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Humans are creatures that rely heavily on all types of communication, verbal and nonverbal, to establish meaning and generate a shared understanding. Through the combination of a common system of gestures or behaviors and the creation of languages and alphabets, we've learned to exchange information and ideas as a basic function and necessity of day-to-day life.

Since the rise of the age of technology, humans have strived to maximize the methods and channels of communication, producing more and more communications technologies, making it possible to locate a person anytime, anywhere, with just a few pushes of a button. With the invention of the Internet came chat rooms, instant messaging and electronic mail, or e-mail. Cellular phones opened up a new world of opportunities, making it easier than ever to connect with friends and family. Maturation of mobile instruments made it possible to seamlessly integrate the best of both technological worlds, and thus the phenomenon that is short message service (SMS), better known as text messaging, was born.

There is no denying that user-friendly phone and wireless capabilities have proven to be beneficial in many ways, including a more interconnected social network, more ways to maintain familial relations, as well as expanded businesses, and business opportunities, in unforeseen ways. These pocket-sized devices have given younger generations instant access to groups, cultures, and information from all over the globe. And the act of making those connections has formed an international community and built collective intelligence. Mobile technology has had such a profound impact on society in that it has rapidly become the most preferred way to stay connected.

However, could the constant need to rely on a third party form a communication, which essentially serves as both a physical and virtual barrier, be detrimental to not only relationships, but also developmental social skills? In our efforts to optimize our, we've compromised the quality and social competence necessary for face-to-face communication, and the more these technologies are overused, the more absurd their use becomes.

Before I explore how we as a society have reached a point where negative social-psycho behaviors have become acceptable, it is important to review the root of the problem. I don't believe that one factor or entity can be pinpointed as the cause, but rather a combination of forces acted as a catalyst. The development of the Internet influenced the development of mobile technology, and vice versa, creating a new set of societal norms. Understanding the functionality of the Internet may help explain why generations of people who grew up using it find comfort in communication through an electronic third party mediator.

The Internet was first introduced to the public in XXXX, but did not gain popularity and much of a household presence until XXXX.

In its most simple form, the Internet is a worldwide, publicly accessible series of interconnected computer networks, or a network of networks. These sub-connections are comprised of millions of smaller domestic, academic, business and government networks that contain various information and services. Essentially, the Internet is one of the greatest facilitators of modern communication (CITATION NEEDED).

The most common uses of the Internet include, e-mail, online chat, file transfer and the World Wide Web. And albeit each of these services contributes to the ways in which today's society interacts, the more important functions to focus on are e-mail and instant messaging or chat.

E-mail actually predates the Internet, but was a critical element in its evolution. Although e-mail has changed the face of enterprise, providing an almost immediate way to connect individuals

who are in different geographical locations, as well as giving the participant a decision on when and how they will process the information, there are some downsides. E-mail has a sense of ease and impersonality because there is not a real, direct interaction between sender and receiver. This can cause a loss of context and understanding, and a disregard for traditional social behaviors. The computer acts as a barrier, protecting the sender from the repercussions of their actions, and therefore a certain level of comfort is formed, reinforcing the social- psycho crutch.

Instant messaging and online chat rooms are technologies that facilitate near real-time text based communication between two or more participants over a network. This differs from e-mail in that there is a much greater perception of a synchronous experience like face-to-face communication. However, chat rooms offer anonymity, making it effortless, and anxiety-free, for users to communicate their ideas through the use of a third party without having to deal with potentially being embarrassed.

Having grown up with the Internet (I got my first screen name at 11), one of the main ways I communicated with friends was through instant messages or group chats. I found it easier to “talk” with a person that was intimidating (they maintained a higher position on the social ladder) in person, forming bonds, and essentially building a digital buddy list. I was able to say things to a boy I liked because I felt safe knowing that I wouldn’t have to look him in the eyes. And over the years, that feeling of safety manifested itself in certain social behaviors that I expressed only online. With a screen in front of my face, my inhibitions went out the window, and I would catch myself saying overtly sexual comments that I would never have said out loud, to someone else, ever. I communicate online very differently than I do in person, and in a lot of ways I still feel safer saying things online. When I have serious, face-to-face conversations, I’m very aware of my physical being, and how awkward I feel about having someone see my own social ineptness, whether I fidget, my cheeks get flush, or I avoid eye contact altogether.

And then I got a cell phone.

In less than twenty years, the mobile phone has transformed from being a rare electronic instruments reserved for the business elite to an essential, relatively low-cost personal necessity. In many countries, mobile phones outnumber land-line phones; in the U.S., 50 percent of children have mobile phones. And, many young adults have adapted cell phones instead of a land-line phone. Because there is a high level of societal mobile phone service penetration, it is a key means for people to communicate with each other, with 1.8 billion users generating \$80 billion of revenue in 2006 (CITATION). Phones have become an extension of their owner, to the point where people will customize the appearance of their phone to reflect their personality.

As the Internet rapidly grew as a social connector, and advancements were made in mobile technologies, it was only a matter of time before gadgets such as the smartphone were introduced. Through the creation of certain behaviors and patterns of use, the smartphone took the most popular functions of a cell phone and combined it with a computer, making it possible to access the Internet from your phone. However the growth and development of these technologies lead to an increase in asynchronous communication, causing a shift in the ways in which people are comfortable and accustomed to conversing.

Although the merging of these two technologies has made it XXXX, currently, texting is the most widely-used data service. SMS is a communications protocol allowing the interchange of short text messages between mobile telephone devices—facilitating the development and growth of text messaging. It is often referred to as text messaging, but actually, SMS is the underlying technology that enabled text messaging. And, although SMS has been available since 1987, it was not until mobile phones became popular and accessible that the younger generations adopted this form of communication (CITATION).

Personally, I think texting is a convenient way to have a conversation without having to invest too much attention. Texting allows for multi-tasking, so that I can text friends while doing homework

or watching TV, and I can text several people at once or have several text conversations at the same time. And, I'm not the only one taking advantage of the informality and ease of communication that texting delivers.

The wireless community is continuing to grow on a daily basis. According to the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association, CTIA, in the first 6 months of 2006, the wireless industry added approximately 63,000 new subscribers per day. There are more than 2.3 billion mobile subscribers worldwide, with 255.4 million wireless subscribers in America. That means that 84 percent of total U.S. population owns a cell phone. 99 percent of Americans are now living in counties in which next generation wireless services are available, and 94 percent live in counties with four or more wireless service providers. In December of 2007, 48.1 billion SMS messages were sent, as compared to 9.8 billion in December of 2005 (CITATION).

Roughly 60 percent of American teenagers own a cell phone, and spend an average of an hour a day talking on them--about the same amount of time the average teenager spends doing homework. Market research suggests that 54 percent of 8-12 year olds will have cell phones within the next three years. A study done by the Center on Media and Child Health in 2005 found that 37 percent of teens felt they wouldn't be able to live without a cell phone, allowing the dependency on calls and text messages to interfere with their daily schedules (CITATION).

Another study of high school students found that the top third of users--students who used their phones more than 90 times a day--frequently did so because they were unhappy or bored (CITATION). What's more alarming than the fact that there is significant statistical evidence that there is an emotional impact of teens' cell phone habits, is the fact that the article refers to the group that uses their cell phone only 70 times a day as "sedate."

And that use is mostly text messaging. 72 percent of teens claim that text messaging is the most useful feature on their phone, and 54 percent of 13-34 year olds use text messaging in particular for social networking (CITATION). 90 percent of teenagers claim to text more than they talk on their phones (CITATION). Research indicates that this reliance on text messaging supplies teens with a social validation and sense of worth. In fact, texting has become a global phenomenon. It has become a part of the culture, and its influences on mainstream media can be seen in everything from TV commercials to dating books strictly based on proper text messaging etiquette for various types of relationships.

What does all of this mean?

From the research, it's clear that the teen demographic is the largest population of text message users among cell phone users. This may be dangerous because many teens are turning to these devices as substitutes for face-to-face communication, causing potential social and psychological issues. The fact that teens consider the number of messages in their inbox a valid indicator of their self-worth may play into why teens rely on texting as a "safe" way of communicating. Because texting eliminates the face-to-face aspect of communication it enables teens to avoid developing certain necessary social skills. If a person feels his or her likelihood of being rejected for a date is high, there is a better chance he or she will ask through a text rather than a higher risk way, such as in person (CITATION). But, rejection is a part of life, and something that people have to learn to deal with sooner or later for several reasons.

This shift in the ways that the younger generations are communicating is changing societal norms, but not necessarily for the better. Refining face-to-face communicatory skills is essential for forming and maintaining adult relationships, both personal and professional, as well as every day social interactions.

Text messaging is a culture all its own, with rules of etiquette and a language; a language that is affecting linguistics. Teens are now using text messaging language in their written homework, i.e. putting a U instead of Y-O-U. Although, this change is not as damaging as other effects because

language has traditionally changed with the culture, where the vernacular reflects the social atmosphere.

A.

II. The social and psychological effects of text messaging (Reid & Reid)

A. Little is known about the psychological impact of texting on social interaction amongst regular users, nor on the long-term consequences of texting on the development and maintenance of these relationships.

B. There are two types of teenage phone users: Talkers and Texters (approx. half and half)

1. For a significant number of users, sending a text message may be more important for building and maintaining social relationships than for coordinating practical arrangements
2. The combination of the sociability of the chat room, coupled with the psychological distance of electronic mail, lends texting a special, but paradoxical, appeal to a significant number of users.

a) Improved the lives of some users, particularly those who experienced difficulties with face-to-face communication

b) Lack of personal information such as appearance would allow greater freedom of self-expression, and nurture relationships that may not otherwise have happened.

c) Lonely and socially anxious people were better able to express themselves and create or get close to a version of the "real self." (typically character traits of Texters)

C. Text messaging provides an opportunity for intimate personal contact whilst at the same time offering the detachment necessary to manage self presentation and involvement. The Texters who capitalized on the social environment created by texting to form and manage close personal relationships.

D. In terms of real-self expression, the majority of Talkers and Texters preferred face-to-face communication. Essentially, the Texters preferred to use text messaging as a way of forming and maintaining relationships, but chose to do so because of their own awkward social tendencies and lack of certain social skills.

III. Although it is great that text messaging provides teens an outlet to express themselves without having to face the terrors of rejection or the possible humiliation that may come along with face-to-face communication, they are doing themselves a great disservice.

A. Necessary reasons for gaining and building certain social skills

B. Making mistakes is how individuals grow both emotionally and psychologically

C. If, and how will this change the way future generations communicate?

IV. Reflection and Wrap-up

A. Children and teens use technology as a way of avoiding face-to-face communication for various reasons, such as fear of rejection or discomfort in social settings. By allowing these damaging social behaviors to exist, society is reinforcing destructive psychological and societal norms that may be harmful to the ways in which humans form and maintain relationships.

B. I believe that a decreasing amount of face-to-face, one-on-one, human-to-human contact will have a negative impact on the quality of life for future generations.

Resource List so far (not in MLA style or alphabetical order)

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS>

2. 100 wireless facts, <http://www.ctia.org/content/index.cfm/AID/10377>, Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association (CTIA)

3. Kasallis, Theresa, Text Messaging Affects Student Relationships, <http://newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/60307>, July 5, 2006
4. Kornblum, Janet, Tapping Into Text Messaging, http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2003-06-02-text-me-main_x.htm, June 2, 2003
5. Linguists Mixed on Effects of Text Messaging, http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2003-02-14-messaging-linguists_x.htm, February 14, 2003
6. Reid, Donna & Fraser Reid, Insights into the Social and Psychological Effects of SMS Text Messaging, <http://www.160characters.org/documents/SocialEffectsOfTextMessaging.pdf>, University of Plymouth, February 2004

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<http://www.cmch.tv/mentors/hotTopic.asp?id=70>

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/05/24/MNGVKJ12341.DTL>