

Spring 5-15-2018

The Loss of Spoken Word

Barbara Sampley
Arkansas Tech University

Follow this and additional works at: https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds_2018

Part of the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sampley, Barbara, "The Loss of Spoken Word" (2018). *Theses and Dissertations from 2018*. 9.
https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds_2018/9

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research and Publications at Online Research Commons @ ATU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations from 2018 by an authorized administrator of Online Research Commons @ ATU. For more information, please contact cpark@atu.edu.

THE LOSS OF SPOKEN WORD

By

BARBARA SAMPLEY

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College of
Arkansas Tech University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS IN COMMUNICATIONS
May 2018

Permission

Title: The Loss of Spoken Word

Program: Communications

Degree: Master of Liberal Arts

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment for a graduate degree from Arkansas Tech University, I agree the library of this university shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted to my thesis director, or, in that professor's absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the Graduate College. To the extent that the usage of the thesis is under control of Arkansas Tech University, it is understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to Arkansas Tech University in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Signature

Date

© 2018 Barbara Sampley

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Merlin Mann of the Communications and Journalism Department at Arkansas Tech University. Professor Mann provided a tremendous amount of support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my research and writing of my thesis paper.

I would also like to thank my MLA director Dr. Deborah Wilson for her input, and direction throughout my years of study in the graduate program.

I would likewise like to thank my thesis committee Dr. Rebecca Garvin, Dr. Donna White, and Dr. Bill Morelan for their advice and support of my project.

Finally, I must express my thanks and gratitude to my husband Billy, and children, Elizabeth and Samantha for providing me with lots of love and support during this process. Along with my niece Danessa, who was a positive voice and my personal cheerleader.

Thank you all,

Barbara Sampley

Abstract

The rapid emergence of social media has the potential to negatively affect young people moving into the job market. In this paper, I examine whether there has been a loss of communication and soft skills, interpersonal skills, and how this has an impact on workforce readiness. Numerous studies have explored the social interactions and the effects technology has had on human behavior. Based on the insights from sociologists, psychologists, educators, and researchers, it appears that interpersonal skills (soft skills) are critical to being successful in the workforce. Research indicates that social media can hamper verbal communication in young people. Additionally, in a technology-driven world, the need for interpersonal conversation is a necessary element in the development of self-reflection and personal relationships, and the success of the young people depends on the ability to communicate both nonverbally and verbally in a variety of environments. All of these are important interpersonal skills that employers desire, but which young people may fail to develop if they are preoccupied with social media at the expense of interpersonal conversation.

Keywords: soft skills, verbal and nonverbal communication, interpersonal communication, social media, soft skills gap

Table of Contents

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	v
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE EXTENT OF TEEN USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA	4
III. THE SURRENDERING OF VERBAL SKILLS	6
IV. BRAIN PATTERN RETENTION AND BEHAVIOR ADDICTION	9
V. THE NEED TO CONNECT THROUGH CONVERSATION	13
VI. SKILLS NEEDED FOR SUCCESS IN THE WORKFORCE.....	17
VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR TACKLING THE LOSS OF SPOKEN WORD	21
VIII. CONCLUSION	24
WORKS CITED	27

I. Introduction

We are vulnerable, compelled and distracted by our devices.

-Sherry Turkle

Today's young people have a lot that they can offer a company. They have innovative ideas, cutting edge technical skills, insight into modern methods, and a revitalizing supply of energy. Despite these positive attributes, why is it that these novice employees have problems acquiring and retaining a job? Could the lack of people skills, problem-solving capabilities, and the inability to communicate without checking their mobile devices be to blame? It seems that these new hires have one foot out the door from the day they are hired.

The necessity of basic communication skills to be successful in the working world is the core issue that will be the subject of the following observations and conclusions. This paper will explore technology interaction, social media usage, effects of technology on the brain, addictive behaviors, and verbal disconnection. First, this paper will consider how people interact with technology, and how it is changing the way teens communicate with one another face-to-face and online through social media. Secondly, this paper will look at the correlations between social media usage and the youth's lack of motivation to communicate verbally, which apparently results in a loss of interpersonal conversation. Third, this paper will examine the effects of excessive use of modern technology on brain patterns and development of addictive behaviors. Then, this paper will argue that the lack of interpersonal connections, conversations, and social skills have contributed to verbal disconnection; and finally, this paper will offer some suggestions for correcting these deficits.

Though we are living in times with amazing technologies and mobile devices, it appears these devices, originally developed to aid in building connections, seem to be causing a disconnect which may create future communication problems.

In today's modern technology and social media world of texting, Messenger, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, one would assume people would have more personal communication rather than less. Sociologists, psychologists, and educators have consistently contended that interpersonal communication skills are essential to healthy personal growth. The idea that people are more connected today, yet less socially verbal than ever is recognized as a technology complication. Sherry Turkle, a professor and author, suggests there are consequences that are not yet fully understood. She states, "We have not assessed the full human consequences of digital media. We want to focus on its pleasures. Its problems have to do with unintended consequences" (Turkle, *Reclaiming* 16). Therefore, it is necessary to study whether social media might be hindering human development.

It is acknowledged that within this cyber-world, online communication seems to be the dominant form of contact for the younger generation. The number of hours young people spend on their smartphones is escalating every year. Parents are purchasing cellular devices for their young children and exposing pre-teens to the new technologies and social media at an earlier age than ever before. These cellular devices are providing a way for parents to stay in contact with their children while they are involved in after-school activities. It is ironic that these devices, whose purpose is to provide a way to stay connected, seems to be triggering a transformation of the younger generation into non-verbal youth. This transformation may affect their ability to be successful later in life.

The need for interpersonal conversation is a necessary element in the development of self-reflection and personal relationships. Studies have shown that the success of young people depend on their ability to communicate both nonverbally and verbally in a variety of environments. Unfortunately, it seems that the youth of today would rather “talk” to each other via electronic devices. A leading forensic cyberpsychologist shared important concerns about how technology may impact the development of the child. She points out that the technology in use daily is reshaping society and believes this is a problem facing youth (Aiken 4). The need to build important interpersonal skills that employers desire remains a very real management problem which may be costly if young people fail to develop those skills. This obsession with social media may be at the expense of interpersonal conversation.

II. The Extent of Teen use of Social Media

*Social media has already become such an integral part of everyday life
that it makes no sense to see it as separate.*

-Daniel Miller

In recent years, social media has shown an increase in usage by youth between the ages of 13 and 20. This growth is to be anticipated because this generation has grown up with the World Wide Web and a cyber-world filled with new technologies, websites, and digital gadgets. Because of the availability of these cyber-technologies, there has been a dramatic increase in social media usage. Sites and apps are used as primary forms of communication in Generation Z's world (Finch 3).

An app developer, Kevin Holesh, created software that he aptly called “Moment.” It is used to tally the amount of time users are active on their smartphone each day. When Holesh created this app in 2014, he stated the average user of Moment logged just under three hours a day. However, the average user time has increased rapidly each consecutive year and with it the number of youths with access to mobile devices (Alter 13).

Dr. Adam Alter has found that “most people spend between one and four hours on their phones each day – and many far longer” (15). Researchers are revealing serious issues that face today’s youth. In each report, the research supports the fact that the social media frenzy is becoming a growing reality. They write, “Almost every internet user can now be reached via social media – 94% of digital consumers ages 16 - 64 say they have an account on at least one social platform and 98% have visited/used one within the last month” (Mander 5). However, with the increase of social media

platforms, Facebook is still leading the network in the number of online users. These numbers correspond to the information that the Pew Research Center has compiled, and the data signifies that teens today are using their mobile devices frequently, and social media is their primary focus. These reports revealed that teens ages 13 to 17 are using Facebook and Snapchat most frequently; “Among these ‘mobile teens,’ 94% go online daily or more often” (Lenhart 1). A Pew Research Center study reveals the popularity of social media, the availability of cell phones among teens and young adults, and the growth of social media use in 2017, shows that the digital user is utilizing social media technology daily to connect to each other. Alter states:

80 percent of teens check their phones at least once an hour. In 2008, adults spent an average of eighteen minutes on their phone per day; in 2015, they were spending two hours and forty-eight minutes per day. This shift to mobile devices is dangerous, because a device that travels with you is always a better vehicle for Addiction. (28)

The problem is that a large amount of the population is choosing to use their devices instead of their voices.

III. The Surrendering of Verbal Skills

I call it the Goldilocks effect: We can't get enough of each other if we can have each other at a digital distance — not too close, not too far, just right.

-Sherry Turkle

It remains to be seen how the world of technology and social media affects the younger generation's ability to function in the working world. As teens and young adults use their devices more for basic communication, they tend to spend less time in interpersonal interaction. These devices may greatly reduce their interpersonal skills and experiences, and it may affect their ability to read verbal and non-verbal cues needed to communicate. The research maintains that the art of conversation is the most endangered life skill.

Researchers found that interpersonal communication is being neglected. Also, the youth of today not only like to text on their devices but prefer to avoid verbal communication situations. Many teenagers will often steer clear of open-ended conversations, even when it is regarding a personal or romantic topic (Alter 41). So, it is not unusual that a teen or young adult would rather respond by message or text than to listen to a voice on the phone or in person.

It is true that the millennial generation that was born into the world of digital connection seems to prefer the concept of texting rather than talking to communicate. However, these youths may not be aware that the lack of verbal communication is a dilemma. The youth may not understand that they need the personal contact they receive during family bonding moments or coffee with friends, and these moments cannot be created online. This verbal communication time can provide an individual with a

connection and contentment that only face-to-face communication can create. However, every day in the lunchroom, café, and the diner down the road, the younger generation ages 12 to 25 are sitting around tables with the digital glow of the phones reflecting onto their faces. The most disturbing issue is that the teens and young adults do not seem to be aware that they are tapping on their devices instead of talking to the people surrounding them. The teens and young adults seem to prefer plugging into the social media and online sharing outlet, rather than engaging in face-to-face conversation. An *Alive* magazine article defines online media “as a place where people not only talk, share and bookmark online, but also provide feedback, voting, comments, and share information” (Niemer 1). This social media tool has made the need of face-to-face conversation obsolete, and it seems that teenagers do not put effort into creating opportunities for a verbal dialogue. Instead, it appears that youth actively avoid any form of verbal communication in favor of digital communication.

These days, youth are more likely to communicate with friends and family through their electronic device rather than face-to-face. Fowlkes proclaims, “As more generations are born into the social age, social media will continue to be the favored form of communication among young people. However, this shift may begin to affect their ability to properly communicate in person with peers” (1). This connection to social media is why researchers debate the effects of technologies on the young person.

A clinical psychologist who works with young people found that many youths have problems with face-to-face interaction. Alter states, “...dozens of adolescents, mainly boys but also girls, who have no problem interacting with peers online, but can’t carry a conversation with someone sitting across from them” (232). The adolescent

online and off-line conversations seem to lack emotions and personal expressions, and these absences can have an impact on a child's mental health. The power of social media technologies appears to have the potential to affect the brain's ability to interpret social cues and its creative hooks that could allow it to be a tool for addiction.

IV. Brain Pattern Retention and Behavior Addiction

*Addictions are damaging because they crowd out other essential pursuits,
from work and play to basic hygiene and social interaction.*

-Adam Alter

The brain works in amazing ways to recognize and remember a multitude of facial movements, vocal tones, and inflections. However, if the brain is not spending time reading these social cues, it will not have these patterns stored. Research supports that the early childhood social experiences help to develop essential areas of the brain. Kardaras states that “if we deprive a child of interaction and touch early on because they mostly socially interact via screens, those areas won’t fully develop” (93). The lack of experience in recognizing facial and verbal cues will decrease the ability of the brain to interpret the many nuances needed to have an effective interpersonal conversation. Dr. David Rock, neuroscientist and author, contends:

With less attention being paid to nuanced facial movements and tone of voice, we don't get to store the billions of patterns in long-term memory that our social network (the one in the brain) needs to draw on for interpreting complex social landscapes. The irony of the social media world is we're becoming less socially oriented. (1)

This supports the idea that people need more interpersonal conversation to build thought pathways in the brain.

Many researchers and doctors contend that these interpersonal interactions are especially valuable for young children.

Neuroscientists warn that a young child's brain raised on online friendships may never adapt well to interaction in the real world. Alter states, "If kids miss out on the chance to interact face-to-face, there's a fair chance they'll never acquire those skills" (232).

Tech companies understand the susceptibility of young people to the charms of technology. Therefore, they are tapping into this knowledge and creating a tempting hook that will snag customers of all ages, causing a blurry line between the everyday user and the addict. Alter argues, "Tech experts also discovered that the environment and circumstances of the digital age are far more conducive to addiction than anything humans have experienced in our history" (4).

Alter sums up the core issue facing youth today when he states, "In 2004, Facebook was fun; in 2016, it's addictive" (5). In the earlier years, exploring the modern technologies of social media seemed to be relatively harmless, however, in the recent decades, it has become apparent that it is addictive. The overuses of technology is a more significant problem than merely the loss of communication. The online technologies suggest that certain behaviors can become addictive. This excessive online usage is what some researchers are concerned about because it is not just drugs, alcohol, and gambling that can have addictive qualities. People also can become addicted to exercise and to eating. Social media is also included in the list of activities that lead to addictive behavior. Addiction is the repeated actions that people do to salve a psychological need but which harms them in the long run. People may use something excessively from eating, to exercise, to social media to try to salve or cover up psychological hurts or disappointment. Today's youth are using technology as a form of entertainment and

escape. They are being drawn in by the digital technology, which is creating a “feel-good result—like finding food or discovering something new on the Internet or in a video game—and dopamine is released, which feels pleasurable and creates a more-we-get-more-we-want addictive cycle” (Kardaras 21).

Researchers state that digital screens “are not the innocuous, rabbit-eared TV screens of yesteryear...and interactive digital screens on young minds is an altogether different animal” (Kardaras 19). It should be a primary concern that children, pre-teen, teens and young adults alike can become addicted to the screen. Kardaras states, “We...know that about 10 percent of people including kids are predisposed toward addiction” (237). The U.S. Census Bureau estimated there were a total of 41,731,233 youth ages 10 to 19 in the United States in 2017 (“U.S. Teen Demographics”). Thus, approximately four million U.S. pre-teens and teens are predisposed to addiction. That is a substantial amount to cause public concern.

Alter makes a strong argument that digital technology can be just as addictive and harmful as any behavior. With smartphones and emails being an essential part of today’s world, it is hard to resist being pulled into these addictive technologies.

To be fair, the social media and texting tool is not the problem; it is just the mirror that reflects the user's problem. Kardaras suggests that the issues that the users face, like excessive texting, are comparable to the difficulties that compulsive gamblers have “including loss of sleep because of the activity, problems cutting back on it and a tendency to lie to cover up the amount of time they are doing it” (Kardaras 89). The growing usage of the social media sites and apps is accompanied by the possible dangers of overusing these sites and apps, much the same way a gambler’s lifestyle causes

detriment in the pursuit of that addiction. It is important to point out that it is not the technology that causes problems for the user. The cellular phone, iPad, computer, laptop, and other technology devices are just a tool for the user. However, if the user abuses the tool, it can be a danger to the user. In Turkle's research, she maintains, "I'm not suggesting that we turn away from our devices. To the contrary, I'm suggesting that we look more closely at them to begin a more self-aware relationship with them" (*Reclaiming* 24). It is essential for the user to understand that the technology tool can be a positive or negative device.

Kardaras suggests that the digital device could be a tool for addiction and argues "...disconnection is the major driver of addiction, and it's weird to say (addiction has) grown because we're the most connected society that's ever been..." (83). The data have convinced some researchers to consider the possibility that this form of addiction may do more harm to the child or the teen than previously thought. Alex Lickerman, a doctor and author, states: "Much has been written about the dangers of Internet addiction... the Internet is clearly the television of the 21st century, and electronic drug that often yank us away from the physical world. Like any addiction, the real cost... is to the number and quality of our relationships with others" (1). The digital consumers socialize by reaching for their mobile devices and screens to communicate electronically, to connect with the frequent tweet, chat or text. However, this type of communication does not help users develop the skills needed to interpret non-verbal communication. A primary concern for the present-day adolescents and young adults is the need to develop connections through interpersonal communication or conversation.

V. The Need to Connect through Conversation

From all of these studies, we clearly see that we need social connection

as much as we need oxygen.

-Nicholas Kardaras

All people need human connection; from birth, children crave human contact.

This contact soothes the child and provides information and comfort. This need to connect is intrinsic and continues to be part of the human composition – even as children grow through their teen years into adulthood. Kardaras declares, “Social connection. It’s not only the most essential part of being human but also a key ingredient in our happiness and health as well” (83). With constant online connections, people are ignoring the need for physical contact, which is an important element for personal development. All humans need nurturing and physical contact to be a healthy individual, and the lack of physical contact may leave lasting “emotional and psychological problems” (Kardaras 87).

One report states, “The concept of social connection...means the feeling that you belong to a group and generally feel close to other people. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that this is a core psychological need, essential to feeling satisfied with your life” (“Social Connection,” 1). Making friends in the cyber-world is only a problem if a person cannot make friends in the real world. Lickerman points out that “the internet is an amazing tool” but one that can come with a “cost” (Lickerman 3, 1). The problem with online interactions is that they can lead to feeling isolated and depressed. Lickerman discusses the problematic issue of isolation; he argues, “The problem, however, comes when we find ourselves subtly substituting electronic relationships for

physical ones or mistaking our electronic relationship for physical ones” (1). The need for social connection is reflected in the way individuals communicate face-to-face using both verbal and non-verbal methods. Friends provide individuals with needed interactions that help them feel contented both physically and emotionally (Alter 229). Close relationships can help people release natural endorphins. “Facebook friends just can’t replicate that; they can’t pat us on the back, rub our knees or give us hugs” (Kardaras 93). The human connection is most difficult to replace or recreate.

In the real world, human connection is about communities. Paul Levinson states “the community is about human relationships – a group of people becomes a community when its members have some common, enduring connections. The two most profound kinds of connection in human life are family and friendship” (13). Although the social platforms and digital technology provide instant communication, it is the face-to-face conversation that provides the human connection that is most rewarding and instrumental to personal growth. For this reason, the need for face-to-face communication is seen as a necessary skill. However, this skill can only be developed through verbal, interpersonal communication.

In *Reclaiming Conversation*, Turkle argues that “... a flight from conversation suggests a problem and not an evolution. And it is a problem with a solution: if we make space for conversation, we come back to each other, and we come back to ourselves” (14). Conversation and relationships can be emotionally complicated and difficult to understand, but both are worth the effort. To have a healthy relationship or a deeply personal conversation, an effort is required to make things work. Turkle points out that relationships are messy, and people are “sacrificing conversation for mere connection”

(“Connected”). Communication is an interchange of information that can be achieved using social media, email, or verbal interaction. Interpersonal communication covers all form of conversations, but the term is usually applied to verbal communication that takes place face-to-face.

Conversation is a necessary element for healthy social interactions and is evident in Turkle’s research. She argues:

Face-to-face conversation is the most human – and humanizing – thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It’s where we develop the capacity for empathy. It’s where we experience the joy of being heard, of being understood. And conversation advances self-reflection, the conversations with ourselves that are the cornerstone of early development and continue throughout life. (Turkle, *Reclaiming* 3)

Pre-teens, teens and young adults need to learn how to express thoughts, emotions, and beliefs in order to gain social growth. These social requirements are traditionally learned through interpersonal communication.

The use of social media sites may make a person feel connected, but in reality, the feeling of connection is artificial and therefore not as valuable as a real face-to-face exchange.

Turkle points out the loss of communication practices “means lost practice in the empathic arts – learning to make eye contact, to listen, and to attend to others.

Conversation is on the path toward the experiences of intimacy, community, and communion” (*Reclaiming* 7). An investment in face-to-face conversation can benefit today’s youth in more ways than one. The verbal conversation is a way of developing

self-reflection, decision-making, problem-solving and developing personal relationships with others.

People need to use their brains and their voices to build better connections because self-reflection and problem-solving is more important today than ever before, especially with the current job market becoming more social, creative, and conceptual. In life, people face the need to grasp and understand complex problems that are sometimes hard to deal with, so being able to communicate these thoughts efficiently with others will not only gain another viewpoint on the issue but also allow the brain to process the concepts, organize them, and then apply them. These are important skills to have in the working world. Therefore, in almost every type of job someone seeks, the need for interpersonal conversation skills could be a major factor. Having the ability to have face-to-face conversations in the working world leads people to become a part of a productive team and insert positive value and creativity into their profession.

VI. Skills Needed for Success in the Workforce

*The employment landscape in the U.S. has undergone profound changes,
and the public is adapting to the new realities of the workplace and
rethinking the skills they need to compete.*

-Anna Brown

In this world of media technology, research indicates that the social media disconnection may be creating problems for some young people going out into the workforce by inhibiting the development of their soft skills. Soft skills are old-fashion teamwork and people skills. Today, many youths are having difficulty adapting to the working world since they are continuously plugged into their online reality and are disconnected to the people around them. When employers hire workers, they look for universal interpersonal communication skills. Author Susan Adams discusses the important skills of teamwork and the ability to problem-solve and make decisions. Adams declares the "... ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization" is a necessary soft skill to obtain (1). Soft skills are understood as people skills, are non-technical skills, and are needed in the workplace. Tulgan argues, "These skills may be less tangible and harder to define and measure than many of the 'hard skills' but they are absolutely critical to the success or failure of any individual in the workplace" (8).

Because the millennial generation does not use their interpersonal skills daily, some have not fully developed these soft skills adequately. One study states:

A large percentage of young people preparing to enter the workforce over the next two decades are significantly lacking in the "soft" or applied skills — such as

teamwork, decision-making, and communication — that will help them become effective employees and managers (Office of Disability Employment Policy 7). These young adults are reported to be both intelligent and creative learners. However, they are also reported to have problems personally communicating face-to-face or in a group. These cyber adults do not “know how to begin and end conversations. They have a hard time with eye contact. They say that talking on the telephone makes them anxious” (Turkle, *Reclaiming* 28).

To combat young people’s, lack of soft skills, Kardaras advises that limits be placed on the use of technology and that supports be created to reinforce character education that are specifically designed for the social growth of children and teens (Kardaras 237). It is not the cognitive skills that the young adult needs to succeed, but the “character skills such as perseverance, grit, curiosity, optimism, and self-control” that are necessary for them to be successful on the job (Kyllonen 19).

Employers in today’s workforce require their employees to use more soft skills than ever before. The employee must use verbal communication skills, decision making, and problem-solving skills to be a productive team member on the job. Inadequate soft skills can hold teens and young adults back, causing them to be deprived of the opportunities that will allow them to compete in the working world. Tulgan indicates that there are three categories of missing soft skills in today’s young employees. These essential soft skills categories are professionalism, critical thinking, and followership. The teens and young adults who are becoming part of the workforce are knowledgeable, and have hard (technical) skills, but these youths often have a social disconnection and lack interpersonal communication skills may hinder their professional work.

Many technological changes are reshaping the workplace environment, and research suggests that employees must learn, grow, and change how they interpret and communicate information to perform at their peak ability. This research indicates that less dependence on technology as the primary form of communication and more emphasis on human interpersonal connections can improve soft skills. Many studies indicate that communication skills are an essential life skill that all young people need to have in order to be successful (Kyllonen 22).

Many business offices around the country have started mentoring programs to build soft skills in the younger employees. These programs are trying to offset the lack of soft skills that the entry-level employee possesses when the employee moves into the workforce (Tulgan 6). Employers want to hire teens and young adults with soft skills and the ability to work well in a variety of situations. The Pew Research Center suggests that jobs that require soft skills are increasing, and “while employment grew by 50% overall occupations from 1980 - 2015, this growth was much higher among jobs that require average or above average social skills [83%], such as interpersonal, management and communication skills” (Brown 2). Basic communication skills are needed to have a conversation, and a conversation is a necessary tool required to be successful in the workforce. Teaching the art of conversation takes commitment from the company and the employee. The building of listening, verbal, and nonverbal skills is very involved and dependent on much practice.

In the workforce, a competitive edge is awarded to the employee who can successfully wield their soft skills. Educators in workforce programs or Career Technical Education across the United States are working to establish courses that will build these

needed skills. In an address, Paul Vitale said, “Students need to become intentional planners, to take ownership of their lives, and they need to work to acquire the skills that are essential skills for the workplace. The schools in Arkansas have to help by giving them the tools they need to accomplish this task.” Since there is a lack of soft skills in some of today’s young employees, there is a need to prepare the students and future employees to participate in personal and work-related conversations while still in the school environment.

By investing in the education of the youth, and in practice of the interpersonal conversation and the development of soft skills, there is a real hope for the children, teens, young adults, and even older adults to place a higher value of people over technology. If people can be aware of their technological tools and reflect about when, where, how, and why they are using these tools in the real world, it will allow people time to reconnect and think about interpersonal communications.

There are many aspects to be considered when an employer hires a new employee. However, “Soft skills matter a lot. The cliché is that people are hired because of their hard skills, but people are fired because of their soft skills” (Tulgan 8). In today’s work environment, people hide from face-to-face conversation behind their phones and screens allowing their time and social skills to fade away.

VII. Suggestions for Tackling the Loss of Spoken Word

“Our humanity is our most precious and fragile asset. We need to pay attention to how it is impacted by technological change.”

-Mary Aiken

Now is the time to give conversation its proper value in education and business. The use of simple conversation in school or at work can help the user deal with personal conflicts, foster empathy, and practice team building skills.

Three suggestions that can help parents, teachers, and teen users to turn around the current issue confronting the youth of today are as follows: 1) create device-free zones; 2) provide educational opportunities; and 3) support research on the effects of digital technologies on children and pre-teens.

The first suggestion is to create a device-free zone. The opening of the door to conversation starts by removing the electronic devices. Creating a time and a place for communication is a necessary step toward conversation. By establishing device-free zoned areas in the home, parents can model how to communicate. This is necessary because childhood has been filled with electronic gadgets that allow both the child and the parent to hide from their peers, problems, and families. Children learn by watching, so modeling how to communicate interpersonally can benefit the child throughout his or her life.

Two areas that are prime zones for conversation and should be designated as the device-free zones are the dining room/kitchen and the car. The device-free zone allows for the chance to develop social interaction and build interpersonal communication skills in children. The kitchen/dining room is a traditional place for family conversation. It is

an area that can provide opportunities to build interpersonal relationships while preparing food or eating at the table. Similarly, the car is another prime area to model good communication as a device-free zone. Not only will this allow for open conversation but will also model proper cell phone use and driving safety. This safety is crucial for the pre-teen and teenagers because of the texting and driving dangers in today's world.

The second suggestion is to provide educational opportunities for students. All school systems should provide students with soft skill educational classes, which would address the problem of interpersonal communication and work toward closing the soft skills gap. The primary goal of the school is to prepare the students for adulthood and the working world. How better to meet this goal than by reinforcing the skills needed to move the students forward and allowing them to achieve in the workplace on a higher level? The Career Technical Education program provides the best place to do this since the program is developed to provide students with knowledge in career or work-force instructions. By adding specific attention to soft skills curriculum, a school can give the students an advantage in the job market. The Career Technical Education Coordinator Billie Reed points out areas where improvements can be made and that educators may need to focus. She states "respecting authority, eye contact, good work habits, and how to have a conversation with employees and employers in the workforce environment are essential. These are areas that business/industry noted as a weak area" (Reed). By using the Career Educational Program, the schools are not only providing opportunities to practice soft skills in the school environment but are reinforcing the soft skills needed for companies that hire these young employees.

Lastly, future research studies are needed on the effect of early cell phone usage on young children and pre-teens. Toddlers and young children are regularly observed in shopping carts playing with a cellular device while their parental figure shops. The use of the digital device becomes more problematic when this pattern persists at home and if parents regularly use digital tools to distract kids to give parents free time. The use of a cellular device as a babysitter should be reconsidered. The device most certainly provides a form of entertainment for the child with its colors, movements, and sounds. However, long-term use in this manner can affect the child's brain development. This would be a prime area for researchers to study. Studies are needed to determine how the early use of cellular technology affects brain patterns of children using digital devices.

VIII. Conclusion

Technological advances in electronic communication have changed the way people verbally connect with each other. Even though social media is an excellent tool for quick and short forms of communication, youth should regulate the amount of time they use this technology as a form of contact because it can obstruct verbal communication. While these advanced electronic devices provide many good things, some researchers and doctors have concerns about the usage of social media and how it may affect the brains of young people. This concern is valid because young people are using social media technology instead of communicating face-to-face, which quite ironically, is causing a new obstacle for teens and young adults to overcome.

The need for interpersonal communication both verbally and nonverbally in a variety of environments is a necessary portion of every individual's success in the real world because the use of verbal communication builds essential auditory and language skills. Each experience in nonverbal communication improves interpretation and visual skills through the use of facial expression and body language, which helps to ensure that the receiver understands the messages being sent. These skills are needed to understand and interpret what others are trying to communicate. Turkle argues that the heaviest users of social media have the greatest problems interpreting nonverbal expressions. She states, "research shows that those who use social media the most have difficulty reading human emotions, including their own" (Turkle, *Reclaiming* 25). It is reasonable to correlate the increased use of social media to the decrease in teens' and young adults' abilities to communicate verbally.

To combat this loss of communication, the youth need to learn the art of listening and interpretation of messages in order to build basic communication skills. They need to talk and connect with other people through verbal dialogue because it is through verbal and non-verbal communication that people build relationships with peers and loved ones. This personal expression is a vital part of the human experience.

However, many teens ignore these opportunities for interpersonal growth and connections, since “the Internet is now a primary adventure zone where teenagers interact, play, socialize, learn, experiment, take risks-- and eventually figure out who they are” (Aiken 167). This lack of experience with face-to-face interpersonal conversation is a concern for doctors, educators and researchers alike.

It is vital to change the way youth communicate because the use of social media as a primary source of communication may not only hinder personal and social interactions, it may also contribute to loss of interpersonal and soft skills, which are critical for success in the workforce. The need to incorporate interpersonal communication and limit the overuse of the mobile technology is a must. To develop intimacy and empathy, along with personal growth, the young person must make time for the face-to-face conversation. These are basic life skills and interpersonal communication skills that will be needed in the future. These skills are the conversations in which the creative collaboration of education and business thrive (Turkle, *Reclaiming* 4). Interpersonal skills are critical to being successful in life.

However, the absence of interpersonal communication skills and soft skills is a problem that will likely become increasingly widespread in the near future until research, training, and proactive educational programs have time to catch up. The process of

discovering the problem has begun, but there is much work to be done to help young people overcome their deficiencies in the soft skills area so they can emerge as healthy, happy, and productive adults.

Works Cited

- Adams, Susan. "The 10 Skills Employers Most Want in 2015 Graduates." *Forbes*, 18 Feb. 2015, www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/11/12/the-10-skills-employers-most-want-in-2015-graduates/.
- Alter, Adam. *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. Penguin, 2017.
- Aiken, Mary. *The Cyber Effect: A Pioneering Cyberpsychology's Explains How Human Behavior Changes Online*. Spiegel & Grau, 2016.
- Brown Anna. "Key Finding about the American Workforce and the Changing Job Market." *Pew Research Center*, 6 Oct. 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/06/key-findings-about-the-american-workforce-and-the-changing-job-market/.
- Finch, Jeremy. "What Is Generation Z, And What Does It Want?" *Fact Company*, 4 May 2015. www.fastcompany.com/3045317/what-is-generation-z-and-what-does-it-want.
- Fowlkes, Jasmine. "Viewpoint: Why Social Media is Destroying Our Social Skills." *USA Today*, 18 July 2017, www.college.usatoday.com/2012/10/11/opinion-why-social-media-is-destroying-our-social-skills/.
- Kardaras, Nicholas. *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction is Hijacking Our Kids and How to Break the Trance*. St. Martin's Press, 2016.
- Kyllonen, Patrick. "Soft Skills for the Workplace." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, Taylor & Francis Online, 20 Nov. 2013, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00091383.2013.841516

Lenhart, Amanda. "Teen, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015." *Pew Research Center*, 8 Apr. 2017, www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/.

Levinson, Paul. *New New Media*. Pearson, 2013.

Lickerman, Alex. "The Effects of Technology on Relationships." *Psychology Today*, 8 June 2010, www.happinessinthisworld.com/2010/06/06/the-effects-of-technology-on-relationships/#.Wt0ODIjwYdU

Mander, Jason. "Digital vs Traditional Media Consumption Summary." *Globalwebindex*, 2014, insight.globalwebindex.net/hs-fs/hub/304927/file-1414878665-pdf/Reports/GWI_Media_Consumption_Summary_Q3_2014.pdf

Miller, Daniel, et al. "What is social media?" *How the World Changed Social Media*. UCL Press, 2016.

Niemer, Ellen. "Teenagers and Social Media." *Alive*, Alive Publishing Group Inc., 30 July 2015, www.alive.com/family/teenagers-and-social-media/.

Office of Disability Employment Policy. "Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success." U.S. Department of Labor, www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/.

Reed, Billie. "Re: Soft Skills & Education." Received by Barbara Sampley, 6 Sept. 2017.

Rock, David. "The End of the Conversation?" *Psychology Today*, 1 Sept. 2011, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/your-brain-work/201109/the-end-the-conversation/.

"Social Connection Definition/What is Social Connection." *Greater Good*, 2017, www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/social_connection/definition.

Tulgan, Bruce. *Bridging the Soft Skills Gap: How to Teach the Missing Basics to Today's Young Talent*. Wiley, 2015.

Turkle, Sherry. "Connected, but Alone?" *TED Talk*, Ted-Ideas Worth Spreading, Feb. 2012, www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together/.

---. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. Penguin Press. 2015.

"U.S. Teen Demographics." *ACT for Youth Center of Excellence*, 31 Oct. 2017, www.actforyouth.net/adolescence/demographics/.

Vitale, Paul. "Essential Skills for the Workplace." 27 Sept. 2017, 303 N. Main Street, Harrison, AR. Address.

