

EDUCATION, MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND INTELLECTUAL ENSLAVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on education, modern technology and intellectual enslavement. A distinct contribution of the paper to the current literature is the focus on modern technology as major contributing factor in the process of intellectual enslavement. After a careful and critical theoretical examination of child formal educational level intellectual enslavement, modern technological level intellectual enslavement, powerful, elite class remote control level intellectual enslavement, and personal, individual level intellectual enslavement (individual consciousness or unconsciousness, or critical or uncritical thought processes), the following conclusion is drawn: Obviously, intellectual enslavement is a dangerous social reality in today's society which results mainly from the powerful forces unleashed by capitalism which have led to members of the powerful, elite class pursuing their interests and promoting their values and ideas and therefore society cannot look for solutions from this class. The solution to intellectual enslavement is most certainly going to come from the actions of concerned educators and more importantly, from the willingness of the unconsciously intellectually enslaved to become conscious of their intellectual enslavement, their contribution to it and their willingness to accept the assistance provided by concerned educators.

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KEYWORDS: education; modern technology; intellectual enslavement; critical thinking; human intellect

INTRODUCTION

New ideas are usually the product of personal experiences or social circumstances or a combination of both personal and social experiences. The idea that gave rise to this paper and its title "Education, Modern Technology and Intellectual Enslavement" was the attitude and behavior exhibited one Monday morning by one of my students in a sociological theory course during the Fall Semester of 2013. This student sat in the front row, was usually totally consumed by her cell phone which she constantly manipulated during class sessions and discussions despite my polite objections and general class discussions of the reasons for my objections. On this particular Monday morning this young lady came in and sat down very quietly, looked very sad and was constantly staring at the ceiling while class discussions were going on. In order to draw this student's attention to the class and class discussions, I asked the following question: What did Max Weber consider to be the independent variable in his study titled "Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism?" I then deliberately decided to call on this particular student. She did not respond and kept staring at the ceiling. I called on her again and she then turned and looked at me in total surprise and she asked me, "Are you talking to me Sir?" I responded yes and repeated the question. She said very calmly: "I am sorry Sir, I have misplaced my cell phone and now I am totally disabled." The rest of the class members started laughing out loudly. It was at this moment that the

word intellectual enslavement immediately popped into my mind.

After this particular experience, I started wondering whether there is some significant relationship between: 1) Modern technology and formal education; 2) modern technology and students' performance in my classes; and most importantly 3) modern technology and intellectual enslavement. For over three years now of my casual observations, I have noticed that the students who are basically glued onto their cell phones in class and find it very difficult to stay away from them, despite my objections and general class discussions of the pedagogical reasons for my objections, do perform very poorly and many actually end up failing my courses. It is this experience that has prompted me to at least attempt to provide some theoretical understanding of the relationship between formal education, modern technology and intellectual enslavement. We now turn to a brief examination and definition of education, modern technology and intellectual enslavement.

According to the Free Dictionary, education is simply "any process, either formal or informal that shapes the potential of a maturing organism. Informal education results from the constant effect of environment and its strength in shaping values and habits cannot be overestimated. Formal education is a conscious effort by human society to impart the skills

and modes of thought considered essential for social functioning”

Is formal education or education in general really the “great equalizer” as Horace Mann (1848), the father of public education in the United States, suggested when he wrote “Education, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery” (in Ballantine 2012:61)? The school system is thus expected to raise everyone’s chances for a better life, to provide equality of opportunity, and to identify those who are most qualified for the most powerful and prestigious positions in society. The inherent contradiction in this statement inevitably leads to some dissatisfaction. Schooling, helps some children move up, it locks others into low-level positions in society (Kozol, 1991; Learning to Fail, 1991).

Educational research clearly shows that formal education tends to perpetrate the existing class structure in society. When the type of education available to people is controlled, their access to positions in society is controlled. Carnoy (1974) and Bowles, Samuel (1977) argued that education serves to reproduce the inequalities based on power, income, and social status. According to Greenwood et al. (2014), better educated people are increasingly more likely to marry other better-educated people while those with less formal schooling are more likely to choose a less well-educated partner. Education certainly makes a difference. Bernstein, Bourdieu, Passeron et al. (1977) argue that the organization of knowledge, the form of transmission, and the assessment of its acquisition are crucial factors in the cultural reproduction of class relationships in industrial societies.

The problem of the control of the type of education available to members of society by the elite and powerful is compounded by modern technology. Modern technology drives the organization of education, its delivery and determines who gains access. The elite and powerful are making very good use of their intellect and producing the technology which is designed specifically to brainwash or inhibit the intellectual development of children from lower classes. This situation is exacerbated by the tendency among members of the lower classes to plunge into noncritical, unquestionable, unreflective material consumption.

The basic premise or thesis of this paper is that all material objects and cultural forms are the products of human intellectual activities. According to this premise, the formal education system is produced by human beings through their intellectual activity. Unfortunately this system tends to emphasize and glorify materialism while de-emphasizing the intellectual processes which produce the ideas that in

turn produce the material objects and cultural forms such as formal education itself. This is promoted by the ruling elite through commercial advertisement, technological innovations and social media which have resulted in what is referred to in this paper as “intellectual enslavement”. This intellectual enslavement, I argue, is the latest tool or device used by members of the ruling elite to control the type of education provided in the education system and subsequently to control the access to positions in society. How does this so-called intellectual enslavement occur? For the answer to this question, I argue, we must start with the distinction between legal enslavement and intellectual enslavement.

Legal Enslavement and Intellectual Enslavement

Legal enslavement, as used in this paper, refers to the coercive requirement that an individual or a group be the property of another individual as granted by law or the legal system of a society. It does not consider the consent of the enslaved. Those who are enslaved legally are generally very conscious of the enslavement individually and collectively. By intellectual enslavement here we mean the unreflective actions, behaviors or responses of individuals with respect to everyday social reality. It is not officially endorsed by the legal system of the society in which it occurs. It involves individual unconsciousness which results from the individual’s inability or failure to reflect, critically examine and question what is otherwise taken for granted. It involves the better or well educated, the ruling elite and the use of their ideas to prevent the less educated, non-reflective members of society from engaging in critical examination of everyday social realities. It involves a deliberate emphasis placed on materialism and the promotion of materialism, promoted by what Veblen (1979) referred to as conspicuous consumption and waste.

Durkheim in his discussion of the sociology of knowledge (Ashley 2005) argues that categories by which we think develop through the impact of social forces and are not biological or innate. Unfortunately, in today’s society these categories by which we think, I argue, are not developed because the social forces such as modern technology, cell phones, television and social media in modern, global, industrial, capitalist society are designed to impede thought. This suggests that for these categories by which we think to develop, individuals in modern society must engage in serious, deliberate, conscious, critical thinking processes in order to really understand the hidden, disguised function of certain modern technological devices. Comparatively, it seems to be much better and much more understandable for a human being to be enslaved legally than to be intellectually enslaved since the intellectually enslaved human being has the ability and freedom to reject the intellectual enslavement whereas the

legally enslaved human being does not readily have this ability and freedom.

Some scholars have used the term intellectual slavery instead of intellectual enslavement in discussing this same phenomenon. Urban Dictionary defines Intellectual slavery as the state of being voluntarily bound to intellectual servitude as the mental property of an intellectual slaver; the practice of mentally controlling a person or group of people by one's thoughts and deeds (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/>). For further examination of the processes involved in this intellectual enslavement phenomenon, I now turn to two important catalysts: Formal education and modern technology.

Formal Education and Intellectual Enslavement

According to Horace Mann (1848), formal education is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery” (in Ballantine 2012:61). This sounds great and meaningful but not achievable in heavily stratified societies produced by capitalism where individual interests and achievement drive every aspect of life and institutions within these societies. Unfortunately, formal educational institutions have become the breeding ground for intellectual enslavement.

Ndifor (2009: 4) in his review of this phenomenon in the Cameroonian Educational system argues: “Unlike the physical slavery that was practiced during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, modern intellectual slavery inhibits the minds of individuals, denying them the ability to think rationally. In Cameroon, he argues, besides the ordinary citizens, some university professors -for quite some time now- have come under the spell of the regime, and have allowed themselves to be turned into intellectual slaves.”

Ndifor (2009) argues “The late Professor Bernard Fonlon—apparently prescient about the looming dangers involved when individuals are not allowed to think freely in order to help others before themselves—wrote about the “The Genuine Intellectuals” as a means to emphasize the role of university education in shaping critical and rational minds. His own very action—resigning from a ministerial position with the Ahmadou Ahidjo regime, and returning fulltime to a university setting—speaks highly of him as that “genuine intellectual”, who had the flexibility and foresight to know when things were not right with the system. Those generally expected to play this role in Cameroon today, are, by this analysis, not up to the task, leaving the universities and other academic institutions as breeding grounds for intellectual slavery.” (2009:4)

Samuel Chen (2005) raised the question: “What is the modern slavery in today's society?” In response to

this question he argues he believes it is intellectual slavery and that he finds it flourishing well in institutes of higher learning such as universities and colleges and even high school where students are no longer allowed to question evolution theory. I think an important question should be: “Who is it that no longer allows these students in institutes of higher learning and high schools to question evolution theory?” The elite and powerful members of society, I would argue, are making very good use of their intellect and producing the technology which is designed specifically to brainwash or inhibit the intellectual development of children from lower classes.

According to Nadiadwala (October 7, 2011:12), “When people stop reasoning, their intelligence gets stagnant. When you let other people to decide on your behalf, when you go blindly following the general trend without cross examining, then you have given yourself into slavery in a different manner. Intellectual slavery, he argues, is not a new brand of slavery in the market, but it always existed in human society,” (October 7, 2011:12). The question becomes why do people stop reasoning? Does this happen by choice and consciously? I argue that it neither happens by choice nor consciously because the elite and powerful members of society control the type of education available to people. The elite and powerful members of society are making very good use of their intellect and producing the technology which is designed specifically to brainwash or inhibit the intellectual development of children from lower classes.

Some have approached the role of formal education in intellectual enslavement from the marriage and family perspective. According to economists, “assertive mating is the tendency of people with similar characteristics to marry. A new working paper by an international team of economists finds that better educated people are increasingly more likely to marry other better-educated people while those with less formal schooling are more likely to choose a less well-educated partner. Education makes a difference. Income inequality has increased because education is strongly correlated with income—the more schooling you have, the more money you typically earn, according to a team of economists headed by Jeremy Greenwood of the University of Pennsylvania. Better-educated men are more likely to marry better-educated women and their household income is more likely to be higher than that of the couple with less formal schooling,

especially because in 2005 their wives or women in general are entering the labor force more than in 1950 (Greenwood et al. 2014). Those with higher levels of education are more likely to be the ones to have new ideas, event new technology and to ensure that their ideas become the ruling ideas in society.

Modern Technology and Intellectual Enslavement

Is there some relationship between modern technology and intellectual enslavement? If yes, what is the nature of this relationship? Who produces modern technology? What is really the purpose of modern technology? Do the producers of modern technology have any hidden agenda? Generally, those with higher levels of education are more likely to be the ones to have new ideas which eventually lead to the invention of new technology. They ensure that their ideas become the ruling ideas in society. They use their ideas to promote their technological innovations and their individual interests. With the use of their values and ideas, they make sure the less educated embrace the technological innovations unreflectively, uncritically, unquestionably and unconsciously. Consequently, the less educated become intellectually enslaved. For example, the use and impact of social media, use of internet, cell phones, texting, guns and their ownership rights. This point can better be illustrated with the example of guns which are used every second in the United States of America to take away a human life, yet this has not stopped the majority of lower class gun owners from opposing any form of common sense gun control legislature because the powerful elite class and gun manufacturers, represented by the NRA (National Rifle Association), use their ideas to inhibit or prevent the lower class gun owners and members of the NRA from engaging in critical thinking processes. It is really the gun manufacturers who are benefiting from gun sales and the absence of common sense gun control legislation, not the lower class gun owners and lower class members of the NRA. Even though smart guns could prevent children from being shot and killed by other children, curtail the number of suicides, and cut down on the resale of stolen guns, estimated to be 230,000 every year and help on-duty cops since smart guns can only be fired by their owner, they are neither mass-produced nor sold in the United States “partially due to fears they are a backdoor to greater gun control,” (Stahl, November 11, 2015).

A different process of intellectual enslavement is used for children in their socialization process. According to Kress (2003), reformed digital cultures and multi resources of communications have severe effects on human beings, especially on children who do have the immediate capacity of learning. The use of modern technology such as television, internet, mobile phones is very common particularly in

developed countries. Research supports the idea that mobile phones and their applications to support video games have vital negative effects on children’s intellectual development because of the incidental learning habit in children (Lievrou & Livingstone, 2002: 76). The very obvious, well documented negative effects of this modern technology on children is the tendency toward violent and aggressive behavior. What is very troubling about the impact of modern technology is that it is not only limited to children, it extends to adults. It is designed to inhibit critical thinking, promote massive use and to be addictive. More and more businesses such as Walmart, Lowe’s, airline companies etc. now have self-check-out technological equipment for customers to use and some of the businesses, especially airline companies even require that customers use them. Customers quickly comply with this requirement and use them without questioning the practice and whose interest is served or promoted. In so doing, they are actively promoting: 1) unemployment for those who need jobs in these fields; and 2) their own exploitation or unpaid services which they provide these businesses since they are actually doing work that should be done by paid employees of these businesses. This practice, I argue, is a clear example of what we refer to in this paper as intellectual enslavement. Those elite, powerful members of society who produce these modern technological innovations are very aware of their effects and they promote them as innovations that are designed to make the lives of their customers, those of the less educated, lower class members of society, better.

DISCUSSION

The main premise or thesis of this paper is that, based on the literature, intellectual enslavement has unfortunately become more than ever before both an individual and a social reality. This thesis leads to the following curious question: How does intellectual enslavement really become an individual as well as a social reality? In response to this question, I argue that it has become an individual as well as a social reality through the following four levels: 1) Child formal educational level; 2) Modern technological level; 3) Powerful, elite class remote control level; and 4) Personal, individual level (individual consciousness or unconsciousness, critical or uncritical thought processes). For a better understanding of each of these levels, we now turn to a discussion of each one of them.

Child Formal Educational Level Intellectual Enslavement

As research on the impact of modern technology on children’s intellectual development has already documented, modern technology has vital negative effects on children’s intellectual development because of the incidental learning habit in children (Lievrou & Livingstone, 2002: 76). Although these vital negative effects have been well documented in

the area of violent and aggressive behaviors, it is not quite clear that children's critical thinking abilities are also negatively impacted. I argue that these negative effects do extend to the proper development of children's critical thinking abilities. Modern technological innovations are designed, introduced to children and their use encouraged by the producers of these innovations. However, by design and deliberately no conscious decision and efforts are made by the producers of these technological innovations, the powerful, elite class, to ensure that a clear distinction is made between the fantasy realities depicted by these innovations and actual social reality. There is a big, important difference between the death of an "actor" in a video game, which uses mobile phones and their applications to support video games, and the actual death of a real human being killed by a real bullet from a real gun. Is the failure to make this distinction very clear deliberate, conscious and by design? I argue that this level of intellectual enslavement is deliberately and consciously designed by the powerful, elite class to promote their own interests which generate revenue for them. This type or level of intellectual enslavement I refer to as "Remote control intellectual enslavement". It is very similar to the type or level which Woodson describes here below concerning the mental development of the "negro":

Starting out after the Civil War, the opponents of freedom and social justice decided to work out a program which would enslave the Negroes's mind inasmuch as the freedom of body had to be conceded. It was well understood that if by the teaching of history the white man could be further assured of his superiority and the Negro made to feel that he had always been a failure and that the subjection of his will to some other race is necessary the freedman, then would still be a slave. If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one (Woodson, 2000, p. 84).

This suggests that if the "negro" can be made to think like his oppressor then his actions can be determined by remote control on most levels.

Child formal educational level intellectual enslavement is clearly a social reality that can easily be understood and explained. However, it is not easily explained as an individual reality since the child is basically subjected to conditioning and incapable of engaging in more advanced,

sophisticated critical thinking processes to be able to distinguish between fantasy reality and actual reality.

Modern Technological Level Intellectual Enslavement

Modern technological level intellectual enslavement does by design produce both individual and social realities since the focus is on adults who have the intellectual capability to engage in critical thinking processes which lead to the ability to distinguish between fantasy reality and actual reality. They are able to distinguish between what Karl Marx refers to as class consciousness and false consciousness (Ashley, David and Orentstein David Michael. 2005:199). It is driven by the uncritical craving for materialism and material consumption. The individual intellectually enslaved and the enslaver are both responsible for the enslavement. However, I argue, the intellectually slaved individual is more responsible and more to be blamed for the intellectual enslavement than the intellectual enslaver because the individual intellectually enslaved has the ability to engage in advanced, sophisticated critical thinking but she or he refuses to do so. In a way, the intellectually enslaved are actively engaged in the process of their own intellectual enslavement due to false consciousness. This is illustrated by the use of: 1) credit cards by many members of the lower class to purchase services or take vacations simply because they want to unreflectively and uncritically embrace the life styles of the powerful, elite class who actually write checks or use earned income to pay for these services or vacations (Veblen 1979); and 2) self-checkout technological equipment which lead to the reduction of employment opportunities for themselves.

Powerful, Elite Class Remote Control Level Intellectual Enslavement

This level of intellectual enslavement is kind of controversial because we are assuming or making the argument that members of the powerful, elite class do conspire very deliberately to produce technological innovations designed specifically to force, coerce, and entice members of the lower classes to engage in the usage of these innovations in a very uncritical, unreflective manner. This raises the question: Why are members of the lower classes uncritical and unreflective with respect to the consumption of this technology? I argue, very controversially and debatably, that members of the powerful, elite class use their ideas to produce modern technological innovations to promote their values through various media forms, these values are unreflectively and uncritically embraced by members of the lower classes who simply want to imitate the lifestyles of the powerful, elite class. One of these values is material consumption which Veblen (1979) referred to as conspicuous consumption and waste. Because of the very effective use of various media forms by the powerful, elite class or by those Veblen (1979)

referred to as the predatory class, material consumption becomes addictive and can no longer be resisted just as it is the case with certain addictive drugs.

This Powerful, Elite Class Remote Control Level Intellectual Enslavement is illustrated by the following examples: 1) masses of consumers flogging to department stores to buy new products, produced and promoted by the powerful, elite class through various media forms and in the process actually walking over other fellow human beings who have been pushed down and actually killing them and yet not even realizing they have just killed a human being until after they have purchased their desired consumption item. According to Rosenbloom (November 29, 2008), “a Wal-Mart worker on Long Island, New York, died after being trampled by customers who broke through the doors early Friday, and other workers were trampled as they tried to rescue the man. At least four other people, including a woman who was eight months pregnant, were taken to hospitals.”; 2) the obvious atrocities produced by guns in the American society yet many members of the lower classes reject or oppose any form of common sense gun legislation, designed to eliminate or solve the problem because the NRA which protects and promotes the interests of the powerful, elite class and the manufacturers of the guns use their ideas to distort this obvious social reality. These actions suggest that the consumption items, such as guns, are now much more valuable than human life; and 3) suicide bombers, who are usually lower level members of terrorist organizations, such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Qaeda, founded by Osama Bin Laden. These suicide bombers who, according to CNN (Saturday, November 21, 2015), are increasingly becoming young people recruited through social media, do unreflectively and uncritically commit suicide, taking away the lives of innocent human beings, simply at the direction and instructions of their leaders. While these horrible acts are executed by the lower level members, the leaders are hiding in well protected, remote locations instead of taking the lead in the suicide bombing campaign in which they believe, promote and encourage. One would expect that the other lower level members of these organizations who are still alive and watching these horrible acts and the actions of the leaders would ask the obvious question: Why are our leaders protecting themselves and hiding in well protected, remote locations instead of taking the lead in suicide bombing themselves which they preach and promote? The fact that this question is not asked clearly points to the remote control intellectual enslavement.

Personal, Individual Level Intellectual Enslavement

At this level of intellectual enslavement we focus on the adult individuals who are viewed as responsible

for and actively contributing to their intellectual enslavement. This is based on or guided by the assumption that these individuals are of sound mind, very conscious and do have the ability to engage in critical thinking processes and make logical decisions that are in their best interest. Here I argue that the intellectually enslaved individuals are responsible for their intellectual enslavement either consciously or unconsciously. Consciously, because they clearly understand that they are being intellectually enslaved and they know the reasons why they go along with this process of intellectual enslavement. Some of such reasons would include making a political statement, getting what they want for free and avoiding being fired before they achieve the goal. Unconsciously, because they simply do not want to activate their intellectual capabilities in order to be able to engage in critical thinking exercises to understand what is actually happening and what is in their best interest. In this case, the intellectually enslaved are simply lazy to engage in critical thinking. The members of the powerful, elite class are neither responsible nor to blame for this kind of intellectual enslavement. This attitude is demonstrated in various areas such as work settings, educational settings, personal undertakings and within various institutions in society.

CONCLUSION

There is clearly some empirical evidence which supports Horace Mann’s (1848) assertion that formal education is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery” (in Ballantine 2012:61). However, formal education’s equalizing capacity of the conditions of human beings is certainly and gradually being eroded by a number of social forces such as the individual human being’s desire to learn, availability of financial resources, the manipulative forces produced by the values and ideas of the powerful, elite class and more importantly, the role of modern technology in the process of intellectual enslavement of members of the lower classes.

What seems to be of great importance and concern that needs further investigation is what I have referred to so far in this paper as unconscious intellectual enslavement, which suggests that the unconsciously intellectually enslaved simply do not want to activate their intellectual capabilities in order to be able to engage in critical thinking exercises to understand what is actually happening and what is in their best interest. If that is the case, then what can educators and those interested in the equalizing potential of formal education of the human condition do to change this?

Obviously, intellectual enslavement is a social reality in today’s society. I argue, given the powerful forces unleashed by capitalism which lead to members of the powerful, elite class pursuing their interests and

promoting their values and ideas, society cannot look for solutions from this class. The solution is most certain going to come from the actions of concerned educators and more importantly, from the willingness of the unconsciously intellectually enslaved to become conscious of their intellectual enslavement, their contribution to it and their willingness to accept the assistance provided by concerned educators.

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