

Subject-Relating and Object-Relating:  
An intersubjective exploration of adolescent texting

Megan M. Kolano

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Psychology

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2013

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## **Abstract**

Subject-Relating and Object-Relating:  
An intersubjective exploration of adolescent texting

Megan M. Kolano, MA

The heightened interpersonal reactivity and natural egocentrism of adolescence is examined biologically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, and intersubjectively to reveal that many aspects of adolescent development have the potential to contribute to and inhibit their capacity for intimacy and, therefore, intersubjective relating. In the social realm, text messaging is a ubiquitous tool that allows teens to have even more experiences of “withness” while also giving them a way to evade responsibility for being with vulnerable others. Through an intersubjective exploration of teen texting, I argue that unmanageable desires, shame, losses, and gazes are among the important motivators for texting, which can easily take one from the precarious landscape of subject-relating (e.g. engaging the otherness of the other) into the safer realm of object-relating (e.g. relating primarily to one’s fantasy of the other). In some instances, it provides a tempting retreat from relatedness; in other instances, a tolerable portal.

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Between April and June of 2010, a comprehensive study estimated that the average adolescent (13-17 years old) in the United States sent or received 3,339 text messages per month (Nielsen Report, 2010). At the time, this was an eight percent increase over 2009, rendering it likely that teenagers might be texting even more today. At roughly six messages per waking hour, "texting" has become a central feature of the adolescent social scene, at times more preferable than face-face-interactions (Reid & Reid, 2006; Walther & Parks, 2002). Reid & Reid (2004), two prominent researchers in the field of texting, found that 90% of teenagers text more than they talk on their mobile phones; adolescents regularly type things in a text message they would not ordinarily say to another person; and they generally feel that the cell-phone is an extension of the self that can be used to reveal and conceal. While similar findings have been published regarding adult texting, the overall usage of the text messaging function by adults is only a fraction of that of the adolescent age group (Barlow, 2008). Findings so striking lead one to wonder why adolescents have their cell phones clutched so tightly and how texting interacts with the developmental demands of adolescence, particularly those involving intimacy and relatedness.

Adolescence is marked primarily by significant changes in the body and is the period of time when styles of relating are solidified in preparation for adult intimacy. In an effort to consider one framework for understanding healthy and unhealthy relatedness, we will turn to intersubjective theory in Chapter Two. As a theory of relatedness between actual people in the world (as opposed to the object-relations of phantasy), intersubjectivity highlights that

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recognition of one another's unique subjectivity is requisite for social-emotional maturity (Benjamin, 1995).

Though desires and fears of intimacy have been addressed extensively in the psychoanalytic literature, cell phones and text messaging have been given much less attention, if any at all. Texting is a huge interpersonal phenomenon that limits access for billions of teens to the direct visual and auditory experience of the texting partner, something that has implications at the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and intersubjective level. Though all are important facets of the texting phenomenon, this dissertation will focus primarily on the intersubjective implications of adolescent texting. Through a synthesis of psychoanalytic theory, developmental literature, and researched texting habits and experiences, I begin to identify some complications that arise from embodied and non-embodied encounters between teens, touching on intrapsychic and interpersonal implications along the way. While one's capacities for intersubjectivity are kneaded and prepared in infancy, adolescence is a time for refinement and casting of those capacities, a process that evokes a great deal of anxiety, as we will see in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 will discuss adolescents' experiences of texting and delve into the ways texting can further enhance or, at times, dilute relations between teens as autonomous, free-thinking, real subjects. Chapter 5 will then review and discuss the ways in which texting complicates the already-challenging adolescent task of developing a robust capacity for intimacy. To preview that discussion, texting seems to be used prevalently as a way to sidestep the "different" or "similar" subjectivity of the other through gaze aversion or other forms of sensory deprivation. Adolescents' fears of difference and otherness are considered alongside fears of sameness and "like minds," all things involved in subject-relating. The ways many teens use texting reflect a

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tension between subject- and object-relating. Their growing capacities and desires to relate to the here-and-now subjectivity of actual others is in conflict with their vulnerabilities, leading them to sometimes prefer less narcissistically challenging versions of others, versions that are easily located via texting.

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### **Chapter 2: Intersubjectivity**

#### **Why Intersubjectivity?**

Inspired by Donald Winnicott (1971), and later elaborated by Daniel Stern (1985), Robert Stolorow (1986), Jessica Benjamin (1988, 1990, 1995), and others, intersubjective theory extends psychoanalytic thinking beyond the individual's internal world of drives, phantasies, and object relations and turns our attention toward the external world of relations between actual people with separate subjectivities (Benjamin, 1995). Intersubjectivity is broadly defined as a capacity for mutual recognition, whereby each person sees the other as an equivalent center of experience. Mutual recognition requires interdependence and reflection from an other, while being an equivalent center of experience requires individual identity and independence. This dialectic is found in the everyday demands of any two people in a relationship, but it exists with greater intensity in the foundational developmental tasks of adolescence – identity formation, capacity for intimacy, and increased autonomy. First let us understand what it means to be intersubjectively related. Then we will think about intersubjective capacities in adolescence and how those are facilitated or inhibited by their use of texting.

#### **Intersubjective Relatedness: What Is It and How Does It Develop?**

Many contemporary writers on intersubjectivity, both philosophical and psychoanalytic, begin with Hegel's (1807) writings on the master-slave dialectic as presented in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. As a post-Cartesian philosopher, Hegel challenged Descartes' notion that people exist as conscious minds in isolation from bodies and others. Instead, Hegel felt that

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people existed as conscious minds only in relation to other minds and bodies, that mutual recognition between people is requisite for self-consciousness. This position introduces a never-ending struggle for conscious beings, between a desire for independence and a desire for recognition, which is illustrated through his unfolding master-slave dialectic. In a given scenario where one person, identified as a “master,” is in some sort of relation with one identified as a “slave,” Hegel points out that neither person can hold his title independently of the other. Imagine that a master wants to revel in his powerful and independent position as master. Prepared to bask in his glorious independence, the master quickly confronts a challenge; a master can only be a master in relation to someone subordinate, someone who is not-master. As a result, his self-revelation as master requires that he elicit the slave’s recognition of his position as such. The master is at the mercy of the slave, himself a slave to his need for the other. Imagine also that the slave wishes to be a free man. The slave will only gain this independence once he is recognized as liberated in the eyes of the master, thereby rendering him dependent on the master, even in his freedom. Thus, both the master’s and the slave’s “independence” from the other can only be gained through their dependence on mutual recognition and oscillating power dynamics.

This master-slave dialectic highlights the fundamental dilemma of intersubjectivity, namely that our “...wish for absolute independence conflicts with the self’s need for recognition” (Benjamin, 1995, p.36). Though the idea that we need others for survival is not new, intersubjectivity posits that we need something more than mother’s food, or even her embrace; we need her genuine desire for us. We need the important people in our lives to desire and take pleasure in our existence, successes, experiences, etc.... As with subjectivity, awareness is neither static nor self-contained; it constantly ebbs and flows between self and non-self

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referents (e.g. between self and other, between the desirer and the desired, or between the thinker and the thought). Benjamin (1995) reminds us of something many have asserted before her, that one's self-awareness only finds itself through a reflection of itself in an other; therefore our self-consciousness is constantly rediscovered and redefined as it bounces back and forth between subjects (and perhaps internal objects as well). In a critical reflection on Benjamin's work, Judith Butler (2000) said that awareness, "must pass through self-loss, but when it passes through, it will never be 'returned' to what it was...The price of self-knowledge will be self-loss, and [the existence of] the Other poses the possibility of both securing and undermining self-knowledge" (p.285). The result of (inter)subjectivity, then, is that the narrative we hold of ourselves and the world is written, edited, and re-written, to varying degrees, every time we interact with an other.

Continuing in the realm of philosophy, Heidegger (1996) felt that humans are always located intersubjectively. The notion that an individual can be self-conscious of herself as only an individual is problematic and inherently alienating. He said that we are not beings in isolation, but always beings in relation to one another, co-creating experience as we go. As people, we naturally attempt to represent our experiences through symbols and language; however, the nuance of an intersubjective encounter is so much more complex than what can be symbolized, so we always fall short of accurately representing experience. Due to our inability to consciously articulate or fully communicate intersubjective experience, Heidegger said that what transpires between subjects constitutes the unconscious. This is in contrast to the Freudian unconscious, which is seen more as a repository for already-symbolized unacceptable thoughts,

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desires, and impulses (Freud, 1900), and more aligned with Bollas's (1992) notion of the "unthought known," that which is experienced but not yet represented.

Heidegger's work was a large inspiration for Jacques Lacan, a prominent French psychoanalyst who was the first in the field of psychology to use the word "intersubjectivity," and did so in his book, *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (1977). Drawing on Heidegger's thoughts about language, representation, and the unconscious, Lacan came to think that being a subject meant being subject to language, as introduced during the mirror stage (Lacan, 1949). Between six and eighteen months, infants begin to make use of receptive language, at which point words, voices, and gazes become constitutional of their subjectivity. Through the parents' use of affective language (i.e. "Look at you!" or "That's you!"), the child learns that her mirror image is her (Fink, 1995). The languages of words, bodies, vocal inflections, and "looks" are taken up and used by all subjects; therefore, these languages are not purely internal or external, but happenings between subjects, as intersubjective processes. Such intersubjective happenings are largely comprised of language and non-verbal communication, but Lacan goes further to articulate notions about the role of desire in intersubjectivity.

Early in his career Lacan felt that intersubjectivity involved one subject's desire for experiences an other had to offer, such as concern, care, love, reflection, and recognition. He initially thought that these experiences were accessed through objects that represented those experiences; for example, a baby's demand for mother's milk (object) was actually a demand for the mother's love (experience) (Žižek, 1997); milk symbolized love. Or, to follow this line of reasoning, a teenager's desire for a text from a friend would actually be a desire for that friend's



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recognition. Though Lacan considered himself to be neo-Freudian, his line of thinking actually opposed Freud's, which was that the infant sought the mother for the main purpose of receiving pleasure by getting her milk; the infant did not seek out the mother for her warm soothing embrace or any other kind of relational experience (Freud, 1915). Instead, Lacan's ideas seemed to resonate with object-relations theory and Fairbairn's (1954) hypothesis that people are not primarily pleasure-seeking but relationship- or object-seeking. Eventually, Lacan came to believe that these ideas alone did not seem to capture the essence of relationships and he revised his notion of intersubjectivity to consider the bidirectionality of desire. As suggested to above, we desire independence, love, recognition, success, etc..., all of which are intrinsically linked with an other's recognition of those qualities; therefore, we all yearn for recognition from others and visa versa.

Lacan rejected the Hegelian notion of intersubjectivity as a dialectic between each individual's independent recognition of desire (i.e. I want Jane to text me back) and desire for recognition (i.e. I want Jane to know how happy I am) because, according to Lacan, desire of any kind does not belong solely to the desiring subject and, therefore, could not be recognized as such (Žižek, 1997). To believe otherwise maintains positions of "me and you" and eludes a deeper kind of intersubjectivity, namely "us." Lacan began thinking that, when the baby desires the mother's milk, what the baby truly desires is to be the center of mother's pleasure and attention, to be the object of mother's desire and for the mother to desire feeding the baby. Similarly, the mother's desire to feed her baby always includes a desire for her baby to take pleasure in being fed. Therefore, subjects by their nature are always desiring something, and their desire always includes the desire of the other. In the examples above, the baby's desire is

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for the desire of the mother, and the adolescent's desire (and that of every subject) is for others to want to respond, relate, or interact. The subject cannot be disentangled from the other and neither subject can be removed from their desire, which, as we shall see, is a poignant state of affairs for adolescents.

In 1978, Robert Stolorow introduced intersubjectivity to American psychoanalysis (Schwartz, 2012). At the time, North American psychoanalysis had been largely influenced by the ego psychology movement of the 1940's, which focused primarily on the one-person psychology of psychic structure, defenses, and libidinal objects, (see Hartmann, 1939, Mahler, 1968, & Jacobson, 1964). Troubled by the strict one-person model of ego psychology, Erikson and Kohut, though theoretically distinct, both extended their respective ideas to include the ways in which individual subjectivities develop within interpersonal and cultural context (Mitchell & Black, 1995). And shortly thereafter, the British school of object relations was exerting its influence in North America by altering and expanding our conception of "objects." Though one cannot do justice to the complexity of these ideas in such a context, objects up until this point were largely defined as people or fantasies toward which one's drives were directed (Freud, 1905) or preconceived phantasies of the breast (Klein, 1957).

Object relations theories redefined objects as internalized versions of affectively charged representations of others as they relate to the self. According to the theory, objects are not the solely intrapsychic phenomena but amended versions of actual relationships that we hold inside our minds, always coloring our relations and interactions with everyone else in the world. At this point psychoanalytic ideas were moving beyond intrapsychic-dominant frameworks to make room for the importance of relationships. For Stolorow and his colleagues, however,

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psychoanalytic theory still fell short; they felt that intersubjectivity was more than a bumping together of two minds or two people. Atwood and Stolorow (1984) defined intersubjectivity as the intersection and interplay between two actual people with a particular focus on the separateness of the two people's thoughts and experiences (Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997). As intersubjectivity began to take shape as a school of thought in North America, research on infant development and attachment brought a significant evidence-base to the otherwise theoretical musings (Stern, 1985).

Leading this research-based intersubjective movement was Daniel Stern's book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (1985). He challenged Freud's notion of the baby as symbiotic, undifferentiated, merged, or one with, the object mother. Stern observed that infant-mother communication occurred between two persons or subjects and that it traveled in both directions, not just from mother to infant, but from infant to mother as well. At around eight or nine months of age, infants gain the capacity to perceive other minds; they begin to develop affect attunement, and understand that the other might be feeling similar or different things than them. It turns out that babies not only interact with The Mother, as a breast-object that provides milk or warmth, but also with their mother, as a particular subject in the world. This development occurs in conjunction with Lacan's (1949) mirror stage, at which point infants begin to develop capacities for receptive language and first experience themselves as the object of an other's gaze, thoughts, or words. They have the affective experience of being an other to the other. With the awareness that others have independent minds comes the budding capacity for intersubjective relatedness, which Stern defined as, "the capacity to share, know, understand, empathize with, feel, participate in, resonate with, and enter into the lived subjective experience of another" (p.78).

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In 1988 Beebe & Lachmann's complex video analyses of mothers and infants expanded Stern's research to show that mutually influencing relationships are crucial for the development of attachment as well as self-regulation. Circuitous interactions between mother and baby clearly confirmed what Winnicott (1971) had written about sixteen years earlier, namely that regulation of self can be facilitated through regulation of the other, and that it can all happen relatively preconsciously through spontaneous interaction. The mother's visual/verbal recognition of her baby regulates the baby who, then, recognizes and affirms the mother's efforts, through faces and sounds, aiding her regulation in kind. This research supports Lacan's notion that both people are mutually influenced by the other's desire and recognition (Žižek, 1997). Additionally, Beebe et. al (2010) correlated disorganized attachment in adulthood with the mother's repeated inability to recognize or reflect one's emotions as an infant. This research illuminated the empathic importance of subtle, complex, and highly interactive mutual recognition involving wide-ranging non-verbal cues. This will be an important consideration when we discuss texting, which tends to lack non-verbal elements so crucial to the appreciation of interactive nuance.

Curious about the works of Stern and Stolorow, Jessica Benjamin (1995) wondered about the difference between the experience of relating to an object, colored largely by one's mental representation, and the experience of relating with a subject, or other mind. As a forerunner of feminist psychoanalytic critique, Jessica Benjamin has written extensively about the problematic legacy of intrapsychic theories of "objects." She says that psychoanalysis is largely comprised of paternalistic frameworks that reduce mothers to "breasts," or objects of fantasy, and neglect the infant's gradually unfolding experience of the mother as a person in her own right. Melanie

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Klein (1946) was the first to write about the infant's ability to recognize the mother as separate and outside her omnipotent control, though her formulation was still couched in the notion of representational "objects." The first analyst to write clearly about the distinction between subject- and object-mother was D.W. Winnicott (1971). The distinction between the mother as an internal object representation and the mother as an objectively perceived external other begins to take shape for the child when her relation to the "inside mother" differs from her experience of the "outside mother" (Benjamin, 1995). Winnicott (1969) illustrated this through a scenario whereby an angry child destroys the object mother in fantasy, yet the subject mother survives in reality, thereby showing the child that the mother is a subject separate from, and stronger than, his fantasies. This was a groundbreaking challenge to the intrapsychic theories of the time, yet few people inquired further into the distinction between subjects and objects.

In a rigorous theoretical revival and reconstruction, Benjamin (1995, 2000) expanded Winnicott's (1971) ideas about the importance of maternal subjectivity while integrating and delimiting Margaret Mahler's (1972) ideas about the rapprochement sub-phase of separation-individuation. Rapprochement, as described by Mahler, is the period of development between 18-24 months where the increasingly autonomous toddler struggles with the dangers of independence, namely, separation from mother. The classic depiction is a toddler walking away from the mother while constantly looking back to see if she is still there, occasionally running and clinging to her, presumably for fear of psychic separateness. For Mahler, a healthy traversal of rapprochement results in the successful internalization of the mother, thereby creating an object-representation of her.

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Benjamin (1995) was drawn to these developmental ideas, but felt that Mahler limited its potential by formulating rapprochement in the sterile and experience-distant terms of “egos” and “objects.” Mahler said that the infant is able to move toward autonomy and separateness as she begins to internalize the object of her mother. Through the lens of “objects,” Benjamin (1995) says, “...the pleasure in mutuality between two subjects is reduced to its function of stabilizing the self” (p.33). Benjamin (1995) felt that Mahler’s formulation was too “infantocentric” and that it failed to consider the independent subjectivity of the mother herself, as well as the pleasurable and unpleasurable interactional elements between the mother/baby dyad.

The notion of recognition became central for Benjamin. Similar to Kohut’s (1977) ideas about mirroring, Benjamin (1995, 2000) says that recognition begins with an experience of the other confirming that our existence has made an impact. Through the other’s nonverbal and verbal responsiveness, meaning is created and intentionality is ascribed to our actions. It is not extremely important that the other’s meaning-making aligns perfectly with our intended meaning, but it is important that the other responds in some capacity to let us know that we matter. As we have seen, nothing happens unidirectionally; therefore, our acknowledgement of the other’s recognition is an act of recognition in return, thereby creating a field of mutual recognition (Benjamin, 1995; Beebe & Lachmann, 1988). In contrast to Mahler, Benjamin contends that mutual recognition is one of the crucial developments in rapprochement. In addition to the toddler looking back at the mother out of anxiety and insecurity (Mahler, 1972), Benjamin (1995, 2000) posits that the toddler is also making contact with the mother’s mind in an effort to share this new and exciting experience. The toddler’s feelings of security rest both on the mother’s recognition of the toddler and the toddler’s recognition of being recognized.

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Once the toddler feels connected and understood, she can then separate again thus creating the ever-lasting tension between closeness and autonomy.

In discovering one's need for the mother's recognition and (ideally) enjoyment of her newfound independence, the toddler is also faced with situations of unmet need when the mother exerts her own independence. Turning around to glean mother's affirming response, the toddler might instead see her mother walking away, thus posing the toddler with the awareness that her mother has independent desires for something or someone other than the toddler herself. This is also the point at which Lacan says that one's desire becomes desire of the "Other". The toddler has fallen from her position of omnipotence over the mother and must now discover ways to make herself desirable, otherwise the toddler risks fading into the background of the mother's awareness. She begins to implicitly ask herself, "What does mother want of me?" which later in life becomes the desire-infused question of, "What does the Other want of me?" "The Other" in this case represents one's partners, society, parents, church, children, political affiliations, teachers, and friends. In sum, Benjamin (1995, 2000) described rapprochement as that point at which we begin holding the tension between recognition of the other and assertion of self, between what the Other desires of me and what I desire of me, and between what the Other wants to share of herself and what I want from her.

As subjects in our own right, we want to think of ourselves as autonomous and independent but, like the slave, our sense of independence is supported by the other's recognition of that fact. One's independence implies an other who is also independent; yet, the other's independence threatens our sense of control and omniscience. In a discussion of Benjamin's position, Schwartz (2012) captured the conflict between object relating and subject relating. He

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said that, "Objects are representations and can be manipulated to satisfy desires, but subjects exist in a reality that is always beyond grasp" (p.419).

All of these ideas coalesced to enrich the contemporary notion of intersubjectivity, a theory described by Benjamin (1995) "...in which the individual subject [who] no longer reigns absolute must confront the difficulty each subject has in recognizing the other as an equivalent center of experience" (p.28). Difficulty lies in our simultaneous dependence on and fear of the other's subjectivity as something that both affirms and threatens our own. The goal is for each person to gain an appreciation for difference, otherness, and novelty through mutual recognition of the other's subjectivity. One's experience of being cherished for one's difference makes it easier for her to cherish the difference of others. The ability to appreciate difference renders it something positive and exciting rather than hostile and destructive (Benjamin, 1995).

Benjamin (1995) says that intersubjectivity dilutes feelings and fears of omnipotence, something that is intensely experienced for some adolescents (Elkind, 1967). In her definition, omnipotence represents a defensive denial of the other's independence and an attempt to reconstitute the primary narcissistic unity felt before one knew the feeling of powerlessness. How does intersubjectivity counteract omnipotence? Benjamin says that if we cannot bring ourselves to connect with the other's separateness, then we are omnipotently denying his independence, thereby rendering him the same as us. These projections of sameness often fuel the omnipotence of the other as an object (Benjamin, 1995). If we are powerful enough to negate the other's subjectivity, then the other could be equally powerful. The more powerful the other seems, the more likely we are to feel like the other is the "doer" and we are the "done to." When there is such a failure in intersubjective recognition, we might feel the need to retaliate by



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asserting our own omnipotence (Benjamin, 1995). It follows, that, “appreciation of a shared reality opens up a space for fantasy that is less dangerous” (p.88). The more we can recognize the subjectivity and humanness of the other, the less omnipotence is a player in the relational field.

This complementary doer/done-to dynamic is negotiated in every moment of relatedness between people throughout the lifespan but is first seen in rapprochement-phase children. A willful refusal to accept the mother as a separate person emerges in play where they take on the retaliatory role of the doer, being the one to leave the mother, as they feel the mother does to them. As the child is able to recognize the mother as someone who might not want to leave but who might have to, the child can reflect on her own desire for the mother to stay, but with an awareness that the mother’s leaving is not an attack on her. A doer/done-to dynamic momentarily shifts to one of mutual recognition and intersubjectivity, a position that is constantly lost and gained again.

Intersubjectivity is attained when the tension is maintained between the intrapsychic and the interpersonal, between fantasy and reality, between object and subject, and between negation and recognition (Benjamin, 1990, 1995, 2000). Any domination of one over the other sends us into a dyadic, defensive, and problematic way of relating that, when chronic, can lead to psychic retreat or stunted emotional growth (Steiner, 2011). True connection with the other bridges two minds, it does not threaten omnipotent invasion or incorporation. In a discussion of these ideas, Frosh (2003) wrote that, “Recognition staves off absorption of self into the other just as it prevents the other from being colonized by the self” (p.172). Similarly, Judith Butler (2000) described intersubjectivity as,

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...a process that is engaged when subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one another, but where this reflection does not result in a collapse of the one into the Other...or a projection that annihilates the alterity of the Other (p.172).

Benjamin's work has highlighted some crucial aspects of one's development of self, attachment, and relationships. Though she acknowledges Lacan in her early formulations, Benjamin quickly breaks off from his more radical ideas that subjectivity is implicitly fractured and, therefore, intersubjectivity is a flawed enterprise. Benjamin, like Lacan, felt that intersubjectivity requires acknowledging the inherent unknowability of the other. Unlike Lacan, however, she feels that it is actually possible for one subject to recognize aspects of the other's true/authentic self, despite our inherent unknowability. For Benjamin, our unknowability creates a place inside our subjectivity that cannot be inhabited by the other; thereby preserving our subjectivity. For Lacan and Butler (2000) it is the opposite; our unknowability is the defining feature of our subjectivity and, therefore, the defining feature of Intersubjectivity.

Misrepresentation, mistranslation, misconstruction, and misrecognition are inherent aspects of human relations that potentially occur multiple times per second. The place at which we "get the other wrong," so to speak, is the place that our unconscious intrapsychic landscape meets the other's; it is the place at which we are interacting with a false idea of the other as an object. In misrecognizing the other, our desires (for the other to be a certain way) co-author the other's identity and fill the other with feelings and desires to metabolize.

The potential for unwanted misrecognition in every human interaction, though necessary and inevitable, can elicit a range of conscious and unconscious feelings like victimization, objectification, or even loss, as will be discussed later (Benjamin, 1995). Though there are

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planned and controlled depictions and false-self presentations, misrecognition sometimes occurs in moments when one desires true recognition. Working through and surviving the effects of misrecognition and negation allows the intersubjective dialogue to resume; in fact, Benjamin says that the destruction of object-others in such situations actually catalyzes our capacity for recognition of the other as a subject.

### **Summary**

Intersubjectivity, as articulated by philosophers and psychoanalysts, attempts to describe the experience of being a person in relationship with other people. Though we have inherent strivings for independence, self-sufficiency, and achievement, we are fundamentally dependent on the recognition of others to affirm our independence, our impact, and ultimately our existence. Recognition can come in many forms: a “Good job” or “Do better next time,” a pat on the back, or a thumbs-down, but also crucially through facial expressions, looks of approval, disappointment, surprise, pride, hurt, etc. Acts of recognition communicate that “I am being seen by you and, in return, I see you as you are, not how I might want you to be, but precisely as you are.” Such a reflection is regulating, organizing, but also subtle and elusive, particularly during texting, where communication is faceless. The next chapter will explore facets of adolescent development that might impact development of intersubjective capacities, and the following chapter will consider the associated implications of texting, so central to the interactive experience of many adolescents.

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**Chapter 3: Adolescents - How Do They Experience Other Subjects?****Introduction**

The notion of a transitional event or phase between youth and adulthood has existed cross-culturally since antiquity, though the term “adolescence” was not coined until G. Stanley Hall’s (1904) two-volume introduction to the concept. As with every stage of development, there is a general consensus that movement through adolescence entails particular shifts in one’s ways of being in and experiencing the surrounding world. Though these shifts are typically thought to begin with the onset of puberty, or children’s entrance into their “teens,” various factors in today’s culture have resulted in many people entering puberty earlier and adulthood later. The concept of adolescence has broadened to include younger “tweens” (11-13 year olds), who are now expressing many qualities once considered distinctly adolescent. Similarly, many of the tasks typical of adolescence, like identity formation and transition into a career, are still developing in individuals well into their thirties, resulting in the concepts of “extended adolescence” and “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 1999). As such, many of the constructs discussed below might also relate to the developmental tasks of some children or adults.

Not only is the construct of adolescence difficult to define, but the literature and research on adolescent development has drastically shifted focus and methodologies over time. From the turn of the twentieth century and well into the 1950’s, the literature on adolescence was largely comprised of psychoanalytically-oriented clinical data and individual case studies (i.e. Katharina, Dora, *A Young Girl’s Diary*, etc...). These methods of study reached astounding psychological depths and offered a compelling epistemology for thinking about intrapsychic and interpersonal

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life (Corbett, 2011); however, their theoretical constructs have not always been tapped or integrated with the work of an array of other contemporary developmental thinkers. Be that as it may, the psychoanalytic body of literature addresses underlying motivations, desires, impulses, and fears that continue to deserve a special place in modern thinking. It is certainly true that, drawing from domains of social psychology, cognitive psychology, and developmental neuroscience, non-psychoanalytic adolescent research has opened vast areas for exploration. Some of those areas are germane to this study of constructs tied to issues of intimacy, self- and other awareness, and intersubjectivity. Therefore, this chapter will address a number of findings that have emerged both outside and inside the psychoanalytic literature.

Before diving in, one final thing in need of addressing is the difficulty faced when attempting to write a chapter on something as diffuse and idiosyncratic as adolescent development. The field of psychology attempts to deal with this difficulty through the production of unitary theories about categories of people and experience (e.g. Freud's psychosexual theory, Erikson's psychosocial theory, Piaget's cognitive theory, and even intersubjective theory at times), which unfortunately cannot help but constrict our view of the individual (Corbett, 2009). In a recent book about adolescents' masculinity and cultural construction, Corbett writes, "The history of psychology is replete with the dropping of the pluralizing –s. We underestimate variability and multiplicity. We relish the norm while overlooking the productive potential to be found in variance" (p.4). It is challenging to speak of adolescents without dropping the –s at the end. While every teen experiences the world from her particular biological, familial, social, socioeconomic, hormonal, and cultural context, it is nearly impossible to address all of these personal dimensions when considering general developmental

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trends and struggles. So this study will attempt to look at some broad adolescent issues, while keeping in mind that there are “normal” exceptions to various common processes cited here. Major categorical differences in the research that might impact intersubjective capacities or experience will be addressed specifically.

### **Puberty: Body, Brain, Impulse, and Desire**

For many developmental psychologists, the onset of puberty marks one’s transition into adolescence (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 1990). With new capacities for reflection and articulation, adolescents are navigating their internal and external worlds with greater dexterity and awareness than in childhood. Developments in abstract and hypothetical thinking permit teens to more fluently perceive, mentalize, and reflect on the intentions, thoughts, and feelings of themselves and others (Piaget, 1967; Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008); however, major biological, cognitive, and social transformations result in acute emotionality that interferes on many levels (Larson, Moneta, Richards, & Wilson, 2002; Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2003). As neocortical circuits are remodeled, problem-solving reverts to emotionally-driven brain regions (Spear, 2000; Steinberg, 2005, 2010) and teens often tend to become more reactive to stressful situations, many of which are interpersonal (Quevedo, Benning, Guner, & Dahl, 2009; Spear, 2009; Steinberg, 2005). Additionally, prefrontal cortical areas of the brain associated with executive functioning mature at a slower rate than the limbic and paralimbic systems, which are responsible for the social-emotional development of teens (Steinberg, 2005, 2010). While various social-emotional areas of the brain are reworked, the areas of the brain responsible for such processes as self-regulation, attention, problem solving, and decision-making, have yet to catch up. Additional emotional and social challenges, conscious or otherwise, are often being

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navigated with the executive functioning of childhood selves, something that tends not to mature and cohere until late adolescence (Spear, 2000; Steinberg, 2005, 2010). Blos (1962) hypothesized that all this reorganization can be “experienced by the adolescent as a feeling of void, an inner [unconscious] turmoil which can be directed, in the search for relief, toward any mitigating opportunity which the environment may offer” (p.76). Affectively charged teens tend, with some exceptions, to be relatively poor self-regulators, and might be more likely to look to the environment to provide stimulation and regulation where they cannot, perhaps looking to others to serve a regulatory function.

Self-regulation can be defined as, “the internally directed capacity to regulate affect, attention, and behavior to respond effectively to both internal and environmental demands” (Raffaelli et al., 2005) and includes things like the ability to delay gratification, restrict the expression of one’s impulses, and contain one’s emotions. These can also be thought of as ego functions, all of which contribute to intersubjective capacities, alter intersubjective experience, and have been shown to grow and stabilize as one passes through adolescence (Raffaelli et al., 2005). Harden & Tucker-Drob (2011) compiled numerous cross-sectional studies on adolescence and found that impulsivity generally decreases with age. Stimulus-seeking (e.g. looking toward the external world to stimulate the self in some way) typically peaks around twelve or thirteen years old (Russo et al., 1991, 1993; Stephenson, Hoyle, Palmgreen, & Slater, 2003) and decreases again in one’s early twenties (Gambia, Camp, & Grodsky, 1992; Roth, Schumacher, & Brahler, 2005; Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978).

In addition to the biological substrates of self-regulation and stimulus-hunger, it is also important to explore potential social, cultural, and emotional underpinnings. It should be noted

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that the ability to tolerate varying emotional states and regulate affect also depends greatly on early relationships with caregivers and how self-regulation and self-soothing was modeled (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). Having said that, we are all born with natural curiosities about the external world; we tend to look at things out in the world to stimulate our wonderment, foster our creativity, and enliven our fantasy lives (Stern, 1985). Although it is natural to seek stimulation from the external world, some worry that North Americans are culturally over-booked and over-stimulated, especially North American children and adolescents (Elkind, 2010; Doherty & Carlson, 2002).

In a discussion about life in The United States, Elkind (2010) talks about the “hurried child” of today. He says that many children and adolescents are significantly stressed as a result of their overly-scheduled lives. Many middle-class teens are balancing multiple clubs, sports, full time academic loads, and social lives, which altogether can result in what Doherty & Carlson (2002) termed “time famine.” The frantic pace of American life leaves little time to process the day. Hurried meals and over-booked lives can preclude spontaneous fun and relaxation needed for neural growth and reorganization. On the other hand, such intense involvement can lead to increased self-esteem and self-awareness, greater integration into the community, greater capacities for emotional regulation, and higher achievements overall (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Urban, Lewin-Bizan, & Lerner, 2010). Though it is unclear if their time famine is actively sought by teens, culturally reinforced, parentally engineered, or some combination thereof, it has been hypothesized that many teens today tend to seek stimulation, not only in pursuit of opening themselves to the world or stimulating creativity,



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but also in the hopes of finding relief and solace from their limitations in an overly-stimulating and demanding world (Esman, 1979).

The increased time, social, and academic burdens and maturing reflective capacities of teens confronts them with a broadened and more realistic view of their own limitations. In 1964 Jacobson observed that adolescents persistently used denial and isolation in the face of overwhelming pressures; similarly, contemporary research observes that early and middle adolescents utilize more emotion-focused coping strategies, like avoidance and denial, while older teens tend to use more cognitive-based coping strategies, like planning (Williams & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2000). From the perspective of ego psychologists such as Jacobson, this use of denial and avoidance of vulnerabilities reflects an early teen's struggle with a "split-ego," or an ego split between childhood and adulthood. On the one side there is a potent, sexual, strong, capable teen seeking independence, and on the other hand, a weak, small, vulnerable, asexual, dependent teen (Vanier, 2001). Waddell (2000) and others have hypothesized that the possibility of learning about all these vulnerable feelings and splits can make thinking and reflecting seem frightening. After all, they are "supposed" to be outgrowing these childish qualities.

Though adolescence tends to be a time of complex academic thought and existential pondering, internal reflection also pushes people toward newness that is both exciting and uncomfortable (Steiner, 2011), so much so that Waddell (2000) says some teens "seem to stop thinking independently altogether and submerge themselves either in the shared mentality of group-life, and/or in activities which are literally mindless...." Of course some teens are comfortable with independent and rigorous thought while others turn to the larger group to

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decide what to wear and how to think. Teens who turn to others to provide stimulation might do so out of a desire to fit in, out of a desire to avoid the consequences of internal stimulation, or out of an inability to self-stimulate. When stimulus-seeking serves the purpose of diverting one's attention away from inner feelings and experiences, it threatens to stifle creativity, curiosity, and fantasy, all necessary things for one to internally flourish, self-regulate, and interact with other subjects (Freud, 1900; Columbi, 2010).

In contrast to Esman's view that stimulus-seeking can remove us from an overly-demanding external world, it can also serve to distract us from a confusing or overstimulating internal world. Puberty brings with it a 26-fold increase in testosterone levels in boys and a 10-fold increase of estradiol levels in girls (Ducharme & Forests, 1993). Radical physical changes in the body are accompanied by neurological hormonal changes that thrust adolescents into a prolonged state of biological and emotional instability (Freud, 1905; Larson, Moneta, Richards, & Wilson, 2002; Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2001; Zimmerman, Mohn, & Spangler, 2009). This re-wiring will eventually result in greater physical and emotional regulation (Schulenberg et al., 2004); however, in the mean time, physiological arousal, secondary sex characteristics, menstruation, and the potential for orgasm all demand attention and integration into the adolescent's body concept.

Emerging teens might struggle to trust their bodily urges; adolescent boys might feel physiologically un-contained, for example, as they find themselves in the middle of class with an uncontrollable erection. Though we all long for that soothing recognition from others, this is undoubtedly a time when non-recognition is welcomed. During this surge of sexual feelings, many adolescents might unconsciously rely on the rules and boundaries of others (i.e. parents,

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teachers, zippers, and screens) to help with the containment and delayed gratification they still struggle to provide for themselves (Blos, 1962). When entering into puberty some adolescents struggle with self-certainty and self-consciousness about their bodies and oscillate between holding on and letting go of their scopophilic, exhibitionistic, and sexual impulses. Feeling a bit more stable and self-contained in mid- to late-adolescence, teens might shift from a narcissistic concern with their own bodies to a focal interest in that of the other. The struggles around this time might center on their ability to pursue the other and simultaneously control their emotional overflow (Kiell, 1964). Both of these developmental positions are reflective of different experiences of and capacities for intersubjective relatedness. If their own body is unfamiliar (Other) and overwhelming, it must also be difficult to tolerate experiencing the bodies of others.

Not only does the image of teens' bodies change from the outside, but the internal representation, or image, teens hold of their selves transforms. Who does this new body belong to? Is it still the mother's body to kiss, dress, prohibit, and caress, as it once seemed to be in childhood (Laufer, 1968)? Does it belong to the other who looks at one's body's new developments with sexual intentions? Adolescence is a time for claiming ownership over one's own subjective body that is made difficult by unexpected arousal, newfound physical and intellectual capacities, and an unfamiliar gaze from the other, a reminder that one's body is a new kind of object.

Though psychoanalytically informed theories of adolescent development are important considerations in this literature review, it is important to mention the well-known research of Offer, Ostrov, and Howard (1981) as it firmly challenged the prevailing "storm-and-stress" model of adolescence and helped pave the road for many of the current ideas about adolescent

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development. Their self-report research suggested that adolescence is a smoother and less-eventful stage of development than was once thought; hormonal changes, they said, do not necessary result in experiences of “upheaval” and “turmoil.” While these findings have been illuminating and influential, it is important to remember that the majority of their studies were conducted via self-report, the findings from which express conscious experiences (that teens were willing to report) and inherently pose the possibility for underreporting of less conscious internal pressures. Even so, it is important to understand the experiences teens permit into their awareness. One aspect of their research that was particularly pertinent to this discussion is that, while teens reported feeling that many social, emotional, and academic experiences of adolescence were relatively under control, so to speak, their experiences of their body changes and sexuality revealed decidedly greater ambivalence.

In the realm of puberty and sexuality, the majority of teens in Offer et al.’s (1981) studies reported feeling pleased with recent changes in their bodies and feeling able to “cope with and find pleasure in their sexuality” (p.87). However, their research also found that 21-46% of teens frequently felt ugly or unattractive. And in the twenty years between the 1960’s and 1980’s, teens reported feeling more and more “sexually behind” the times (Offer et al., 1981). It seems that they felt comfortable and confident with their budding sexual bodies but perhaps they also felt precociously pushed into using those bodies, as if there was a sociocultural pressure to be more sexually comfortable, liberated, or sophisticated than they were. Since Offer et al.’s research in the 1980’s, public displays of sexuality have only become more liberal. Businesses post billboards of men and women with impossible or unhealthy bodies, many of which are extremely revealing and have been digitally altered. Similarly, the music that targets teenagers

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and young adults has moved far beyond the disguised sexual metaphors and odes to love of the baby boomer generation; lyrics about sex today are oftentimes explicit, illicit, and at times grotesque. If the teens of the 1980's felt "sexually behind," it likely that teens today might feel even more pressure to be sexually competent and comfortable. One wonders what happens to those conscious feelings of being "sexually behind;" how are they metabolized, acted on, or disguised? One also wonders what happens when their conscious experiences come into contact with those that are less conscious. For these we will move away from the self-report data of Offer et al. and back into the psychoanalytic literature.

External stimulation from music, advertising, and peers can lead individuals to feel conscious sexual discomfort. However, internal pressures from hormonal upsurges and other non- or un-conscious processes might also weigh on growing teens, impacting their intersubjective experience, and emerging in their capacities for intersubjectivity and motivations for texting. As a prequel to adulthood, Sigmund Freud stressed that puberty is a necessary sequel to infancy in which teens experience a resurgence of impulses that had been repressed throughout latency (Freud, 1905). After roughly six years of latency where one neither feels particularly sexualized or powerful, Freud said that adolescents discover in themselves a very potent genitality. Newfound sexual desires and impulses toward a real present other might feel overwhelming. Benjamin (2011) said that, "Desire might frighten us simply with its Otherness" and with its potency.

Latency is a time to refine one's internalization of social rules and the parental superego (Freud, 1905) and adolescence is a time to challenge those rules from a position of increased autonomy. "Breaking free" might consciously feel empowering and liberating; however, the lack

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of such containment might also feel internally precarious. For example, a teenager might report feeling powerful, effective, or successful when he gets away with breaking his parents' rules; however, he might also unconsciously desire containment, protection from himself, and reassurance that he is not so powerful. The maturing adult-like bodies of teens give them the capacity for real physical impacts on others. Melanie Klein (1957) wrote about the infant's desires both to possess the good satisfying object (e.g. breast, mother) and destroy the bad withholding or attacking object. As an immobile infant, these dominations and gratifications are relegated to the internal landscape of fantasy (Freud, 1905). But as physically capable and affectively charged teenagers, they now have the capacity to both possess and destroy the objects of their sexual and rageful fantasies, which can feel both empowering and terrifying (Vainer, 2001). Facing the fantasies and desires of their own minds and bodies highlights the possibility that those fantasies and desires might also exist in the minds and bodies of the other. One's own fantasies of romance, seduction, objectification, harm, and competitiveness might be difficult enough to negotiate without also negotiating those of an equally powerful other.

Boredom, a common adolescent experience, is indicative of an unconscious flight away from one's internal world, and/or an inability to stimulate one's self through fantasy, that signals a person to look to the external world for distraction or stimulation. Giambra et al. (1992) found that one's tendency to seek external stimulation out of boredom significantly decreases as one moves out of adolescence and enters adulthood. Adolescents' "boredom" might reflect a defensive posture toward an overwhelming or under-stimulating inner world or it could also reflect a deeper felt sense of loss and lack. In his *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Aktar (2009) described boredom as:

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A psychological state characterized by a blocked sense of longing for something, an inability to know what is longed for, a feeling of time having slowed down, an impediment to generating wishful fantasies, and an attitude of passive expectation that the external world might offer some satisfaction and yet ending up inconsolable and frustrated (p.17).

Adolescents face a “...compulsive acquisition of substitute gratifications that are sought to replace what is felt to be lost” (Barrett, 2008, p.144), what is longed for but not satiated.

Substitutions for such lack could include friends, sports, music, and perhaps texting. The use of such substitutions is undoubtedly multiply determined. They could be pursued as an end in themselves, as avenues for growth, competence, and mastery, and/or to compensate for a loss of things such as childhood innocence, freedom to play, or sitting on Mom’s lap. With each step away from the proverbial nest comes independence and individuation, but also the potential for isolation (Ostrov & Offer, 1978).

As with any developmental stage, adolescence results in a host of gains and losses that impact intersubjective capacities and experiences of being with others as subjects. As pre-teens enter puberty, the body grows, expands, and fills out. Some teens might seek the recognition and approval of others for their sexually maturing bodies, whereas others would be loath for anyone to see evidence of their arousal. Looking desirously at the bodies of others can highlight their sexual urges as well as those of others seen objectifying them back. Teens are tasked with redefining their subjective and objective bodies, how they will be experienced, used, displayed, concealed, and so on. Pubescent boys have the capacity to impregnate others; they have become physically strong enough to hold their own in a fight with their fathers or to inadvertently hurt their mothers. Similarly, pubescent girls can carry new life inside of them; while their precocious bodies carry great powers of seduction, their sexual objectification can render girls

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simultaneously powerless against the male gaze. The tension between scopophilia and exhibitionism, seeing and being seen, rises with their increased capacities to reflect on themselves and others; however, their neural re-wiring leaves them extremely sensitive to others, with nascent ego capacities to aid in self-regulation and impulse control. At times, adolescents might feel free to tackle the world, while at others they might have to immediately call home. With bodies that are starting to look grown-up, and adulthood waiting around the corner, teens are naturally and culturally propelled to separate from their parents and form new more intimate relationships with their peers. They can no longer “pass” for the vulnerable child that might still be lingering inside.

### **Individuation and Social Relationships**

The tasks of adolescence pose a seemingly contradictory challenge for teens – they are internally compelled and socially pushed into independence from their parents, all the while needing to learn how to form intimate mutual relationships with their peers. Though we innately strive for autonomy and the ability to “do it ourselves,” as illustrated by the repeatedly assertive “No!” heard from normally developing toddlers, we do not loosen practical ties with our parents and strike out into the world without some ambivalence (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Blos, 1962); teens are not so different from the rapprochement-phase toddler in that respect. In adolescence, however, peer relationships typically help to mitigate this ambivalence and are a good compromise between two developmentally unrealistic options, parental dependence and adult independence. The mental and emotional energy that was once directed toward things like impressing or being intimate with one’s caregivers is now directed more toward one’s peers



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(Aarons, 1970) and other parental figures, like coaches and teachers. It is primarily from these new figures that teens will seek recognition of their maturation.

The ability to establish close and intimate relationships is thought to be more important in adolescence than any other preceding developmental phase (Buhrmester, 1990). Whereas childhood was generally focused on learning how to join groups and play nicely, emerging teenagers are learning how to be close and intimate with one another, how to negotiate the boundaries of appropriate self-disclosure, how to attend to other's needs, express honest opinions and dissatisfactions, and appreciate difference. As a prototype for later intimate relationships (Fuhrman & Wehner, 1994; Sullivan, 1953), adolescent relationships provide the context for expression and regulation of affect/emotion, competition, leadership, ethical dilemmas, social hierarchies, sexual expression, and aggression, just to name a few.

Different than relationships with family members or the family friends of childhood, relationships with peers in adolescence are more voluntary; each person actively chooses to be a member of a friendship and, therefore, there is an implicit understanding that each person can also choose to remove herself from that friendship (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). Teenagers now have the mobility to come and go based on their enjoyment of the relationship, something they are constantly reevaluating and reacting to. In the United States, adolescents' heightened need for approval and increased self-awareness tends to intensify experiences of anxiety (Blumenthal et al., 2011; Deardorff et al., 2007; Offer et al., 1981). At a time when identity and sense of self are relatively fragile, many teenagers fear interpersonal scrutiny with special affective intensity and avoid potentially embarrassing situations with equal vigor (Erath et al., 2007).

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Although social anxiety is not unique to adolescents, the ways in which many act on their social anxiety seem idiosyncratic. Research suggests that teens who identify as having social anxiety and who avoid initiating or maintaining vocal conversations, especially those that are informal and unstructured (Beidel, Turner, & Morris, 1999), and they respond by withdrawing into solitary behaviors while in social situations (Strauss, Frame, & Forehand, 1987). We will see in the next chapter that texting is largely employed during such situations. Unfortunately, this creates a vicious cycle where anxiety leads to social withdrawal, which interferes with the development of the very skills needed to engage others competently and confidently (Hymel et al., 1990; Erath et al., 2007). If their social anxiety stems from a fear of interpersonal scrutiny, as discussed above, then it would follow that their social anxiety and subsequent withdrawal might also reflect a fear of confronting others as subjects with negating judgments and differing opinions. Fear of judgment and subsequent avoidance is not necessarily unique to adolescence, but the affective intensity surrounding the experience and their particular medium of avoidance (i.e. the text) is.

Many feel that there are important gender differences in the experiences of social relationships, intimacy, and individuation. Some have said that girls are more oriented toward relationships and spend more time relating while boys spend more time engaged in solitary activities involving things and objects (Galambos et al., 2009; Su, Rounds & Armstrong, 2009). Girls' friendships with one another have been characterized by intimacy, self-disclosure, validation, soothing, relational repair, and discussions of jealousy or appearance, while boys' friendships more often include competitive banter, risky activities, excitement, and inhibition of intimate feelings (Benenson & Christakos, 2003; Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005; Rose,

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Carlson, & Waller, 2007). As a result, girls tend to be more attuned to the potential for relational rupture, oftentimes blaming themselves (Perry & Pauletti, 2011), and boys seem more vulnerable to others' perceptions of behaviors, like aggression (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). In romantic relationships, girls' relational styles have been found to be marked by intense needs for intimacy and anxiety about potential rejections, whereas boys are often more avoidant and dismissive of intimacy in potential romantic relationships (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009). Though males and females have been shown to equally participate in electronic aggression as perpetrators and victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007), aggression tends to be acted out more impulsively or in seemingly unprovoked ways in boys' relationships, whereas girls seem to prefer aggressing in passive and anonymous ways (Hyde, 2005).

Many contemporary writers have questioned the validity and reliability of such gendered research. According to feminist theorists, the experience of individuation differs for girls. The general goals of individuation (e.g. focus on increased autonomy and independence) can make the teen girl seem pathologically related (Gilligan, 1991; Miller, 1976, 1984), especially when she is compared to an equally unrealistic view of teen boys. Some would say that the internal and external lives of boys and girls seem to reflect already-written stories of gender construction and constriction (Corbett, 2009), stories that are archaic and incomplete.

In her book *Deep Secrets: Boys' Friendships and the Crisis of Connection*, Way (2011) discusses how one rarely sees discussions of intimacy and close friendships between men, and especially not between young adolescent men, only women. Our Western culture depicts boys as emotionally illiterate, focused on independence, activity-oriented, and lone rangers. William

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Pollack (1998) writes about the “mask of masculinity” that equates emotional stoicism, invulnerability, physical toughness, and independence with being male; however this does not seem to capture the whole truth about men. Cultural icons of masculinity suggest that boys crave competition and autonomy, yet the results of Way’s (2011) in-depth interviews with hundreds of boys from early to late adolescence, “suggest that their closest friendships share the plot of Love Story more than the plot of Lord of the Flies” (p.4). She writes,

Listening to boys, particularly those in early and middle adolescence, speak about their male friendships is like reading an old-fashioned romance novel...At the edge of manhood, when pressures to conform to gender expectations intensify, boys speak about their male friends with abandon, referring to them as people whom they love...They talk in great details and with tremendous affect about their best friends, with whom they share their deepest secrets and without whom they would...’feel lost’ (p.2).

Sullivan (1954) wrote similarly about the developmental need for pre-teens to have a close relationship with a same-sex chum; however, it seems that as boys transition into men, they become acculturated to not feel their need or desire for closeness with other men. We live in a culture where expressing human needs is often denounced as “girly,” “wimpy,” or “gay.” As a result, Black, Latino, White, and Asian American boys struggle against stereotypes of masculinity (Way, 2011), and social pressures to individuate (Pollack, 1998).

Through the many contexts of adolescents, young people become more cognizant of their cultural, physical, intellectual, social, and emotional limitations. Idealistic hopes and dreams of childhood are challenged and vulnerabilities highlighted, which are exacerbated by pressures to focus their efforts toward a potential career and the awareness that they are preparing to take over the roles and responsibilities of the caregivers (Winnicott, 1968). Additionally, the intrapsychic and interpersonal landscapes of teens shift to house more complex versions self and

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other. Teens will emerge from adolescence with a well-formulated awareness that the idealistic or omnipotent parental figures of childhood have become people who also have faults, vulnerabilities, and limitations. Beginning in early adolescence for most, disillusionment with parents marks the beginning of a mourning process that every person undergoes consciously or unconsciously. Some teens might mourn the loss of the object-parents of childhood by intrapsychically killing off any part of that parent that was good, creating a fully inadequate object-representation of their parents as “all bad.” For others, mourning might manifest through intermittent moodiness (Aarons, 1969) as they struggle to integrate the bad with the good, the lost with the gained. It should be noted that parents can fall from grace, if you will, at all stages of development due to various traumas or failures, but adolescence often brings a naturally occurring disillusionment that reflects another growth spurt toward the ability to tolerate others as flawed and separate subjects.

The realization that parents are flawed people means that they cannot always protect us; therefore, another task of adolescent individuation is determining where their parents’ control and prohibition ends and where theirs begins. The superegoic internalization of parental restrictions had heretofore acted as an inhibitor, saying “No” in the face of urge and desire. Adolescence is a time to emerge from the blanket of this parental superego, perhaps to play free of this confinement, and to weave a new superego out of the handpicked ideals of their parents, friends, mentors, and culture (Louw, Van Ede, & Louw, 2008). Unlike the repressive and prohibitive culture of Freud’s time, however many argue that our current Western culture of designer capitalism and biggie sizes now demands that we say, “Yes,” that we enjoy everything and say “No” to nothing (Žižek, 2004; Jagodzinski, 2004; Nusseldar (2009). In the midst of that

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journey, teens cling to their peers to glean information about who they are and how to limit themselves. Hyperintimacy with peers seems to provide the feeling of security, fulfillment, and recognition (Blos, 1968; Turkle, 2011) that will help them mature through this process of individuation and learn when to indulge. As children grow into teenagers and young adults, they typically gain a tolerance for their parents (and others) as important yet flawed subjects, a crucial development in their capacity for intimacy.

While individuation is a natural process for many people, it is also a culturally prescribed way of being that might leave young boys feeling prematurely independent and young girls feeling pathologically needy. Though many teens are tasked with mourning the loss of the self- and object-representations of childhood, they are also celebrating their increasing freedom, maturing achievements, and deepening peer relationships, all of which contribute to one's solidifying sense of self and identity.

### **Identity Development**

Erik Erikson was perhaps the first and most prominent psychologist to write about identity formation with a focus on individual context. Biology, drives, parents, gender constructs, academic achievement, culture, family dynamics, etc... all inform the sense of identity that will coalesce in adolescence and early adulthood. Though all are important, this section will focus on the relational and intersubjective aspects of these qualities, namely the extent to which they impact one's identity as a subject and as an object.

As we have learned through our journey into intersubjective theory, others constitute a social mirror into which one could gaze to gain a sense of one's self as a subject and an object. Many clinicians have expounded on the effects of the mirroring and reflections of others on the

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acquisition and development of the self (Lacan, 1949; Winnicott, 1967, 1971) and there is a consensus that, over time, our experiences of those reflected appraisals become internalized to inform our sense of self in relation to others. The ways others recognize and respond to our gestures, thoughts, and feelings constantly interact with our internal representations of self (and others); in turn, the self that continually reemerges in the world is greatly informed by experiences with others, actual (subjects) and fantasied (objects) (Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Kohut, 1971; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1967). Although there is not unanimous agreement about the precise process (e.g. some might privilege a more intrapsychic drive-dominated view, think in terms of internal object-representations, or selfobject transferences), there does seem to be general agreement that aspects of one's self/identity seem inextricably linked to the perceptions, availability, stereotypes, and recognitions of others, much of which is communicated nonverbally.

Teens are reflecting mindfully on their many selves; who they want to be in public, private, with family, friends, during class, or athletics, alongside who they feel they are internally and whom they want to present externally. As intersubjective theories postulate, this newfound and heightened awareness of subject-self differing from object-self cleaves what was once experienced as a coherent self into many seemingly disparate selves (Damon & Lerner, 2008). This experience, though perhaps more authentic and not unique to adolescence (Bromberg, 2001), can feel quite disruptive and disorienting, thereby pushing people into a search for integration and wholeness again. It should be noted that babies and children are accustomed to being objects of interest, things to be smiled at, held, touched, and talked about, all of which serve the evolutionary and developmental function of surrounding the child by nurturing

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caregivers. But this awareness is not yet fully symbolized and represented through language as something that can be reflected on, as it is in adolescence. Similarly, being an object of interest serves much different functions for both the looker and the looked-upon during adolescence.

One potential consequence is paranoia, concern, or distress about why one is being looked at.

As discussed earlier, the awareness of being looked at raises the feeling of being objectified in the mind of the other and splits the subject into one who is the experiencer and one who is experienced. Though this split first happens during infancy, adolescents reflect on these roles from a heightened cognitive, social, and emotional awareness that can render the gaze of the other particularly uncomfortable. Faces seem to incite uncomfortable feelings in teens specifically. A 2005 study on adolescent eye contact found that neurotypical teens looked at the face of their conversation partner an average of 62% of the time while listening, and 43% of the time while speaking (Turkstra, 2005). While this might not be much different than average amount of eye contact in adults, the experience of eye contact seems different for teenagers. A recent brain imaging study illustrated the evocative experience of faces, even for “normal” adolescents (Pfeifer et al., 2011). As the 45 neurotypical children in this study entered adolescence, they showed significantly increased neural activity in the amygdala, hippocampus, and temporal lobes when viewing pictures of emotional faces, which then decreased again as they exited adolescence (Pfeifer et al., 2011). This and other similar research (Guyer et al., 2008) indicates that teenagers respond more emotionally to the sight of faces than children or adults. In speculating, perhaps the sight of other faces could evoke, in the teen, the affective feeling of the other, which is already experienced at a heightened level. Perhaps outside of a lab study, the sight of other faces looking at them gives the seers the experience of being seen, an



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evocative experience for perception-focused teenagers. One's affective response to being a subject, who is doing the looking, might feel very different from one's affective response to being an object who is being looked at. The efforts of teens to cope with and reconcile their disparate selves (i.e. self as looker and self as looked at) may in some instances draw them toward, or push them away from, intersubjective relatedness.

There is some evidence indicating that both girls and boys are affected by this distinction between object-self and subject-self, though each expresses it differently. Adolescent girls seem to be more preoccupied with self-image and appearances, actual and perceived (Harter, 1997). Their self-esteem generally rests on the perception of others and is easily damaged by relational ruptures and rejection (Cross & Madson, 1997). It is well recognized that girls growing up in the United States are bombarded with messages about female objectification. A study by Evans (2006) showed that teen girls feel pressure from a male gaze to present their bodies as passively beautiful, which is oftentimes in direct conflict with pressure they also feel to have athletic sculpted bodies; however this source of pressure does not always stem from an actual onlooker. Even when the male gaze was absent, like in all-girls physical education class, girls still expressed the tension between wanting to be feminine/attractive and wanting to be active, suggesting that the gaze has been internalized by the time girls reach puberty (Evans, 2006).

Objectification is not only a female's plight; boys have also internalized the gaze of the Other. Though they may be less preoccupied with their appearance in the eyes of individuals in their lives, boys tend to feel more pressure to identify with their culturally prescribed gender roles of masculinity, independence, and toughness (Diamond, 2008; Corbett, 2009). American culture is becoming progressively more accepting; however, teens in the United States still live

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in a culture where it is more permissible for girls to be strong and competitive than for boys to be sensitive and artistic (Way, 2011). One's gender identity is constantly in tension between what one feels internally and how the external world reflects those impulses/desires, and, like every aspect of identity, is heavily influenced by cultural context. Teens both want to fit into the group and to find social, gender, spiritual, ethical, political, academic, professional, intellectual, and romantic identities that will feel authentic to them.

Erikson (1968) felt that identity development required, not only a sense of personal continuity over time, but also one's sense of being recognized by others for whomever one decides to be. Teens look to others to inform their new identifications but do not want their identity to be foreclosed by anyone (Winnicott, 1963). Many resist the definitions given to them by others; they want to be their own person as defined by them, but find themselves humbled as they realize their dependence on reflections from others for the very recognition they seek (Winnicott, 1971; Hegel, 1807). Perhaps if teens do not have to look into the other's eyes, they will not have to see who they are to the other before they have figured out who they are to themselves.

Benjamin (2004) suggests that desire for such control unfolds in an internal process like, "No, you can't make this of me, but you can make that of me" (p.7). When we try to limit or control what others make of us, Benjamin says that we are trying to act omnipotently, thereby shifting into the non-intersubjective position of "twoness," of doer/done-to. In describing Britton (1988, 1998), Benjamin (2004) says that, in those moments where we cling to controlling the other's perception of us, "the presence of an observing third is felt to be intolerable or persecutory" (p.23). When we fear judgment, like so many adolescents do, the Other's gaze can

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be destabilizing. Fearful that they are “looked-at,” some teens might take up the compensatory position of “looker” or “judger” in an effort to regain some power. These power dynamics of mutual judgment so often seen in the subtle nuance of teen relationships cause many teens to be anxiously aware of their simultaneous dependence on and fear of the other’s subjectivity, particularly as something that both affirms and threatens the stability of their own.

A solid sense of identity is the result of one’s assimilation and accommodation to the internal and the external, the intrapsychic and the intersubjective (Bohleber, 2010; Bollas, 1992). It emerges not from carefully controlling everyone and everything in one’s environment, but from assimilation and accommodation to it all, which can be difficult for adolescents negotiating a new, more real kind of independence. Teens who fear their independence might do exactly as others wish (i.e. not-thinking). Or teens who incessantly pursue independence might rebel against everything, “just because.” Most adolescents probably find a happy medium overall, but choose to conform or rebel on specific issues. People cannot be intersubjectively related when they radically accept or refuse difference, or always conform or rebel. Similarly, neither can people form a coherent and full identity by embracing everything others want them to be or by being nothing others want them to be (Benjamin, 2004). This poses challenges for teenagers who define themselves by what they are not, yet also want to blend in and be just like their friends (Crosnoe, 2011). For many teens, difference is caste alien. Even if they seem to be embracing a radical uniqueness with their interests, appearance, or beliefs, they are still likely to surround themselves with “like others.” While connecting with those who share similar interests is not itself unique to adolescents or indicative of intersubjective struggle, doing so out of a fear of difference might be.

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Perhaps otherness generally threatens the fragile and plastic identities of teens. The narcissistic position so often adopted or reverted to by teens is a reflection of how threatening otherness can feel. In an effort to compensate for their fears of difference and not-knowing, some teens may defend themselves through judgments, bullying, exclusion, omniscience, or omnipotence, all of which negate the other's subjectivity and preclude intersubjective relating (Kiell, 1964). Though their narcissism might allow them to feel as if they know everything or that everything is under their control, this is an inherently objectifying stance toward their selves and others.

In sum, identity is found in the transitional reconciliation of inner world and external reality (Bohleber, 2010; Bollas, 1992), between what others want of us and what we want for ourselves, between how others define us and what we do with those definitions. Similarly, to live intersubjectively is to move in and out of recognition and negation of "inside" and "outside" others (Benjamin, 1995, 2000), between the internal image we have of the other and who the other is in reality. Intersubjectivity requires a cyclical process of recognition and negation of our "inside" and "outside" selves, the selves of our fantasies, the selves of reality, and the selves that others reflect. Though it can be fulfilling to see our selves reflected in the gaze of the other, it can also be frightening to see our selves being created by the other. Being seen can feel recognizing, foreclosing, or some vacillating combination thereof.

### **Summary**

Adolescence is a time of transition from a state of dependency on parents to one of mutual reliance (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 1990). Though we begin to recognize the separate minds and desires of others in toddlerhood, adolescents come to relationships with the cognitive

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and moral capacities to comprehend the grave implications of personhood and subjectivity.

Whether we term adolescence a time of storm and stress, metamorphosis, or transition, the bodily changes, surging hormones, and pressures to establish “an autonomous identity” increase adolescents’ vulnerabilities to emotions, judgments, and desires. This vulnerability is highlighted in the intersubjective space between themselves and others where difference, sameness, desire, power, and powerlessness confront teens with the dangers of relatedness at a point when they so blatantly depend on it. Though recognition can feel affirming, many teenagers suspect that others might be looking at them at any given point in time, judging their looks, actions, or words, as they might be doing to others. However, the feelings of omnipotence or invincibility common to teens during this vulnerable time need to subside before true individuation can occur (Benjamin, 1995). Benjamin (1995) said that individuation rests on our ability to acknowledge the limits of our knowledge of others, relinquish the feeling that everyone is identical to us, and understand that much is outside of our control. Thus, individuation, identity, and intersubjective capacities are in constant dialogue that challenges adolescents’ sense of self-control, character, and power. In contrast to adolescents in times past, teens today are using text messaging as a way to facilitate, satiate, inhibit, prohibit, and dilute the experience of “witness” necessary for intersubjective relatedness. Chapter Four will discuss teens’ reflections on their cell phone use and how their texting reflects their development, relatedness, and intersubjective experience.

**Chapter 4: Text Messaging Teens****History of Text Messaging**

Over the last twenty years, instant communication has grown to become an integral aspect of modern societies. While the advent of personal computers, e-mail, blogs, and social networking has afforded up-to-the-minute contact with others, the ubiquity of the mobile phone has allowed this instant contact to also be constant. As of 2005, there was approximately one mobile phone subscription for every three people in the world, and there were 19 countries in which the number of mobile phone subscriptions exceeded the country's total population (Ling, 2010). In the United States, 69% of all 11-14 year olds and 86% of all 15-18 year olds own a cell phone. The telephone has historically been used for talking to one another; however in the US alone, approximately half of all phone calls last less than a minute with only 30% exceeding two minutes in length (Ling, 2010).

Numerous studies show that the majority of cell phone users spend much more time sending text messages, or texting, than they do talking (Nielsen, 2010; Reid & Reid, 2004, 2007; Ling, 2010, Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Lenhart et al., 2010). Ten years after text messaging technology became an available feature of the cell phone (Ling, 2010), the average cell phone user sends and receives between 500 and 1,000 text messages per month (Nielsen, 2010). 9.3 billion text messages were sent during the last half of 2008, which quickly jumped to an astounding 24.2 billion texts sent in the last half of 2009 (Lenhart et al., 2010). One can only imagine how many text messages are being sent today. Although most people have a cell phone and most cell phone owners utilize the texting feature of their device, there is wide variability in

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people's use of these technologies, and the largest differentiating variable seems to be that of age. Those who prefer texting to talking on the phone tend to be under 21 years of age, in adolescence or emerging adulthood.

Half of U.S. teens report sending or receiving over fifty text messages per day, one-and-a-half to three times the national average, and fifteen percent of those surpass 200 texts per day (Lenhart et al., 2010). That is six to twelve hundred times more than the average user! While fifteen percent of teens are texting an astounding 6,000 times per month, there are individuals like fourteen-year-old Alice Miller, mentioned in a recent New York Times article, who send and receive upwards of 27,000 text messages per month (Richtel, 2010)! In short, 90% of teens across the country are texting an average of 90 minutes a day while only talking on the phone an average of 33 minutes per day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).

The Nielsen Report (2011), a comprehensive study of international cell phone use, found that the frequency of sending and receiving text messages wanes as individuals grow out of adolescence and into their late twenties. Similarly, a comparative study by Barlow (2008) found that age of the texter was negatively correlated with the frequency of texting, indicating that older mobile phone users tend to text less than younger users. In response Ling (2010), a prominent writer and researcher on texting, found that texting seems to be more of a “life phase medium,” than a “cohort medium,” meaning that it serves a particular purpose for people of many different cohorts while they are in their adolescence, and that people tend to outgrow their preoccupation with the medium as they enter adulthood.

Adolescent texting looks different than adult texting. Teens are more likely to put themselves in dangerous situations for the sake of texting (i.e. texting while driving) (Barlow,

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2008), they spend more time constructing and reconstructing their messages to others, and are more likely to present a different self image through their texts than they do in person (Reid & Reid, 2004), like saying things via text message that they would not say in person or over the phone (Barlow, 2008). Perhaps this is related to the teenage social anxiety so common in face-to-face interactions, anxiety they can easily avoid by texting. Without the anxiety of being seen, it becomes easier for teens to express their emotions through the medium of their cell phone (Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005). Salmon Akhtar (2003) wrote that cell phones can be considered “neogenerational objects of adolescence.” Like posters, piercings, music collections, torn jeans, or guitars, cell phones facilitate the process of individuation from their parents and promote a sense of community and likeness with peers. Texting, in particular, has allowed teens to develop an idiosyncratic and condensed language that extends beyond their immediate friend group out to the larger group of young texters across the country and, perhaps, the world (i.e. “wud” means “What are you doing?” and “ikr” means “I know, right!”). This allows them to be a part of something inclusive that also excludes parents. Akhtar goes on to say that these neogenerational objects help the teenager form a new ego-ideal, one that does not hinge on the superegoic parents of their childhood. These writers imply that heavy texting is related in some way to the social-emotional developmental tasks of adolescents today and/or may be less compatible with the work- and family-oriented demands of adulthood.

Though there is something idiosyncratic about teens’ relationships with their cell phones, there are also differing patterns of usage within the adolescent population based on various gender, racial, and emotional factors (Reid & Reid, 2004; Ha et al., 2008; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Lenhart et al., 2010). To start, research shows that 73% of White teens, 71% of



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Hispanic teens, and 64% of African American teens own cell phones across socioeconomic classes (Lenhart et al., 2010). Within those demographics, White adolescents spend less time talking on their cell phones (25 mins/day) and less time texting (1hr 22mins/day) on average than Hispanic (37 mins talking/1:42 texting) and African American (46 mins talking/2:03 texting) adolescents (Lenhart et al., 2010). It is unclear why there are racial differences in cell phone usage; perhaps for some reason Hispanic and African American teens feel slightly more hungry for recognition or more anxious in face-to-face situations, but nominally so. Studies on gender and texting have showed similar mild disparities. Teen girls average about 80 texts/day totaling about an hour and fifty-eight minutes of texting time, whereas teen boys average about 30, totaling about an hour and fourteen minutes of texting time (Lenhart et al., 2010). Though the average number of texts seems significantly different, adolescents of both genders clearly spend a lot of time texting. Both gender and racial variances in texting are in need of further cultural and phenomenological research.

In terms of the social-emotional qualities of teens who use their phones primarily for texting, Boraie (2010) suggested they are more likely to report more social anxiety and loneliness than those who primarily use their cell phones to talk. Similarly, Ha et al.'s (2008) research found that that "excessive" texters (averaging 39 texts/day) tend to be more depressive, alexithymic, interpersonally anxious and insecure than "non-excessive" texters (averaging 26 texts/day). Though the research is unclear about which came first, it is possible that excessive texters entered the texting world with a degree of social anxiety and isolation from their childhood years and, through texting, found a preferred "faceless" method of socializing. Further, feelings of loneliness and social anxiety seemed to correlate with the feeling that one's

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text messages are more indicative of authentic self-expression than their face-to-face interactions (Reid & Reid, 2004). For the socially anxious, texting seems to allow more authentic expressions of self and less intimate interactions with others.

Excessive texting and its social-emotional implications is an important area of study; however, it is beyond the scope of this discussion. Instead, I aim to approximate and understand the inspirations and implications of teens using texting as an intersubjective conduit or buffer in any way, excessive or normative. A comprehensive review of the texting literature illuminated some broad motivations for texting among adolescents: connection and communication with others, modulating how they see others and are seen by others/identity formation, emotional titration, and maintaining momentum of emotional experience (Reid & Reid, 2000; Hutchby & Tanna, 2008; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005; Madell & Muncer & Muncer, 2007; Barlow, 2008, Turkle, 2011). This chapter will explore each of these areas in detail with a primary focus on whether or not these motivations are unique to adolescents' intersubjective capacities and how we are seeing these urges manifesting in and resulting from their texting.

### **Communication/connection**

The medium of the text offers a quick and easy way for people to find one another at a particular location, to plan a meeting, and to exchange information about school/work/peers/parents, among many other things. Texting introduces new rules of engagement and new conversational implications. For example, texting does not require a focus on a singular purposeful encounter and, as such, it does not require an explicit beginning and ending (Hutchby & Tanna, 2008). Conversations via text lack the finitude of face-to-face encounters and consequently have the built-in ability to start informally (i.e. eliminating the need for social

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niceties such as “Hi. How are you doing?”) and continue indefinitely (i.e. not having to say, “I have to go now”). Texters rarely acknowledge the initiation or termination of an interaction.

With a text, each party engages in one-way, asynchronous communication where both parties cannot simultaneously occupy the communicative space (Hutchby & Tanna, 2008). In these ways, a conversation via text message has different rules regarding give and take and conversational overlap. For instance, if two people simultaneously text each other a question, it is likely that both people will respond to the other’s question, thereby initiating two distinct but concurrent conversations. Whereas an analogous situation face-to-face would not happen except perhaps in a Woody Allen comedy, this “talking at” as opposed to “talking with” might not be an infrequent event for two individuals engaging in a conversation via text.

When we text, we are essentially communicating with an image of the other held in our minds, that is then affirmed or negated through the words, punctuations, and emoticons received from the actual person on the other end of the screen. Walther (1996; 2007) identified a particular style of communication, unique to text-based interactions, that supports the notion that texting has a large fantasy component. He says the “hyperpersonal communication” of texting is intense and dramatic. The lack of synchronicity or visual cues can foster idealized perceptions of the other as well as grandiose presentations of the sender that allow each party to enter into an intensely affective yet fantastic interaction with one another. In a separate paper Curtis (2007) said, “Hyperpersonal communication occurs based on the sender’s and on the receiver’s reciprocal and hyperbolic construction of each other and their relationship within a minimal cues environment” (p.104). For example, Amy sends a text to John asking for a ride to school, and he responds with, “Yes”. If Amy is at all sensitive to the relational dynamics between herself and

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John, like most people, she will attribute some emotional valence to John's response. And if Amy has any insecurities about the relationship at all, they might be triggered by the lack of punctuation and emoticons in his response, two things that are somewhat standard texting procedure. Responses such as, "You bet!" or "YES!" or "Sure :)" may have given her a bit more affective information to quell her anxieties, but as it is, a simple "Yes" leaves any affective attribution to her own object-relational dynamics. Does Amy generally feel burdensome asking for favors? Does she worry that John's curt response means he does not want to give her a ride? Does she assume that he would do anything to get fifteen minutes alone in the car with her, thereby ignoring any potential negative feelings on his part? The cuelessness of texting fosters interactions that are more fantasy-based, or object-based, something that would be more difficult on the phone or face-to-face. Finding the other's subjectivity through the screen is a task that must be pursued with purpose.

There seems to be something interpersonally alluring about texting. Reid & Reid (2004) have extensively studied preferences for texting versus talking on a cell phone, and found that over a quarter of their sample (N=982) preferred texting to vocal conversation. A subsequent study in 2006 found a striking increase; nearly half of individuals in their sample between 16 and 55 years of age preferred texting to face-to-face conversation across multiple contexts and for various reasons. Ling & Yttri (2002) posited that texting might actually feel more important for building and maintaining emotional relationships than for coordinating practical events or avoiding contact with others. Similarly, a literature review by Thurlow (2003) found that only one third of texts serve a practical function and a 2005 study by Kamibeppu & Sigiura found that 79% of instant communications between teens are not purposeful, but are in pursuit of contact

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for the sake of connecting. When compared to other methods of communication, it was found that texting (as opposed to a phone call) more often involves a “desire to connect” (Borae, 2010), implying that texting is somehow more interpersonally gratifying or protective for teens than talking on the phone (Walther, 2002). Indeed, texting was found to satisfy the need for companionship, closeness, and care better than other forms of communication like e-mails, instant messages online, and landline telephone calls (Ramirez, A., 2008 cited in Borae, 2010).

There is an impulse to sociability in the teenager (Simmel, 1971). Adolescence is a time of establishing intimate peer relationships and relinquishing dependence on their parents, feeling like they belong to a group, and learning how and when to share intimate things and with whom to share them (Damon & Lerner, 2008); practically speaking, text messaging is a quick, popular, and inexpensive way to accomplish those things. It gives teens privacy from listening ears and curious parents and allows for a wider range of topical discussions, especially those that may otherwise be prohibited. Although adults also use texting to connect with others, make plans, gossip, or find privacy, they generally lack the feelings of urgency and importance that spike in adolescence with regard to intimate connections. As mentioned before, teenagers regularly risk their lives by texting while driving in the service of connecting with someone (Barlow, 2008). Aside from the poor judgment sometimes found in adolescence, this is a peek into the lengths teens will go to for connection. One wonders how teens managed this yearning prior to texting and whether or not the yearning had similar or different qualities.

Western culture prescribes independence and autonomy for the budding adolescent. With their increasingly complicated internal world and social push toward independence from parents (Blos, 1967; Boles, 1999), teens might cling to their cell phones to promise them contact with

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anyone available to help soothe feelings of vulnerability. Research showing that texting has increased daily contact between adolescents and parents (Weisskirch, 2011) leads one to wonder if texting is providing teens a quick and hidden way to seek parental soothing from afar. Teens might strike out as physically separate and autonomous people while still looking to their parents for emotional soothing in moments of stress. Similarly, parents can use texting to communicate information or quell their own worried feelings about their teens' independence. Perhaps the contact teens can maintain with their parents helps them feel less intrapsychically and interpersonally vulnerable.

Face-to-face conversations are habitually and chronically paused for outgoing and incoming phone calls or text messages (Turkle, 2011). One high school teenager said, "I interrupt a call even if the new call says 'unknown' as an identifier – I just have to know who it is. So I'll cut off a friend for an 'unknown.' I need to know who wanted to connect...and if I hear my phone, I have to answer it. I don't have a choice. I have to know who it is..." (Turkle, 2011, p.171). Interruption breaks the continuity of the face-to-face interaction, which might feel relieving to some intersubjectively anxious teens. Perhaps teens who text while with others are too interpersonally anxious to feel sated by the experience, too busy protecting themselves from potential negation or rejection. However, such an interruption also signifies the beginning of another connection, something adolescents today seem to crave (Turkle, 2011).

Every time we see the screen light up or hear our ring tone, our nervous system gives us a shot of dopamine (Turkle, 2011). Our bodies are stimulated by the idea of connecting with and being desired by an other, even while we are already with someone else. Knowing that someone wants to connect and having the ability to immediately receive (or seek) that connection via text

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bolsters those who feel they lack intimacy in their relationships (Reid & Reid, 2006). Western culture as a whole may already be so technologically immersed that we are all physiologically excitable by cell phone contact, but imagine the intensity of this experience for the neurologically and physiologically maturing teen. Might the idea of being desired boost libidinal excitation in an already hormonally activated body?

For teens in the grips of desire and associated fear, texting allows the pursuit of both desired and feared others in a boundaried way. Similar to the old tradition of passing notes in school, the words in the text message are objects unto themselves that can be interacted with separately from the author. As such, texting generally leads to self-disclosure and, for adolescent boys and girls, self-disclosure seems to be the cornerstone of intimacy (Bigelow, 1977); therefore, teens feel closer with those to whom they pass digital notes, but in a unique way. In one sense, the absence of visual contact via text could protect socially vulnerable teens from subtle but potentially devastating messages of disapproval. But it could also shield them from other more positive feedback that would aid in the development of self-esteem. Many people report feeling that words on a screen are insufficient; they lack the interpersonal nuance that makes interactions richly gratifying (Barlow, 2008). There have been many contrivances aimed at reclaiming some of those nonverbal communications limited by the screen. Visual indications of happiness (“:-)”), sadness (“:-( ”), tearfulness (“:\*( ”), surprise (“:-o ”), seduction (“:-\* ”), and playfulness (“;-)”) are widely used alongside interjections such as “hmm” or “um” and indications of laughter (i.e. “haha” or “lol” meaning “laughing out loud”). More recently, the technology of iMessages launched by iPhone allows texters to have visual indications when the other is typing (i.e. “...”), and also when the other has read your message. All of these

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mechanisms seem to represent attempts to make texters feel more present with one another, to provide more communicative information, so that the texter really feels as if the other is with him, seeing him, and responding to him affectively. Those who are critical of these new iMessage communications privilege the privacy of texting and do not want the other to know when they are typing or when they have received messages. Some people want texting to remain an entirely different way of communicating and do not want it to approximate synchronous or f2f contact. For some texting is highly sought despite its limitation and for others it is sought because of them.

Though the infinite connectedness of texting seems to have dissolved some of the social boundaries implicit to relationships of the pre-virtual world (e.g. limitations of temporal, geographic, or attentional availability), some say that virtual space naturally fits the limitations inherent in adolescent relationships (Turkle, 199r). For instance, the expectable self-consciousness and relational insecurity of adolescence fits well with the splitting of virtual life and “real” life. In her research with teenagers, Turkle (2011) found that there is an ethos of not speaking in the real world what happens in the digital/virtual. One high school student said, "...I could have long conversations with someone [digitally] and the next day [in person] just be like, 'Hey' (p150). Something about texting allows for a split relationship with the other, as if the other is “words on a screen” by night (i.e. an object) and a “living breathing person” by day (i.e. a subject). Facing the living breathing person seems more fraught and burdensome, as reflected in their expressed use of texting to avoid the faces of others.

### **Seeing and being seen**



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Perhaps unsurprisingly, the ability to avoid seeing and being seen by the other is the second most widely cited motivation for teen texting found in this literature review after connection and communication (Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005; Barlow, 2008). When texting, each person usually exists outside of the direct visual field of the other, so the person to whom one is communicating is visually engaged with the object of the cell phone and the words on the screen; she does not need to be mindful of how the other perceives her visually, nor does she need to absorb the nonverbal communication of her conversational partner.

In addition to the preferred visual anonymity of the text (Reid & Reid, 2004), 70% of adolescents reported using texting as a means to also avoid seeing others (Barlow, 2008). The facelessness of texting provides an overall ability to micromanage and titrate the outgoing and incoming gaze. One high school student said,

An...apology. It's cheap. It's easy. All you have to do is type 'I'm sorry.' You don't have to have any emotion, any believability in your voice or anything. It takes a lot for someone to go up to a person and say, 'I'm sorry,' and that's when you can really take it to heart... (Turtle, 2011, p.196)

Teenagers know how uncomfortable it is to face the emotions of others but, without confronting one another in such a scenario like the one above, was there actually a fulfilling recognition of wrong-doing? If not, intersubjectivity has not been achieved.

Not having to see/hear the other or be seen/heard by the other provides equal opportunities for concealment and closeness. Through texting, teens can leave gaps in the conversation, hide the truth (Madell & Muncer, 2007), or carefully construct the image one wants to portray (Chenault, 1998; Ling & Yttri, 2002 & Madell & Muncer, 2007). This does not happen all the time in text-conversations, nor is it absent in vivo. While concealment and

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performance also occurs during face-to-face interactions, nonverbal information is inevitably and, perhaps, unwittingly communicated. Texters are free of this sort of nonverbal betrayal.

Teens feel an overall sense of control when they text and they also seem to feel liberated from the immediate social judgment inherent in *tete-a-tete* interactions (Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005).

In a seemingly contradictory fashion, those feelings of control and safety, in turn, allow them to more freely express authentic emotions. They are better able to tolerate the raw intimate contents of each other's mind when shielded by their cell phones (Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005) and can be sure that any self-revelation will be purposeful, thought-out, and on their terms. To illustrate this point one sixteen-year-old girl said,

With a text...I can answer on my own time. I can respond. I can ignore it. So it really works with my mood. I'm not bound to anything, no commitment...I have control over the conversation and also more control over what I say...Nothing will get spat at you.

You have time to think and prepare what you're going to say, to make you appear like that's just the way you are. There's planning involved, so you can control how you're portrayed to this person, because you're choosing these words, editing it before you send it...A phone conversation is a lot of pressure. You're always expected to uphold it, to keep it going, and that's too much pressure... (Turkle, 2011, p.190)

One question that arose in the literature was about the effects of multiple "virtual identities" on adolescent identity development; texting allows teens to play with different roles, to say things they would not normally say, and to send pictures of themselves doing things that the other might not ordinarily see. With or without text messaging, though, teens' self-presentations often shift frequently; for many, who they present at any given moment seems highly dependent on their social context (Damon & Lerner, 2008). And perhaps this is how it should be; a teen who does not struggle with shifting and morphing identities is somehow missing out on a crucial developmental task. During a time when teens relentlessly ask, "Who

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am I," perhaps the text is able to provide something tangible and concrete to reflect on and say, "This is who I am; this is who I've been." While simple communication may be broadened and enhanced in various ways, texting also opens the possibility for a wider range of relational authenticity, inauthenticity, rupture, and repair, at times expanding the emotional experience of being in relationships, while constricting it at other times.

### **Emotional Titration and Momentum**

Closely related to the notion that adolescents text in order to avoid the other's gaze is the proposition that teens text in order to regulate their emotional input and output. Teens often seek out any external stimulus that will help contain or regulate overwhelming feelings stirred by their internal and external world (Blos, 1962; Esman, 1979). Many of the stirrings to be discussed were mentioned in the previous chapter, and will be further discussed in relation to texting below. Turkle (2011) said that digital communication protects a fond communicator from a frigid response; the vulnerable adolescent can hide behind a facade of deliberate nonchalance; she can save herself from the unbearable awkwardness of social interactions, and can seek immediate feedback on her thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It seems that the cell phone has become instrumental in teenagers' pursuit of stability; it provides a way to escape embarrassing self-revelation, ambiguous verbal and non-verbal nuance, and other minor traumas of interacting with others who have a revelatory face.

One trauma that repeatedly emerged in the literature was the trauma of unwanted endings and, as we will see later, unrequited desire. Ending a phone call or face-to-face conversation before we are ready can be difficult for anyone, but especially for emotionally sensitive teens. Social breaks can assuage anxiety when desired, but when unwanted, social endings can be

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experienced as anxious separation, rejection, and possibly even abandonment (Turkle, 2011).

Given that teens are still developing adequate methods for coping with such intense emotions, these feelings can be magnified. One wonders if the ability to avoid these feelings might limit the development of one's capacity to tolerate frustration, relational rupture, or unmet desire.

One way teens deal with feelings of anxiety, separation, and rejection is by channeling the opinions and support of their peers. While there is nothing inherently wrong with the desire for social contact, some have argued that cell phones and text messaging have facilitated a transition from a developmentally appropriate desire for the other to a dependent and compulsive need for the other to help regulate the self. An excerpt from an interview with another sixteen-year-old girl illuminates this point. She says, "If I'm upset, right as I feel upset, I text a couple of my friends...just because I know that they'll be there and they can comfort me, and stuff like that...I'm always looking for a text that says, 'Oh, I'm sorry,' or 'Oh, that's great'" (Turkle, 2011, p. 175) Because without this feedback, "It's hard to calm down" (Turkle, 2011, p.175). Texting is used by many teens to help regulate emotions they are unable to regulate on their own.

While teens may use texting to break the momentum of a distressing emotional experience, they also use it to maintain or initiate positive emotional experiences when they are unable to stimulate themselves internally. Research shows that people of all ages use cell phones and text-messaging to fill unoccupied moments in their lives (Turkle, 2011). When there is nothing immediately stimulating us, it is easy to turn to that little machine. The possibilities are boundless; there are always games to play, friend's statuses to read, news to keep up with, e-mails to return, and texts to send. We might ask if today's digitally-mediated fulfillment is different from any other type of moment-filling (e.g. reading a book, talking on the phone,

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watching television, journaling, or daydreaming) and, furthermore, how adolescent moment-filling differs from adult moment-filling.

Teens frequently send text messages in an effort to counteract boredom and provide entertainment through brief zaps of stimulation that are constant, impulsive, and compulsive. They use texting in their pursuit of stimulation in class, at home, on the bus, or at work, but also when they are already engaging socially with others (Barlow, 2008), as if some internal stimulus is disturbing their ability to be present in the moment. Cell phone play fills space that might otherwise be occupied by overwhelming or anxious thoughts and feelings. This also means that texting is filling potential space for reflection, meditation, planning, creating, or experiencing.

Texting others about their experience can allay strong feelings in a moment of aloneness or maintain the positive momentum of an emotional experience. Through the text, one gains affirmation or recognition from an other who now knows about one's experience. So we see in teenage texting behaviors, the instant gratification of reaching out for another, the impulsive movement toward the cell phone in an unoccupied moment, and what appears again to reflect their search for a tolerable experience of "withness."

### **Texting as a Social Addition, Not a Replacement**

Many a newspaper and magazine article have attempted to address concerns that technology is alienating teens from one another. While it is true that many teens are sending and receiving an inordinate amount of text messages on a daily basis, research has not supported the claim that they are also spending less time together (Turkle, 2011); if anything, texting might even promote more face-to-face interactions with those they might not have otherwise spent time with (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011). Although texting might be situationally preferable to phone or

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face-to-face interactions, texting has not supplanted the impulse to socialize for many adolescents. This might seem to contradict earlier findings (i.e. Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005; Barlow & Barlow, 2004) that teens use texting to avoid aspects of social interactions. Based on all the literature reviewed thus far, it seems that texting is not decreasing teens' socialization time with others but, rather, might be decreasing their need to work through social anxieties in the moment (see Turkle, 2011; Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005; Reid & Reid, 2004, 2007). If so, this might decrease their need to intrapsychically or interpersonally cope with discomforts resulting from intersubjectivity. While the cell phone provides a plethora of solitary activities that could be used to remove oneself from an uncomfortable situation, an argument could be made that some adolescents use texting to avoid one type of social situation by looking to another, thereby maintaining social connection but at the expense of a more nuanced intersubjective relatedness.

### **Summary**

Over the last ten years, mobile phones and text messages have become integral aspects of people's lives and have brought new ways of interpersonally connecting. Eight years after the advent of texting, youth talking on the telephone is becoming a thing of the past. Half of all phone calls now last less than one minute (Ling, 2010) and people in the United States alone exchange 196 billion text messages per month (The Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association [CTIA], 2011)! As with any cultural shift, the integration of digital communication into everyday life changed (and continues to change) the ways we relate to one another. For example, text messaging largely deprives (or relieves) its users of the subtle nonverbal nuances gleaned from being in the presence of an other, while enabling us to feel that we can take anyone

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with us anywhere at any time. Texting opens up the possibility for indefinite connection and, in some instances, can even give one the feeling of greater intensity and intimacy than is achieved face-to-face (Walther & Parks, 2002).

Although people of all ages are texting one another, adolescents are utilizing this function the most (Reid & Reid, 2004) - sending or receiving over 3,000 text messages per month on average (Nielsen Report, 2011). Teenagers use text messages for purposes such as basic communication (Reid & Reid, 2006), mitigating social anxiety and judgment (Kamibeppu & Sigiura, 2005), modulating levels of intimacy (Barlow, 2008), counteracting boredom (Barlow, 2008; Turkle, 2011), and experimenting with various self-images (Reid & Reid, 2004), all of which are in some way reflective of the developmental tasks of adolescence and their unfolding intersubjective capacities.

In sum it seems that there is a tension between teens using texting to connect and to avoid. One's hiddenness behind a screen can promote a more intimate exchange of thoughts and feelings while also providing the organizing feeling of being recognized and known by an other. Texting can do all this while simultaneously facilitating avoidance of uncomfortable intersubjective nuance, allowing teens to relate to one another in a more sterile faceless way in which they purposefully shield themselves from being seen and known.

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**Chapter 5: The Subject- and Object-Relations of Texting Teens**

Thanks to the research of Stern (1995), Beebe & Lachmann (1988, 2010), and the like, we know that the capacity for intersubjective relating emerges as early as eight months of age; however, the dearth of research indicating how that capacity continues to develop throughout the lifespan made our discussion about adolescents primarily a task in language translation. Through an exploration of major neurological, hormonal, cognitive, social, and emotional trends in adolescence I highlighted some aspects of their development that might facilitate intersubjective relatedness (i.e. abstract thought, neural reorganization, and the intense desire to form many intimate relationships with peers) and some that might inhibit it (i.e. comparatively underdeveloped ego capacities, increased affective responses to faces, desire to avoid identity foreclosure, puberty). Though each adolescent is different and navigates the world from her individual context and history, we know that, in general, puberty positions teens to biologically and cognitively experience adult-levels of intimacy (Galatzer-Levy, & Cohler, 1990; Piaget, 1967; Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008), but leaves them with relatively underdeveloped emotional resources with which to navigate their intimate experiences (Larson, Moneta, Richards, & Wilson, 2002; Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2001; Zimmerman, Mohn, & Spangler, 2009; Spear, 2000; Steinberg, 2005, 2010). We also know that teenagers, more so than any other developmental cohort, use texting as a tool to aid in their navigation of this new intimacy, shielding them from or facilitating affect in a number of ways.

One might say that texting is largely used as a defense mechanism at various levels of awareness. Defined by Nancy McWilliams (2011) as, “A means of processing anxiety and assimilating a complex and disturbing reality” (p.103), defenses are adaptive, over-determined,



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and differently defined throughout the field of psychoanalysis. For example, a Sullivanian might feel that texting, at its core, is about managing levels of anxiety in each participant. A self psychologist might say that texting, when used defensively, preserves narcissism, whereas a Kleinian would likely focus on its function for splitting, projection, and protection against envy and rage. Since this discussion approached the subject by way of intersubjective theory, we looked at the ways texting modulates the vulnerability of being a subject confronting other subjects. The intersubjective literature has been very helpful in delineating what it means to be fully related with others in the world, but as Judith Chused (1999) said, “One consequence of the heightened interest in intersubjectivity in the current psychoanalytic literature has been a relative neglect of the examination of unconscious fantasies.” That is to say that intersubjective theory is admittedly limited and this discussion covers just a small, but important, piece of a very complex experience.

As a simultaneously defensive and adaptive maneuver, texting acts in the service of protecting the subject in some way, though it does not always act in the service of protecting intersubjectivity. In fact, the non-visual and non-auditory medium of the text inherently ruptures and/or precludes intersubjective relatedness, which requires bodies and minds interacting in cultural/historical space. Texters are still relating to each other in many other ways (i.e. as objects, thoughts on the screen, emoticons, fantasies, ideas, histories, receptacles, auxiliary ego’s, transitional objects, organizers etc...), but not as two embodied subjects. Although we are always growing throughout our lifespan, adolescence seems to be a particularly plastic developmental period where chronic avoidance of emotional discomfort, introspection, and relational friction have a lasting impact on the mind and self. Whether or not the non-intersubjective aspect of

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texting is a direct motivator for teens has yet to be determined, though much of the literature does seem to subtly point in that direction. When used excessively, or even frequently, texting complicates the already-challenging adolescent task of developing a robust capacity for intimacy. By freeing them of the challenges of being in a body and similarly exonerating them from the responsibilities of confronting an other's face or hearing the other's voice, texting interrupts necessary communication between one's internal object world and her external subject world.

One of the inevitable experiences of being intersubjectively related is that the fantasy, ego ideal, or mental representation of one's self will be repeatedly rewritten, or at least brought into question by the self that is reflected back by others. Similarly, there is inevitable discomfort when the fantasy one holds for an other is contradicted by the reality of that other. Misrecognition, regardless if we are the doer or the done-to, is an experience of loss that needs to be metabolized. When the other gets us wrong, for example, we must take a second (or more) to mourn the loss of our idea of that other as one who understands us. Perhaps we must also momentarily mourn the loss of the fantasy that we are understandable. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (1917) described how "being slighted, neglected, or disappointed" is an ordinary experience of being in a meaningful relationship. Every moment of an encounter with an other contains vacillating micro-experiences of recognition and negation, moving closer and moving away (Butler, 2000). In a discussion of Freud's paper, Steiner (2011) reminds us that, "Each of these rejections of love involves a loss and presents [us] with a conflict that centres on [our] capacity and willingness to recognise the reality of the experience" (p.152). In order for us to properly mourn these minor ruptures, they must be brought into awareness as something lost, which is particularly difficult when the negating person is still present and potentially loving.

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Recognizing something as lost, however minor, requires us to give up a prior belief we had about the other, our selves, or our relationship with that other. It confronts us with a conflict between acceptance and denial. Steiner goes on to say that, “Acceptance involves a mini-relinquishment and mini-mourning, while denial involves a return to dependence on a concrete internal object as well as the redeployment of earlier mechanisms that deny the loss” (p.153). Loss in real life impels teens to turn toward an internal object that is safer and more controllable, one that does not have a body or a face.

Alessandra Lemma (2012), one of the few writers to address cell phones and psychoanalysis, recently wrote that technology frees us from the challenges of being-in-a-body. Adolescents particularly wish to transcend their awkward bodies and to get out of the strangeness of their new skin. Cell phones, she writes, “provide a culturally reinforced and readily accessible vehicle for the enactment of conflicts related to our embodied nature...” (p.694). Desires located in the body, desires directed toward the other’s body, and desires to possess the other’s body, all come into conflict with emotional readiness, cultural/religious/ parental prohibitions, and the other’s desire for us. It seems that teens purposefully place a screen in the midst of that conflict. Does the screen act in place of their underdeveloped ego, allowing them to look, read, and want, but not touch?

Teens today are learning how to control their new bodies and also how to control the objects that are extensions of those bodies. Jagodzinski (2004) wrote that our skin-ego acts as a protection when our body feels out of control, too close to intense emotions like hysterical laughter, fear, anxiety, anger, sexual desire, etc... Orifices are the access points that can open and close to let things in or keep things out, and so are cell phones. In the face of scary, awkward, or

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strange feelings, the phone is being used as a stopgap, protecting the user from overstimulation or dysregulation. In contrasting cases of cyber-bullying or cyber-stalking, two things that runs rampant in adolescence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, 2013), the phone can become a violated orifice, others piercing one's psychic and physical space in "omnipotently" abusive ways.

Lemma (2012) says that technology can be easily used "...in the service of managing a disturbing experience of 'otherness' that is felt to be concretely located in the body" (p.694). Puberty confronts young adolescents with a foreign body, a body that has betrayed their sense of control and is, therefore, an uncomfortable body for a time. Objectification from others, powers of seduction, physical potency, not-yet-pubescent weakness, precocious development, height differentials, awkward gangly bodies, acne, and unmodulated physiological arousal are just a few of an infinite number of uncomfortable situations that are experienced in adolescence, but not always fully thought. Though teens report consciously feeling comfort with and excitement about their developing bodies, they also text to escape the burdens of those bodies being seen. Whether one is purposefully hiding or impulsively responding to an unformulated experience (Stern, 1997), texting could be, and reportedly is, used to dilute the otherness of bodies.

Virtual reality, more so than other avenues of intersubjective avoidance, carries a, "promise of sameness...so compelling for some young people: it bypasses an exposure to an experience of difference, and to the sense of insufficiency we all must find ways of managing in ourselves" (Lemma, 2012, p.695). Those who make convenient use of it get to avoid brushing up against the minor traumas of interacting with others who have a face. When one suppresses recognition of the other as Other and does not tolerate differences, the necessary link between subjects is not created, the relationship is consigned to the level of a represented object

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relationship (Bohleber, 2010), and an overwhelmingly narcissistic ego threatens to form (Jagodzinski, 2006).

It has long been acknowledged that recognition occurs through one's reflection in the face of an empathic other (Winnicott, 1971; Kohut, 1971; Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Benjamin, 1995), particularly in the other's gaze or voice (Lacan, 1978), without which Stern (2005) said, "...it would be hard to achieve the empathic, participatory, and resonating aspects of intersubjectivity. One would only be left with a kind of pared down, neutral 'understanding' of the other's subjective experience" (p.86). This "neutral understanding" is quite different from the emotional feeling-with required for empathy, but at times seems to be a preferable mode of relating none-the-less.

## Conclusion

There is a tension between one's need to be desirable and known and one's need to also maintain absolute control over how she is viewed and to what her eyes are subject. Winnicott (1963) said that teens do not really want to be known; an other "knowing them" might feel foreclosing. They long to be seen, but not too clearly, wanting recognition only for things over which they have control. Though teens might fear being labeled before they have had the opportunity to form their own internal self-representation, a hearty identity requires an intersubjective interchange between self and other. They must be authentically seen by others and they must see themselves being seen by others if they are to outgrow their own personal fables (Elkind, 1967) and grow into a comprehensive view of self.

Perhaps texting and other virtual technologies reflect the cultural phenomenon of "emerging adulthood." The individual and cultural transition from adolescence to adulthood has

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been extended and given its own developmental stage in recognition that it is taking individuals in the United States longer to “grow” in some ways. Arnett’s (2000) pivotal research on emerging adulthood in the United States revealed that those individuals between 18 and 24 who did not identify as adults felt so for two primary reasons: either they felt they did not accept responsibility for themselves or they did not make primarily independent decisions. Taking ownership over one’s self includes taking responsibility for one’s body, thoughts, emotions, words, character, and decisions, for better and worse, responsibilities that texting is often employed to avoid. Having independent experiences and making independent decisions is made difficult by the ability to immediately share experiences or consult with an other. Seemingly harmless in moderation, it is possible that texting is one of many contemporary phenomena (including such things as academic entitlement and the practice of everyone getting a prize) that reflect a cultural attempt to shield our selves and our children from shortcomings; the natural egocentrism of adolescence is culturally reinforced at many turns, lengthening the maturation process.

Texting connects us with the words of instantly affirming others while obscuring faces that could give us disappointing information, and bodies that could confront us with difficult feelings. Faces can reject, objectify, and misrecognize just as easily as they can affirm, subjectify, and recognize, thus is the risk of seeing and of intersubjectively relating. Sensitive to judgment, acceptance, foreclosure, rejection, and loss, adolescents can turn to texting to control exposure of self and other, carefully obscuring and revealing at will. I suggest that texting highlights the vulnerability many adolescents feel with respect to seeing, hearing, and speaking, and further complicates the already difficult developmental task of maturing embodied intimacy.

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