

On Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives

Interview with Dr. Zur by Dr. Bob Phillips

- Bob Phillips: Hello again everyone, I'm Dr. Bob Phillips. Welcome to Coping Conversations. My guest today is Dr. Ofer Zur, a licensed psychologist, lecturer, ethics consultant, and expert witness in private psychotherapy practice in Sonoma, California. We have a fascinating topic to discuss today, one of Dr. Zur's areas of expertise, which we can call The Crisis of the Digital Divide in the Family. Ofer, welcome to the show.
- Ofer Zur: Thank you, Bob, for having me. It is indeed the most exciting topic of our time. It's a crisis not only in the family. It's a crisis in the Middle East and maybe, who knows, maybe in China and other places soon, too. Crisis, not only in the family but the workplace. In the educational system. You choose kind of which crisis, but it's all tied to the Digital Divide, in some way or another.
- Bob Phillips: Let's start by talking about what you are referring to when you talk about the Digital Divide.
- Ofer Zur: That's a good place to start. The Digital Divide refers to what we call the differences between digital immigrants and digital natives. I don't know how old you are but you sound like a digital immigrant. That means that you and I were not born into technology. At two years old, we did not program the VCRs. Definitely, we didn't play with iPhone or an iPad or with a computer game at age two, three, four, five, six, or even fifteen or eighteen. We had to immigrate into this digital land. Some of us immigrated with more enthusiasm. Some of us immigrated with more reluctance.
- Unlike us, the younger generation was born into that. While some of them are more excited about it or less excited about it. All of them, or almost all of them, have Facebook profiles and this is how they connect with their friends and text, rather than we kind of prefer to do, by phone. The differences are generational but we also have a way of how we communicate, how we socialize. What is a sense of gain? How do we define our community and do we multi-task? The differences are enormous with the way we kind of see the world, in some regard, and live our lives.
- Bob Phillips: We're talking with Dr. Ofer Zur. Why is this such a crisis? Now we're not talking about the Middle East or China, whatever. Why is the Digital Divide, the difference between digital immigrants and digital natives, such a crisis?
- Ofer Zur: You know, I came back from my writing shack yesterday, at 4 o' clock and my fifteen year old is on his Facebook profile, on his laptop. He's watching NBA on the television. He is texting nonstop, up there in his profile. Every now and then he shows me a YouTube or NBA, on YouTube, or on the computer. He does homework

at the same time. He has the capacity to hop from task to task and to multi-task. When parents see this kind of things, they just often freak out and start yelling and nagging and threatening and all this stuff. Now the kids have not only to do Facebook and watch YouTube and text. They have to listen to the parents nagging and threatening.

The parents don't understand that this is, the kids can indeed complete their homework, they indeed retain information, even though they hop and multi-task. They have different brains than we are. We created a crisis of parents not understanding how the young one functions in these capacities. We yell and scream, as parents, and the kids feel more alienated. They shut us off more and go even deeper into the Facebook and text and YouTube. This creates a rift.

Parents come with a lot of fear, "Oh you are addicted. You're ADHD." We see all these labels coming around, which primarily comes from fear and ignorance. We don't see the parents really joining the kids and understanding what is the orientation? What appeals to them? We see a rift within the family along this line of the Digital Divide, that creates a lot of tension and alienation, due to misunderstanding and ignorance.

Bob Phillips:

What you're saying in a way is that the immigrants, people of an older generation, they were used to being goal-directed by one set of tasks. You study for a test and that's it. They prepare a paper and that's it. If they wanted to succeed, they had to follow that one set of tasks. Now, we see the digital natives who basically can multi-task with the best of them, and the Digital Divide, the whole digital era, has not been around so long that we can really predict accurately what the outcome is going to be.

Whether or not this generation, the native generation, is going to grow to be as successful, hopefully, as the immigrant generation. So the parents get scared. They start questioning, "Is this the right way? It should be done some other way." Of course, kids don't know any different so they just argue with the parents.

Ofer Zur:

Beautifully, you said when the kids don't know the difference. Let me kind of clarify some items. The kids don't multi-task. Multi-task is, for example, now, I'm talking to you and I'm pacing here in my study. This is multi-task. What the kids are doing is, what we call, is "Task-switching" or hopping. The brain has capacities that your brain and my brain cannot hop that fast as our kids. So they're not really multi-tasking. They are hopping, or task-switching, and they have a brain that got trained to do it, from one or two years old.

As we know, with the newest research about brain plasticity, the brain can change and adapt in a fantastic way. We start getting the physiological indication that they have different brains, in some regard. First, we need to understand that they have capacities, that, while we cannot do it, they may. To the second point, about success; it's a different world. Success for them will have a different format than it was for us. They are not going to read the fifty greatest novels. You and I grew with

Dostoyevsky, I don't know where you grew up, but I do read all these long Russian novels back to back. They don't read. They read a paragraph at a time. They're going to be oriented towards movies and videos rather than books. They are not going to read back to back.

You know, when the print press came in the fourteenth century, everybody freaked out. "Nobody will listen to anybody anymore. The oral tradition is dead." It's true. That the print, and fourteenth century and on. We had books thereafter and all this change. The way humans were creative and communicated with each other in the oral tradition indeed changed drastically as well. The reading is going to change right now. If it's bad, I'm not sure. They are going to be successful within their world. They don't need to be successful within our world.

Bob Phillips: We're talking with Dr. Ofer Zur. What do you see as the next thing that going to happen, if you continue this continuum, so to speak, from the point of view where, let's say, print was important and now where print is less important and the digital era becomes more important? What's going to happen next?

Ofer Zur: Oh my goodness, you know, this is a fantastic question! I'm working so hard to catch up with the daily news, that there is nowhere ... My sense, if I really tried to be futuristic, it would be that our brain and the machines will connect in a more fluid way. That it would be able to work on the computer with our sight, and who knows, maybe with our thinking.

This isn't the next big, big step, if you're asking me. It is just me, kind of being speculative, right now. There is so much to catch. We didn't know about iPhones a couple of years ago. We didn't know about iPads a year ago. It's continued to change in front of us. We didn't know that the revolution in the Middle East can happen due to Twitter.

Bob Phillips: I think what happens of course is that the digital immigrants become more and more fearful of what's going to happen next, whereas the digital natives become more and more excited.

Ofer Zur: It's true, but we need to make sure that the ... as my recent article, that perhaps we can just tell the audience they can find it at www.zurinstitute.com and go to article, again zurinstitute.com. Very simple, zurinstitute.com. My recent article with my daughter is, emphasizes, it's not all digital immigrants are created equal. We have to remember Bill Gates is an immigrant. But he is an enthusiastic adopter. And he is ... so there are some reluctant, some enthusiastic adopters, and there's some experts.

Some of us are excited, as you can hear it in my voice. Anthropologically, I am very fascinated with what is happening, and my wife isn't; she's reluctant. She checks her emails, if we are lucky, every two, three days. She doesn't have a Facebook profile. So we see a lot of immigrants that are reluctant. Even in most digital natives there is some differentiation. Even though most of them are tech savvy, they may

not like it. The difference is how much they're going to spend time online or not or where they're going to spend time online. There is some ... even digital natives are not all created equal.

Bob Phillips: Ofer, what are your suggestions, as to how parents and children can better work together on this whole critical Digital Divide?

Ofer Zur: I think that the first step is for parents to become more curious and less fearful and judgmental. This will be one of the first steps. If you are concerned about cyber bullying and porn and into gaming addiction; these are valid concerns. You are not going to get your way by yelling. Get an account, and go play Second Life with your child. Go and play World of Warcraft with your child. They'll make fun of you because you, probably like me, are completely inept and clueless and clumsy. It's so you play with them. Walk into the world and don't criticize what they put on Facebook. Educate them. Use, of course, parental controls when the kids are very young with the issue of violence and pornography. Watch for cyber bullying.

But come from place of knowledge and curiosity and care, rather than fear that goes to judgment and punishment very fast and you'll lose your child in the process.

Bob Phillips: Very good suggestions. Dr. Ofer Zur, thanks so much for joining me on the show.

Ofer Zur: More than welcome, truly my pleasure.

Bob Phillips: Thanks for all of you for joining us on this episode of Coping Conversations. This is Dr. Bob Phillips, reminding you that no matter what problem you may face, you can always improve the quality of your life. So long for now