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## What the Phub?

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# What the Phub?

## **Abstract**

“Nobody talks to each other anymore.” When my grandfather said this as we sped down the highway, I wondered what to make of it. Is he simply being a negative elderly man, or is there some truth to the statement? Considering that I had been trying to tune out his questions with my headphones the whole drive, I guess I deserved some type of scolding. As his questions were repeated, my mother pointed out to my grandfather that I could not hear him, to which he shook his head and said, “Nobody talks to each other anymore.” Finally, I put aside my sour mood and took off my headphones, answering his questions about college life and my general wellbeing. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, body language, social settings, phubbing, generational differences

## **Disciplines**

Social Media | Sociology | Sociology of Culture

## **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

# SURGE

[ VERB ] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

## WHAT THE PHUB?

February 26, 2014

“Nobody talks to each other anymore.” When my grandfather said this as we sped down the highway, I wondered what to make of it. Is he simply being a negative elderly man, or is there some truth to the statement? Considering that I had been trying to tune out his questions with my headphones the whole drive, I guess I deserved some type of scolding. As his questions were repeated, my mother pointed out to my grandfather that I could not hear him, to which he shook his head and said, “Nobody talks to each other anymore.” Finally, I put aside my sour mood and took off my headphones, answering his questions about college life and my general wellbeing.



Reflecting back on my grandfather’s statement, I have begun to realize the implications of what he meant. My grandfather is the type of man who can walk into a room and talk to complete strangers as if he were an old friend. I vividly remember sitting with him in the airport once while he recounted his time in the Navy to three young adults. They sat enraptured by his storytelling, and I couldn’t help smiling with respect.

“Nobody talks to each other anymore.” Even if we want to disagree, our generation knows what he means. We have all walked into a classroom or a presentation, waiting for something to start, and seen a room full of people staring down at the smartphones in their hands, enraptured by a small screen, oblivious to those around them.

Turns out this behavior has a word to describe it. [Phubbing](#). The act of snubbing someone in a social setting by looking at your phone instead of paying attention.

Don’t get me wrong; I am not saying I don’t do the same thing. When I feel bored or even slightly uncomfortable, I pull out my phone in an effort to shield myself from everyday social anxiety or to add some zest to the monotony of everyday routines. But I am wondering if there is something wrong when so many of us look for social gratification online while real opportunities for human connection and friendship are literally sitting a few feet from us.

When our heads are down staring into our screens or our ear buds are droning out the crowd, do we ever stop to wonder what we may be conveying to other people? To me it inconsequently conveys “I’m busy” or “I’m not in the mood to talk to you.” It cuts us off from a friendly conversation opener like a smile or a wave.

I cannot help thinking of the recent film [Her](#) directed by Spike Jonze, which follows a man's unhealthy relationship with an artificially intelligent operating system. Or Ray Bradbury's sci-fi classic Fahrenheit 451, where citizens constantly have a small earpiece murmuring news and music so they are always connected even when sleeping. Unfortunately, the film and the book are both prophetic, conveying our growing attachment to technology and our increasing separation from each other.

Modern humans have disconnected from themselves, each other, and the outside world in an ironic effort to stay connected to each other. When we log onto a social networking site are we really socializing, or just further isolating ourselves by cultivating an online personality that may not necessarily represent our true character? I used to have a Facebook page, and it's a good way to keep in touch with old friends. But when people have 500 plus "friends," but won't talk to someone they don't know sitting next to them, and when people update their status every hour as if at any moment they may become the next internet sensation, but won't ask me how I am doing, the irony is just too much.

I truly hope that we can take a step back and really observe ourselves and those around us. The smartphone more than ever has become a toy in a kind of occupy-our-mind protest against boredom and social discomfort. I spend more time introducing myself to my phone than I do other people. For real, I go to my phone more than my friends to work out tough questions. So let's [stop phubbing](#). Let's put the phone down for an hour, turn it off, put the leash down and stop walking with our phones in our face, take the earbuds out and listen with complete honesty to the rhythms of our lives.

We risk so much more [than physical injury](#) if we don't.

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