

TEXTING AND ITS USE IN PASTORAL COUNSELING

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to examine texting as an appropriate and useful tool when counseling an individual. Texting has been a growing trend in communication, especially among teens. Teens prefer to text over any other form of communication. Almost 90% of teens who have phones text. One study reports that the average number of texts sent per day among teens who own phones is 167 while the median for all users is 60. That is an average of over 5000 texts per month and the median of 1800. There are many situations in which teens prefer texting compared to other modes of communication, especially when addressing an uncomfortable subject. If teens revert to texting for uncomfortable conversations with their own friends, imagine the difficulty when communicating with their pastor. Texting can be used to communicate in a way that the counselee is comfortable. Teens feel comfortable texting and will continue to text throughout their lives so a pastor should be ready to text people of all ages. This thesis will also share some practical advice about how to go about texting in a pastoral counseling situation.

## INTRO

“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way” (Daniel 5:5-6). The Babylonians had conquered the Jews and brought many into exile. King Belshazzar spit in God’s face and mocked him by partying with goblets made from the articles of the temple in Jerusalem. God wanted King Belshazzar to get a specific message. He chose a form of communication with which no one was familiar. None of the king’s enchanters or diviners could interpret this message. Daniel was brought in to read and interpret. This was the message. “*Mene, mene, tekel, parsin.*” This short message had a lot more to it. Daniel went on to interpret the meaning.

*Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.*

*Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.*

*Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:25-28).*

God sent the first text message.<sup>1</sup> King Belshazzar was frightened that a heavenly hand appeared to write the message on the wall. He had no idea how to interpret it. Do some people feel like King Belshazzar when it comes to texting? Texting is a new wave of communication that can be overwhelming, especially when written in textese,<sup>2</sup> the shorthand form of writing a text message. Others identify with Daniel; bold and confident in their ability to read, interpret, and communicate this text language. In either case, texting is a new and popular way to communicate, especially for teens. A recent study gave this summary and example:

Wireless communication has emerged as one of the fastest diffusing media on the planet, fueling an emergent “mobile youth culture” that speaks as much with thumbs as it does with tongues. At one of our focus groups a teen boy gushed, “I have unlimited texts . . . which is like the greatest invention of mankind.” His enthusiasm was hardly unique. Cell phone use and, in particular, the rise of texting has become a central part of teens’ lives. They are using their phones to stay in touch with friends and parents. They are using them to share stories and photos. They are using them to entertain themselves when they

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<sup>1</sup> Although the original message may not have been in Hebrew, humor me. This is 33 characters in the Masoretic text with spaces and vowel pointing. It would easily fit in the maximum allowance of 160 characters in a text message. It is also a shorthand form for a longer message later interpreted by Daniel. This full message and interpretation is 178 characters with spaces and vowel pointing.

<sup>2</sup> Textese a shorthand language used in Short Message Service (SMS). It is also known as txt-speak, txtese, chatspeak, txt, txtspk, txtk, txto, texting language, txt lingo, SMSish, txtslang, or txt talk. This information is from the Wikipedia Encyclopedia article “SMS Language” Available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_language). Internet.

are bored. They are using them to micro-coordinate their schedules and face-to-face gatherings.<sup>3</sup>

This increase of texting has started to find its way into the pastor's office. Members are even texting pastors with personal problems that previously would be addressed with a counseling session.

### COUNSELING IN SCRIPTURE

It has always been a mission of God to counsel his sheep. Beginning in the midst of the beautiful Eden, God had to confront the original sinners with the error of their ways. But he did not start accusing Adam and Eve; rather he asked a series of questions. "Where are you?" "Who told you?" and "Have you eaten of the tree?" (Genesis 3:9,11). God used a method of questioning like counselors use today to allow the counselees to confront the real problem. The omniscient Lord did not need to ask Adam and Eve what happened. The questions were not for his benefit. It was to bring the sin to light so our first parents could deal with the real issue. After presenting the counselees with their problem, God gave them the solution: the promise of a skull crushing Seed (Genesis 3:15). The Messiah would come to destroy the root of all problems on earth: sin, death, and Satan. This is the first of many examples in Scripture of God counseling his wounded, wandering sheep with Christ as the center.

As the New Testament church was established, "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:18-19), Jesus commissioned the apostles to take the news about him into all nations. This would include a great amount of teaching and counseling. The epistles share glimpses of counseling individuals and congregations. Paul mentions his admonition of Peter, addressing the problems of division to the whole congregation. "How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" (Galatians 2:11-21). He uses the method of questioning. Paul also sends letters of support to Timothy as he struggles in his new ministry. 1 Timothy is filled with emotionally charged words of encouragement like "My true son in faith," "I urge you," and "I hope to come to you." Paul counsels Timothy. John is commissioned to write specific counsels of God to the seven churches in Revelation. God wants to counsel his sheep. All Biblical counseling centers on Christ, the shepherd.

The goal of Christo-centric counseling has remained concrete since the first session in the Garden of Eden. Whether it is sin or grief, a counselor reveals God's truth to change a person's

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<sup>3</sup> Lenhart, Amanda, et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones* (Pew Research Center, April 20, 2010), 9.

heart. At first, God communicated his own words directly to people by signs and visions, but mostly God used people to communicate his message. Today we recognize the same truth. God's word is powerful and useful to change hearts, and someone needs to share it. Paul states this so eloquently. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:16-17). The Bible is the message. The method of relaying this message in counseling is through a person.

### COUNSELING IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Counseling itself is nothing new but it has evolved. Since the 1930s progressive thinking and learning slowly infiltrated the secular counseling world. Sigmund Freud talked about the use of religion being a thing of the past. Reason and science became the authority.<sup>4</sup> More and more churches and seminaries were introducing psychological training for pastors based on theories from Freud and others which were against Scripture.<sup>5</sup> As a result, human reason was elevated over the use of Scripture in counseling. The church had to do something to combat the humanistic ideologies if she wanted to hold onto God's word as its norm and authority. The Wisconsin Synod<sup>6</sup> appeared very cautious in approaching much of the psychoanalytical and scientific methods of counseling. The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) curriculum did not change while other seminaries in the United States adapted methods that combated against truths in Scripture.<sup>7</sup> The Wisconsin Synod remained true to the concrete goal of Christo-centric counseling. Even in the midst of an evolving approach to counseling, Wisconsin Synod pastors used God's truth to counsel the hurting heart.

As science and psychology continued to advance in the 1960s and 1970s, the psychological community discovered and categorized more mental disorders. Secular counseling began to incorporate new ways of treating these disorders. Questions surfaced about the pastor's

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, James W., 'Foreword' in Charles Spezzano and Gerald J. Gargiulo (eds.), Soul on the Couch: Spirituality, Religion and Morality in Contemporary Psychoanalysis (Hillsdale, 2003), p. xi. Kepnes, Steven D. (Dec. 1986). "Bridging the gap between understanding and explanation approaches to the study of religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25 (4): 510.

<sup>5</sup> Hein, James M., *The Past 75 Years of Counseling Methodology in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (WLS Library, 2007), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Did not become Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod till 1959.

<sup>7</sup> Hein, 4-5. This is also affirmed by the WLS catalogues 1935-1971. There is no report of a change in counseling curriculum until 1970.

counseling. What does the Bible say about mental disorders? What does God's word say about depression? What does God's word say about eating disorders?<sup>8</sup> Pastors came to understand that some psychological understanding has an appropriate place. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) saw the need to incorporate psychology with biblical healing. After a thorough study, the WELS birthed a conservative, biblical option to secular counseling. Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services (WLCFS) opened its offices in 1965 to elevate the centrality of Christ in counseling.

The advance in learning began to affect how WELS pastors were trained. Counseling was taught to seniors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), incorporated into a two-hour/quarter class called "Christian Marriage/Counseling." Professor Armin Schuetze from WLS and a counselor at WLCFS, Fredrich Matzke, recognized that such a short amount of time was not enough, so they undertook to better train pastors in the art of counseling. This project would be later become the book *The Counseling Shepherd*, published in 1988. This effort recognized that pastors needed more training in the classroom. Two to three hours of training did not properly equip them to handle all the personal problems of their members. Although the book was written, the class time wasn't expanded until Professor Alan Siggelkow was called to WLS in 1991 to take over the "Christian Marriage/Counseling" course. The 1993 Seminary Self-study reports that after re-evaluation, an additional hour was given to Professor Siggelkow's course, expanding it from two hours/quarter to three hours/quarter. This was a minor but significant improvement. This class would not be expanded to a specific counseling class till Professor John Schuetze was called in 2003. The class was expanded from three hours/quarter to two hours/semester and devoted specifically to counseling. This addition of time was intended to increase a pastor's knowledge and confidence in counseling.<sup>9</sup>

The training, whether two or twenty hours, had one focus: how can a pastor better help a hurting soul with the Word of Christ. The purpose of *The Counseling Shepherd* is to serve "as a practical help to the parish pastor who has many responsibilities besides counseling."<sup>10</sup> This book taught a broad spectrum about counseling in a condensed way for pastors who are busy

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<sup>8</sup> Hein, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Catalogs from 1980-2012 and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Self Study, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Schuetze, Armin. *The Counseling Shepherd* (Northwestern Publishing House, 1988), xiii.

with ministry but still want to grow in counseling skills, and it was used in the curriculum for counseling at WLS.

Another book written by WELS pastor H. Curtis Lyon and published in 1991 was also influential during this time of change. It kept the same goal but approached counseling with a different tactic. As its introduction explained, "The purpose of this book is to suggest ways to use these resources (the professional and medical communities) while maintaining that real healing can come only from God through his gospel."<sup>11</sup> The author used stories and case studies to highlight a few major points a pastor should consider.

Both sources were filled with pastoral counseling advice. They used the available psychological education to better communicate Christ to hurting sheep. Neither book mentions the mode of communication in a counseling situation. At that time, it was unnecessary to include such advice. It was understood that pastoral counseling was done in a face-to-face meeting or over the phone. Email and the internet did not go public till the late 1980s and were not a popular means of communication till the mid 1990s.<sup>12</sup>

So how did pastors counsel their flocks? Most was done on a face-to-face. In earlier years, counseling occurred in the pastor's office when members would come to register for communion. Each member registered personally with the pastor when they wanted to receive the Holy Communion. This registration process was slowly replaced by a simple phone call and then phased out completely. Many churches retain a version of this practice by a making use of a written registration for communion. Now a pastor has fewer personal moments with each member that would give him the opportunity to do pastoral counseling. Most often, a member contacts the pastor with a need. Before 1980, some of this was done by mail or over the phone, but most occurred in person because that was the only effective way to communicate in a counseling setting. One pastor from this generation makes the point, "Nothing can be more important than helping a person in the flesh. That shows them that you really care."<sup>13</sup> Face to face has always been the preferred method of counseling.

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<sup>11</sup> Lyon, H. Curtis. *Counseling at the Cross: Using the Power of the Gospel in Christian Counseling* (Northwestern Pub House, 1991), xix.

<sup>12</sup>Wikipedia article *History of the Internet* [on-line] (accessed 15 November 2012); available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_history); Internet.

<sup>13</sup> Quote from a pastor after an email survey about methods of communication in pastoral counseling.

Today counseling takes many forms. Technology advanced with the invention of the internet and the evolution of the telephone. 85% of Americans carry a cell phone<sup>14</sup> and 90% have email addresses.<sup>15</sup> People communicate with technology: computers, cell phones, land line telephones, etc. Most scheduled counseling still is through face-to-face contact. But there are also many cases of un-scheduled counseling happening through the media of technology. Some would rather talk to their pastor, instead of trying to find a certified counselor. Their pastor is only an email away. Their pastor can respond to a phone call almost anywhere at almost any time. Pastor can even respond to a problem on his time, and one can introduce it to him with a short text. The mode of communication that a pastor uses for counseling has broadened tremendously in the past 30 years.

The psychological education in the 1930's influenced pastors to reconsider how they were counseling their flock. The different modes of communication today now call for the same consideration. The aim of this thesis is to show how texting is a useful tool in pastoral counseling.

#### A COMMUNICATION SHIFT

With many communication tools available, the pastor still has one goal in mind: to understand the solid foundation of God's word and find ways to better communicate it. Which way is best? This was an easier choice with Adam. God and Adam had conversations. God used the spoken word to communicate with and counsel him. Moses had this same blessing, except God used him to preserve the word in order to communicate it further with the written word. Reaching into the New Testament, the same spoken and written means continued: God spoke and man wrote. But when Jesus came, we catch a glimpse of how God yearns and acts as he shepherds all people. He dines with the "sinner" to bring back the lost and he preaches to the Jews to remind them that have the truth (Luke 15). The apostles and evangelists both spoke in person and wrote letters to the churches. Speaking face-to-face or writing a letter was the way to counsel the sheep in the fold. For almost 2000 years, this would remain the mode of counseling in the Christian church.

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<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia article *Mobile Phones* [on-line] (accessed 15 November 2012); available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile\\_phone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_phone). Internet.

<sup>15</sup> Wikipedia article *Email* [on-line] (accessed 15 November 2012); available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email>; Internet.



Communication took a dramatic shift on March 10, 1876. Ever since Thomas Watson heard Alexander Graham Bell's voice transferred through electrical current say "Come here, I want to see you," communication has never been the same. Skeptics about the phone doubted that this invention would ever amount to anything practical. Bell's "toy," as Western Union called it when they regrettably denied purchasing the patent for \$100,000, became one of the most successful inventions in history.<sup>16</sup> The telephone is still used today to connect people all around the world.

Ninety years after the first vocal communication on record in Bell's experiments, the telephone went mobile. This first mobile phone was nothing like it is today. Mobile phone capability was achieved in 1946 by use of radio waves. It was first introduced commercially in 1947 as a car phone because the battery was too large to carry. Although there were 5000 subscribers, only three users were able to talk at the same time because of the limit in channels. This was later expanded to twelve circuits to allow more subscribers to use their mobile phones at the same time.<sup>17</sup> Even so, a subscriber would have to stay in range of the area in order to make a call.

In 1947 American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) developed the concept of "call hand off" by using a cell frequency instead of radio frequency to dramatically increase the traffic capacity of mobile phones. In 1968 they introduced this concept to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), but the regulations on the use of the radio channels were not lifted because the technology to back the concept had not been developed. After 14 years of encouragement and technological improvements from AT&T, the FCC opened up the commercial use of more analog space for cell phones and the ability to hand off calls to different cell areas. This new system would start a nationwide trend for cell phones. The same towers are used for cell service today, but now have changed over from analog to a digital signal.<sup>18</sup>

After the first hand held mobile phone was invented in 1973, the evolution of the cell phone took over and technology rapidly evolved. It took a relatively long time to shrink the

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<sup>16</sup> Barnett, Lincoln. "American Heritage," *The voice heard round the world* [on-line], (accessed 6 February 2013); available from <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/voice-heard-round-world>. Internet.

<sup>17</sup>Published on the AT&T website. *1946: First Mobile Telephone Call* [on-line] (accessed 1 December 2012); available from <http://www.corp.att.com/atlabs/reputation/timeline/46mobile.html>. Internet.

<sup>18</sup>Bellis, Mary. *Selling the Cell Phone- Part 1 History of Cellular Phones* [on-line] (accessed 1 December 2012); available from <http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa070899.htm>. Internet.

original bulky design from its original 2.5 pound, 9 inch long, 5 inch deep and 1.75 inch wide design to one more compact. The first phone to fit in a pocket came out in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1986.<sup>19</sup> Once the cell phone was able to fit in to the pocket, the next thing was to advance the capabilities of the phone.

One of those capabilities was the use of Short Message Service (SMS), or texting. On December 3, 1992, Neil Papworth, a 22-year-old test engineer for Sema Group, an Information Technology (IT) company in the UK, sent the first text message from his desk to the director of Vodafone, a UK mobile phone service provider. Richard Jarvis received a small “Merry Christmas” message that appeared on his phone while he was at a Christmas party. This first 15-character text message shook the world of communication. This new wave of texting started slowly but gradually influenced communication today. The texting service was not introduced commercially for a few years in the United States.<sup>20</sup> By 2011, less than 10 years later, 71% of the 83% of Americans who own cell phones use their phone for texting.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE POWER OF TEXTING

Texting has influenced communication devices, the preferred mode of communication, and language itself. Texting has influenced the design of phones. Most phones today are built with full QWERTY<sup>22</sup> keyboards to make typing faster. The top six cell phone companies in the US provide a heavy number of cell phones that come with a full keyboard, but a few retained the normal 10-digit keypad without a full keyboard. For T-mobile: 1 out of 29 phones did not have a QWERTY keyboard; for Verizon: 3 out of 47; for AT&T: 3 out of 44; for Cricket: 2 out of 13; for U.S. Cellular: 2 out of 26; for Sprint: 4 out of 47.<sup>23</sup> The top companies sell these phones assuming that texting will be one function of the phone by providing phones with full keyboards.

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<sup>19</sup> Wikipedia article, *Technophone* [on-line] (accessed 15 October 2012); available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technophone>. Internet.

<sup>20</sup> Wikipedia article. *Text Messaging* [on-line] (accessed 16 October 2012); available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text\\_messaging](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text_messaging). Internet.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, Aaron. *Americans and their cell phones* (Pew Research Center, August 15, 2011), available from <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Cell-Phones.aspx>, 6.

<sup>22</sup> A QWERTY keyboard refers to the arrangement of keys established Sholes and Glidden typewriters. The name comes from the first six keys at the top left corner of the keyboard.

<sup>23</sup> Results from exploring each company’s web sites on November 5, 2012, and counting the available cell phones listed. Each phone’s specifications were checked to see which had a QWERTY keyboard or not.

Texting has also become the preferred mode of communication among teenagers. A study led by Pew International, one of the leading research companies in the United States (US), reports that “some 75% of 12-17 year-olds now own cell phones, up from 45% in 2004. Those phones have become indispensable tools in teen communication patterns. Fully 72% of all teens – or 88% of teen cell phone users — are text-messagers. That is a sharp rise from the 51% of teens who were texters in 2006. More than half of teens (54%) are daily texters.”<sup>24</sup>

Texting has not only influenced cell design and the preferred method of communication but has evolved its own language. The textese that is used in texting today is a form of shorthand, not a new development in writing. Shorthand is a style of writing that uses abbreviations in order to compress information and write more quickly. This style of writing dates back to ancient Greece.<sup>25</sup> Shorthand was also used to record Martin Luther’s lectures and sermons. Texters use a shorthand form of writing to fit large messages into the 160 character limit message and to speed the process of writing a message. Here is one example:

“My smmr hols wr CWOT. B4, we used 2go2 NY 2Cmy bro, his GF & thr 3 :-@ kids FTF. ILNY, it’s a gr8 plc.”

Translation:

“My summer holidays were a complete waste of time. Before, we used to go to New York to see my brother, his girlfriend and their three screaming kids face to face. I love New York. It’s a great place.”<sup>26</sup>

This message in textese cuts the character count almost in half, from 199 to 102 characters.

All the change brought about by the advancement of cell phones has affected, communication in pastoral counseling. Texting has already crept into the counseling “office” and may continue to pound down the door. The pros and cons of this will be discussed later.

#### TEXTING: A BATTLE OF GOOD VS. EVIL

Opinions about texting influence whether or not people are going to use it. Although it comes from a small population, the negative opinion of texting rings loudly. Negative opinions

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<sup>24</sup> Lenhart et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Wikipedia article, *Shorthand* [on-line] (accessed 16 November 2012); available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shorthand>. Internet.

<sup>26</sup> Crystal, David. *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8* (Oxford University Press, 2008), available from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/73333581/Txtng-the-Gr8-Db8>, 36.

towards texting may cause people to despise it as a means to communicate. Consider these negative opinions about texting.

Some say texting is too informal. Wiki Answers say texting is informal because formal documents like newspapers and letters have a layout and texting does not.<sup>27</sup> Another article from [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com) weighed the pros and cons of texting in a business setting in which the author described texting as “communication between friends and close acquaintances.” The author urged caution about bringing it into the business world.<sup>28</sup>

Others simply do not like texting. One expert linguist describes his interaction with a woman about texting. “‘I hate texting,’ she said. ‘Why?’ I asked. ‘All those stupid abbreviations.’”<sup>29</sup> Her dislike for texting stems from disliking the textese language. There are web pages, blogs, Facebook pages, and twitter accounts dedicated to sharing a common dislike to texting.<sup>30</sup>

Texting is not only considered wrong but also harmful. A website sponsored by the George Lucas Education Foundation did a survey about text language’s effects on academic writing. 53% of the 3357 respondents answered, “Yes. I believe students are carrying over the writing habits they pick up through text messaging into school assignments.”<sup>31</sup> *The New York Times* takes this further explains the harm. “The phenomenon [of texting] is beginning to worry physicians and psychologists, who say it is leading to anxiety, distraction in school, falling grades, repetitive stress injury and sleep deprivation.”<sup>32</sup>

Stronger opinions against texting are determined to prove that it is destructive. Here are a few headlines taken from a single page of research reports found on the Web in 2007:

Texting fogs your brain like cannabis  
Texting does not influence literacy skills

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<sup>27</sup> *What is the difference between formal and informal documents?* [on-line] (accessed 16 November 2012); available from [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What\\_is\\_the\\_difference\\_between\\_formal\\_and\\_informal\\_documents](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_difference_between_formal_and_informal_documents). Internet.

<sup>28</sup> Ruggieri, Christina; *Is Texting Appropriate in Business Communication?* [on-line] (accessed 16 October 2012); available from <http://managerialcommunication.wordpress.com/2011/12/03/is-texting-appropriate-in-business-communication/>. Internet.

<sup>29</sup> Crystal, *Txtng*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> A Google search of the words “who hates texting” done on 10/25/12 revealed these results.

<sup>31</sup> *Does text messaging harm student’s writing skills?* [on-line] (accessed 26 November 2012); available from <http://www.edutopia.org/poll-text-messaging-writing-skills>. Internet.

<sup>32</sup> Hafner, Katie. “Texting May Be Taking a Toll,” *The New York Times*, (May 26, 2009), sec. Health, available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/26/health/26teen.html>. Internet.

Texting replaces speech for communication among teenagers  
Texting deprives children of sleep<sup>33</sup>

The researchers want to show how texting is harmful.

With the amount that teenagers are texting, some have investigated if texting is habit forming. An interview done on CBS with David Greenfield, the founder of The Center for Internet Behavior, explains the possibility of becoming addicted to texting. This particular addiction, as described, is similar to being addicted to gambling. The unpredictable ups and downs of a text conversation create an emotional high for the texter. Consequently, one can text for hours waiting for the “good news text.” This time spent texting can cause loss of sleep, distraction from school or work, strain in relationships, and can even cause physical strain on the thumbs.<sup>34</sup>

Many people look down on texting because of times it is abused. They point to statistics about distracted drivers. It is reported that 8000 car accidents per day happen because drivers are distracted; one distraction is the use of the cell phone. Almost half of drivers in a survey admitted to reading a text while driving, and a third admitted to sending texts while driving.<sup>35</sup> Texting when driving can cause accidents that result in injury or death. Therefore, many people have negative feelings towards it.

Despite the many negative opinions about texting not everyone hates texting, since most Americans who own a cell phone use texting.<sup>36</sup> In fact, though there are internet sources dedicated to support those who dislike texting, there are even more for those who love to text.<sup>37</sup> Blogs, websites, Facebook pages, and even dating sites are built around the love of texting. Here are some reasons that one blogger loves texting: “I love so much that my daughters want to text me so badly that they do it before school, during lunch at school, and after school. I love that my 18 year old son still texts me to tell me he loves me. I love that I don't have to pick up the phone and hope somebody answers, and that the kids are around. Instead, I can text, and we can say all

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<sup>33</sup> Crystal, *Txtng*, 3. Crystal sites that the Web research reports were collected by the UK Literacy Trust: [on-line] (accessed 16 November 2012); available from <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/texting.html>. Internet.

<sup>34</sup> CBS News interview. *Addicted To Texting* [on-line] (accessed 16 November 2012); available from <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=6825863n&tag=api>. Internet.

<sup>35</sup> AAA Insurance foundation. *Distracted Driving* [on-line] (accessed 26 November 2012); available from <http://www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/2011DistractedDrivingMessageDevelopmentStudy.pdf>. Internet.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. statistic on page 1.

<sup>37</sup> A Google search with the words “I love texting” done 5 December 2012.

the things that are so hard to say in person.”<sup>38</sup> Even in the intimacy of a family unit, it is hard to speak in person. Texting helps families stay connected. This mother even enjoyed how texting can help communicate an uncomfortable subject. A survey conducted in 2006 reveals that 63% of parents who text their children say it improves communication.<sup>39</sup> Here are a few headlines taken from a single page of research reports found on the Web in 2007:

Texting linked positively with literacy achievements  
Texting helps shy teenagers communicate  
Teenagers to get free mobiles to improve literacy standards  
Mobiles prove effective in getting NEETs back into learning.<sup>40</sup>

These researchers found that texting can have a positive effect on communication and life as a whole.

Many people love texting because they feel it is good for a person’s wellbeing. *Educause Review*, the online source for an award winning magazine devoted to higher learning in the IT community, published a study to see how texting affects connectedness in a community. It concludes with these thoughts:

The text message application of a handheld device such as a smartphone can engender social connectedness in many ways, not least of all in helping enhance the users’ emotional well-being. This study revealed how a group of graduate students communicating through text messaging developed enhanced interpersonal opportunities. Although apparently ephemeral, micro-moments of co-presence and feelings of connectedness, strung together over time, almost certainly helped reduce feelings of isolation in students who spend much time off campus. In the long run, this could positively impact their academic performance, helping them build stronger emotional health and resilience and reinforcing their affinity with the institutional community.<sup>41</sup>

The study above states that texting can be a useful tool for the wellbeing and productivity of an individual.

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<sup>38</sup> *Glitter: Why I Love Texting* [on-line] (accessed 26 November 2012); available from <http://www.bandbacktogether.com/post/1064/>. Internet.

<sup>39</sup> Peters, Dr. Ruth, *Txt2connect: Survey Indicates Text Messaging Improves Parent-child Communications* [on-line] (accessed 13 February, 2013); available from <http://multivu.prnewswire.com/mnr/cingular/25194/>. Internet.

<sup>40</sup> Crystal, *Txtng*, 3. Crystal sites that the Web research reports were collected by the UK Literacy Trust: [on-line] (accessed 16 November 2012); available from <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/texting.html>. Internet.

<sup>41</sup> Mentor, Dominic; *Supporting Students’ Connectedness via Texting* [on-line] (accessed 16 November 2012); available from <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/supporting-students%E2%80%99-connectedness-texting>. Internet.

Texting is appreciated for its ability to help people connect. An article at [www.Time.com](http://www.Time.com) reviewed a recent study that texting helps introverts.

“Our findings suggest that IM’ing<sup>42</sup> between distressed adolescents and their peers may provide emotional relief and consequently contribute to [their] well-being,” the authors write, noting that prior research has shown that people assigned to talk to a stranger either in real life or online improved their mood in both settings, but even more with IM. And people who talk with their real-life friends online also report feeling closer to them than those who just communicate face-to-face, implying a strengthening of their bond.<sup>43</sup>

In the case of an introvert, texting or IM’ing is viewed by some researchers as more beneficial than a face-to-face conversation.

Some teachers use texting in class to increase student involvement. A study was done in classroom settings where texting is used to assist in learning. Most of the students reported positively in its effectiveness in communicating. One teacher reports how she is able to get answers from more students because of the use of texting in her classroom. “[Texting] has given a voice to a large number of students intimidated by a classroom or group environment, enabling them to ask questions, put forth an opinion, and interact with fellow group members in a dynamically technological manner.”<sup>44</sup> One student gave this assessment after the experience: “I believe that texting in the classroom is an effective form of students learning. For example, some may feel shy to ask a certain question, therefore texting will enable people to ask questions anonymously.”<sup>45</sup> Both student and teacher agree that texting helps those who are shy communicate when they otherwise would not.

In conclusion, texting carries the baggage of both negative and positive opinions, and studies support each side. These opinions can influence whether people will use it or not. David Crystal, an influential linguist,<sup>46</sup> sums up the argument as follows: “If it’s causing problems, we

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<sup>42</sup> IM’ing is short for “instant messaging.” It is a text based peer conversation over the internet.

<sup>43</sup>Szalativz, Maia; *How Texting and IMing Help Introverted Teens* [on-line] (accessed 26 November 2012); available from <http://healthland.time.com/2012/08/30/how-texting-and-iming-helps-introverted-teens/>. Internet.

<sup>44</sup> Bradley, Clair, et al., *A little less conversation, a little more texting please - a blended learning model of using mobiles in the classroom* (University of Hertfordshire, UK, 2010), [report on-line] (accessed 10 February, 2013), available from <http://angliaruskin.openrepository.com/arro/handle/10540/131879>, Internet.

<sup>45</sup> Bradley, Clair, et al. *A little less conversation, a little more texting please*.

<sup>46</sup>David Crystal wrote many books in the field of linguistics but is most known for the books *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* and *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. This information is available from the *Biography of David Crystal*, [on-line] (accessed 11 March 2013); available from [http://www.davidcrystal.com/David\\_Crystal/biography.htm](http://www.davidcrystal.com/David_Crystal/biography.htm). Internet.

need to be able to manage them. And if it is providing benefits, we need to know how to build on them.”<sup>47</sup> Most people use texting because it helps them communicate.

### TEXT LANGUAGE

Texting itself, while breaking down communication barriers, has also broken the rules of the English language. Crystal gives this example:

Some even think it is harming language as a whole. “Text messages destroying our language,” headed a report in a Washington paper in May 2007,<sup>48</sup> and the writer goes on: “I knew this was coming. From the first time one of my friends sent me the message ‘I’ve got 2 go, talk to U later,’ I knew the end was near. The English language as we once knew it is out the window, and replacing it is this hip and cool slang-induced language, obsessed with taking the vowels out of words and spelling fonetkally.”<sup>49</sup>

The author of the newspaper article is equating the shorthand textese language with the death of the English language.

It is not just American newspapers printing articles about texting destroying English. The second best selling newspaper in the UK, *The Daily Mail*, wrote an article calling texters “vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbors eight hundred years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped.”<sup>50</sup> There are many who text but are adamantly against the textese language.

On the other side, a study was conducted to see whether texting actually does impact communication. David Crystal shares a study which found that children who abbreviated more in their texting were better at spelling and writing than those who did not. “Children could not be good at texting if they had not already developed considerable literacy awareness. Before you can write abbreviated forms effectively and play with them, you need to have a sense of how the sounds of your language relate to the letters.”<sup>51</sup> Crystal shows how children build off of what they know. Those who already know how to read and write function well in the abbreviated world of texting.

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<sup>47</sup> Crystal, *Txtng*, 6-7

<sup>48</sup> Uthus, Eric. “Text Messages Destroying Our Language,” *The Daily* [on-line] (accessed 26 November 2012); available from <http://www.thedaily.washington.edu/article/2007/5/7/textMessagesDestroyingOurLanguage>. Internet.

<sup>49</sup> Crystal, *Txtng*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Online Demand Lifts William Hill* [on-line] (accessed 26 November 2012); available from [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in\\_article\\_id=483511&in\\_page\\_id=1770](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=483511&in_page_id=1770). Internet.

<sup>51</sup> Crysta, *Txtng*, 162



Abbreviations in texting are a response to a difficulty in technology. Crystal published his book, *Txting, The gr8 db8*, in 2004 when the QWERTY keyboard was not yet integrated to most phones. The Blackberry and iPhone were the leading phones that had a full keyboard; the rest kept the 10-digit keyboard, making it difficult to text. Phone companies were also either charging a fee for every text message or allowing a limited number of texts to be sent per contract. Therefore a subscriber wanted to fit as much as he could in a single text in order to save money. In order to cope with this primitive technology and high prices, people invented an intelligible short hand language. Crystal makes an interesting observation.

The remarkable thing is that nobody ever told anyone to do this. There was no ruling from the mobile phone companies which said: “you must abbreviate.” It just happened, and in next to no time. It happened so quickly, I believe, because texters already had an instinct about the value of shortening words in order to speed up communication and already knew how to do it, so they simply transferred (and then embellished) what they had encountered in other settings.

Crystal says that writing shorthand text messages is a natural response to the conditions that a texter was in and that textese has remained even though most phones today have a full QWERTY keyboard.

Crystal also reveals that there are fewer text-isms in educational papers than one may think. He cites one educator as an example.

Tim Shortis, a former chief examiner for English language A-level at the exam board AQAB, said he had rarely seen textisms used in A-level papers, though they were more common at GCSE level. He commented. “There’s a moral panic about young people and language, a populist alarm. But the examples you see in the media are rarely used. You get initialisms such as LOL for ‘laugh out loud’ and letter and number homophones such as r and 2, but they are not as widespread as you think. There are also remarkably few casual misspellings.”<sup>52</sup>

This expert believes that texting does not affect language as much as some say.

Apparently most abbreviations in text messages are understandable. Crystal writes, “Even with the more extreme cases of abbreviation, the problem of unintelligibility is far less than some have suggested. As one texter said: ‘f u cn rd ths thn wats th prblm?’” The texter is stating that most messages can be read without many problems.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Crystal, *Txting*, 155

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the appendix D for examples of the power of the human mind to understand words that are not spelled correctly.

One study wants to take a proactive role in the formation of text language. Texas A&M's *CEDAR Yearbook* published an article that compares text fluency to reading fluency. "Like reading fluency, which is one's ability to read text accurately and with a certain level of speed and expression, texting fluency allows one to access information, which in educational environments would prove tremendously advantageous for those who are more fluent than those less fluent."<sup>54</sup> The article proposes to teach people to become fluent in the textese language instead of fighting against it.

The use of texting language has been debated on both sides and will probably continue. There are some who write in textese and some who do not. One study reports the disconnect that comes from different writing styles within the text world. "Teens say that their parents are not comfortable with the style of the writing.... Their parents react to their more stylized writing and ask them to use more traditional formulations." Parents of teens are uncomfortable with textese due to what is lost in translation. The fact remains, however, that textese is a language teens understand, and their prolific use of the language indicates how they define their world and communicate about themselves.

#### WHY TEENS TEXT

Texting, aside from calling, is the most used function of the cell phone.<sup>55</sup> 75% of cell phone users in America send text messages with their mobile phone. Teens prefer texting over any form of communication, even face-to-face.<sup>56</sup> This graph shows it in comparison to several other ways to communicate.

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<sup>54</sup> Ortlieb, Evan. "Texting Fluency: The New Measurement of Literacy Proficiency?" *CEDER Yearbook* (2012), 160.

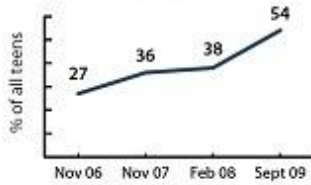
<sup>55</sup> Lenhart et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Lenhart et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones*, 2.

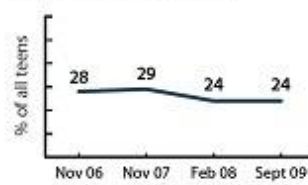
## Texting takes off, while use of other communication channels remains stable over time

the % of all teens who have used each communication method to contact their friends daily, since 2006

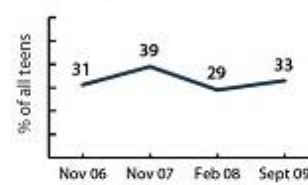
Text messaging



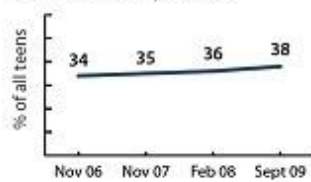
Instant messaging



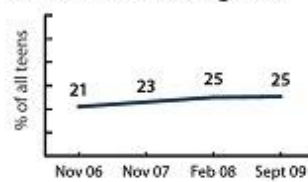
Talk face-to-face



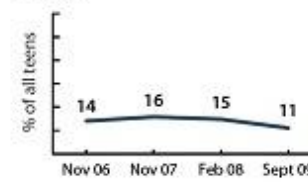
Call on cell phone



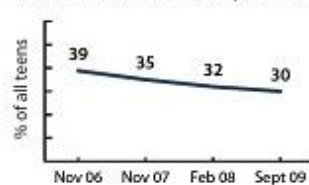
Social networking site



Email



Talk on a landline phone



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project surveys. Percentages are for all teens ages 12-17.



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The study discovered many reasons why teens are texting instead of using the other forms listed above:

1. Texting allows for asynchronous interaction and it is more discrete than making calls.
2. Texting does not necessarily command the attention of a conversational partner. This means that a teen can send a message and then simply await the answer.
3. Texting is used in situations when it is discourteous or even prohibited to talk on the cell phone.
4. Texting is used to get around rules and for cheating.
5. Texting can be used to cover one's tracks.
6. Teens use text messaging when they have to break bad news or make an uncomfortable request of their parents.
7. The delay afforded by texting means that the teen has more control over the pace and tone of the interaction.

<sup>57</sup> Lenhart et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones*, 2

8. Some teens simply prefer to text with friends for the clarity that words on the screen can bring and the removal of the awkward moments found in phone conversations.
9. It gives them more time to craft a message or respond in a tough situation.
10. Finally, texting is an easy way to keep up with the flow of everyday life.<sup>58</sup>

But the study also noted that there are times when a teen states that he prefers to call.

1. There is immediacy and fullness to voice interaction that is not often possible with texting, and talking provides teens with more social cues, allowing them more nuanced interaction.
2. Texting can be too laborious, and some people are out of the texting loop.
3. They preferred calling when they needed to talk about something that was important or serious.
4. Other teens prefer the verbal cues that come with voice calling.<sup>59</sup>

While the teens who were surveyed indicate that they would prefer to call in a serious situation, the study does note a difference in a teen's actions. Note both points six and nine above under "reasons to text." Teens break bad news or make uncomfortable requests of parents via text instead of with a call and want more time to craft a response to a difficult situation. The study also adds a side note, analyzing a comment from one participant in the study, "It is apparent that when this participant needed to shield herself from the reaction of someone whom she thought she had disappointed, the more indirect medium of texting was preferable."<sup>60</sup> Teens say that they will call when there is a serious situation like a need for counseling, but is that really the truth? Through their actions, many teens illustrate that texting is preferred over talking about an uncomfortable topic.

Teens show that they use texting as a shield from what others think or from their disappointment. The author has his own experience with this as well. At a youth group meeting, a high school girl asked him how to gently decline an invitation from a boy who asked her out. After giving a bit of advice on what to say, he told the teenager to call the boy. He felt it was important for her not to hurt her friend, and the author thought it would be more appropriate to have the conversation over the phone as opposed to texting. She hesitantly agreed. Later that evening, the author asked if she called the boy, and she replied, "No, but I did text him." When a

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<sup>58</sup> Lenhart et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones*, 47-49.

<sup>59</sup> Lenhart et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones*, 49-50.

<sup>60</sup> Lenhart et al., *Teens and Mobile Phones*, 50.

teen is faced with a tough or awkward issue, texting remains the preferred mode of communication.

Two WELS pastors interviewed about their use of texting in pastoral counseling agree that it is advantageous to their ministry. Each uses texting for different situations when they counsel. Pastor A received many texts after his lecture about sex for all incoming freshman at a Lutheran college. Pastor B receives his texts from members of his congregation of various age levels.<sup>61</sup>

Pastor A explained that he receives anonymous texts from college students about uncomfortable sins that need to be addressed but that no students approach him in person.<sup>62</sup> In fact, the number one reason he believes he receives these texts is because of the anonymity. In his experience, the younger generation is more comfortable approaching a sticky situation via text than in a face to face meeting or even a phone call, especially if there is anonymity. Pastor A states, “You can establish a relationship, as shallow as it may be, via text.” There is no threat of a relationship being ruined due to an embarrassing sin because there is no relationship in an anonymous text. The Catholic Church used a booth for anonymity in confession and to prescribe penance. Pastor A uses a text message and provides scriptural encouragement.

One advantage of texting is that it eliminates the small talk before the counseling can start. Pastor B states, “Any time you call, it’s ‘Hey. How are you doing?’” He goes on to explain that it is easier to cut to the chase with a text, especially when a counselee does not have a lot of spare time. Pastor A confirms this. “Most of the time it is like, boom, it’s on.” The counselee is able to open up with the issue on his heart instead of spending time with small talk as an introduction to counseling.

The readiness to share what is typically uncomfortable information has been referred to as “the online disinhibition effect.”<sup>63</sup> Kate Anthony, a leading expert on the use of technology in therapy,<sup>64</sup> defines this effect as follows: “The more distressing or uncomfortable issues come up

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<sup>61</sup> Pastor A, Interview with the author. Phone Interview. Wauwatosa, WI, 24 October, 2012. Pastor B, Interview with the author. Phone Interview. Wauwatosa, WI, 13 November, 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Pastor A gives students his cell phone number, encouraging students to contact him in any way they are comfortable if they have any questions about the presentation.

<sup>63</sup> Anthony, Kate, and DeeAnna Merz Nagel. *Therapy Online: A Practical Guide* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 12.

<sup>64</sup> *About Kate Anthony* [on-line] (accessed 4 February 2013); available from <http://www.kateanthony.net/about-kate/>. Internet.

much earlier than they would in face-to-face sessions, and the practitioner may find that they are struggling with this information before they really ‘know’ the client and are able to feel that the unconditional positive regard is inherently in place.”<sup>65</sup> It is easier for a person to get out what they want in a text. People skip the chit chat and are comfortable to chip away at the problem immediately in a text without the need to build a relationship first.

There is a youthful angst about calling or even talking about serious issues face-to-face, and it takes time to break down that barrier. Part of the pastor’s purpose in texting is to peek into the teen’s personal problem as he begins to open up. Both pastors state that they always respond to a text with a text. Some issues could be solved within the text conversation but others’ problems need a deeper conversation. Both pastors aim for ending those conversations by phone. Pastor A has asked for permission in a text, “This is getting really hard to text, is it ok if I call you?” Neither pastor has ever experienced rejection when asking to end a text conversation with a call, yet they agree that they may not have had a chance to reach the individual if it were not for replying to the initial text with another text. Pastor B explains: “Personally, I would rather call, but I am 100% thrilled with texting to meet them where they are at.” The goal is always to communicate in a way that the counselee is most comfortable. When the pastor gains trust, he has earned the right to call and take the conversation to the next step.

It is up to the pastor how or if he will respond to the initial text. Pastor B states, “Mostly I follow their lead. If they are willing to text it to me, I am going to follow their comfort level.” Pastor A agrees and says, “I always take it on the level where they are.” Pastors do not use texting for the sake of being innovative. Kate Anthony affirms, “I don’t use technology for my professional work for the sake of using technology; it is just the communication system that works best for me for that client at that time.”<sup>66</sup> Later she says, “The technological base for communication is incidental, through necessity or preference.”<sup>67</sup> The person in need of help has initiated it via text. So the natural response is done through text because that is where the person is comfortable communicating on the issue.

*Counseling Today*, a website dedicated to informing counselors in the US, posted this story about one counselor.

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 14.

The safety plan for Wade's adolescent client dictated that she call Wade, a private practitioner in La Plata, Md., whenever she felt like cutting herself. But instead of calling, the client kept texting Wade. When Wade responded by calling the client back to try to de-escalate the situation, the girl would hang up on Wade, insisting she didn't want to talk. The client would then explain the whole situation via text. "I clearly had an ethical obligation to communicate with her, [but] I needed to do it in a way that she was going to be receptive to," says Wade, a member of the American Counseling Association who also works in a group counseling practice and is working toward her doctorate. "We had a discussion about the lack of confidentiality regarding [texting] and my uneasiness about it, but the fact of the matter was, I had to do what was in the best interest of my client. And in that situation, it was to text and calm her down that way."<sup>68</sup>

Wade goes on to explain how failing to respond to the client in the way that she was comfortable would have created a harmful, possibly life threatening, situation. Wade was not willing to risk the safety of his client to communicate in a way only he felt comfortable with.<sup>69</sup>

Another reason why texting is being used in counseling situations is because it "has reduced the stigma."<sup>70</sup> A church member no longer has to avoid the formality and embarrassment that comes with setting up an appointment. He no longer is worried about who notices a special meeting with the pastor at his office. The informality of texting promotes communication and willingness to receive pastoral advice. It provides the pastor a new opportunity to feed the sheep entrusted in his care.

Texting is a flexible mode of communication. Wade tells *Counseling Today*, "There are a number of clients out there who may hesitate to do therapy because they travel a lot. Technology gives those clients the ability to access services in nontraditional ways and in ways that work for their schedule."<sup>71</sup> Wade and others believe that texting is just another way to help individualize care for a client.

#### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

In the article from *Counseling Today*, the private practice counselor, Wade, mentions a disadvantage to texting in a counseling situation. "This has become a 24/7 sort of society, and

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<sup>68</sup> Shallcross, Lynne, "Finding Technology's Role in the Counseling Relationship," *Counseling Today*, (October 2011), available from <http://ct.counseling.org/2011/10/finding-technologys-role-in-the-counseling-relationship/>. Internet.

<sup>69</sup> Shallcross, *Finding technology's role in counseling*.

<sup>70</sup> Shallcross, *Finding technology's role in counseling*.

<sup>71</sup> Shallcross, *Finding iechnology's role in counseling*.

with that comes the blurred lines of boundaries.”<sup>72</sup> The article continues to speak about professional counselors who hesitate to use these forms of communication because clients expect to get help at any time of day. This is even more prevalent with pastors. Pastors want to be available to their members to help in anything. Since texting is less discrete than a phone call, it is easier to send a text at 2 a.m. than call.

Texting in a counseling situation also receives a strong warning. Kate Anthony states, “The instant and sometimes rash use of texts by the therapist can result in serious ramifications if used within an unboundried relationship or one that is failing to maintain the therapeutic framework in which clearly ethical, and therefore safe, behavior thrives.” Anthony then posts an example, “In 2009, a therapist’s use of texts (among other behaviors) such as, ‘I’m here 4 u, always, deepest luv affection’ and ‘lots of warm fuzzy’s 4 u to guide threw the darkest moments. Now 4 ever’, resulted in removal of membership from the [British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy].”<sup>73</sup> When the line is crossed, a counselor can lose his job. While the professional counseling world has different boundaries than a pastor has, there are still boundaries that can harm a pastor’s position if crossed. As the apostle Peter warns, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).” In order to stay alert, pastors in the WELS are instructed to have an open door or a window where they counsel a woman one-on-one in person. This is done to be above reproach and to avoid temptation. It may seem that there are no doors or windows in a text message. It is one-on-one every time. One disadvantage to texting is that it can blur the boundaries in the relationship of a pastor and the counselee. But a wise pastor remembers that any text sent is recorded, whether a person acknowledges it at the moment or not.

The pastor who chooses to text should be aware of other unique challenges that come with keeping up with the technological advances of cell phones. One is finding time to maintain currency with ever-evolving hardware, software, and language. The pastor’s time is already consumed by ministering to people and it will be a challenge to make time to stay current with evolving cell phone technology. Another challenge that corresponds with the one previous mentioned is helping others to understand a vision of technology used in professional and personal settings. The pastor may need to convince others, like members of the church council or

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<sup>72</sup> Shallcross, *Finding Technology’s role in counseling*.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 144.



the elders of the congregation, that texting and keeping up to date with technology is a worthy tool to help Gospel ministry. The next challenge would be obtaining and/or maintaining financial resources sufficient to stay current as mandated by changing environments, technology and personal needs and abilities. The pastor and the church may need to decide who will pay for the phone to text and the cell phone plan that includes text messaging. After the decision has been made and the pastor is using his cell phone, the next challenge is managing technology so that it improves the pastor's life, rather than allowing negative impacts from technology infringement. One of the temptations is to spend too much time using the cell phone with all its capabilities and forget about the regular work that the pastor needs to accomplish. The cell phone is a tool for the pastor to improve communication with the members but is not the only way he will communicate. Awareness of these challenges helps the pastor avoid problems and optimize the potential benefits of texting his members.<sup>74</sup>

J. Michael Tyler and Dr. Sabella Russell summarize the pros and cons of using technology to improve counseling. "Opting out of technological literacy and implementation in today's high-tech world reduces effectiveness and efficiency while increasing the risk of unethically practicing beyond one's competence. On the other hand, counselors who march along with progress of high-tech tools and electronic media stand to enjoy the benefits and temper the potential dangers that prevail."<sup>75</sup> To put it another way, a pastor could choose to use texting as a tool, knowing the possible dangers and risks. Or a pastor could avoid texting and possibly miss reaching out to souls in a way that face-to-face communication cannot. The choice is up to him.

#### SOME RECOMENDATIONS

The author of this thesis has been convinced that the evidence in favor of the pastor doing some texting for counseling purposes is compelling. In view of that, he makes the following recommendations.

#### **The Influence of Scripture in Texting**

Texting impacts technology and language. As texting influences the younger generation, a pastor would be wise to think about how he can bring scripture into that influence. It is an

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<sup>74</sup> Tyler, J. Michael, and Russell A., Ph D. Sabella, *Using Technology to Improve Counseling Practice: A Primer for the 21st Century* (Amer Counseling Assn, 2003), 247.

<sup>75</sup> Tyler and Sabella, *Using Technology to Improve Counseling Practice*, 23.

awesome opportunity that a pastor can attach Jesus to a form of communication that influences language and people.

### **The Use of a New Language**

Pastors learn several languages in their training. Texting makes use of a different language, especially but not exclusively, among teens. The pastor does not necessarily need to learn this new language; partly because it changes from person to person but mostly because he has no time to learn it nor needs to invest that much time in it. That being said, a familiarity with this language can improve communication to those who use textese. A dictionary list of common texting phrases is in Appendix B as a translation tool. The pastor can also ask for clarification about textese in a conversation in order to completely understand what is being said.

### **Texting Is What People Do**

Communication and counseling was done face to face or by letter in the Christian church for almost 2000 years because those were the only ways of communication. In the past 130 years, each generation has added a new form of communication and is comfortable using each one. The latest generation texts and shows no sign of stopping. Pastor A told a story about a child who was living with his family who would not verbally talk with him, but, while sitting in the same room, they would text. Texting is how most teens want talk, and the pastor can learn texting in order to communicate with the newest generation in a way they want to communicate.

### **Texting Is Comfortable for the Counselee**

One reason text communication is on the rise is to avoid an uncomfortable conversation. This is one of the biggest reasons why a pastor should use texting in his counseling. A pastor can use texting to build trust and gain a counselee's confidence in order to take spiritual guidance to the next level.

### **An Opportunity to Initiate Communication**

Pastors currently have fewer personal moments with each member compared to what they once had. Perhaps it is as a result of communion registration being reduced to signing your name to a piece of paper. Texting is a way to bring that back in a way that does not take up a lot of time or commitment. A pastor can take the initiative of starting a healthy communication with members that opens the door for personal confession and absolution through texting.

## **Texting as Part of Counseling Curriculum**

At the moment, there is little in WLS curriculum about modes of communication in counseling. The class concentrates on what to communicate but does not mention what to do when a member calls, emails, or texts a problem. As noted above, *The Counseling Shepherd* does not mention modes of communication because it was written in the 1980s, before email and texting were used and assumes most counseling is done face-to-face. Since there are more ways a member will bring up his problems, it may be beneficial to mention these in the classroom setting.

## **WELS Text Care Line**

There was a WELS care line for people to call in for help any time of day. WLCFS is branching out to video counseling that can help congregations in the WELS all over the world. Is there a future for a WELS texting help line? There would be many benefits and challenges in a program like this that one can investigate in the future.

## **Confidentiality in Texting**

There is little to no texting done in secular counseling in America on the record because of the security issues. Americans stress privacy and security in their personal life. Text messages can be viewed as long as they are on the phone, and this can be a security issue if someone, other than the owner, can access the phone. Therefore, most American, secular counselors see this as a breach of doctor-patient confidentiality. Also, there is no absolute certainty that the counselee on the other line is really who he says he is. Some counselors verify who it is by using safe words that only the counselor and counselee know. Because of these problems, the pastor would be wise to consider the confidentiality and security when text counseling. This is a very real problem in the use of text messages in a counseling setting, but the same issue exists in email, and pastors continue to use it for counseling.

## **Christo-Centric Text Counseling**

All counseling is situational. Each pastor decides how he can best Christo-centrally counsel his sheep. He will have to decide whether or not texting can aid his ministry or not. That being said, the author maintains that texting is a useful and beneficial tool in pastoral counseling. Texting can reach people where they are comfortable and in control of a situation. Texting can break down barriers and can build a relationship on Christ and his counsel from scripture.

## HOW TO GO ABOUT TEXTING IN A COUNSELING SITUATION

Certain characteristics of face-to-face conversation can be lost in a text conversation. The pastor can take steps to ensure that these elements remain to a certain extent. Conveying that one is genuine without the benefits voice inflection and body language is a challenge, as noted by two therapists:

Being genuine . . . often means experiencing a perceived sense of safety with disinhibition, for the therapist as well as the client. This is not to suggest that self-disclosure by the therapist is any more appropriate, but rather that being congruent can often mean that disclosure of personal information is often seen as a way of being genuine where it would be inhibited in a face-to-face situation.<sup>76</sup>

If the pastor in a text reveals a little about himself, he may gain the trust of the person on the other end. This is one tactic that can retain being genuine in a text response.

The pastor must remember that he may not be held responsible by the law to follow all the standards of privacy required of a professional counselor. But he should know that texting is not a secure conversation. Phone companies record texts. Some post them in phone bills. Once it is sent, it is final and it is recorded.

The texting pastor is wise to use clear language. “It is important to remember that the client can carry the therapist’s input, literally, at all times, and therefore the text must be carefully constructed to avoid any ambiguous meaning that the client can use to fuel any self-fulfilling prophecies that she or he might have.”<sup>77</sup> Pastors who use email or mail have always understood this, yet the reminder is beneficial. A pastor would be wise to take care when texting a quick reply and re-read the text before sending it.

If a pastor wants to text in counseling, he may want to consider honing his communication skills with an aim in texting. Pastors are communicators by trade and can utilize a tool such as texting by improving the skills he has already. Expressive writing skills are at the top of a pastor’s qualifications, and texting is an area where conversation thrives on being descriptive in order to give words life. If one wishes to use texting in counseling, he will believe that meaningful and therapeutic relationships can exist in a text conversation. In this relationship, there are different expectations for the timetable of each response. One member of the church may want a swift response from the pastor while another may not respond to the pastor’s text for

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<sup>76</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 14.

hours. A pastor would be wise to tolerate this variation in different situations. A pastor may also want to improve his quick touch type skills in order to respond with ease.<sup>78</sup>

The pastor does well to remember that “listening” skills still apply in texting. “The therapist must ‘listen’ and gauge whether or not to wait for the complete thought, whether the thought arrives as one entry or in ‘chunks’ from the client.”<sup>79</sup> The pastor must determine when to reply and when to wait to see if more is still to come.

The pastor may want to send more than a single-text reply. With a limit of characters in texting, he can indicate when more is coming. Here are several ways to indicate more is coming:

- Therapist: Maybe, in time, you could come to accept...  
Therapist: ...that everything you do doesn't have to be perfect  
Therapist: Maybe, in time, you could come to accept (more)  
Therapist: that everything you do doesn't have to be perfect  
Therapist: Maybe, in time, you could come to accept that everything you do doesn't have to be perfect (important question coming up).  
Therapist: Do you think that could be possible?<sup>80</sup>

If the pastor is unable to fit everything he wants to say in one 160-character message, he should indicate that another message is coming so not to leave a counselee with an open thought.

Body language has been said to be lost in a texting conversation. Anthony believes there is a way to read between the lines in a text.

Attending to body language is also possible via text-based therapy. During face-to-face therapy, a therapist pays attention to body language to gain clues about mood and affect beyond the client's self-report. Attending to body language in [texting] means listening to tone; to read and hear the text “aloud.” By doing this one can usually sense mood and envision body posture. Other ways to pick up on body language is to watch for cues in the typed text. Is the client typing slower than usual...? Is the client using all CAPS or changing usual patterns?<sup>81</sup>

Are there emoticons<sup>82</sup> in the text message? “Emoticons are important in not only conveying emotion, but in helping reduce the amount of potential misunderstanding that typed text can carry.”<sup>83</sup> One must be careful not to read too far into things and so attempt to read between every

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 27.

<sup>79</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 55.

<sup>81</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Appendix B for a dictionary of text language and Appendix C for a list of emoticons.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 49.

line. Nevertheless the counselor will be attentive to certain words and characters that convey emotion.

Should a pastor use the textese language in his counseling? Kate Anthony takes the middle road. “Using acronyms can be useful with someone familiar with them, but there are many that will only serve to confuse the reader.” If it is a textese phrase as common as “LOL” (Laugh Out Loud), she would advise using it. If it is less common like, “TYDKIDKWD” (If You Don’t Know I Don’t Know Who Does), then avoid it.<sup>84</sup> Pastor B prefers to avoid textese in his counseling texts, even if he uses it in other texts. He wants to maintain the professional and serious tone of the situation by avoiding textese. Each pastor will have to wisely discern what he believes is best for each situation.

Using texting in counseling allows the pastor to be available at any time of day or night. If a pastor is in a meeting, on the phone, or doing a shut-in call, a text can be sent without interrupting. This can also bring a challenge. One of the challenges with the use of the cell phone in pastoral counseling is finding time away from work. Here are some suggestions to help establish boundaries. If a pastor has a smartphone, there are apps that reply to text messages automatically. This is useful for replying to a text at periods during the day when he is not able to do so.<sup>85</sup> A pastor can also establish a time and a place when he does not use his cell phone. Just because one can access his email and texts anytime, night or day, does not mean he has to. Establish times during the day and places one can go where he does not access his phone. One pastor leaves his phone at the door when he is in his house. Another way to help maintain a boundary in texting is with the language the pastor chooses to use, as mentioned above.

The pastor is not limited only to replying to conversations initiated by text. There are times when he can initiate a text conversation in a meaningful way. For instance, the pastor may send short messages of encouragement as a preventative measure to the alternative of counseling. He can send a text to members of his youth group. He may write, “I knw finals r soon. Prayn 4 u. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” He may send a text to a member who lost a family member. “I know last year today your mom died. God strengthens you on hard days. She

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<sup>84</sup> Anthony and Nagel, *Therapy Online*, 50.

<sup>85</sup> Here are two links to set up a quick reply using apps. [www.freesafetext.com](http://www.freesafetext.com). Currently there is only an app with an automatic reply for Android phones. They are currently working on an app for an iPhone. There is an app called “Quick Discreet Text” for an iPhone that has short pre-composed messages but they are not sent automatically. It can be found at <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/quick-discreet-text/id522504025?mt=8>.

is in heaven with Jesus, singing praises.” He can text the single mother who is struggling to make ends meet. “Prayin for God to strengthen you today. Jesus said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” Texts can be a powerful tool for encouragement.

The pastor may remind counselees of the “homework” he has assigned. He can say, “How many times have you had to stop and count to 10 before blowing up?” Or he can text, “Have you bought flowers for your wife this week yet? If so, how did it go?” Reminders such as these can help a counselee focus on the goals that he has set up with the pastor in counseling sessions.

A pastor can use text messages to confirm meeting times and places. In a survey conducted by a group of pastors who text, this was the number one function of texting with members.

### ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN

Today there are many ways to get in touch with another individual. One can call on the landline or a mobile phone, one can send a fax, an email, a Facebook message, a tweet, an instant message, or a text. Research currently shows that texting is the number one way that teens want to communicate. The younger generation learns to communicate through text, masters a new language, and uses this creation to impact the world into the future. When they start to deal with the issues of life and want help, they are more likely to use texting. If the pastor texts, he can provide scriptural support and encouragement. If there is a way Jesus can reach a soul, a pastor will be wise to consider it. His eagerness to communicate may stretch himself beyond what is personally comfortable in order to share Jesus in a way that is most comfortable for others. The apostle Paul said it best:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey about Pastoral “Text” Counseling

1. What is the majority of texts you receive from members?
  - a. Information
  - b. Change of schedule
  - c. Personal problems
  - d. Other\_\_\_\_\_
2. How often do members text you with personal problems?
3. What is the age group of members you text most often?
  - a. 13-18
  - b. 19-25
  - c. 26-35
  - d. 36-50
  - e. 51+
4. It is 12 am. Judy (a close member) texts you. “Jim left again. I am tired fighting for this. I don’t know what to do.” How do you respond? (Explain your reply if you feel necessary).
  - a. Pretend you didn’t see it and go to bed. “I will respond in the morning.”
  - b. Call her to talk.
  - c. Text a quick encouragement.
  - d. Text a time to meet.
5. In a text conversation, who is in control? Explain your answer.
6. Do you have any experience in counseling via video chat (skype, etc.), phone, or email?  
If so, please explain.
7. Would you mind a follow up phone/personal interview to talk about specific examples? If so, please attach your phone number.

## APPENDIX B

### Common texting abbreviations from *Txting, the gr8 db8*:

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Translation</u>	<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Translation</u>
@	at	8	ate (or as part of word)
1daful	wonderful	a3	anytime, anywhere, anyplace
2	to, too, two	aam, aamof	as a matter of fact
2b, 2B	to be	ab	ah bless!
2d4, 2D4	to die for	add	address
2day, 2DAY	today	afaik	as far as I know
2moro	tomorrow	aisb	as I said before
2nite	tonight	aml	all my love
4	for, four		
4e, 4ever	forever		

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Translation</u>	<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Translation</u>
atm	at the moment	g	grin
atw	at the weekend	g2g, gtg	got to go
ax	across	g9	genius
b, B	be (or as part of word)	gal	get a life
b4	before	gbh	great big hug
b4n	bye for now	gf	girlfriend
bb1	be back later	gl	good luck
bbs	be back soon	gm	good move
bcnu	be seeing you	gmab	give me a break
beg	big evil grin	gr8	great
bf	boyfriend	gt	good try
bg	big grin	h2cus	hope to see you soon
bion	believe it or not	h8	hate
bn	been, being	hagn	have a good night
brb	be right back	hak	hugs and kisses
brt	be right there	hand	have a nice day
bt dt	been there, done that	hbtu	happy birthday to you
btr	better	hhoj	ha ha only joking
btw	by the way	hig	how's it going
c	see	howru	how are you
c%d	could	hth	hope this helps
c%l	cool	hv	have
chln	chilling	iccl	I couldn't care less
cid	consider it done	icwum	I see what you mean
cm	call me	idk	I don't know
cmb	call me back	ilu, iluvu, ily, iluvy	I love you
cn	can	imho	in my honest / humble opinion
cu	see you	imi	I mean it
cupl	couple	imo	in my opinion
cuz, cos	because	iooh	I'm outta here
cya	see ya (¼ you)	irl	in real life
d	the	iuss, iyss	if you say so
d8	date	j4f	just for fun
dinr	dinner	jam	just a minute
dk	don't know	jk	just kidding
doin	doing	jt luk, jtlyk	just to let you know
dur	do you remember	kc	keep cool
ezi, ezy	easy	khuf, khyf	know how you feel
f	friend	kit	keep in touch
f2t	free to talk	kwim	know what I mean
fc	fingers crossed	l8	late
ff	friend(s) forever	l8r	later
fone	phone	lmao	laughing my a** off
ftbl	football		
fwiw	for what it's worth		

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Translation</u>	<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Translation</u>
lmfao	laughing my f***** a** off	swdyt	so what do you think
lmk	let me know	sys	see you soon
lo	hello	tþ	think positive
lol	laughing out loud	t2go	time to go
luv	love	ta4n, tafn	that's all for now
m8	mate	tcoy	take care of yourself
mbrsd	embarrassed	thn	then
mob	mobile	thnq, thnx, thx, tx	thank you, thanks
msg	message	tmb	text me back
mtf	more to follow	tmi	too much information
n	and; no	toy	thinking of you
n1	nice one	tttt, ttutt, ttytt	to tell (you) the truth
nagi	not a good idea	ttul, ttul&r, ttyp, ttyp&r	talk to you later
nc	no comment	tuvm, tyvm	thank you very much
ne	any	txt	text
ne1	anyone	u	you
nethng	anything	u4e	yours for ever
no1	no one	uwot	you what
np	no problem	v	very
nvm	never mind	w	with
o	or	w8	wait
omg	oh my God/goodness	wadr	with all due respect
ova	over	wan2	want to
pcm	please call me	wassup, wu, wuuu	what's up?
pita	pain in the a**	wayd	what are you doing
pls	please	wbs	write back soon
ppl	people	wckd	wicked
prt	party	wen, wn	when
prw	parents are watching	wenja	when do you
ptmm	please tell me more	werja	where do you
qix	quick	werru	where are you
r	are	werubn	where have you been
rgds	regards	wk	week
rotfl	rolling on the floor laughing	wknd	weekend
sc	stay cool	wl	will
sit	stay in touch	wot	what
sme1	someone	wtf	what the f***
sol	sooner or later	wtm	what time?
sot	short of time	wuw, wywh	wish you were here
spk	speak	xlnt	excellent
sry	sorry	y	why; yes
sum1	someone	ya	you, your
sup	what's up	ybs	you'll be sorry
		yi	yes I understand
		yr, YR	your

Abbreviation  
yyssw

Translation  
yeah, yeah, sure, sure  
– whatever

Abbreviation  
z

Translation  
said

## APPENDIX C

Emoticon Samples from <http://messenger.yahoo.com/features/emoticons/>:

:) happy

:( sad

;) winking

:D big grin

::) batting eyelashes

>:D< big hug

:/ confused

:x love struck

:"> blushing

:P tongue

:-\* kiss

=(( broken heart

:-O surprise

X( angry

:> smug

B-) cool

:-S worried

#:-S whew!

>:) devil

:(( crying

:)) laughing

:| straight face

/:) raised eyebrows

=)) rolling on the floor

O:-) angel

:-B nerd

=; talk to the hand

:-c call me

:)]	on the phone
~X(	at wits' end
:~h	wave
:-t	time out
:-&	sick
:-\$	don't tell anyone
[-(	no talking
:O)	clown
8-}	silly
<:-P	party
(:	yawn
=P~	drooling
:-?	thinking
#-o	d'oh
=D>	applause
:-SS	nail biting
@-)	hypnotized

8->	day dreaming
I-)	sleepy
8-	rolling eyes
L-)	loser
:^o	liar
:-w	waiting
:-<	sigh
>:P	phbbbt
<:)	cowboy
X_X	I don't want to see
:!!	hurry up!
\m/	rock on!
:-q	thumbs down
:-bd	thumbs up
^#(^	it wasn't me
:ar!	pirate*

## APPENDIX D

The origins of the email below which started circulating in 2003 are unknown but it has piqued the interest for linguistic studies. It shows that the mind can read over word changes and spelling mistakes. Some complain about not being able to interpret text language abbreviations, but may not have any trouble reading the paragraph below.

If you can raed this, you have a sgtrane mnid, too.

Can you raed this? Olny 55 people out of 100 can.

I cdnuolt blveiee that I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd what I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it dseno't mtaetr in what oerdr the ltteres in a word are, the olny iproamtnt tihng is that the frsit and last ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can still raed it whotuit a pboerlm. This is bcuseaethe huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the word as a wlohe. Azanmig huh? Yaeh and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt! If you can raed this forwrad it.

I've seen this with the letters out of order, but this is the first time I've seen it with numbers. Good example of a Brain Study: If you can read this OUT LOUD you have a strong mind. And better than that: Alzheimer's is a long long, way down the road before it ever gets anywhere near you.

7H15 M3554G3  
53RV35 7O PR0V3  
H0W 0UR M1ND5 C4N  
D0 4M4Z1NG 7H1NG5!  
1MPR3551V3 7H1NG5!  
1N 7H3 B3G1NN1NG  
17 WA5 H4RD BU7  
NOW, 0N 7H15 LIN3  
YOUR M1ND 1S  
R34D1NG 17  
4U70M471C4LLY  
W17H 0U7 3V3N  
7H1NK1NG 4B0U7 17,  
B3 PROUD! 0NLY  
C3R741N P30PL3 C4N  
R3AD 7H15.