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Young People Are Always On Their Phones

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Texting

By
Sydney Culpepper

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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ABSTRACT

Since the invention of texting in the 1990s, it has become a vital tool of interaction used by people all over the world. Texting is a unique form of communication because it uses written language to emulate aspects of spoken language through the usage of textisms – emoticons, abbreviations, acronyms, and more. It is these textisms that have been the cause of much hysteria and concern over the future of the English language, and most of the focus has been put on the biggest proponents of texting: young people. This senior thesis reviews the history of standardization in writing and research on texting to investigate the linguistic purpose and function of textisms. I surveyed members of my community to learn patterns in usage of and attitudes toward texting with a focus on demographics and claims against texting, with the goal to assert that texting is an incredibly innovative form of language that enhances, rather than degrades, English.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction.....	1
History of Written Forms.....	3
History and Standardization of Written English	3
History of Texting.....	4
The Reason for Textisms	7
Literature Review	10
The Function of Textisms	10
Moral Panic and the Complaint Tradition.....	13
Texting in Relation to Literacy	17
Valid Concerns About Texting	21
Sociolinguistic Studies on Texting	21
Methods	25
Results/Data	28
Demographics	28
Texting Opinions.....	33
Texting Habits.....	44
Textisms	50
Discussion	57
General Observations.....	57

Claims Against Young People (Because of Texting)	65
Young People Are Becoming Illiterate	65
Young People Are Killing Written English.....	67
Young People Can't Write Essays Anymore	70
Young People Don't Have Conversations	72
Young People Have No Respect for the Standard	74
Limitations and Future Research	77
Conclusion	78
Appendices	79
Charts and Tables Index.....	79
Survey Questions	82
Glossary	92
Works Cited.....	94

INTRODUCTION

The past twenty years have seen a growth in technology that's almost never been seen before. The laptop was invented in the early 1980s, and now they're essentially a college requirement. The first cell phones were clunky and had limited functions, and today they're practically a miniature computer that almost everyone carries in their pocket. With these technologies and the Internet came new forms of expression and writing, such as blogs, social media sites, forums, and, most notably, texting.

Texting soon saw linguistic innovations that shocked and horrified much of the general public. Educators saw acronyms such as *OMG* and *ROFL* and became worried over their students' literacy and writing abilities. Parents saw the immediacy and privacy of text communication and became worried about cyberbullying and delinquency. English-lovers across America saw texters shirking spoken conversations for text conversations, thus replacing words with emojis, and began to mourn what they saw as the impending death of the English language.

Twenty years later, much of the hype has subsided, but people cling to the belief that texting is bad: bad for writing, bad for literacy, bad for critical thinking, and bad for young people, whose impressionable minds were raised on this technology. Yet our society continues to rely on cell phones and texting, and so, like taking an extra cookie out of the jar, we continue to do what we know – or think we know – is bad for us.

When one sits back to think about the hysteria that surrounded texting when it first came about, one must wonder where it came from. Much of it came from the

media, with their splashy headlines and prophecies about the end of English as we knew it, but it also came from fear of the unknown. What is texting exactly? Is it writing or speech? To this day, nobody can decide for sure.

At face value, it is writing. The process of writing a text involves using typographic symbols to create words for someone to read and understand. Yet the process of texting itself involves conversational turn-taking and correspondence between individuals, which makes it similar to speech. It is “essentially a mixed modality” (Baron “Always” 48) that is not quite writing, but not quite speaking. I assert that texting is written language that is attempting to replicate spoken language.

It is this reason that many of the anomalies of texting – acronyms, emoticons, abbreviations, word shortening – came into existence, and it is these very anomalies that caused most of the uproar. While there have been investigations into the effects that texting has on literacy, safety, socializing, and more, less has been done to understand exactly what texters are doing linguistically and why.

With this curiosity in my mind, I sought to investigate texting usage and opinions across demographics in the community of Western Oregon University in Monmouth, OR, USA. I hoped to uncover patterns of usage as well as opinion, and to investigate how legitimate the claims against texting are.

HISTORY OF WRITTEN FORMS

History and Standardization of Written English

The primary form of communication throughout history has been oral. Writing is believed to have been invented three times in different parts of the world, with the earliest form being cuneiform script used in Mesopotamia, dating all the way back to 3200 BC (Schmandt-Besserat). The English writing system dates back to the 600s, when it was adapted from the Roman alphabet (Kemmer). As the English language developed, so did its written form, and standards of spelling and pronunciation shifted and changed over hundreds of years until the invention of the printing press in the 1400s (Kemmer). The printing press allowed for texts to be produced more efficiently and effectively, which made it an advantage in record-keeping, government, and more, thus bringing the usage of writing into the mainstream (Kemmer). With the growth of writing, a need for a standard orthography came into existence, and spelling and punctuation began to matter (Baron, "Instant" 29), especially to printers, as variation made printing more difficult (Kemmer). Thus began the precedent of publishers dictating the standards of writing.

Another contribution toward standardization in English was the invention of English dictionaries. The first English dictionary was a book of difficult words rather than an all-encompassing list, and many of the dictionaries that followed tended toward language purification and prescriptivism, which bases grammar rules on how people think a language should work rather than how it does naturally (Kemmer). Samuel Johnson wrote a different dictionary, *Dictionary of the English*

Language, which was a rather descriptive – deducing the grammar rules that people subconsciously follow when they use language – dictionary, and the spelling system at that time was basically modern English, with a few twists (Kemmer).

In today's world, there are two recognized standards of English: British and American. British English is the worldwide standard for English learning, although there has recently been a shift toward American English (Kemmer). Additionally, a new wave of language innovation has swept the world, giving rise to questions of standardization. This new wave is due to the emergence of electronic communication, which takes many forms: email, instant messaging, blogging, social media, and texting.

History of Texting

The first cell phone was invented in 1973 by Dr. Martin Cooper, and twenty years later texting came about as the Short Message Service (SMS) in Europe after the Global System for Mobile Communications began developing the idea back in the 1980s (Crystal 4, Baron "Always" 16-17). The first messages were sent in Finland, and it took five years for a user base to build up (Crystal 4). The average number of messages sent a month by the year 2000 was only 35 – a very small number considering today's averages. Once a charging system was worked out for the messaging service, texting began to spread far and wide (Crystal 4). Texts per year skyrocketed. In the United Kingdom alone, texts per year went from 12.2 billion in 2001 to double that by 2004 (Crystal 4). In America, however, it was a slightly different story.

Something that may be hard to believe, considering the “text messaging mania” (Crystal 100) that America has been in for over a decade, is that texting actually took a while to catch on in America. Personal computers caught on in the United States sooner than in other countries, and as such email and instant messaging – free services aside from the cost of Internet – were heavily embedded in America’s communication culture by the time texting came about (Crystal 98, Baron “Always” 138). As opposed to Europe, where texting was cheaper than calling, texting was an additional expense in America (Baron “Always” 140). Once it caught on, however, it spread rapidly. Americans sent 158 billion text messages in 2006, nearly double from the previous year (Baron “Always” 27).

This high-speed growth in texting corresponds with the growth of personal cell phone usage, which already expanded communicative possibilities by being able to call anyone from anywhere. SMS pushed that communicative ability even further. Individual SMS messages were capped at a 160-character limit, and longer texts were sent in parts using concatenated SMS (Crystal 6). The Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) expanded texts’ abilities by being able to send photos, videos, and more (Crystal 6). The ease and speed that texting now offered made it much more appealing than email, and made it “highly lucrative” (Baron “Always” 17) for companies. The spread continued exponentially through today, and modern technological advances with cell phones have made texting even easier and more appealing.

Along with the spread of texting came the spread of what is often called “text language.” Spelling norms are often difficult to change due to the reluctance of

schools and the publishing industry, which are the two guardians of standard orthography. However, the speed of accessibility that comes with electronic communication and the general informality of the medium has given way to widespread language innovation and change. This, combined with an increasing trend toward informality in American society (Baron “Always” 164), and “a marked indifference to the need for consistency in linguistic usage” (Baron “Always” 169), led to the emergence of text language.

Many people worry that text language will replace Standard Written English (SWE). However, as mentioned before, young people and the Internet do not hold the power to change SWE. Since the invention of the printing press, the publishing industry has held the power to say what is acceptable in writing based on what they print, and then educators teach these acceptable practices. Thus, “IM is unlikely to play a significant role in altering writing standards” (Baron, “Instant” 31) unless publishers and educators allow it.

There are many names for text language: computer-mediated communication, electronic language, mobile language, netspeak, textspeak, textese, txtng, etc. This paper will use the word “textisms,” as used by Drouin and Driver (2012), Kemp (2016), Powell and Dixon (2011), and others, to refer to the non-standardisms that are iconic of texting and electronic language, including, but not limited to:

- Emojis – small pictorial images
- Emoticons – pictures created by using typographic symbols
- Acronyms/Initialisms – phrases or groups of words reduced to letters

- Abbreviations – shortened forms of words
- Alternate spellings – nonstandard spellings of words
- Logograms – using single characters to represent whole words or phrases
- Nonstandard punctuation – using punctuation in nonstandard ways
- Multiplication – repeating letters or punctuation marks

The Reason for Textisms

There are many reasons for the invention of these textisms. David Crystal cites two main reasons: it's easier and fun (65). The claim that textisms make texting easier is based first on the quality of technology. Grace and Kemp say that “the richly abbreviated language of text messages initially developed in response to 160-character message limits and physical constraints of alphanumeric keypads” (220-221). Texting first used a multi-press system, which made use of the number keys, which were connected to three or four other letters. The user needed to press a key as many times as needed, then wait for the phone to move on to allow the user to type the next letter. For instance, the 2-key is linked to the letters A, B, and C. To type A, only one press was required. B needed two, and C needed three.

This method of typing was tedious, and one reason was the alphanumeric keypad was not invented with the intention of being used for language (Crystal 67). The letters are attached to the number keys in alphabetical order, and no attention was paid to how common certain letters were, such as S, which requires four taps of the 7-key. There was no need to acknowledge the commonness of letters, since they

were originally used when “area telephone exchanges had names” (Baron “Always” 17). They became a staple of telephone keypads, and texting simply made use of what was already in existence, despite the inconvenience.

Technologies such as T9 and predictive texting were invented to ease this. Predictive texting uses a dictionary of words to suggest words based on letters the user had already typed and frequency of word use. T9 was a kind of predictive texting that allowed for a single-press of each button and predicted words based on the letter groups associated with each number. For example, entering 2-2-8 could produce *cat* or *bat* or *act*. These predictive texting programs use algorithms to learn what words a user types frequently, although a study done on its usage revealed that only half of texters utilized the service (Thurlow with Brown, ref. in Crystal 67).

Other methods to alleviate the tedious multi-press system were: the next-key, which eliminated the pause time needed for the phone to move on to the next letter; the long-press system, which allowed a user to hold a button for varying amounts of time to access a letter; the two-key system, which allowed a user to press two keys for each letter by entering the number and symbol needed (e.g., F would be 23: 2-key, third letter); and more (Crystal 66).

More appealing and easier than using these technologies was the usage of abbreviations. It’s much faster to type out *cya* than *see you* or *probs* than *probably*. Abbreviations also mean that words take up less of the 160-character limit, which could save a user money if they’re able to fit more words and sentences into a single text message, or save money if their provider charged per character instead of per message. If intelligibility isn’t lost while speed is gained and money is saved (Crystal

69), why not abbreviate? However, with modern cell phones, the alphanumeric keypad has been all but eliminated by the QWERTY keyboard. The keyboard makes texting full words just as easy as with a computer, and the popularity of unlimited texting plans make cost a nil factor as well. If these factors are essentially no longer in play, why do people still use textisms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Function of Textisms

In order to investigate this, Grace and Kemp conducted a study in 2015 to see if textisms were changing in frequency or usage as technology improved. The study was conducted using first-year university students in Australia across four consecutive years. They used questionnaire data in addition to asking the students to copy down the last five text messages they'd sent, which were analyzed for textism usage.

The results showed that overall textism use did decrease proportionally over time. They suggest that technology does play a part in textism use, as participants who used a multi-press system used more textisms than those who had a full keyboard. Those who used the multi-press system also showed that they used textisms such as abbreviations and acronyms more than alternate spellings and multiplication. This makes sense considering that those textisms often include adding more characters, which takes time and more button-presses in the multi-press system. Since Grace and Kemp have shown that "multi-press entry is associated with greater textism use" (221), we must ask, why are textisms still so prevalent? This brings us to David Crystal's other reason for textisms: they're fun.

Crystal describes this as "the human ludic temperament" (71). He gives examples of the numerous ways that people have always played with language, from Scrabble to riddles and more. Many of the textisms found are actually "quite complicated to type" (Crystal 71), such as this emoticon for a rose: @}--`--- . It's the same reason that people use metaphors in poetry, and why elementary school

children spell “boobies” with the numbers on their calculators: humans like to have fun with their language. This means that brevity and speed – the two factors most often focused on – aren’t the most important factors of textisms after all.

Not all textisms exist to shorten and speed up typing. Many textisms work to portray tone and emotion. Grace and Kemp note this distinction in the function of textisms by separating them into two main categories of contractives (e.g., g-clippings and initialisms) and emotives (e.g., emoticons and punctuation multiplication) (222). While contractive textisms do relate to the brevity factor, emotives relate to the human ludic temperament, but also to the function of portraying the tone and emotion of a message – aspects of in-person conversation that are lost in electronic conversation. While the speed and playfulness of textisms is very important, I argue that the most important factor relating to the invention and persistence of textisms is the purpose they serve to bridge communication gaps in electronic conversation.

Emotive textisms such as alternate spellings and word lengthening portray humor, verbal colloquialisms, accents, and tone. A text reading *Giiiiirl!* makes the reader hold out the vowel in their head, similar to the way a speaker may hold out the vowel in speech. A text reading *Fo sho!* reflects r-dropping in the phrase *For sure!* that happens in some English dialects. The same manipulation happens with punctuation. Multiple exclamation points following a *sorry* will intensify the apology. Placing a period at the end of a message will make it seem “less sincere” (Feltman). While this all may seem odd, using punctuation and orthography to guide tone isn’t a strange practice at all. In fact, the exact purpose of punctuation in

written language was to be “a way of supplying direction to a speaker’s voice in order to reflect tone” (Buchanan 33). Texters instinctively recognized this and took it a step further by developing alternate spelling, emoticons, and acronyms “to attempt to address the rich and varied complexities of communication” (Buchanan 32).

However, Buchanan believes that these textisms aren’t fully suited to the job. She acknowledges the usage of textisms as “a means of attempting to compensate for the absence of facial expression, body language, and voice in written communications” (30), but she argues that “texting vocabulary and trends are in constant flux” (32), which makes them difficult to navigate. She then presents an alternative: a new punctuation system, suggesting that “a carefully conceived punctuation system will provide an expedient method of adding clarity to text-based communications” (30).

Buchanan is not the first to suggest this, as she gives a history of proposed punctuation marks to expand the typographic repertoire, starting in the sixteenth century. To learn what kind of new punctuation marks would be most beneficial in today’s world, a survey was conducted in 2013 to “discover which tones are most frequently used, most frequently misunderstood, and how these particular tones were being delivered/supported” (42) in text conversation. Seventeen tones were discovered, and the nine most frequently used were: “joking/humour [sic], sarcasm, questions/inquiry, happy, thanks/gratitude, interest, apology/sorry, excitement, confused” (43).

Rather than coming up with new typographic symbols to represent these tones, Buchanan suggests reappropriating symbols already in existence as we've done recently, such as the use of the # symbol for tagging on social media (41). She then narrowed down the list of typographic symbols to those not in common use in writing, and sat down with focus groups to form new meanings for these punctuation marks (46). She came up with the following: the asterisk should be used to mark sarcasm; a question mark and a tilde to show confusion; and double end parenthesis to indicate a joking manner. However, until these or other punctuation changes occur, texters will have to make do with textisms.

Moral Panic and the Complaint Tradition

Textisms are so distinctive in relation to standard writing that texting has often been called its own language. However, the situation is not as dramatic as that. It's true that texting often does not adhere to the rules of Standard Written English (SWE), but it is still English. John McWhorter recognized this and referred to texting as "fingered speech", an evolving form of communication that combines verbal and written elements" (qtd in Buchanan 32). What McWhorter did is acknowledge that texting is written language that is imitating spoken language. This is due to the fact that the situational characteristics of spoken conversation and texted conversation are very similar, which will be discussed later.

What seems most upsetting to the public is that textisms are not limited to texting. In fact, they are used in almost every form of electronic communication – Facebook, Twitter, casual emails, and more. Since textisms are non-standard forms

of English, they're inherently informal, and are typically used in informal interactions such as instant messages and social media platforms. However, some people have used them in formal situations like emails to superiors and, apparently, essays.

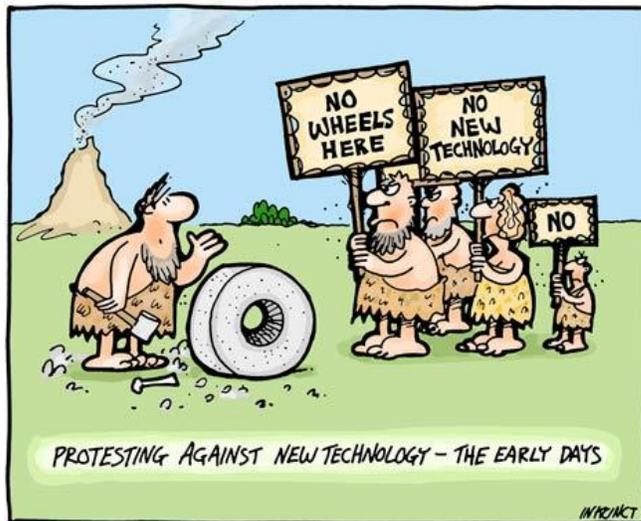
Although textisms seem relatively harmless, they have instilled a "moral panic" (Thurlow, qtd. in Crystal 8) in the general public about the future quality of the English language. One of the main reasons for the strength of this panic was an article published in the Daily Telegraph in 2003, titled, "Girl writes English essay in phone text shorthand" (Cramb). The article describes how a girl submitted an essay to her teacher that was written entirely in textspeak, riddled with the features named earlier. The teacher found the essay incomprehensible, and it instilled the desire to "stamp out the use of texting as a form of written language so far as English study is concerned" (Gillespie, qtd. in Cramb). While the full essay was never produced, leading some to believe it was a "hoax" (Crystal 24), it still fed into the "media hysteria" (Crystal 22) regarding texting, which continues today.

Adding to this hysteria, an editorial written in 2011 warned against allowing cell phones and texting to become "an unhealthy obsession" (Editorial) and worried that "American youth is too dependent on technology" (Editorial). The piece pointed out that texting allows people to "hide from real human interactions" (Editorial), bringing up concerns over socialization in young people. In fact, the article claimed that "texting has become a lifestyle" (Editorial) and it brought up the changed social dynamics that surround texting. The author of the editorial also asserted that "language suffers because people have replaced writing out full words

with acronyms” (Editorial). Six years later, this editorialist’s opinions are still in line with many of the common beliefs about texting that exist today.

One quite famous reaction against texting is an article from 2007 by John Humphrys in the Daily Mail, titled “I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language.” In the article, Humphrys mourns the loss of the hyphen from 16,000 words and accuses “the texters, the SMS vandals” (Humphrys) of destroying the language. He uses strong language to declare that texters are “pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary” (Humphrys). While Humphrys’ reaction may be more “apocalyptic” (Crystal 9) than most, he’s not alone in his worries. His complaints actually follow in a very long tradition of humanity; the complaint tradition, in fact.

What people don’t know or don’t acknowledge is that with each new innovation, there almost always came a wave of resistance and negativity.



Cartoonist John Ditchburn satirizes the “complaint tradition” in this image, which shows cavepeople protesting the invention of the wheel, captioned “Protesting Against New Technology – The Early Days”.

This image is humorous because the wheel was an essential invention for the growth of society, and many can’t imagine the world without it. Yet, thousands of years ago, it was likely strange to the people who hadn’t seen it before. The

reasoning behind this moral panic, according to Milroy and Milroy, is that the “idea of linguistic decline usually carries with it the implication that general standards of conduct and morality in society are also in decline” (32). For example, one media outlet “likened text message dependency to a heroin addiction” (Allen in Drouin). David Crystal satirizes his own experience with the complaint tradition in his book *Txting: The Gr8 Db8*:

The end is nigh! If I had a pound for every time I have heard of someone predicting a language disaster because of a new technological development, I should be a very rich man. My bank balance would have started to grow with the arrival in the Middle Ages of printing, thought by many to be the invention of the devil because it would put all kinds of false opinions into people’s minds. It would have increased with the arrival of the telegraph, telephone, and broadcasting, each of which generated short-lived fears that the fabric of society was under threat. And I would have been able to retire on the profits from text messaging, the latest innovation to bring out the prophets of doom. (9)

What Crystal is describing here is the resistance to innovation that is seemingly inherent to humanity. Technology that we often take for granted as normal today, such as printing and telephones, caused quite a stir when it was first invented. Now, looking back, their reactions seem comical. It is likely that years down the line people will look back at the frenzy around textisms and laugh.

Most linguists acknowledge that language is always changing and accept textisms as natural language growth, but there are many non-linguists who don’t

want to see the language become “a series of ridiculous emoticons and everchanging abbreviations” (Humphrys) as they believe it will. With this belief comes a concern over literacy, and despite the fact that “the claim that there has been a decline in writing skills, whatever its merits, goes back decades” (Crystal 157), there have been many investigations to see how exposure to textisms affects people’s use of language.

Texting in Relation to Literacy

One of these investigations was by Drouin and Driver, who, in their 2014 study, state that “children’s use of textese has a positive relationship with literacy skills, and adults’ use of textese has a negative relationship” (253). They suggest that this is perhaps due to the fact that “children are manipulating standard English in more purposeful and creative ways” (253), whereas adults “are making more errors or using ‘lazy writing’” (253). It seems that “intentional manipulations are more positively related to literacy” (253).

Their study involved 183 undergraduate students. They compiled a text message corpus and conducted the literacy part of their study in two parts, one focusing on textism density (frequency of textisms per message) and the other on category density (frequency of kind of textism per message). While a higher frequency of text messaging correlated with frequent use of textisms, it did not significantly correlate with literacy abilities. Textism density, however, did show a significant negative relationship to standard literacy abilities. Turning to the categories of textisms, the evidence shows that accent stylization (such as *didja* [did

you]) and symbols (emoticons) showed positive correlation, while omitted capitalization and omitted apostrophes had negative results. Although “the negative relationships were consistent” (264), Drouin and Driver note that it’s important to look at which kinds of textisms have the most negative impact.

Another researcher, Nenagh Kemp, conducted a study with Australian university students to investigate this possibility. 61 participants were asked to read text messages written in standard English (“*Please forgive me if I don’t get back in time to help celebrate your birthday*”) and in textisms (“*Plz 4give me if i dnt get bak in time 2 hlp u celebr8 ur bday*”) (57). Most participants reported that they understood the common textisms, but had difficulty with the obscure ones. In fact, 46 participants said they only use textisms for some words, while only 2 said they tried to use textisms for most words. 13 participants even “avoided them completely” (58). Texts written in conventional English took longer to type out but were easier to understand, while textisms were much faster to type, yet resulted in a higher error count.

Turning to the question of literacy, evidence shows that “individuals with higher literacy skills were more efficient at composing and deciphering text messages than their peers” (60). Those who were able to type faster with both textisms and conventional English “correlated with better reading and spelling, and fewer errors in reading both conventional and textese messages” (65). This study seems to conclude that “relationships between fluency with textisms and more conventional literacy skills in young adults are neutral or positive” (65), which

“provides further evidence that media fears about the use of textisms masking or even causing problems with reading and spelling may be unfounded” (65).

Powell and Dixon conducted a study in 2011 that had a similar purpose. They sought to research whether or not exposure to “phonetically plausible misspellings” (59) negatively affected adults’ spelling. They hypothesized that there might “be something in the very nature of the textisms that helps children with literacy” (58). The 94 participants were students of Roehampton University, and they were divided into four groups: two that were exposed to non-standard spellings (one to misspellings and one to textisms), and two that were baseline groups (one exposed to correct spellings and one with no exposure).

Firstly, “mean spelling scores generally increased from pre- to post-exposure test” (61) with the Textisms Group. The Misspellings Group showed that, as they predicted, “exposure to misspellings had a negative effect on spelling, while exposure to correctly spelled words resulted in improved spelling” (61-62). It appears, then, that “the finding that exposure to textisms had a beneficial effect on participants’ spelling performance is inconsistent with the anecdotal claims of negative effects of texting on literacy” (63).

Powell and Dixon discuss that exposure to misspellings draws on false representations of language, while exposure to correct spellings reinforces the proper representations. The effect that textisms had, then, more closely mirrors the effect of correct spellings. They continue to speculate that “the beneficial effect of textisms could arise because they provide partial information of words’ orthography, which effectively primes that word for subsequent spelling” (64). Of

course, the same argument could be made for phonetically plausible misspellings, but Powell and Dixon propose that misspellings are a more passive form of error, while textisms are marked in form and often eliminate vowels, where many errors occur, and so “textisms did not appear to actively interfere with stored orthographic knowledge” (64).

Textisms are not unique to English, and a study conducted by van Dijk et al. investigated the effect of textisms on literacy in Dutch children. Based on previous research, they did not anticipate a negative relationship, and they hypothesized that children familiar with textisms may benefit in cognitive abilities the way bilingual children do. Through a number of attention tasks, questionnaires, sample texts, and other methods, they found that, while there wasn't much “clear support for the idea that the bilingual advantage can be generalized to the combination of conventional writing and textese” (van Dijk et al.), there was a correlation between more textese and improved grammar, in terms of “word and sentence formation” (van Dijk et al.).

Clearly, the issue of literacy is more complicated than the cut and dry assumption that texting is “harming language as a whole” (Crystal 7). It has now been 14 years since Humphrys wrote in the Daily Mail, and it's pleasing to note that the English language has not yet died because of texting, nor is it likely to, according to most research. As Kemmer says, “a language can be threatened or endangered only if it ceases to be used at all,” and since there are upwards of 1.5 billion English speakers worldwide, the death of the English language does not seem imminent.

Valid Concerns About Texting

Now, there are valid concerns surrounding texting and cell phone usage. Texting allows for people to be nearly always accessible, even in situations that may not be appropriate, such as while driving, in school, and at work. Crystal declares that, “as with any technology, people have to learn to manage it. There are undoubtedly problems in relation to the use of texting, but they seem to be social or physiological, not linguistic, in character” (168).

Schools had to come up with cell phone policies due to behavioral issues. New safety laws about driving and cell phone use were put into motion, and hands-free technology was invented. Psychologists are investigating how this new method of communication affects socialization and “problems of reduced concentration, productivity, and even IQ” (Crystal 169). There is always an adjustment period that comes with new technology as people test their limits and officials figure out how to regulate it. Meanwhile, the linguists are busy figuring out how people use language with this technology and why.

Sociolinguistic Studies on Texting

Ling et al. sought to examine how teenagers engage with members of the opposite sex when texting by focusing “on how US teens use texting in gender and sexual identity construction” (Ling et al. 423). They describe texting as a training ground where teens can “test his/her social skills in a relatively small, protected group” (424). They found much tension in communication between the sexes, and found that “interacting with girls can be socially awkward and difficult to

understand” (428) for the boys. Other male participants said that emoticons and letter multiplication in texts from girls indicated flirting, but that it was not something they use when texting other boys. From the girls’ perspective, the textisms “serve to buffer the message” (430), and that it’s thought to be “abrupt, rude, and brusque to not use them” (430). Ling et al. conclude that “texting is an important channel for gender identity work and the issues of exploring cross-gender interaction for teens” (433). This is just one study of the intersection between sex and textisms, and it shows the amount of communicative power that can be wielded in text messages.

Kelly et al. spoke to six focus groups of college students about what they like or don’t like about text messages. They found that the five attributes (reduced cues, brevity of messages, asynchrony, ubiquitous nature of texting, and record of interactions) provided control over the young adults’ interactions and made communication more convenient. However, there were disadvantages, such as receiving texts at all hours of the day and the possibility of miscommunication, which led the participants to portray texting “simultaneously as positive and negative” (4). Despite these difficulties, students largely prefer texting, saving email for “professional situations” (7) and phone calls or face-to-face conversations for “serious” (7) talks with family and close friends.

Meanwhile, Harrison et al. looked at the social acceptability of texting during certain situations, addressing the claims that teens are so obsessed with texting that they do it at inappropriate times. They distributed an online questionnaire to college students, where participants were given 33 situations and asked them to

rate on a Likert scale how acceptable it would be to text then. Interestingly, many respondents would rate a situation inappropriate to text during, such as while in a movie theater or while at work, but that they did it anyway. This split between what is culturally acceptable and what people practice is definitely worth more research.

Ling and Baron sought to learn what differences exist between texting and instant messaging. They review the history of texting and instant messaging (or IM), remarking that “IM was introduced in the 1980s at several American universities” (292), and became “ubiquitous on American college campuses” (292), while texting was still gaining ground. They wished to gather a corpus of texts to compare against IM data and had students record their texts sent in a 24-hour period “using paper diaries distributed to undergraduates at a large, public, Midwestern university” (293). Ling and Baron analyzed these texts in three ways: for text length, for sentential punctuation, and for lexical shortenings and emoticons (293).

What they found was that “text messages were consistently longer and contained more sentences” (296), and they attribute that to texting costs. Texts showed more contractions than IM due to message length constraints, but a lower use of apostrophes, likely owing to the difficulty of accessing punctuation marks in the multi-press system (296). Texts also showed far more instances of abbreviations and other lexical shortenings (294). This study shows the effect that medium has on electronic language, and they remark that “focus groups with college students would enhance our understanding of how students craft text messages” (297).

These are just a few studies that have been done to explore the linguistic factors of texting. The social demographics that affect what types of textisms a texter may use are what interest me. It's been discussed that "social factors, such as the perceived social value of participating in textism-rich communication, may also influence textism use" (Grace and Kemp), and that's where my study comes in. Additionally, I was curious to see patterns of opinion toward texting. Since the hysteria about texting has died down over the past few years, I wanted to see if opinions had changed, and I wanted to look into the validity of these opinions. My paper contributes to the research already done on texting and social demographics, but also addresses the factors of motivation based on extralinguistic influences, and investigates social attitudes and beliefs about texting.

METHODS

To examine attitudes toward and usage of textisms across demographics, I designed a survey using Zoho Survey. I chose Zoho over other more popular survey sites because I found it to be intuitive and cost-effective while offering lots of options and tools, such as question logic, various question types, and analyzation reports. The survey was broken into four overall sections: demographic questions, texting opinions, texting habits, and textisms. The full survey questions can be viewed on page 82.

Since I hoped to uncover patterns of usage and opinion across demographics, I asked a wide range of demographic questions, such as age, gender identity, relation to WOU, first language, and more, as these are all factors that have been shown to play into variances in spoken language. Participants could choose to pass on any demographics questions they felt uncomfortable answering, or were worried would identify them.

The next section asked participants questions regarding their opinions on texting. Questions included how frequently they texted, whether they liked or disliked it, if their opinions had changed before, how they thought it affected literacy, use of different messaging apps, and so on. Then, the questions shifted toward their own personal messaging habits. This focused on the kind of phone they possessed, if they paid attention to grammar when texting, usage of predictive texting and autocorrect technology, when it's appropriate to text, and who they text. The questions then focused on textism usage, asking participants which textisms they used, how they felt about the textisms, and when they used textisms.

My questions focused on ten types of textisms:

Type	Definition	Example
Emojis	Small pictorial images	😊 🐼
Emoticons	Pictures created by using typographic symbols	:) ^o^
Acronyms, or initialisms	Phrases or groups of words reduced to letters	BRB [be right back] lol [laugh out loud]
Abbreviations	Shortened forms of words	l8r [later] Cya [see you]
Alternate spellings	Non-standard or stylized spellings	Gurl [girl] chu [you]
Word lengthening, or letter multiplication	Repeating one or more letters in a word	Whyyyyyyyyy Fiiiiiiiine
Word shortening	Shortening a word by leaving out syllables or g-clipping (removing the -g from -ing words)	Perf [perfect] Talkin [talking]
Alternate capitalization	Omission of capital letters or typing in all-capitals	what's up? HEY!
End-message periods	Absence of periods at the end of the last sentence in the message	"I guess" rather than "I guess."
Punctuation multiplication, or repeated punctuation	Repeating exclamation points and/or question marks	Hey!!!! What??!?!?

Table 1: The ten textism types that I focused on in the study.

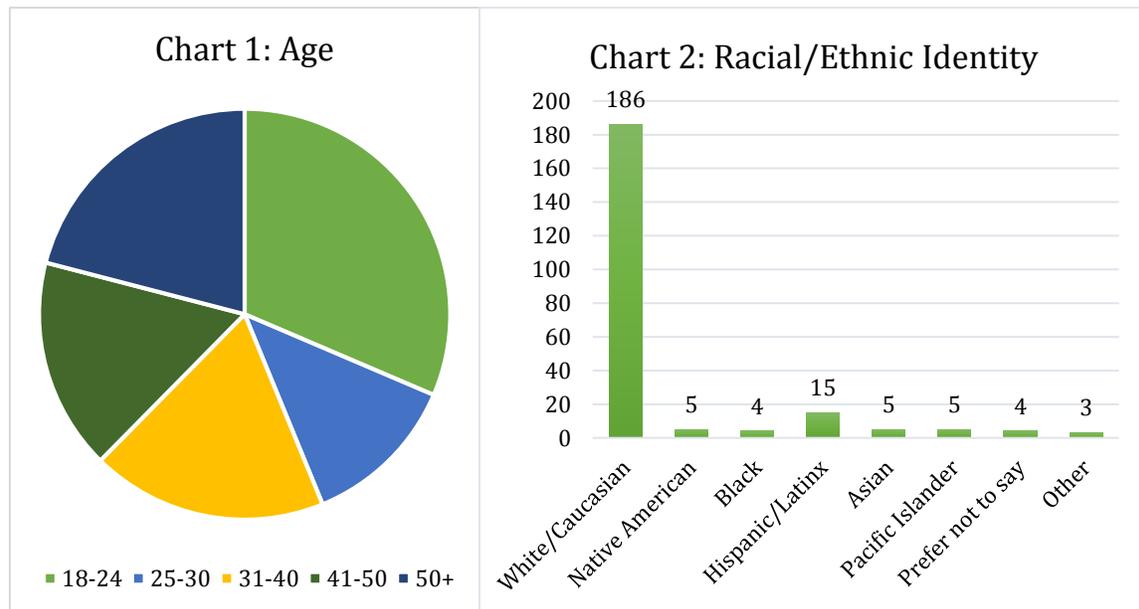
On June 1, 2017, my study was approved by Western Oregon University's Institutional Review Board, and I distributed my survey to the WOU and Monmouth community via mass email and social media. Any students, alumni, staff, faculty, or community members were encouraged to respond, though there was no compensation for taking part. A letter at the beginning of the survey explained the implied consent of participating in the survey, and participants were assured of

their anonymity. Survey responses were collected for about two weeks. I analyzed the data received using Zoho Survey's report analyzation software; SarAnt, a free search and replace tool; and AntConc, a free corpus analysis program; as well as my own skills.

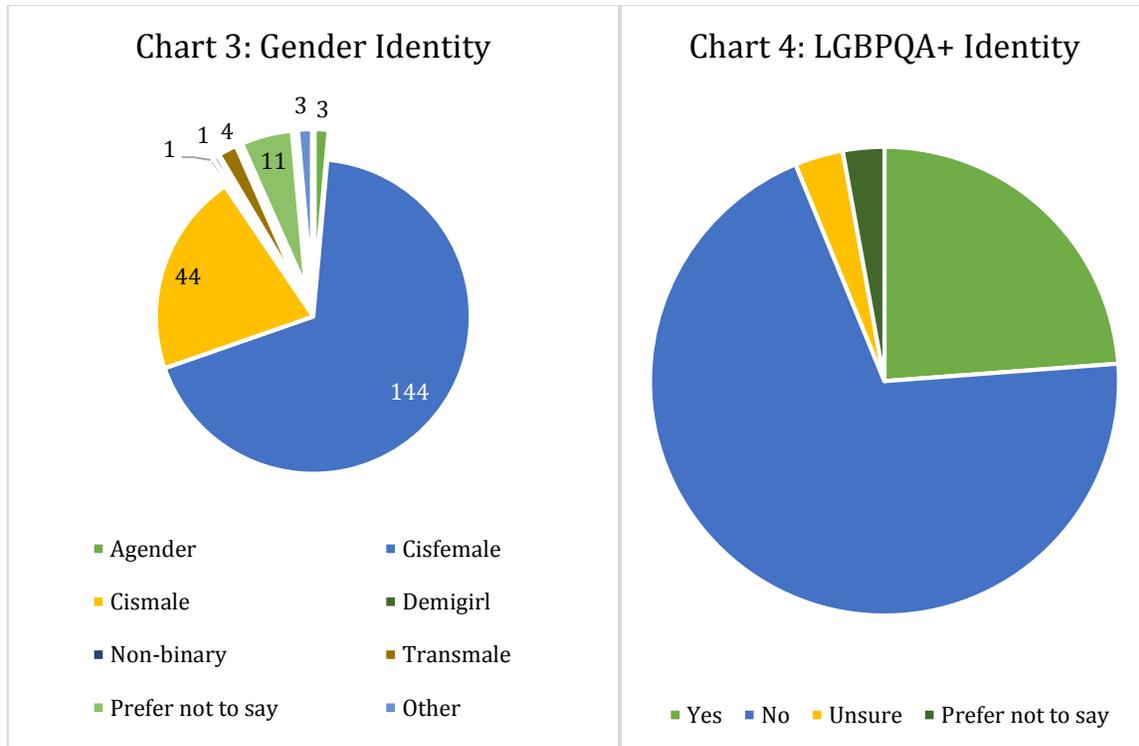
RESULTS/DATA

Demographics

261 people responded to the survey, however 49 responses were partial and therefore removed from the data pool since I wanted to work with complete data. That left 212 complete responses. Of these responses, two individuals did not text.



Of the 210 texting respondents, 31% were in the 18-24 age range, which was expected. 12% of respondents were 25-30, 18% were 31-40, 17% were 41-50, and 21% were 50+ (Chart 1). In terms of ethnic and racial identity, participants were encouraged to select as many as they felt applied to themselves. 88% percent of participants reported identifying as white or Caucasian, which is in line with the racial demographic of Western Oregon University itself (Chart 2).



Regarding gender identities, 70% identified as cisfemale, and 21% identified as cismale. *Cis-* is a prefix that's come into recent use to refer to gender. It means that the sex one was assigned at birth and the gender they identify as closely correspond; it is the opposite of *trans-*. This also aligns with Western's reported gender distribution. The other 9% reported their gender identity as outside of the cisgender binary or preferred not to say (Chart 3). Only 24% of participants said they identified in the LGBPQA+ spectrum of romantic and/or sexual identities, while 6% said they were unsure or preferred not to say (Chart 4).

Chart 5: Relation to WOU

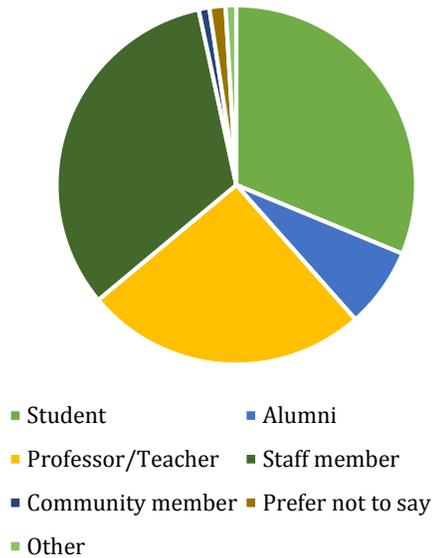


Chart 6: Honors Students

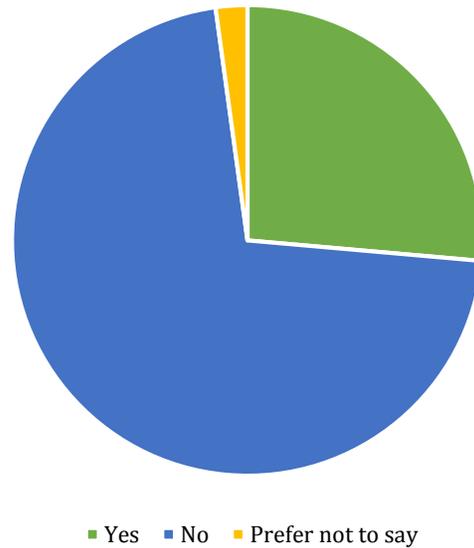
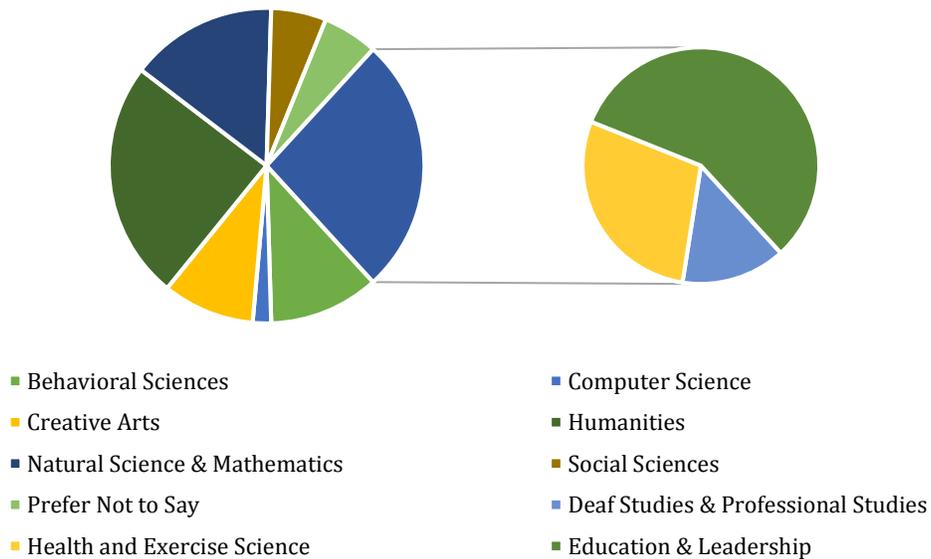
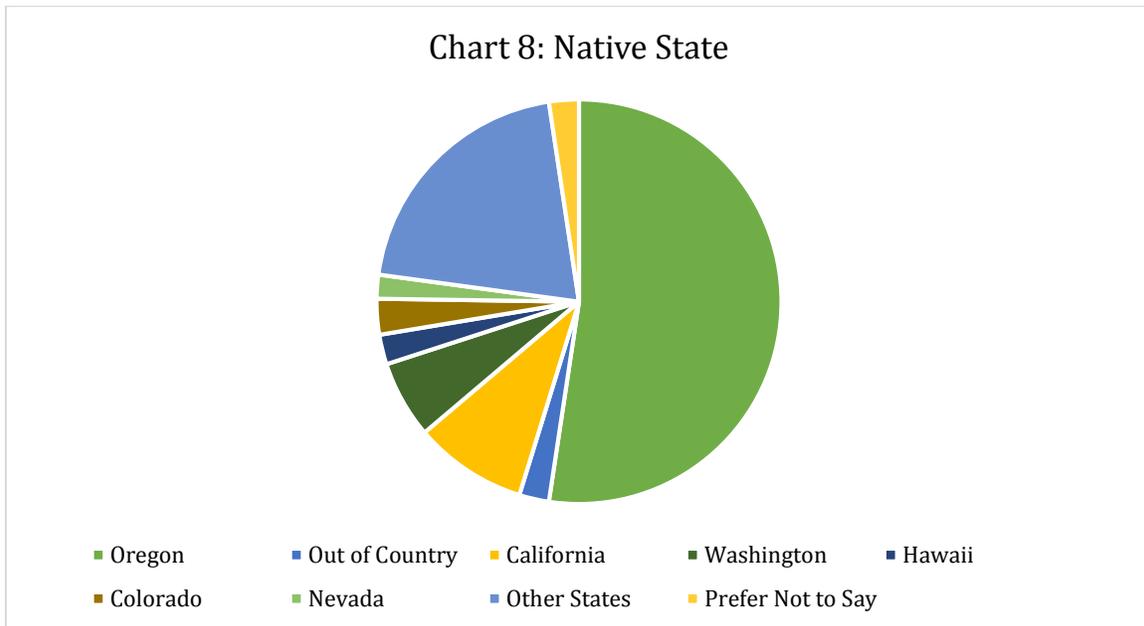


Chart 7: Subjects Taught

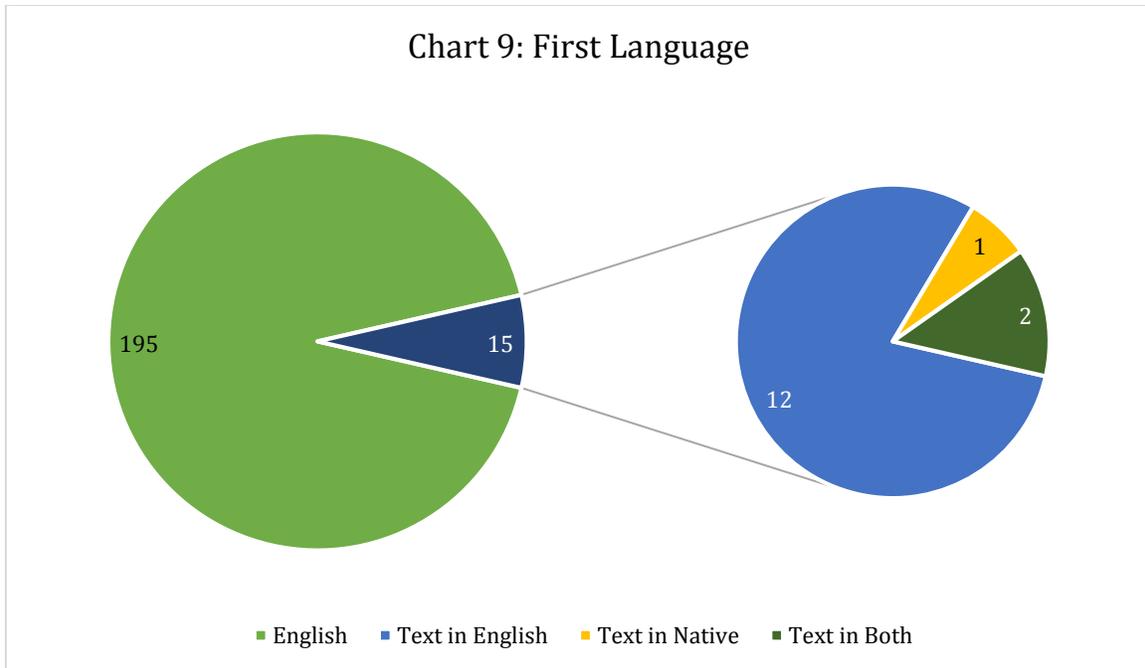


31% of survey participants were WOU students, while 7% were alumni. 25% worked at Western Oregon University as faculty members, and 33% worked as staff. The other 4% reported that they were community members, other, or preferred not to say (Chart 5). Of the participants who identified themselves as students, 71% of

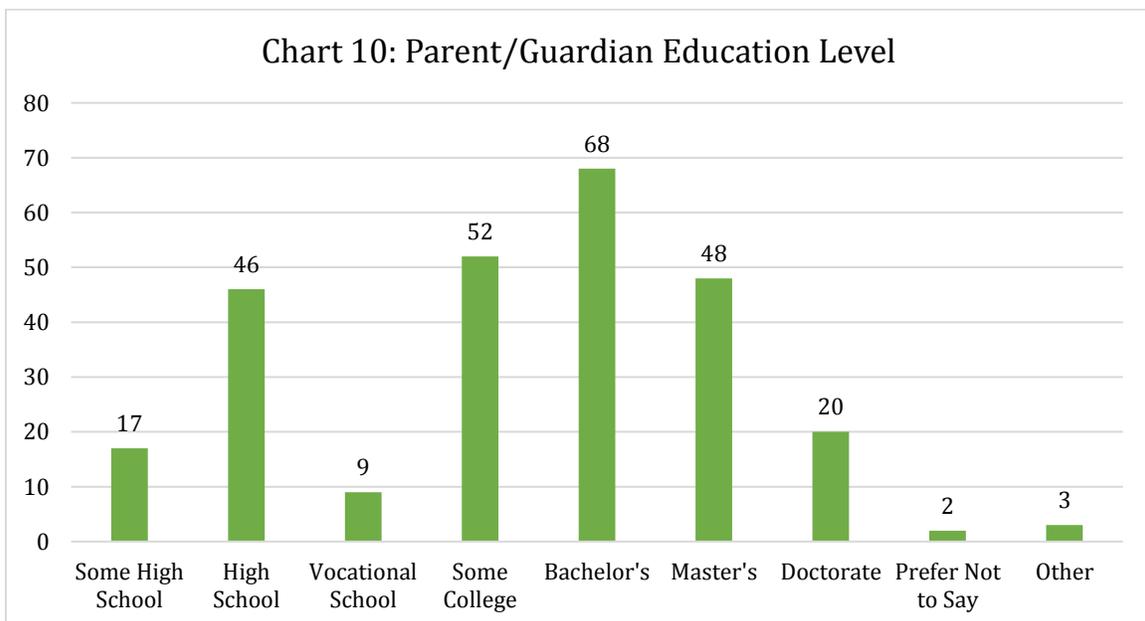
them were not involved with the Honors Program at Western. 26% were, and 3% preferred not to say (Chart 6). Of the participants who identified as teachers or professors, three-quarters were from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (the left pie), while the other 26% were from the College of Education (right pie) (Chart 7).



A little over half the participants said they were from Oregon, while the other half preferred not to say or were from out of state, and a few were from out of country. Many non-Oregonians were from California or Washington, and some hailed from Hawaii, Colorado, and Nevada. This is in line with where most out-of-state students come to Western from, and was not surprising (Chart 8).



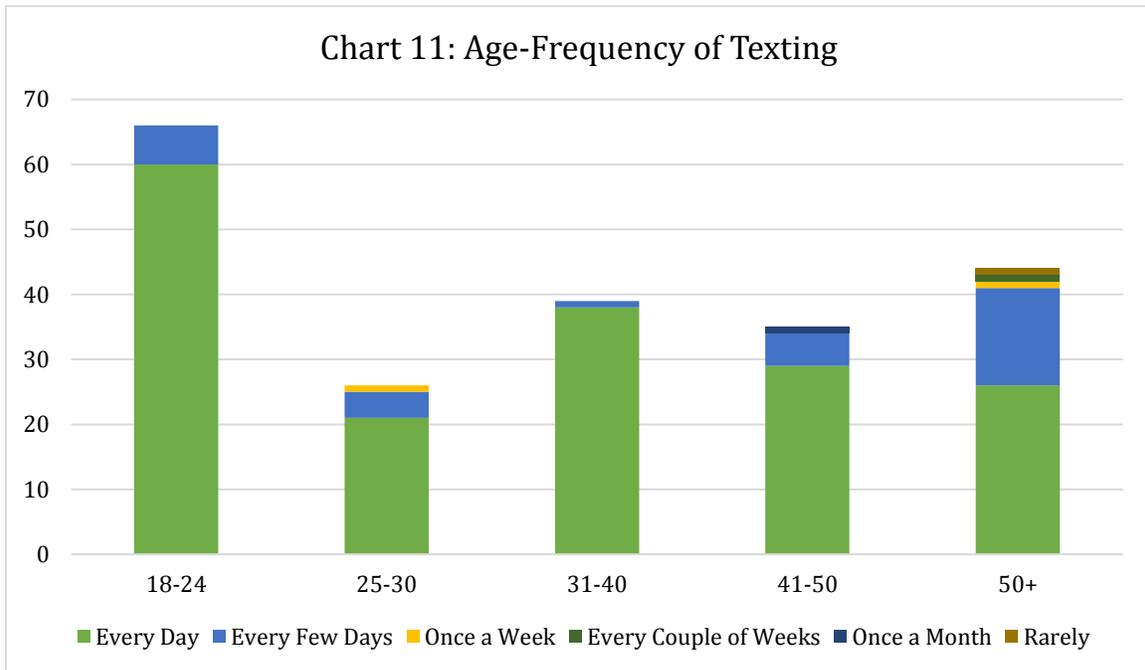
English is the first language for 93% of respondents. Other first languages included Spanish, American Sign Language, and Chinese, to name a few. Of the non-native English speakers, only one said they primarily texted in their native language, two said they switch back and forth frequently, and the rest said they primarily texted in English. (Chart 9)



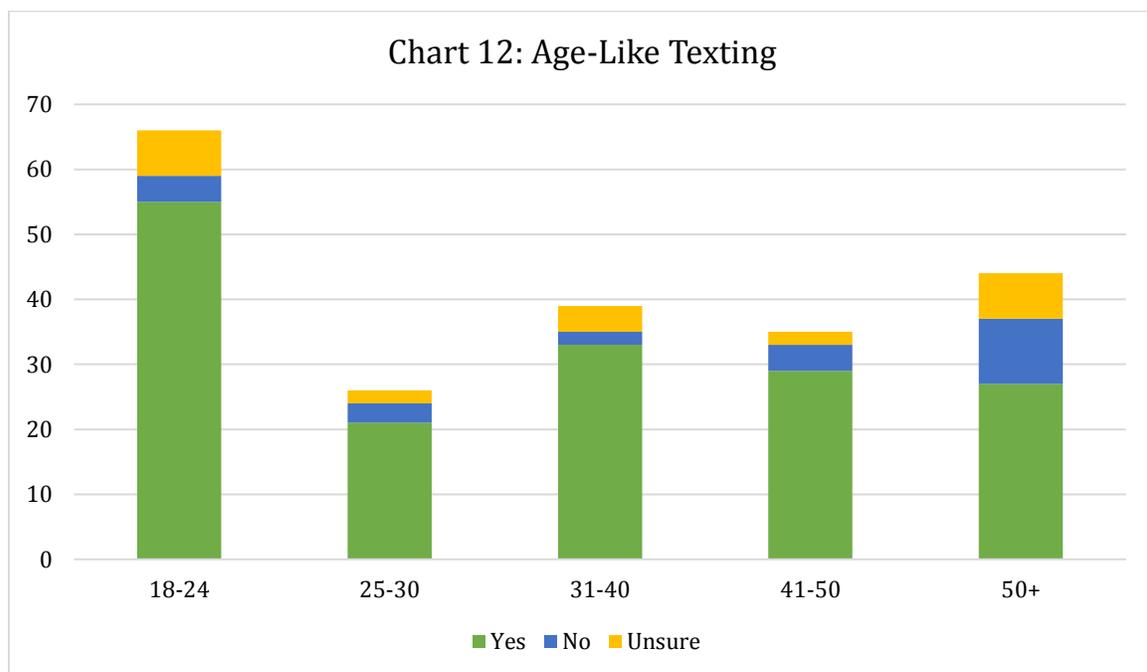
Then participants were asked their parent(s)/guardian(s)' education level. Some college or a bachelor's degree were most common, being selected by 24% and 32% of respondents, respectively. High school and a master's degree were the next most common, reported by 22% of participants each. Only 9% said they had a parent or guardian with a doctorate, 8% had some high school education, 4% went to vocational school, and 2% preferred not to say or had another response (Chart 10).

As for the two individuals who did not text, they cited not having cell phones as the reason. Both were in the 41+ age range, identified as cisfemale, and spoke English as their first language. Neither were originally from Oregon, and they both worked at WOU.

Texting Opinions



Looking at the overall reported frequency of texting, 83% of respondents said they texted every day, and 15% said they texted every few days. Looking closer and comparing this data with reported age groups, 90% of 18-24 year olds said they texted every day, and the rest reported every few days. At least 80% of the 25-30, 31-40, and 41-50 age groups all reported texting every day, with some texting every few days, and one 25-30 year old who responded that they texted once a week. Contrastively, of the 50+ age group, only 58% said they text every day, and 33% said every few days, making up the majority of the overall every few days responses. There were also three 50+ respondents who said they texted once a week, every couple weeks, and rarely (Chart 11).



When asked if they liked texting, 79% of participants said yes, 10% were unsure, and 11% said no. Again, I crosstabulated these responses with the age groups. Around 80% of each age group reported that they liked texting, except for

the 50+ age group. Only 60% said they liked texting, and 22% said they didn't (Chart 12).

Those who answered yes or no were given a box to explain why they did or didn't like texting. I took these responses and decided to run them through the AntConc program after cleaning them with SarAnt to look at word frequency lists. The most common adjectives from responders who liked texting were "easy," "quick," "convenient," and "fast." It was praised for being a direct mode of communication, and quite a few participants liked how it kept them in better touch with friends and family. They reported that texting felt more personal, and that they liked the ability to respond on their own time. Many people praised texting over phone calls, saying calls were "aggressive," "disruptive," and "awkward."

In contrast, the most common adjectives from people who don't like texting were "impersonal" and "slow." Some criticized the "one dimensional" nature of texting and the way that it's become preferred to verbal conversation. Another factor seems to be difficulty in using phone keyboards to text. The primary complaint against texting, though, was that texting loses the qualities of a face-to-face conversation such as tone, facial cues, and body language.

Quotes From Participants Who Like Texting:

- Quick way to communicate with friends, family, employees/supervisees or students. Can be done when convenient for each party
- It is easy and quick. I don't [sic] like talking anymore over the phone.
- It keeps me in contact with people I don't get to see regularly, like family and friends that have moved away.
- It is an easy way to communicate that feels less invasive as compared to a phone call. In other words, I like that I can send messages when it suits me and recipients can answer at their convenience. It feels like less of a bother than calling

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick. Easy. Often immediate feedback. Offers the possibility of responding at my convenience. Quiet.
Quotes From Participants Who Dislike Texting:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking is more efficient and less annoying • It is one dimensional and not a complete form of communication. It is very difficult to understand the emotional impact of text messages without things like inflection in voice, non-verbal cues, etc... • It is easy to lose track of or forget about text conversations, tone is hard to convey, and it is much slower than regular conversations. • big thumbs on small cell phone screen • Too informal, a lot of information can be misunderstood

Table 2: Participant quotes on why they like or dislike texting

When asked if their opinions about texting had changed over the years, 53% said yes, while 43% said no, and the other 4% were unsure. If participants answered yes or unsure, they were then given a box to describe how and why their opinion had changed. I read through all 119 responses and grouped them into three categories: positive change, negative change, and unsure. 64% of opinions had changed toward the positive. Many people cited improved technology such as smart phones and QWERTY keyboards as one reason for a positive shift. Another common reason was that it's become a necessity for work, so people have gotten used to it. Older participants often reported that it's the only way to get younger family members to stay in touch. Overall, people said that they previously did not "appreciate how useful texting is," but now do.

While most opinions were positive, 31% seemed somewhat conflicted or unsure. Many simply don't text as often as they used to since the frenzy died down and it became "more mainstream." Others enjoyed certain aspects of texting, such as convenience and usefulness, but had concerns over the effects on literacy and

socialization. This concern was shared by the 12% of people who had negative opinions. Many of them reported that they have experienced people's communication skills diminishing due to texting. Others disliked texting because of the immediacy; they felt they had to be constantly available.

Quotes From Participants with a Positive Opinion Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I used to think it was better to make a phone call. I realized sometimes it is much better to use when you just need to send a quick message (like, "I am on the way") • As texting technology and the phones themselves improved, texting has become my preferred method of communication. I would rather text than talk on the phone for the most part. • I used to DESPISE texting. I thought it was annoying and inconvenient. I refused for several years to have a phone capable of receiving texts. • Texting has become an obvious way to communicate with the younger generation • I used to think it was frivolous but now see it as a valuable means of communication.
Quotes From Participants with a Negative Opinion Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My opinion has changed over time because I used to be interested in texting when there were keyboards, but texting on screen keyboards is difficult for me. • At first it was nice to have a quicker way to reach people. Unfortunately due to our nature to expect everything to be as instant as possible, it quickly became a primary form of communication. • I feel like all people do is text now and don't have face to face or phone call conversations. • more fights have been caused, texting doesn't inflict [sic] tone. • Texting is a pointless means of conversation for teenagers

Table 3: Participant quotes on whether their opinions changed

As discussed earlier, one of the controversial issues surrounding texting is whether or not it affects literacy, and, if it does, if that effect positive or negative. Participants were given a text box to describe how they thought texting affects literacy. Again, I read through the 210 responses and grouped them into four

categories: positive effect, negative effect, no effect, and unsure. 55% of the participants argued that it negatively affects literacy. Many felt that texting “doesn't require the texter to use correct spelling and grammar,” and that reliance on autocorrect has caused these skills to diminish, in addition to a decline in overall communication skills. Respondents who are educators or parents reported that they've noticed younger people using textisms at inappropriate times, such as in homework assignments or formal emails.

Only 13% felt that it didn't have an effect at all. They claimed that texting is a different form of writing, and doesn't affect how people write in other situations. Some cited research that denies an effect on literacy and said there was “little evidence” to the contrary. Others weren't quite as sure. Many people felt they couldn't say one way or the other, saying it “depends on the person” and the kind of education they got. Some suggested that it doesn't have an effect on older generations who “didn't grow up with this technology,” but that it was possible “for young people.”

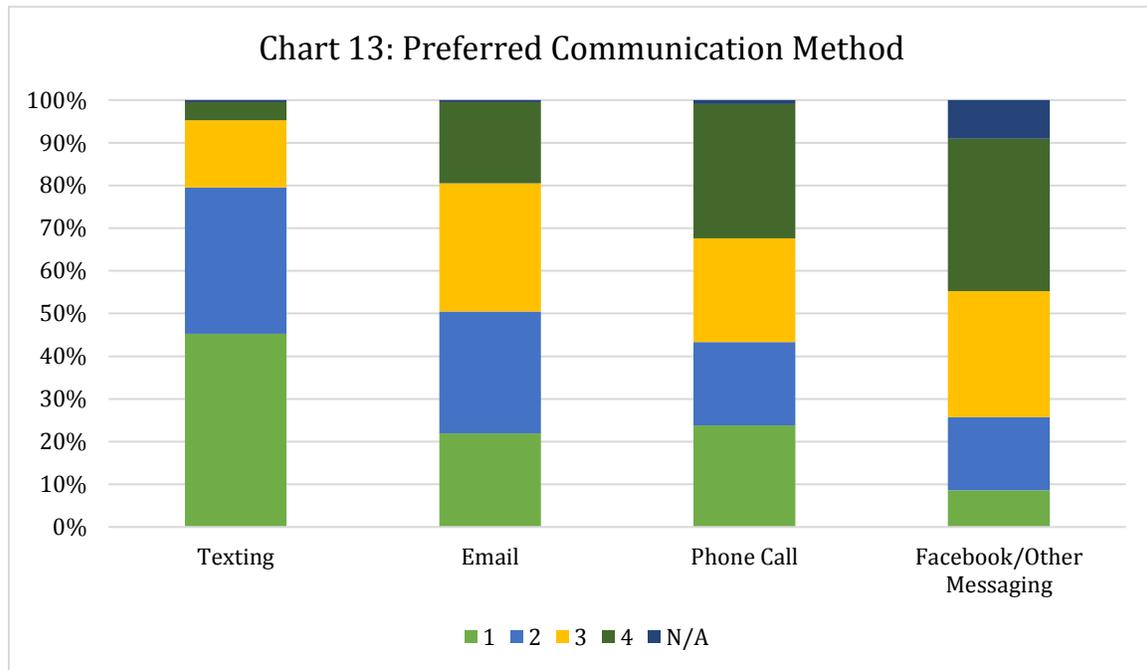
Then there were the 9% who felt that it had a positive effect. Some people reported that since they “read and write a lot more” when texting, they felt their literacy improved due to constant exposure to the practice. It gives people a creative way to use their language. One person felt that it “forces you to look up vocabulary,” and another said that their child “always asks how to spell things.” The other 23% were unsure or gave unclear responses.

Quotes From Participants Who Believe a Negative Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, because people will use acronyms when speaking since they use it so often in texts, or disregard grammar rules or spell checking since their message gets across in a text. • Yes for sure. Texting is short and abbreviated so if that's the only kind of reading one is doing it makes it harder for them to read academically for example. • Yes. I believe that there is not enough of an emphasis on developing proper English for writing emails, papers, and other forms of professional writing. Often, students email me the way they text and it is not professional or encouraged. • Yes kids now are getting phones so young so most of their reading and writing at an early age comes from texting. • Yes! Duh! OMG! WTF? Really?
Quotes From Participants Who Believe a Positive Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes. I think that texting could improve literacy because it allows people who may be unfamiliar with more common ways of speaking or writing to get to be exposed to that language use. I think people can also benefit from the auto-correct that helps with spelling, and people are more likely to correct each other, I think, when they're texting than in an email or something. • Yes, it forces you to look up vocabulary sometimes and spellcheck often. • I know that texting has improved my spelling because I'm embarrassed to send misspelled messages. • Yes, because texting has become such a common practice many people are constantly reading. That has to translate into literacy in some way. • I remember T9 texting. We had to get creative and include tone and mood in a very brief shorthand way, which was probably good for my literacy.
Quotes From Participants Who Believe No Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No - I am familiar with research that suggests otherwise. I don't text instead of reading scholarly content, it's a different task. • No. I think that most people at least implicitly understand the important of context when communicating and make appropriate changes to their affect, style, etc. • No. Language evolves and understood language isn't a threat to the ability to engage with written communications. • I think texting has changed the way we communicate, yes, but I have trouble believing that someone gets a phone and suddenly their ability to

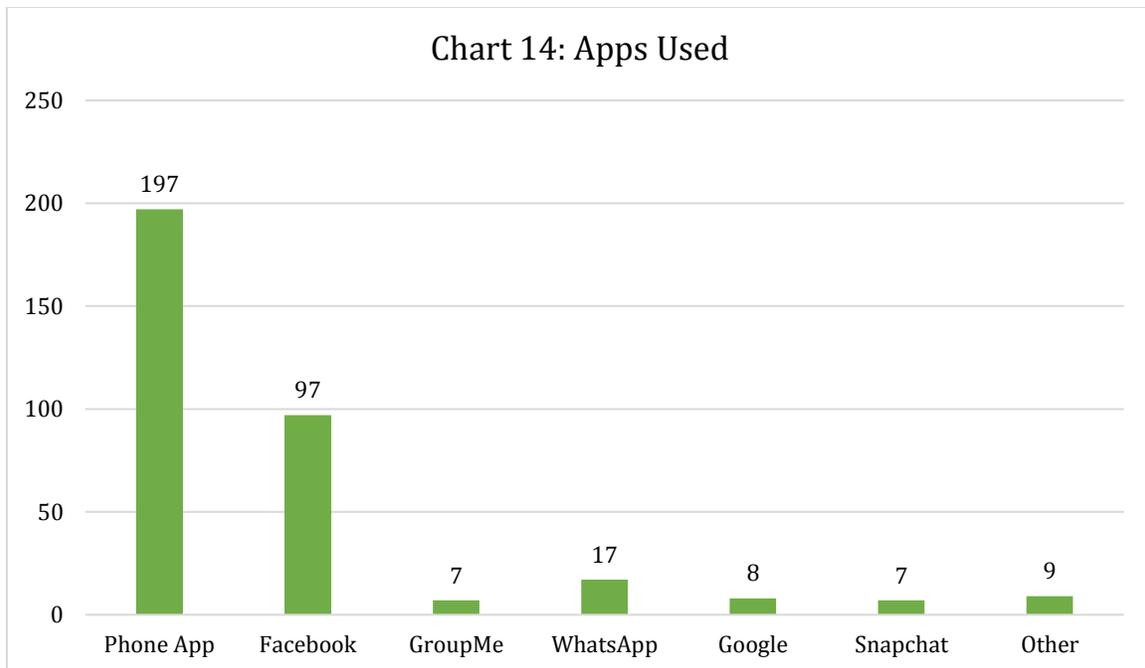
spell or use appropriate grammar goes down. The way I text is completely different from the way I write academically, or send emails for example.

- Personally I don't believe so. To me, it's the evolution of our language.

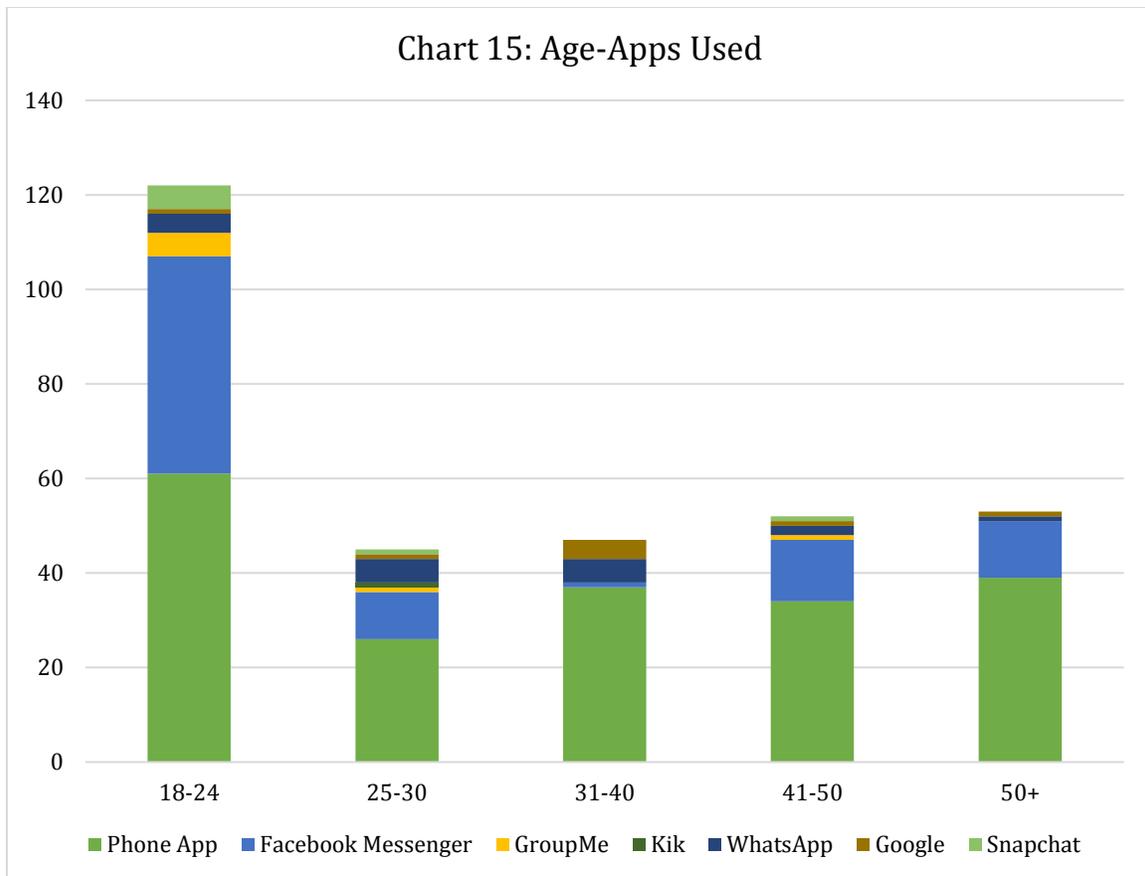
Table 4: Participant quotes on the effect of texting on literacy



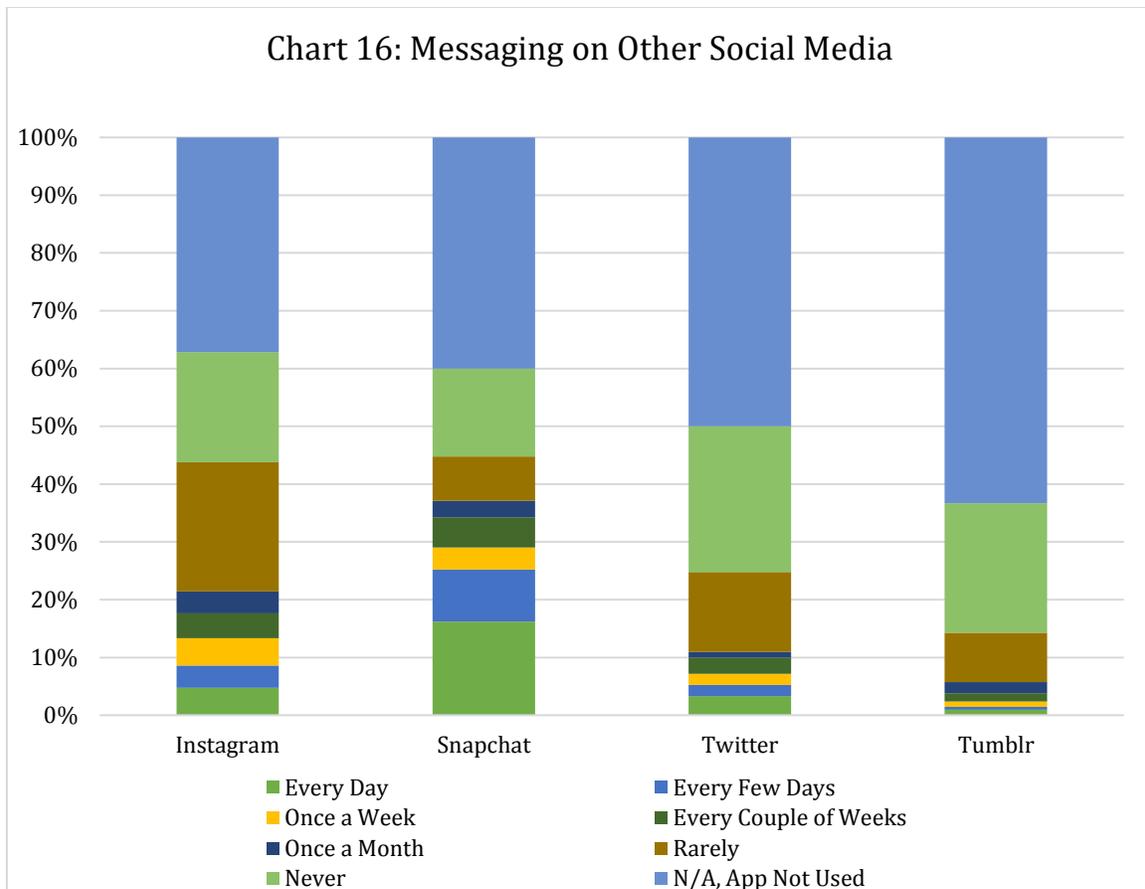
Survey participants were asked to rank these four methods of communication (texting, email, phone call, and Facebook/other messaging) in order of preference, one being highest and four being lowest. Texting was ranked first by 45% of participants, and second by 34%, making it overall the most preferred method. Email was ranked second overall: only 22% marked it as first, but 29% and 30% marked it as second and third, respectively, earning it a higher preference than phone calls, which was ranked as last by 31% of participants. Facebook/other messaging systems was last, with only 9% of participants marking it as first. It was marked third or fourth by 66% of participants, and 9% even said that method was not applicable to them (Chart 13).



I also asked participants which apps they used to text on: the standard messaging that comes with their phone, Facebook messenger, GroupMe, Kik, WhatsApp, or other means, with the option to select as many as applicable. Technology doesn't only affect how people text, but also 'where' they text; different apps offer different features, and these features may affect their choice in messaging app. Unsurprisingly, the standard messaging app was chosen by 94% of participants. Facebook messenger was second-most popular, used by 46% of respondents. WhatsApp was selected by 8% of participants, and GroupMe by 3%. Snapchat and Google were popular answers in the Other category, equaling 3% each (Chart 14).

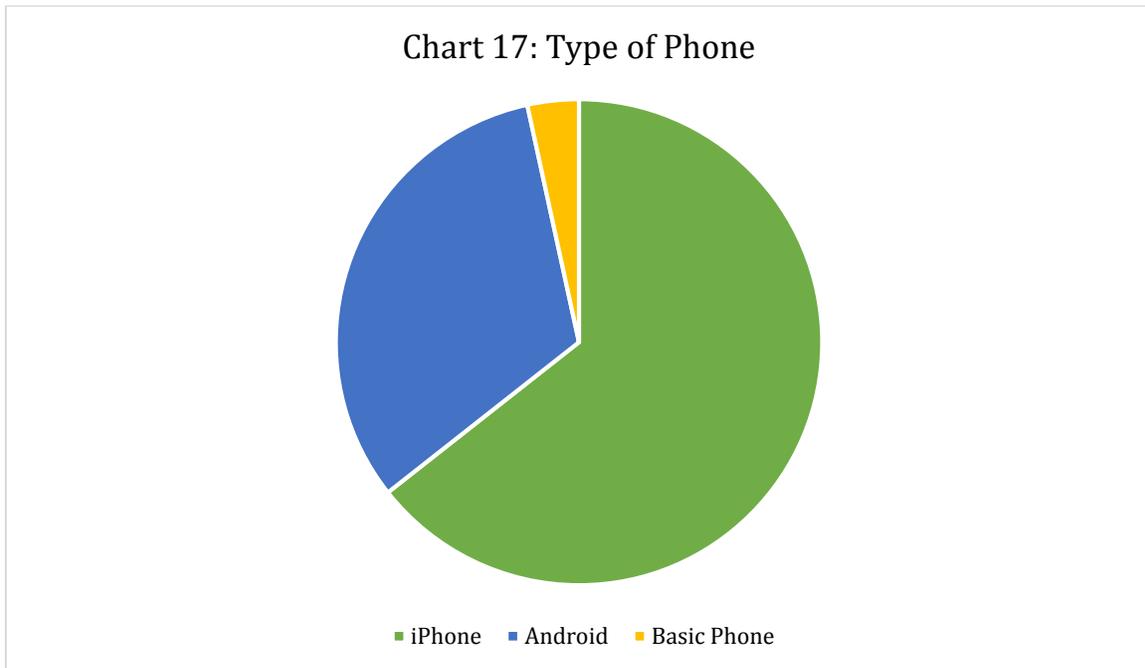


Looking closer at this data to see any interesting patterns across age, I found that at least 92% of respondents from the 18-49 age groups said they used their phone apps, compared to only 86% of the 50+ age group. Facebook messenger was also around 35% more popular in the 18-24 age group than any of the others. GroupMe was also used primarily by 18-24 year olds, and the same goes for Snapchat. However, Google messaging services was reported most by 31-40 year olds, and WhatsApp was used fairly equally across the 18-50 range (Chart 15).

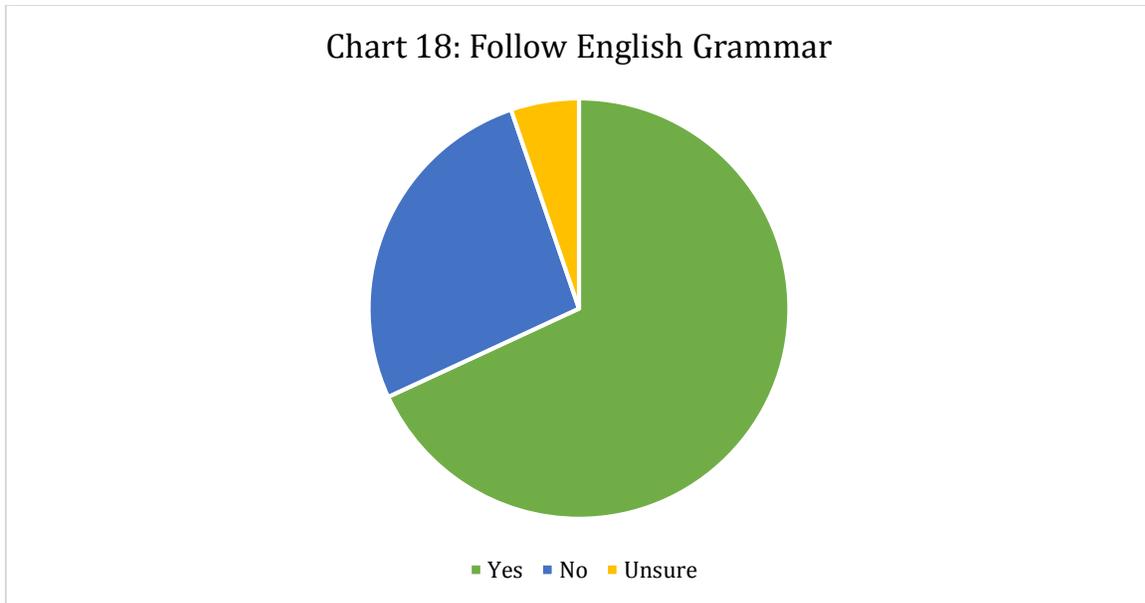


Snapchat's popularity as a messaging app was further reflected when participants were asked how often they use the messaging services on these four social media apps: Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Tumblr. Snapchat was reported as being used every day by 16% of participants, far higher than the other apps. Tumblr's messaging system was the least used, with over half of the participants not using the app in the first place (Chart 16). Overall, it's clear that these social media platforms are not used for their messaging services.

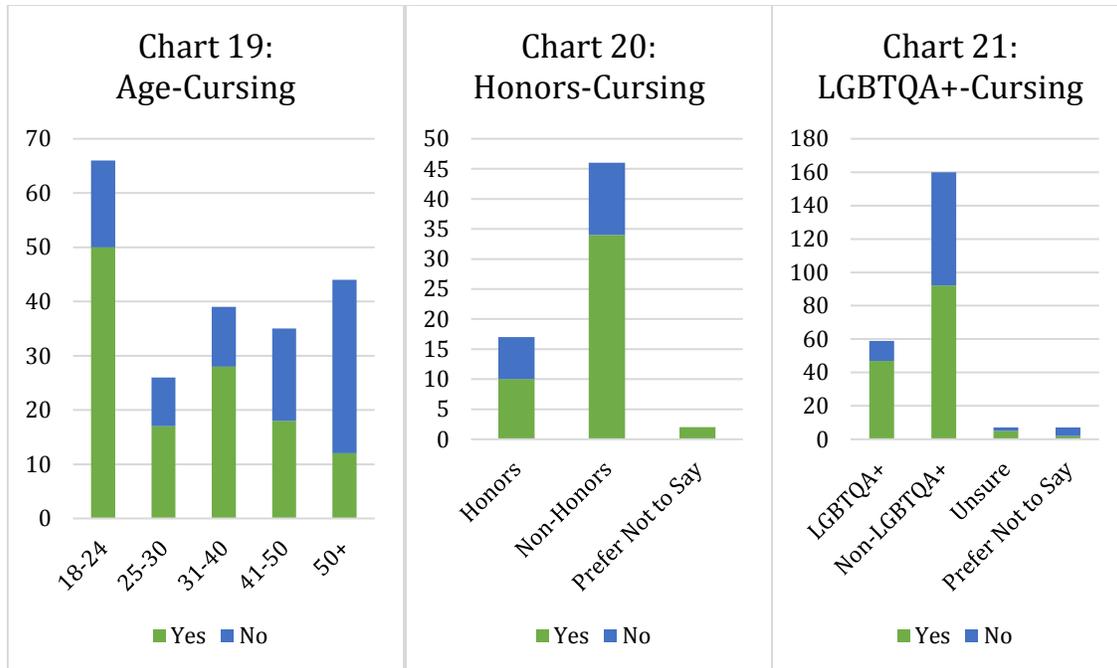
Texting Habits



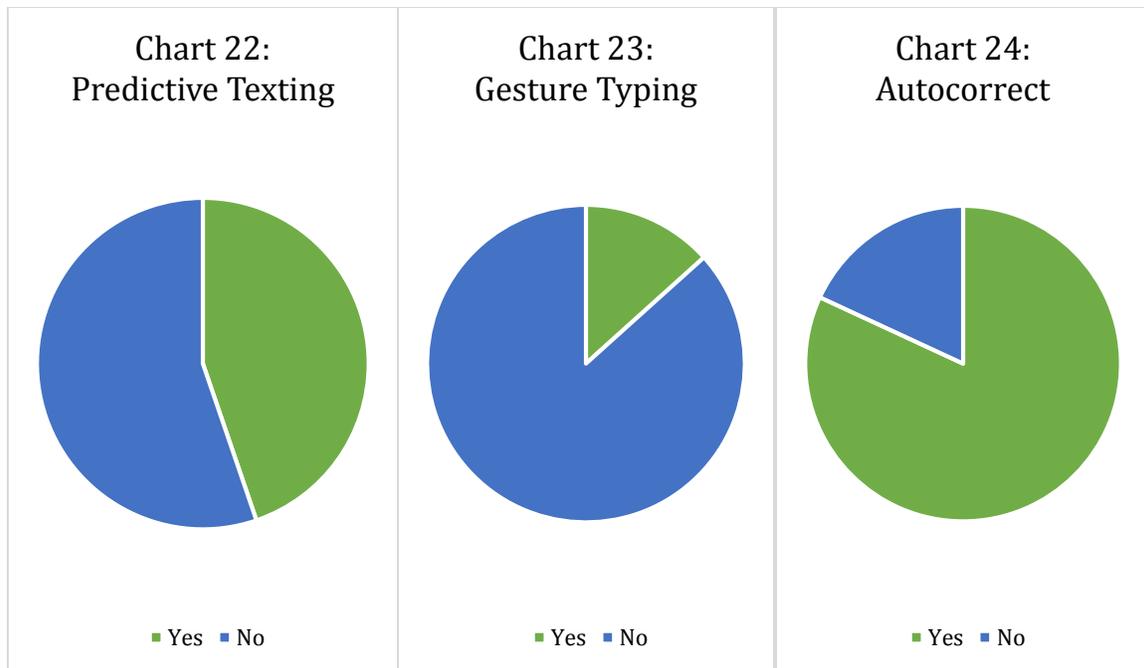
In order to better understand why people text the way they do, I needed to know some factors that may influence their texting. First, I asked if they had a smart phone, since this reveals the technological restraints or benefits that may affect their texting. Only seven participants did not, and of those only two had phones with the older alphanumeric keypad. Also, only two people without smart phones texted on another device, such as an iPod. Of the smart phone users, 65% had iPhones and 33% had Androids (Chart 17).



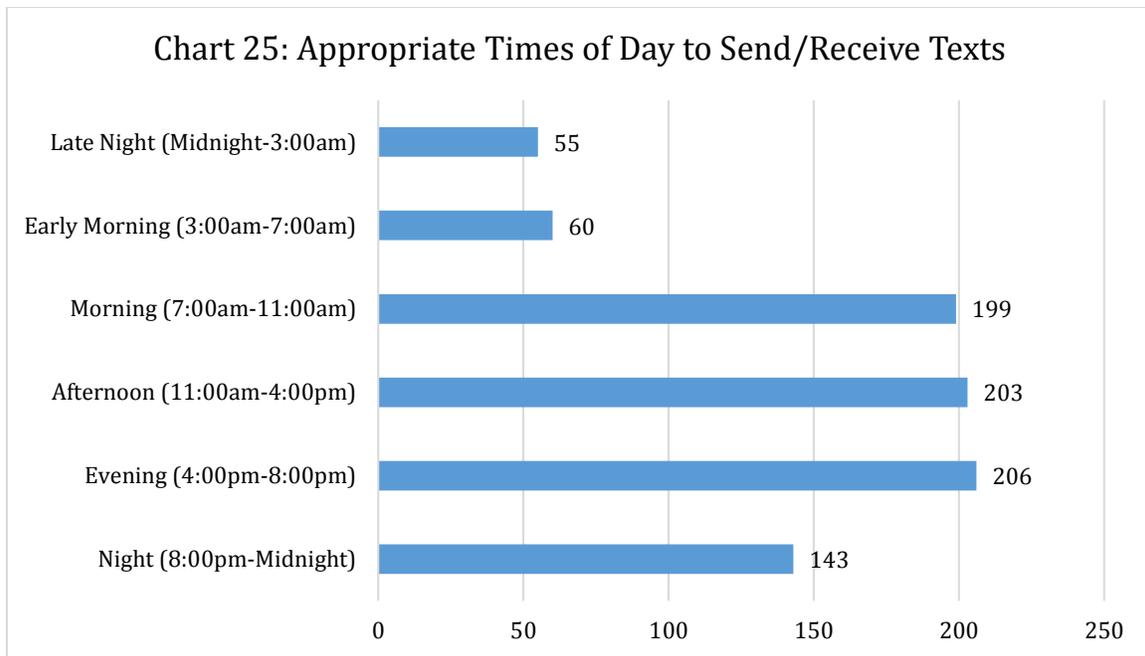
When asked if they believed they followed traditional English grammar rules when texting, 68% said yes. Only 5% reported that they were unsure, and the rest said no (Chart 18). There was no pattern of different answers across age groups, as I expected to find, or across any other demographics. The phrasing of the question was intentionally broad, though I gave examples of “correct punctuation” and “proper capitalization.” When asked why they did or didn’t text this way, many people reported that they use proper grammar out of habit, or because it increases clarity. Many said that they “text the way [they] talk,” and will use full sentences with the occasional textism. People who said they didn’t use proper grammar reasoned they did so because texting is informal, it’s unnecessary to do so, and it’s faster.



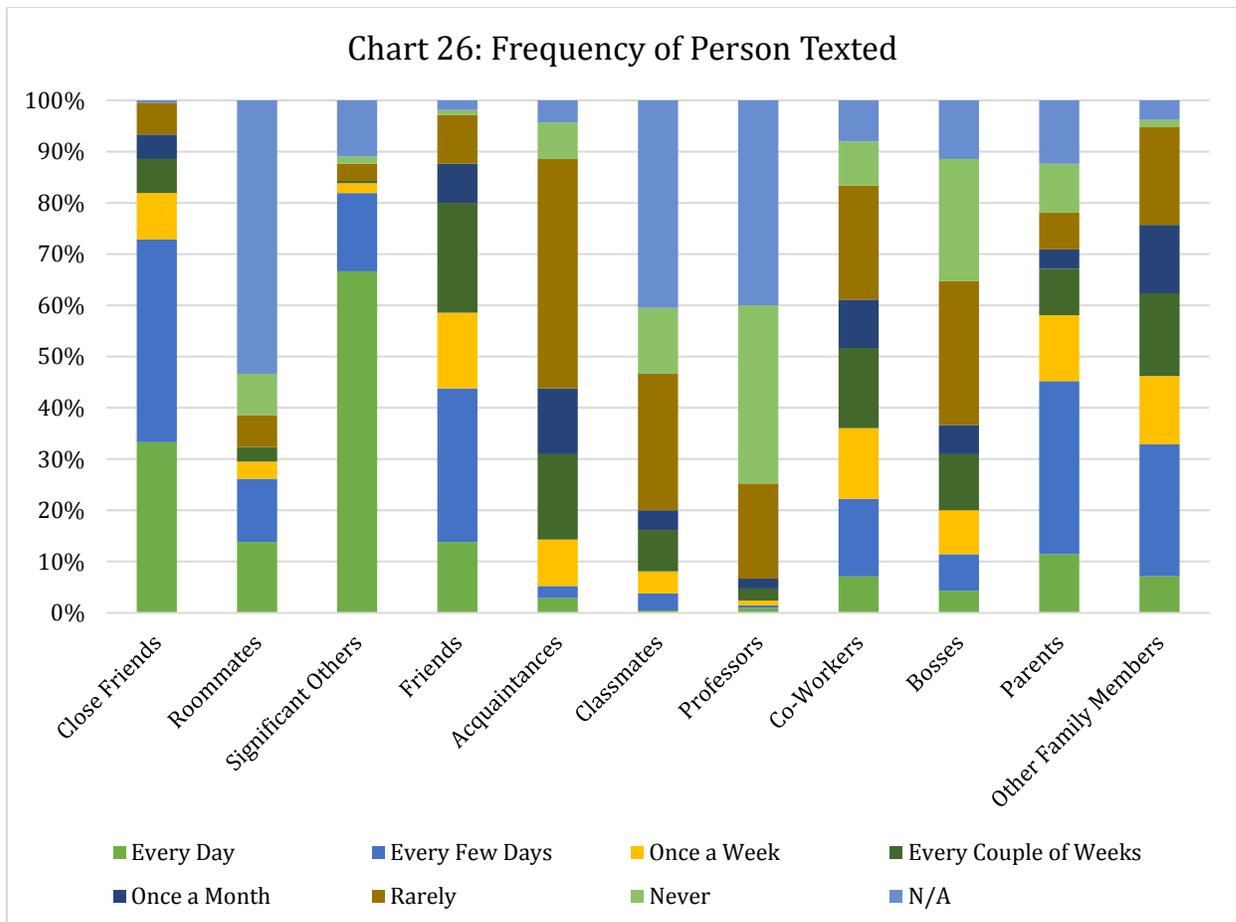
Drawing upon the informality of texting, I asked participants whether they cursed in texts or not. 60% responded yes, and 40% responded no. Looking at demographics, 76% of 18-24 year olds said yes, whereas only 27% of 50+ said yes (Chart 19). 59% of Honors students said they curse in texts as opposed to 74% of non-Honors (Chart 20). Of those respondents who identify within the LGBTQA+ community in gender identity and/or sexual or romantic orientation, around 25% more reported that they curse in text messages than non-LGBTQA+ participants did (Chart 21). This coincides with the results from the Age-Cursing chart, as 10-30% more 18-24 year olds identified as LGBTQA+ than those in the older age groups. From this, we can gather that cursing – a highly informal part of language – is only used in informal instances.



45% of participants reported that they use predictive texting (Chart 22), while only 13% reported that they used gesture typing (Chart 23). Gesture typing is an Android-based technology by Google that allows a user to press their finger to the screen only once and drag their finger around to the letters rather than lifting and pressing for each letter. Respondents who said yes to either of these questions reported their reasoning was that it made texting faster and easier. Contrastively, 82% of respondents said they use autocorrect (Chart 24). Also, 84% of those who said they like texting use autocorrect, while only 65% of those who dislike texting use it.



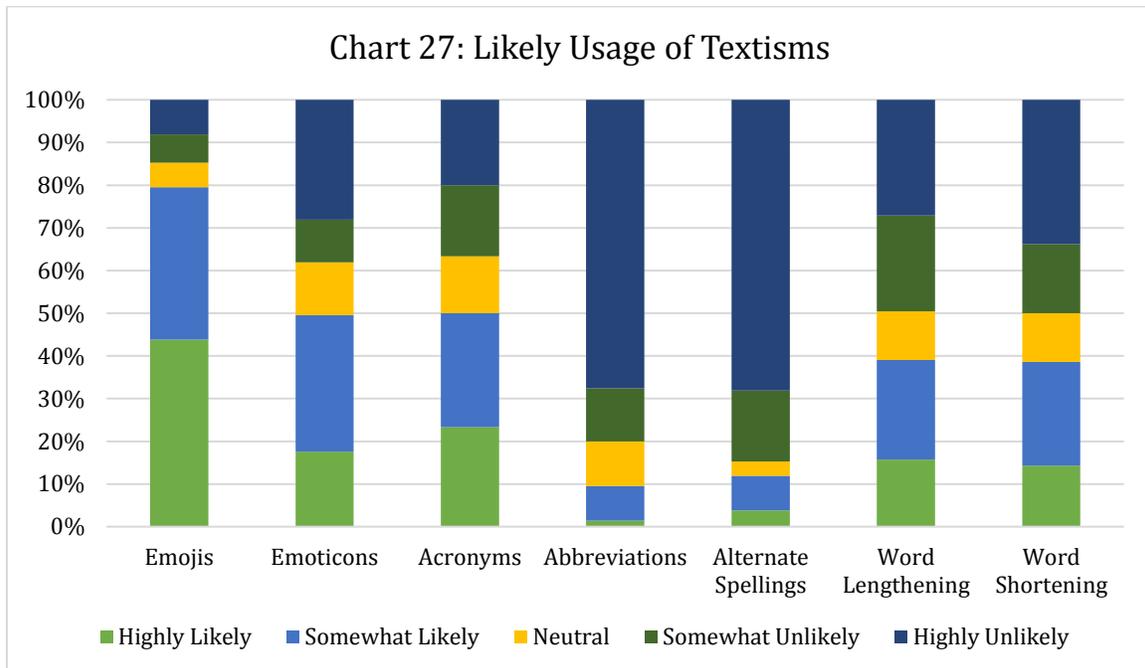
Delving further into texting habits, participants were asked to report what times of day were appropriate for sending or receiving texts. Almost all participants said that texting during the morning, afternoon, and evening (from 7:00am to 8:00pm) was appropriate. 68% said texting at night, 8:00pm to 12:00am, was appropriate, while only around 27% of people said it was okay to text from 12:00am to 7:00am (Chart 25). 20% more of 18-24 year olds said it was appropriate to text during these late night/early morning times, which corresponds with 20% more WOU students and alumni reporting the same.



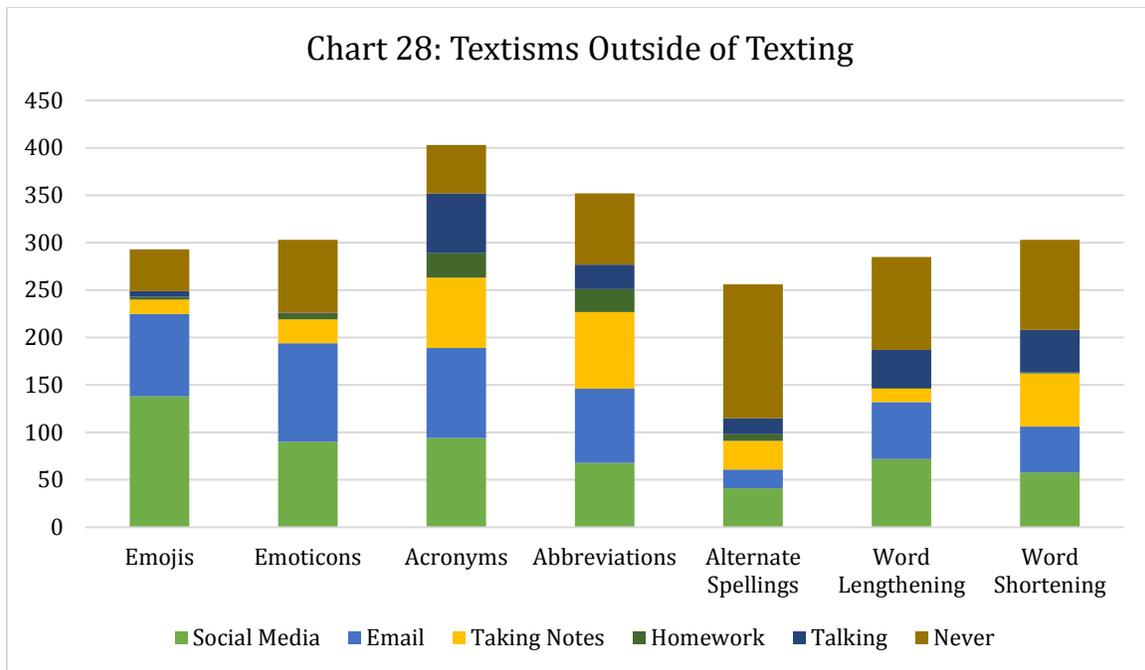
In terms of who the participants are texting, 67% said they texted their significant other every day, far more than any other category. 73% said they texted close friends either every day or every few days. Friends and parents were only texted every day or every few days by around 40% of participants. Roommates, classmates, and professor were texted fewest, with over 40% responding that they were not applicable. Professors were texted rarely or never by 54% of respondents. Classmates and acquaintances were also texted very infrequently (Chart 26).

Thinking of these recipients, 80% of participants said they believed they texted differently depending on who they were texting. 18% said they didn't, and the last 2% were unsure. These percentages were fairly ubiquitous across demographics.

Textisms

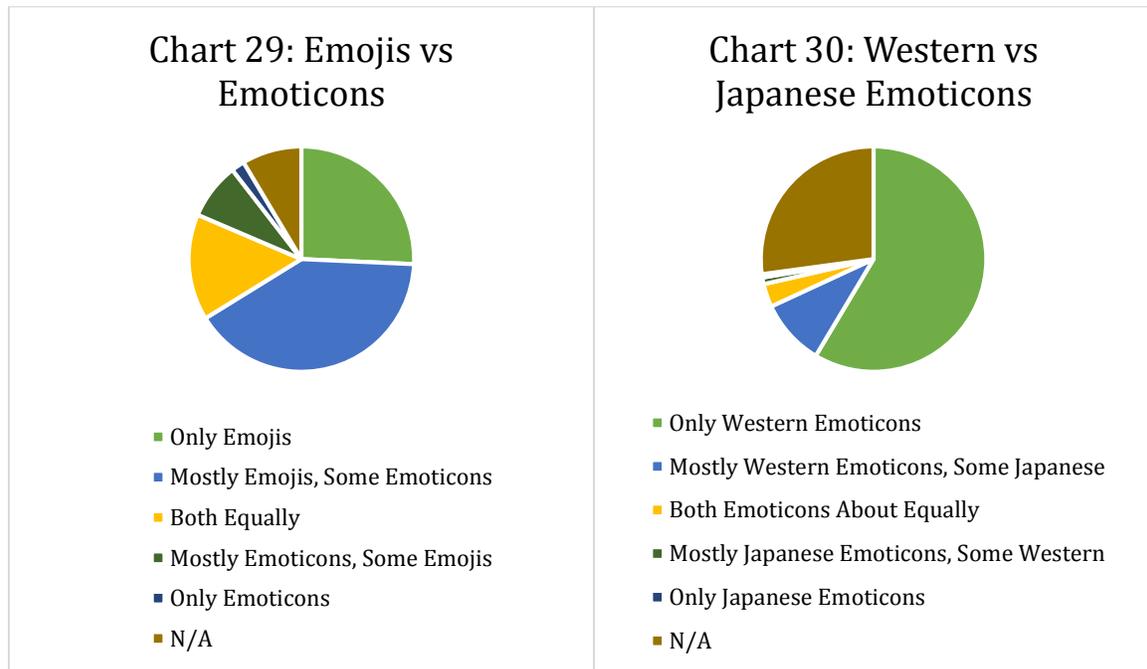


Participants were then asked to rate how likely they'd use these textisms: emojis, emoticons, acronyms, abbreviations, alternate spellings, word lengthening, and word shortening. For examples and definitions of these, please refer to page 22. Emojis were rated the highest, with 44% of participants reporting highly likely and 36% reporting likely. Abbreviations and alternate spellings were definitively the lowest, both were selected as highly unlikely by 68% of participants. The other textisms had a spread of likelihood, with emoticons and acronyms tipping toward likely and word lengthening and shortening staying neutral (Chart 27).



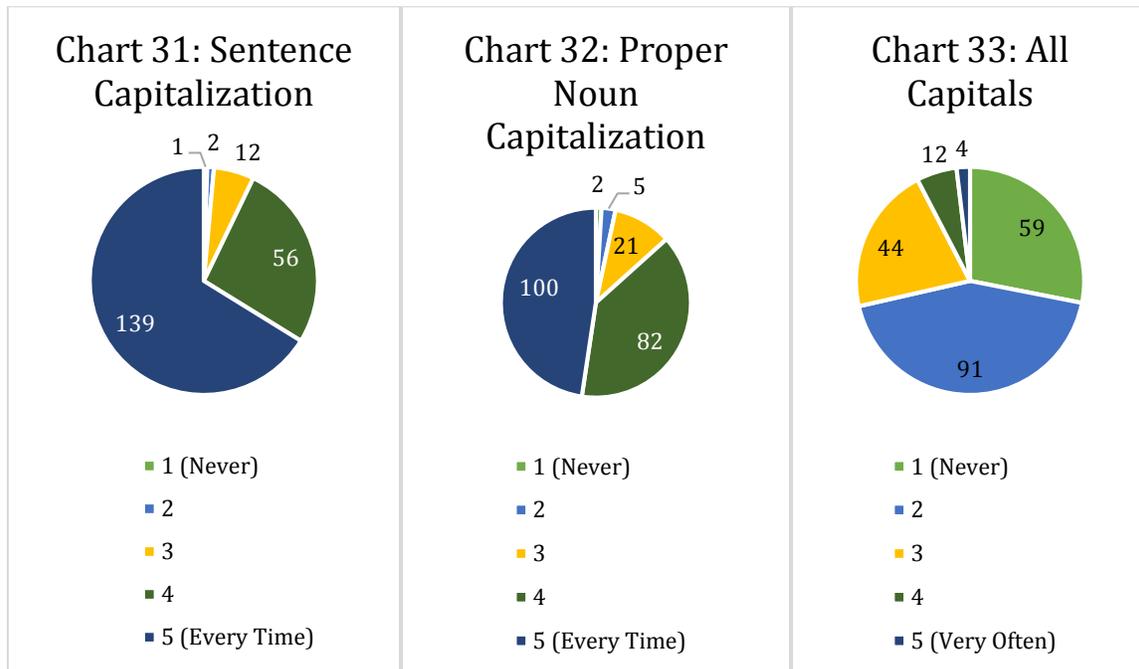
One complaint about textisms is that they're used out of appropriate contexts, such as essays instead of texting and social media, so I asked participants if they'd ever used the above textisms outside of texting in social media, email, taking notes, homework, or while talking. It is difficult or impossible to use some of these textisms in certain situations, such as emojis in speech, but I wanted to cover all bases in one question. Emojis, emoticons, and acronyms were popular choices for social media and email, chosen by around half of the participants. They were trailed by abbreviations, word lengthening, and word shortening, which were chosen by around 30% of participants. Alternate spellings were again least popular, with 67% of respondents reporting that they never used that textism outside of texting, if at all. Acronyms, abbreviations, and word shortening were chosen by about 35% of participants to be used in note taking, but only around 10% said they used the textisms in actual homework. Also, 30% of participants said they used acronyms while talking, and around 20% said they used word lengthening and shortening

(Chart 28). Of course, word lengthening and word shortening are normal aspects of casual conversation, but it just shows that these textisms embody verbal cues. In the future, asking participants under which conditions they would use these textisms outside of the context of texting would be beneficial for understanding.



Emojis are far more popular than emoticons. 26% of participants said they use emojis exclusively, and 40% said they use mostly emojis rather than emoticons (Chart 29). Looking at the age demographic, surprisingly around 15% more 18-24 year olds and 50+ participants reported using only emojis than the other age groups. Most of the users who did not have smart phones reported that they used neither emojis nor emoticons, likely owing to technological limitations. In terms of emoticon usage, there are two kinds: Western and Japanese. Western emoticons are sideways, such as =) or :-0. Japanese emoticons are upright, such as ^_^ or T-T. 59% of participants said they use Western emoticons only, with the numbers dropping off sharply afterward. In fact, 27% said it was not applicable to them,

implying that they don't use any emoticons (Chart 30). This preference for Western emoticons makes sense considering that nearly all of the participants are from the Western side of the world, where they are more likely to be exposed to Western emoticons.



Turning to issues of capitalization, around 88% of people say they capitalize proper nouns and the beginnings of sentences every or almost every time (Charts 31 and 32). How much of this is due to autocorrect or personal doing is not known. The percentage of participants who said they capitalize proper nouns increased with age. Typing in all capital letters, however, is not very common. Only 8% said they do it very or fairly often (Chart 33).

Chart 34: End-Message Periods

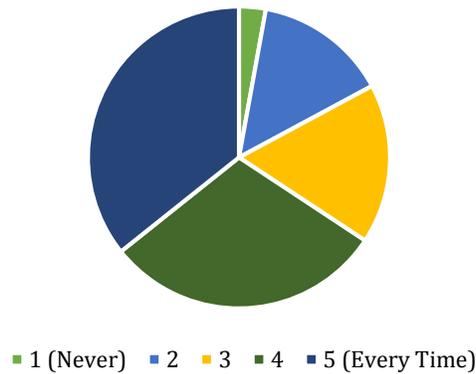


Chart 35: Age-End-Message Periods

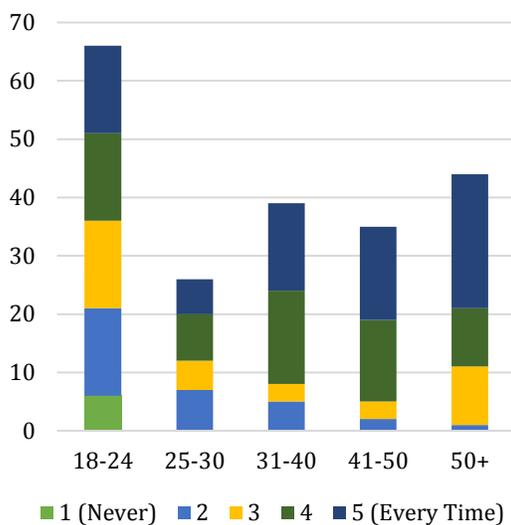
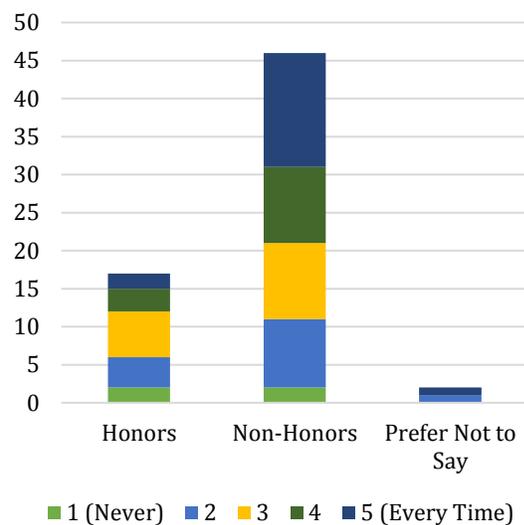
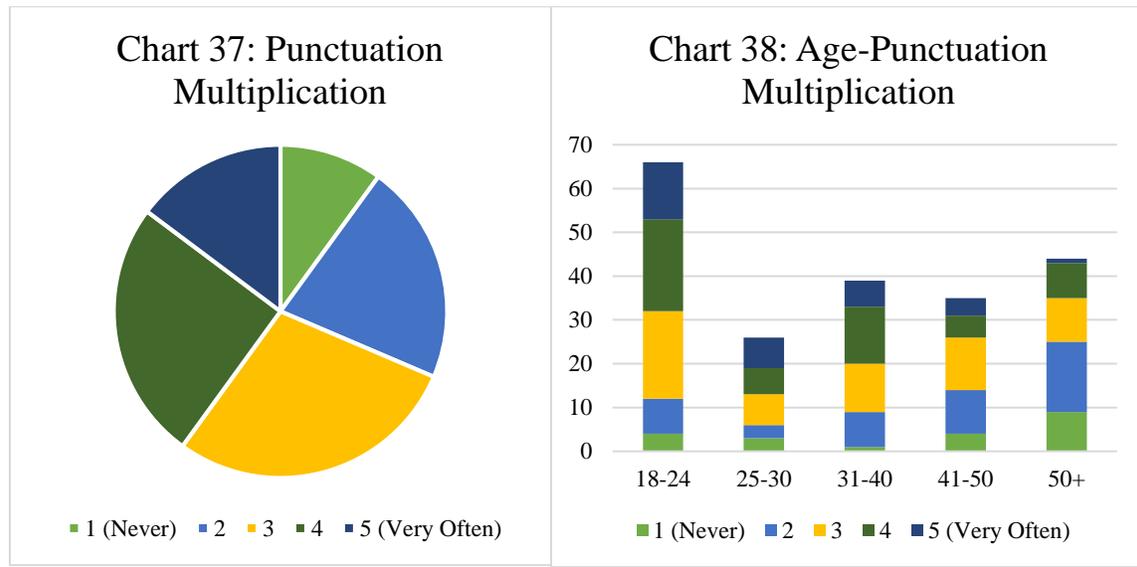


Chart 36: Honors-End-Message Periods

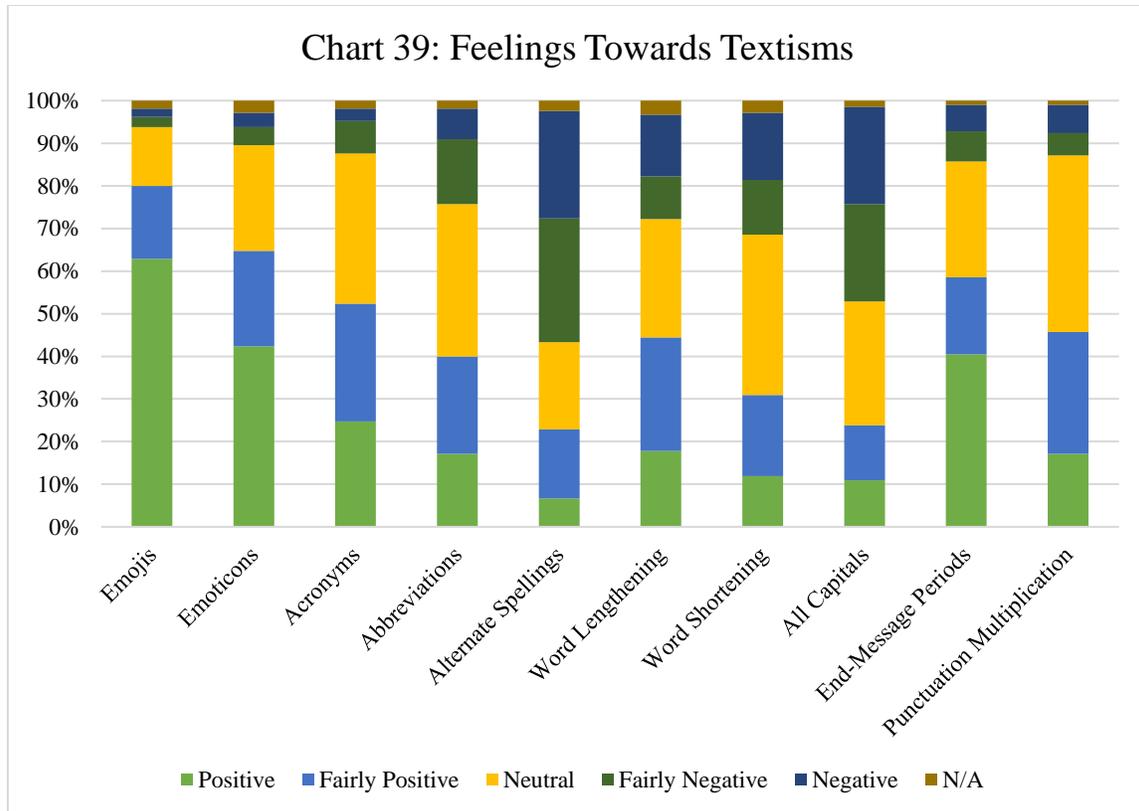


66% of participants reported that they used final-sentence end periods almost or every time (Chart 34). 18-24 year olds had a wider spread of answers, being the only ones to answer that they never used end-message periods (9%). Only 23% said they always use periods. On the other hand, 51% of the 50+ age group said they always use periods (Chart 35). Interestingly, a lower percentage of Honors students said they used end-message periods than non-Honors, a difference of around 25% (Chart 36). I do wonder if a significant percentage of participants

didn't understand the question, interpreting it as periods at the end of all sentences rather than periods at the end of transmission-final sentences. These results surprised me, as it is very rare that I find end-message periods in texts from young people.



Punctuation multiplication had a greater range of answers. 40% reported that they repeated exclamation points or question marks very or fairly often, while only 10% said they never did (Chart 37). This practice is again more common in 18-24 year olds, 52% of whom reported the textism very or fairly often, with the numbers dropping to 20% in the 50+ age group (Chart 38).



The final question asked participants how they felt about the ten types of textisms described earlier. Emojis were received best, with 63% of participants rating it as positive, and 17% as fairly positive. Emoticons and end-message periods were next, with around 40% rating them as positive. Alternate spellings were the most negative. 54% of participants rated the textism as negative or fairly negative. Abbreviations, punctuation multiplication, and word lengthening and shortening were largely rated neutral, by about 40% of participants. And, overall, acronyms tipped toward the positive and all-capitals tipped toward the negative (Chart 39).

DISCUSSION

General Observations

Many of my results correspond with results from other researchers, as well as commonly held beliefs about texting. For instance, “the younger you are the more likely you are to text” (Crystal 89), which held true in my findings (Chart 11). This could be due to a lack of desire to learn new technology in the older generations or due to a difficulty in working it. These findings make the statistics for who likes texting in Chart 12 unsurprising. The more people like texting, the more likely it is that they’ll do it often.

The adjectives and reasons that came up when participants said why they did or didn’t like texting were fascinating because they often contrasted one another (Table 2). Many people praised texting for being easy and fast, while others criticized it for being difficult and slow. It seems the usability of the technology differs, usually across generations. Some reported difficulty using the screen keyboards. Thus, it seems that it is not texting itself that some people dislike, but the functionality of the phones. This is reflected in the section where people were asked about their opinions (Table 3). Many said they grew to like texting once they got used to it or when technology improved with QWERTY keyboards and other functions. It seems, then, that the ability to use the phone technology and understanding the culture surrounding texting are the important factors in whether a person likes texting or not.

Despite the often negative opinions toward texting, it was ranked as the most preferable method of communication by participants (Chart 13). Facebook and

other messaging systems being ranked last surprised me. Facebook in particular, being so widely used, has the ability to connect users all over the world, and its messaging is free with lots of features. Then I thought about the intimacy that's connected with cell phones.

Each cell phone has a phone number that the cell owner must give out in order for people to call or text them. This means that, usually, there is some kind of personal connection between people who text each other because a cell phone number is personal information. This is reflected in Chart 26, where it is clearly shown that people with a closer personal connection, such as significant others, close friends, and family members, are texted more often than people with a more distant personal connection, such as professors, bosses, and acquaintances. The closer one is with a person, the more likely they'll have their number.

In contrast, messaging systems on social media platforms are typically accessible by anybody on the site. With Facebook, all anybody needs is a name in order to find someone and message them. Security measures can limit this to an extent, but overall it means that complete strangers or even just Facebook friends someone hasn't talked to in years all have the ability to message them. This gives a person far less control over their communicative circle, and would make the communication method overall less desirable.

Still, Facebook was the second-most popular choice for apps that survey participants use to text (Chart 14). WhatsApp was next popular; WhatsApp is a messaging application for cell phones developed almost ten years ago, which uses one's cell phone number and a wi-fi connection to send texts for free. Since it came

about when texting costs were still a larger concern, this likely made it very appealing, it is still used today. Google messaging's surprising popularity among the 31-40 range (Chart 15) likely results from them preferring Gmail, and having the ease of messaging from the Gmail screen. Snapchat messaging's popularity was unexpected, since it's not often thought of as a messaging app, but its popularity among the 18-24 year olds makes sense since it is an app that's marketed more toward younger demographics.

In fact, when compared against other social media platforms in Chart 16, it came out on top in terms of messaging service usage. While Snapchat is primarily used for sending disappearing photos and videos to friends, that is still closer in function to text messaging than the primary use of the other three platforms. Instagram is used for posting photos, Twitter is used for sharing short text posts, and Tumblr is used for blogging. In this context, it makes sense that Snapchat is used more for messaging than the other apps.

Usage of predictive, gesture, and autocorrect technology was interesting because I believe it reflects the quality of phone technology today. As discussed earlier, predictive technology was developed to combat the difficulty of navigating the alphanumeric keypad. It was only used by about half the user base (Thurlow with Brown, ref. in Crystal 67), and that continues today (Chart 22). While most people have full keyboards on their phones, making typing words much easier than with the alphanumeric keypad, predictive texting can still speed things up. Gesture typing is an Android-based technology, and most survey participants were iPhone users (Chart 17), making the lack of use of gesture typing make sense, as it was only

used by 13% of participants (Chart 23). The use of autocorrect, however, is widespread. 82% of participants reported that they use autocorrect (Chart 24). Autocorrect primarily corrects spelling, though it also allows someone to skip apostrophes and capitals in words while typing, which requires more thumb taps, while knowing that the phone will automatically change the word to its proper form. This speeds the process of texting up, and lets them be grammatically correct.

The data in Chart 25 on times of day it's appropriate to send or receive text messages was intriguing, because it mostly corresponds with appropriate times to call someone; namely, during daylight hours when people are awake and going about their days. The night, late night, and early morning (8:00pm to 7:00am) times were least popular, but mostly chosen by those in the 18-24 year old age group. This is the age group that is, overall, most familiar with texting and its customs, and they more understand the asynchronistic nature of it. Texters can take their time responding to texts, meaning that someone who sends a text sent at 3:00am is likely not expecting a response until later, when the recipient wakes up, whereas phone calls are immediate and demand response. This is why it's rude to call someone in the middle of the night, but apparently okay to text, thus revealing social norms surrounding communication. Still, since most people are sleeping in the late night and early morning hours, it's not common for people to be up and texting, and texting alerts may wake light sleepers, which is why those times remain unpopular for texting.

Turning to textisms themselves, it seems that they are not as commonly used as the public might think. David Crystal notes that media stories often portray

young people’s texting habits as using purely textisms, when in fact “very few words in a language are abbreviated by texters” (156), and textisms have been found to be used “in as few as 6 per cent of messages” (156). This is reflected by the data in Chart 27. With the exception of emojis, all the other lexical textisms were rated as highly or somewhat likely by only 50% or less of participants. It’s clear, then, that people aren’t rampantly trimming vowels and respelling words as they’re portrayed in the media. In fact, not all textisms are created equal in the eyes of texters.

I believe textism preference has something to do with the nature of certain textisms. For this discussion, I will divide the ten textisms into three categories: pictorial, lexical, and grammatical:

Category	Textisms	Examples
Pictorial	Emojis Emoticons	How are you? ☺ Hi! =)
Lexical	Acronyms Abbreviations Alternate Spellings Word Lengthening Word Shortening	<u>Omg</u> so true [<i>oh my god/gosh</i>] Just leave it unlocked <u>plz</u> [<i>please</i>] <u>Stahhhhp</u> [<i>stop</i>] I’m feeling <u>verrrrrry</u> good I mean <u>probs</u> not [<i>probably</i>]
Grammatical	Alternate Capitalization End-message periods Punctuation Multiplication	SO MUCH what? I’m not sure. I guess so_ Yay!!!

Table 5: Three Categories of Textisms; examples are all genuine texts that I’ve sent

Pictorial textisms – emojis or emoticons – were overall rated as most likely to be used and as the most acceptable textisms (Charts 27 and 39). This is likely because they’re simply cartoon images meant to add emotion or fun to a message. Emojis were developed in Japan by a man named Shigetaka Kurita, and they made

their way into North American usage by the late 2000s (Sternbergh). There are hundreds of emojis in existence, though not all are commonly used. In fact, around 45% of emojis used are a kind of happy face, followed by sad faces (14%) and then hearts (12%) (Evans), showing that emojis and emoticons “are a very literal effort to add a face to written dialogues” (Buchanan 30). Not only do they serve to add facial expressions to text conversations, but they’re also accessible and friendly.

One complaint about textisms is that they make texts unintelligible, but there’s hard to find something vague about a smiley face or a cartoon horse. There are, indeed, some gray areas when it comes to emojis, but these are few and far between. One such issue is “a lack of consistent representations” (Buchanan 32) across platforms, which could cause an emoji to look very different on an iPhone compared to an Android, leaving room for possible miscommunication. Another is a lack of understanding of Japanese culture, such as in the case of the poo emoji (Sternbergh), or due to different interpretations. For example, the emoji with two hands pressing together has been interpreted as either a high-five or as praying hands, but in Japan it’s a gesture meaning thanks (Emojipedia). However, on the whole, emojis have very clear meanings, making them understandable and accessible to texters everywhere.

It also makes them sincere, as Sternbergh discusses. Without the nonverbal cues that come with face to face conversation, it can be difficult to interpret texts, and there’s a tendency to doubt the texter’s intent. Adding an emoji is a way to intensify or add sincerity to a message since “emoji’s default implication isn’t irony” (Sternbergh). Sternbergh also discusses the non-aggressive nature of emojis by

saying they were not “designed to convey meanness” (Sternbergh), and that they have the ability to “soften” messages. The softness of emojis combined with their near-universal understandability makes them by far the most appealing and usable textism, especially when compared against the lexical and grammatical textisms, which can be exclusionary, obscure, and fluctuating.

Lexical textisms are often used to express individualism and to show in-group membership. Like slang words in spoken language, they’re typically used by those in the younger generations to “feel like they are part of the same gang” (Crystal 57). They’re also the most difficult to understand because they take something familiar to people – their written language – and twist it into something that’s unrecognizable to many people. These manipulations can be as tame as turning *want to* into the colloquialism *wanna*, or as alien as taking *what’s wrong with you* and making it *wuts rong wit u*. It looks strange and confusing, similar to a visual dialect – or like another language, as many say – and it causes someone to need to pause and decipher the words if they’re not already familiar with the alternate forms. This may be why alternate spellings were rated the least favorable textism by survey participants (Charts 27 and 39).

Not all lexical textisms have this negative affect, however. For the most part, texting acronyms have fairly standardized meanings, and most acronyms that are in use tend to be the commonly known acronyms, such as *idk* [I don’t know], *brb* [be right back], and *lol* [laugh out loud]. If a user doesn’t know an acronym, they can quickly look it up using Google or Urban Dictionary. Word lengthening is an easily understandable textism, as it simply repeats a letter or letters in a word.

Additionally, word shortening doesn't change much of the word; it merely eliminates some syllables. Many word shortenings in texts also exist in colloquial speech, such as *fam* [family] and g-clipping. For these reasons, these textisms are more commonly used (Chart 27), but they may not be received all too positively (Chart 39). Lexical textisms are a good example of the need to be understood, and since most "texters are well aware of differences in their audience" (Crystal 58-59), and would likely not use alternate spellings in texts to their elderly grandparents.

Meanwhile, grammatical textisms can also be difficult to navigate. It seems that the rules for punctuating text messages shift continually. While the exclamation point was once used "to straightforwardly and sincerely indicate excitement" (Sternbergh), its usage has shifted to irony (Sternbergh), and then to "minimally acceptable enthusiasm" (Sternbergh) in today's world. Thus, in order to show true enthusiasm, "a repetitive series of the mark are now required to express the original sentiment and intent of the point" (Buchanan 34), and additionally all capitals are used for emphasis and excitement. Other punctuation marks have also experienced shifts or expansions of meaning. The question mark is used to express questions, confusion, and uncertainty. The period is no longer "friendly" (Feltman), the comma is "geriatric" (Bennett), and the tilde and the asterisk are coming into new usage (Bennett).

As stated before, "digital punctuation can carry more weight than traditional writing because it ends up conveying tone, rhythm and attitude rather than grammatical structure" (Zimmer qtd in Bennett). With a limited amount of punctuation marks and many different tones and emotions to portray, there's no

doubt that punctuation has its work cut out for it, as Buchanan has discussed. This has caused people to create new ways of punctuating to portray different feelings and sincerity, but “the rules are changing quickly” (Bennett). The “constant flux” (Buchanan) that texting trends are in, especially punctuation, make it a difficult landscape to navigate. Even if someone swears off textisms, they can’t avoid punctuation unless they want to come off robotic and toneless, but using the “wrong kind” of punctuation could spell disaster. Dealing with this is even more difficult for older generations who likely aren’t as ‘in the know’ when it comes to these trends.

I conclude that the issues of understandability and clarity are the important factors when it comes to liking or using textisms. Pictorial textisms add clarity with small cartoons, and are widely used and accepted (Charts 27 and 39). Lexical textisms can be exclusionary due to their in-group and individualistic nature, and tend not to be used as often or received as positively (Charts 27 and 39). Grammatical textism trends change often, making it difficult to know how to properly punctuate a message without causing miscommunication. They’re not used very often due to constant fluctuation (Charts 33, 34 and 37), but their function is still to try to add clarity to texts, so they’re mostly received well (Chart 39).

Claims Against Young People (Because of Texting)

Young People Are Becoming Illiterate

The issue of literacy and texting is no doubt complicated. As mentioned, a lot of respondents claimed that they felt texting had a negative effect on literacy because it “doesn’t require the texter to use correct spelling and grammar.”

However, this is not entirely true. It is possible for grammar and spelling errors to occur in text messages, as they can occur in any written medium, but the idea that someone does “not know basic English” because of texting is inaccurate. Texting is a form of written English, as asserted before, and in order to be intelligible, the sender must adhere to basic grammar. The purpose of texting is to be understood, and despite the view that texters are “deviant” (Crystal 16), there are lines that can’t be crossed if one wants to be understood. Choudhury et al. assert that “characters and words cannot be deleted arbitrarily, as it may seriously hamper the understandability of the message” (157), and as such “there is always an unconscious pressure to respect some of the standard properties of the orthography” (Crystal 17).

I believe that all texters prove their literacy in their textisms. In fact, I argue that many abbreviation textisms came about through a great understanding of the phonetic structure of English. After all, “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” (Crystal 162). Abbreviations such as *h8r* [hater] and *u* [you] come from people noticing the similarities in the phonemes and morphemes of different words. The word shortening *tho* [though] reveals understanding about silent letters in English. Powell and Dixon indeed found “positive associations between texting, reading and phonological awareness” (59) in children.

In fact, many of the textisms are not much different from standard ways we manipulate language in everyday life. In the third chapter of his book, *Txting: The Gr8 Db8*, David Crystal investigates “antecedents in earlier language use” of six kinds

of textisms: pictograms and logograms, initialisms, omitted letters, nonstandard spellings, and shortenings. Crystal argues that there is nothing “especially novel” (53) about textisms, since people have been involved in the practice of manipulating language for centuries. Indeed, what is the difference between shortening *Monday* to *Mon.* and *totally* to *totes*? It’s about the same difference as wearing a swimsuit in public versus underwear: social acceptability.

It has been shown that texters are, on the whole, not manipulating language in any strange or unprecedented way, and that these manipulations actually show deep insight, knowledge, and instincts about their language. As discussed earlier, research shows that texting might just have a positive effect on literacy, and “other writers have instead emphasized the positive and creative effect that texting can have in motivating writers to engage in written communication” (Kemp 54). I believe the conversation should be shifted, then, from how texting affects literacy, to how we can engage young people in improving their literacy and writing skills through texting.

Young People Are Killing Written English

Another common slight against texting is that it is becoming another language, a claim that was echoed by many survey participants. However, the situation is not as drastic as the texting dictionaries and guides would like you to

believe. To suggest that texting and Standard Written English are as different as

GET A LIFE! by Tim Lachowski



English and Romanian is farfetched and nigh hysterical. Again, the purpose of text messages is to be understood by the recipient. Both the sender and the receiver must “[have] a grounding in the standard English writing system” (Crystal 48), or any other language, in order to participate in texting each other.

What people actually mean when they say texting is a different language is that it’s different register. A register is a particular variety of language that has certain a situational context under which it is used. For example, newspaper articles are one register, and advice columns are another. Even though they’re in the same genre of newspaper writing, they have different situational characteristics and are therefore written differently. Register analysis follows that “linguistic features tend to occur in a register because they are particularly well suited to the purposes and situational context of the register” (Biber and Conrad 6).

As stated earlier in this paper, the situational characteristics of spoken conversation and texted conversation overlap greatly:

Situational Characteristics	Spoken Conversation	Texted Conversation
Participants	At least 2	At least 2
Interactivity	High	High
Assumption of shared knowledge	Highly common	Highly common
Mode	Speech	Writing
Production Circumstances	Real time	Possibly planned and edited; often real time
Shared temporal space	Yes	Not necessarily
Shared physical space	Not necessarily	Not typically

Private/Public	Varies	Private
Communicative purposes	Varies	Varies
Topic	Varies	Varies

Table 6: Situational characteristics of speaking and texting; *Register, Genre, and Style* (2009) by Biber and Conrad

One can clearly see the great deal of similarities between speaking and texting. This similarity was enhanced when “the Apple iPhone present[ed] a radical alternative using speech bubbles rather than linear text” (Crystal 68). What’s lost when conversations are written rather than spoken is the tonal and body cues that make up 93% of meaning in communication (Mehrabian qtd. in Buchanan 28). Thus, “text as a vehicle of communication relies almost entirely on external styling, talented wordsmithing, or intrinsic knowledge/assumed intent to convey emotional and intellectual nuances” (Buchanan 28). In the face of this absence of communicative power, textisms were developed.

This emphasizes the point I made in the beginning of this paper, that, while brevity, speed, and fun are all important factors into why textisms exist, their social function to add character and attitude to texts is above all the most important factor. Evans says that emojis “enable us to better express tone and provide emotional cues” to the people we’re communicating with. The inherent informality of acronyms lets the recipient know that you’re not in a bad or serious mood. Letter multiplication can add “emotional nuance that you can’t do in writing” (Erard qtd. in Doll). The lack of a period at the end of a message can assure the recipient that you’re not mad at them. Thus, text language is not due to “ever-loosening standards for written language” (Doll), but rather very purposeful and creative efforts to clarify communication.

Young People Can't Write Essays Anymore

Although to many it may seem obvious to use formal Standard Written English in essays and to not include textisms, it is not apparent to all. Many survey participants who are educators stated that they've had "students turn in papers and official documents with text-speak writing in them." This is reflected in the survey data, where 10% of respondents said they've used some textisms in homework. If it's true that students "treat texting language as though it were the same as formal English," how do we rectify the situation? By teaching them that text language has its place.

What's happening when students turn in homework with textisms is more than likely not "a systematic inability to spell and punctuate" (Crystal 153), but rather a lack of awareness surrounding registers and appropriateness. The situational characteristics of texting were noted above, and textism use should generally be limited to those kinds of contexts: informal, interactive conversations between individuals with some kind of shared knowledge via electronic text. Limits and boundaries can be pushed, but it may be to one's detriment.

In the beginning of this paper I brought up a 2003 article in the Daily Telegraph that told of a girl who wrote an essay entirely with textisms and textspeak. This article seemed to confirm some people's worst fears about texting, but there are doubts as to the legitimacy of this report. The entire essay was never produced as evidence, only a portion that "had very little in common with the everyday texting patterns" (Crystal 24). Crystal suspects that it might have been a

hoax, or a mischievous student simply pushing the limit. After all, in order to effectively deviate from the standard, one must recognize that there is a standard.

The basic understanding of register is likely already in their minds, as 80% of survey respondents said they believe they text differently depending on the recipient. This shows an instinctive knowledge of codeswitching, or alternating between languages or language varieties depending on the context. In fact, 85% of 18-24 year old participants responded yes that they text differently depending on the recipient, when only 64% of 50+ participants. The 18-24 year olds are the ones more likely to use textisms, and therefore are more likely to need to codeswitch. All that's left is to build upon this implicit knowledge.

While it may be frustrating to teach something as obvious as not to use textisms in schoolwork, it is clearly necessary. Teenagers are creative and energetic, and they "have long been a source of linguistic and behavioral novelty" (Buchanan 30). However, "what teenagers are not good at is fully understanding the consequences of what they are doing, in the eyes of society as a whole" (Crystal 163). If students were taught the concept of registers and the varying acceptability of language types within different genres and registers, they would have the explicit knowledge that textisms shouldn't be used in essays and lab reports. In fact, I predict that writing skills would improve overall if students were taught genre and register because they would be able to tailor their writing to the genre they're writing for. As Crystal says, "If there are children who are unaware of the difference between texting and standard English, then it is up to teachers to make them aware" (Crystal 165).

Young People Don't Have Conversations

In the survey results, I was surprised to find that, overall, people even preferred email to phone calls. Perhaps that was due to a personal bias, as I tend to use email simply for professional encounters, and I call home often. Yet, it seems that “a generation of e-mailing, followed by an explosion in texting, has pushed the telephone conversation into serious decline” (Shapira). This is, at times, bewildering to parents who grew up with calling people on the phone and whose children won't call them back (Shapira). There were many survey respondents who reported that they found texting to be a good way – or the only way – to keep in contact with younger family members. In fact, it's been found that “63 per cent of parents who text believed that it improved their communication with their child” (Crystal 108).

This begs the question, why are phone calls so undesirable? Baron says that “the most important effect of IM on language turns out to be not stylized vocabulary or grammar but the control seasoned users feel they have over their communication networks” (“Instant” 30). One of the features of texting is that responses can be made on the user's own time, and texts can be thought out and planned. In contrast, the real-time turn-taking of phone calls and in-person conversation requires immediate answers and on-the-spot thinking. Some people even say that “phone calls are by their nature impolite, more of an interruption than the blip of an arriving text” (Shapira).

This is reflected in my survey data. When reporting why they like texting, many survey participants said that they preferred texting to calling because it was less disruptive and faster. Others liked the visual aspect of the conversations, and the fact that conversations could be looked back on with full accuracy. One person said they felt “awkward” when on the phone, which likely has to do with the pressure of real-time responses. A few said that they use texting to arrange times to have phone calls, which is something that Sternbergh found as well. Regardless of why they prefer texting to calling, this shift in communication preference has sparked concern that young adults are losing their ability to socialize, since they seem to prefer looking at screens rather than looking at faces.



This cartoon, by Adam Ellis of BuzzFeed, addresses that concern. The top panel shows four people sitting on a train, staring at their screen and not talking. The bottom panel shows that, while

they may not be talking to each other, they are ‘talking’ to the people they’re texting.

This comic portrays texting as a means of communication – just not verbal communication. It is doubtless that the way we communicate is changing, and it's likely almost entirely due to cell phones. It seems that we have shorter attention spans, and that we value "directness" (Crystal 97) in our interactions. We also value the control that texting gives us: control over our responses, when we communicate, and with whom.

This "discourse management" (Baron "Always" 32) that people are engaging in is no new practice. It previously manifested itself in screening phone calls and caller ID. As Baron says, "individuals have always developed strategies for controlling their interactions with other people" ("Always" 32). It's no different with text messaging. Just as in the past people would cross the street to avoid interacting with someone, today we pretend we're on the phone, or we ignore text messages and emails until we want to respond. Understood in this way, it's unlikely that humans as a species are becoming more antisocial than before, but rather that we have greater control over who we socialize with. After all, we only have so much energy for social interactions, and we'd rather spend that energy on our loved ones than on strangers on the train.

Young People Have No Respect for the Standard

Teenagers and young people have always been innovators of language, and the freedom of the internet has allowed for such innovations to flourish. This spirit was enhanced in the millennial generation, as they were educated with an "informal, student-centered, and non-normative" (Baron "Always" 169-170) approach. A

societal focus on multiculturalism has led to an emphasis on the importance of diversity, and there is where we see the seeds of non-standardism begin to grow (Baron "Always" 170).

First, it's important to acknowledge that "the process of standardisation [sic] is associated with power in society" (Leith 56) and always has been. The idea of proper English is inherently ableist, racist, and classist. In order for there to be "acceptance of such a norm, therefore, occasions a rejection of kinds of English that are felt to be outside it" (Leith 42). These kinds of English that are outside of the norm have historically been racial and ethnic dialects, those who speak with accents, those from lower classes, those with speech or learning impediments, and, most recently, those who use textisms. As is seen with the stigmatization of Southern American English or African American Vernacular English, for example, "non-standard speech is equated with simplicity or roughness" (Leith 42), and thus pressures people to change their language to fit the standard.

Therefore, "by its very nature, diversity is at odds with a normative social model" (Baron "Always" 170). It's difficult, then, for a standard to be enforced while also valuing cultural and social differences. Still, standard language is enforced primarily through pressure to be successful; whether that's success in jobs, resumes, public opinion, or more. However, this pressure isn't as intense in the informal spaces of the Internet or text messages. In these contexts, free of societal pressures, young people can make use of textisms and non-standardisms to express their individuality and identity the same way they do with slang in informal speech.

The true freedom with this medium comes from the fact that “text messaging has still to become codified. There is no ‘house style’ for texting, as there is in writing for newspapers or journals” (Harrison et al. 192), and I doubt there ever will be. As I’ve discussed, there are norms and expectations surrounding texting and textisms, but they are socially and community-driven, rather than rule-based, and there’s always room for innovation. There can never be a standard for texting the way there is for newspaper articles or essays because the informality of texting prevents it. Just like with casual spoken conversations, there are ways to have more successful interactions with texting, or ways to make yourself more understandable, but there is no governing board that approves text messages before they’re sent. Texters are free to text however they want, and most follow the standards that have been agreed upon by most texters, which have been discussed ad nauseum. Therefore, while it is true that texting defies standards of formal written English, it is exactly in line with the standards of its register.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of my survey reflect a small area of the world, but coincide with many other researchers' conclusions. I unfortunately was not able to uncover much in the way of patterns across demographics – except in terms of age – due to a low numbers of minority participants. In the future, larger and/or more specific demographic samples will likely reveal deeper insights into the way different kinds of people use and react to textisms. In addition to this, collecting sample texts from participants would also give a greater understanding to how people text and why. I originally planned to conduct interviews with a sampling of survey participants, but was not able to do so.

A narrower scope on certain issues of texting and textisms will likely allow for more in-depth results. Research focused more on textisms themselves may benefit from interviews and having research participants interpret and react to different texts to test the effects and purposes of textisms. There are also many different aspects of texting that were not touched on in this study, such as the new messaging features that Apple added in iOS 10 that include handwritten messages, messaging apps, and message effects.

This was the first time I've conducted a major research project and survey, and in the future, I plan to design more effective surveys and to conduct interviews to get more in-depth responses from my participants. As always, when data relies on participants self-reporting, all data relies on participants' truthfulness and interpretations of the questions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I affirm that textisms are valid innovations of written English that have a specific communicative purpose. Texting is a new informal register of electronic communication, which has community-built standards, and writing effective text messages is a skill like any other. Its distinctive and non-standard features are often used as a means of attacking young people for being deviant or disrespectful, but in truth are reflective of intuitive knowledge of language and creative manipulation. Textisms may very well improve literacy through meaningful manipulations of the language, but, regardless, participating in texting will more than likely help one engage with family, friends, and the world at large.

CHARTS AND TABLES INDEX

Charts

Chart 1: Age.....	28
Chart 2: Racial/Ethnic Identity.....	28
Chart 3: Gender Identity.....	29
Chart 4: LGBPQA+ Identity.....	29
Chart 5: Relation to WOU.....	30
Chart 6: Honors Students.....	30
Chart 7: Subjects Taught.....	30
Chart 8: Native State.....	31
Chart 9: First Language.....	32
Chart 10: Parent/Guardian Education Level.....	32
Chart 11: Age-Frequency of Texting.....	33
Chart 12: Age-Like Texting.....	34
Chart 13: Preferred Communication Method.....	40
Chart 14: Apps Used.....	41
Chart 15: Age-Apps Used.....	42
Chart 16: Messaging on Other Social Media.....	43
Chart 17: Type of Phone.....	44
Chart 18: Follow English Grammar.....	45
Chart 19: Age-Cursing.....	46
Chart 20: Honors-Cursing.....	46
Chart 21: LGBTQA+-Cursing.....	46

Chart 22: Predictive Texting.....	47
Chart 23: Gesture Typing.....	47
Chart 24: Autocorrect.....	47
Chart 25: Appropriate Times of Day to Send/Receive Texts	48
Chart 26: Frequency of Person Texted	49
Chart 27: Likely Usage of Textisms.....	50
Chart 28: Textisms Outside of Texting	51
Chart 29: Emojis vs Emoticons	52
Chart 30: Western vs Japanese Emoticons	52
Chart 31: Sentence Capitalization	53
Chart 32: Proper Noun Capitalization.....	53
Chart 33: All Capitals	53
Chart 34: End-Message Periods	54
Chart 35: Age–End-Message Periods	54
Chart 36: Honors–End-Message Periods.....	54
Chart 37: Punctuation Multiplication.....	55
Chart 38: Age-Punctuation Multiplication	55
Chart 39: Feelings Towards Textisms.....	56

Tables

Table 1: The ten textism types that I focused on in the study.....	26
Table 2: Participant quotes on why they like or dislike texting	35-36
Table 3: Participant quotes on whether their opinions changed.....	37

Table 4: Participant quotes on the effect of texting on literacy	39-40
Table 5: Three Categories of Textisms	61
Table 6: Situational characteristics of speaking and texting	68-69

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Demographics

1. How old are you?*

- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 50+
- Prefer not to say

2. What is your ethnic/racial identity? Check all that apply.*

- White/Caucasian
- Native American
- Black
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please Specify)

3. What is your gender identity?*

“Cis-” is the opposite of “Trans-”, it means the gender you were assigned at birth and the gender you identify as both match up.

- Agender
- Bigender
- Cisfemale
- Cismale
- Demigirl
- Demiboy
- Genderfluid
- Gender non-conforming
- Non-binary
- Transfemale
- Transmale
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please Specify)

4. Do you identify anywhere on the LGBPQA+ spectrum in terms of romantic and/or sexual identity?*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
- Prefer not to say

5. In relation to WOU, you are a:*

- Student
- Alumni
- Professor/Teacher
- Staff member
- Community member
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please Specify)

6. Are you in the Honors Program?*[This only displayed if the participant marked Student on Q5]

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

7. What subjects do you teach?*[This only displayed if the participant marked Professor/Teacher on Q5]

8. What is your parent(s)' or guardian(s)' education level?*

- Some high school
- High school
- Vocational school
- Some college
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please Specify)

9. Are you from Oregon?*

- Yes

- No
- Prefer not to say

10. Where are you from?* [This only displayed if the participant marked No on Q9]

11. What is your first language?*

- American Sign Language
- Arabic
- Chinese
- English
- French
- German
- Spanish
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please Specify)

12. Do you text primarily in English or your first language?* [This only displayed if the participant marked anything other than English]

- English
- First language
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please Specify)

Texting

13. Do you text?*

- Yes
- No

14. Why don't you text?* [This only displayed if the participant marked No on Q13, and then the survey ended]

Texting Opinions

15. How often do you text?*

- Every day
- Every few days
- Once a week
- Every couple of weeks
- Once a month
- Rarely

16. Do you like texting?*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

17. Why do you like texting?* [This only displayed if the participant marked Yes on Q16]

18. Why don't you like texting?* [This only displayed if the participant marked No on Q16]

19. Has your opinion of texting changed over the years?*

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

20. How and/or why has your opinion changed?* [This only displayed if the participant didn't mark No on Q19]

21. Do you believe texting has an effect on literacy? Please explain.*

22. Please rank these communications methods in order of your preference, 1 being highest and 4 being lowest.*

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|-----|
| - Texting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | N/A |
| - Facebook/Other messaging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | N/A |
| - Email | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | N/A |

- Phone call 1 2 3 4 N/A

23. Which messaging apps do you use most frequently to text?*

- Standard phone messaging app Kik
- Facebook Messenger WhatsApp
- Group Me Other (Please Specify)

24. How frequently do you use the messaging services on these social media apps?*

	N/A, app not used	Never	Rarely	Once a month	Every couple of weeks	Every few days	Every day
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tumblr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Texting Habits

25. Do you have a smart phone?*

- Yes
- No

26. What kind of smart phone?* [This only displayed if participants marked Yes on

Q25]

- Amazon Fire Phone
- Android
- iPhone
- Windows Phone
- Other (Please Specify)

27. What kind of keyboard does your phone have?* [This only displayed if participants marked No on Q25]

- QWERTY
- Number Pad

28. Do you also text on another device?* Such as an iPod touch or a tablet. [This only displayed if participants marked No on Q25]

29. Do you believe you follow traditional English grammar rules when texting?* (Ex: correct punctuation, proper capitalization, etc.)

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

30. Why or why not?*

31. Do you curse in text messages?*

- Yes
- No

32. Do you use predictive texting?*

- Yes
- No

33. Why do you use predictive texting?* [This only displayed if participants marked Yes on Q32]

34. Do you use gesture typing?*

- Yes
- No

35. Why do you use gesture typing?* [This only displayed if participants marked Yes on Q34]

36. Do you use autocorrect when texting?*

- Yes
- No

37. Which of these times of day is it appropriate to send or receive text messages?*

Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Late night (Midnight-3:00am) | <input type="checkbox"/> Afternoon (11:00am-4:00pm) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early morning (3:00am-7:00am) | <input type="checkbox"/> Evening (4:00pm-8:00pm) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Morning (7:00am-11:00am) | <input type="checkbox"/> Night (8:00pm-Midnight) |

38. How often do you text these people?*

	Every day	Every few days	Every couple of weeks	Once a month	Rarely	Never	N/A
Close friends	<input type="radio"/>						
Roommates	<input type="radio"/>						
Significant others	<input type="radio"/>						
Friends	<input type="radio"/>						
Acquaintances	<input type="radio"/>						
Classmates	<input type="radio"/>						
Professors	<input type="radio"/>						
Co-workers	<input type="radio"/>						
Bosses	<input type="radio"/>						
Parents	<input type="radio"/>						
Other family members	<input type="radio"/>						

39. Do you believe you text differently depending on who you're texting?*

- Yes

- No
- Unsure

Textisms

40. How likely are you to use each of these textisms in a text message?*

	Highly likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Highly unlikely
Emojis	<input type="radio"/>				
Emoticons (ex: “:)” or “^o^”)	<input type="radio"/>				
Acronyms (ex: OMG or af)	<input type="radio"/>				
Abbreviations (ex: “l8r” for “later” or “cya” for “see you”)	<input type="radio"/>				
Alternate spellings (ex: “gurl” for “girl” or “chu” for “you”)	<input type="radio"/>				
Word lengthening (ex: “worrrrrd” or “whyyyyy”)	<input type="radio"/>				
Word shortening (ex: “talkin” or “probs”)	<input type="radio"/>				

41. Have you ever used these textisms outside of texting?*

	Social Media	Email	Taking Notes	Homework	Talking	Never
Emojis	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Emoticons	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Acronyms	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Abbreviations	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Alternate spellings	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Word lengthening	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Word shortening	<input type="checkbox"/>					

42. How often do you use emojis versus emoticons?*

- Only emojis
- Mostly emoticons, some emojis
- Mostly emojis, some emoticons
- Only emoticons
- Both equally
- N/A

43. When using emoticons, do you typically use Western emoticons [such as “=)” or “:-O”] or Japanese emoticons [such as “^_^” or “T-T”]?*

- Only Western emoticons
- Mostly Japanese emoticons, some Western
- Mostly Western emoticons, some Japanese
- Only Japanese emoticons
- Both emoticons about equally
- N/A

44. How often do you capitalize the beginning of a sentence in a text message?*

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Never ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Every time

45. How often do you capitalize proper nouns?* (Ex: “Monmouth, Oregon” instead of “monmouth, oregon”)

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Never ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Every time

46. How often do you type words in all caps?* (Ex: “HELLO” or “WHAT’S HAPPENING”)

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Never ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Every time

47. How often do you use periods to end the final sentence of a text message?* (Ex: “Sure, we can go.” instead of “Sure, we can go”)

1 2 3 4 5
 Never ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Every time

48. How often do you repeat your end punctuation?* (Ex: “Heyy!!” or “What?!?!?”)

1 2 3 4 5
 Never ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Every time

49. What is your feeling toward these textisms when others text them to you?*

	Positive	Fairly positive	Neutral	Fairly negative	Negative	N/A
Emojis	○	○	○	○	○	○
Emoticons	○	○	○	○	○	○
Acronyms	○	○	○	○	○	○
Abbreviations	○	○	○	○	○	○
Alternate spellings	○	○	○	○	○	○
Word lengthening	○	○	○	○	○	○
Word shortening	○	○	○	○	○	○
All capitals	○	○	○	○	○	○
End-periods	○	○	○	○	○	○
Repeated punctuation	○	○	○	○	○	○

GLOSSARY

Cis- – a pronoun which, when used in reference to gender, means that one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity closely correspond

Codeswitching – alternating between language varieties depending on the context

Corpus – a body of written texts

Descriptive grammar – a set of grammar rules based on how the language is used naturally

Gesture typing – an Android-based technology by Google that allows a user to press their finger to the screen only once per word and drag their finger around the keyboard rather than lifting and pressing for each letter

Grammatical – referring to the system and structure of a language

MMS – multimedia message system; a way to send and receive messages that contain media elements such as photos, videos, and voice recordings

Multi-press – a system of typing using an alphanumeric keypad, where each number is linked to three or four letters, requiring multiple presses of the button to access various letters

Lexical – referring to the words or vocabulary of a language

Literacy – the ability to read or write in a language

Orthography – the standard spelling system of a language

Pictorial – referring to pictures or illustrations

Predictive texting – phone keyboard technology that uses a dictionary of words to suggest words based on letters the user has already typed and word frequency

Prescriptive grammar – a set of grammar rules based on how people think language should be used

Register – a variety of language use defined by the social context it's used in

Situational characteristics – external factors that affect how we use our language

SMS – short message system; a way to send and receive short text messages

Textism – any non-standardism that is iconic of texting and electronic language

Typographic symbols – marks and symbols comprising the written punctuation of a language

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