When the Sauce from the Cupboard Just Doesn’t Cut It:

An Examination of my Data Literacy and my Plan to Improve

By Amanda Weikel

 Dieting has always been a word seldom used in my vocabulary, because I have a consistent history of failing at the process. I always would say that it was too hard and run for the nachos at top speed. In recent years I have taken a new approach to my attempts at dieting, without even noticing it was happening. I seem to now have the tendency to simply not eat when I diet. I find that searching, filtering, creating, and synthesizing a proper diet, is too daunting of a task.

 In *The Information Diet* by Clay Johnson, he writes, “fasting is not dieting…It’s good to disconnect-everybody needs a vacation. But unplugging, ‘Internet sabbaticals,’ ‘social media vacations’, and ‘email bankruptcies’ are all ways to avoid the real problems: our own bad habits” (Johnson 76). This is the quote that struck me the hardest in the entire text, because it was exactly what I had been doing in both my food diet and my information diet.

 What I also realized was that when I thought I was avoiding the news and information, I really wasn’t. When I chose to not look up news or the political race I go to Netflix, YouTube, or my own movie collection. This media is information, but it is the sugar of information. These information outputs have very little if any educational value with the exception of the rare documentary; which I would consider the a chocolate covered fruit due to the informational/nutritional aspects of a documentary is covered in the entertainment/sugary coating.

 As I discussed in earlier assignments, I am very careful where I get my facts from and will avoid media that I feel tells a twisted or false version of the story. The problem with this approach is that I have never mastered the search and filtering aspects of my information diet. When I want to find an article on something I tend to go to my specific sources to search; and unless I am looking for a quick definition that search rarely includes google, bing, or other popular search engines. So it’s the equivalent of me saying that I want pasta sauce so I grab the same old sauce from my cupboard, instead of going to the grocery store and browsing the sauce aisle. Google is the grocery store of any good information diet. Because I never really mastered the search aspect of my information diet that then means that I have very little practice with the filter aspect of my information diet. I do know enough that if I were to search in google to avoid the general search and filter it down to news, or journals if I am looking up something specific.

 Before I can start to create and synthesize data I must first fix my search and filter habits. My plan for that is to continue visiting my main sources (*New York Times, Boston Globe, Publisher’s Weekly,* etc.) but I will also start using Google search in order to expand my sources while still avoiding he general search. In order to avoid reverting to Netflix all the time I plan on using the the Pocket app in order to try and read more news. I also will utilize TED more in order to give me the same kind of audio and visual stimulation that Netflix does but with better content.

 Once I keep up with the above goals I hope to become a better creator of data in the same way that I am hoping to improve my cooking skills; by taking the new information I garner from the above techniques and letting it add to, but not control, my own opinion and thus my contribution. I took the opportunity to look over the data that I have already contributed, and while there are a couple worthwhile pieces, most of it is less than intelligent. I am hoping to change that by completing and continuing ElegantOrchidPhoto.com, the world can always use some more beauty and photos are a great way to do this, and in the next year developing a new ePortfolio at AmandaWeikel.com. I am hoping that I can take the elements of my old portfolio I liked, the organization, the variety, and the ease of use, and build on those to produce a well-organized but continuously growing ePortfolio/blog, but that is a project for a little later in life.

 The only distraction that I might encounter, besides Netflix, is social media. Social Media is an unavoidable beast most days, and the way that I plan on limiting this distraction is to only go on the websites when I have something productive to add. This will limit the number of times I check the social media websites while also helping me add to the creating part of my data diet. I also hope that the interconnectivity of social media and other forms of data will help me synthesize the information that I contribute with existing information.