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Does Face-to-Face Conversation Make us More Human in This Modern World of Technology?

In class we have focussed on two very important readings that I personally think that everyone should read if they get the chance. In the passages, *The Empathy Diaries*, by Sherry Turkle and, *Making Conversation*, by Kwame Anthony Appiah both authors provide exceptional examples of what they believe conversation is defined as and what is obstructing conversation from happening. I believe that these authors both complicate each other, but can also expand on each other's ideas. One of Turkle's arguments is that technology is the crucial object and idea getting in the way of conversation and our ways of humanity. She also brings in the ideas of the virtuous circle that many individuals fall 'victim' to. On the other hand, Appiah brings the idea of religion and finding our creativity and imagination. One point that I want to focus on is how Turkle does not mention the idea of religion in any of her writing and that Appiah makes a valid point when he brings up religion in his writing. Turkle's ideology of technology disrupting the virtuous circle isn't completely true as many people use technology everyday to converse, show their creativity and imagination, and even religion. Some of the statements made by Turkle don't match with the modern day approach of technology.

One of Turkle's crucial ideas is that "Face-to-face conversation is the most human - and humanizing - thing we do" (343). For Turkle one of life's most important vices is that conversation is what keeps us human. But, in modern day how is this possible when one of the most common ways that individuals talk to each other is over the phone? The topic that Turkle

brings into this argument is that the first chair of the virtuous circle is one for solitude. In saying this she means that no technology should get in the way of what we are thinking and that we need that chair of solitude to reflect on the things we do. Another main topic she points out is “Solitude reinforces a secure sense of self, and with that, the capacity for empathy. Then, conversation with others provides rich material for self-reflection” (348). This is where the circle part comes into play, we become more aware of certain things that involve self reflection due to conversation and then we use that self reflection to bring up conversation. This is where people fall into the virtuous circle. A main thing that Turkle brings up is how technology is disrupting the circle, but if one of the most crucial ways in today's time is talking over the phone to build conversation then how does this cycle make complete sense? Bringing in my own experience, I know that if I did not have the technology I have now I would not be able to talk to over half of my family and be able to celebrate many things like my religion, creativity, and imagination with any of my family who lives in England and Canada. One of the main traditions that takes place in Canada is Boxing Day, which me and my family who live in the United States would not be able to participate in with my family on the other side of the world if we did not have the technology that we have today. Turkle does not go into any detail about religion, but does talk about the virtuous circle and mentions solitude, friendship, and society. One of the biggest topics in the world is religion, so how could this have not come up in any of her writing? Especially when religion is one of the biggest conversation starters. In order for someone like me to follow my religion and talk about certain details of my Catholicism, I need the technology we have today. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when we couldn't go to church and practice in the right ways. We had to watch it all online.

Appiah brings in the ideas of how conversations bring up creativity and imagination in people. He also talks a lot about how the evolution of religion has taken place in conversation and how it has spread all over the world. One main thing that Appiah states that stuck with me is that “So I’m using the word *conversation* not only for literal talk but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others” (55). The way that I interpret this quote is that Appiah utilizes the word conversation as much more than just face to face talk that makes us more human. He sees the benefit it can have for people and their creativity, imagination, and even religion as religion can fall under the benefits of life for many individuals. Appiah is not strictly saying that this conversation has to be face to face either, he is just saying that conversation is used for more than just human connection. We can also see in Appiah’s writing that he talks about the evolution of religion. He asserts “Why did these young women, in the heart of Asante, decide to urge the young men of Adum to do what was not just untraditional but taboo? One possibility is that circumcision somehow became identified in their minds with being modern” (49). Appiah starts to bring in the idea of the modern world which I think is very important because everyday the world is changing. It isn’t just change, it’s evolution. The world is evolving in many ways and some people cannot grasp the idea of technology slowly taking over and this is what we can see in Turkle’s statements. But Appiah, pulls in the idea of evolution which makes me think that he understands why conversation is so important and that no matter what technology is going to be used. The more modern approach of things is always going to include technology, it is how people talk and how they get in contact with one another. While Appiah realises the importance of the way the modern world is changing, Turkle seems to have no take on how technology has become such a big part of life and how people use it day to day.

Both authors make very strong and valid points on each side, but they complicate each other in many ways. While some might recognize that Appiah is pulling together an idea that makes us more human, others also might rebuttal against this and say that the idea of conversation that is being spoken about is for the person themselves. Some people may recognize that he is saying this so that individuals can get a better feel of their own identity and that it brings out the creativity and engagement in oneself. It can be argued that Turkle's statement above complicates Appiah's statement because she is attempting to say that without conversation we are dehumanizing ourselves and that the use of technology is one of the main reasons as to why this is happening. That without conversation we don't know who we are and that we are less human without it. While Appiah's statement idealizes the fact that through conversation we can focus on ourselves and find out who we truly are both literally and **metaphorically**, Turkle's statement argues that it is more human to have face-to-face conversations and that we need it to be human. We can look at this as two of the same statements, but finding your own identity and creativity does not have to be done in conversation and is not essentially what makes us more human as Turkle is stating. Appiah's statement seems like conversation is a more personalized **ideal**, while Turkle's statement is said to get everyone involved with one another and to break the routines we have with technology.

Many people may not agree with the statements above, which I can agree with because there is so much more to it than religion and strictly finding who you are. Looking into the passages we have been reading in class, an argument can be made about how conversation overall makes us ultimately more human. In the text Appiah states "So I'm using the word *conversation* not only for literal talk but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others" (55). Appiah utilizes the word conversation as much more than just

face-to-face talking. He mentions that it is used for engagement with others and that it also helps with ideas and who we are. Another concept that he brings into this argument is that conversation is also used for more than just literal talk, that is used to engage people's creativity and imagination which we can pull religion into. Sherry Turkle's insights corroborate this in many distinct ways. Within the passage Turkle mentions that "Face-to-face conversation is the most human - and humanizing - thing we do" (343). For Turkle one of life's most important topics is that conversation is the event that makes us more human and pulls society out of the technology phase that everyone has fallen into. These two passages can merge with one another because we can argue that Appiah is trying to display that conversation means a considerable amount more than just face-to-face conversation. He pulls in the ideas that conversation is used for engagement with one another and that it opens us up to a whole new world of creativity and imagination. Ultimately agreeing with Turkle that conversation is what makes us more human.

While I think that the counter argument is very strong and brings many great points into this piece, I also think that without technology and the use of technology today, we wouldn't be able to find out who we are and be able to find that creativity, imagination and engagement with certain people. I know that if I didn't have the technology we have today then I would not be able to share the creativity that I have found with others, I wouldn't be able to reflect and find that virtuous cycle that Turkle has talked about. We live in a world that is constantly evolving and face to face conversation isn't the main root of humanity anymore.

Works Cited

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Making Conversation." *Emerging: Contemporary Readings for Writers*, by Barclay Barrios, 5th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, Macmillan Learning, Boston, 2022, pp. 39–57.

Turkle, Sherry. "The Empathy Diaries." *Emerging: Contemporary Readings for Writers*, by Barclay Barrios, 5th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, Macmillan Learning, Boston, 2022, pp. 343–354.