July/August 2010: 64, 66. Online.

In this article, Jong analyzes Shteyngart's effectiveness in the novel along with the prominent factors that he uses to get his point across. One of these being ethnicity, which plays a role especially in Lenny, who is a Russian-Jew and struggles to fit within the American society. I am planning on using this source to solidify my point that how one sees his or her race and whether or not they feel that they fit in can play a huge part of his or her identity.

Maior, Enikő. "The Question of Identity in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*."

In this article, Maior analyses how identity is portrayed in *Super Sad True Love Story*. This is accomplished through technology, familial relations, race, and social hierarchy. I plan on using this article to both expand and refute arguments made in relation to the importance of technology, race, and social status in identity.

Ness, Patrick. *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. Berryville: Candlewick Press, 2008. Print

In this novel, Todd Hewitt is the only remaining boy in Prentisstown, where there are no women either as a result of biological warfare released as an attack on humans on this new world. The germ also brought the "Noise", a constant stream of all surrounding thoughts projected into your head at all times, or at least that's what Todd has been told. Suddenly he has

to be uprooted from the only home he has ever known when he discovers a girl in the woods, and they escape from Prentisstown and continue running from their pursuers while trying to unearth the truth. I plan on using this as a comparison to *Super Sad True Love Story* between the “Noise” and the never-ending stream of information from the apparati. This will be useful, because it brings validity to my statements and will clarify my argument.

Nilles, Melissa. “Technology is Destroying the Quality of Human Interaction.” *The Bottom Line*. N.p., 24 Jan. 2012. Web. 5 Oct. 2015.

In this article, Nilles argues that technology is limiting our face-to-face connection, and isolating individuals by ruining the quality of interactions. Even though we have more access to keep in touch with others, the sheer quantity of “friends” is overwhelming and enforces a technological disconnect from the others.

Shteyngart, Gary. *Super Sad True Love Story*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010. Print.

Researched Argument Rough Draft

Savannah Ramsey

Muddled Identities through Technology in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*

In Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) technology is the source of a lost sense of identity, which is commentary towards the path of today's society. The slightly altered, futuristic society that's not far off from our own is completely ruled by apparatus, a new technology that is similar to a smart phone, but provides access to endless data and rankings. Lenny, the main character, struggles to keep up with the times and technology, and makes an attempt to fit within the rigid social hierarchy that plays a large role in defining societal identity. The other main character, Eunice, embodies youth and the societal ideals in the way that she is robot-like, and constantly on her apparatus shopping or messaging. The interactions between the two and their interactions with the surrounding technological society provide a glimpse into Shteyngart's commentary on today's society. **Through the emphasis of materialism, biotechnology, and the degradation of language, privacy and social interactions, Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* points out the decline in today's society through an exaggerated dystopic version of the annihilation of identity by technology.**

An immense amount of data is accessible in Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, and is responsible for the lack of privacy. There is a never-ending stream of information and data that is available through the apparatus, and is similar to the never-ending swarm of thoughts called "Noise" in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. In this novel, the society is infected with this germ that makes men's thoughts able to be heard by everyone at all times. In both societies, everyone has access to all of the minute details and secrets about everyone else. There is no hiding in either society. In both of these situations, the disease and the technology cause

the population to be in a daze, and control their lives. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Todd Hewitt, the main character, does the following trick to calm himself, “You close yer eyes and as clearly and calmly as you can you tell yourself who you are, cuz that’s what gets lost in all that noise” (Ness 17). In his society, one begins to lose his identity in all of the Noise and begins to assimilate into those around him, since everyone’s thoughts get muddled together. With all personal information available, there is a dilution of what defines a person, because only the extremely internal thoughts that are hidden deep down remain. These limitations dehumanize the population and strip away their lives to that of a monotone nature.

Erica Jong claims that Shteyngart seems “like a smart-alecky adolescent who thinks youth and parental praise will last forever,” which rests upon the questionable assumption that youth is everlasting and can be maintained through the use of biotechnology. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, Shteyngart is commenting the opposite using Joshie as a case study. Shteyngart realizes that youth is fleeting and meaningless in the grand scheme of life, so he places a great amount of emphasis on elongating life in the novel only to refute those perceived notions with the failure of Post-Human Services. Joshie states in a public speech that “Our genocidal war on free radicals proved more damaging than helpful, hurting cellular metabolism, robbing the body of control. In the end, nature simply would not yield,” which is effective support that even technology couldn’t maintain a youthful identity. Joshie, in an update to Eunice, says that he is going to have his “heart removed completely. Useless muscle. Idiotically designed... Call me heartless” (Shteyngart 295). This is Shteyngart’s way of eluding to the complete loss of identity due to the loss of heart. The robot-like transformations make a comment on their loss of emotion and identity within the technological, dystopic society of *Super Sad True Love Story*.

Identity within Shteyngart's novel is affected by the continuously diminishing social interactions facilitated by the technological emphasis of society. On pages 89-91 of *Super Sad True Love Story*, Lenny's friends are teaching him how to use all of the features on his new apparat, which uses a plethora of personal information from each person's profile to determine various rankings. There is an obsession over the rankings to the point where Lenny becomes depressed at the thought that "Money and Credit was about all [he] had at this point" since his "Sustainability", or credit ranking, is the only one that was high (Shteyngart 91). Frank Pasquale argues in "The Algorithmic Self" that "rankings become a source of identity," furthermore, this creates a reliance on validation through others' approval, and forces people to conform to societal pressures (2). A general sameness exudes from the societal identity that is formed, which limits an individual's own identity. People rely so heavily on their apparati and the online connection that when all of the connections were cut during the Rupture, several young people committed suicide, because they "needed to be ranked, to know [their] place in this world" (Shteyngart 270). This reliance is not so farfetched from today's society. Nilles declares that technology, although it provides a miraculous way to stay in touch with friends long distance, is actually a hindrance in the way that it causes a disconnect from the world around us. This "technological detachment" is providing a sense of isolation that is seen in *Super Sad True Love Story* (Nilles 1). There is such limited face-to-face communication and interaction between the characters in this novel, and when it does occur, it is poor quality, because it is interrupted by the encompassing world of the apparati. As Nilles bluntly states, "technology seems to be subtly destroying the meaningfulness of interactions we have with others" and nothing can replace the face-to-face connection of body language, facial expressions, and the attention of another.

Materialism, encouraged by the use of the apparat, is restricting identity and socioeconomic status by placing emphasis on appearance and possessions that fit within the societal pressures. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, Lenny, while looking for information about Eunice, comes across her and her sister's purchases that are mostly comprised of boutiques in L.A. and New York, footwear, and expensive socks. During his analysis, he feels the need to save them from themselves and "the idiotic consumer culture that was bleeding them softly." Materialism also comes into play with the apparat models. You aren't cool or important if you don't have the newest model with all of the best functions as displayed when Lenny returns from Rome and is forced to get the most updated version in order to increase his status at work. The consumer approach of the apparat is similar to that of iPhones in the sense that the most recently released version shows status. This plays into the social hierarchy that controls their world, and is beginning to control ours. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, "they are measure according to their buying and spending power" there is so much emphasis placed on how you look and what you have, especially with the judgmental nature. Maior declares that in *Super Sad True Love Story*, "they are measured according to their buying and spending power" there is so much emphasis placed on how you look and what you have, especially with the judgmental nature (2). Maior further states that, "in this new order the leaders will be the well-to-do ones" (2). To be someone of importance one has to look the part, which requires one to have money. This creates a socioeconomic issue that restricts those in the lower class from reaching higher levels in many industries. The resulting vicious cycle is that neither group end up with a true identity. The credit poles in *Super Sad True Love Story* line the streets, and tell one's credit score when he walks past. This invasion of privacy is restricting in the way that the credit score becomes one's

life, since there is so much relying on it. Pressure applied by materialism in society is masking identity with credit and money.

A degradation in language occurred due to the focus on technology in popular culture found in *Super Sad True Love Story*. Books are almost obsolete in Shteyngart's novel, and have become known as "bound, printed, nonstreaming Media artifacts" (90). The society as a whole thinks very negatively about books, and believes they are old, smelly, and useless. Lenny is looked down upon for reading, and picked on by his friends who deem him the "last reader on earth" (Shteyngart 90). I agree with Maior's argument that Shteyngart "expresses his disappointment regarding the reading habits of the young generation" through Lenny's character, and further state that it is aided through Eunice's demeanor in response to books. Lenny's persistence in reading and literature is grounding in Shteyngart's optimistic view that there is still a chance to change the direction our society is heading. Books play a large part in one's culture and identity, through stories told, lessons learned, and connections made, but that was an absent part in the society of *Super Sad True Love Story*. Literature connects past and present through different generations, which is another factor of the disconnect and disdain between the younger generations and the older generations in the novel. The deeper meaning of this disconnect between generations is the loss of communal identity that ties communities together, and provides a sense of belonging to individuals. The lack of reading and appreciation for literature in the novel's dystopic society is related to the lack of communication skills and ability to connect with one another. Language and communication have been further damaged through the abbreviations and slang used, such as "TIMATOV. ROFLAARP. PRGV." as used by Eunice after just meeting Lenny. There is a loss of beauty in the way that technology is destroying language as it pertains to the spoken rhythm and meaning. The decline of language in today's

society is blown to extremes in *Super Sad True Love Story*, but it remains within reason and is frightening in that in agreement Jong, “you feel it is, alas, coming true” (2). The texting, social media, and constant cellphone usage in media is the cause of not only lack of meaningful connection, but also the ability to have meaningful conversation that isn’t over a technological device. As Melissa Nilles says, “There’s something intangibly real and valuable about talking with someone face to face,” which is largely in part to the sense of comfort we find in language that we are exposed to at a young age, thus holding a strong place within our identity.

Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story* comments on the path of today’s society through the destruction of identity through technological means within the aspects of the degradation of language, privacy and social interactions, materialism, and biotechnology. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, the society is similar to today’s as if looking through a mirror in a fun-house, maintaining the same characteristics but distorted in a way that everything is exaggerated. This is the effect of the novel on the issue of muddled identity from the ever present technology. Nilles asserts, “it is causing [us] to spread ourselves too thin, as well as slowly ruining the quality of social interaction that we all need as human beings,” which is emphasizing the need to deeply connect without technology to not lose sight of our identity by allowing it to dilute. By the end of the novel, Lenny comes to the realization that one’s identity is the most vital aspect of his life, so he leaves the crumbled society behind for a new “place with less data, less youth, and where...an older man...could be considered beautiful” (Shteyngart 328). This is Shteyngart’s way of telling us to do the same by making conscious efforts to focus on our identity and not allow ourselves to get lost in today’s technological society.

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Researched Argument Final Paper

Savannah Ramsey

Muddled Identities through Technology in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*

In Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) technology is the source of a lost sense of identity, which is commentary towards the path of today's society. The slightly altered, futuristic society that is not far off from our own is completely ruled by apparats, a new technology that is similar to a smart phone, but provides access to endless data and rankings. Lenny, the main character, struggles to keep up with the times and technology and makes an attempt to fit within the rigid social hierarchy that plays a large role in defining societal identity. The other main character, Eunice, embodies youth and the societal ideals in the way that she is robot-like and constantly on her apparat, shopping or messaging. The interactions between the two and their interactions with the surrounding technological society provide a glimpse into Shteyngart's commentary on today's society. **Through the emphasis of materialism, biotechnology, and the degradation of language, privacy and social interactions, Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* points out the decline in today's society through an exaggerated dystopic version of the annihilation of identity by technology.**

Through comparison to Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, evidence of limited privacy is prevalent in *Super Sad True Love Story*. An immense amount of data is accessible in Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, and is responsible for the lack of privacy. A never-ending stream of information and data that is available through the apparat and is similar to the never-ending swarm of thoughts called "Noise" in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. In the latter novel, the society is infected with a germ that makes men's thoughts able to be heard by everyone at all times. In both societies, everyone has access to all of the minute

details and secrets about everyone else. There is no hiding in either society. In both of these situations, the disease and the technology leaves the population in a daze and controls their lives. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Todd Hewitt, the main character, does the following trick to calm himself, “You close yer eyes and as clearly and calmly as you can you tell yourself who you are, cuz that’s what gets lost in all that noise” (Ness 17). In his society, one begins to lose his identity in all of the Noise and begins to assimilate into those around him, since everyone’s thoughts get muddled together. With all personal information available, there is a dilution of what defines a person, because only the extremely internal thoughts that are hidden deep down remain. These limitations dehumanize the population and strip away their lives to that of a monotone nature.

Similar to the way the nonexistent privacy is dehumanizing society in *Super Sad True Love Story*, biotechnology is cutting away vital aspects of human identity. Erica Jong claims that Shteyngart seems “like a smart-alecky adolescent who thinks youth and parental praise will last forever,” which rests upon the questionable assumption that youth is everlasting and can be maintained through the use of biotechnology. Jong is mistaken, because she overlooks Joshie in *Super Sad True Love Story*, where Shteyngart makes the opposite comments. Shteyngart realizes that youth is fleeting and meaningless in the grand scheme of life, so he places a great amount of emphasis on elongating life through biotechnology in the novel only to refute those perceived notions with the failure of Post-Human Services. Joshie states in a public speech that “Our genocidal war on free radicals proved more damaging than helpful, hurting cellular metabolism, robbing the body of control. In the end, nature simply would not yield,” which is effective support that even technology couldn’t maintain a youthful identity. Joshie, in an update to Eunice, says that he is going to have his “heart removed completely. Useless muscle. Idiotically

designed... Call me heartless” (Shteyngart 295). This is Shteyngart’s way of eluding to the complete loss of identity due to the loss of heart. Through this metaphor, there is an emphasis placed on the heartlessness trend of today’s society, where people tend to care about the individual concerns more than the communal concern. The robot-like transformations show a loss of emotion and identity within the technological, dystopic society of *Super Sad True Love Story*.

Identity within Shteyngart’s novel is affected by the continuously diminishing social interactions facilitated by the technological emphasis of society. On pages 89-91 of *Super Sad True Love Story*, Lenny’s friends are teaching him how to use all of the features on his new apparatus, which uses a plethora of personal information from each person’s profile to determine various rankings. There is an obsession over the rankings to the point where Lenny becomes depressed at the thought that “Money and Credit was about all [he] had at this point” since his “Sustainability”, or credit ranking, is the only one that was high (Shteyngart 91). Frank Pasquale argues in “The Algorithmic Self” that “rankings become a source of identity,” furthermore, this creates a reliance on validation through others’ approval, and forces people to conform to societal pressures (2). A general sameness exudes from the collective identity that is formed, which limits an individual’s own identity. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, people relied so heavily on their apparatus and the online connections that when all of the connections were cut during the Rupture, several young people committed suicide, because they “needed to be ranked, to know [their] place in this world” (Shteyngart 270). This reliance is not so farfetched from today’s society. Nilles declares that technology, although it provides a miraculous way to stay in touch with friends long distance, is actually a hindrance in the way that it causes a disconnect from the world around us. This “technological detachment” provides a sense of isolation that is

seen in *Super Sad True Love Story* (Nilles 1). The reliance on rankings and inability to make meaningful connections as a result forces conformity and restricts individual identity.

Much of the time that was once spent in social interactions is being spent in the vast online consumer market that strips many of the necessary credit scores. Materialism, encouraged by the use of the apparat, is restricting identity and socioeconomic status by placing emphasis on appearance and possessions that fit within the pressures enforced by society. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, Lenny, while looking for information about Eunice, comes across her and her sister's purchases that are mostly comprised of boutiques in L.A. and New York, footwear, and expensive socks. During his analysis, he feels the need to save them from themselves and "the idiotic consumer culture that was bleeding them softly" (Shteyngart 38). Materialism also comes into play with the apparat models. People in *Super Sad True Love Story* are not seen as trendy or important if they don't have the newest model with all of the best functions, as displayed when Lenny returns from Rome and is forced to get the most updated version in order to increase his status at work. The consumer approach of the apparat is similar to that of iPhones in the sense that the most recently released version shows status. This plays into the social hierarchy that controls their world, and is beginning to control ours. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, "they are measure according to their buying and spending power" there is so much emphasis placed on how you look and what you have, especially with the judgmental nature. Enikő Maior declares that in *Super Sad True Love Story*, "they are measured according to their buying and spending power" there is so much emphasis placed on how you look and what you have, especially with the judgmental nature (2). Maior further states that, "in this new order the leaders will be the well-to-do ones" (2). To be someone of importance one has to look the part, which requires one to have money. This creates a socioeconomic issue that restricts those in the lower class from

reaching higher levels in many industries. The resulting vicious cycle is that neither group ends up with a true identity, which means that their identities are not internalized but rather reliant on the external factors that they allow to define their lives. The credit poles in *Super Sad True Love Story* line the streets, and tell one's credit score when he walks past. Being forced to see it changes the role that it plays in the characters' lives. This is restricting in the way that the credit score becomes one's life, since there is so much relying on it. Pressure applied by materialism in society is masking identity with credit and money.

A degradation in language occurs due to the focus on apparatus in popular culture found in *Super Sad True Love Story*. Books are almost obsolete in Shteyngart's novel, and have become known as "bound, printed, nonstreaming Media artifacts" (90). The society as a whole thinks very negatively about books, and believes they are old, smelly, and useless. Lenny is looked down upon for reading, and picked on by his friends who deem him the "last reader on earth" (Shteyngart 90). I agree with Maior's argument that Shteyngart "expresses his disappointment regarding the reading habits of the young generation" through Lenny's character, and further state that it is aided through Eunice's demeanor in response to books. Lenny's persistence in reading and literature is grounding in Shteyngart's optimistic view that there is still a chance to change the direction our society is heading. Books play a large part in our culture and identity, through stories told, lessons learned, and connections made, but that was an absent part in the society of *Super Sad True Love Story*. Literature connects past and present through different generations, which is another factor of the disconnect and disdain between the younger generations and the older generations in the novel. The deeper meaning of this disconnect between generations is the loss of communal identity that ties communities together, and provides a sense of belonging to individuals. This differs from the social identity that is

suffocating individual identity, because social identity is conforming and forceful where communal identity is supportive and accepting. The lack of reading and appreciation for literature in the novel's dystopic society is related to the lack of communication skills and ability to connect with one another. Language and communication have been further damaged through the abbreviations and slang used, such as "TIMATOV. ROFLAARP. PRGV." as used by Eunice, after just meeting Lenny (Shteyngart 22). This contrasts Lenny's following language of "What makes me a nerd in your estimation?" which is more formal and traditional due to the fact that he still writes regularly in his diary (Shteyngart 22). There is a loss of beauty in the way that technology is destroying language as it pertains to the spoken rhythm and meaning. The decline of language in today's society is blown to extremes in *Super Sad True Love Story*, but it remains within reason and is frightening in that in agreeance Jong, "you feel it is, alas, coming true" (2). The texting, social media, and constant cellphone usage in media is the cause of not only lack of meaningful connection, but also the ability to have meaningful conversation that isn't over a technological device. As Melissa Nilles says, "There's something intangibly real and valuable about talking with someone face to face," which is largely in part to the sense of comfort we find in language that we are exposed to at a young age, thusly holding a strong place within our identity.

Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* comments on the path of today's society through the destruction of identity through technological means within the aspects of the degradation of language, privacy and social interactions, materialism, and biotechnology. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, the society is similar to today's as if looking through a mirror in a fun-house, maintaining the same characteristics but distorted in a way that everything is exaggerated. This is the effect of the novel on the issue of muddled identity from the ever present technology.

Nilles asserts, “it is causing [us] to spread ourselves too thin, as well as slowly ruining the quality of social interaction that we all need as human beings,” which is emphasizing the need to deeply connect without technology to not lose sight of our identity by allowing it to dilute. Nothing can replace the face-to-face connection of body language, facial expressions, and the attention of another. By the end of the novel, Lenny comes to the realization that one’s identity is the most vital aspect of his life, so he leaves the crumbled society behind for a new “place with less data, less youth, and where...an older man...could be considered beautiful” (Shteyngart 328). This is Shteyngart’s way of telling us to do the same by making conscious efforts to focus on our identity and not allow ourselves to get lost in today’s technological society.

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Reflection:

I made many revisions, but the main one was to add topic sentences to my paragraphs to increase the flow of my paper. These topic sentences are important, because they serve as a road map for the reader and allow them to know what is coming next as well as connecting previous paragraphs to new as a sense of cohesion. Another edit I made was in the last body paragraph, where I chose to contrast Eunice and Lenny's language in one scene rather than only having Eunice's language. This provides more context for readers that have not read *Super Sad True Love Story*. I also elaborated on several ideas that were very flat before. These claims required explanation and support to be viable and strong in my argument. There were many repetitive or vague words, so I worked on varying the language used along with syntax. In my second body paragraph, I included a sentence that shows that I am refuting the previous quote in order to connect my points and provide support to my argument. In my third paragraph I removed a couple sentences that didn't really fit within that paragraph and add parts of them into my conclusion.