



RESEARCHERS WORRY AS TEENS GROW UP ON-LINE

¹Teens don't understand the big fuss. As the first generation to grow up in a wired world, they hardly know a time when computers weren't around and they leap at the chance to spend hours on-line, chatting with friends. So what?

²But researchers are increasingly concerned that, as cyberspace replaces the pizza parlor as the local hangout, adolescents are becoming more isolated, less skillful at interpersonal relationships, and perhaps numb to the small - and big - deceptions that are so much a part of the e-mail world. Researchers are asking just how the future of teenagers is changed when so many of them are spending an hour or two on the Internet each day, replacing face-to-face contact with computer contact.

³"We're not only looking at what the computer can do for us, but what it is doing to us," said sociologist Sherry Turkle. "It's on so many people's minds." She wants to know how a teen's sense of self and values may be altered in a world where personal connections and the creation of new identities can be limitless.

⁴Social psychologist Robert Kraut said he's concerned about the "opportunity costs" of so much on-line time for youths. He found that teens who used computers, even just a few hours a week, showed increased signs of loneliness and social isolation. In his study of 100 families that use the Internet, Kraut said these teens reported having fewer friends to hang around with, possibly because their computer time replaced hours they would have spent with others. "Chatting on-line may be better than watching television, but it's worse than hanging out with real friends," he said.

⁵Today's teens, however, don't see anything strange in the fact that the computer screen occupies a central place in their social lives. "School is stressful and busy. There's almost no time to just hang out" said Parker Rice, 17. "Talking online is just catch-up time".

⁶ Many teens acknowledge there's an unreal quality to their cyberspace communication, including their odd shorthand terms such as POS (parent over shoulder) or LOL (laughing out loud). Psychologists see this code as part of the exclusive shared language that teenagers love.

⁷When it comes to e-mail exchanges teens also show a remarkable tolerance for each other's deceptions. Nor are they surprised when a mere acquaintance unloads a personal



secret through e-mail. Nobody seems to expect the on-line world to be the same as the real world.

⁸Teens say they also appreciate the ability to edit what they say on-line, or take the time to think about a response. As cowardly as it may seem, some teens admit that asking someone for a date, or breaking up, can be easier in message form. But they insist there's no harm intended, and cyberspace has become just another medium – like the telephone – in the world of adolescence.

Adapted from The Boston Globe. RICHARDS, J. C. & ECKSTUT-DIDIER, S. Strategic Reading 3. Cambridge: CUP, 2003, p. 38. (Adapted)

GUESSING MEANING FROM CONTEXT

A. Find the words in italics in the reading. Then match each word with its meaning.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. isolated (par. 2) | |
| _____ 2. adept (par. 2) | a. written with abbreviations and symbols |
| _____ 3. numb to (par. 2) | b. talk about a problem |
| _____ 4. shorthand (par. 6) | c. separated and alone |
| _____ 5. fudge (par. 7) | d. not concerned or bothered by |
| _____ 6. unload (par. 7) | e. skillful |
| _____ 7. put off (par. 7) | f. concerned or bothered |
| | g. a dishonest statement |

MAKING INFERENCES

B. Mark each statement Researcher's opinion (R) or Teenager's opinion (T).

- _____ 1. Spending a lot of time online affects teenagers' ability to form relationships.
- _____ 2. Teens who use computers to chat, spend less time with friends.
- _____ 3. There's nothing wrong with teens spending hours online.
- _____ 4. Every hour that teens are online is one hour less they could spend with a friend.
- _____ 5. The internet provides a way to keep in touch with friends.
- _____ 6. It's all right for people not to be completely honest when they are online.
- _____ 7. Communicating online allows more time to think about what to say.
- _____ 8. Teens might be developing a different sense of what's right and wrong.