

Are Cell Phones Making us Asocial?

Relating Cellphone Usage to Asocial Behavior

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### **Are Cellphones Making Us Asocial? Relating Cellphone Usage to Asocial Behavior**

There is a variety of research done on cellphone usage in general along with social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat with specific regard to the consequences of what influence it can have on a user. Now that technology allows us to use the internet in the palm of our hand, is technology changing personalities? Is it changing the way we communicate and socialize with others? The question that I answer with this paper is whether cellphones and SNS are making us social, like the name suggests, or is it actually having the opposite effect and making us asocial? To this end, I am going to examine different categories of cellphone usage and relate them back the characteristics of being asocial. The measure that I will be examining are cellphone, internet, and social networking addictions, attitudes towards work and school when using cellphones, relationships and cellphone use, internet use and depression, as well as cyber bullying and cellphone usage. With cellphones making communication very accessible, where you do not have to step outside the door to have a conversation with someone or to watch a movie because you can do it in the palm of your hand, I think cellphones may in fact be leading people into an asocial lifestyle.

#### **Characteristics of Asocial Behavior**

It is important that a definition for asocial be established and to contrast it with the commonly used “antisocial” label. Coplan, Prakash, O’Neil, and Armer (2004) uses unsociability in replace of asocial, which means that people choose to withdraw themselves from social interactions because they want to be solitary and prefer solitary activities. They can also be inconsiderate or hostile to others. When someone is inconsiderate of others, he or she usually do not care what others think of him or her when talking. Being hostile to someone is basically being unfriendly and unkind to others, also not caring what others think. For example, a person

at a party who tries to stay away from the crowd and avoid talking to anyone may be considered asocial. This person may also decide to stay home and watch television instead of going to the party to avoid social interaction of peers. This is not to be confused with antisocial personality disorder where people tend disregard and violate the rights of others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These are more harmful to the society in a sense that one might display aggressive or violent behavior towards others and any act that is against the law (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). For example, a person at a party decides to be a rebel and trash the house out of disrespect to the house owners or saying means things to people trying to pick a fight instead of having a simple conversation with them.

Someone who tries avoid social interactions like trying to stay away from crowds or talking to people, some characteristics that we usually think of are shyness, nervousness, being anxious, having lack of confidence, and fear of embarrassment, or maybe the person is depressed and do not feel they are happy enough to socialize. Asocial behavior heavily uses the characteristic of shyness when describing social withdrawal (Barry, Nelson, & Christofferson, 2013). It can be troubling when transitioning from a teenager to an adult for a variety of reasons (Barry et al., 2013). These individuals who are shy have trouble getting a job since they try to withdrawal from all social relations, so during an interview they tend to have anxiety and struggle with simple tasks such as firmly shaking the bosses hand to harder tasks like answering work related questions (Barry et al., 2013).

When shyness is the main characteristic that is driving a person to be asocial, they tend to have lower quality relationships with friends, family, and their romantic partners (Nelson et al., 2008). This can be troubling as a shy person already tends to have more problems with him or herself like anxiety, depression, and lower self-worth than those who are not shy (Nelson et al.,

2008). They are likely to settle in the first relationship regardless of the quality of relationship to save the trouble of having to start the dating process over again (Nelson et al., 2008). Although, people who are asocial with low anxiety levels tend to do fine with the dating process, but when given the choice, they often choose not to socialize (Barry et al., 2013).

### **General Cellphone Usage**

Technology has been on the rise since internet use has become commonplace such that now can you not only access the internet through a computer, but wirelessly on a cell phone or smartphone device. These devices have a variety of uses and have improved from being able to simply make a phone call, to text messaging, to picture and video messaging, to having access to the internet, to gaming, and so on.

College students in particular have reported using their cellphone for reasons such as a preference for texting someone compared to face-to-face interactions; they feel like they are missing something when their phones are turned off; they have pretended to use their phones so they can avoid interactions with other people; and they feel the need to immediately answer calls or text messages (Emanuel, 2013). When students get bored, 77% of them tend to use their cellphones as a method of entertainment instead of socializing in a face-to-face manner with friends and family, or participating in activities such as sports, reading, watching television, and working (Emanuel, 2013).

### **Cellphone, Internet, and Social Networking Addictions**

Since Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat have been introduced as social networking sites, there are 100s of millions of users every day. the Neilson Company reported that an average young adult in that age range sends approximately 1630 text messages per month, which breaks down to approximately 54 text messages a day, or 3 text messages an hour

which would mean that he or she spends time on the cellphone while at work, and point in time every hour while not at work (NielsenWire, 2010). This would also mean that during family time, leisure activities, and when completing other tasks not during working hours are spent using cellphones. The top three uses of cellphones for college students were text messaging, emails, and SNS although men and women slightly differ in what they are addicted to more (Roberts, Yaya, & Manolis, 2014).

Social networking sites are one of the three top uses for cell phones but the purpose of visiting the sites can be positive or negative. Positive usages would include using it to stay in contact with their friends and family that have no other way of communication (Wei & Lo, 2006). However, there are negative usages for SNS sites also including, but not limited to, attention seeking (Seidman, 2014). A vast majority of people that are on SNS are only on them because all they want is attention (Seidman, 2014). They strive for how many likes, comments, and shares they can get on a status update, a new picture upload, or a video posted. This strive comes from impulsivity, urgency, lack of perseverance, depression, and obsessive passion (Burnay, Billieux, Blairy, & Larøi, 2015). They usually post pictures of themselves trying to look their best by wearing certain clothes, wearing certain makeup, or having their hair done in a fashionable way for self-oriented reasons rather than other-oriented motives like caring for others (Seidman, 2014). This gives the person an opportunity for nurturance and potentially a reassurance of his or her worth since they know people are paying attention to them (Burnay et al., 2015). This can lead to an addiction just like the need of drugs or alcohol where they feel they are obligated to check their notifications, respond to someone's message or answer a call (Lepp, Barkley, & Karpinski, 2014).

Cell phones present an easy distraction for many users where they can often experience cravings similar to cravings for chocolate or drugs and alcohol (Burnay et al., 2015). Further, people who are addicted to the internet often have thoughts running through their heads about the next time they are going to use their cellphone to go on SNS or the internet (Burnay et al., 2015). When your mind is wandering like this wondering when you are going to check your phone next, it is often due to internal factors like having a loss of control and having trouble blocking out those specific thoughts of going on the internet (Bain & Leung, 2015; Burnay et al., 2015). This can turn into a problematic behavior because it is consuming too much time in your life where eventually you will not be able to stay focused long enough to complete a certain task because all you are thinking about is going on the internet instead of doing work. This may be because using the internet for things like chatting or scrolling through Facebook creates a positive reinforcement for avoiding social interaction or important tasks (Burnay et al., 2015). For example, if a shy person was at a family gathering, he or she may experience social anhedonia where the social interaction is not rewarding, so to counteract that feeling, he or she could choose to avoid social interactions of family members by using his or her cellphone as a positive reinforcement.

Another characteristic that influences cellphone addictions is the inability to concentrate at the task at hand when becoming bored or frustrated (Roberts, Pullig, & Manolis, 2015). Roberts and his colleagues (2015) suggest that this attachment that a cellphone exerts on a person where you feel as if you have to have it on you all the time is due to the fact that there are numerous activities and functions that are available to you at your fingertips. Robert et al. (2015) found that people thought it was more important to use a cellphone while trying to complete a task rather than trying to fix the impulse of using a cellphone itself.

If a person with an internet addiction is not able to get on the internet to satisfy oneself, it can become a problem where they may start to have feeling of withdrawal and preoccupation potentially leading depression and/or impulsivity (Leung & Lee, 2012). Further, the fact that you can hide everything in your phone from your family and friends with a simple password or pin can play a role in addicts with the internet as well (Leung & Lee, 2012). An asocial person would rather be alone than to socialize with others, likewise as person who has an internet addiction spends more time than intended on the internet especially so when they can hide what they are looking at or are in a private space (Leung & Lee, 2012). So, if someone with an internet addiction is constantly on his or her cellphone, he or she are usually not socializing with others in a face-to-face manner, then this may be linked to being asocial because the average amount of face-to-face communication is only 2.10 hours per day (Pea et al., 2012).

Bian and Leung (2015) found that another identifiable characteristic of someone with an internet addiction was someone who disregarded harmful consequences and feelings of being anxious and lost. This too can be linked to being asocial because asocial people are usually hostile and inconsiderate to those around them and they may avoid social interactions because they may feel anxious when trying to keep a conversation going with others or when they are a part of a large crowd. Those who are anxious around crowds tend to be shy as well which is linked to cellphone addictions and loneliness (Bain & Leung, 2015). If you give those who are lonely and shy a cellphone, they may become addicted because they continue to be shy and lonely since they can communicate and be entertained without every interacting with people face-to-face (Bain & Leung, 2015). If the addiction did not persist, than there would likely be more socializing done in a face-to-face manner, therefore one would not be classified as asocial since they are not avoiding social interactions or being hostile to others.

### **Attitude Towards Work and School and Cellphone Usage**

While at work people who tend to use SNS often are those who do not do as well with completing tasks or work on time because the higher cellphone usage consumes the majority of time (Lepp et al., 2014). De Cock and her colleagues (2014) found that a person who uses the internet spends about 2 and a half hours at work or school wasting time while remaining cognizant of the fact that what they are doing may be adversely affecting the quality of work. This is known as cyberslacking (De Cock et al., 2014). It has been reported that many bosses have had to speak to employees about using the internet for matters not related to work (De Cock et al., 2014).

When time is consumed with things like SNS it often becomes a habit. When things become a habit they, by definition, are often practiced regularly. For example, before an exam you started to get nervous, so you started to chew your finger nails. You realize that it comforts you and do it again the next time you have an exam. Then you realize that you are doing it every time you feel uncomfortable. So it becomes routine to chew your finger nails when you get nervous at any time. Cellphone usage can be looked at in the same way where every time you feel bored you go on a SNS to see what has been going on, if anyone is doing anything tonight, or to look at pictures. Someday you may get bored at school or work and decide to take out your cellphone to get you through class, or until you get off work for a break, or until it is time to go home (Robert et al., 2015). Then every time you get bored at school or work you are no longer paying attention to the surroundings because you have all focus on what is on Facebook. Students are now starting to struggle between being able to manage time for leisure activities, such as using a cellphone, and time for academic learning. This in turn may leave the excessive user with a lower GPA compared to those who are able to focus on school during class and at

home (Emanuel, 2013; Lueng & Lee, 2012). In support of this, students have been shown to have a lack of control over the amount of time spent on their cellphones when completing school work or trying to stay focused in class, as well as staying on their cellphones for longer than they intended to (Stemaniuk, 2014).

Compounding the previously mentioned issues, is the fact that cellphones can be easily hidden if your teacher or boss comes around. Applied to students in the classroom, this can negatively impact academic performance (Lepp et al., 2014). Since students are obviously not obeying policies that require cellphones to be turned off and put away during class time, it would be beneficial to find some way of incorporating them into the learning system (Emanuel, 2013). With that said, the onus is on the student to pay attention in class and the system should not have to adjust to accommodate those who cannot turn off their phones. However, with the proliferation of cell phone use being so extreme, incorporating their use into lecture time may be useful on a variety of fronts.

It was found that those with higher income and education status engaged in cyberslacking (i.e., using the internet on a computer or phone while at work or school) than those who had lower incomes and education (De Cock et al., 2014; Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011). One reasoning behind this may be because those who have lower incomes know they have to work hard to earn money to support their families while those who have a higher income may have more leniencies with their money.

Students who are disobeying the rules (missing classes, skipping full days of school, not engaging in extracurricular activities, and avoiding social events school dances and seminars) can be linked back to being asocial because when people choose to use their cellphone during class time when a policy or professor prohibits them, students are engaging in a task that is

against the norms and being inconsiderate of other students and the professor (Leung & Lee, 2012). They are using their cellphones enough that they are getting addicted to them since they contain a variety of components for entertainment when completing boring tasks at work or school.

### **Relationships and Cellphone Usage**

Cellphone are a great tool for keeping in touch with friends and family. The amount of time spent on social networking sites play a role in relationships as well. It has been found that the more time spent on the internet in general, the weaker social relationships one has with their mother and friends (Sanders, Field, Diego, & Kaplan, 2000). However, a positive to cellphone accessibility is that you are able to maintain contact with friends and family that are near and far. Still, that comes with a downside due to possibly feeling the need to have your cellphone constantly on because of wanting to be constantly connected to those people (Walsh, White, & Young, 2009). This need of wanting to have your cellphone on you at all times because those who have a cellphone feel a sense of belongingness to a group more so than those who do not have cellphones (Walsh et al., 2009). They also have lower self-esteem than those who do not use cellphones and feel the need to use their cellphone to fulfill their needs of wanting to belong because of the added pressure as a teenager to have a group of friends (Walsh et al., 2009).

When talking to someone through text messaging or Facebook messenger, may be a loss of emotion and messages can be interpreted in the wrong way. Overtime there may be a loss of face-to-face communication due to the extensive cellphone messaging, where nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and/or hand gestures may be lost (Bian & Leung, 2015).

Bernardi and Pallanti (2009 as cited in Sariyska et al., 2014) internet use has been linked to borderline and avoidant personality disorder. People with borderline personality disorder have

unstable relationship patterns which can relate back to those who are asocial that tend to have lower quality relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Nelson et al., 2008). People with avoidant personality disorder on the other hand tend to avoid activities that involve social interactions which is similar to those who are asocial out of fear of being rejected or criticized by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Barry et al., 2013). So, if internet over-usage can be linked with these psychological disorders, then it follows that relationship quality may be low since interpersonal situations and contact will be avoided. Those afraid of negative outcomes may be able to create better relationships on the internet since they never have to show themselves or come into contact with the people they are communicating with online. This can be related back to being asocial because they often avoid social interactions as well. If an individual is always avoiding social interactions because they are more concerned about using cellphones and the internet, then his or her relationship quality will likely be really poor with friends and family assuming the person even has any friends due to the lack of socialization and hostility towards others.

The closeness of a relationship would be better if there were less disruptions causing negative conflict (Berndt, 2002). One can socialize with a couple of friends, but the majority of time if spend looking down at a cellphone. Not only is it rude to your peers, but it may cause problems with how you communicate the next time when socializing because your peers may expect you to pay attention to what they are saying, but instead you are on your cellphone (Roberts, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Berndt (2002) says in order to have a good quality friendship there has to be high levels of behaviors that benefit the person and their friend along with intimacy and low levels of conflict and rivalry. Texting can be a good way to show intimacy to a person. All that is needed is a few hugs and kisses at the end of the conversation (xoxo) to show

that you care about that person in some sort of way although if the message is misinterpreted then relationship problems may arise. With cellphone usage leading to less face-to-face communication, the poorer social and interpersonal communication skills may in turn lead to loneliness (Jin & Park, 2013; 2012). However, it should be noted that those who use their cellphones for voice calling only tend to have better communication skills than those who use their cellphone for other purposes (Jin & Park, 2013; 2012).

People who are asocial also have lower quality relationships because of characteristics like shyness which may lead to avoiding social interactions. So, if relationship quality is lowered with increases in cellphone usage, then one may become more asocial and start choosing not to socialize with others due to bad experiences of cellphone socialization. Socialization avoidance may then lead to more cellphone usage which may exacerbate the socialization problems. This may happen with parasocial relationships where an individual may think that the media and celebrities are talking directly to him or her when watching television or videos on the internet (Baek, Bae, & Jang, 2013). The more they watch these celebrities and think they are in a relationship with them, the more an individual may become reliant on cellphones to watch videos of the celebrities to become satisfied, not realizing that the individual is becoming lonely with no personal relationships leaving the person avoiding social interactions with friends and family (Baek et al., 2013). This is similar to asocial and avoiding social interactions as well because the person would rather engage in a parasocial relationship with a celebrity and become reliant on a cellphone.

### **Internet Use and Depression**

One may not think that internet use can trigger such mental health issues such as depression, but overtime heavy use of the internet may in fact change how you feel about your

overall well-being and life (Ha et al., 2007; Lepp et al., 2014). Heavy internet users tend to be less physically fit due to the stationary nature of internet use (Lepp, Barkley, Sanders, Rebold, & Gates, 2013). Since a cellphone can serve the same purpose as the internet with the exception that the internet is more accessible on a cellphone because you can carry it around in your pocket, one can say that heavy cellphone users tend to be less physically fit too (Lepp et al., 2013). Those who tend to be less physically fit also tend to lack self-efficacy where if you perform low on a task it might affect one's self-esteem where he or she may become depressed (Lepp et al., 2013). Although depression can trigger internet addictions, internet addictions can trigger depression as well because of the multipurpose use of the internet where people can engage in activities that may change the emotions of the person to the point where he or she may become depressed (Ha et al., 2007).

Likewise depressive symptoms in young adults may lead to withdrawing and avoiding situations because they tend to keep their depressive symptoms internal trying not to let anyone know that they are in fact depressed (Ha et al., 2007). Cellphone and internet users often create fake profiles on SNS where they get to choose what they look like, how they act, what type of personality they have among other relates factors that make up a person. This is often because the user experiences more satisfaction with their online personalities and relationship than those in the real world (Whangs & Chang, 2004). These depressive symptoms may lead to more internet use because it makes them feel safe and a give them a sense of belonging. Although people who over use the cellphones and the internet may have better online relationships, they may build an ideal world from their online experiences (Ha et al., 2007). Heavy users of the internet may think that the majority of people are nice because they only talk to nice people on the internet and they may think that life is a game. When these people get out in the real world,

they experience nothing like they have on the internet which may lead to the person becoming upset because life is not what they thought it was on the internet. This may lead to the person becoming more depressed where they become more addicted to the internet because that world is more ideal and they can be happier being on the internet than out socializing (Ha et al., 2007).

When people become depressed, they usually keep to themselves trying not to let anyone know what is going on. They may become lonely and turn to cellphone and internet usage as a means of coping and staying away from social interactions like an asocial person (Ha et al., 2007).

### **Cyberbullying Using a Cellphone**

Cyberbullying is unfortunately quite common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a threatening and harmful type of bullying and it can be done anonymously in any place or time as long as the victim has access to the internet. Cyberbullying can range from sending mean messages to someone, sharing someone's passwords, sending pictures of that person or mean pictures to someone via text message, voicemail, social networking sites, and the internet in general.

Cellphones are a key tool in cyberbullying now since you can send out a message to as many people you like without anyone know who you are. Along with whenever you like if you have a cellphone on you at all times. Sending private messages are also a key factor people staying cyberbullies because they are less likely to get caught than those who use traditionally face-to-face bullying as well as not seeing the effects that it has on the victim (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012). The cyberbully may feel less guilty towards the victim due to the lack of social interaction and not being able to see the effects it has on the victim when using a cellphone. This can be related back to being asocial where the cyberbully is inconsiderate

of other, hence the bullying and that there is a lack of social interaction between the bully and the victim(s).

### **Conclusion**

I think that when you look at all the different aspects of what cellphone usage and social networking sites can do to a person. For example, changing the way a person interacts with others from a face-to-face manner to not having to step outside of your door to talk to someone has made life easier, but it may be making people more asocial. With the presented research, I think that cellphones with access to social networking sites and the internet are making us more and more asocial instead of what the name entitles it to be, "social". Cellphone are not only used for means of communication, gaming, and information searches, but to for ways of escaping problems, social interactions, relaxation and to lift unhappy moods (Smetaniuk, 2014). These are the also characteristics of asocial behavior where a person withdraws from social interactions due to shyness and fear of being rejected or embarrassed (Asocial, 2011).

People are becoming depressed due to their withdrawal from social interactions stemming from increased cellphone usage and social networking addictions. Although, shyness does play a role in the amount the communication skills that a person has, the cellphone has the advantage of communicating in private via cellphone (Nelson et al., 2008). With communicating in private, the cellphone does not encourage a person to go out and socialize with others which turns back to being asocial and not wanting to socialize. With cellphones being able to send private messaging there is also the possibility for cyberbullying where a person may feel hostile or be inconsiderate of others like an asocial person would display.

Asocial people often have very little relationships with family and friends which is very similar to those who use cellphones more than others (Sanders et al., 2000). Relationships may

still exist regardless of increased cellphone usage, but face to face socializing may disappear over time. Over time, cellphone over-usage tends to disrupt communication in socializing since the cellphone may be often examined in the middle of a discussion. That action tends to be considered rude and you may lose friends or diminish a relationship with them if it continues leaving you wanting to not socialize anymore.

This becomes particularly bad if people become addicted to their cellphone. They tend to have their cellphone with them and on at all times and often feel the urge to take it out to see if someone messaged or called, or to even play games when boredom strikes (Roberts et al., 2015). The more the cellphone is used, the less interaction there is with people because they may start to make an ideal world where all they know is what is on the internet (Ha et al., 2007). Internet is an ideal world for those who are addicted to cellphones and the internet because they are able to interact and communicate without the social aspect. Then when they go out and socialize, the real world is not what they expect, so they often get depressed and go back to using their cellphones as a way avoiding those feelings again, like an asocial person would often do (Whangs & Chang, 2004).

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