

Devolution of human
communication
through technology:
an analysis of the
society ...



M. T. Anderson's *Feed* offers poignant criticism on the technology and its apparent benefits. In a futuristic dystopia, seventy percent of humanity are embedded with the "feed"—a high-tech device which essentially acts as a phone and a computer. Through this device people can receive word suggestion, read a dictionary, and contact one another via m-chat (mental chat). While this technology appears extremely helpful, the main character Titus and his friends use the feed as a crutch as they have lost the ability to speak articulately. The word-suggestion aspect of the feed and high-tech society has taken a severe toll on their verbal capabilities as seen by the excessive use of slang-terms and thinking in email format. This change in traditional communication has a severe effect on traditional human interaction as most people no longer speak to one another but rather choose to communicate via their feeds even when standing next to one another. These ramifications due to the technology meant to improve and ease life showcase how as technology evolves, the more humans devolve and lose the ability to communicate and thus lose an important aspect of human life.

A consequence of the humans of *Feed* having the technology since birth is that they lose the ability to speak well and articulate their thoughts unaided. Titus constantly requires the help of his feed to find the words he means and struggles to think clearly such as when he could not think of the word "glide", "for awhile we played a game with the ball, and we were twirling all over the place, and we were like, what it's called when you skim really close over the surface of something, we were that to the floor, with our arms out" (Anderson 15). This problem appears throughout the novel whether with simplistic or advanced vocabulary such as when he tries to describe Violet's

appearance, “ I didn’t know the word. Her spine was like...? The feed suggested ‘supple’” (14). This lack of basic knowledge of language further reveals itself by Titus and his friend’s inability to understand more advanced vocabulary without a dictionary, “ You put the ‘supper’ back in ‘suppuration’...he didn’t have any idea what the hell she was talking about either...the rest of us were...looking up “suppuration” on the feed English-to-English wordbook” (33). This reliance on the feed for understanding language—a basic human function—displays the devolution of the human memory, knowledge, and intelligence as humanity can no longer clearly articulate their thoughts or understand one another unassisted.

Instead of using traditional language to communicate then, Titus and his friends simplify language to slang, technology-derived language, and consistent use of the word “thing” to describe the world around them. They shorten words like low-gravity to “lo-grav” and use curse words to fill in that which they do not know. Even adults fall prey to this type of language as seen by Titus’ father unable to clearly describe his meaning, “she’s like, whoa, she’s like so stressed out. This is... Dude,” he said. “Dude, this is some way bad shit” (103). Titus and his friends popularly use the word “thing” when they cannot think of the proper descriptor word, “You broke off a... a thing,” said Marty. “You broke off a fuckin’ thing” (55). Beyond even Titus and his fellow teenagers, professional adults also have this degraded understanding and knowledge of words saying things like “could we get a thingie, a reading on his limbic activity?” (121). Generally, doctors are expected to know the lingo associated with their craft, yet in this feed-reliant world, such knowledge is unnecessary as the feed can quickly supply the

correct word or phrase they look for. Some characters, mainly Violet and her father, recognize this detrimental simplification of language and try to combat the process by using complex words and avoiding too much dependency on their feeds for vocabulary assistance, “ He says the language is dying. He thinks words are being debased. So he tries to speak entirely in weird words and irony, so no one can simplify anything he says” (216). Despite their effort to personally fight against the devolution of human communication and intelligence, through the thoughts of Titus it becomes evident how ingrained technology has become. His thoughts are overwhelmed by technological-based phrases and advertisement-esque vocabulary, showcasing how the constant use of the feed and exposure to capitalism has affected even how humans think anymore. An example of this is how Titus thinks in email-format, “ I tried to tell myself that being here was not re: sleeping but re: being with your friends and doing great stuff” (19) which reveals how language of technology has become so ingrained people even think in the way they communicate via the feed.

As a result of utter dependency on their feeds to articulate themselves properly and use of the lingo in their thoughts and everyday speech, most people solely communicate via their feeds and the “ mental chat” that comes with it. Even when right beside one another, people choose to chat through their feeds, “ the girls, they did something else on the feed. They were chatting each other and we couldn’t hear them, but they kept laughing and touching each other’s faces” (9). The girls behavior show how virtual communication has become more used and visibly have resorted to rudimentary forms of communication through touching one-another. This

shift from verbal communication exposes the devolution of communication as a whole, where people can mentally talk with one another and use the act of touching one another as an emphasized form of this communication—this is reminiscent of the behavior of people who cannot understand one another whether through lack of language capabilities or a language translation barrier. The feed has ripped all communicative independence from its users and rendered them child-like in their speech and general interactions with other people.

This devolved speech so necessary to Feed thematically offers a critique strongly favoring the viewpoint that the overuse of technology causes reliance and dependency which in turn causes a decrease in human intelligence and knowledge. With the necessity to know and understand even one language removed, all communication becomes rudimentary in nature and extremely simplified. Even with some of the characters in the novel desperately trying to combat the devolution of humanity as a communicative species, their efforts are ultimately futile as the technology-dependent society has effectively taken over as seen by seventy percent of the world having installed feeds and the newest generation thinking in the format that information is presented to them. The loss of traditional communication and simplified speech so intently displayed in Anderson's novel supports the idea that as technology evolves, the more dependent on it humans become and subsequently become more devolved as a species.