Chapter 1
The Emerging Field of Technoself Studies (TSS)

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ABSTRACT

Human identity and the meaning attached to being human have been shaped throughout human history by the entrenchment of new technologies and the cultivation of new human-technological relationships in life and society. This is particularly salient within contemporary society where the rise of digital culture and human enhancement technologies allow for human-technological relationships that directly challenge traditional conceptions of human nature and what it means to be human. New digital technologies and human enhancement technologies offer unique opportunities to improve the human condition by augmenting human abilities and practices in life and society. In response, a growing body of scholarly work focusing on the changing nature of human-technological relationships has nurtured in the emerging field of Technoself Studies (TSS). The purpose of this chapter is to trace the recent emergence of this new interdisciplinary field of research by exploring its conceptual development, important issues, and key areas of current technoself scholarship. The first part of this chapter provides a rationale, introduces key concepts, and presents a skeletal overview of key developments underlying Technoself Studies. The second part identifies key areas and issues in technoself research.

OVERVIEW

Technology matters because it is inseparable from being human -David Nye (2007)

Major breakthroughs in the advancement of key areas of technology (i.e., information and communication technologies, digital media, human enhancement technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, nanotechnology, medical technology and neuromedicine) are altering life in the 21st century as they become deeply embedded in private and public life, popular culture and politics, work and education, social practices and public institutions. This is particularly important within the current landscape of academia where the increasing role of technology in work and life has redefined the study of human identity and spurred the growth of a new interdisciplinary field of research and scholarly interest. Part of the reason for this is that digital technology is redefining key aspects of who we are online and offline, how we spend our time, how we create meaning, how we present ourselves, how we interact with and treat our technological creations, and how we interact with others online and offline (Gonzales, & Hancock, 2008; Merchant, 2006; Mesch & Talmud, 2006; Ramirez, & Zhang, 2007; Ribeiro, 2009; Stritzke, Nguyen, & Durkin, 2004; Suler, 2004, 2002; Turkle, 1999; Wang, Walther & Hancock, 2009; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). In addition, the advancement of human enhancement technologies offers new ways to augment human genetics, the human mind, body, and emotional states in ways that were not previously possible.

The result of this recent technological advancement has created serious public debate and ethical conundrums which have led to a plethora of new research opportunities and unanswered questions that researchers are attempting to address: How is advancing technology reshaping private and public identity within society? How do individuals define and navigate their identity within a culture that has grown up online? What factors influence the evolution of online identity? How has online identity augmented and/or limited work and life offline? What are the risks and benefits of life online? What are the ethical and legal implications data mining of personal information found online? How does online anonymity affect individuals' approaches to personal information sharing and disclosure? How does surveillance technology affect human meaning and identity development? How are smart technologies and artificial life applications transforming life in society? What various strategies or techniques do individuals use when presenting themselves to others online compared to offline? How have online personal and professional relationships affected offline relationships and vice versa? How is technology transforming professional identity and the meaning of work? How is political and cultural identity defined and navigated within a technological society? Do robots have an identity, rights, and responsibilities? How is genetic research redefining the boundaries of life and identity? Where does the machine and the person begin? What is the future relationship between technology and identity? In an effort to address such questions, one emerging body of scholarly work under the umbrella of Technoself Studies (TSS) has focused on the examination of human identity within the ever changing landscape of human-technological relationships.

What are Technoself Studies (TSS)? To answer this question one must begin by understanding the base concept of technoself. The notion of "technoself" is a recent concept advanced to address the changing state of human identity in society resulting from the adoption of new technologies. Specifically, the term "technoself" was coined by this author to describe the evolving configurations of human-technological relationships that continually shape the human condition and what it means to be a human being. Building on this, Technoself Studies (TSS) are defined as the interdisciplinary field of research concerned with all aspects of human identity and human alteration within a

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