



Saturday June 18th Morning Sessions

9:30 AM Symposium Session: Social Media, Human Relationships, and Empathy

Moderator: Ellen Messer

Panelists include: Janice Abarbanel, Mark Gerzon, John Powers, and more.

This morning session will explore how information technology, artificial intelligence, virtual identities, and social media impact our lives, including intergenerational communication, changing notions of aloneness and togetherness, media-driven tendencies toward polarization, and, in a word, empathy. *Additional, downloadable program information to be posted in early May.*

The topic draws on the research and memoir of Sherry Turkle (HR 1969), who, in her 2021 *Empathy Diaries*, chronicled her intellectual and social development at Radcliffe-Harvard, and her pioneering social-scientific analysis of artificial intelligence and social media impacts on human relationships. Her accounts, culminating in *Alone Together. Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other* (2012), encourage reflections about our personal life experiences as well as comparisons with David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd. A Study of the Changing American Character* (1953) [which all entering Radcliffe freshmen were instructed to read in preparation for a dinner discussion at Radcliffe Freshman Orientation (September 1966)] and Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), in conversation with Erik Erikson's "Stages of Psychosocial Development," which influenced many of us during our undergraduate years.

RESOURCES

Sherry Turkle's concepts (presented in two short Sherry Turkle videos):

(1) her (2012) TED Talk, "Connected But Alone," which combines ideas from her (2011) book, *Alone Together* and additional themes subsequently channeled in her (2015) book, *Reclaiming Conversation*. (Access at:

https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_connected_but_alone (19 minutes) and

(2) her "Big Idea" at the Aspen Institute (29 Jun 2015), which succinctly asserts: We have a crisis of empathy that we can cure with conversation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_H4NgVZoaE (3:26)

Additional resources (if anyone is so inclined):

Sherry Turkle: Harvard Book Store interview on *The Empathy Diaries*: access @

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpsQD3RqcbM>

Lunch interview with Rana Foroohar (21 Mar 21). A short Financial Times “lunch” commentary connecting Turtle’s memoir to gender discrimination and other business and professional struggles and social movements. Access at:

<https://www.ft.com/content/7a9471e6-434f-4ae0-9ce6-ff3f6e4c597d>

“Technology and Empathy after COVID 19” (15 Jul 20) Access at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqjqcB9GjxA>, which contains deep commentary on creative uses of the internet to improve communications and the arts (around 19:xxxx)

10:45 AM Small Discussion Groups:

1. Addressing the Climate Crisis- Claire Broome (former CDC Deputy Director and climate activist for 15 years) and Michael Linn (inventor, entrepreneur, and Co-Chairman of the Climate Boot Camp)
2. Threats to Democracy- MA Sen. Mike Barrett and Judith Baker (international educator and social justice activist)
3. Arts in Our Lives- Mac Dewart (internationally recognized sculptor)
4. Social Media and Sports- John Powers (Pulitzer prize winning sports journalist)
5. Social Media and Learning: Not Just for Kids- Joe Blatt (Harvard Graduate School of Education professor)
6. Polarizing Politics: Integrity versus Despair in 2022- Mark Gerzon (author, mediator, and conflict resolution specialist)
7. Exploring Purpose in Our Lives: the five "f's" --family, faith, fun, fervor and philanthropy - Richard Paisner (innovator in for-profit and not-for-profit ventures)
8. Grandparent-Adult-Child Intergenerational Relations- Janice Abarbanel (child psychologist)
9. Aging with Resilience- Rick Kopelman (physician and medical educator, Tufts Medical Center)
10. Social Media and Business Relationships- Bill Kutik (journalist and business consultant)
11. Spirituality, Religion, and Empathy- Rev. Jan Gough (hospital chaplain, spiritual director and retreat leader)

Expanded Small Group Discussion Descriptions

1. Addressing the Climate Crisis: Claire Broome and Michael Linn

Claire Broome AB 1970, MD 1975: I've spent the past 15 years accelerating adoption of renewable energy in California, including participation as a party in regulatory proceedings at the California Public Utility Commission and working with advocacy organizations like Sierra Club and 350 Bay Area.

I spent 28 years working at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), starting as an epidemiologist responsible for prevention of bacterial meningitis and pneumonia, serving as Deputy Director of CDC from 1994-1999 (Acting Director 1998) and from 2000-2006 leading the development of a web based transformation of CDC's national disease monitoring systems.

When I retired in 2006, I had a unique opportunity to use my time, energy, and professional skills to work on anything I wanted. What could be more important than addressing climate change, an existential threat to humanity?

Michael Linn AB 1970, MBA 1973: Michael Linn is a climate refugee, inventor, entrepreneur and currently Co-Chairman of the Climate Boot Camp, a joint project of Climate Reality and Harvard Alumni for Climate and the Environment. He was Chairman of Inua Partners in Hope and won the 2014 ASHRAE Global First Place Tech Award for Ed Buildings.

Proposed structure for breakout session: Participants will identify two or three near-term broad objectives that need to happen to prevent catastrophic climate change (e.g., building electrification, accelerating renewable energy generation especially distributed energy resources, transformation of food system to local, organic, sustainable (economically and ecologically) and share experiences showing how advocates and activists can move toward necessary changes. The framing of human relationships and empathy can demonstrate how to be effective as a change maker - individuals can change their organizations via their relationships. Empathy builds bridges and fact based decision making can lead people across those bridges. Facilitated discussion will focus around how technology, including social media, and grassroot and national organizations have or might address these objectives.

2. Threats to Democracy - MA Sen. Mike Barrett and Judith Baker

Threats to Democracy: Voices on both the right and the left characterize the country's divisions as the most serious since the American Civil War. What to do now? Discuss.

Mike Barrett AB 1970: Massachusetts State Senator, in charge of the body's climate policies. Former Congressional staff.

Judith Kauffman AB 1970: 35 year teacher and basketball coach, then to now African Storybook project, Joburg/Nairobi, community activist Dorchester MA, grandmother worried about the racism, fascism and climate degradation my grandsons face.

3. Arts in our lives - Mac Dewart

Mac Dewart AB 1970 writes: I have spent fifty years making sculptures. Four of my one-ton sculptures will be on display during the reunion outside Memorial Hall. I have work in more than thirty-five museums and public collections around the world and a big bronze of mine sits in the courtyard of Leverett House, purchased by Harvard in 2006.

4. Social Media and Sports - John Powers

John Powers AB 1970, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for the Boston Globe, will speak about the growing impact of social media on sports. As athletes have embraced Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and other platforms as powerful tools to connect with their fans and establish their personal brands they've also made themselves targets for criticism, much of it racist and misogynistic.

BREAKOUT SESSION: Cable TV and the internet have transformed sports into mass entertainment and turned athletes into wealthy celebrities. But that transformation also has given rise to gambling, doping and cheating and blurred the distinction between professionals and amateurs.

5. Social Media and Learning: Not Just for Kids - Joe Blatt

Joe Blatt AB 1970 writes: My engagement with these issues spans both halves of my career: I spent the first 30 years as a documentary producer, first in public television and then in educational applications of newer media. For the past nearly 20 years I have been on the faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where my research and teaching focus mostly on young children, including the *Sesame Street* audience – but I also work with students who are interested in adolescent and adult learning. Important disclosure: I study social media but I am a very reluctant user – so I look forward to learning about the experience from those of you who are among the “always on” majority.

Discussion/ breakout: This breakout will go wherever participants want to take it. But I (Joe) suggest we start by considering three questions:

- Can we identify specific examples of social media contributing positively to learning – or do we hold a strictly “threat or menace” view?
- How does the educational potential of social media vary with age?
- The best learning experiences combine cognitive and emotional supports. Could it be that social media offer the optimal learning environment for the digital age?

6. Polarizing Politics: Integrity versus Despair in 2022 - Mark Gerzon

Mark Gerzon AB 1970: Mark has worked as a mediator and conflict resolution specialist for most of his professional life. Despite early training in clinical psychology and family therapy, he has chosen to engage with larger social and political systems. Both as president of Mediators Foundation, a UN emissary, and as an independent consultant, he has worked to facilitate engagement between adversaries both in the USA and abroad. His books include *Leading Through Conflict* (Harvard Business School Press) and *The Reunited States of America* (Berrett-Kohler). The latter inspired the documentary *The Reunited States*, currently streaming on Amazon Prime.

This panel presentation and discussion will begin with consideration of three questions:

1. *Where are we in Erik Erikson's model of the life cycle (integrity vs despair)? How are our "life histories" and "history" intersecting to impact this stage of our lives?*
2. *After living in these body/minds for 70+ years, what can they teach us?(about social media, political polarization, liberalism/conservatism. etc)*
3. *How is our specific lifespan (roughly 1950s-2020s) different than those who preceded us and those who are following?*

Mark is looking forward to a dialogue with classmates about being at this stage of our lives, facing a world very different than the one we imagined when we are together at Harvard half a century ago. Informed by the wisdom of Erik Erikson, Mark wants to explore together how we are making sense out of new social media, intensified political polarization, the climate crisis and other current challenges. His particular interest is where psychology and politics intersect at this time in our lives, particularly the tension between integrity and hope, on the one hand, and despair and fear on the other.

7. Exploring Purpose in Our Lives: the five "f's" --family, faith, fun, fervor and philanthropy - Richard Paisner

Richard Paisner AB 1970 spent fourteen months as a lawyer, twenty five years as a private equity investor largely in health care (and President of Arthur Garfunkel Enterprises) and another twenty five years advising CEO's of large and small enterprises as to how to resolve cultural issues keeping their entities from maximizing their performance. Along the way, he served as Chair of the Advocacy Institute and the Institute for Sustainable Communities, the co-founder of the Center for Innovative Medicine at Johns Hopkins and the Health Futures Council at ASU. He has served on the boards of the National Cathedral Elementary School and the Jewish Funds for Justice. He and his wife Christie Weiner have three children and four grandchildren and now live in Oakland, CA.

8. Grandparent-Adult-Child Intergenerational Relations- Janice Abarbanel

Janice Abarbanel AB 1970 has recently retired from a long career as a clinical child psychologist. Over the years, she brought her skills and interests into a variety of settings living and learning in London, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Portland, Maine, Romania and Hungary (US Peace Corps), Berlin, Germany, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her many frames of reference have guided her towards an appreciation of personal growth through shared learning across generations.

Panel/Facilitated Discussion: Janice joins our panel to facilitate shared reflections about our sense of ourselves as an older generation, drawing on an awareness of the impact of culture, historical moments, and society's influences on who we are and what we are learning in intergenerational collaborations.

She will speak about several personal and professional experiences related to the impact of social media on empathy and human connections. Janice will honor the influence of Professor Erik Erikson and Mary Catherine Bateson (Class of 1960) on her awareness of the necessity for resilient thinking, feeling, and learning through intergenerational collaboration..

9. Aging with resilience - Rick Kopelman

Bio:

Discussion/ Topic:

10. Social Media and Organizational Relationships - Bill Kutik

Bill Kutik AB 1970 wrote for newspapers for 20 years – The New York Times, The New York Daily News and The Boston Globe – after being one of three editors in charge of The Crimson news coverage during the Bust and Strike junior year. Since 1990, he has been a self-employed analyst, columnist and impresario in the software industry.

Social Media and Business Relationships will discuss how the technology of social media has changed the relationships of every person to every other person and the organization as a whole

within for-profit (work) or non-profit (voluntary) organizations. How has that changed your life at work? Or now in volunteer organizations?

11. Spirituality, Religion, and Empathy- Moderator TBA

Discussion/ Topic: For younger generations, social media has become the new "Ground of Being/God/Higher Power", the source of self-worth and belonging. Traditionally, that connection has been made within communities of faith, all of which have teachings on empathy and compassion, both of which are so tragically lacking in most exchanges on social media. So... for those of us for whom spirituality and religion are important, what creative responses might we have to Marshall McLuhan's now-fulfilled prophecy that "The medium is the message"?