

ARTIFACTS

A Journal of Undergraduate Writing

Texting: The New Form of Communication; Actually, the New Form of Everything

Alexis Onanian

MOS, PAW, PIR, and POS: any guesses as to what these combinations of letters are used for? If the guess has to do with something along the lines of crazy government acronyms to keep outsiders oblivious to the inner workings of the government, well that is actually close to the real answer with one small change. These letters are not meant to block out spies or traitors to the country but rather a much less threatening group of people: parents. The acronyms MOS (mom over shoulder), PAW (parents are watching), PIR (parents in room), and POS (parents over shoulder) are used frequently among teenagers to quickly and covertly tell a friend that parents are in the room.

Instant messaging and text messaging have become vastly popular in recent years as a way for members of the younger generation to communicate with each other while avoiding actually opening their mouths. There has been much debate recently about the pros, cons, and everything in between for this subject. It has even sparked national attention in the form of articles published by two major media outlets. *r u online?: The Evolving Lexicon of Wired Teens* by Kris Axtman published in *The Christian Science Monitor* (and reprinted in Gary Goshgarians *Exploring Language*) and *Text Generation Gap: U R 2 Old (JK)* by Laura Holson published in *The New York Times* show the phenomenon of texting from two different viewpoints.

While *The Christian Science Monitor* looks at texting from a teachers point of view and *The New York Times* attempts to grasp the parents point of view, both bring important information to light about the growing fad of Generation IM (instant messaging), but neither of these articles address the view of the generation they are scrutinizing in depth. The teenagers perspective is the most crucial component in this debate and without it a drastic misunderstanding of texting results.

Kris Axtman, author of *r u online?: The Evolving Lexicon of Wired Teens* focuses her argument about instant messaging around two main ideas. One idea is that Net lingo as she calls it is slowly destroying the beauty of the English language. In her article, she uses teachers as her main defense to this claim. Many feel the more that teens use the abbreviations so common to text and instant messages the more they will eventually seep into their school work as well as their chatter with adults who have no idea what LOL (laughing out loud), OMG (oh my gosh), or IDK (I dont know) mean. Still, one teacher points out her observation on teens improved ability to multitask. This apparent pro however does have some who see it as a negative: Because of the internet, experts say, kids today are able to multitask like no other generation. But with frenetic multitasking, others say, comes easy distraction and the shrinking of already-short attention spans (Axtman 2).

This statement is strengthened by the following paragraph that describes a typical night of a teenager, Garret. Garret manages his homework while surfing the net, talking on the phone, and engaging in upwards of ten separate instant message conversations at the same time. With so much going on at once, he has no need to focus on one particular aspect for longer than a few seconds, in fact, if he does, the careful balance he has created between the numerous tasks will crumble. Axtmans article addresses the viewpoint of Garrets mother only once throughout the article. In her article, Axtman explains the only real advantage in instant messaging that Garrets mother has discovered. She has noticed her oldest son, whos normally quite shy around girls, feels more comfortable talking to them online a positive, she thinks (Axtman 2). While in this article the view of parents is not addressed in detail, Laura Holson focuses almost entirely on parents perceptions of the new phenomenon.

Text Generation Gap: U R 2 Old (JK) by Laura Holson focuses on a different aspect of the evolving use of text messaging to communicate than the article by Kris Axtman. Her article opens with a scene that is becoming more and more common among households. Russell Hampton, father of a fourteen-year-old girl was driving her and two of her friends to see a play in Los Angeles when the conversation in the backseat of the car suddenly stopped. When Hampton asked his daughter why her and friends suddenly got so quite except for the clicking of a phones key pad her reply was, But, Dad, we're texting each other, she replied with a harrumph. I dont want you to hear what Im saying (Holson). While this scene shows the negative of text messaging for parents, Holson is quick to point out the one advantage text messaging has had on parent-teen relationships. She explains how college students in particular use texting as a quick, easy way to keep in touch with parents from hundreds of miles away. The final point brought up by Holson is again a negative. She tells of cell phones distracting from family time such as dinner, family movies, or family vacations.

One proponent of texting, Ms. Turkle, mother of a daughter in her teens, had particular trouble with this last example of family interference. Holson tells the story of Ms. Turkle's trip to Paris with her daughter: Ms. Turkle recalled a vacation with her daughter in Paris, where she hoped to immerse her in the local culture and cuisine. Part of the idea of Paris is being in Paris, Ms. Turkle said. But during an afternoon stroll, her daughter received several calls and text messages on her cellphone from friends back in Boston. Her daughter, she said, felt compelled to return every one (Holson). This example proves exactly how texting has invaded every corner of teenagers lives, and, as a result, invaded the lives of parents, siblings and other relatives.

In both of these presentations on the topic of texting/instant messaging, one important aspect is drastically overlooked: the teenagers perspective. Both of these articles work well together to show the more negative aspects of this new trend. Unfortunately, since these articles were written by members of a generation unfamiliar to such forms of communication, the many positive effects texting has had on teens are left unaccounted for. Even the attempts to show positives, such as improved multitasking skills are coupled with negatives. Nothing is mentioned concerning increased relationships among teens and their friends due to the convenience and speed of text and instant messaging. It is now possible to know what friends are doing just by typing a quick message.

Neither of these articles bothers to point out the kind of creativity and thought put into creating an entirely new cyber language. Not only did youngsters create this language, but they spread it like wildfire throughout the country. A teenager from Queens can talk to an acquaintance in rural Alabama using any combination of established instant messaging acronyms and know exactly what the other one is saying. Instant messaging also allows for teenagers to communicate with friends they have moved away from.

After I moved from Missouri to Alabama, the most convenient way to communicate with old friends was instant messaging. I could talk to several friends at once without having to run up the phone bill with long-distance calling, a pro my mother greatly appreciated; however, neither article addressed these points. The reasoning for the exclusion of the teenage perspective is unknown; however, without it a crucial piece of the debate is missing.

The effects of this new form of technology on society as a whole are still slightly unknown due to its recent explosion into the mainstream. One certainty however is it will only increase in popularity in the coming years. This is evident based on the national attention it is receiving from the articles such as *r u online?: The Evolving Lexicon of Wired Teens and Text Generation Gap: U R 2 Old (JK).*" These articles display several different negatives that can be seen in the text and instant message rage that has swept across teenage America. While the authors, Kris Axtman and Laura Holson, reach several valid conclusions, without the input of the teenagers who utilize this technology, there is a significant gap in understanding. This is especially true for members of a generation in which cell phones, text messaging included, were nonexistent during teenage years. Yet, some parents do try to get in touch with the new fad of texting, all the while hoping that the good outweighs the bad.

Alexis Onanian is a sophomore currently pursuing a degree in nursing with a minor in psychology. She plans on earning a Masters degree in pediatric nursing and working somewhere in the Midwest, probably St. Louis or Chicago. Throughout the school year, she volunteers at University Hospital on the pediatric floor.

Part of Issue 1, published in Summer 2008

Topics: Technology

About *Artifacts*

Artifacts is a refereed journal of undergraduate work in writing at The University of Missouri. The journal celebrates writing in all its forms by inviting student authors to submit projects composed across different genres and media.

Artifacts is sponsored by [The Campus Writing Program](#).

Published by the Campus Writing Program.

Copyright © 2014 — Curators of the [University of Missouri](#). All rights reserved. [DMCA](#) and [other copyright information](#). An [equal opportunity / affirmative action](#) institution.