Diagnostic: Societal Forgetting

For a person who grew up in the 90’s, technology has never really been foreign to me. Whether it was television, telephones, or computers; I learned to master each by the turn of the century. However, with availability and access to these commodities came responsibilities. I could only watch certain shows, call my next-door neighbor at certain times, and most importantly; utilize the Internet with certain caution. In Jeffrey Rosen’s essay “The Importance of ‘Societal Forgetting,’” Rosen discusses his views on the causes and effects users of the world-wide Web create—with or without awareness. In modern day, information leaked on the Web has the ability to shatter a person’s reputation. Societal forgetting is valuable because of the need for forgiveness and the significance of community.

It is exceedingly difficult to imagine where any of us would be today without forgiveness at some point in our lives. Rosen proclaims, “The fact that the Internet never seems to forget is threatening…our ability to control our identities; to preserve the option of reinventing ourselves and starting anew; to overcome our checkered pasts,” (Rosen). For the majority of the populations in first world nations, this claim probably evokes the idea of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and various social networking websites that are widely popular and partially known for causing controversy. As members living in the digital age, we often fail to realize that our actions on the Internet cannot always be taken back. Even if a person deletes a post, picture, or video; anyone and everyone could have saved the material onto their own computers. Because of this uncontrollable force, the phrase ‘never hear the end of it’ unfortunately holds some validity. In order to forgive a person for his or her actions or words, the person or people offended cannot dwell on the wrong-doing, but instead; overlook the issue that brought about conflict. Stubbornly grasping onto ill-feelings will only stunt the growth and potential we have to live in better harmony.

Living in harmony—which may be seemingly impossible and oftentimes remarked as a cliché goal—is not a concept to undermine. In the U.S., freedom of speech is instilled in us from as early as elementary school, but cannot always justify our online actions. When a 25-year-old teacher gets in trouble for posting a photo of herself intoxicated, she soon learns her post is not protected speech. Although I disagree with the ruling from the federal district judge, I understand how an action in the public can cause a domino effect. I choose to practice safe Internet use by keeping my personal life personal, and public life private (in reference to the settings available on webpages). Without forgetting or forgiving, we as a community struggle to recognize that
faults are frequent and impermanent. Accepting differences, errors, and pasts is the key to moving forward, or ‘evolving’ as Rosen describes it.

Societal forgetting is valuable because of the need for forgiveness and significance of community. I would concur with Rosen’s views of our ‘global village’ because I believe in second chances and learning from mistakes. Although mistakes may be the best ways to learn lessons, our society should not stifle the opportunity to detach from poor choices. Instead, we should operate in a way of encouraging better decisions; not reminding our peers of regrets.