***SMS Addictions/Texting Addictions***

We are very concerned with texting in the ministry. Ministers are spending much of their time texting, being on call immediately creating a monster which may not be reversible. Most pastors have difficulty in finding enough time to do everything, why create something that will cause a pastor to be at the beckoned call of every church member? I have seen pastors who could not finish lunch due to thinking as if they have to text immediately. Why?

Leave it to psychologists to label yet another behavior an “addiction” — short message service (SMS), also commonly known as text messaging (or just plain “texting”). But let’s back up a bit, because this is becoming commonplace with any new technology that seems to eat up people’s time and attention.

In modern times, we can trace the desire to call certain behaviors without drugs “addictions” to the rise and popularity of coin-operated and home video games in the 1970s and 1980s. Parents watch their children move from spending hours in front of the television to spending hours in front of a video game (or going to the video arcade to escape their parents’ watchful eye). The following pronouncements were not uncommon in the research literature at the time:

“It is suggested that the potential usefulness or harm of video games is still open to empirical validation; however, the potential for abuse is inherent” (Soper & Miller, 1983).

Inherent. Well, that is such a generalization that could be made about anything. The potential for abuse of the phone is inherent. The potential for abuse of one’s friendships is inherent. The potential for abuse of getting *really into any hobby you enjoy is inherent*. By definition, something we enjoy doing is usually not a problem, no matter how much you do it or how much other people think you are crazy for doing it so much. Look at how much athletes work-out for instance. Are they addicted to working-out, or is it something that is rewarding to them (not only potentially financially, but intrinsically as well)?

In 1995, along came “[Internet addiction disorder](http://psychcentral.com/netaddiction/),” a term cooked up by researchers by taking the symptom list for “pathological gambling,” and changing the word “gambling” to “Internet use” and giving it to a self-selected sample of people who said, “Hey, I think I use the Internet too much.”

I could create a dozen new disorders tomorrow doing the exact same thing, but unfortunately it would be no more scientifically valid.

Since that time, of course, a lot more research has been conducted. But alternative hypotheses which could readily explain this behavior are rarely considered in this research, and no long-term studies have been done to see whether this is a problem related to the relative “newness” of the Internet as a technology (just as few researchers look for “video game addiction” or “television addiction” to join the diagnostic manual any longer, as people became acclimated to the technology and adapted to it for everyday use).

So here it is 100 years after the invention of the radio, 60 years after television became popular, and more than 30 years after video games hit the scene. Are any of these technologies — technologies where people spend many hours every day (depending upon the decade) glued to it — “addictions” today? Nope. Not a single one. As a society, we learned to cope with them, integrate them into our lives, and even though we may spend too much time with any given one at a time, basically recognized the value of life (and living it) beyond the radio station, TV screen, or video game.

Really, is SMS and texting an addiction, or just the latest technological fad that people obsess about for awhile? Ten years from now, it too will just be a blip on the screen of history.

**Reference:**

Soper, W. Barlow; Miller, Mark J. (1983). Junk-time junkies: An emerging addiction among students. *School Counselor, 31(1), 40-43.* SMS Addiction by John M. Grohol, PhD.

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