

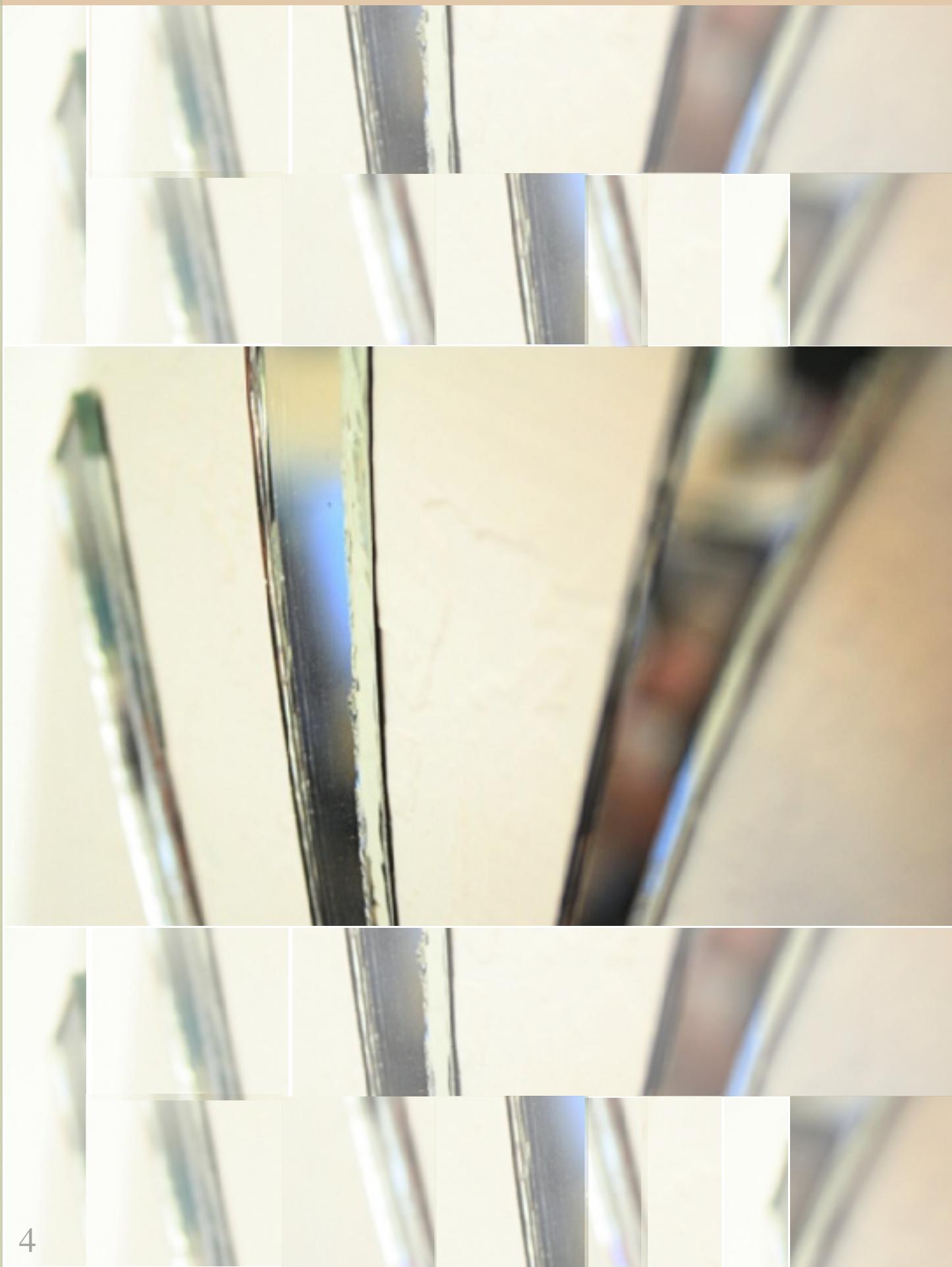
iGeneration



By Corinne Medeiros and Kate Eglen



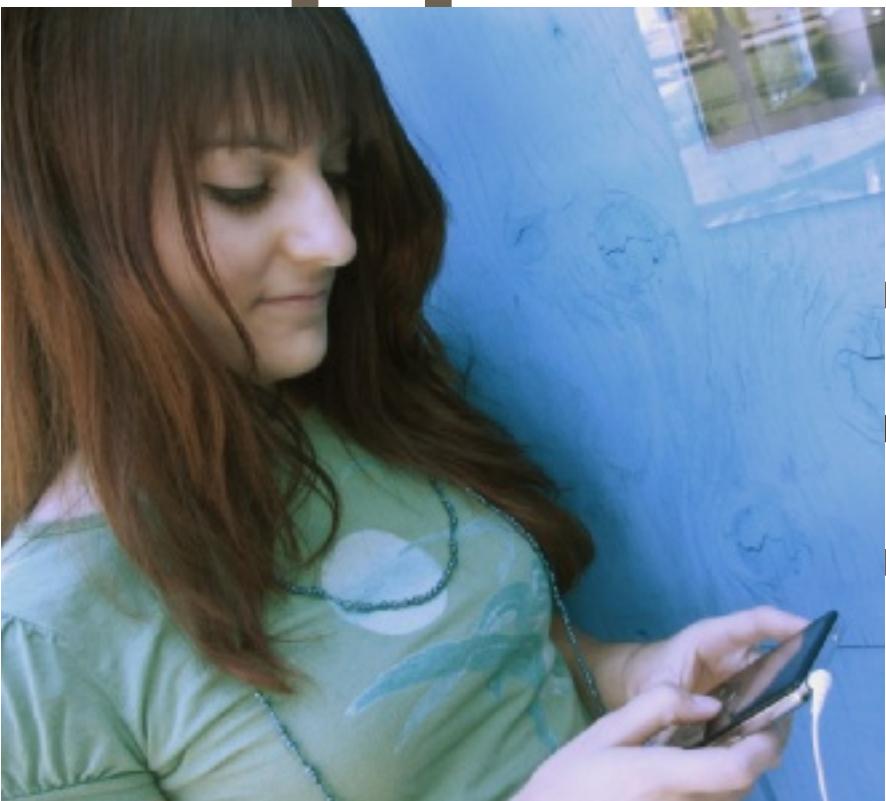
A close-up of a dark blue or black button. The word "PLAY" is printed in white capital letters above a large, light blue triangular play button icon. The button has a slightly recessed center and a raised border.

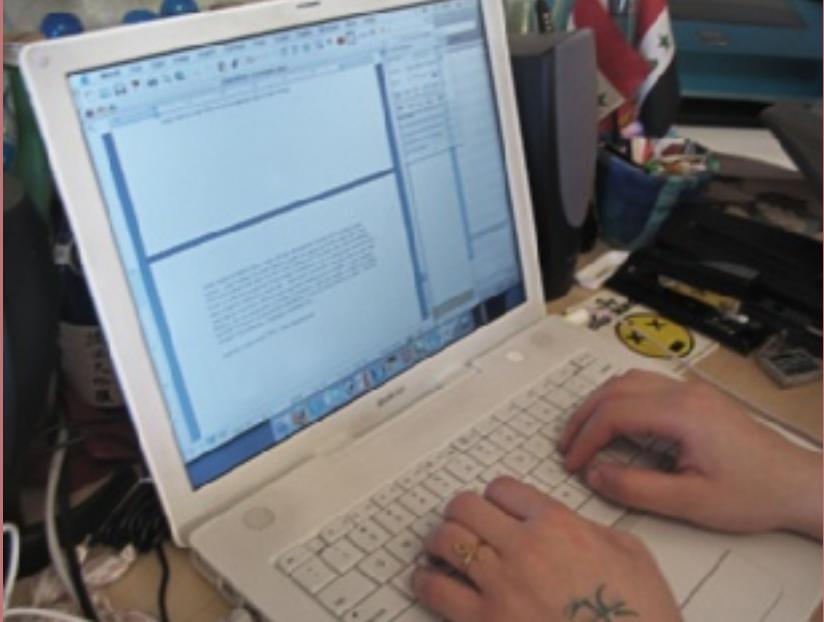
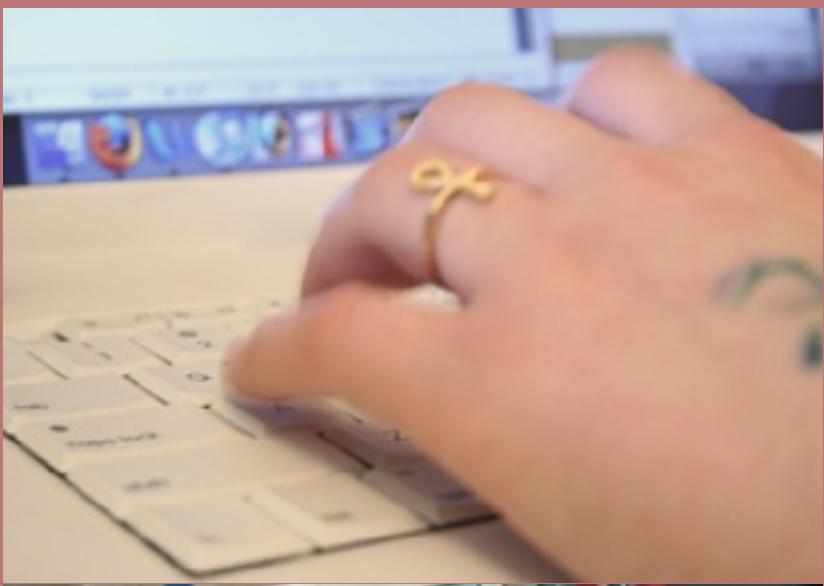


Foreward

“It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.” The words of Albert Einstein touch upon the current issue involving teenagers and technology today. How much of our humanity is being sacrificed for machines and gadgets? Have we let communication devices replace human contact? Teenagers all over the world are experiencing the wave of opportunity and efficiency that comes with modern technology. Yet are they even considering their fundamental values of good social skills and speech? The most crucial period of establishing identity is the teenage years, where opportunities and possibilities seem endless and maybe even overwhelming. New developments and advances are coming into existence every passing day, affecting the current generation of teenagers immensely. Today there are even more paths to take in life, even more decisions to be made because of technology. The complexity of modern life is frequently overlooked by teenagers because of how familiar it is to them. They have grown up in a world completely different from their parents, and in that way they are more independent and resourceful due to consistent access to technology. Looking more closely at how teens today define who they are can lead to interesting conclusions. The new generation is forming identity in a whole new way; their self-confidence and methods of self-expression are transforming to keep up.







Technology in the past and present has followed the dollar. Wherever people are willing to spend money is where the companies flock. This rule of thumb has been the catalyst for the growth and expansion of the Internet, so that it now plays an integral part in all of our lives. The Internet is now the superhighway of information; the masses demand it. Communication between countries of opposite sides of the globe has increased exponentially. People routinely check certain websites for their daily dose of knowledge. Yahoo.com provides four different obscure articles day by day, while CNN.com supplies a monstrous cache of news pieces.

Whichever website you choose, you find pages of information. Teenagers have utilized this aspect of the web for projects such as a research papers and college applications. "I use the internet to check my homework, so I go online and figure what I have to do for class the next day. I do a lot of my homework on the computer . . ." says Mountain View High School junior Michael Martinez. (Martinez, 2007)

The Internet has become a major factor in measuring people's abilities and testing their knowledge, self-worth, and unfortunately their gullibility. To be online is to enter a different dimension, an endless whirlpool of information, some of it useful, some of it not. Partly truthful, partly not. A worldwide connection helping and hindering society. It can mesmerize, manipulate, and discriminate. Yet at the same time it has the power of communication and mind molding. Teenagers see the Internet as all those things and more. For them, it is a way of expressing themselves and putting themselves out there. Through profiles on Myspace.com and personal blogs and chat rooms they are able to mingle indirectly with others and pour their thoughts out for everyone and anyone to view. They feel empowered and enlightened. The power of communication and knowledge is at their fingertips; the online world is theirs to explore. How ironic that they're alone. They might be meeting new people, making friends, expressing opinions through debate, yet are they really more connected? Is this generation really resorting to isolation and detachment to achieve connection and unity? Historically, we've come a long way in terms of access but we have taken a step back when it comes to valuable communication skills and experiences.



Growing up in Zimbabwe, Marcia “Sonika” Ozdoba didn’t have access to much technology as we know it today. She learned through books and used a manual typewriter, eventually moving on to an electric typewriter. She strongly believes in direct communication that relies on sensory information. “When we meet people, we communicate with them through our senses. We gain a lot of information visually, through our hearing, kinesthetically. And when people are trying to communicate over the internet, we aren’t getting any of that information at all.” When asked about teenagers specifically, she added that communicating through the computer “doesn’t give them the ability to really go out there and be a person in their own right. If you always rely on a machine to communicate what you need to say, it becomes a type of surrogate voice.” Overall she believes that “technology can never replace human contact,” that if it did, simple social skills are being sacrificed. She adds that “it provides instant access to people,” but also hinders the new generation from learning real communication skills. (Ozdoba, 2007) For example, if a teen wants to contact someone, they have the option of text messaging or instant messaging them, which is far from formal in terms of communication and doesn’t allow face to face conversation.







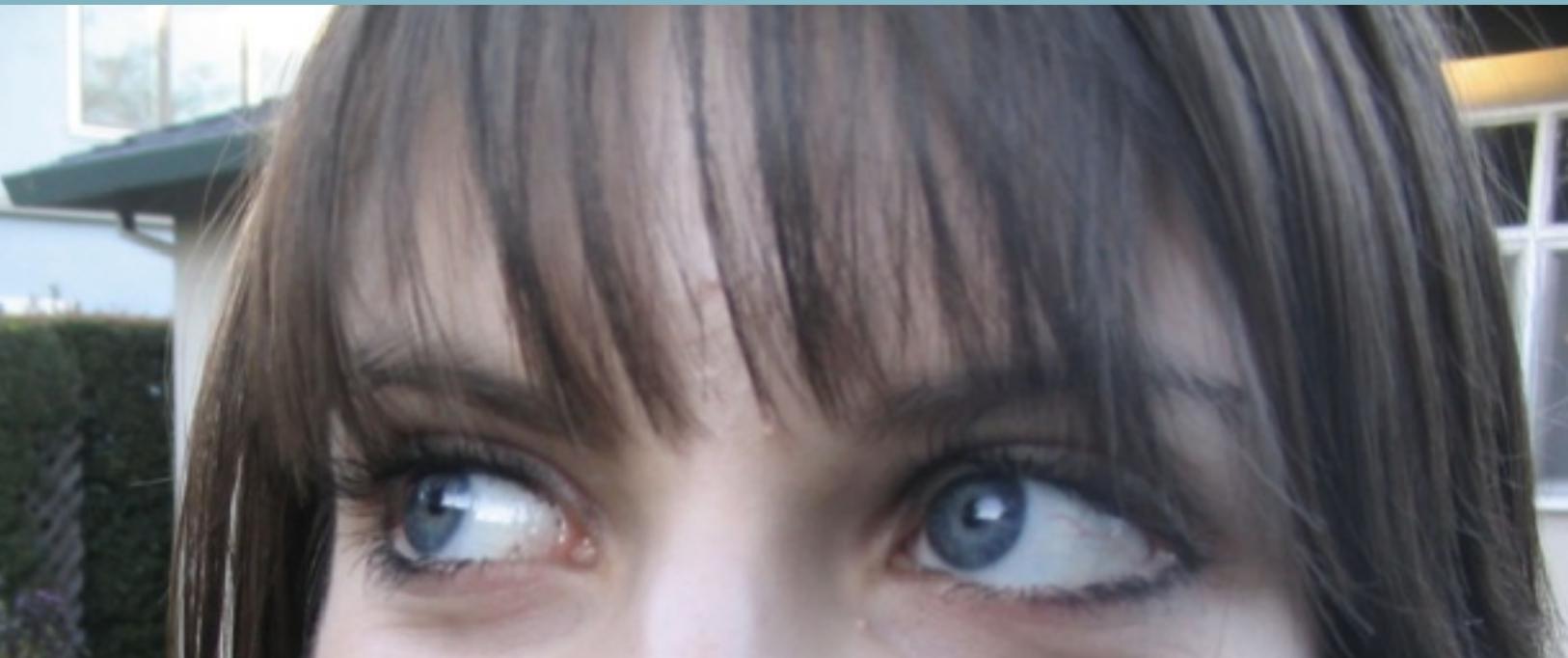
Free speech has become a whole new ball game for our generation. During the sixties, old school hippies gathered in protest of the Vietnam War. Picket signs were the only way to convey strong opinions about current issues within the community. The only people to react were the people who happened to come in contact with the mob of protesters, or hear about the situation through word of mouth. Today, in the middle of the Iraq war, protests are splashed throughout every form of media. Flash cartoons are posted in various blogs, and news programs show video footage of actual protests, broadcasting them throughout the world, in every household.



Traditional conversation usually involves people speaking directly to other people. More recently, the normal conversation is often carried out through machines. Traditional communication devices like radio used to mean family members would gather together to listen to shows and enjoy each other's company at the same time.

Author T.S. Eliot described radio as “a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time, and yet remain lonesome.” This statement is more true to the ways of modern society, in which people are overall well connected but also isolated. Another unfortunate sacrifice is the decline in personal notes. In the past, if a friend or family member lived further away there would be frequent communication through hand-written letters. Regretfully, this method of communication is rarely used in the modern world of email and text messaging. Receiving a handwritten note is somewhat surprising and somehow more appreciated and thoughtful than it used to be. Sadly our generation is either too lazy to send a letter through the mail, or we are just ignorant of how personal and special this traditional communication can be. I think this lack of direct contact is partly the reason why public speaking is one of the number one fears in society. By relying so heavily on indirect correspondence like email, cell phones, and instant messaging, the current generation of teenagers is lacking in speaking experience and the art of conversation because there's usually no pressing need to engage in it.



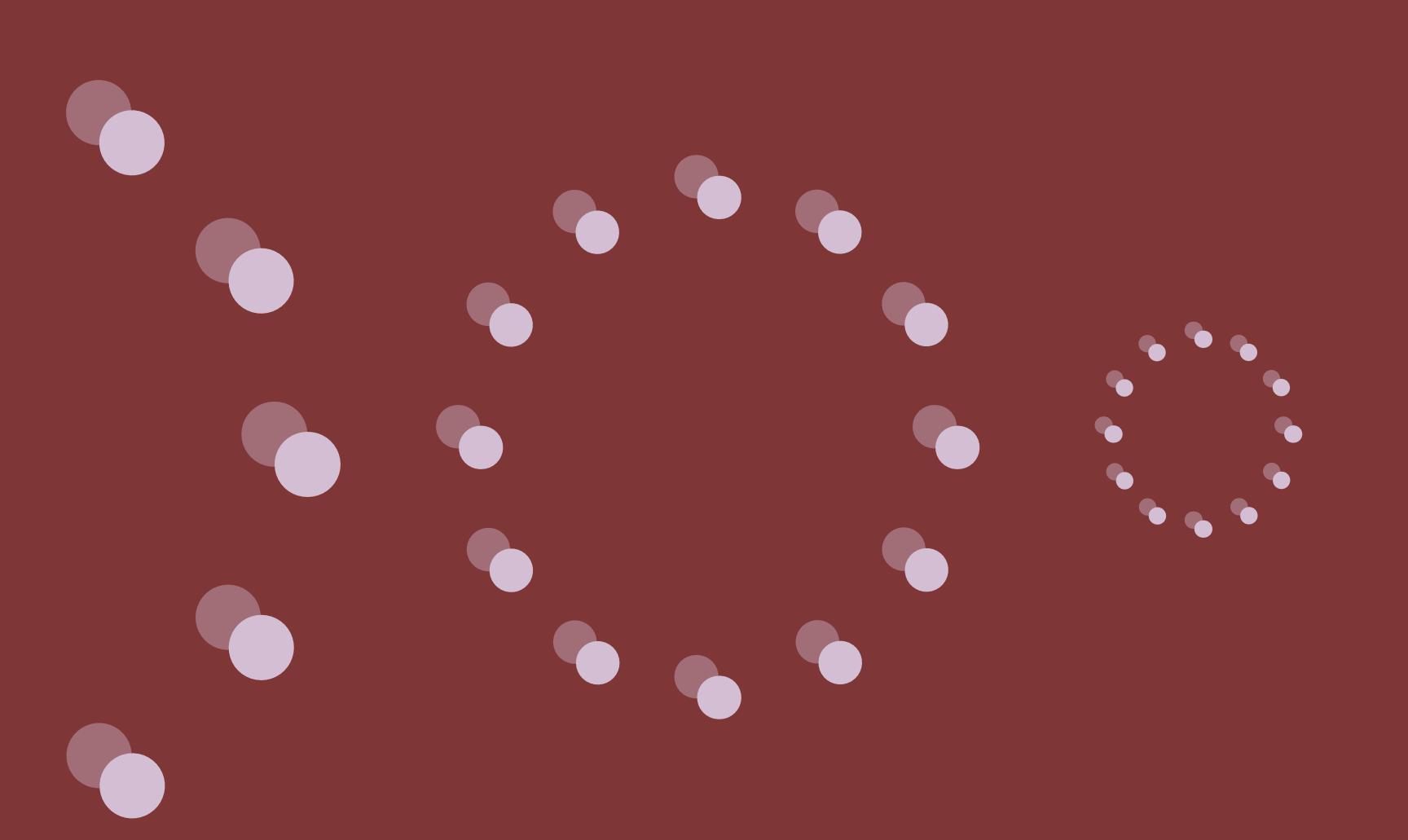


The world is constantly plugged into a constant stream of information. Some may hold fast to their low-tech life, but it isn't possible to deny that the world is changing. Youtube.com, Dailymotion.com, Video.google.com, and other sites satisfy our curiosity by allowing us to peek into another person's life. *Numa Numa* spread throughout the land, prompting outbursts of the *Numa Numa* Kid's infamous dance. Instant fame brought to you by the Internet. But it isn't just Gary taking his talents and thoughts to the World Wide Web; millions of people post videos to express themselves.



Talking head video diaries are not the only pieces of expression making their way online. People create businesses, legitimate jobs, which, without the Internet, would be impossible. Web comics, for example, gain thousands of daily readers. Artists such as Tim Buckley make their living off of merchandise associated with their comic. Buckley's comic, Ctrl Alt Delete, follows the lives of two video game addicts. Through word of mouth, the site began attracting masses of readers. The popularity of the strip transformed Buckley's art into a thriving business. "This comic has completely changed my life. I now have a daily responsibility to the site that I didn't have before." (Buckley, FAQ) Although Ctrl Alt Del became a lucrative way for someone to put their artwork on the Internet, thousands of people post their artistic expressions for fun and critique.

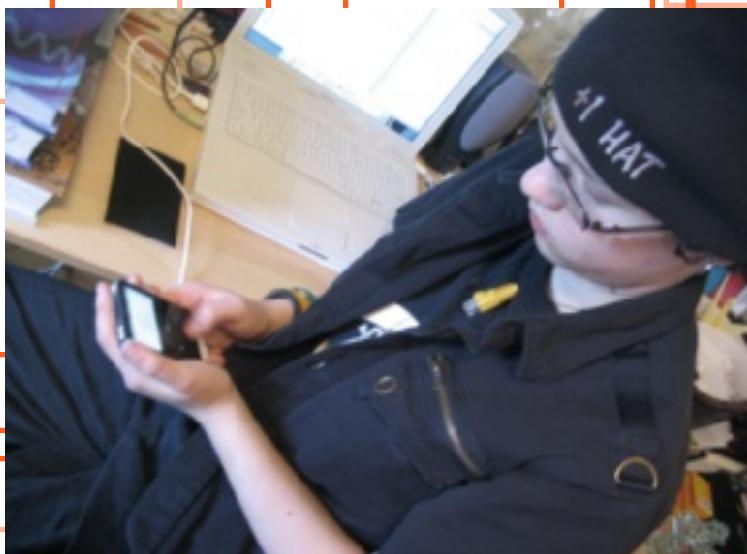
In the past, self expression was limited to the talented few. Artists apprenticed with the masters. But with technology came the influx of the masses' ideas and thoughts. With affordable software available, technology became a necessary part of everyday life. The millennium generation gravitated towards computers and cell phones for the ease that those devices promised. In addition, teenagers discovered that with technology now affordable, they could express themselves artistically. Michael Martinez says, "I express myself a lot through technology . . . I like art, I like writing and I write all the time on the computer." (Martinez, 2007) Michael's experience seems to be in step with many other teens, who say that they use technology for creative expression by using music and websites such as livejournal.com. The internet has undoubtedly provided easier ways to post and share thoughts and work all over the world.







Yet technology has also been beneficial by spreading peer-to-peer communication. Networking websites such as Facebook.com and Myspace.com allow teens to keep in contact with one another and meet other people as well. Some teenagers, such as Martinez, see myspace.com as "a waste of time . . . I really don't think that it accomplishes anything," (Martinez, 2007) while others, like Saam Talebi, frequent the site. He comments, "It takes up a good two hours of my day," which isn't an odd statement to hear from a teenager. Myspace.com "addiction" has caused schools like Mountain View High School to block Myspace.com altogether. So the question becomes, is technology like the Internet helping teenagers accomplish anything?

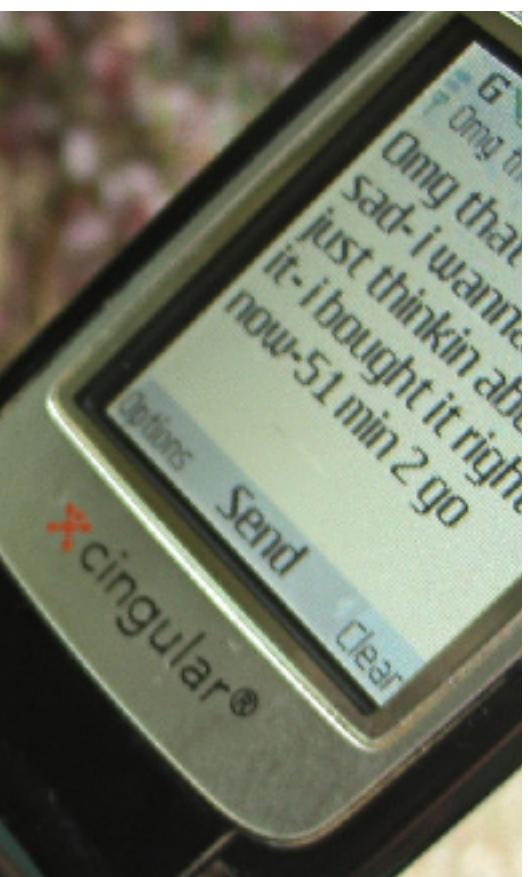






In many ways, the answer is yes. For example, all over the world, young adults are being educated through computers, communicating with society, and becoming more knowledgeable overall due to better access. "Between 1994 and 1998, Internet access in public schools increased from 35 to 89 percent." (McConnell, "Technology") Even in Mexico, teenagers have the opportunity of learning via television. Here in the United States, schools like Freestyle Academy of Communication Art & Technology are using cutting edge programs and equipment to create a fun learning environment and experience. The twenty first century has been a culmination of technology. Computers and wiring now play a major part of our lives.





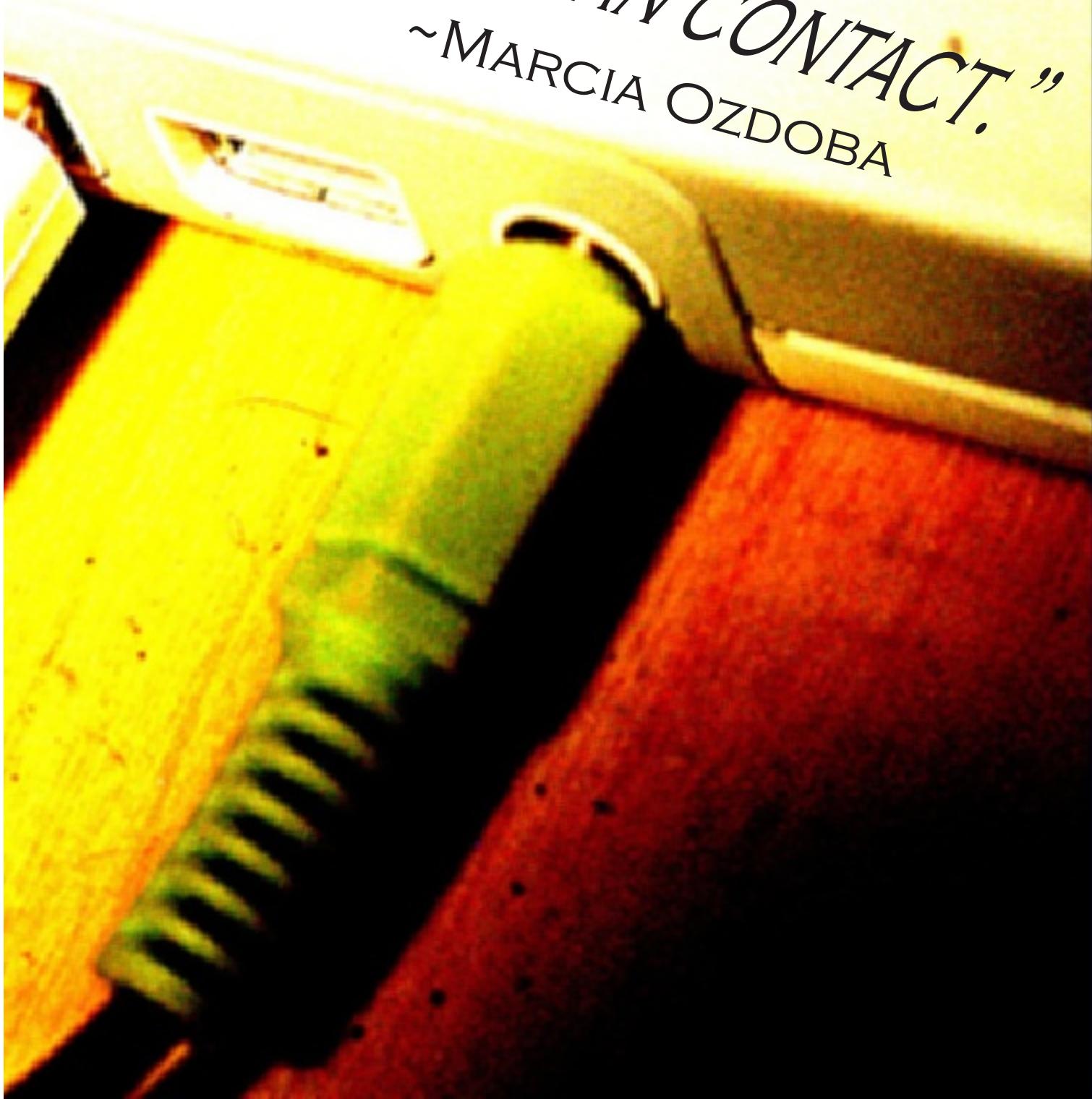


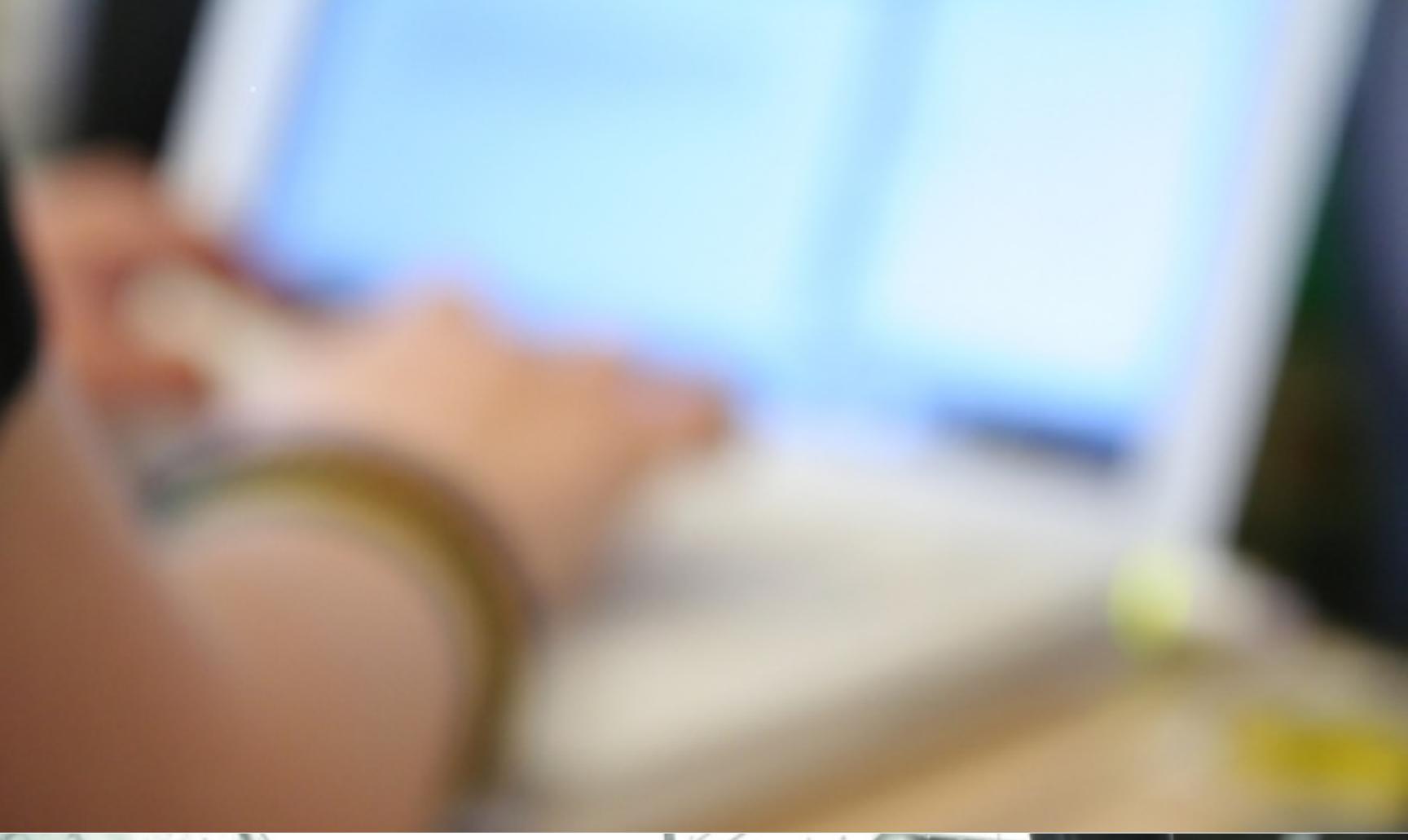
Cyberspace has a dark side too, however. It gives and gives but can also take away privacy, self-esteem, and even identity. The concept of privacy has definitely changed over the years of technological advances, but our sense of personal worth needs to be strengthened, not weakened. Rumors can scar someone for life. Because of how efficient we have become with the internet, lies can be spread instantly and are almost impossible to obliterate. Technology has the potential to take over your life completely. One extreme case of this happening was the suicide of Shawn Woolley. Shawn obsessively played *Everquest*, an online game known for its addictive qualities. Some players refer to it as, “Evercrack” in a reference to crack cocaine. A week before his suicide, Shawn quit his job at a pizza parlor in order to play Everquest twelve hours a day, at his parent’s house, since he had been evicted from his apartment. An online friend of his had stolen some of his character’s money, causing Shawn to be in tears. Soon after, Shawn created a character in his own likeness with the name, “Iluvyou” suggesting that he had been rejected by a girl in the online game. He was found at his computer with *Everquest* still running. (Wikipedia, “Shawn Woolley”) Yes, of course this is a severe example, but it illustrates how certain aspects of technology have the capability to create an online persona for a person. But for people with addictive personalities, this can be very dangerous.



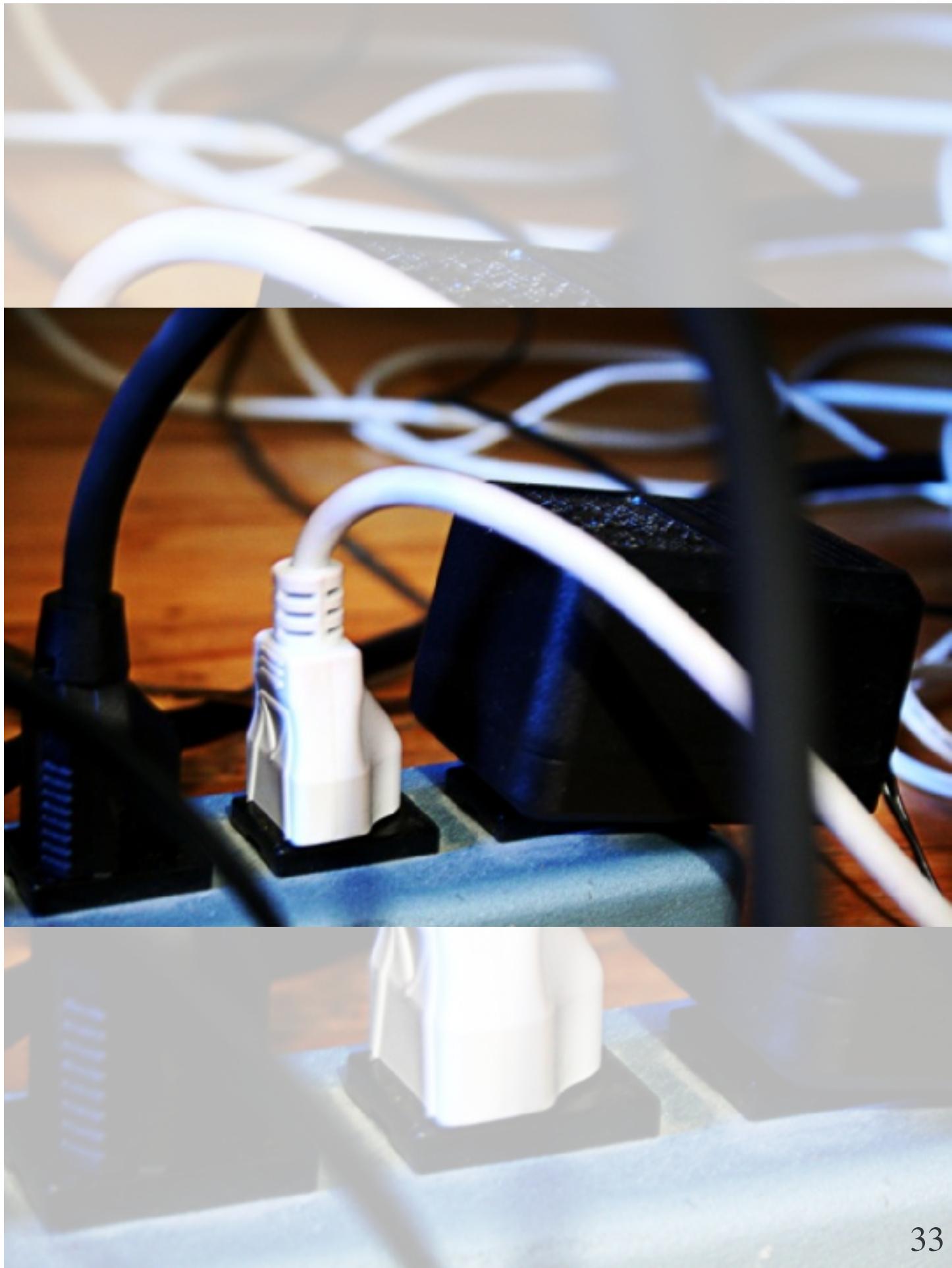
*"TECHNOLOGY CAN NEVER
REPLACE HUMAN CONTACT."*

~MARCIA OZDOBA

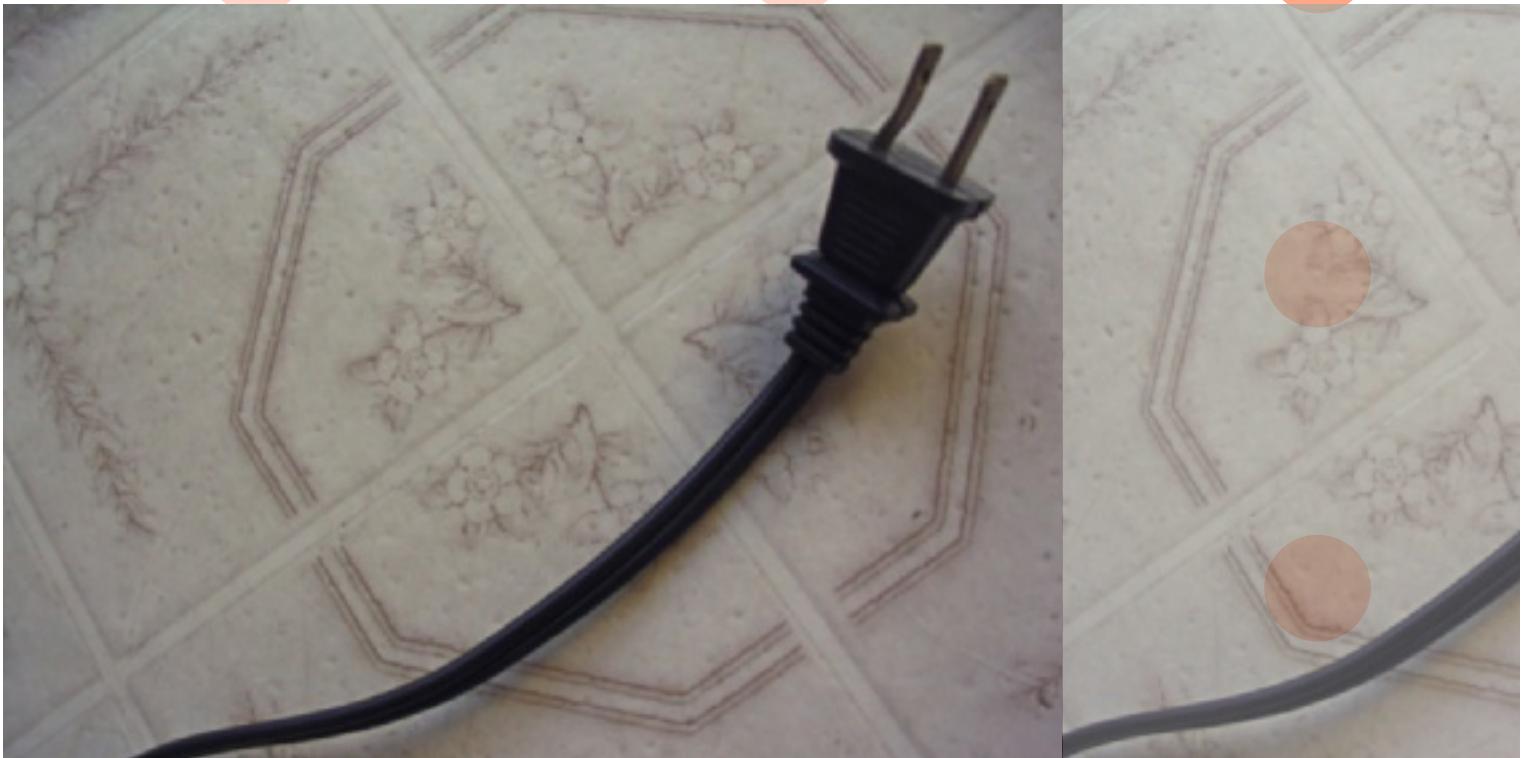




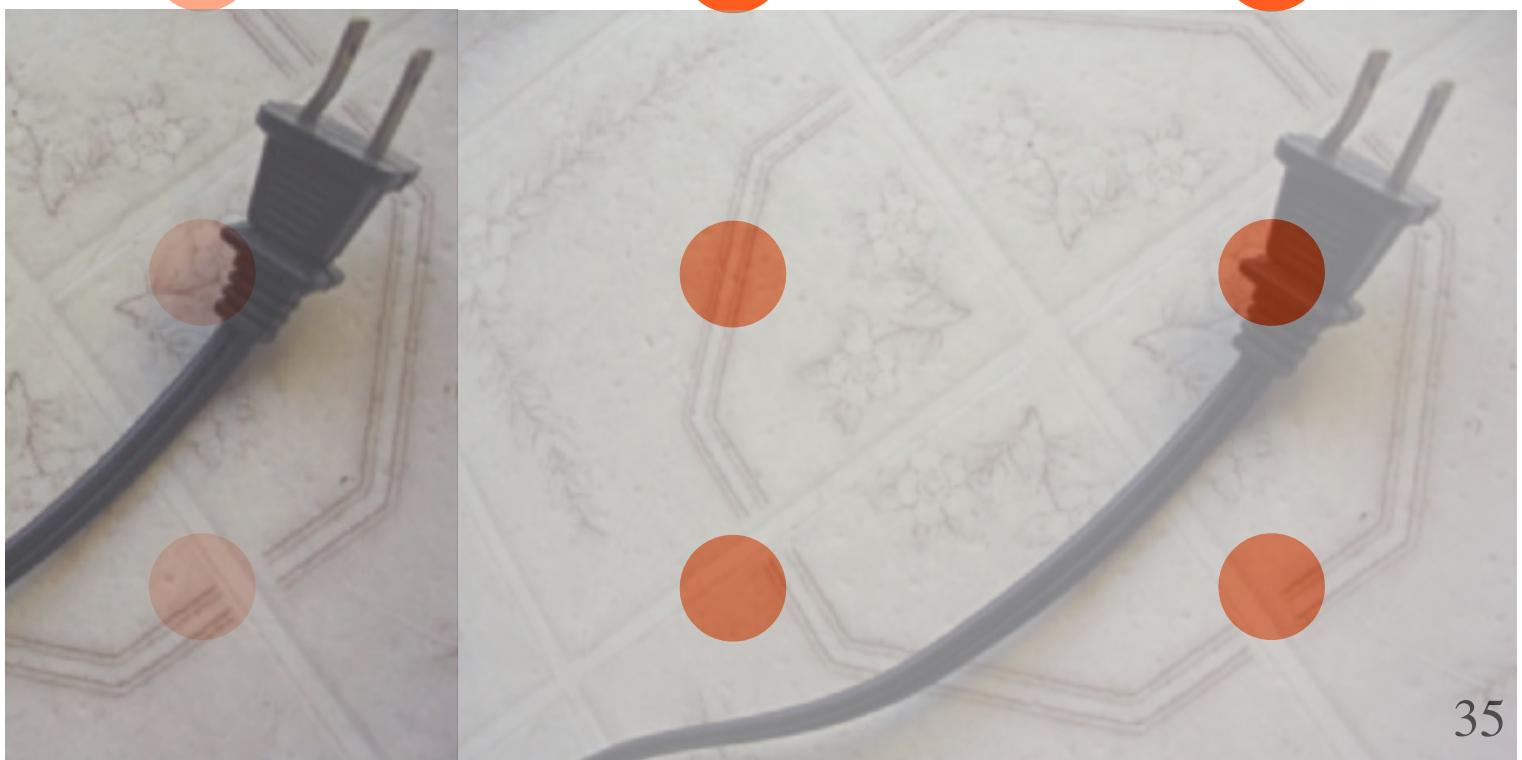




Interestingly enough, teenagers today are evolving into the dominate decision makers in the family when it comes to technology and technical difficulty. In the same scenario presented above, modern teens would have more knowledge on the item, and be able to direct and advise their parents on the best possible efficient machine. Adults often turn to the youth for advice on the latest technology and how to use it. If the family computer has a problem, the technological savvy teenager is usually expected to fix it. Society is generally relying on the youth to spread the word about how to use what the modern world has to offer. Teenagers can sometimes abuse this possession of knowledge by exaggerating their need for the item, knowing their parents won't be able to differentiate between need and want.



The overall connection between parents and their kids is deteriorating in some ways, breaking away from traditional family communication and being replaced by machines. While cell phones provide security and a strong communication system within families, they introduce isolation and aloofness at the same time. According to Melony Carey and Chrissie Wagner on The Care and Feeding of Teenagers, "Today's teens spend an estimated 6 hours per day engaged in technological correspondence of some kind." (Carey and Wagner, Generation Techs)



EEING





“IT HAS BECOME APPALLINGLY
OBVIOUS THAT OUR TECHNOLOGY
HAS EXCEEDED OUR HUMANITY.”

~ALBERT EINSTEIN



Overall, teenagers adjust and adapt with ease to the pros and cons of new technology. Oftentimes teens are unaware of the disadvantages, simply because they don't know the difference due to familiarity and constant usage of machines. Take for example, an online profile on Myspace.com. A teenager would willingly post personal information and several photos of themselves, believing it to be purely normal communication with peers and friends. A parent, having grown up without Myspace.com and the internet would see it as isolating and possibly an invitation for an online predator.

These contradicting perspectives can lead to varied reactions towards the high-tech ways of the modern world. Instead of traveling to exotic places around the world, teens have the option of exploring a desired destination through Google imagery and virtual tours. Instead of putting in the sincere effort and time to practice and master an instrument, new technology has allowed teenagers to gain instant satisfaction from playing instruments electronically through video games such as "Guitar Hero." Teens are so used to being plugged into technology, that certain iconic devices, namely the iPod, have given our generation a new name: the "iGeneration."







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