

PASSAGE 4: RESEARCHERS WORRY AS TEENS GROW UP ONLINE

1 Teens 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 online, chatting with friends. So what?

2 But researchers nationwide are increasingly concerned that, as cyberspace replaces the pizza parlor as the local hangout, adolescents are becoming more isolated, less adept 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 futures of teenagers are changed when so many of them are spending an hour or two on the Internet each day, replacing fact-to-face contact with computer contact.

3 "We are not only looking at what the computer can do for us, but what are they doing to us," said sociologist Sherry Turkle. "It's 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.

4 Social psychologist Robert Kraut said he's concerned about the "opportunity costs" of so much online 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 online may be better than watching television, but it is worse than hanging out with real friends," he said.

5 Today'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 is almost no time to just hang out," said Parker Rice, 17. "Talking online is just catch-up time."

6 Many teens acknowledge there is 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.

7 When it comes to e-mail exchanges, teens also show a remarkable tolerance for each other's fudges or deceptions. Nor are they surprised when a mere acquaintance unloads a personal secret through e-mail. Nobody seems to expect the online world to be the same as the real world. Jonathan Reis, 14, did not seem the least bit put off when he learned that a girl was not totally honest when she described herself online. "I know it's likely they will say they look better than they do," he said.

8 Teens say they also appreciate the ability to edit what they say online, 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 is no harm intended, and cyberspace has become just another medium—like the telephone—in the world of adolescence.

Comprehension

A. Match terms with their corresponding definitions

Terms	Definitions
Isolated ()	a. written with abbreviations and symbols
Adept ()	b. talk about a problem
Numb to ()	c. separated and alone
Fudge ()	d. not concerned or bothered by
Unload ()	e. skillful
Put off ()	f. concerned or bothered
Shorthand ()	g. a dishonest statement

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 to spend less time with time.

_____ 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.