

Shrink Rap Radio #146, April 4, 2008, The Individual and the Collective on the Internet

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” speaks to the Person in Society class, taught by Dr. Shepherd Bliss at Sonoma State University
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Susan Argyelan)

Excerpt:

Dr. Shepherd Bliss: *In class here today are the Person in Society class. It's going to be a little different than usual; it's an interactive class. This is Dr. Dave, David, also known as David Van Nuys, who is a longtime faculty member here, 34 years, was head of the – I started to say President of the Department. He was Chair of the Department for seven years, and he's written a book on the Zodiac killer and has a variety of different kinds of things he does, like hold microphones in front of people's mouths. And you'll be invited and welcome to have your say on radio to thousands of people who listen to his Shrink Rap Radio, and learn a lot of things. So, he's a media psychologist in his retirement here, and he was also a stage hypnotist for a while. So, I'm not sure what he's going to do, but basically, the class is his, and I'm going to stay here to make sure, you know, just monitor it a little bit, but I trust him. So I'm turning it over to Dr. David.*

Dr. Dave: *Hello everybody, and thank you for that, Shepherd. How delightful it is to be able to stick a mic in front of Shepherd and see him get all nervous, because he's an expert in communication. That's what he studied for years and got at least one of his degrees in Communication. And so coming her, I knew that I would be scrutinized from moment to moment for my skills as a communicator. So, this was my opportunity to put the shoe on the other foot for just a moment.*

Introduction: The clip you just heard is from an invited presentation that I recently gave at Sonoma State University. The class is called Person in Society, and it's being taught by my friend, Dr. Shepherd Bliss, who I interviewed on Shrink Rap Radio #82, almost a year ago exactly. I wanted my presentation to be as interactive as possible, and after my introductory remarks, the students made a number of excellent contributions. The whole session runs a bit long. I've tried to shorten it by taking out several selections of me talking about Shrink Rap Radio and podcasting generally. If you're listening to this, you already know all that. So other than reminding you to use the discount code, Shrink 3 upon checkout from GoDaddy when you buy your next domain name, I'm going to disregard my usual format and just play the recorded session. I hope you find it to be of some interest. I promise to make Internet stars of those students who spoke up, so here goes.

Dr. Dave: As you can see by the fact that I'm holding this microphone, is I'm thinking that this might become a broadcast, this whole session that we're going to do here today. And I don't really have a formal lecture prepared to present to you. I don't

really know for sure where this is going to go, but I'm hoping that we can have an interactive kind of session here, and that I can get ones of you on the mic, and then you'll be able to tell family and friends, "Hey! You can listen to me on the Internet!" and there you will be. So if all goes according to plan, that's what we'll be doing. Let me just step back and maybe give you a larger framework for what we're going to be talking about today. My understanding is that the name of this course is Person in Society? It's either Person in Society or Person and Society; I'm not sure.

Bliss: Person in Society.

Dr. Dave: Person in Society. I never taught this particular class, Person in Society, but that's what the title immediately evokes for me, is that issue of the individual versus the collective. Now, I don't know if any of you have studied Jungian psychology at all. Let me see a show of hands. Anybody had exposure in any class work yet to some Carl Jung? This is a very fundamental concept in Jungian psychology because Carl Jung felt that our task is to – as we mature and develop – is to differentiate ourselves from the crowd. You know how when you're young, let's say when you're in junior high school, do you remember how important it was to you to fit in and to be one of the crowd? And how you had to have a certain brand of sneakers and a certain brand of jeans, and it's like, "Mom, I can't go to school in these!" Maybe you can remember that, or maybe it's already fallen under repression; I'm not sure. Maybe you've forgotten it. But having had four kids myself, I remember going through that phase. As we go through the lifecycle, ideally, according to Jung and others, we become more our own person, more individualized, more individuated, so that we begin to separate ourselves from the crowd, from the mass consciousness, into the more individual kind of consciousness. One of the challenges that's presented to us as persons in society is, how are we going to make a difference? How am I going to make a difference in my life? Society is so big, and I'm so little; there's just one little old me, and there's this big mass out there that we call society. And for me, one answer in an earlier part of my life to that was I liked to think that by being a teacher – by being a psychology teacher – that I was sharing a bit of light that I would share with my students and that they would take that light somehow, as they learned to understand more about themselves and what made them tick and what made their friends tick, and hopefully, ignited them with some passion for life and for the inner life, really. That's where my passion was, was to excite students about the possibilities of the inner life and working with themselves and working with others. And so hopefully, that would spread out. So in some ways, teaching is a small contribution, but in other ways, it's a very large and important contribution, particularly if the things that you've taught have value to individuals and then somehow become manifested in their lives. So that was my hope for that portion of my life. But then as I moved into retirement, that question emerges again: What can I do that will have a difference in the world that could have some impact? And I want to tell you that that answer for me that has emerged, and it didn't emerge by sitting down and scratching my head and asking myself that question. I think that's a question that

isn't always a conscious question that you sit down and you write out an outline or a plan for your life. I know I never did that. Somehow, life has a way of unfolding. But I think sometimes that larger question is somewhere in the back of our mind – either in the forefront of our mind or in the back of our mind – and I think it was there somewhere for me. What's the next phase? What am I going to do? How am I going to get my voice out there? How am I going to carry a message out that could possibly be of benefit to people? So, it was at about that time that I discovered this emerging technology, sometimes referred to as “new media” collectively, referring both to audio podcasting and now video podcasting as well. And I realized that here might be a vehicle. And so I thought, well, what would I want to do if I had my own program? And I have to tell you, this is a revolutionary technology. So imagine if somebody came and told you... I mean we're on the cusp of a revolution here, and one of the interesting things to me is that these revolutions happen and we just take them for granted. We just ease into new technologies just almost like you're putting on a new pair of shoes. Particularly the younger you are, the more you take it for granted, “Oh, this is just how the world works,” and we don't realize that we're living in science-fiction land. And stuff that only a few years earlier had been the stuff of imagination and of science fiction, and that perhaps seemed really farfetched. So just two or three years ago – I think podcasting is really only about two years old, maybe three – so let's say five years ago, if I told you, “Hey, imagine that you could have your own radio station very inexpensively; and you could put your own content onto the radio station; and you wouldn't have to get anybody's approval; and you could broadcast it to whoever you wanted to; and you could have a worldwide audience; and this would all be relatively affordable, you could fit it into your budget.” That would've been five years ago or certainly ten or further years back than that. That would have been an amazing proposition. It's very hard to get a radio license. You have to have a whole lot of money. For one thing, the spectrum's all taken up, so you'd have to buy the radio station from somebody else. And then you have to get FCC licensing and so on. Now, you up the ante if you go to television. I mean, that's even more expensive to break into television and have your own television station! But now you can through the miracle of podcasting, of video podcasting. You can have your own television station. So, this is just foreshadowing what's about to break out all over, which is the ability to obtain video from everywhere. I'm going to talk more about audio. So, back up to when I first heard about this, and I thought, well, what could I do a podcast about? And what came to mind was, well, duh! Probably something about psychology, since I've been a psychologist, psychotherapist, clinical psychologist, humanistic psychologist, transpersonal psychologist-type person all these years, and so I thought, you know, maybe there are people out there in the world who'd be interested in this brand of psychology that I've had this longstanding allegiance to. And so I thought, well, you know, I've got interview skills, both from the market research background and the psychotherapy background and the teaching background; why don't I interview people? So that's what I decided I would do. And I didn't know if anybody would listen. Would anybody be interested? Okay, so that's the part about podcasting. Let me pause here to see if there are any questions about anything that I've said so far.

Student: It seems like you're having a lot of fun with this new venture.

Dr. Dave: That's true. I am having a lot of fun with this new venture, and I probably would have burned out on it except I am getting such wonderful feedback from listeners. How many of you listen to podcasts now? Show of hands...two out of about 50 people. Amazing. I would have thought that maybe it would be more by now. Okay, I'm going to shift gears now. That's enough about me and my podcast. And I want to shift gears back to this idea of the individual versus the collective, and I want to talk a bit about technology and the impact of technology and how it bears on this tension between the individual and the collective, between person and society. And as I say, I'm hoping that it will be a dialogue. I sort of foreshadowed it a little bit earlier when I said we're living in a science-fiction future; that we adapt to new technologies without even realizing that we've transitioned into them. And so, for example, you all look like you're of an age maybe...most of you look like you're of an age where you've kind of grown up with cell phones? Is that right? How many people here can remember before there were cell phones? Whoa! I guess cell phones haven't been around as long as I thought! Most people have raised their hands. You can remember that far back?

Student: It's the next generation.

Dr. Dave: It's the next generation. It's the people who are what? In...

Student: (inaudible) brothers and sisters.

Dr. Dave: Say that again.

Student: (laughs) It's our brothers and sisters that have cell phones when they're six years old, and...

Dr. Dave: Yeah, so we might speculate on what kind of changes, you know, what kind of difference is that going to make? How many of you do texting now? Just about everybody raises their hand. Texting, that's a generational thing. I have only just started to text a little bit, and that's because one of my kids is into texting, so now we text back and forth a little bit. But I resisted texting for a long time, and I'm really slo-o-ow when I text. Can anybody here, I hear there are people who can text without looking at the keyboard, that they can just...? How many people here can do that? Wow, it looks like about 25 people can do that. See, to me that's mind-blowing that you can just text and not even look. I understand... And this presents a pedagogical danger, right? Because people can be sending answers to tests to their friends and all. All kinds of things can be going on, and it's a challenge for teachers. Teachers – now, I think in secondary schools and I don't know if this is happening in college – they're having to forbid, you know, “Turn your cell phones off, or don't bring your cell phones to school. We will confiscate them.” Because otherwise, you've got kids that are sitting in a classroom and they're not even

looking, and they're sending messages and dialoguing, and their head is someplace totally elsewhere. So, all of these developments are going to change us somehow. One of the things that I've started to think about that caught my eye the other day is, I wonder if you've seen this Verizon ad? It's an ad on TV that Verizon puts out where there's this crowd of people, they're all wearing hard hats, and the person in the ad says, "It's my network." And all these people in hard hats are following them around? How many people have seen that TV ad? Okay, good, you know what I'm talking about. It's kind of interesting to me. That's kind of interesting, and you know, these advertisers are clever, right? They try to be clever. They want to appeal to our deeper needs. They want to figure out, well, what's the zeitgeist right now? What's moving with people? And I think sometimes they do that consciously; sometimes they do it unconsciously, I think – key in to what's going on in, if you will, the collective unconscious. So I'm kind of watching this thing about crowds. There's something going on now about crowds, and that ad is kind of appealing to the concept of, that you could have a *crowd* who's interested in you, who's following you around, this crowd of people who are your *assistants*, if you will. They're your network. Of course, this immediately brings up the idea of social networks and social networking. How many of you are on MySpace? Okay, it looks like about 15, 20 people. How many of you are on Facebook? Even more people on Facebook. How many of you are on both MySpace and Facebook? About 12 people, and I have to raise my hand. I'm on both. I don't know why. (laughs) I don't know what I'm doing there, but I don't want to be left out of the crowd, I guess. I had people telling me I needed to be there! Who had their hand up about Facebook? Let's just – either Facebook or MySpace. Okay, let me have you say your name. I'm going to ask you to say your name. You don't have to use your whole name; it could just be your first name. Just pretend like I'm not putting a microphone in front of your face; it's fun. Okay, what are you on? Who are you?

Jessica Spence: I'm Jessica Spence, and I'm on Facebook and MySpace, but I don't use MySpace.

Dr. Dave: Okay, so what is that drew you to being on Facebook and MySpace?

Spence: My friends made me do it...(laughs)

Dr. Dave: Your friends *made* you do it. So tell me more about that.

Spence: They literally went on and made one for me. And for about the first three, four months, I didn't use it at all. And then when I came up to school, I had, like, two friends. And so everyone was like, "Hey, do you have Facebook?" And I was like, "Yeah, you can find me, I guess." So they did, and now I have more friends. Supposedly.

Dr. Dave: Oh. Yeah. I want to explore that "supposedly" because that's important. So I'm curious: Did getting on Facebook, then, help you to make or solidify actual what we call "[meat space](#)"? You know, real-world friendships?

Spence: Umm...I have tons of friends that aren't even on Facebook, but being on Facebook, I don't know, we make a joke about it that, like, "Oh, we're friends on Facebook now, so now we're real friends." Like, it...

Dr. Dave: And you made quote marks in the air. What do those mean?

Spence: That we're, I don't know...like, solidifies it, or makes it official, yeah...

Dr. Dave: Okay, who else is on one of these social networks? Okay, give us your name...

Eric: My name's Eric.

Dr. Dave: Okay, Eric. Tell me a little bit about, what – which one are you on?

Eric: I'm on Facebook.

Dr. Dave: Okay, and so how does this fit for you psychologically with your psychology?

Eric: Um, I don't know how it fits with my psychology. What do you mean by the question?

Dr. Dave: Well, I don't mean academically, but I just mean in terms of your own personal needs, values, etc.

Eric: I got on Facebook so I could keep in contact with friends from high school who are in different towns or different colleges so I'm not in contact with them anymore – not in physical contact with them – so, it's just a way for me to see what's going on in their lives and post, like, notes to them every now and then. I just kind of stay in relation even though we're physically far apart.

Dr. Dave: Okay, and that's a function that e-mail was serving for a while, and it sounds like Facebook and MySpace are kind of moving into that space. Is there some reason why that's a better way to do it than e-mail?

Eric: I think it's nicer than e-mail because you see that, like, you can see your friends interacting with other people, so you don't always have to be in the conversation. And you get to see pictures, so you can kind of see who their new friends are, the different things that they're doing, whereas you can't really do that as well with e-mail.

Dr. Dave: Okay, so we've heard some of the upside of social networking. Does anybody have any ideas or experiences – even better – about downsides? Ah...a hand shot right up! (laughs) What's your name?

Cristina: I'm Cristina, and my negative starts with MySpace, because it's good for procrastinating because they have all these surveys and bulletins that you can post to all your friends. And so when I'm trying to do homework, I'll just fill out a survey instead.

Dr. Dave: Okay, okay. Well, that's a good example. I wasn't thinking of that, and particularly as somebody who does surveys. (laughs) So that's interesting. Any other downsides that come to mind? Yes, I see a hand over here, and speak up loud enough so the whole class can hear you.

Emily: My name's Emily, and people find me that I don't necessarily want to find me. And they – I'm on MySpace, by the way – want to be my friend, and as many times as I deny them, they just keep trying. So, they'll send me messages and I ignore it, and so that's kind of annoying.

Dr. Dave: And that brings up the whole issue of privacy. And it has been observed that our notions of privacy, our sense of privacy – our sense of the importance of privacy – seems to be changing. I'd love to hear your thoughts about that.

Nick: My name is Nick, and well, I saw a guy at a bar, he knew what I was up to, I didn't like it, and I don't even know why I have a MySpace because I'm such a private person to begin with. So, actually I'm going to be getting rid of mine, because nothing positive has ever happened by having it.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well, that's interesting that you ask yourself, "I don't even know why I have a MySpace since I'm such a private person." So, when you ask yourself that question, what is the answer? Why did you get a MySpace?

Nick: I got one, I don't know why. It seemed everybody else had one, and it seemed like it had potential to help me, and it hasn't.

Dr. Dave: Okay, okay. I'd have to say something very similar for myself. (laughs) I thought it had potential, maybe, to help me. I actually have a fan club that one of my listeners started, so there's a Shrink Rap Radio Fan Club on Facebook, I believe. Check it out! (laughs) I don't know that there's a lot of activity going on there right now.

Caitlin: I'm Caitlin. I think with how technology's changing – you know, we're such a visual world, we can see everything, we want to check out people's pictures, we want to see what they're doing, what kind of music they're listening to. But at the same time, it's proliferating stalking, basically, because then you have people, like, "Oh, well, this person's dating my boyfriend," or my ex-boyfriend, or, "Oh, this guy was hanging out with this person," or, "She said she was doing this." So it's like, catching everybody in lies, and it's creating another world, at the same time. And if you try to delete your MySpace, it is the hardest thing ever. They send you like four different e-mails: "Are you sure? Are you sure?" Then you have to

follow all of these processes. I've deleted mine before, and now mine's on "private," and the only people I'm friends with are people that I know for sure, or that I'm family with. And no one can view my profile unless they are my friend.

Dr. Dave: And I wonder if you're all aware that everything that's on the web is archived, and it's all there even after you delete it. Is there anybody that was not aware of that? I think we tend to forget it, even though I'm aware of that – intellectually, I know that...my behavior, it's not always reflected. The warning is out there now. I'm sure you've heard about people on American Idol who...it turns out something was on the web about them, that they did lap dances or something like that. And that's now there; it's the permanent record, so you need to keep that in mind as you move forward, because you don't know what political office you may want to apply for someday down the road... Be careful about the footprints that you leave behind you. Yes...

Cody: Hi, my name's Cody. I'm just speaking on a privacy issue on MySpace. I'm going into law enforcement, and my background investigator, one of the first things they did was open my MySpace to see what kind of things might've been on there. So, prospective employers are going to start looking at that as a way to judge who they're hiring, so...

Dr. Dave: That is great, a great alert that you're giving everyone here. And I'm sure that you're totally right. So, it's good to hear a first-person account of that. I see another hand over here.

Elan (sp): Hi, I'm Elan. I think eventually, with privacy, as it's going on, nothing's going to be private anymore, nothing. And you're going to have to work even harder to stay private.

Dr. Dave: So, do you think that will ultimately be good for society, or bad, or neutral?

Elan: I think it's neutral. I mean, I'm a pretty open person, but I don't know. It could be bad...it depends on what you don't – you better not have a lot of dirty laundry, because eventually it's going to be found out.

Dr. Dave: Hmm... (laughs)

Elan: I'm kind of a pessimistic person sometimes. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: It definitely, it's something I think that we need to be aware of and be thinking about, because I think it is going to change our world, and it is changing... Did you want to say something, Shepherd? Good! Now Shepherd's on the other end of this technology continuum, and thank goodness there are people like him to keep us sane. One of the things I want to talk about is technology addiction, and Shepherd is not addicted to technology. (laughs)

Bliss: Yeah, I'm a throwback, so I don't want to speak about this particular technology, but I think much of technology is not neutral. The tools influence who we are; the amount of time we spend with machines takes us away from bodies; it takes us away from nature. Obviously, I use e-mail. I don't have a television, and I think consciously about how many machines I have and how I use them. And I think one thing it does is to split consciousness. Like you were talking about the person with texting behind, they're not really there fully. And you can tell in a class; you can tell who's there, you know, and it speeds us up. It gets us into a machine pace rather than a human pace. It often disconnects us from animals. Now, again, I'm not speaking about these specific technologies, which I don't know anything about. I heard about it once: MySpace and your space, or her space, or his space, or your foot, or your ass, or your face, or whatever it is, you know? But it's just I think we need to think carefully about what we give up, the freedoms, the privacy. I protect mine carefully, and I think we're all wise to do this because we can't imagine what kind of work we're going to do in the future, we can't. It's good to be thinking about what you might do, but things catch up with you. The chickens come home to roost, you know. So think about the consequences and the unintended consequences because it may give you some immediate rush, the visual impact, all of that. But there may be all these side effects. It's like a bad medicine, you know. And you know where much of this technology comes from? The military! That's where computers came from. That's one of their main functions, is to make more precise bombing and killing of people. And we get a few little crumbs along the side, so they're gathering information about you. They are really gathering information about you – your likes, your dislikes – so that they can market objects to you. So you become a commodity, a consumer rather than a citizen. So, I think we need to roll back some of these individually, make conscious decisions about which ones we're going to do and try them out. And if they're not working, don't go with the herd. You can be individuated. You don't have to be a member of that hard-hat crowd. You can make individual decisions about what your life is going to be like and what your future's going to be like. I don't talk to people on the phone if they're multitasking. I am only talking with them; I'm not washing the dishes, I'm not feeding my livestock, I'm not doing all that. When I feed my livestock, I give them full attention because they deserve it, and that's what they want. When I talk to my sweetie on the phone, full attention, you know? And that's how I make decisions about who I want to relate to. I don't want to relate to you if you're a technophobe. I don't mean to say that I don't use those tools myself...

Dr. Dave: You mean "technophile."

Bliss: Technophile. I'm a technophobe. (laughter) You're right. So, there is this addiction, you know, and this loss of contact. I would rather have my hands in the soil than on the keyboard. Doesn't mean I don't spend a lot of time on the keyboard. I've gone on too long, so...

Dr. Dave: I'm going to take it back, then. (laughs)

Bliss: Okay.

Dr. Dave: Does anybody want to respond to what Shepherd said? Ah, here's a brave soul!

Bliss: She *is* brave! (inaudible) a lot of brave (inaudible)!

Lillian: I'm Lillian, and I actually did a research project last semester on relationships, and relationships ending and continuing because of technology. One of the things that people – I did interviews, and one of the things that most people said that having technology and – I'm actually agreeing with you. Having technology and cell phones and Internet and Facebook actually prevents them from creating new relationships, although it does help them stay close to the people that they've lost contact (with), or have continued contact from the past. So they said they come out of the classroom and immediately call their friends instead of looking to talk to new people around them.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. One of the interesting things – thank you for that. And if you look at crowd scenes in Tokyo or even in major U.S. cities, there's an irony in seeing people walking down the street, talking on cell phones. In other words, there are people all around us, but we're somewhere else. (laughs) We don't want to talk to *those* people; we don't want to relate to *those* people. We want to relate to somebody else, somewhere else. It seems like there's just a little bit of a paradox or an irony there. I have to say that your arguments, Shepherd, are strong, and there's a big part of me that agrees with them. I remember when I was first a teacher here at Sonoma State, long time ago, and you'd walk through the hall - I used to play tennis with my students, used to hang out with students – you could walk through the hallways, and you'd see professors sitting there, talking to students. You'd see administrators that you could go in and talk to. But in more recent years, you try this experiment for yourself – not just at Sonoma State, but just about anyplace you go – as you walk through, if there are doors open, you'll see somebody staring at a computer screen. And that certainly characterizes me. I'm staring at a computer screen maybe way too much of the time. Another thing that I've noticed in myself – you talked about attention span – and it's been observed, you know, it's kind of popularly observed, that it seems like our attention spans are getting shorter. Advertisers know that. They keep making tightly packed little commercials, you know, to try to hold our attention. And Sesame Street and people in educational technology are continually trying to pack more and more content into shorter and shorter segments to capture this supposedly wandering, short attention span. I have to say my attention span has gotten shorter, and I do think it is something about my relationship to the computer; that I've watched it over the years; that I have less patience for face-to-face interaction. There's something about being in control, I think, at the keyboard, where I can go to this page, go to that page, scan down, grab whatever little nugget I'm interested in. I even have difficulty at the computer if there's a whole article there, reading the whole article. And I notice I just want to oh, kind of grab a little information and move on to the next thing. So, I see in

myself behaviors and traits that I'm not altogether proud of, and yet I have from boyhood, a strong allegiance to science and a fascination with science and progress and technology. So, I'm somewhat split. I'm definitely in the technophile camp, but I'm also aware of the dark side of technology. And there's definitely a dark side, and as you say, every tool has its own dark side. There was an influential book a few years back, and I'm going to block on the title. But I went through a period where I was reading books and lecturing about the dark side of technology, which totally shocked everyone who knew me. There's a story about a certain kind of hoe that was used in the American southwest. I don't know if you know the story, Shepherd, but it's a short hoe, and people from Mexico and other immigrants would use this hoe, working in the fields. And so we might think, you know, that's just a tool. That doesn't have any political implications, a tool. But this particular author pointed out that in fact even a hoe has political implications. The reason why this hoe is short is because it keeps the person stooped down, and that way, the person who is the, I want to say, overseer, the "boss man," can look out across the field and see who's working and who's not. And so there's a strong political implication in that tool. And all of these tools that we have do have sometimes buried, implicit implications that aren't immediately obvious and that need to be unpacked. So, it's interesting that at the very time that – to jump back on that political bandwagon a little bit – at the very time that our First Amendment, our Bill of Rights freedoms seem to be threatened, at the same time we're sort of willy-nilly going down this path of surrendering privacy. Not only is privacy being stolen from us by the increased use of wiretaps and so on, but at the same time, we're surrendering our privacy to corporate America more and more. Like when you go to the mall, for example, and there's the giveaway, you know: "We're going to give away this Hawaiian vacation," or "We're giving away this car. Just fill out this form and you'll be entered into a drawing," do you ever stop to wonder *why* they're going to give you that car or that Hawaiian vacation? Because they want the information that you're going to write on that pad. They want your name, phone number, and address, and if they can get it, an e-mail address so that they can market to you. And that is worth money because they can compile a list, and then they can sell it to people like me, who do market research. (laughs) I wear a lot of different hats, and I'm a contradictory sort of fellow. What can I say? So let's talk a little bit about technology addiction. I'm very interested in the whole, in that whole concept of technology addiction, gaming addiction... How many of you have been gamers? Video gamers, gamer gamers? Okay, we've got mostly guys. We've got seven or eight guys here. Okay, I'm sorry, I didn't see your hand. We have a girl. And anybody on [Second Life](#)? Does everybody know what Second Life is? Okay (laughs) Shepherd doesn't know about Second Life. Second Life is a – boy, how to describe this? – Second Life is a virtual world that you can go into; it's kind of like a cartoon world that you can go to in the computer. And the cartoons are getting better and better, by the way, more and more realistic. And you have a cartoon figure of yourself that you can create or that you can hire somebody to create for you, and that is called your avatar. And that probably comes from a really neat science-fiction novel called [Snow Crash](#). If you haven't read Snow Crash, definitely read Snow Crash. And so, there's this whole world there of

Second Life. Maybe I'll show you a video clip so you can get a little taste of it. Second Life in many ways mirrors first life. Now I haven't gotten into Second Life myself because I'm afraid I'll get totally sucked up in it and maybe never come back. (laughs) And I am so busy in my first life that I just don't see how I have time to get involved in a second life, but I may just have to check it out, you know, so that I have some "street cred" when I talk about this kind of thing. (laughter) There are interesting things going on in Second Life because you can... Well, first of all, I say it mirrors this reality, and it's totally engrossing. There is an economy in Second Life called "Linden dollars," or "Lindens," and you buy Lindens with real dollars, so when you go in... First, initially they give you a certain number of Lindens for free, but then if you want to have your own real estate in Second Life, you will pay for it. And you may pay handsomely, and you might say, "Well, why would I want to buy a piece of real estate in this imaginary cartoon world?" I can see on Shepherd's face that the question is arising. (laughter) Well, imagine if you could buy property next to Madonna, or next to some famous psychologist or theologian or environmentalist, and you'd like to be there, so that you could kind of hang out with that person and be associated with that person. So that might be worth some money to you. There is one woman who's – I forgot what the figure is; I think she's made hundreds of thousands of dollars, of *actual* dollars – selling imaginary real estate in Second Life. There are people who are making a livelihood in Second Life, designing avatars for other people who don't have those skills or artistic abilities, and selling flying machines or various kinds of powers that people can exercise in Second Life. So, it's got a whole commercial aspect, and guess what? The commercial world has discovered it and so Ford has a site, and Toyota and all your major, more and more major commercial entities are appearing in Second Life. They have billboards there. They have cars, their newest car models that you can get in and test drive, you know, in an imaginary kind of way. In terms of my world of focus groups – you know, where I interview groups of people – I have colleagues, competitors who've created market-research environments in Second Life where they can snag passers-by and say, "Hey, how would you like to earn some Linden dollars by taking this survey, or by coming in and having a chat about this new product?" So market research is happening. Go a step further, there are people who are doing counseling and psychotherapy in Second Life, so that if you really want to be anonymous, you can go in and let your cartoon figure get some therapy. I see a hand here.

Marvin: Hi. My name's Marvin. I'm wondering, are there any homeless people in Second Life?

Dr. Dave: Uh, (laughs) that's a good question! I don't know. Are there homeless people in Second Life? What would a homeless person, what's your fantasy about that?

Marvin: I don't know. I think I'm going to go try to do that, actually. Because I don't think I could do it myself in real life, you know. I just would like to have a home,

and I've worked myself into a position where I can have that, but I think it would be an interesting experience, at least.

Dr. Dave: Boy, you could do, you could write a paper about that, maybe, or get a publication about being a homeless person in Second Life, maybe dressed in rags.

Marvin: And to see how people reacted to you. I mean, would I be able to make any Linden dollars to get, you know, with the surveys, or those kinds of things...would they want me in there? Because...or would I still have a stigmatism (stigma) because I was homeless, whether or not I had a home here?

Dr. Dave: That's a great question, and I could see you maybe having a tin cup and begging, and see what that's like and record it. That's a wonderful idea for an experiment because what really goes on in Second Life is just the reverse of that...is that people design these avatar representations of themselves that are highly idealized. So the guys are really buff and big and powerful and handsome-looking, and the girls all have bazooms out to here (laughter) and look very shapely. I see a hand going up over here. You want to sign up?

Female student: (laughs) No, I'm okay. My life is way too busy already. But there is a Law and Order S.B.U. episode about it, and it showed the darker side of it, where a woman got kidnapped in real life and was, like, held hostage by this guy who almost killed her. So it's just scary. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and there is that darker possibility for all of these things, so for example, I have a clip that maybe I'll bring up of a suicide bomber in Second Life. Yeah, there is somebody and she's wearing the pack of bombs strapped to her, and she's walking around through Second Life. And I'm not sure if this is a person from the Islamic world or not. I don't have the skills to totally research it. I got a little bit of that impression, and I have the impression that they got banned from Second Life. But there's that whole darker side of human nature, it seems, will out, and will want to come out in whatever environments get created. I'm sure you all heard about this case of the girl who ended up committing suicide as a result of the taunts that people were sending her on her Facebook page. Yeah, really tragic case, and I just heard from a friend last night in a men's group that I'm in, and the father, my friend, told me that his daughter, his 12-year-old daughter, has received texts on her phone that I can't repeat on the air here. I try to have a clean show, but really abusive, foul language, threatening kinds of texts. Now a 12-year-old, you know, getting that kind of stuff being sent to her, very upsetting. I see a couple of hands here.

Tim: My name's Tim. I think that that's one of the biggest problems with the technology that we're talking about right now. I have a 13-year-old sister that wants to get on MySpace, and I have continuously been around friends that have been solicited by, you know, not trustworthy individuals that'll end up on your MySpace or your Facebook. And I think about this Second Life, and I just think, you know, there's

no alarms going off in people's heads that we're not communicating in real time, and that we're starting to communicate, you know, outside in these electronic forums, with people that we don't necessarily want to know everything that we're doing, every place that we are, every interest that we have. We're being profiled, you know, and to larger consumers. It's very important to look on the sidebars of MySpace and Facebook and see who's paying for those ads and those different spaces. And if you look at that, you'll – at least for me, that's why I've started to distance myself from those communities. Because that's what's being paid for, is sexual solicitation, in a lot of ways.

Dr. Dave: Interesting. Did you say your name?

Tim: Tim.

Dr. Dave: Tim. Okay, thanks, Tim, for that observation. And I see a hand here...

Female student: I know this, this isn't just a problem with Second Life. I mean, this is a problem with most MMRPG's because...

Dr. Dave: MMRPG's...multi-...?

Female student: Mass multi-player games online.

Dr. Dave: Say it again?

Female student: Mass multi-player games online. But anyways, (laughs), I know a number of stories of people killing themselves over people breaking into their accounts and stealing all their special items. Also, there was a funeral on World of Warcraft for a young lady who died in real life, and someone came through and murdered all the people at the funeral – all their avatars at the funeral. And that's one of the most viewed comedy scenes from World of Warcraft. I think that's something that's a tragedy also, how death gets portrayed in video games. And one of the reasons why I quit Second Life is actually due to the freedom of what people can put up everywhere, and I was seeing way too many pornographic images that I would never, ever want to see. And that's actually why I exited Second Life, 'cause it was pretty ridiculously disturbing for me on a day-to-day basis to see those types of things.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, actually I guess there is a lot of prostitution going on in Second Life, which is a little hard...I haven't been there to check it out. It's a little hard to comprehend exactly what the gratification is since it's not going to be actual physical gratification, I presume, at this point. However, it's not too hard to imagine that that could change. I won't spell it out for you, but maybe you can imagine some ways in which that could change, that people could... I'll spell it out a little bit, that it would be possible to remotely control electronic devices and have

that be hooked into this imaginary space. You can just about count on that happening, if it isn't already.

Female student: I just want to say it already has happened. I learned about it in my Human Sexuality class.

Dr. Dave: It already has happened.

Female student: You get a suit you can wear, and you control, like, what you feel.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, okay, so it's already here, and of course that will only get more advanced as... So we just, you know, we're probably not going to be able to stop any of this stuff, but we need to, I guess, be as conscious as we can be about it, and to be aware of the possible social consequences. And as a couple people here pointed out, really make a conscious decision of, is this something I want to opt into or not? Is it something that I want to further or not?

Female student: My worry is with technology, like, we don't have to see someone face-to-face anymore to say anything. We have all this courage behind a text message, behind an e-mail, and then you have people coming in and having murders at funerals on the computer, and you wonder if people start to mastermind things like that. Like, they don't have to face anybody, but how much of that is going to build up their courage to do it in real life?

Dr. Dave: Yes, I'm so glad you brought that point up, the sort of decline of civility. And it seems the decline of civility seems to start online. People say outrageous things, outrageously insulting things that they would not say in person, generally. But you have to wonder if that isn't carrying over in ways to society at large. There were, as I was investigating and trying to prepare for this a little bit and kind of poking around online, I found at least one story of... Actually, it was a video series that was done in the U.K. about a married couple where the husband was really concerned that his wife was spending too much time in Second Life and too much time with her fantasy lover there. And in fact, there are a number of such instances like this, and marriages have broken up, and so on. And then they show you what these people really look like, you know? So, her fantasy lover, the real guy, is kind of dorky, but in Second Life, he's this really buff, macho-looking guy, and she's this goddess with wings, and just gossamer stuff. And so you can imagine – I can imagine – how addictive that would be. I'm a little bit afraid to go in there, you know? If you can just live out your fantasies and you can fly, and you can have the perfect, youthful body, and so on? And by the way, I think most of us would guess that it was mostly teenagers in Second Life. I have a friend who's done some research on that. It's mostly people who are young adults, I'd say 25-35 would account for about 60% of who's there. And about 60% of people have experimented with being a different gender than they actually are. Has anybody here ever done that? Gone online and tried being a different gender? Would you mind talking a little bit about that? What's your name?

Cristina: It's Cristina, and I...

Dr. Dave: Your address? (laughs) I'm kidding!

Cristina: I personally didn't do it, but my boyfriend plays Dungeons and Dragons, which is like a pen-and-paper RPG. So, like they roll dice, and then they have certain attributes. And he is a woman, a goddess, in that game, and I don't really get it. But yeah, he lives out a lot of fantasies that he wants to do. It's weird. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Did you ever ask him why he wanted to be a goddess or what he gets out of that?

Cristina: 'Cause he's obviously not a goddess in real life. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: You know, in a way I could see that there's potentially a very healthy aspect to this, of the ability to experience what it's like to be the other gender and maybe to learn some of the challenges and difficulties, and maybe pick up some sensitivities along the way as well as maybe broadening one's own sense of flexibility, of a certain kind of flexibility. Yes...

Stephanie: Hi, my name is Stephanie. Except for the fact that nobody is really genuinely interacting with anybody else, they're interacting with technology. And so what's happening is a fundamental breakdown of an understanding of who they are as beings and who "the other" is. So, that's why things like mass murders happen in this realm, and I go to... There's enough trauma that we all have had to deal with in various aspects of our lives, so what is so compelling about going into another realm in which one absents oneself from one's own life and opens oneself up to more opportunity for God only knows what, as far as trauma goes, or bizarre encounters, and just separating oneself from life, actual physical life, and interactions with other human beings in the world around us. What comes to mind for me as I've been listening to this conversation is books like *Last Child in the Woods*, where we have children who are actually suffering from nature-deficiency disorder, who don't know what floats when you throw it in the river. Does a rock float, or does a piece of wood float? Because they have no natural, actual experience with being out in the world, and so as this continues – as this goes on – yes, okay, it's the 25- to 35-year-old realm people. People my age who, in another time and another place, were developing careers, developing relationships, beginning to think about potentially having children, having families. They're so disconnected from themselves and from other people. What are they going to, how are they going to be present for their children? We have such a difficult time – and I'm a mother, so obviously I go here, right? – but what we do? We have enough children who aren't connected with their families, because families have to work so much in order to make ends meet, particularly here in the Bay Area in California. So we're adding this whole other level, and it's a matter of mindfulness and a sense

of healthy self. It's like here we are in this Person in Society class, where people, people aren't healthy in their original person-in-society, so they're going and creating another person in a *fake* society!

Dr. Dave: I think maybe that's a good place for us to wrap it up. (laughter)

Bliss: Well, Carrie (?) has something, Carrie has something she's been wanting to say. You probably just didn't see her hand.

Dr. Dave: Okay, I guess that's *not* a good place to wrap it up. (laughter)

Carrie: Well, I was just going to touch, really, on what Stephanie was saying, that when people make another person of themselves – when they create the Second Life – they're inherently creating this second society that doesn't exist. And by creating the second society, they're ignoring the current one that we have, and so when I think of the people who are participating in this Second Life, I think of all the people who are *not* participating in solving problems that we have in our current society, who are working towards global climate change. Or all the people that are *not* participating in things that I think they should because they *are* living in this world. There may be a virtual world, but they can't ignore that. They can't ignore that they exist here, and I think that should be their first priority.

Dr. Dave: Let me play devil's advocate here and suggest that I don't know if Hillary or Barack are campaigning in Second Life, but if they're not doing it in this presidential election, I guarantee you it will be done in the next one.

Carrie: Barack Obama is my friend in Facebook, and he has applications that you can do that can help campaign, but I'm also a precinct captain for Barack Obama and his campaign for 2008. And that's the actual physical work that goes into it, so there are clear distinctions for doing something virtually – “virtually” means “not actually doing it.” Not actually putting physical effort towards it, as opposed to going out to the Bay Area or going to Nevada or going to the caucus: these things that are physical that are making a difference.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Some listeners, though, might argue that these virtual tools could be used to enhance activism. And in your case, actually, it sounds like it is being used, that being a friend of Barack's on Facebook is enhancing your activism. So, there's a possible upside there. (laughs) One of the TAs has just gone to the board and written “FEAR OF DEATH” in large letters. (laughter)

Bliss: RED letters.

Dr. Dave: In large red letters, and I would want to alert you that I've done a couple of recent podcasts on the fear of death, so you might want to listen to those. That's my commercial message. What was behind your needing to write that on the board?

Stephanie: Well, it's Stephanie again...and...

Student: Still Stephanie!

Stephanie: Still Stephanie! So I want to step back and say what I'm hearing in that conversation about using Second Life or something like that for a potentially positive purpose is that these things can be used mindfully to do good work in the real world, okay? But what is deeply disturbing to me is the addiction piece that you were speaking to before, in that there's that fundamental fear of... You know, we have a global climate crisis. There are terrible things that happen – and wonderful things that happen – in this world, but issues that need to be reconciled and rectified. And what happens, I believe, is that when people are so overwhelmed and so terrified of their own mortality and what they're capable of doing, they want to escape. And so, their fear of death – their fear of their own mortality, their fear of their own...

Dr. Dave: Powerlessness?

Stephanie: Powerlessness! Exactly – thank you – powerlessness launches them rather than *into* action, into *inaction*, or into, even worse, action in a false reality.

Dr. Dave: And here's Shepherd...

Bliss: I want to follow up on that because [Erich Fromm](#)– the psychologist that I've spoken about, that I think so much about – who wrote the book, *The Art of Loving*, he also wrote another book called *Escape from Freedom*. And it was early on, in the fifties, that he was already tracking this. And we were at a dangerous point, when our freedom was being taken from us and, as you said, we surrender a lot of our freedom. So, what's being bred is passivity. Instead of people learning *social* skills, they're learning skills of deception. They're learning how to be someone that they're not, rather than who they *are*. And this course is about you finding who you really are – at least for now – and experimenting with not some false, engineered, technological vision of a buffed-up or breasted-up person, but actually who you *are*. And so it goes – all of this really goes – contrary to this. So, I would encourage us to learn social skills and skills of who we really are on the *inside*, rather than some fantasy. Now, I like fantasy TV and fantasy movies, but that's a different kind of thing than what's being described here, in my opinion.

Dr. Dave: Okay. (laughs) Another hand here...

Female student: I'm just going to represent the gamer because I am a gamer, and I actually love playing video games. I wasn't allowed to when I was growing up, but when I came to college, I got into it because a couple of my friends were into it. And I absolutely love my time online, I really do. You're right, there is an aspect of escape. There is, because it's instant gratification, especially when you totally rule a server. (laughs) Instant gratification, especially for being a female, being able to

say, “Oh, good game! Great, everybody! Yeah, by the way, I just got beat by a woman!” and have that whole reaction take place. It’s definitely, that’s what it is for me. But also, I develop many social skills online. And I understand what you’re saying, “fear of death,” and that’s actually not an issue for me. I mean, it does apply for some people, but not for me. But I’ve been able to reassert and find identity things about myself because of the way other people react and act to me, and some of the things that they say to me that I find very inappropriate because I’m a female online and in a gamer’s situation... So, yeah, it’s helped me reaffirm some of my values and my morals. And I have met some really great people online that are my gamer friends.

Dr. Dave: I’m glad you spoke up. That really helps to balance out the picture. It’s more complex than, you know, than we might like it to be. And what you say reminds me that I heard from a listener who was – I don’t know how to describe this person – but someone who, because of early childhood experiences, had not been able to develop a lot of socialization skills. And this person wrote me with great excitement to say that she had been playing [the Sims](#). And the Sims, if you don’t know it, is a game environment in which you can build a little world with little people, and it’s a simulation, a building-up a society. And she said that she was learning social skills as a result of that. Oh – if you talk to somebody, they become friendlier to you. You know, just *basic* things like that that we take for granted. She was having an “aha” experience. I’ll go here and then I’ll go there...

Tim: It’s Tim. I think that that “aha” experience is still predicated on the fact that you’re interacting with a piece of plastic and a screen. You’re not interacting with the real reactions. It’s a computer simulation of how an individual would react. Has nothing to do with – okay, maybe if you’re not on a microphone or it’s somewhat live, and there’s that type of interaction, but I just think that systematically, we’re starting to cultivate groups of individuals that are more comfortable interacting with an inanimate object and voices and a microphone, and your power coming from that, than interacting with a live, intelligent individual. Because, I mean, games like the Sims and stuff are starting to appear in *all* lower-grade groups and people are starting to be more comfortable. And then you said it earlier: interacting with a professor in the hallway, it’s easier – “I’ll send you an e-mail about that” – than to just say what’s on your mind and have that recollection, have those types of interactions. And I think that systematically, we’re evolving and sitting down at a computer, being more comfortable than going out and having our conversation. And that scares me.

Dr. Dave: Thank you. We have a hand over here that’s been up for a while.

Elan: Hi. It’s Elan again, and I agree with what you’re saying, but I also think it can be a stepping stone for the listener if she had that “aha” moment, if she could see what the Sims, you know, talking, she can take it to the real world. You just have to find that place where you can step off the ledge.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. And in fact, she – that was part of her report, was that she had taken it to the real world, that it was translating for her. We have a hand over here that's been up for a while...

Female student: So – what was that last point? – Oh, I think touching on just, having a technical, er, having an addiction to technology. And I think that's very pertinent to this discussion. Because like what Lillian is describing is enhancing social skills, and that's not an addiction. That's a pastime. It's a hobby. But the Second Life not only is an addiction and becomes an addiction, but it appeals to the addicts of our society, which I think is very important because it's kind of taking away from the positivity of what it could potentially have. It no longer has that, so it's taken too far.

Dr. Dave: Okay. And I see another hand. This is the Shrink Rap Radio that will not quit! (laughter)

Marvin: This is Marvin again. This is for Shepherd, actually. There's a Star Trek episode that (laughter) where...yeah, it's about technology. It's about the Star Trek people. They meet this race of people that are called, like, I forget what. So, at any rate, they've evolved with technology for so long that literally, part of their brain is computerized, right? So, they use computers so much that they interface with them and grow with them and they already have a symbiotic relationship with them. And the problem in this particular episode was that these people needed help, but they didn't even know how to ask for it. Instead of asking for it, they just took what they wanted, and it has a lot of unintended consequences and a lot of problems, but it's all because – or at least the moral of the story there was – they were so connected with their technology that instead of asking the people who were in control of their spaceship that they had, they just took the spaceship and took what they needed when they could've just asked. Because we all know those people on Star Trek are very helpful and would have gladly given them what they needed.

Dr. Dave: Well, the Star Trek series was such a wonderful series because it did all these “what ifs,” kind of imagining itself along these various futuristic scenarios, all of which relate to basic human dilemmas and philosophical problems and issues that confront us. One of the things that, according to what I read, is certain, is that we're all moving towards a [cyborg](#) – towards a kind of cyborg – reality; that is, that we will begin to merge with the computers in certain ways. For example, if you look at a hearing aid right now, the hearing aids have gotten smaller and smaller, almost invisible. And they do have ones that can be kind of like an implant, a cochlear implant, which is starting, I think, to go into the head. And we're learning the information about the brain, and how the brain functions is growing exponentially. And so people are envisioning that within the next 25 years or so, we will begin to have various kinds of enhancements where we begin to merge with the machine. But maybe that's a topic for another day. I want to thank you all for being willing to hear me out and being so interactive.

