

2.3 Self Enslaved Campus

All throughout the nation, from campus to campus, the culture differs. Being an out-of-state student really opens up a unique perspective of what people at Washington State University (WSU) are like. This is because, I have not fully been integrated into the schools culture. When one gets comfortable or conforms to their surroundings and culture, one becomes to an extent oblivious to what is going on. This holds true because when something befalls into routine or a habit it goes unnoticed. Luckily coming fresh out of California, some differences and similarities are evident here at WSU. Specifically the culture and how we as a student body decide to socialize, or not.

Being at a highly fervent and ardent "sports school" such as WSU calls for a vast amount of social interaction. Whether it is on a ritual Saturday, with a large enthusiastic crowd at football games, or smaller crowds at volleyball games but with an equally enthusiastic crowd, or simply walking to class and interacting with peers, one is always undergoing a state of social interaction. With so much interaction going on in just about every aspect of our lives we still find ourselves here, asking why social interaction is diminishing. The answer to this ever-boggling question can be interpreted by the research of social interaction and the use of cell phones. Considering that 91 percent of all Americans own a cellular device it is no shocker that day after day their role within our lives increases radically (CTIA, Paul Lilly).

The cell phone originally served the single purpose of allowing people to talk to each other. Cell phone manufacturers realized they could expand upon the features of the cell phone and began to include: address books, text messaging, email, and Internet capabilities. These new phones with various proficiencies are known as smartphones, and the term "mobile device" is being used more frequently to emphasize that the cell phone is no longer just a tool for verbal communication. These features have altered the cell phone from being a verbal communication tool to a multimedia tool. Despite these changes, the cell phone still appears to be used as a tool for social connection and interaction. Online games and apps such as Farmville allow users to interact with other players all while comparing stats and scores, which brings out our inner competitor. Although modes of interaction between people may have changed the need for social interaction has not.

Whether you are dating someone, interviewing someone, or just meeting someone for the first time, there is a special quality about face-to-face interactions. You can catch the subtle tone in their voice, see their expressions and reactions to what surrounds them, and you can look them in the eyes and see whether or not you get a sense of trust from them. All this builds connections with people you come in contact with on a day-to-day basis. So it's unfortunate that real-life interactions are on the outs as cell phone conversations, texting, instant messaging and Facebook emails start to take up more of our time. For the young population (those whom were interviewed) at WSU consisting of 17-23 year olds, having a cell phone or iPod in hand and at the ready is the default mode while walking across campus streets. This of course means far less chance of conversation with the people who populate their surroundings and everyday lives, all at the cost of attending those who populate their virtual world.

For example my first interviewee, although having admitted to have previously used a cell phone to avoid social interaction, Nicole stated, "People my age (19) are addicted to them," while discussing viewpoints on cell phone usage. She also went on to say "I try not to have them on me at all. I just don't like the idea of people being able to contact me wherever I go." Nicole like I is a freshmen here at WSU. It was also mentioned that she has 3 siblings back home, two younger one older. She expressed a sense of confidence and kept eye contact with a slight stare to the floor ever so often. Nicole was very outgoing and had no problem talking to strangers even as we went about the interview process. After our interview, surprisingly she went on to add her own viewpoints by stating that "[She] rather be with the people who surround her at the moment than have worry about who's going to call [her], and who [she] needs to call back and all that". It illuminates the really desolate state of our society is in. Walking around and having to see so many people tied down to their cell phones is almost scary.

On the other hand my interviewee Ericka who also admitted to having used a cellphone multiple times to avoid interaction around campus, stated that "Cell phones do have the potential to make us more focused on what's going on in our personal lives, and the personal lives of the people who we're close to". I too share a similar point of view as Ericka. With apps that let us organize our lives and get ourselves in order, we can certainly be aware of a lot more going on everyday. At first when she was approached she seemed uncomfortable. This of course would be reasonable since we weren't completely acquainted before hand. Ericka stated that she was an only child. When asked if she would be able to go twenty-four hours without her phone she went on to promptly respond "No?!" with a look of disbelief of what was just asked. She followed up by stating, " I LOVE my phone, I shower with it" those word exactly. She often moved around within the area we were in and would look away a lot, lacking the eye contact that Nicole had. She displayed more reliance on her phone almost as if it was a part of her. Ericka displayed more of a calm personality. However she was comfortable enough to

talk a couple of hours with me, which was extremely surprising. She went on to tell me about her family and how having her phone around her provides her with a way to contact multiple people at once.

Yes there are many ups and downs to what happens on our campus and our culture in general. Maybe we're not paying enough attention to things outside the "virtual" realm. Trying to connect with someone at a personal level when a cell phone distracts him or her can be a frustrating and trying experience. But while it's probably obvious that conversing with people whose eyes are glued to their cell phone screens can be a difficult endeavor, we have also found that the mere presence of a cell phone has the ability to distract us from achieving a close personal connection even if the phone isn't being used.

Others in the interview process were quick to counter by giving arguments that technology has actually made us more connected to people rather than just disconnected with our present situation. But can also be countered with responses by others such as "If we're going to be a connected culture, then we have to respect that our need for the absolute attention of our dinner date is self-serving and always has been." Perhaps this is true, but I also wonder what the long-term effects will be of devaluing our current situation, our current surroundings and the people we spend time with in person. Personally, I don't long to be in the company of people who are constantly connected to something else. And it's not just talking to other people on cell phones. Smart phones allow people to be connected to the Internet for sports scores, news and weather updates all at your fingertips no matter what your social situation.