

Technology's role in close friendship



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Picture a typical American high school student in the society of 10 years ago. His favorite way of passing time would be going bowling with friends, hanging out at a trendy eat-out, spending time at a close-friend's place or something similar which would include real friends and real people. Picture the same person in the society of today. You would find his hobbies drastically different. He would rather spend his time in front of his computer or laptop using some social networking website like facebook or twitter or playing games virtually on his X-box or Wii or massively texting/chatting with " friends" through his latest texting device, iPhone, iPad or some similar gadget. (Rath, 2006). What is the most noticeable difference between a teenager of 10 years ago and a teenager of today? Anybody would notice the infiltration of technology in their everyday lives. However, what we fail to notice is its actual impact, which is the continuous lessening of personal contact. (Anderson & Taylor, 2010). As the number of " friends" on facebook increases, the number of " real" friends diminishes. This is why the average number of close friends an American has is decreasing drastically. (Henslin, 2010). And this is not the case just in America. As the world becomes more and more obsessed with acquiring the latest technology, people everywhere in the world are gradually losing the " human" touch and are very happily adopting a robotic lifestyle. (Chall, 2004). What we fail to understand here is that human beings are social animals. In order to function properly psychologically, they need continuous interpersonal communication to feel alive. (Macionis & Plummer, 2008). However, in this never-ending race of technological innovations, people are very happily adopting a very artificial

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un-human-like lifestyle secluding themselves from other people, mostly unconsciously, which is giving rise to various psychological and social problems. (Rath & Harter, 2010). Depression, anxiety, loss of self esteem and self confidence, prolonged stress, loneliness and fear of social gatherings are some very common issues to name a few. Ironically, these and many other issues have become so common that they are not even considered to be a social problem as such. We are deliberately taking away the joy of sharing with our loved ones and we are happily embracing this isolation. (Anderson & Taylor, 2010). Human beings are genetically designed in such a way that they feel better when they spend time with people. (Rath, 2006). Sharing the joy with friends and family doubles it while sharing the sorrow is mollifying. (Henslin, 2010). This seems to be a long forgotten golden principle of life though. People have become so busy in their technological obsession that they would rather communicate with the person across the hall through a communication device (phone, text messenger or the like) instead of taking just a few steps towards the person and meet personally. (Macionis & Plummer, 2008). Parents and children living in the same house would communicate through chat messengers and friends in the same club would rather text than hang out together. (Anderson & Taylor, 2010). Just a few years ago, this was a popular joke people would make to depict the advent of technology. Today, this has become a reality. Earlier, the more “ real” friends a person had and the more “ real” admirers surrounded him would be an exhibit of his popularity through which he would derive his self esteem, his ego and his self-confidence. (Henslin, 2010). Now, it’s about how many people follow you on twitter, how many friends you have on facebook and how many people like your comments, posts and

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photos. This newly found self-esteem might be enough to keep a person living in a hallucinated “ happy” world, but it has very adverse psychological impacts. (Rath & Harter, 2010). People have hundreds of friends on facebook but in real, their close friends are not more than one or two, with whom they actually interact. (Macionis & Plummer, 2008). And this lack of interaction might be a very dangerous factor in ruining one’s personality. (Chall, 2004). The irony of the situation here is, that even after knowing the consequences we still pursue this path of self-seclusion and on top of it, we feel great about it.

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