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iGen

Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*

*And what that means for the rest of us

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An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

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First Atria Books hardcover edition August 2017

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Interior design by Kris Tobiassen of Matchbook Digital

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-5011-5198-9
ISBN 978-1-5011-5202-3 (ebook)

For Julia, the last of iGen

Chapter 2

Internet: Online Time—Oh, and Other Media, Too

The New York Police Department's 33rd Precinct recently warned residents about a danger lurking in their beds: their phones. Several had caught fire when people kept them under their pillows while they slept, creating click-bait pictures of scorched phones and beds with large brown burn marks. A similar incident happened in Texas, where a 13-year-old girl woke to the smell of something burning. Her charging phone, tucked under her pillow, had overheated and melted into the sheets.

It turned out that some Samsung phones had a spectacular issue with spontaneously combusting batteries. But to me, the flaming cell phone wasn't the only surprising thing in these stories. Why would anyone have her phone under her pillow? my GenX self wondered. It's not as though you can surf the Web while you're sleeping. And who could slumber deeply inches from a buzzing phone? Curious, I asked my undergraduate students what I thought was a very simple question: "What do you do with your phone while you sleep? Why?"

Their answers were a profile in obsession. Nearly all slept with their phones, putting them under their pillows, on the mattress, or at the very least within arm's reach of the bed. They checked social media websites and

watched videos right before they went to bed, and reached for their phones again as soon as they woke up in the morning (they had to—all of them used it as their alarm). Their phone was the last thing they saw before they went to sleep and the first thing they saw when they woke up. If they woke up in the middle of the night, they often ended up looking at their phones. They talked about their phones the way an addict would talk about crack: "I know I shouldn't, but I just can't help it," one said about looking at her phone while in bed. Some saw their phones as a lifeline or as an extension of their bodies or like a lover. "Having my phone closer to me while I'm sleeping is a comfort," wrote Molly, 20.

Smartphones are unlike any other previous form of media, infiltrating nearly every minute of our lives, even when we are unconscious with sleep. While we are awake, the phone entertains, communicates, glamourizes. Azar, the high school senior we met in chapter 1, is a good example. When I ask to take her picture, she sweeps her long dark hair to the front and chirps, "Have to look pret-ty!" I ask what her favorite apps are; she names Instagram, Snapchat, and one I hadn't heard of called iFunny. When I ask if she can show me how iFunny works, she gets visibly excited and says, "Really? I can take out my phone?" and proceeds to show me all of the areas of the site, keeping up a constant patter about all of the funny memes and videos. When the wireless signal starts to waver, she sighs in frustration. "Where is it? My Internet—noooo!" Her phone plan, she tells me, has unlimited data and texting but only one hundred minutes of talk time a month, "because I never call people." She keeps her phone out for the rest of the interview, showing me pictures and apps.

It seems obvious that teens (and the rest of us) spend a lot of time on phones—not talking but texting, on social media, online, and gaming (together, these are sometimes labeled "new media"). Sometime around 2011, we arrived at the day when we looked up, maybe from our own phones, and realized that everyone around us had a phone in his or her hands. But maybe what we see in the coffee line or at the dinner table isn't representative, and the endless parental and media hand-wringing over screen time isn't necessary. Maybe the smartphone obsession is pronounced only in middle-class and affluent communities, or maybe we just don't notice the teens who aren't

always on their phones. Fortunately, we can turn to the large, nationally representative over-time surveys, since they ask teens how much time they spend online, gaming, and texting. So how much time is it?

The short answer is: a lot. iGen high school seniors spent an average of 2¼ hours a day texting on their cell phones, about 2 hours a day on the Internet, 1½ hours a day on electronic gaming, and about a half hour on video chat in the most recent survey. That totals to six hours a day with new media—and that's just during their leisure time (see Figure 2.1). Eighth graders, still in middle school, were not far behind, spending 1½ hours a day texting, 1½ hours a day online, 1½ hours a day gaming, and about half an hour on video chat—a total of 5 hours a day with new media. This varies little based on family background; disadvantaged teens spent just as much or more time online as those with more resources. The smartphone era has meant the effective end of the Internet access gap by social class (see Appendix C).

Considering that teens spend about seventeen hours a day in school, sleeping, and on homework and school activities, nearly all of their leisure hours are now spent with new media. The hour and a half that's left is used up by TV, which teens watch about two hours a day. Of course, this makes it look as if they have more than twenty-four hours in their days. But more than likely, they are multitasking—texting while web surfing, watching TV while posting to Instagram. (They might also be sleeping less, a possibility we'll return to in chapter 4.) Overall, teens spend much more time online

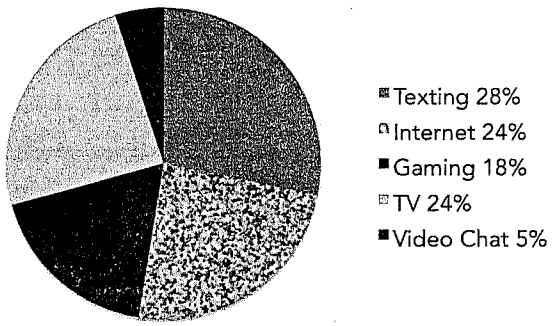

Figure 2.1. How 12th graders spend their screen time. Monitoring the Future, 2013–2015.

now than they did just a few years ago—12th graders in 2015 spent twice as much time online as 12th graders in 2006 (see Figure 2.2; see Appendix C for online time for 8th and 10th graders).

Even with multitasking included, six hours a day is a staggering amount of time. What are teens doing with that time? Lots of texting—the teens I talked to all said it's the primary way they communicate with their friends. About what? Many of the same things adults text about, but more often. "I am usually texting my girlfriend over random things, school items, and relationship issues. I also text my friends and just send jokes throughout the day," wrote Victor, 18. "I text my best friend or my boyfriend," said Eva, 19. "We are generally talking about something funny that happened during the day or just checking in to see how their day is going/anything new that's happened since we last talked." Texting has mostly replaced talking on the phone: in 2015, teens talked on the phone about forty-five minutes a day, about a third of the time they spent texting.

The surveys did not start asking about texting until 2010, when the practice was already well established, so we can't really see its popularity take off

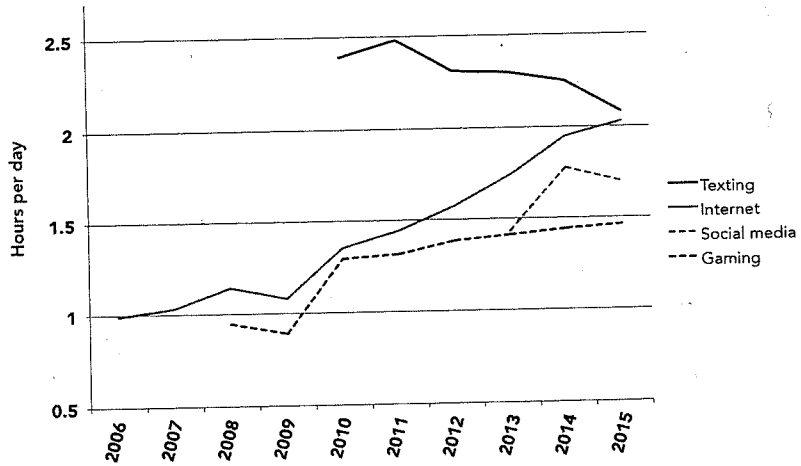

Figure 2.2. Hours per day spent by 12th graders on new media (texting, on the Internet, social media, and gaming). Monitoring the Future, 2006–2015.

from nonexistent in the 1990s to a two-hour-a-day activity by 2010. From 2010 to 2015, the time teens spent texting actually declined slightly—by about thirteen minutes a day. Why? Probably because they were spending more time on social media.

Everybody's Doing It: Social Media

As my rental car rumbles up the dirt road, I can see the barn in the distance against the green cornfields and blue sky of a summer day in rural Minnesota. Emily and her family are there when I pull up at the lake cabin where Emily's extended family has gathered for the July Fourth weekend. Emily is 14 and has just finished her freshman year in high school. A member of the track team, she's runner lean, with wavy blond hair in loose braids and a wide, happy smile that shows off her braces. She ends most sentences with a happy "So, yeah!"

Emily lives in the Twin Cities, two hours away, but her best friend lives at the farm next door to the lake cabin, and the two shuttle back and forth frequently. So the first order of the day is for me to meet Emily's cow, Liberty, born two years ago on the Fourth of July. Barefoot, Emily hops the fence at the barn door and brings Liberty over, smiling as we take her picture next to the huge black-and-white animal looking at us warily with dark brown eyes.

A girl on a farm, braids swinging, showing off her cow—it's a timeless scene, at home at any time in the last two hundred years. But it's not just any time, and Emily is like most iGen teens in the 2010s: she connects with her friends through social media, partially because it's virtually mandatory. "Everyone uses it," she says. "It's a good way to, like, make plans with people. If you don't, you might miss out on plans that you could have gone to." Emily got her first smartphone fairly late for an iGen'er, at the beginning of 9th grade, but already finds it indispensible. When I ask her what apps she uses, she says, "The main ones are Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter. . . . I'll get updates from the track team and watch funny videos. I post pictures from my track meets and just if I'm doing a fun activity with my family or my friends. A lot of other people post a ton of selfies—like, every other post will be a selfie." She tells me how tagging photos on Instagram works; if someone

doesn't tag you, that means "you're not really friends anymore, or they're mad at you." This is the new reality of teen social life: it's conducted online, for all to see, with clear messages about who's in and who's out.

How much time are teens spending on social media, and is it really any different from ten years ago? Social media sites are not new. The first social media sites appeared as early as 1997, MySpace debuted in 2003, and Facebook opened up to everyone over age 13 in 2006. (I'll use the terms *social networking sites* and *social media* interchangeably.) The Monitoring the Future survey first asked about social networking sites in 2008 (so sadly late that the otherwise diligent survey administrators must have been asleep at the wheel). The question about social media use is very general, asking whether teens use social networking sites "almost every day," "at least once a week," "once or twice a month," "a few times a year," or "never." Even with the survey late to the party and asking such a broad question, the growth in these sites' popularity is still very evident (see Figure 2.3).

In seven years, social media sites went from being a daily activity for half of teens to almost all of them. That's especially true for girls: 87% of 12th-grade girls used social media sites almost every day in 2015, compared to 77% of boys. The increases in use have been even larger for minority and lower-income teens—in 2008, white and higher-SES (social scientists call this socioeconomic status, or SES) teens were more likely to use social media sites every day, but by 2015 the race and class differences had disappeared. The daily use of social media sites is now an equal opportunity experience among teens. They have become almost required: in 2008, 14% of 12th graders said they never used the sites, enough to perhaps form a group; by 2015, those who never used them had dwindled to 3%. Only 2% of 12th-grade girls said they "never" use social media sites. So 97% of 12th graders and 98% of 12th-grade girls use social media sites at least sometimes—about as universal an experience as you can get.

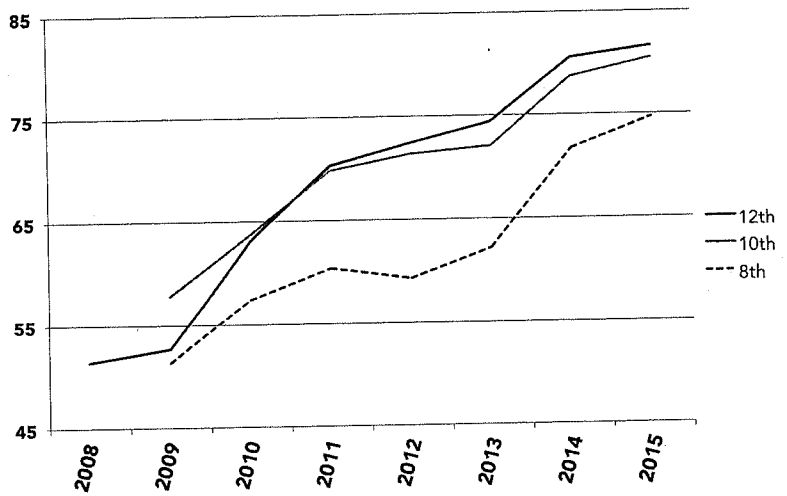

Figure 2.3. Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders using social networking sites almost every day. Monitoring the Future, 2008–2015.

Social media also requires a specific strategy of self-presentation. Harper, 12, was the youngest iGener I interviewed. She and her aunt arrived at our house on a sunny spring afternoon, and we chatted as her aunt played with my kids. Harper still looks more like a kid than a teen, although she's used to wearing lots of makeup for the cheerleading competitions she participates in nearly every weekend. She lives in a small town in the California mountains, sometimes staying with her grandparents due to her parents' divorce. She already has an iPhone and uses it frequently. Like many teens I talked with, she agreed that social media was mostly for posting positive things, requiring a certain cultivation of one's image. "Normally you don't want to look sad on there," she said. She uses social media mostly to follow her friends on Instagram: "If your friend is, like, out doing something, you can see all the cool things that they're doing," she says. "No one does anything bad on it—we just see what each other is doing."

The *Washington Post* recently profiled Katherine, a 13-year-old living in McLean, Virginia. The story described what she did on her iPhone during the twelve-minute drive home from school: "Her thumb [is] on Instagram. A Barbara Walters meme is on the screen. She scrolls, and another meme appears. Then another meme, and she closes the app. She opens BuzzFeed. There's a story about Florida Gov. Rick Scott, which she scrolls past to get to a story about Janet Jackson, then '28 Things You'll Understand If You're Both British and American.' She closes it. She opens Instagram. She opens the NBA app. She shuts the screen off. She turns it back on. She opens Spotify.

Opens Fitbit. She has 7,427 steps. Opens Instagram again. Opens Snapchat. She watches a sparkly rainbow flow from her friend's mouth. She watches a YouTube star make pouty faces at the camera. She watches a tutorial on nail art. She feels the bump of the driveway and looks up. They're home." Katherine has 604 followers on Instagram and keeps only the photos that get enough likes: "Over 100 likes is good, for me," she says. When she changed her Snapchat username, her Snapchat score went to zero (Snapchat users get a point for every snap they send or receive). So she sent 1,000 snaps in one day to up her score. She uses her phone so much that her father has had trouble finding a data plan to cover all of it.

For her book *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*, reporter Nancy Jo Sales interviewed hundreds of teen girls across the country about what they do on their phones and how it affects them. She described girls constantly in search of likes and positive comments on their pages, with persistent pressure to post sexy and revealing photos. Those, after all, get the most likes. One spring day she interviewed a group of 13-year-olds in Montclair, New Jersey. The girls, just like the teens I interviewed, had a love-hate relationship with their phones and social media. "I spend so much time on Instagram looking at people's pictures and sometimes I'll be like, Why am I spending my time on this? And yet I keep doing it," said Melinda. "If I go on my phone to look at Snapchat, I go on it like an hour, I lose track," noted Riley. "The minute I start my homework I have to have my phone by me to see what my friends are texting. . . . It's like someone is constantly tapping you on the shoulder, and you have to look," said Sophia. They'd like to stop, but they feel they can't. When Melinda's parents deleted her Instagram app for a week as a punishment, "By the end of the week I was stressing, like, What if I am losing followers?" "I've always wanted to delete my Instagram," said Sophia. "But then I think, I look so good in all my photos."

Eventually, many iGen'ers see through the veneer of chasing likes—but usually only once they are past their teen years. James, 20, is a college student in Georgia. "When you go on social media you post a status or you post a picture and all of a sudden you get all those likes, you get all those affirmations from people, and it can be addictive because you have the constant pats on the back that, like, 'You're smart, you're funny, you're attractive,' " he says. But, he acknowledges, "I feel like it's also kind of hollow."

This is, of course, a different world from the one GenX'ers and even Millennials grew up in. "You realize how insane things are today when you think about the relative rate of change," says Paul Roberts, the author of *The Impulse Society: America in the Age of Instant Gratification*. "When I was in high school, if I had gone around saying, 'Here's a picture of me, like me,' I would have gotten punched. If a girl went around passing out naked pictures of herself, people would have thought she needed therapy. Now, that's just Selfie Sunday."

So which sites are teens using? Social media sites go into and out of fashion, and by the time you read this book several new ones will probably be on the scene. In fall 2016, the management firm Piper Jaffray found that only 30% of 14-year-olds used Facebook at least once a month, compared to 80% using Instagram and 79% using Snapchat. Those platforms were also growing among young adults: by spring 2016, Pew Research Center found that 59% of 18- to 29-year-olds used Instagram and 56% used Snapchat, a big increase since 2015. The teens I talked to, in late 2015 and 2016, mentioned Instagram and Snapchat the most often. Most recently, group video chat apps such as Houseparty were catching on with iGen, allowing them to do what they call "live chilling."

Matthew, the 19-year-old Pennsylvania college student we met in chapter 1, uses a Snapchat feature called Snapstory. "If I'm at tennis practice or at one of the dining halls with some friends, I'll take a video or a picture and add it to my Snapstory and share it with friends. I'll also see other friends' Snapstories, and see what they're doing," he says. On Snapstory, photos stay for twenty-four hours and then disappear, forming a continuous, updated stream of photos that are sent to everyone you've tagged as a friend. It's easy, he says, because "The app is basically just a camera" and the pictures upload much faster than they do to Facebook. "It helps me stay in the loop and just know what's going on with everybody." Many teens use the regular version of Snapchat, in which pictures and messages automatically disappear (according to the company, Snapchat servers automatically delete "snaps" after they have been viewed). Teens see Snapchat as a "safe" way to talk to

their friends, because there is no embarrassing permanent record that can be shared around. A relatively new feature alerts users when someone has tried to keep their message by using a screenshot—"and then they get mad at you," one teen told me.

As we saw earlier, girls usually spend more time on social media sites than boys do. So what are boys doing instead? Often, they're playing video games—and so are many of the girls. Teens spend more time playing games on their computers than they did just a few years ago—12th graders spend about 1½ hours a day, compared to less than an hour a day in 2008. Girls have caught up quickly in video game time, perhaps due to less violent, more girl-friendly games on phones such as *Candy Crush*.

Gaming has what statisticians call a "bimodal distribution": some teens don't do it at all, and others do it a lot. In 2015, 27% of teens said they played video games less than an hour a week, and 9% said they played more than forty hours a week—the time commitment of a full-time job.

When I interview Max, 16, at his San Diego high school and ask him about what he likes to do for fun, he says, "Play video games." He usually plays multiplayer games online in which he can talk to other players through his headset, he tells me. I've never played those games, so I ask him how they work, and he tries to explain. "You start at one point, and you're trying to capture or destroy the enemy's thing and you have minions and stuff that fight each other and take down towers along the way," he says. He and his group of four friends talk about things other than the game, but when I ask if he gets together with his friends in person, he says, "Sometimes, but not really that often." He doesn't do much on social media sites, either. When I ask him about other social activities, he says he doesn't go out much. That's when I begin to realize that playing video games is Max's only social activity.

Mark is a 20-year-old community college student in Texas who describes himself as "a big gamer." He met his best friend when he heard him say "Snapshot" (a reference to his favorite video game, *Halo*) in the high school hallway. They exchanged their Xbox gamer tags and have been playing together ever since. When I ask Mark what he most wants older people to understand about his generation, he surprises me by saying that the most important thing is for older people to understand how video games work. "With Xbox whenever you play online with people, you can't pause your game. Well, when your parents want something of you, they demand it then and now. And when you try to explain to them, 'I'm playing online with other people,' I can't just pause and hop to it, they don't understand."

Some young men spend so much time playing video games they eventually have to cut themselves off. Twenty-year-old Darnell is majoring in business at a state university in Georgia. In high school, he says, "I had a problem where I would play and I really wouldn't do anything else. I'd get out of sports practice at eight thirty, nine, I'd come home and start playing video games and I'd probably play until three thirty, four o'clock in the morning. And I'd have to be ready for school at, like, six thirty," he says. Now he restricts his gaming to school breaks and doesn't play when classes are in session. "I didn't want that to be a problem in college. There's no one to say, 'Go to class,' so I just wouldn't go to class."

Overall, both boys and girls are spending much more time online and with electronic devices. Here's the thing: this time must come from somewhere—there must be something else that iGen teens are *not* doing that previous generations did. There are probably several, but one obvious candidate is all the other ways people used to communicate and entertain themselves. And I don't mean flip phones.

Are Books Dead?

The cool air inside the house is a welcome relief as we come in from a muggy late-spring day in suburban Virginia. Thirteen-year-old Sam opens the door to his room gingerly—his arm is encased in a black sling after he injured it tussling with a friend. His room is a mix of sports posters and school clutter, with wood furniture and navy blue curtains. He plans to play football in high school, and maybe wrestle as well: "I like physical sports where you take people to the ground," he tells me matter-of-factly. His favorite thing to do is hang out with his friends, and they tease each other in the easy, friendly way that only males can get away with. One friend's slight mustache inspired the nickname "Pube-stash," and another is dubbed the "Diabeto Torpedo." Although Sam prefers to see his friends in person, he also likes Snapchatting

with them, especially the face swap feature, which switches the faces (but not the body or hair) of two people in a photo. "It usually ends up being super-funny," he says. If he has a half hour of downtime, he'll watch *SportsCenter* on ESPN or sports videos on YouTube. That made me wonder: Does he read *Sports Illustrated* or the sports section of a newspaper or books about sports? No, he says, "I only read what's assigned for an English project. I'm not a big fan of reading for fun."

Is Sam's aversion to print typical of iGen? They spend so much time on their phones, it would be an easy guess to say yes. Even if it is typical, maybe teens have never liked to read. As always, the best way to tell is to compare teens of the same age across time: are iGen teens less likely to read than teens in previous eras?

That appears to be the case. In the late 1970s, the clear majority of teens read a book or a magazine nearly every day, but by 2015, only 16% did. In other words, three times as many Boomers as iGen'ers read a book or magazine every day. Because the survey question was written in the 1970s, before e-readers existed, it does not specify the format of the book or magazine, so Millennials or iGen'ers who read on a Kindle or iPad would still be included.

Ebook readers did seem to briefly rescue books: the number who said they read two or more books for pleasure in the last year bounced back in the late 2000s—but then it sank again as iGen (and smartphones) entered the scene in the 2010s. By 2015, one out of three high school seniors admitted they had not read any books for pleasure in the past year, three times as many as in 1976. Even college students entering four-year universities, the young people presumably most likely to read books, are reading less (see Figure 2.4, next page).

This huge decline flatly contradicts a 2014 Pew Research Center study cheered by many in publishing, which found that 16- to 29-year-olds were *more* likely to read books than older people. Why the difference? The Pew study included books read for school assignments, which younger people are of course more likely to have. Thus it committed the classic mistake of a one-time study: confusing age and generation. In the data here, where everyone is the same age, iGen teens are much less likely to read books than their Millennial, GenX, and Boomer predecessors.

Why? Maybe because books just aren't fast enough. For a generation raised to click on the next link or scroll to the next page within seconds, books just don't hold their attention. Twelve-year-old Harper, whom we met earlier, makes all A's in school but says, "I'm not a really big reading person. It's hard for me to read the same book for such a long time. I just can't sit still and be superquiet. We have to read for twenty minutes a day, and if a book takes a while to get interesting, it's really hard for me to read."

Books are not the only print media in decline for iGen. The 8th- and 10th-grade surveys ask about reading magazines and newspapers, and the declines are steady, large, and breathtaking (see Figure 2.5, next page). Newspaper readership plummeted from nearly 70% in the early 1990s to only 10% in 2015 (and this is reading a newspaper once a week or more, a fairly low bar). Magazine readership fared little better.

Some of you might be thinking, yeah, no kidding. However, this is a surprising result according to many prominent theories of media use. Some

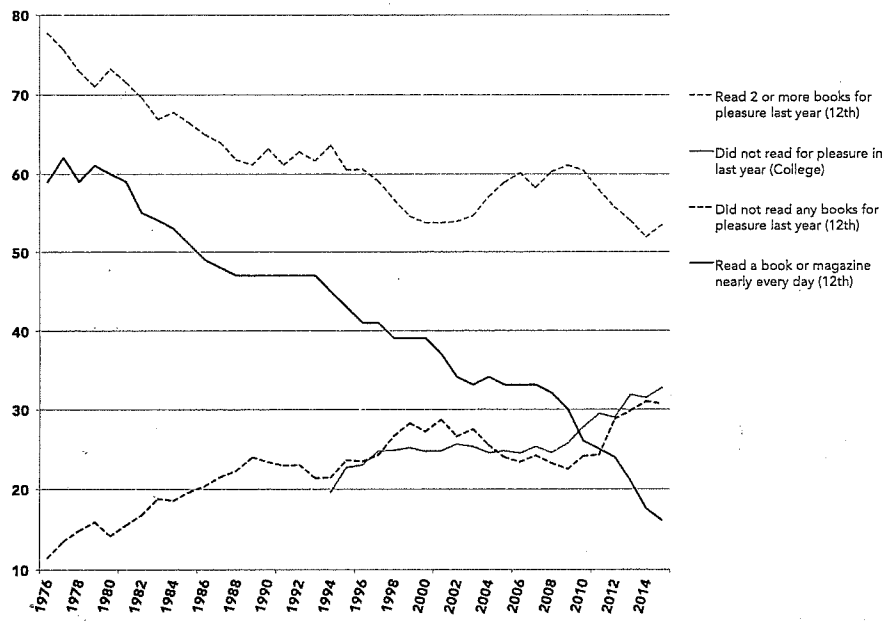

Figure 2.4. Percentage of 12th graders who read books and magazines, (Monitoring the Future), and entering college students (American Freshman Survey, 1976–2015).

researchers have argued that new technology doesn't replace older forms of media but instead supplements them. People who are interested in a topic often seek it out in many forms of media, they point out. In addition, technology makes reading books and magazines easier, since they can be delivered instantly to iPads and Kindles. But those factors were not enough to stem the tide of the decline of print. (As one librarian in a cartoon puts it as she hands a book to a teen, "Just think of it as a long text message.")

Are teens reading for pleasure less because they have more homework and more extracurricular activities? No—as we saw in chapter 1, teens are spending about the same or less time on these activities than in previous decades. (And recall that they also spend much less time working for pay.) 8th graders are the most clear-cut example: they spent two hours less on homework a week than they did in the early 1990s, but they are also much less likely to read magazines and newspapers. When NPR asked Washington, DC, 9th grader Jamahri Sydnor if she ever reads, she said, "I don't really read for pleasure. . . . I watch Netflix shows, or Hulu shows, mostly

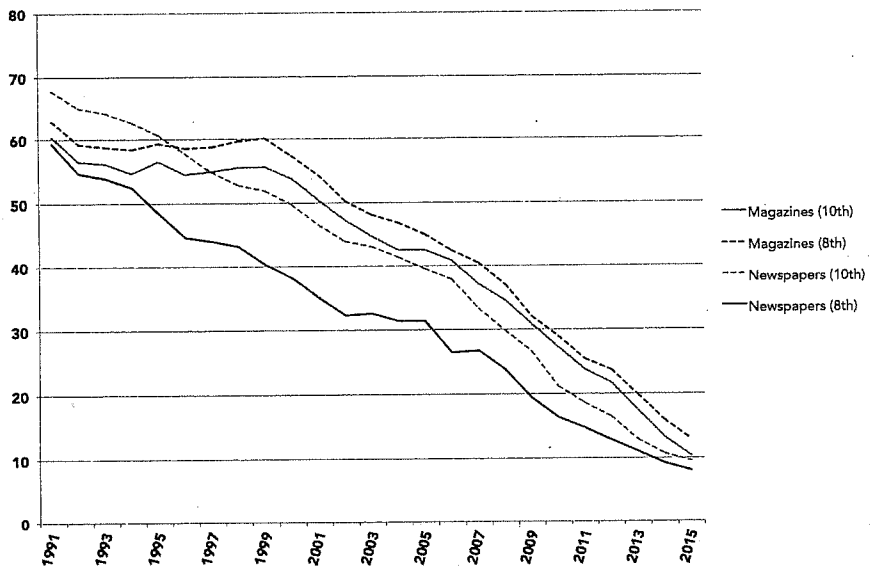

Figure 2.5. Percentage of 8th and 10th graders who read magazines and newspapers once a week or more. Monitoring the Future, 1991–2015.

TV. That's it," she said. Her friend Chiamaka Anosike said, "I don't read for pleasure either, unless it's for a school assignment. I'm usually on my phone or watching TV, too."

Of the two hundred San Diego State freshmen and sophomores I surveyed in 2015, most said they never read newspapers, and their magazine reading was restricted to celebrity gossip or fashion magazines. One was very specific: "I read magazines like *Cosmopolitan* when I'm flying on an airplane." A typical response mentioned required assignments for classes: "[I read] only if a school assignment requires it because I'd rather not spend my free time reading extensively."

Although many said they enjoyed reading books, those who did not were steadfast in their dislike. "I do not enjoy books," wrote one. "They put me to sleep and they are boring." Another noted, "I do not have the patience to read books that I do not have to read." One stated flatly, "I never read any books."

To paraphrase the cult classic movie *The Princess Bride*, print is not dead—it's just mostly dead. Or perhaps on life support. With smartphones taking up so much of teens' time, there is little left for other leisure pursuits. As one teen put it in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* interview, "My dad is still into the whole book thing. He has not realized that the Internet kind of took the place of that."

Perhaps this move away from print is innocuous, especially if teens are still keeping up their academic skills. But they are not: SAT scores have slid since the mid-2000s, especially in writing (a 13-point decline since 2006) and critical reading (a 13-point decline since 2005; see Figure 2.6, next page). Unfortunately, iGen'ers' academic skills lag behind their Millennial predecessors' by significant margins.

Declines in SAT scores are often attributed to more students choosing to go to college: if more high school students take the test, the population taking the test will be a less academically talented group over time. That's probably why SAT scores declined so much between the 1970s and the 1990s, when college enrollment soared. However, that's not the case for the shift from Millennials to iGen in the late 2000s and early 2010s, when college enrollment stayed fairly steady. It's interesting that the change in critical

reading scores follows the same pattern as that of those reading two or more books for pleasure each year, which bumped up in the mid-2000s and then fell again.

Apparently, texting and posting to social media instead of reading books, magazines, and newspapers are not a boon for reading comprehension or academic writing. That might partially be due to the short attention span that new media seem to encourage. One study installed a program on college students' laptops that took a screenshot every five seconds. The researchers found that students switched between tasks every nineteen seconds on average. More than 75% of the students' computer windows were open less than one minute. This is a very different experience from sitting and reading a book for hours.

The decline in reading creates some distinct challenges for a wide swath of concerned elders, including parents, educators, and publishing companies. For example, how are students who rarely read books going to digest an eight-hundred-page college textbook? Most faculty report that their students simply don't read the textbook, even if it's required. Many

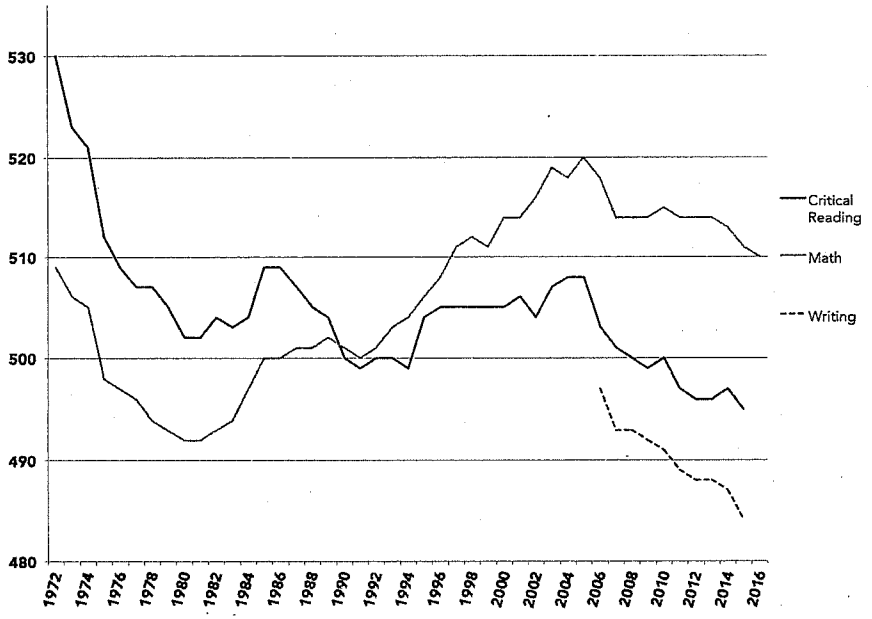

Figure 2.6. National average SAT scores, 1972–2016. College Board.

publishers are moving toward more interactive ebooks to try to keep students engaged. As a university faculty member and the author or coauthor of three college textbooks, I think this needs to go even further. iGen'ers need textbooks that include interactive activities such as video sharing and questionnaires, but they also need books that are shorter in length and more conversational in their writing style. They are coming to college with much less experience reading, so we have to meet them where they are, while still teaching them what they need to know. That might mean leaving behind some detail, but that's better than students' not cracking the book at all.

Regular books and magazines have already taken some of these steps, such as making their articles shorter and lowering their reading level. They may also eventually incorporate some of the same features as textbooks, imbedding quizzes and polls to keep readers interested or including images and videos just as web pages do. Perhaps then iGen—and the rest of us—will return to reading.

Funny Cats Big Compilation 2017!

"They have, like, a dog climbing a baby gate, and it, like, unhinges the baby gate, and you see the gate swing back with the dog on it, and you see the dog fall out of the frame—I just think it's really funny," says Chloe, the 18-year-old high school senior from Ohio we met in chapter 1. She and her friends watch video clips on Twitter, Buzzfeed, Facebook, and YouTube, with animal videos their usual faves. There's another one she likes on YouTube, she says: "The dog, like, got into something—have you ever seen when a dog is in trouble and they know they did something and they'll kind of, like, try to smile? The dog was, like, smiling, and [the video] had this weird, sympathetic music. I was in love with that video for two days in January—I couldn't, like, not watch it every five minutes."

These types of short video clips are very popular and have been since YouTube debuted in 2006. Although none of the over-time surveys specifically tracks the amount of time teens spend watching them, a good chunk of teens' online time is likely spent watching videos, either through social

media or via sites such as YouTube. iGen'ers find videos through Twitter as well—20-year-old Darnell says he follows several people on Twitter who post nothing but dog photos, so, he says, "sometimes I look at puppies all day." The most popular videos seem to feature "fails," animals, or animal fails. Laughing babies, children drugged at the dentist, music videos, and dancing chickens have also been popular. We have the most complete and instant access to information in all of history, and we're using it to watch funny cat videos.

Online videos have replaced some TV time for teens, although the declines in TV watching are not as steep as those in reading. Teens watched about an hour a day less TV in 2015 than in the early 1990s (see Figure 2.7). Even with new TV options such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, funny cats are winning.

And when iGen'ers do watch TV, it's more likely to be on demand or streaming. "I don't even know how to turn on our TV at home and consume all of my 'television' content on my laptop," wrote 17-year-old Grace Masback in the Huffington Post.

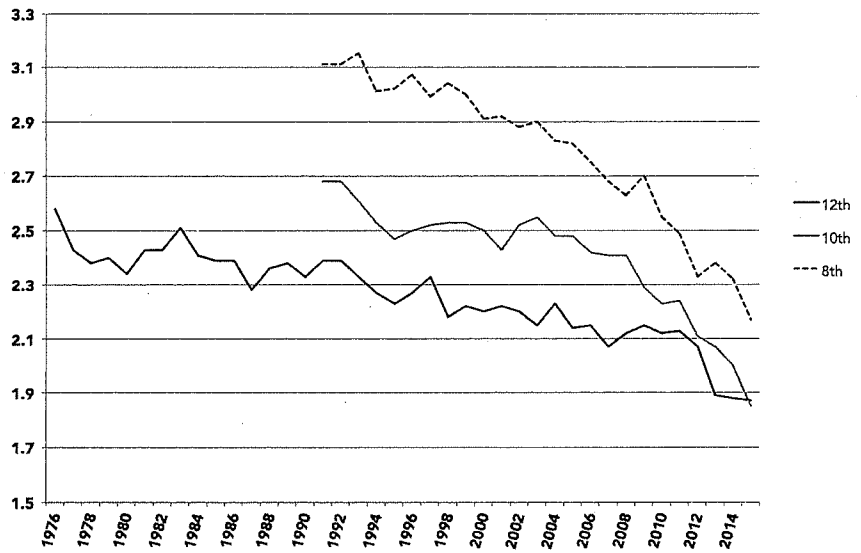

Figure 2.7. Hours 8th, 10th, and 12th graders spent watching TV on weekdays. Monitoring the Future, 1976–2015.

iGen teens also don't go out to see movies as often. Going to the movies stayed fairly steady through the video rental era of the 1980s and 1990s and remained robust until the mid-2000s, when it started to slide (see Figure 2.8). So at least among teens, Blockbuster Video (which opened in 1985) didn't kill going to the movies, nor did Netflix's mail service (which debuted in 1997). But streaming video and other online activities did (and of course they also killed Blockbuster).

When I asked my students if they preferred to see a movie in the theater or at home, most answered at home, citing convenience, cost, and being able to stay in their pajamas. Many iGen'ers prefer to personalize their movie experience in ways that can't be done at the theater. "I do not quite understand people who say that they enjoy paying to go watch a movie at the movie theater," wrote Carmen, 22. "With today's technology, you can stream the

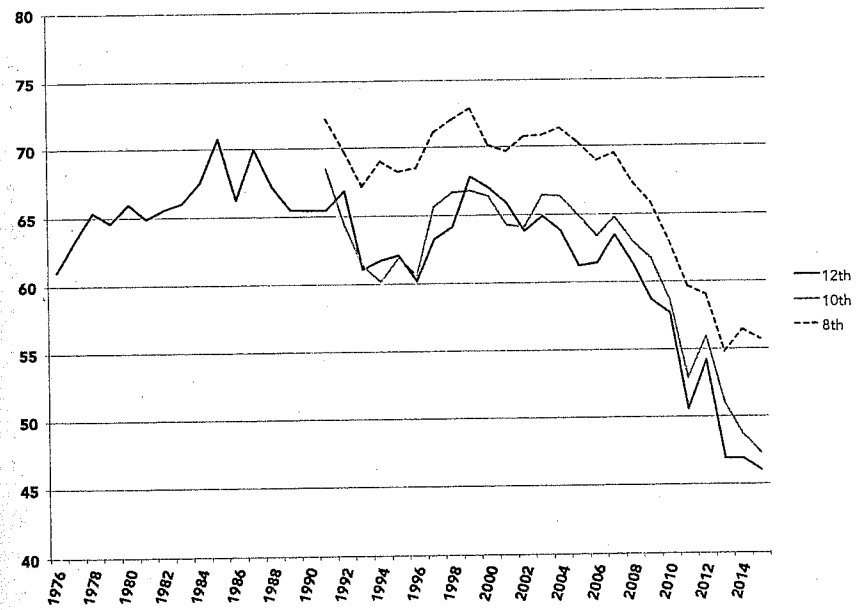

Figure 2.8. Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders who go out to the movies once a month or more. Monitoring the Future, 1976–2015.

movie online, wear your most bum-like outfit (or don't wear pants at all), and eat snacks straight from your fridge and pantry. You can also pause, rewind and fast-forward the movie as you please, something that does not happen in a movie theatre. Ever."

So: iGen is spending much more time online and texting and much less time with more traditional media such as magazines, books, and TV. iGen'ers are spending so much time on their smartphones that they just aren't interested in or available to read magazines, go to movies, or watch TV (unless it's on their phones). Although TV presaged the screen revolution, the Internet has hastened the demise of print. The printing press was invented in 1440, so for more than five hundred years words printed on paper were the standard way to convey information. We are living, right now, in the time when that is changing.

iGen's future—and all of ours—will be shaped by this revolution. It could turn out well, with web pages supplemented by long passages of text in the form of ebooks, with all of the information we'll ever need contained in our laptops and on the Internet. No more recycling the newspaper, no more packing boxes of books when you move. Or it could turn out badly, with iGen and the next generations never learning the patience necessary to delve deeply into a topic and the US economy falling behind as a result.

There's another, more immediate question: If teens are spending more time communicating with their friends online, how much are they seeing their friends in person? Has electronic interaction replaced face-to-face interaction? Let's find out.

Chapter 3

In Person No More: I'm with You, but Only Virtually

Kevin and I sit down at two desks just outside his third period class at a h school in northern San Diego. He is 17 years old and Asian American, w spiky black hair, fashionable glasses, and a wan smile. He is the oldest of th children, with his parents expecting another child in a few months. U recently, the family lived in an apartment, where the noise from his youn siblings was deafening. Perhaps as a result, he is unusually empathetic a teenage boy. "Been doing this all day?" he asks as I take a drink of w before beginning our interview.

Kevin is not the most organized student: he initially neglects to have dad sign the back of the permission slip, and when I talk to the class l he forgets his question by the time I call on him. But when I ask him w makes his generation different, he doesn't hesitate: "I feel like we don't p as much. People stay in more often. My generation lost interest in socializ in person—they don't have physical get-togethers, they just text together, they can just stay at home."

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