Our ethnography research group set out to answer the question of whether or not cell phone usage was preventing us from making friendships at Parkland Community College. We found through extensive research, that cell phones were, in fact, having negative impacts on the way students communicated with each other and on whether or not they were able to make friends here at Parkland. Our group came to this conclusion through a variety of research methods. The first method we implemented was participant observation. As a group, we made observation in the U Wing of Parkland College during the lunch hour for several days. From there, we each set out to interview a few of our friends, two females and two males total, and recorded the interviews. My role in the group was to make observations and to interview a male friend of mine. Since I am a student at Parkland College, I believe it was a lot easier to make observations. Since we were in a group while making observations, it is likely that the students we watched didn’t think it was weird we were watching them so they didn’t do any behaviors that were out of their norms. I think that some of the answers to the interview questions we asked may have been affected by the fact that we were interviewing friends and that it was for an assignment. It is likely that our friends wanted us to succeed in our project and may have answered the questions differently because of that. In some cases, I believe it may have been more beneficial to have interviewed strangers.

I believe that the most important data that I helped gather was found in the interview I recorded. My interview gave us the perspective of cell phone usage and how it impacts
friendships from a male perspective. The most interesting piece of data collected was that the male I interviewed did acknowledge that cell phone usage has become a problem but does not seem bothered by it. Shockingly, I found that my interviewee actually preferred the disconnect that cell phone usage was causing. He liked that people wouldn’t try to bother him because they were too busy with their cell phones. He seemed content with not trying to make friends therefore the overall problem had little to no effect on him. This information and data was all very interesting to our group because it showed us a different view on the topic that it turned out dealt with a gendered perspective as, until that point, the two females we had interviewed seemed more genuinely concerned with the problem while my interviewee was not bothered by it. Furthermore, my interviewee said he had lost his phone for a day and was perfectly fine while the females we interviewed said they would not be able to handle that.

Another great piece of data that I helped gather for the project came from my observations. Through my observations I noticed that, would people would not only use cell phones when they were sitting alone at tables, but also when they were in large groups. This showed us that not only are cell phones hindering the potential friendships from being formed but they could also be damaging to friendships that are already formed. It showed people may not be able to have more meaningful conversations or deeper relationships because they are constantly distracted by the devices in their hands. My observations also showed us that there may be a difference in age and how cell phones are used. The staff and older students who looked like they were over the age of thirty, would eat their lunches without constantly being on their cell phones like the younger students. If there was a group of older students or staff, they would all be engaged in a conversation rather than on their cell phones yet again.
I believe that our findings relate to two of the articles we read in class, “Talk in the Intimate Relationship: His and Hers” by Deborah Tannen and “Understanding Humans and Human Problems” by Aaron Podolefsky. Tannen’s article discusses the differences in the ways males and females communicate with each other and others. Our research caught a glimpse of this in the way males and females responded to the problem being caused by excessive cell phone usage. The reason females may be more disturbed by the damaging effects of cell phone usage is because according to the article, “they are more focused on involvement, that is, on relationships among people…” (Tannen). For Tannen, metamessages are the message we try to communicate “between the lines” of our actual words through body language, intonation, and other markers. Based on this article I believe that the females we interviewed could be reading more into the metamessages that people are sending out when they are constantly on their phones, such as they are less likely wanting engage in conversations, as opposed to the males who are less aware of this.

Yet another article this research relates to is that by Podolefsky in the introduction of our textbook which talks about how anthropology can be applied in life. The text mentions how cultural anthropology is now more focused on studying the culture of those in our own society which is exactly what my group did with this project (Podolefsky). In addition, the article discusses the idea of experiencing culture shock while doing an ethnography. While we were researching our own culture, I think we still all experienced a bit of a shock while conducting the research. Initially, we went into this knowing that people use their cell phones entirely too much but I don’t think we noticed how awful it looks from the outside. While doing some of my initial observations, I was shocked by how many people were on their cell phones at all times and seemed to be so closed off to those around them.
The most important findings in this project that I contributed to were the differences in gender and age in regards to their perception of the issue of cell phone usage. We found that males were aware of the issue but didn’t seem to be as concerned about it as females were even though females were the ones that typically used their cell phones more than the males. Through our research, we found that cell phones were in fact having negative impacts on the way students communicated with each other and on whether or not they were able to make friends here at Parkland. Future questions that could be asked about this subject would be ones that try to come up with a solution. Such as, how can we fix this, what it is about cell phones that makes them so addicting, why do people feel more comfortable when they have their cell phones, and what can we do as a society to make cell phones less harmful to the way we communicate.
Works Cited
