

Stop Googling. Let's Talk

This excerpt from Sherry Turkle's "Stop Googling. Let's Talk" outlines the various effects of the usage of phones during face-to-face conversations. Turkle claims that the usage of phones during face-to-face conversation decreases the quality of the in-person conversation, which in turn prevents the topic of conversation from ever diving any deeper than surface level. She argues that this is due to people incorrectly believing that they have the ability to multitask by both participating in the conversation whilst being active on their phone. This reduction in concentration on the physical conversation leads to the decrease in quality.

I agree with Turkle's line of reasoning in that the usage of phones during conversation decrease the quality of the conversation, but I believe the root cause of this issue dives much deeper than the presence of phones only during conversation. It is evident and proven that humans can never truly "multitask" in the sense of giving meaningful thought to two topics simultaneously. Much like a computer with only one core, it never truly does multiple operations at the same time, but can switch between operations repeatedly. Whilst the same is true of humans, many still seem to believe that they have the ability to give their attention to multiple things at once, which in the case of conversation and phones, cripples both interactions due to missing important details while your mind is off somewhere else. I find that this problem in my own life is easily solved simply by not believing that I am capable of multitasking. Prior to believing so, I would often attempt to hold conversations with people while writing notes or programming something, but after some time you'd begin to realize that you're never truly doing both things at once, you're doing both poorly and intermittently. Without prolonged focus on a single idea, you never keep your "train of thought" and never reach "flow state" for either task.

Another growing problem with the modern generation is the idea of Dopamine addiction. On the topic of the presence of phones, Turkle states "You can put your attention wherever you want it to be. You can always be heard. You never have to be bored." The idea that entertainment and dopamine is readily available at any time essentially destructs any attention span that the modern generation may have. This similar degradation in attention length has similar effects of not giving your full attention when "multitasking" and similarly decreases conversation quality. In my own life it is very easy to find examples of phone usage due to boredom. Even right now as I am writing this essay, my sister is getting bored of waiting for people to finish their turn during Monopoly deal and resorts to scrolling Instagram reels for instant dopamine. Even for myself when waiting on anything it is hard to think of a time when I do not go find an article to read or a video to watch as it feels more productive with my time than to be waiting, but this idea tends to bleed into any time anyone feels any boredom at all, including during conversation.

I believe that attention and depth of conversation are strongly linked to conversation quality. The statistics that Turkle provides on both usage of phones during social gatherings and opinions on their effects on conversation become painfully logical when you consider the effects the presence of phones. Intermittent attention from multitasking leads directly to a reduction in depth of conversation combined with the reduction in attention span collectively strongly decrease conversation quality.

Similarly, I dislike the commonly stated solution of the "rule of three." Simply only allowing yourself to go on your phone when there will be three other people carrying the conversation only allows the conversation to continue, but never deepen due to participant's intermittent participation. I believe the only solution to meaningful conversation is to give your full attention to conversation when participating in one, same as any other task. I agree that usage of phones needs to be done with greater intention with their effects on every other task, especially in conversation.