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Modeling the Environment

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Disconnect

Last week the theme of our Montserrat was how technology affects our daily lives. With an introduction parable by David Wallace of the fishes that were unaware of their surroundings, the question became whether our generation is like the two fishes that are oblivious to the water, “technology”, because it has always been part of their lives? From *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle’s talk, our class discussions, the dinner, and the *connections* event, I was able to conclude my own views on how ever-present communications technology is affecting the quality of our interactions with others. Professor Turkle made great points that I agreed with but her overall presentation was somewhat extreme on the cases she presented and made it seemed like everyone was like the people she interviewed. For example the “Rolo and Jade” situation that’s pushing it. I don’t know a single person that spends a major part of their lives on role-playing games online, I didn’t even know about these games until recently. With the range of research she has completed it may seem that what she preached is completely true and that it applies to the vast majority, however many students would agree with me that most of the extreme examples don’t apply to most of us. Professor Turkle asks us to “put technology in its place not to get rid of it completely” and that “we make our technology and in return it makes and shapes us” but then isn’t the individuals own decision to decide whether or not to use the technology to an extent? Regarding our interaction with others and the security based worries that Turkle expressed, I don’t completely agree with her statements but must admit that it did spark some thoughts on some of the issue.

First, what is my own “life mix”? I see myself as a very technologically involve student with the internet, Facebook, emails, and texts but I’m not completely attached to it. A phone became part of my life on my 14th birthday and since then seven different phones have crossed my path. Phones were replaced not because an update was necessary but rather because breaking or losing “accidents” kept occurring. My dad got so tired that my sophomore year I was disconnected from the world or in other words *dead*, since people would constantly ask “are you even alive?” Realizing that year that owning a phone did not shape how I interacted with others, made me appreciate the fact that a phone was helpful but not necessary. I didn’t die nor had a panic attack because as Turkle says I didn’t have my “phone to hide behind” but even though it was harder to communicate with my friends it was not impossible to manage through it. But now that I do have a phone and in college, that sense of being “always on” is inevitable. The constant emails, texts and Facebook notifications are always there haunting you, keeping you company. It’s scary how Turkle mentioned that even when you don't have your phone on you, one feels “knows” that they have received a text or a call: “ghost ring”. Every day I receive about 20 emails from different organization and about 10 notifications on Facebook and I am compelled to reply. Turkle points at this compelness to answer by mentioning that if we don’t, then people may assume that we have “something to hide,” since we are expected to “share” our lives with everyone, “I share, therefore I am”. Turkle mentioned that some kids described that growing up they found themselves competing for attention with their parent’s phones, and even though I had never experience that myself it seemed more sad than surprising to hear. This kind of situation creates a mindset on the children that they must use technology to obtain that attention from someone, anyone, and technology helps with that.

Communicating with others through technology is one of Turkle’s biggest worries. She explained a theory she calls “The Goldilocks effect,” which is the way we want our interaction with others to be like: not too close not too far but just right. She further explained that today people would rather text than talk and communicate in sips rather than having a full conversation. Consequently, by taking these sips we are not really getting to know each other and become too busy communicating that we lose creation and the ability to distinguish what really matters. One point that grabbed my attention was when she said that by texting we eliminate “the respect of the complexity of human beings” because we disregard their true feelings, something not seen through a text. And that in a text we want to be in control of what we say which puts an emphasis on “performing a self rather than being a self”. I agree with this point but when she says that we have “a fear of conversation [because it’s hard for us] to end a conversation and not knowing how to say goodbye” that is just foolish. In twitter a friend of mine twitted "Many young people say they do anything to avoid conversations" What?!? What kind of young people do you know?” Reaction like this one made presence in twitter. Her example of a guy saying that “someday someday but certainly not now, I will like to have a conversation” is also irrelevant because she uses this to generalize our society from one person’s personal thoughts.

During the Turkle’s talk, about taking a break from technology, 4 out of 6 students in my row were on their phones playing games, on Facebook, texting and even twitting about the talk. I found this offensive to the speaker but also somewhat humorous. So I went on twitter and read the tweets from some of my classmates. A student twitted “This speech is about how technology is ruining our relationships with each other... Everyone's on their phone right now #The Irony” and another said “I think this lady said something about technology distracting us.. idk for sure tho, I was texting.” Here she was explaining how it “used to be I have a feeling so I need to call someone, now it’s I need to have a feeling to send a text/post” and how multitasking between texting and trying to pay attention to something never works. Here she sees students doing exactly what she is saying is wrong which helps prove her point, right? That is not the case, this talk actually encouraged students to have long conversations about how much they dislike what Turkle had said and twitting about it during the talk was just the start. Twit: “#thingsthatgetmemad, when old people try to explain our generation.”

Towards the end of her talk, Turkle made two points that grabbed my attention. First she said that “we often feel we must speak before we have something to say,” this is interesting because it can be applied to certain situations but I personally don’t see how that problem has to do with technology. A twit that I read that applies to this said “So now she's saying our generation is dumb -\_\_\_\_\_\_- #where they find her at.” I thought this was funny because it’s true. I guess it wasn’t just me that felt a little offended by some of the stuff she said about our generation. And second, when she mentioned that “in the future schools will teach kids how to unitask because we only multitask to get that rush.” With this point I do I agree and I see how technology has to do with this. Technology helps us do things faster and puts us in a mindset that we must do everything at the same time to get it done quicker. She gave an example of breast feeding and texting and how multitasking affects any kind of situation.

One topic that I noticed she was very passionate about was security online. She said that students know about what is going on concerning privacy but seemed to be indifferent about the situation. We know that companies like Apple and Facebook are keeping our information and might be selling it but we don’t really care. The example she gave was that we are like an animal in boiling water, If we are put in it we noticed right away there is something wrong, but if we are put in room temperature water and turn the heat up to slowly boil the water we won’t notice that something is wrong until it’s too late. She asked, what needs to happen for students to realize that this is a problem? I see her point to an extent. We do realize what is going on and know it’s wrong but that doesn’t mean we aren’t worried about our privacy or haven’t done anything to find a solution.

Turkle mentioned that a solution to her concerns was to have “everyone take a time out to experience and learn about themselves”. I agree with this but this disconnection can be done for many things not just applying to technology. It is always good to step away from your busy life and just enjoy some quiet time. My disconnection was not 100%, I did stay away from the internet on Friday and off my phone but on Saturday I went home so I used my phone to call my parents. This event helped me realized that, even though I hate to admit it, I waste a lot of time on the internet. I go on Facebook often to see what other people are up to, I do online shopping, and watch videos and leave my work until the end. But this weekend was different. I did so much on Friday that I didn’t even know there was that much time in a day. I went to the mall and did physical shopping, I talked to my friends, danced and even got a lot of work done. It was a great experience and that is why I’m going to try and continued to disconnect from the internet unless necessary. One thing that I just couldn’t do and I don’t think I will ever be able to stop is calling my parents every night. That is one of the things I am most thankful about. Technology helps me stay connected with my parents whether they are in Mexico, Michigan or Connecticut; I know I will always be able to talk to them. She ends her talk by saying that technology “it is not an addiction because that will mean that in order to get better we must get rid of it completely and technology is going to be part of our lives forever”. We just need to find a way to manage our own usage because ultimately we control technology not the other way around.