Most, if not all, social scientists agree that contextual factors are important in understanding developmental outcomes. Examples of contextual factors might include family structure, culture, socioeconomic status, historical events, and actors present in the scene. This article explores the impact of cultural and historical forces on contemporary adolescent perceptions of social media use who are members of a community located within the Pacific Rim.

During the formative period of adolescence, teenagers experience major changes in all domains of development. Some of these developmental milestones include a search for identity, anatomical changes, and the development of peer relationships that emphasize intimacy, loyalty, and trust (Lerner & Sternberg, 2009; Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza, 2012; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007). As with all formative periods of development, adolescence in the 21st century is subject to particular historical, economic, political, and cultural influences that affect developmental outcomes and ultimately the adolescent experience (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 2004). Normative influences are
typically associated with particular eras or historical events. An example of this is a normative history-graded influence.

Normative history-graded influences are related to how historical context impacts development. These typically center on significant events that guide the behavior and attitudes of a historical generation – a collective group who experience an event at a formative period of life (Papalia & Feldman, 2011). Events such as the Great Depression, severe weather disasters, famine, and war are all examples of normative history-graded influences. For teenagers in the 21st century, electronic communication forms such as social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, Tumblr, LinkedIn, or Instagram are history-graded influences.

In addition, historical forces affect electronic communication preferences and activity. For example, teenagers tend to prefer Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube whereas their engagement with blogging has declined in popularity in the last five or six years whereas older adults still seem to enjoy and participate in this activity (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickhur, 2010). In addition, why teenagers use the Internet has also changed from the latter decades of the 20th century to present times. Then teenagers used the Internet for entertainment and leisure; now teenagers use the Internet and electronic media for interpersonal communication (Lenhart, Madden, & Hilfim, 2005).

Adolescent electronic communication form use has also changed over time. Contemporary adolescents heavily invest in electronic communication forms such as phone texting, instant messaging, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). According to Lusk (2010), adolescent Internet use has risen drastically over the past decade and has almost reached a saturation level of nearly 100%. The Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) survey on media use, reports that teenagers spend an enormous amount of their free time on this activity. Estimates suggest teens devote approximately 7 hours a day/7 days a week with the majority of the time devoted to text messaging (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; see also Vahlberg, 2010).

Although college students typically serve as participants in Internet and social media use studies, numerous studies address adolescent media use. Some of this literature addresses risky or dangerous behavior as teenagers navigate and use the Internet. For example, Anderson-Butcher et al. (2010) explored the purpose of adolescent weblogs. Their sample included 100 teenagers. They found that teenagers design and participate in blogs as a means of socially connecting with others. This medium helps establish and maintain relationships with peers. Common text comments included shared information related to daily routines such as homework, spending time with peers, and organizing and planning social happenings. They concluded that this sample of teens engaged in less risky behavior than expected when navigating through cyberspace.

Similar to Anderson-Butcher et al.’s (2010) study that explored the dangers of Internet use for teenagers, Mesch and Talmud’s (2010) work addresses the dangers of Internet use while acknowledging the role of technology in adolescent life experiences. They offer recommendations that include educating teens about the dangers of revealing personal information and making online contacts while sensitive to the importance of social media to their daily interactions and social experiences. They also recognize the positive benefits associated with SNS and cyber relationships for teenagers. These include a medium that supports long distance relationships and relationships with individuals for whom face to face contact is not possible. This addresses the range of adolescents’ online communication partners that include relatives, friends, acquaintances, and online game players. Other works by Lusk (2010) and Zheng, Burrow-Sanchez, and Drew (2010) also acknowledge the importance of social media in adolescent life experiences and address both the benefits and risks with engaging in this behavior.

Several works draw attention to the role of social media and its relationship to
adolescent developmental milestones. For example, as Reich et al. (2012) noted, adolescence is a formative period during which teenagers seek out peers with whom they can form close relationships. This sense of belonging becomes particularly important during this period and social media is a medium through which teenagers help satisfy these needs (see also Steinberg, 2010). Their survey with 250 high school students revealed that teens primarily use social media as a means to communicate and stay in touch with others, especially those with whom they are familiar. Thus, social media does not replace face-to-face interactions. Rather it supports and complements already established social connections.

Teenagers also use different electronic communication forms for specific purposes. For example, Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2003) reported that cell phones and phone texting are the most pervasive ways teens communicate with others in their social world. They noted that teenagers tend to use their cell phones to communicate with friends and family as these types of communication are more private compared to the more public, online venues such as Facebook. In a related study, Boneva et al. (2006) found that teenagers use instant messaging to communicate with peers of the opposite sex and peers to whom they are not necessarily close. They argue this form of communication fulfills teenagers need to belong to a group and facilitates the development of their group identity.

Similarly, Van Cleemput (2010) noted that adolescents utilize different electronic communication forms depending upon the degree of friendship. For example, she found that communication choice and the degree of the relationship are bidirectional. In her study with Belgium high school students, communication between close friends occurred through face-to-face interactions, phone text messaging, cell phone use, and social media. In contrast, acquaintances or less intimate friends primarily interacted through face-to-face communication and social networking sites.

Other empirical studies on adolescent social media use focus upon teenager community relationships and sense of belonging. For example, Reich (2010) explored MySpace and Facebook to explore adolescent senses of community focusing upon whether SNS demonstrate a psychological sense of community for teenagers. The sample included both high school and college students. A meta-analysis of existing focus group and survey material revealed that as a group, teenagers utilize SNS in more personal, individualistic pursuits than those that would be representative of a genuine on-line community. Thus teens use SNS more to maintain, establish, and sustain personal relationships rather than focusing upon a psychological sense of belonging or community. Studies from other countries such as the Netherlands support teenager use of electronic communication forms to maintain their ongoing relationships (Valkenberg & Peter, 2007).

Studies that address cultural influences in Internet use also appear in the literature although these are much less common than works that pursue the dangers and risks of adolescent Internet use. As Rideout et al. (2010) suggested, there are ethnic differences in the US with respect to Internet access. In their report, they revealed that European Americans have the highest percentage of Internet use followed by African Americans, and Latinos. Equally important is the notion that the form of interaction and the type of media used also varies across cultural groups (Lopez & Livingston, 2010).

In their study on adolescent social networking, Reich et al. (2012) explored adolescent perceptions of their own social media use. They were interested in the purpose, function, and with whom young adults engage in their Internet activity. They found that Latino young adults use social media sites to stay in contact with individuals with whom they have strong ties. Face-to-face interactions reflect the collectivist ideals of many Latino cultures (Raeff, 2010; Triandis, 1993, 1995). However, they also found no difference between the European American teens in their sample in this regard. With respect
to peers, teens reported that they interacted primarily with their friends and that they did so offline as well with the same peers. Most activity was social in nature. One positive finding was that few teens reported engaging in risky or dangerous behaviors. Finally, social media preferences did differ. Latino youths tend to prefer MySpace in contrast to other ethnic groups.

The current study explores electronic communication use, primarily Internet and social media use among adolescents in a non-Western community. It focuses upon the means by which teens access the Internet, why they do so, and the role of electronic communication forms in their daily experiences. Theoretical frameworks include developmental literature such as Erikson’s (1993) view that adolescence involves a search for identity marked by a need to belong to a group that is accomplished in part through maintaining and establishing friendships (Reich et al., 2012; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). An additional framework utilized is relational communication theory as it focuses upon the interconnectedness between discourse exchange and relationships (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Solomon & Theiss, 2008). In this study, electronic communication serves as a mechanism through which individuals construct and maintain, and acquire meaning about their relationships.

This study contributes to existing literature as it explores Internet and social media use in a non-Western, collectivist culture. In this community, socialization practices focus upon encouraging interdependent, prosocial, reciprocal, and face-to-face interactions. Studies that investigate social media use among Hawaiian adolescents are relatively scarce. This study will broaden our understanding of adolescent social media use among the different regions located in the Pacific Rim.

Based upon research with other collectivist cultures (Lopez & Livingston, 2010), we anticipate the teenagers in this work will use electronic communication forms such as SNS and cell phones (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003; Van Cleemput, 2010) as a means to communicate with family and friends. In line with other research on adolescent social media use (Reich, 2010; Rideout et al., 2010), we anticipate that these teens will engage in little dangerous activity, phone text and post on SNS more than search the Internet, and that technology plays a significant role in their everyday experiences.

The following queries informed this study:
1. What is the nature and form of adolescent electronic communication such as social media use?
2. What is the value and purpose of social media use to the adolescent experience?
3. How do cultural and historical factors influence adolescent social media use?
4. How are collectivist values reflected in these adolescents’ social media use?

Method

Participants

The participants attended Keana High and Elementary School in one of the islands, which is part of the Hawaiian public school system. The student population includes children enrolled in grades K-12. The total student body was approximately 550 students; 180 were high school students (US Department of Education, 2013). Participants were high school students in grades 9th through 12th. There were 26 boys (ten Filipino, seven part Hawaiian, six part Filipino, and three teens from other ethnic heritages) and 24 girls (six Filipino, eight part Hawaiian, eight part Filipino, one Native Hawaiian, and one teen from another ethnic heritage). Ages ranged from 14-19 years with a mean age of 15.4 years. This sample of adolescents is representative of the families that reside in this island, Keana, although it does differ from other islands in the Hawaiian Islands chain. For example, according to US Department of Commerce (2010), other islands such as Waimea and Kihei report differing percentages of individuals from European American, Hispanic, Asian, native Hawaiian and biracial ethnic heritages. In the
text, Keana, Waimea, and Kihei are fictitious names that replace real island names to ensure participant confidentiality.

All currently enrolled high school students were eligible to participate in the project. Thus, every high school student received a parental consent form and any student who returned a signed parental consent was eligible to participate. At the timing of this project, 102 of the 180 potential high school students could participate. A percentage of students were unable to join the project due to school absences, their departure from the island during the school year, and their class schedules. Students with full class schedules and no free periods were not able to join the focus group sessions that took place during the school day.

The distribution of parental consent forms occurred as follows. The second author delivered consent forms to the students’ home room teachers. Teachers then disseminated the forms to the teenagers with the instructions that they should be given to their caregivers. Consent forms were available in English and the Filipino dialect, Ilocano. Child assent forms were also distributed and collected at the beginning of each focus group. The total parental/guardian consent return rate was 51%.

A division of the sample by grade, sex, ethnic heritage and consent return rate appears in Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Parental/Guardian Return Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRESHMAN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part Filipino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Hawaiian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOPHOMORE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part Filipino</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Part Filipino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>Part Filipino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Holmes, Liden, & Shin

1 (see Table 1). All minors were treated according to the American Psychological Association’s (2002) guidelines for ethical treatment of human participants (see also Christensen & James, 2008; Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007; Greene & Hogan, 2005 for conducting research with children). In the text, children’s real names were replaced with pseudonyms. An institutional review board granted approval for Human Subjects Research. Additional permissions for this project were obtained from the cooperating school and parents/guardians.

Settings

Physical Setting and Geography. The Hawaiian Islands are the most remote and geographically isolated island chain in the world. Keana is the least populated and one of the more remote islands in the Hawaiian Islands chain. Its landscape includes massive sea cliffs, shorelines, mountainous trails, a desert like region, forest, plateau, rock formations, and inactive volcano. It has a drier, more temperate climate than most of the other islands as well (State of Hawaii, 2013).

Cultural Setting. According to the 2010 US Census, there are 3,102 island residents (US Department of Commerce, 2010). The community is an ethnically and socioeconomically homogenous neighborhood. The majority of residents in this island community are primarily from Asian (Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Chinese) and part-Hawaiian ethnic heritages. Most people live in the capital city located in the island’s central region. A community park frames life here and it is the central meeting place for residents. It is approximately two hundred yards long and one hundred yards wide. Flea markets are held there on weekends, caregivers play with their children on outdoor equipment, special events are held here, and older children hang out and socialize there. Local restaurants, the launderette, places of worship, a community center, school, senior center, public library, banks, and food markets are located on its perimeter (see also Holmes, Liden, & Shin, 2013).

Life on the island could be compared to life in a small town - it is an interwoven and tightly knit community. Many of the residents can trace their ancestry back several generations. The community is relatively crime free, children are safe in their neighborhoods, traffic congestion is nonexistent, and it is rare to find somebody on the island who does not know most of the other residents. Life is calm and community and individual life rhythms are slow paced (Holmes, 2011). Although young children do not verbally acknowledge their idyllic life experiences, teenagers do.

During a focus group for this project, the first author asked them what was special about being a teenager in Keana. One freshman boy replied, “You don’t have to worry about rape.” Another freshman boy added, “You can walk around town by yourself.” A third freshman boy added, “No gangs.” Girls also focused upon safety issues but included the freedom that comes with feeling secure. For example, one freshman girl succinctly stated their everyday experiences, “Fun. We have lots of freedom too. We don’t have to worry about being kidnapped because everyone knows everybody.” That was the consensus at the table and it is an accurate assessment of island life.

Individualism–Collectivism. Triandis (1993, 1995) employed the individualism–collectivism construct as a way to compare cultures. Community residents are primarily from non-Western cultural heritages (Filipino and part Hawaiian) and socialization practices emphasize collectivist values. Cultural values are clearly embedded in community members’ daily interactions. Daily interactions take place within an atmosphere of respect, generosity, and friendliness. This is true of adult, adult-child, and child peer social interactions. Children are socialized to be respectful of authority and elders and sensitive to the needs of others.

Although the construct has recently received criticism, if one utilizes the individualism–collectivism continuum (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), collectivist values are
Adolescent Perceptions of Social Media in a Pacific Rim Community

vibrant. Social relationships are interdependent, reciprocal and obligatory, and face-to-face interactions are highly valued. Talking story and other face-to-face social activities that involve discourse exchanges are highly encouraged by caregivers (Affonso, Sibuya, & Frueh, 2007). Historical influences and technological advances in communication have altered to a degree children, teenager, and adult face-to-face and long-distance communications. Adults caregivers are concerned that technology is leading to social isolation; some children and teens told the first author that their parents use Facebook and the phone as much as they do.

Children internalize values that emphasize prosocial behaviors such as cooperation and sharing. Family and familial relationships figure prominently in children's socialization experiences. Equally important are relationships children have with others in social worlds outside of the family context (Holmes, 2011, 2012; Holmes et al., 2013). Belonging to a group and being sensitive to the needs of others are revealed in children’s daily social interactions. Adults encourage and prefer that their children interact with peers. This is reflected in the children’s social interactions. Children and teens rarely play alone as they have internalized the importance of group membership.

As Neulip (2012) noted, it often leads to inaccuracies when entire countries are absolutely categorized as either individualistic or collectivist. Regional variation in the United States supports the view that particular areas of the country are more collectivist than other regions. Vandello and Cohen (1999) assessed collectivism in the United States and ranked Hawaii as the most collectivist region in our nation. They believe this is due in part to the high percentage of residents who are of Asian and native Hawaiian heritages. As Neulip (2012) reports, varying degrees of individualism and collectivism exist in every country. The teenagers in this study live in the United States where they are exposed to mainstream American values. However, some contemporary parents occasionally bend collectivist values to meet the demands of mainstream American values (Holmes, 2011; Holmes et al., 2013). This supports past research that suggests no country is decidedly individualistic or collectivist.

Design and Procedure

This study employed a qualitative design (Bernard, 2011). Raw material was collected through written surveys and focus group interviews. The written survey consisted of several quantitative questions that assessed usage. Rideout et al.'s (2010) work served as a source for some of these questions. In addition, the authors added several open-ended questions that addressed the role of social media in adolescent life experiences. The first author distributed the self-report measures prior to each focus group session. All of these sessions took place on school premises primarily in a large classroom with a working kitchen located on the school campus. On occasion, the first author also conducted focus groups in a resource room when the main classroom was occupied. No other adults were present in the room when the adolescents completed the surveys and participated in the focus groups.

The survey questions served as talking points during the interviews and allowed the authors to collect quantitative information regarding the nature and form of the adolescents' social media use. Gathering raw material began in January 2012 and ended in January 2013. During these visits, the first author mediated six focus group sessions with the teenagers. These occurred on three separate occasions.

The instrument’s face validity was assessed prior to its distribution. First, the questions appeared to measure the intended topic, that is, adolescent social media and Internet use. Second, face validity was confirmed when several researchers reviewed the survey and concurred its face validity and content (Bernard, 2011). Third, after numerous conversations with teenagers on the island there was clear consensus regarding the definitions of social media and Internet use. Most children engage in this activity daily so providing definitions was effortless for them. Finally, we employed a pilot...
study to assess the measure with adolescent participants.

**Survey and Focus Group Beginnings.** We employed mixed methods for the following reasons. First, most of the teens are relatively quiet and passive, an outcome of their childhood socialization. We anticipated that relying solely on focus groups would leave several of the quieter children out of the discussion. Second, some of the open-ended questions addressed sensitive issues such as cyber bullying and parental monitoring. As the authors are familiar with the teens, we believed the sensitive issues would be best addressed in anonymous ways. Thus we selected written self-report to complement and support the focus group material.

However, we also acknowledged the usefulness of using a focus group format for several reasons. First, this type of approach is particularly suited to research questions that elicit participant opinions, attitudes, and beliefs (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Barbour, 2007). Since we were interested in how teens view the role of social media in their everyday experiences, this seemed a logical methodological choice. Second, focus groups have worked successfully with children and teens in the past (e.g., Holmes, 1995, 2012; Kools & Krueger, 2001; Yuen, 2004). It seemed plausible to conclude that teenagers would be both capable and willing to talk about social networking and social media use (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Third, these teenagers are socialized to adopt collectivist goals and values. Face to face social interactions, talk story, and personal communication, and interdependent relationships are cultural norms. Thus, these teenagers are group oriented and comfortable interacting in these types of social situations (Heras, 2007). As many of the existing large scale media use surveys employ quantitative approaches, the use of focus groups was also utilized to engage the teenagers in the research process (McCarthy, 2010) because they are capable of conveying knowledge about their experiences (Dell Clark, 2006). Finally, the use of focus group interviews highlights the role of social interaction in teenager’s everyday experiences.

Convening focus groups can be problematic (Holmes, 2012). The relationship the mediator (the first author) establishes with group members as well as the relationships between group members is critical (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Although some of the teens referred to the first author as “Auntie” – a term they use with familiar women – she also knew that these children are socialized to be respectful of their elders. In agreement with McCarthy (2010), she was aware of the power differentials that can arise in the field. However, she has worked on the island for several years and has always adopted the friend role with the children (Fine, 1999; Lahman, 2008). She was familiar to most of the teenagers and interacted with them in and outside of the school context. Before and after each session she always spent time taking with them about a variety of subjects often sharing her own personal experiences. She believed that these actions helped her establish rapport with the teenagers that was critical to the success of the focus groups.

One issue to consider is the ethnic similarities between the first author who served as the mediator and the teenagers. In most cases, there was an ethnic/cultural mismatch between the first author and the adolescents as many were from Asian or part-Hawaiian ethnic heritages. However, she and the other authors did not anticipate potential problems with self-disclosure for the following reasons. The first author was familiar to the teenagers and shared their socialization experiences as a child raised in a collectivist household. In addition, the teenagers are accustomed to interacting with European American women and men as many of their teachers are members of this ethnic group. However, as noted earlier the teenagers did not perceive the first author as an authority figure. This was also true for the second and third authors. Although they are staff members, they are not teachers. One of the authors has teenagers in the school and both of these authors are viewed more as nurturing women or
substitute mothers rather than authority figures. In addition, the first author was the only adult present in the room when the teenagers discussed their social media use.

Groupthink, a situation in which members change their position due to pressure to conform was also a concern (Kassim, Fein, & Markus, 2011; Krueger & Casey, 2000). To diminish the emergence of groupthink, the second and third authors, who regularly work with the teenagers, took care when selecting group compositions. They arranged groups primarily by age and avoided placing a lone freshman in a group of juniors or seniors or a lone senior in a group with freshman to avoid the power differential that might arise due to class year. The authors also kept the groups intimate enough so that the first author could see and make eye contact with all of the teens at the table.

Following the advice of Krueger and Casey (2000), the authors tried to assign students that were unfamiliar with one another to groups. In this small community, this was simply not possible. In fact, several teens were related and as other researchers have noted, there are advantages to interviewing participants in focus groups with familiar peers. The teens were friendly and cordial with one another often making sure that no one ever dominated the conversation (Raag & Rackliff, 1998). All teenagers contributed to the conversations in some way.

Focus group selection proceeded as follows. The second and third author compiled a master list by class of all teenagers for whom parental consent was obtained. In a few cases, the teens were 18 years of age so they provided their own consent. They brought all the participating teenagers to the room where all interviews were conducted. The second author introduced the first author as “Doctor Robyn” a professor and friend who has been working with the children on the island for several years. Several of the adolescents assisted her with other projects over the years. These teens called her “Auntie” – a culturally appropriate term they use with familiar adults. Its usage spread and most of the teens used this term of address throughout the sessions.

Focus group sessions ranged from about 1 to 1 ½ hours. In each session, the second author introduced the first author to the teens and she proceeded to explain that she was interested in the role of social media in their everyday experiences. These teens enjoy sports so she often asked them about their favorite sports teams. The school has a 100% graduation rate and the community highly values education so these topics were culturally relevant. The teens were especially friendly and she viewed the process of establishing rapport as bidirectional. Teens completed a written survey that included open-ended questions for discussion just prior to the focus groups and these questions served as a talking point for the focus groups.

Sessions took place primarily in a large classroom with a working kitchen located on the school campus. On occasion, the first author also conducted focus groups in a resource room. In both, the table was long, rectangular, and perfect for the focus groups as every teen could see every other and the mediator could maintain eye contact with them. The second author chose the school space because it was familiar to the teens, comfortable, and quiet during the day. As Krueger and Casey (2000) noted, establishing a level of comfortableness with respondents is important as it facilitates their willingness to participate in the interview. The second and third author brought the teens to the room or they wandered in by themselves. They waited until all the teens were present and then they departed. The first author was the only mediator in all sessions and was alone with the teens for the focus groups. She decided to do so as she believed the teenagers would be less forthcoming if their teachers or other authoritative adults were present during the focus groups.

We prepared the question list using existing media surveys and pilot conversations with local teenagers and teenagers from the first author’s home state about their social media use. Sample questions included: What is the value of SNS in your everyday experiences? Do you believe SNS are a positive experience? Could you please
explain that for me? Do you spend more time on SNS or actually interacting with your friends? Can you explain? Have you ever been the victim of cyber bullying or do you know anyone who has? Can you please explain?

We employed semi-structured interview guidelines in each focus group. This guideline appears in the Appendix (see Appendix). This helped to ensure that we were consistent across groups and that each group received the same set of questions. In addition, semi-structured interview guides are most useful in situations where you have one opportunity to meet with your group and you wish to promote an atmosphere where your respondents feel comfortable expressing their feelings and thoughts in their own words (Bernard, 2011). This was a desirable goal for this project. Another issue is group dynamics. This process in part guided the direction of the individual focus group conversation. Some groups were more interested in social networking; others general social media use. Some groups enthusiastically responded to questions and asked questions too. These groups often produced lengthier responses to queries that contained richer, substantive detail. Some participants answered in shorter, simpler sentences. Therefore, participants guided the course of each session.

As Yuen (2004) noted, some teens were less participatory than others were. In this project, group dynamics and level of comfortableness with the first author shaped the teens’ responses. The first author alternated starting positions for each session and made sure each teen was able to participate. As an icebreaker she asked the teens their name first and then a question. If he or she was quiet or offered a simple forced choice response, the mediator was respectful of this. The first author moved to another teen, often a familiar one and then returned to the previous teenager to see if he or she was more willing to contribute to the conversation. The teens in general have quiet yet friendly temperaments. In line with their socialization experiences, the teens themselves ensured that all their peers contributed to the focus group sessions. If one teen wanted to enter the conversation, other teens either waited for their turn or would draw attention to the teen who wanted to participate. They were cordial, patient with one another, and sensitive to when another peer wanted to contribute to the conversation. The mediator used probes and pauses sparingly. Although all conversations were audio taped, the first author also took copious notes during the focus groups. These later confirmed the audio material or resolved any discrepancies that arose in transcribing the tapes.

**Text Analysis and Content Coding.** The first author transcribed all the focus group raw material. Raw material from the written surveys and transcribed interviews were content coded. Verbatim words and short phrases were arranged into larger cultural domains or categories using pre-established objective and systematic rules (Stemler, 2001). Techniques for coding were derived from existing empirical and methodological works (Bernard, 2011; Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995; Dupuis, Bloom, & Loughead 2006; Holmes 2005; Holmes et al., 2008).

The process occurred as follows. First, original participant responses were re-entered into an Excel file. Text containing a single idea or thought was grouped together. Different ideas and thoughts were colored coded and used to form smaller order categories. These subordinate categories were labeled to reflect their content. For example, responses such as “connecting with others”, “facilitates friendships”, and “you make new friends” were used to frame smaller categories. Smaller categories that contained joint features and qualities were incorporated into several higher-level, superordinate categories or themes. For example, the previous statements were also included in the higher order category, “Establishing and maintaining social relationships.”

In some cases, one participant response might include several ideas or thoughts. For example, when asked why they blocked or unfriended people from Facebook, one participant reported, “People I don’t know and those I don’t want to see stuff about me.” These were tallied as
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separate responses since unfamiliarity and privacy are different issues. All responses with multiple thoughts and ideas were coded similarly. All text from every response was placed into a respective higher-order category and counted separately. These categories appear both in the text of the Results section and the accompanying tables.

To ensure reliability in the process, several coders were employed. The first author trained several assistants to code the material. Random segments of the raw material were selected for practice sessions. The three coders assembled in the same room and worked independently coding the same section of texts. Then they compared their outcomes. When inconsistencies arose, they were immediately discussed. After four sessions, no discrepancies were reported and at this time actual coding commenced. The three coders received 15 percent of randomly selected text from each transcription for reliability coding. Inter-coder reliability using Cohen’s kappa was .87 percent, a satisfactory outcome.

Results

In this section, we present responses to the written self-report measure and transcribed focus group interviews regarding adolescent usage and perceptions of social media. This section is further subdivided into two sections: one for quantitative information obtained from the written survey; the other presents responses from the focus group interviews. Actual questions serve as lower level headings.

Quantitative Forced Choice – Usage (Self-Report Survey)

This section presents the frequencies and coded responses for the forced choice questions that addressed adolescent social media use. It includes what mediums they use, why they access the Internet, and for what purposes it is used. In instances where verbatim quotes are inserted we have included ethnic heritage, sex, and class year.

The first seven questions of the survey addressed consumer behavior, usage, and preferred forms of communication. Teenagers in this sample owned a variety of electronic devices. All reported they owned a computer (100%); all but five (three girls and two boys) teens (90%) owned iPods; all but five (four boys and one girl) teens (90%) owned either a cell phone, smart phone, or iPhone; and a majority (70%) owned game systems (eight boys and seven girls did not). Tablets such as iPads were reported least (56%). Family income was one factor that affected ownership of the teenagers’ electronic devices.

When asked to report why they used the Internet, 91% of all respondents noted that they used the Internet for fun; 86% did so for school; 100% used the Internet to do homework; 86% did so for social communication; and not one respondent noted that he or she used the Internet for another purpose. The majority searched the Web (86%) for things that interested them. Interviews supported the use of the Internet for school and homework as well as social communication.

These adolescents were also asked if they used e-mail and for what purposes. More than half, 60% reported that they did not send e-mails for fun. This was equally true for boys and girls. When respondents did use e-mail, it was primarily for school (80%) or social purposes (82%). Only three respondents noted that they used e-mail for other purposes. Two were unspecified; the other for online shopping. Actual Internet use varied. Approximately 46% of all respondents reported that they accessed the Internet between 2-4 times a day. The other 54% accessed the Internet more than 5 times a day with 20% of all respondents accessing it more times, than they could count. Not one respondent reported that they never use the Internet.

When asked to report which device they use more for social networking, an equal percentage reported using the phone or the computer. Some respondents used both devices. This appeared in 20% of all responses. With respect to accessing
SNS such as Facebook, all but one respondent reported that they engaged in these kinds of activities. Amount of time devoted to these activities varied and ranged from once a month to an infinite number of times during the day. The majority of teenagers accessed these sites several times a day (72%). Other Internet activity included going online to obtain information or news of current events. This appeared in 51% of all responses and those who did – do so sparingly. More than half of these teens accessed the Internet to participate in the activity, online shopping. Boys and girls reported doing so almost equally (14 boys and 11 girls).

Interestingly 71% of all respondents reported that they did not use Twitter though from conversations with the children we suspect this rate is somewhat higher as many teens have grown dissatisfied with Facebook. Those teens that did – did so frequently. In addition, YouTube was popular among this group. All but two respondents (96%) accessed this site and the amount of time varied between once daily to multiple times all day long. Sending private messages to friends was a favorite activity. This was reported in 96% of all responses with most noting that they did so often.

Questions that addressed adolescent usage for particular SNS activities revealed that this group of teenagers used these sites primarily to socialize or communicate with their friends. On a 5-point Likert scale, most reported that they did so at least sometimes with 34% of the sample using these sites more than often. Almost all of these teens use SNS to type text comments to their friends’ pages or walls. This was reported 95% in all responses. This was not true for pictures. Approximately 32% reported that they never posted pictures whereas 40% reported that they did so but only sometimes. However, they did report that they typed comments to friends’ pictures. This was reported in 95% of all responses though the time spent doing so varied. Half of the respondents did so sometimes; others more than frequently.

### Qualitative Open Ended Questions – Focus Group and Survey Material

The following questions were both included in the written survey and served as talking points and focal questions during the interview sessions. In the text, quoted material is marked as emerging from either the written self-report or interviews.

> **“What types of content do you post on social networking sites?”** Table 2 presents the raw frequencies for responses to the query, “What types of content do you post on social networking sites?” (see Table 2). These teenagers posted diverse types of typed text on SNS. These included material such as reports of daily activities such as “where I am” or “what I’m doing”, pictures, birthday greetings, funny anecdotes, music, and statuses. Feelings, statuses, pictures and videos from YouTube, and accounts of daily activity appeared in over 50% of all responses. Typed text comments about food and sharing pictures of food were common responses from boys. In a focus group one freshman boy replied, “I post pictures of food. Mostly I follow girls.” Some respondents also mentioned that they post “what’s on my mind” and exciting events. Most of the teens used this medium to stay connected with their friends many of whom they see daily in face-to-face interactions.

Interview material confirmed written responses. For example, focus group responses confirmed that these teens post material related to what they are doing in real time and how they feel. For example, Ilikai, a sophomore boy stated, “I post how I feel.” During the interview eight teens noted that they posted “I’m hungry” or “I post what I want to eat”. Similarly, Ali’i, a junior boy posts when “I’m bored.”

> **“Have you ever made a contact that asked you to reveal personal information?”** These teenagers were cautious and protective of their personal information. Only two respondents noted that they provided personal information and this was limited to a phone number. During
Table 2
Raw Frequencies to the Query, “What Types of Content do You Post on Social Networking Sites?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Life Occurrences</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about Family and Friends</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant Messages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Greetings and Birthday Wishes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comical Information or News</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past, current, future activity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interests</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative comments about games, Meals, location</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant Messages</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing (N/A or No Response)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Tell A Story, A Reminder, Meet People)</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Personal Thoughts</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes and religious verses</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Quotes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Personal Thoughts</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes and religious verses</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the focus group, some of the teens responded to this question with “No!” and “Not at all!”.

Contrary to the notion that teens are unaware of the dangers of the Internet, this was not revealed in this sample of respondents. Interviews supported their written responses.

“Have you ever been bullied in cyberspace? Do you know anyone who has been bullied? Please explain.” (This question was of particular importance to the school district who was concerned with potential bullying instances via social media and the Internet.) Using school criteria for bullying as a guideline, for the purposes of this paper we defined bullying as an aggressive behavior intended to psychologically harm or injure another child. This included behavior that was cruel and defamatory.

More than half of these teenagers (57%) revealed that they had neither been bullied nor knew of anyone who had. During the focus groups, several teens offered this response in describing their community “Not over here.” However, several teens did report that they had either been bullied or knew someone who had also. This was true for both boys and girls and was present in 25% of all responses. One sophomore boy stated, “many people get bullied over the Internet for what they say/do.” Another Filipino sophomore girl reported that she had been bullied in cyber space on MySpace. An additional Filipino sophomore boy stated that, “I see a lot of fights and bullying on Facebook.”

Similar to other teenagers, some of these respondents have experienced bullying on other social media sites. Sophomores reported most of these cases. During one focus group, a freshman girl shared that her brother’s girlfriend was bullied on a SNS.

“Would you say social networking sites like Facebook are a positive experience? Please explain.” Most of the respondents perceived Facebook and other SNS as a positive experience. This was true for 82% of the sample and for both boys and girls. Positive experiences centered on the power of this medium to help them socially connect with friends and family.

Staying in contact and communication with others was the most mentioned reason SNS are a positive experience. For example, a junior girl stated, “it’s a positive experience because you can contact friends or know about family that you never met or see in a long time.” A senior boy noted, “I get to keep in contact with far away family and also make new friends.”

Similarly a sophomore boy during a focus group noted, “because you can keep in contact with family that do not have phones and that are off the island.” One senior Filipino girl echoed this reasoning “you can talk to friends and family that is somewhere else or find friends you haven’t seen in a long time.” A freshman girl supported the positive view of the SNS, “it keeps you in contact with your family.” Some teens were diplomatic and noted that whether it was a positive experience depended upon how the media was used. For example, a senior girl noted, “It can be if people use it correctly and not bully others.”

A smaller percentage (20%) focused upon the negative impact of participating in SNS. For example, one sophomore boy stated, “it’s kind of a negative because people make you feel bad”. Boys in particular mentioned the experience as negative by emphasizing the drama that unfolds in cyberspace. One senior boy noted that is it “not really [a positive experience] because people start fights like teasing then it becomes a big problem.” In the focus groups, some teens such as a freshman girl noted that “Facebook is boring” and other members added, “I don’t go on Facebook anymore.” Boys such as Keanu, a freshman boy complained about the spam and the pictures.

“Would you say that social networking sites like Facebook are a negative experience? Please explain.” When respondents were asked whether Facebook and other SNS were a negative experience, 34% stated that their usage was a negative experience. Another 26% noted that the view of SNS as positive or negative was dependent upon how it was used. Responses revealed several reasons why SNS were negatively viewed. One reason addressed its
impact on one’s social status, reputation, and in broader terms – life. For example, a junior girl reported, “Yes. You can get bullied, it can affect your reputation. People take things the wrong way."

The consequences of bullying surfaced in several responses. Another senior girl (part Filipino) also focused upon the social implications of Facebook. She reported, “if you post personal drama...people may judge you by that.” Some teens focused upon navigating the site such as a senior girl who recounted it was a negative experience because “it is distracting and people like to procrastinate a lot on FB.” Other negative views of SNS focused upon the time spent on SNS. For example, a sophomore girl noted “sometimes [it could be a negative experience] b/c most kids are addicted to it.” Finally, some teens focused upon self-disclosure. For example, one senior girl of mixed ethnic heritages noted, “when you post something everyone can see what you post and most of the time it’s not a good thing.”

“How many people have you blocked or unfriended from your Facebook account? Why?” The rationale for why respondents either blocked or unfriended individuals was quite uniform. One recurring reason people were blocked or unfriended was if they were annoying or irritating. This was true for both boys and girls. Other respondents noted they blocked and unfriended people who “give me problems.” “Rude postings” and unwanted commenting was another reason that appeared with frequency. Most teens who rarely blocked or unfriended people gave a similar reason. For example, in an interview session one senior Filipino girl noted that she did not block anyone because “all of my friends in FB are my relatives here in the states and my hometown in Philippines, also my friends from off island and this island that I trust.”

“Have you ever regretted posting (typed text comments) material on Facebook? Please explain.” Over half of the respondents (52%) recounted that they did not regret the text comments they posted. Teens who regretted the material they posted provided reasons for their remorse. These included being mad at the moment of posting text online; “posting things like stupid pictures of me...”; posting online material that had consequences such as “My auntie saw it and told my parents and I got busted.”; and misrepresenting statuses or gossiping about a person. On the island, the folk term for gossip is na'ila. Facebook provides a medium in which teens can engage in gossiping outside of other face-to-face interactions such as talking story.

“So you spend more time communicating with your friends on Facebook than you do actually spending time with your friends?” Unexpectedly, most teens reported they do not spend more time on Facebook than they do in actual face-to-face social interactions. Only two teens reported that they spent more time online in SNS than they did with their actual friends. Sometimes the boundaries of social interaction blended. For example, one senior Filipino noted that she spends time with her friends in actual social interactions and then goes on Facebook. Some of the teens noted that they confined their Facebook time while they are at work, at night and on weekends. During focus groups, the teens noted that they are not permitted to access SNS while at school. One sophomore boy noted that he signs in before school, “At school; Check in at 8:15am – on board.”

“Do you form long distance relationships with people on Facebook?” Boys and girls reported that they either formed (34%), shied away from (32%) or sometimes (34%) formed long distance relationships online. Several teens clarified their yes response by providing a rational for doing so. In these cases, the long distance relationships were typically with friends and family.

“When communicating with your friends, do you phone text or post online more?” Almost unanimously, these teens reported that they phone text more than post comments using a
computer. Only one respondent noted that he posted comments online more. Four teens reported that they engaged in neither phone texting nor used a computer to type comments on social media sites. Typical reasons for the phone texting preference including the speed of the medium (“I text more than post ‘cause it’s faster”); with whom one is communicating (“I text more when I communicate with my friends”); and what device the receiver possesses (“I text if they have a phone”). Aware that the teens frequently phone text, the mediator asked if they ever phone texted people who were in close proximity to them. For example, one boy noted, “I’ve Facebooked people sitting at the table with me.” In one focus group, freshman boys and girls unanimously answered, “We do that too.” Others teens call their brothers and sisters on the phone when they want to talk to them or for dinner. Privacy is another reason why these teens opt to text. For example, during a focus group session one freshman boy responded to the question of text vs. calling with, “you might text someone something you don’t want others to hear. It’s [phone texting] only between you and that person.”

“What is your favorite social networking site? Why?” Although a majority of teens in this sample preferred Facebook, its popularity waned during the course of the project. Facebook’s popularity was based upon several factors. First, its appeal was linked to the fact that the respondents’ friends also use this site and the site allows you to meet new people. Second, it helped them communicate with friends and family who reside far away from the teens. Finally, teens preferred this site out of necessity because it was their default SNS. Social networking sites such as Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr appeared although with much less frequency. However, Tumblr’s appeal was associated with the distinction between it and Facebook.

For example, a senior girl noted, “Tumblr is more like expressing your feelings, you can post cool pictures.” Twitter was preferred because it had “less drama” than Facebook. Both boys and girls viewed Facebook as a site “where people vent.” YouTube was also popular among these teens as many shared video clips or posted them in other venues. During a focus group, one freshman girl replied, “Everybody’s going to Twitter now.” When asked to delineate the differences between Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram one freshman boy noted, “Twitter is like instant.” A freshman girl added, “You can post your feelings” and another freshman girl added, “You can do it every second, every minute.” A junior boy noted, “On Facebook it’s like if you post your status every two minutes it’s like okay this guy has no life. On Twitter you post and it’s like this guy is normal.” Some teens drew attention to their similarities. For example, one freshman boy noted, “Instagram is Facebook with better pictures.” Finally, some teens focused upon ease of use. For example, a senior boy noted, “You can do more on Facebook. I find Facebook easier to use than Twitter.”

“Is there any school involvement in your Facebook activity? For example, does the school search your profile and pictures? If yes, how do you feel about this?” Although the majority of teens responded that there was no school involvement in their SNS activity, about 20% reported that they were uncertain whether the
school did so. Several teens did respond that the school was proactive in this respect. Only one respondent a senior girl mentioned that she did not care if the school did so. This was not true for the other teens who responded in the affirmative. Focus group discussion reflected their perception that this practice was an invasion of their privacy. For example, a sophomore girl declared, “I really feel that it’s none of their business.” A junior boy noted he would feel stalked and stuff.” In addition, a sophomore girl declared, “I don’t like it. Can’t we have some privacy?” One freshman girl noted that “our school computers are blocked, no YouTube, Facebook everything” to which a freshman boy added, “They block everything fun.”

“Could you go one day without accessing your social networking site? Please explain.” Even though anecdotal observations support that the teens frequently engaged in this activity, only one teen responded “No. I would always go on it every day. That is the way I am.” Both boys and girls reported that they could forego this activity. Some provided rationales for why it was good to balance their SNS usage with other activities. For example, a junior girl noted, “Yes, I have and it’s a good feeling to be unconnected from the Internet.” A sophomore boy noted, “Yes, go somewhere like the beach and leave devices at home.” Other respondents clarified time durations. For example, a sophomore boy stated, “I could go one week without accessing my social networking sites because I have more things to do such as school work, chores, something productive.” One sophomore girl replied, “I’ve gone months. No big deal.”

“Do your parents have access to your account? Are you friends with your parents and can they see your page?” Almost half of these teens reported that their parents do not have access to their account. Some of the no responses were followed by !; whereas other teens either blocked their parents or their parents did engage in Facebook activity. In addition, a fair percentage 35% stated that they had friended their parents and that their parents could view their page. In some instances, caregivers had their own accounts on Facebook.

“Please finish the following sentence for me. Facebook is------?” This question was typically the last question posed during the focus groups. Some of the responses to this sentence completion were unexpected. One of those was “boring.” However, many of these teens accessed SNS for entertainment to connect with their friends and family. Some of the teens found the site boring and did not want to be “caught up” in the postings between site members. For example, both girls and boys noted that Facebook “is too much drama.” One senior boy, Pali finished the sentence with, “Instead of Facebook it should be Dramabook.” Other teens, both boys and girls found the site entertaining and fun. This is correlated with their responses to other questions about SNS. One boy completed the sentence with, “like your girlfriend…it’s like what you feel, right. And you tell your girlfriend what you feel…” Finally, one boy noted Facebook is “like a drug.”

Discussion

As anticipated, electronic communication forms such as SNS and phone texting are an important part of these contemporary teenagers’ everyday experiences. Influenced by technological advances that have modified face-to-face and long distance communication, these adolescents are, to a degree dependent upon technology to maintain and establish their social relationships. These findings support O’Keefe and Clark-Pearson’s (2011) and Lusk’s (2010) work on 21st century adolescent social media use. For example, these teenagers possessed a variety of different electronic devices and accessed the Internet for both personal and academic purposes. Types of usage included employing the Internet for homework and surfing, phone texting family and close friends, and accessing SNS. Such communication does not replace these teenagers’ daily face to face
interactions in their community; rather their electronic communication form both expand and complement their existing real world relationships (Reich et al., 2012).

For example, the teenagers in this project reported they spend more time actually interacting with friends and family in their social worlds compared to the time they spend in virtual communications. My anecdotal observations in the community in general and with the teenagers in particular support this view (Holmes, 2012; Holmes et al., 2013). One plausible explanation is that these teenagers’ socialization experiences emphasize the importance of face-to-face social interactions and discourse exchanges (Affonso et al., 2007). In addition, the teens primarily use electronic media after school and on the weekends. As many are involved in social, school, and community activities this leaves little time for online activity. However, two findings are noteworthy. First, their usage is similar to that reported for other teenagers in other areas of the US. Thus it seems logical to conclude that these teens are able to navigate through social contexts that hold both collectivist and individualistic ideologies. Second, their experiences differ considerably from those of teenagers in previous generations who did not grow up with electronic forms of communication (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008, Vahlberg, 2010). Thus historical forces also shape their social media use behavior.

Second, technology influences these teenagers’ socio-emotional development. During the formative period of adolescence, teenagers focus upon developing and maintaining peer relationships. This is connected to their need for a sense of belonging (Erikson, 1993). Thus for these teens, SNS use helps them stay connected with their peers and these peers are typically those with whom they interact with daily. They also use the media to connect with family members both near and geographically separated from them (Reich et al., 2012). Embedded in these teenagers’ socialization is a sense of belonging that extends to their everyday social interactions. Electronic communication forms help these teenagers in the search for both an individual and group identity. They phone text, instant message, and post comments to each other to stay current on gossip, current happenings, and other information that connects them to their friends, school, family, and community both near and far (Lopez & Livingston, 2010). Communicating in these mediums help the teenagers culturally construct meaning about their relationships and their relationships help inform how and what kinds of information the teenagers exchange with one another (Solomon & Theiss, 2008).

Similar to Wolak et al.’s (2003) findings, these teenagers selectively use phone texting with peers and family members with whom they have close relationships. They do so in part because of the private nature of these communications. Thus, certain discourse exchanges occur across specific communication forms. Their responses regarding their preference for one communication form over another support this. In addition, they phone text and access SNS either with individuals that they interact with daily or in long distance relationships including family and friends. These electronic communication forms serve to maintain existing relationships and helps facilitate the development of new relationships (Van Cleemput, 2010).

As noted throughout this work, community values are collectivist and in some ways, technology has caused cultural change. For example, caregivers and community adults worry that SNS and other electronic communication forms will lead to social isolation, an outcome at odds with collectivist, cultural values. However, based upon these teenagers’ responses, their concerns appear to be unfounded. This group of teens navigates between cultural values, adolescent norms, and electronic communication forms such as social media to connect primarily with their friends and family. This supports findings reported by Lopez and Livingston (2010) among Latino adolescents who also hold collectivist values.

In accordance with relational theory, these teenagers use electronic forms to complement, enhance, and maintain their relationships,
Adolescent Perceptions of Social Media in a Pacific Rim Community

particularly with family and friends who are in their physical worlds (Solomon & Theiss, 2008). For these teenagers, electronic communication forms do not substitute for the daily social interactions that take place in their physical worlds. Rather these exchanges help keep the teenagers connected in different ways when face-to-face interactions are not possible. Conversely, their relationships help guide the kinds of information these teenagers communicate to friends and family. Their behaviors reflect their collectivist values that stress face-to-face social interactions.

In addition, these communication types help the teenagers maintain and establish relationships, and consequently a sense of group identity. This is in concert with collectivist values. These interdependent relationships help satisfy their cultural values and developmental milestones to achieve a sense of belonging. This need is particularly salient in collectivist cultures where children internalize the importance of face-to-face, reciprocal and obligatory relationships (Heras, 2007; Affonso et al., 2007). Similar to other same age peers, cultural values and norms guide the developmental needs of these teenagers (Reich et al., 2012).

Third, self-report and focus group material reveals that these teens rarely engaged in dangerous or risky online behavior. For example, they are cognizant of the dangers of sharing private, personal information on line with strangers. Anderson-Butcher et al. (2010) and Mesch and Talmud (2010) report similar findings. Finally, more than half of these teenagers did not report knowledge of either being bullied or knowing someone who had been bullied. These instances rarely surfaced and those that did reported minor instances where posted material was misunderstood and taken out of context. One plausible explanation for the relatively low incidences of bullying is socialization practices. Caregivers promote collectivist values and my own research in this community confirms that they do not condone violence or hurting another child (Holmes, 2011; Holmes, 2012). Thus, one would expect physical and cyber bullying to be rare in this community.

Fourth, these teenagers acknowledge the positive and negative aspects of using social media use (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). For most, it is a fun and entertaining way to stay connected with friends and family. They dislike the drama that unfolds in part because it can be hurtful to those involved in the typed text dialogue. Socialization practices encourage the acquisition of prosocial skills, thoughtfulness and sensitivity to others, and violence of any kind is not condoned (Hera, 2007; Holmes, 2012; Holmes et al., 2013). Thus, phone texting or posting online negative comments conflicts with the teenagers’ cultural values and it occurs infrequently. Their online activity and behavior reflects their cultural values and the teens use these to construct and guide their electronic communication content. Although negative experiences do occur, they are quite rare. Positive social interactions figure prominently in their daily experiences as these teens regularly display a regard for one another. This is true in all the social settings in which they are situated.

Limitations

There were some challenges in the current project. First, this group of teens is relatively homogeneous with respect to ethnic heritage and socioeconomic status. Thus, it would be difficult to generalize these findings to a broader population. Second, there were unequal proportions of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the sample. This was a consequence of both school enrollment and participation rates. In addition, it is possible that some of the more sensitive questions were difficult to address in the focus groups. Questions that addressed the school’s or their parent’s involvement in their social media use might have made the teens uncomfortable to answer in front of their peers.

Future Research

As O’Keefe and Clark-Pearson (2011) and
Lusk (2010) noted, technology and social media use is a historical-normative influence for 21st century teenagers. The interconnectedness of electronic communication forms and discourse exchange is a pervasive part of life for most American teenagers (Lusk, 2010; Vahlberg, 2010). The teenagers in this sample are able to manage their electronic communication forms such as social media and cell phone use in ways that are consistent with their cultural values (Lopez & Livingston, 2010) as collectivist values are reflected in their social media activity and behavior. Collectivist values guide how these teenagers culturally construct their understanding of and how they maintain, complement, and enhance their social relationships (Solomon & Theiss, 2008). Future research might pursue similar projects with teenagers from different cultural regions and ideologies to broaden our understanding of the role of technology in the adolescent experience and from their perspective. Finally, future research might consider developing both qualitative and quantitative measures to assess how cultural practices shape adolescents’ electronic communication behavior and perceptions.

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**References**


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Appendix: Sample Interview Guide

Icebreakers:
What are some of your favorite things to do? What is a typical day like at school? What do you want to do when you graduate high school? What is your favorite sports team? What is life like on the island?

Interview Guide:
1. What types of content do you post on social networking sites?
2. This question is about privacy. Have you ever made a contact that asked you to reveal personal information?
3. Have you ever been bullied in cyberspace? Do you know anyone who has been bullied? Please explain.
4. Would you say social networking sites like Facebook are a positive experience? Please explain.
5. Would you say social networking sites like Facebook are a negative experience? Please explain.
6. How many invitations from friends did you accept on Facebook?
7. How many people have you blocked or unfriended from your Facebook account? Why?
8. Have you ever regretted posting material on Facebook? Please explain.
9. Do you spend more time communicating with your friends on Facebook than you do actually spending time with friends?
10. Are your friends on SNS the same as your friends in the community?
11. How do you define your online friends? How do they differ from the friends you see every day?
12. Do you form long distance relationships with people on Facebook?
13. When communicating with your friends do you phone text more or post online more?
14. What is your favorite social networking site? Why?
15. What is the value of Facebook/Twitter to you?
16. What is your overall impression of social networking sites?
17. Is there any school involvement in your Facebook activity? For example, does school search your profile and pictures? If yes, how do you feel about this
18. Do your parents have access to your account? Are you friends with your parents and can they see your page?
19. Do you think teenagers in other parts of the country use social networking sites the same way you do?
20. Could you go one day without accessing your social networking sites? Please explain.