

Negligence in a Modern Families Lives

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Abstract

Modern invention on telecommunication devices has reduced the distance between people in the world. People can make contact between one another within seconds, and the cost of communication is very minimal even free if conducted between the same providers. Ironically such condition has a reverse impact on the interpersonal relations between some family members since each individual in the family tends to be preoccupied having contact with others while neglecting their own family communication, or they keep themselves busy sending text messages while having a family gathering. The act of texting has become problematic in official meetings; individuals would rather pay more attention on their personal matters by texting. This has become a form of the act of negligence in interpersonal communication and is considered as impolite or inappropriate. While families need to maintain interpersonal communication by having activities such as family dining or family gathering in a limited time frame, the act of texting during such activities may increase feelings of interpersonal distance among family members resulting in the sense of alienation between the members. This paper will present case studies where such act of negligence has created more gaps between family members resulting in the sense of alienation that destroys family bonding.

Keywords: Negligence, Alienation, Modern communication, Interpersonal relation, family bonding.

Introduction

Recently people need to have instantaneous communication by using more complex instruments. They are not using natural instruments such as voice, body language, or facial expression, but also utilizing modern technology such as mobile phones, smart phones and internet (Caplan, 2003). The development of telecommunication devices has opened more opportunities for people to get connected across areas immediately, and to get responses from others instantaneously with low cost (Heeks & Jagun, 2007). Decades ago people need excessive amount of time to communicate across places by mailing letters through the postal system or at least by going to a telephone booth with a number of coins. Recently people mail letters through the internet and can immediately make a phone call by using hand phones without having to go to a telephone booth (Wang & Andersen, 2007).

The telecommunication industries have been developed extensively and significantly since the beginning of 1980 (Locke & Strickling, 2010). Hand phone technology is developed rapidly in the world (Rebello, 2010). In the year of 2001, hand phone users were around five billion with the greatest number of users in the developing countries rather in the advanced countries (Kelly, 2009; Rebello, 2010). Individual needs to use such communication devices are increased when the features in the devices are perfected such as to save dates, videos, photos, and internet connection. As a result hand phones become an important instrument for a person to obtain information, promotion, business and to have social communication through internet (Locke & Strickling, 2010). Such facilities have created more possibilities for people to keep in touch and to be together with others although in an illusory world.

Recently hand phones have been utilized for various purposes besides merely for communication. In a number of countries and places the people, primarily youths, create their unique subcultures through hand phones by using SMS (short message service) or texting, or by using e-mail through hand phones (Ishii, 2006). The SMS facilities support people to maintain their communication between one another in the society, in order to not feel lonely although they were physically alone (Manghani, 2009). According to Manghani (2009) a person uses SMS to show their emotion, idealism, and values to others. SMS is an extending instrument for a person to communicate with others to perform their emotion by a creative way. The hand phone itself is an instrument to reduce distances between people which potentially help people to deal with feelings of loneliness.

Holtgraves (2010) mentioned that a person uses SMS in order to feel with others while being alone. SMS is considerably efficient to be utilized for sending short and direct messages. This is associated with keeping the relationship with others. Aside from that, according to Pettigrew (2009) people use SMS not only to maintain interpersonal relationships, but also to influence intimacy to remain close to others. SMS is a form of direct communication that is also personal and facilitates interpersonal relations and simultaneously maintains independency.

There are abundant reasons that SMS may increase the quantity and the quality of interpersonal communication. SMS allows individuals to maintain communication in distant places. SMS increases self disclosure. SMS allows foreign or unknown person to ask direct questions and to get direct responses as well as increases interpersonal attraction (Barnes, 2003).

Family members are expected to have good communication. Good communication between the members in the family can create strong familial bonding (DeVito, 2013). Strong family bonding will support the members to become healthier, and having better social interaction. However, the existence of modern technology, particularly SMS in hand phone or smart phone can change the communication pattern between family members (Rhee & Kim, 2004). Hand phones allow parents and children to keep connected in an emergency situation, or during daily conversations. However in South Korea, such communication modes create conflicts in the family primarily parents and children (Rhee & Kim, 2004). Research in the US on male and female children to adolescents (age 10-17) who have close relations in the illusory world through telecommunication modes tend to have communication problems with their parents and tend to have problems in the society. The case is not so among those who do not have friends in the illusory world (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). The excessive use of telecommunication modes makes people have a lack of face to face communication with friends and families (Bower, 1998; Nie, 2001), and such condition will influence a person to experience loneliness (Moody 2001). When a person changes the face to face communication with illusory communication, the quality of communication with the environment will be disturbed (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor II, 2010).

Currently there are researches on the impact of communication modes on friendship interaction (Kraut et al., 1998 in Ishii, 2006). The result indicates that a person's social ability will be reduced after he or she uses more internet or SMS modes. However, LaRose, Eastin and Gress (2001) explained that such modes also have the power to reduce depression due to the existence of social support by internet or SMS (Ishii, 2006). Therefore, the development of technology on hand phones may provide efficient and cheap modes of communication, yet at the same time they may also create problems due to inappropriate use of the instrument while being with others. In a number of cases people use the devices while being with others or while in a family gathering when face to face communication is ongoing. Other persons may feel neglected when a person who is supposed to communicate with them is busy texting. People will feel neglected and unexpected to have conversation with someone who is busy texting. In a family, when members are busy texting, the others may feel neglected and even alienated. Such conditions will gradually create emotional distance between family members (Ishii, 2006).

Success in developing family life depends on the family members' interpersonal communication. In a survey on 1001 adolescent respondents (age 18), 53% claimed that lack of effective communication is the primary source of marital failure (DeVito, 2013). Therefore, internal communication within the family is very important, whereas lack of communication will create interpersonal conflict associated with lack

of love and care, lack of time to get together, problems of trust, and members in the family creating more distances (DeVito, 2013).

Methods

The two cases below are obtained voluntarily. Family history, life history and personal communication are used to collect data. Qualitative analysis is utilized based on in-depth interview, observation, and personal historical data.

The Cases

There was a mother (N), 34 years of age who has 2 sons of 6 and 4 years old. Both children have limitations on physical and mental development. N babysits her own children without any help. N regularly takes care of her children by utilizing hand phones. She turned on the music on the hand phone and gave the hand phone to the children to allow the children to play by themselves; in the meantime N kept herself busy texting with others. The older son frequently yells “mamma”, and N changed the music on the hand phone. N also gave a toy car that produces music to the second son, so that they both played independently, meanwhile N remained busy texting.

One day, the older one was having cough. N gave him a generic cough syrup and did not take him to a doctor. Sometimes the child whispered in pain followed by yelling “mamma”, asking to be hugged and to get attention from his mother. However, N considered that the illness was just a common flu, and N remained busy with her hand phones. N took her son to travel to a mountain area for vacation even though his condition was seemingly weak. On return from vacation the child requested to be hugged by N, and N did it for only a few minutes while her hands remained busy texting. The following day the child’s body was getting colder, he was taken to the hospital, but it was too late. He died in the hospital. N remained silent and kept busy texting. This is an example of how a person utilizes the communication modes inappropriately, she became addicted on texting and she neglected her child resulting in the death of the child. Indeed the instrument is not the thing to blame but the person who uses the instrument is.

Another case is a 55-year-old mother (D) who has 4 children. She has financial problems thus needs to ask help from others to get financial support. For such reason, she is busy using her mobile phone either to make or receive phone calls or to do texting. The family members become second to the mobile phone. She rarely communicates to show her concern over her children’s activities. Her husband who has already been retired tends to feel lonely due to lack of communication with his wife. Her financial pressure creates stress as well as resulting in sensitive responses during conversations with her family members, and this easily triggers conflict in the family since she easily outbursts.

At present she remains having problems with family communication, yet she also remains addicted with her telecommunication activities. Most of the time when she starts to communicate with the family members, personal conflicts begin.

Conclusion & Discussion

Prior to the modern life conditions, family members may have lack of communication associated with limited communication access. Yet when communication access is considerably improved in a modern life it does not solve the problem of limitation of communication access. Ironically the modern communication devices potentially influence the family communication in a rather negative direction.

The existence of the internet and mobile phone that supposedly help people get closer by keeping close contact has counterproductively created more distant relationship between family members. Being addicted with modern communication mode of instruments is potentially creating the attitude of negligence regarding the presence of other people and family members. Negligence is a form of abuse in some way, and impolite as well as inappropriate manner in another way. Although all behavior is determined by the person and not by the instrument, the attractiveness of the instruments may potentially threaten human interpersonal relationships.

One needs to take precautions in utilizing the devices, yet people tend to lose their behavior and emotional control once they are attracted to an object that can provide interesting facilities. It is indeed human nature to get attracted by facilities that may fulfill their personal needs, yet they also need to be aware that they live in the society along with their friends and families. They may use the facilities to avoid loneliness by keeping in touch with others in an illusory world, yet neglecting the real presence of others. Such condition will create possibility that they gradually become lonely and alienated in the family. Or perhaps, they have really been alienated prior to having the modern modes of communication, thus when the modes exist they prefer to get closer with the modes than to their families.

Further research and considerations are necessary to explore that may be such people initially were lonely and alienated thus are easily attracted by the devices, or they initially were attracted by the devices resulting in being alienated in the family. It may be both. It may be that basically many people are feeling alienated in the society, and they get confused in directing themselves to socialize. They may have been alienated in a modern life, or perhaps modern life has created potentials for people to get more alienated from the society.

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