Do Walls Help or Harm?

There is a wall built within Facebook, e-mail, and even one’s cellphone, but do these modern technologies really hide everything a person wants hidden? There is really no way to hide everything uploaded or sent through social media. There is always a way to find information sent to someone, whether it is saved without a person’s knowledge or looked up through Google. Believe it or not, the same modern day issues faced today are reflected in American Literature. For example, in “Mending Wall,” Robert Frost discusses a false sense of security, the dangers of a wall, and the accompanying sinister feelings. The same concerns Frost had are amplified by modern day technology, and, not just any technology, but the technology most people use on a daily basis.

Frost’s life was not easy in the slightest. He moved a lot with his family. The sinister feelings expressed in “Mending Wall” come from the many deaths that happened earlier in his life. The deaths he experienced include his mother and two of his children: Elliot and Elinor (RESOURCES). Later on in his life, in addition to the deaths already experienced, his daughter Marjorie died, his wife Elinor died, and his son Carol committed suicide within a six year span (RESOURCES). He also moved around a lot during his life. So many deaths and moving around so much would take a damaging toll on anyone. Such negativity had a huge effect on his life. Soon after, “Frost die[d] on January 29, 1963 in a Boston hospital, following an operation” (RESOURCES).
To begin with, Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” creates a false sense of security. Frost writes, “The gaps I mean,/No one has seen them made or heard them made” (Frost 9-10). The gaps in the wall were made without anyone seeing or hearing. Neither neighbor realized there were holes in the wall until the spring mending-time. When the speaker would notice a stone being knocked down, he would fix it, but one can only fix something so quickly. A person would never know what may have slipped through the gap while the stone was missing. It was also hard to get the stones to stay in place where they were supposed to go without them falling. “We have to use a spell to make them balance” (Frost 18). The men would have to hope and pray that the fallen stones would stay in place and not fall back out later, letting unknown objects and/or people got through the wall.

In many ways, Facebook is just like “Mending Wall.” Facebook has a false sense of security. Gaps often appear in the wall without the two characters knowing how or why. The audience often doesn’t know the whole story when reading a status on Facebook. People often automatically judge different statuses on Facebook without knowing what others are going through. Just like people often build a wall between them and their neighbors, humans build walls in their mind because of Facebook. There are many ways to block people on Facebook, but does that really keep them from finding out? Once can block a person’s Facebook page, block individual people from an individual’s status, and also make Facebook private where people can’t even send a friend request. Individuals can always find a way around those attempts to hide one’s personal life though. People can ALWAYS find a way to see one’s Facebook! It can be looking at it through a mutual friend’s profile that is friends or googling. That wall was not mended very well…
Then again, a wall might be a good item to have in the future if anything ever happened. “Before I built a wall I’d ask how to know what I was walling [sic] in or walling out and to whom I was like to give offense” (Frost 32-34). Frost had a witty and crude sense of humor, and writes, “He is all pine and I am apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines” (Frost 24-26). He had a point… apple trees and pine trees have nothing in common. Do the two types of trees really have anything to do with the wall or is that just an excuse? Perhaps the neighbor is hiding information. People tend to hide private information from neighbors, family members, and even friends. The neighbor mentioned in “Mending Wall” could be hiding something from the narrator. Frost left the saying “Good fences make good neighbors” (Frost 45) as an open ended quote to get the readers to question their own relationships and secrets.

Another form of modern technology that can cause a lot trouble is email. When communicating with someone through email, there could be a misunderstanding of information or information not shared with others. When something is typed and not said in person, the person who received the email could read and interpret the content in a variety of ways. An example of information not shared with others would be if a person works for the government and was working on a top secret project. What would happen if they did not share information with fellow employees and it caused a horrible problem? This actually happened in the United States in 2001. “FBI agents were frantically trying to locate a suspected al Qaeda operative named Khalid al-Mihdhar. Toward the end of August, Steve Bongardt, who was working the criminal investigation of the USS Cole bombing, received an e-mail from one of the Bureau's intelligence officials; it mentioned that al-Mihdhar might have entered the United States. His curiosity piqued, Bongardt picked up the phone and asked his colleague to tell him more. What
he got was an order to delete the message; it was sent to him by accident [sic]” (Sales 1796). Khalid al-Mihdhar, the same man that the FBI was looking for, was one of the men who helped hijack the plane that flew into the Pentagon on September 11th. The government soon figured out that it might be a good idea to share their thoughts with one another. If more people in the national security office knew about the concerns of their fellow employees, there would have been a better chance of apprehending the criminal without that plane going through the Pentagon. If he was a part of that hijacking, he certainly knew more about the two planes that hit the twin towers. So many families would still have their loved ones and all of the destruction in New York City, New York could have been avoided. “…mass communication has been the presumption that media and their content have significant and substantial effects” (Perse 3). This statement in *Media Effects and Society* really puts the September 11th attacks in perspective when it comes to the feelings of the nation and families of the victims today.

At one point in Frost’s poem, he is describing his neighbor as someone evil. The narrator points this out to the reader when he says, “He moves in darkness as it seems to me,/Not of woods only and the shade of trees” (Frost 41-42). The image is almost of a man lurking in the shadows like he is hiding something from his neighbor. The sinister feelings that the narrator feels are mutual to many modern day feelings about neighbors. Maybe the sneaky neighbor on the other side of the wall is not all he is cracked up to be. What if the pine trees are just a ploy to hide something more menacing and evil? The apples present a happy go lucky presence, while the pine cones represent something dark and hurtful. Pine cones are not exactly delightful to the touch. They will poke with their very sharp points. The neighbor is the one who encourages to keep the wall up between the neighbors, which emits an uneasy feeling about him. One can’t help but sit and wonder what is so special or evil behind that wall.
Cell phones can cause sinister feelings between friends or family members. Once can put up a wall to friends by ignoring their text when they want to talk. If a person is ignored, he or she would begin to feel more like a burden than a friend. A person could also be mad at someone, causing sinister feelings toward them. Maybe the person being ignored would start talking behind the “friends” back or even post a cruel Facebook post. Not only can the simple fact of texting get a person in trouble, but there are so many apps that are easily loaded free on a person’s phone today. For example, Facebook and Twitter are two of those apps. Once can block someone on Facebook or Twitter and on a phone without that person even knowing. But, that builds a huge wall in a supposed friendship.

After reading “Mending Wall,” it is obvious the poem is about building a wall or creating a barrier of some type, and there could be multiple reasons that the neighbor in the poem wants to keep the wall up. However, the wall leads to a false sense of security, miscommunication or misinformation that can result in negative or fatal situations, and sinister feelings yielding unhappiness. Modern technologies and their obsessive usage, from Facebook to cell phones, perfectly demonstrate the dangers of constructing and putting trust in such walls. Instead, cultivate a private and professional persona every day and look for the good, strive to express, and be a neighbor to all.
Works Cited


