



# VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION in a Generation Why World

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# VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION in a *Generation Why* World

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## THEME

This paper is an attempt to define and clarify the changing nature of communication within the demographic group of Japanese 17-23 year olds, which from this point I shall refer to as *generation why*,<sup>1</sup> or at times for simplicity, *gen why*. The prior youth group was known as *generation x*. The present group of adolescents suitably is dubbed *generation why* as they tend to question and doubt the reliability and worthiness of authority, information and rules.

My interest here is not of a linguistic nature but rather a research into communication patterns. My premise is that the youth comprising *generation why* are no longer receptive to learning from traditional teaching styles and methods. Technology has altered the nature of how the *generation why* communicates and receives information.

I will set out to demonstrate a series of recent lifestyle trends in communication, analyze their effect on society and then provide teaching suggestions for keeping pace with these rapidly changing challenges.

The analysis that follows takes 2 vast subjects, *virtual reality and generation why*, both of which are undergoing chaotic renewal daily, and extracts a small area where they overlay and dynamically feed each other. This area is in *virtual communications*.

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<sup>1</sup> In a larger context, *generation why* includes the 5-24 year olds, but this study will focus upon the sub-group of 17-23 year olds. This group specifically examines the communication patterns of students 1 year prior to entering college, "college age" students (though non-college students were included), and young adults 1 year after college graduation.

## METHOD

In July 2000, I completed a survey taken within Kansai, Japan among the *generation why*, 17-23 year old sub-group. All questions involved *generation why* lifestyle patterns ranging from entertainment, study habits, personal hygiene, to likes and dislikes. The responses provided a rich cultural backdrop for possible causes underlying the more germane topic of *virtual communications*. The intention was to look at how the shifting communication patterns of *generation whys'* primary relationships, i.e., the inner circle of friends and loved ones, differ from those of older generations', and if, in any way, their communication and relationship to their secondary relationship - the outer world of their environment and society, is affected.

Approximately 4000 people responded to answering 3 lifestyle questions out of a total of 20. The 3 questions were randomly chosen by the interviewers. The result of this method was that some questions were asked more than others, but a general, well-displaced sampling resulted. The margin of sampling error within the Kansai *gen why* population was approximately plus or minus 6%. The purpose was to record a very general feeling of present lifestyle patterns and trends that are now appearing. Examples of some of the questions follow: "How many hours do you sleep at night?" ... the average being about 6.8 hours a night; and "How many times are you absent from class in a week?" ...average response - 2.3 times.

One area of questioning given special attention was **the i-mode cellular phone**. I will set out to provide reasons backed up by research and deductions to show that presently **Japan's biggest technological mover of societal change is found in virtual communications**.

## COMMUNICATION'S NEW FACE

The manner and the media through which communication is now taking place is transforming the social structure of Japan, and thereby inviting a revolution in attitude towards education, the workplace, family, friendships and most importantly...self. In Japan there are 12, 391, 000 people<sup>2</sup> in *generation why* born between 1977 and 1983. This number is significant as it represents 10% of the entire nation of 126, 486,000 people and is providing the major driving force that will lead Japan in this new century.

Prior to discussing *how the generation why* is communicating it is necessary to look at their present lifestyle patterns. In interviewing 220 students in the Kansai area the average time spent studying outside of the classroom is 4.6 hours per week. Within this average, the 18 year olds studied significantly longer than senior university students. Part of this is attributable to most senior students working more than 20 hours per week, or job-hunting, or the general feeling that university life is just about finished and is of no further value. In a survey taken 5 years ago among my students, the average time studying was approximately 3 hours each day. The average student, in this targeted *gen why* age group of 17-23 year olds, out of 320 interviewed, is now working 15 hours per week at a part-time job. For those looking for work, nearly 9 % are unemployed; double the unemployment rate for all age groups.<sup>3</sup> According to Norio Mochizuki, the business news editor of *The Yomiuri Shimbun*,<sup>4</sup> 'an increasing number of young people have no intention of looking for work or quit their jobs on their own initiative, even after putting great effort into finding them.' According to a government survey, nearly

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2 *The Management and Coordination Agency of Japan* - "Somucho."

3 *The Management and Coordination Agency of Japan*.

4 Article by Norio Mochizuki, "Freeters," *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, Aug 2000, p.7.

80% of those between the ages of 17 and 24 who are not working are "voluntarily unemployed." They are known by the name *freeters*,...a convenient combining of the English "free" and the German "arbeiter" (worker). *Freeters* will work part-time or hop from one temporary job to another.

Free, leisure time 5 years ago was spent by meeting friends in cafes, shopping, family time together, playing sports, student clubs, karaoke, family computer games, listening to music, and watching TV. These social activities have not disappeared by any means, but the length of time involved within each category has greatly decreased, except for computer games, listening to music, TV watching along with the ever-increasingly popular cell phone phenomena.

Before, in the Japanese society, bonding was established within the extended family and face-to-face interaction with others, as has been the case in all societies since the beginning of civilization. The main changes over time involved whom it was acceptable to interact with, within the limited and accepted geo-socio-political norms of the day. In today's world, such rules have been thrown out the window. People throughout the world want contact, "**Is there life out there...**beyond my artificially created social world?" Technology has forever changed the nature of communication. What then is *communication*? One definition would be, "The exchange of *meanings* between individuals through a common system of symbols."<sup>5</sup> In 1928, the English literary critic and author I.A. Richards defined communication as a discrete aspect of human enterprise:

*Communication takes place when one mind so acts upon its environment that another mind is influenced, and in that other mind an experience occurs which is like the experience in the first mind, and is caused in part by that experience.*

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5 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2000.

Today, "**minds are acting upon their environments,**" but in ways that were unimaginable in the days of Richards. **The medium of choice for receiving and transmitting information, ideas, and assurances of love and friendship has become virtual.**

To understand the present meaning of the word *virtual* it is necessary to go back to William Gibson's coining of the word *cyberspace*: "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts.... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding."<sup>6</sup> Existing, living, functioning, communicating in external, non-earthly realities is the world of *cyberspace*. This reality, with the suggestion of computer scientist/futurist Jaron Lanier, soon became known as *virtual reality* (VR). One definition of *virtual* is: "Being such in essence or effect though not formally recognized or admitted."<sup>7</sup>

Brenda Laurel, a renowned thinker on how computer devices can be used as virtual theatrical stages, was asked about today's virtual communications, "No matter whether you look at the informational function or the Dionysian one, the idea of it happening in real time and in the present location, both activities require people to be in the same space at the same time. What VR has done that is so discontinuous is get rid of real space as a requirement. Cyberspace has the potential of being able to make space go away as a mediator of collective experiences."<sup>8</sup> For *generation why*, the virtual spaces created by today's multi-media technologies, in particular the cellular phone, are becoming the "new realities"

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6 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, New York: Berkley Publications Group, 1984.

7 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2000.

8 Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality*, Summit Books - Simon & Schuster, 1991, p.385.

where meetings take place, different aspects of the self are expressed, and culture is reforming. ***Gen why feels comfortable in cyberspace, a virtual reality where the trials, demands and responsibilities of day to day earth life are suspended.*** Communication becomes low impact, non-threatening and controllable. Emotions can be eliminated or played out to any level of fantasy that one desires. The medium, the virtual space, becomes the holder that absorbs, transmits, disappears the communication; to the extreme, the **relationship in this space also becomes virtual.** Cyberspace architects from AutoDesk specializing in CAD (computer aided design), Randolph Walser and Eric Gullichsen wrote, "Cyberspace will not merely provide new experiences, like new rides at a carnival. More than any mechanism yet invented, it will change what humans perceive themselves to be, at a very fundamental and personal level. In cyberspace, there is no need to move about in a body like the one you possess in physical reality. You may feel more comfortable, at first, with a body like your "own" but as you conduct more of your life and affairs in cyberspace your conditioned notion of a unique and immutable body will give way to a far more liberated notion of "body" as something quite disposable and, generally, limiting."<sup>9</sup> Walser and Gullichsen, writing in a science journal, go on to question what is this new identity? And if in cyberspace, when communicating and experimenting with new versions of our personality, are the consequences of our actions physically, socially, economically, artistically, technically, and ethically as significant as those in our "original" personality? Does an alternative personality, active only in cyberspace, legally constitute a person?<sup>10</sup> Sometimes immersion within virtual reality creates personality changes of assuming different identities and personae. Are these permanent or tempo-

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9 Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality*, Summit Books - Simon & Schuster, 1991, p.191.

10 Eric Gullichsen and Randal Walser, "Cyberspace: Experiential Computing," *Nexus '89 Science Fiction and Science Fact*, 1989.

rary?...Our future history will tell us. One small aspect of this, *i-mode* usage, is miniaturizing virtual communications, written and spoken, and minimizing face-to-face communications.

In researching the nature of communication, the American psychiatrist and scholar Jurgen Ruesch has identified 40 varieties of disciplinary approaches to the subject, including psychological, anthropological, architectural and political among many others. If other informal communications are added, such as play behavior and sexual attraction, there are over 50 modes of interpersonal communication that may be analyzed. For some time researchers within different disciplines have attempted to explain the ways in which human dispositions, social interactions and perceptions of reality are affected by certain kinds of communication. Until recently, communication was a singular event, that took place at a specific time and place, whether in a movie theatre, a 7pm news program, or an evening phone call to a friend. Today, for *generation why*, **communication has become process oriented** whereby the gathering and sending of facts and opinions in the form of information bytes is nearly instantaneous and continuous. Ideas in dramatic moving action can be accessed immediately through the streaming of audio-visuals over the Net; self-photos and video are sent to loved ones with the push of a button on a wireless Internet device. **Storing and remembering information is secondary; how it flows is primary.** Information technology, now called IT, for *gen why* has become an extension of the self like **the vocal cords or hands.**

In the 1960's, the Canadian education theorist, Marshall McLuhan made the often-discussed statement, "The medium is the message." He was referring to the effects of the media on modern day culture in moving from *hot* media - the *print* culture of books, magazines, and newspapers in which people and the medium are intimate by having an intellectual bond with one another, to *cool* media - radio and initially TV formats



where the people have been less engaged. The communications industry for some time accepted TV as being a cool media format. The historian, John Vivian<sup>11</sup> argues that McLuhan believed the new electronic media *were* actually *engaging* people not so much in a separate individualistic way but rather in a connected way with others around the earth. This McLuhan called, the **Global Village**. McLuhan believed that the print culture had actually alienated people one from another, firstly by the insular experience of reading and secondly by changing how people were thinking and thereby communicating. The written word required logical, sequential thinking of following information from one point to the next, in order. This way of thinking was contrary to our traditional way of relating by, what McLuhan called, **tribal** communication which was multi-sensory, spontaneous and free to move down any path chosen by the communicator. To follow this thought into the present day, one might argue that 'yes' a **retribalization**<sup>12</sup> has indeed taken place within the Internet via *hypermedia* which encompasses sound, images and movies. Hypermedia is part of the great wonder of *hyperlinks* that allow the computer users to move freely from page to page while jumping from web site to web site. This non-linear, somewhat spontaneous form of communicating with the computer and with others certainly, in many ways, contributes to tribal communication on a global scale. From this point though, I will have to take a different path by asserting that the present communication medium of choice in Japan, the *wireless cellular phone*, **is breaking down the bonds of deep human connection** and, thereby,

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11 John Vivian. "Human Alienation," *The Media of Mass Communication*, 1997, p. 428.

12" retribalization," Marshall McLuhan's word for the high level, multi-sensory, spontaneous communication taking place within and among many people together. As McLuhan died in 1980, maybe if he were living today he would acknowledge the wisdom of his beliefs.

**creating isolation within *generation why*.**

There are many who will avidly stand-up and support the social/business merits of the Internet revolution. Much has been voiced about this. The point of contention here is how the wireless cellular phone is affecting thinking, emotions and, in turn, communication behavior. I also, by no means, am suggesting that cellular phones should be banned from Japan. That, by itself, would create a revolution.

With the debut of NTT DoCoMo's i-mode service in February 1999 a tribal cohesion among Japanese *gen why* instantly took place. Within 20 months, there were more than 12 million DoCoMo i-mode users in Japan. This number does not include the other cell phone companies. The transmission of high resolution photos, moving pictures and sound will soon be the norm. *Gen why* is on-line with one another; connecting, browsing and checking in. **The tribal cohesion is in this connectivity.** As will be further noted in this paper, this connectivity is of primary importance; the meaning and depth of the communication message tends to be secondary or irrelevant. Regarding positive social changes much could be written in support of being on-line, mainly in convenience: university students checking teaching schedules, accessing medical and nursing care information for the elderly, stock market information, the news, theatre listings, computer games and *sushi* horoscopes.

Of all the *generation why* that responded to the questions, about 98% owned a cell phone. Most of the respondents were university students, and my assumption, based upon some general statistics, is that within the non-university group at present, the percentage of ownership is slightly lower. For university students, between 5-10% owned a desktop or laptop computer. In comparison with American university students, according to an August CNN-TV technology survey, 90% owned a desktop or laptop computer, 18% owned a cell phone (37% of families own a cell phone) and 10% brought a Palm-handheld computer to class. At this

moment, the biggest demand is for a palm computer with wireless Internet and voice transmission capabilities...in both countries.

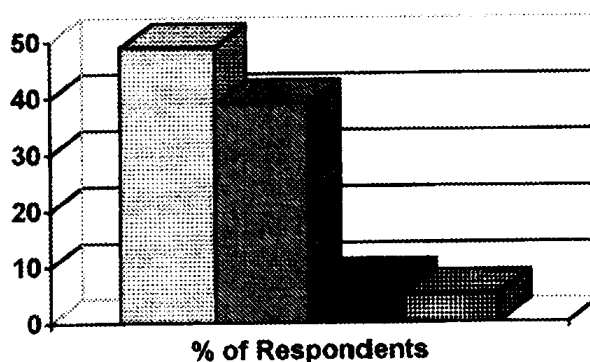
The following survey analysis provides general data for looking at how *gen why's* communication and social life is beginning to revolve around the use of the cell phone.

A short commentary follows most surveys. The first question about "Which cell phone company are you using?" was significant only in that the respondents felt it was rather important to use the same model as that used by their friends. To a certain extent, it defined a belonging to their cell phone relationship group. The other questions about cell phone time, costs and purpose were an attempt to look at to what extent their personal life and resources are being directed towards possessing and using the cell phone.

## CELL PHONE SURVEY

Question A: "WHICH COMPANY'S CELL PHONE ARE YOU USING?"

<u>Company</u>	<u>% of Respondents</u>	<u>Number Responded - 220</u>
DoCoMo	49	
J-Phone	39	
TuKa	7	
Other	5	



■ NTT DoCoMo ■ J-Phone ■ Tu-Ka ■ Others

Typical Respondent Comments

1. DoCoMo's i-mode is considered to be the highest quality
2. J-Phone - good service and cheap

**Question B: "YOUR MONTHLY CELL PHONE COST?"**

Average Cost: Y8100                      Number of Respondents: 220

Comments: 'A cell phone is much cheaper to buy than a computer, although the monthly operating costs are much higher.'

**Question C: "WHO PAYS?"**

<u>Themselves</u>	<u>Parents</u>	<u>Number of Respondents: 20</u>
65%	35%	

As might be expected, the older the *gen whyer*, the more (s)he was responsible for paying the monthly fees. This leads to the aforementioned survey result of students spending much more time doing part-time work. Now, one of the reasons for working more and studying less is to pay the ever-escalating costs of new devices along with the monthly fees of M-mail (mobile mail).

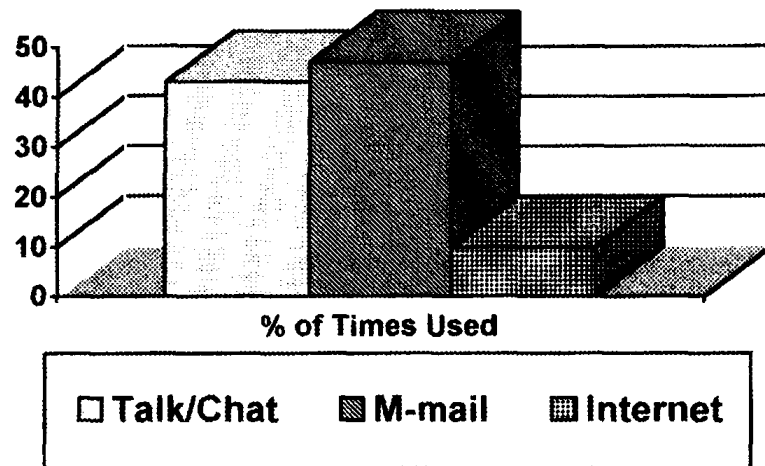
**Question D: "IS IT IMPORTANT TO OWN A CELL PHONE?"**

<u>Essential</u>	<u>Not Essential but Useful</u>	<u>Not Necessary</u>	<u>Respondents: 100</u>
24%	63%	13%	

**Question E: "EACH TIME USED, WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?"**

in % of Times Used

<u>Talking/Chatting</u>	<u>M-Mail</u>	<u>Internet Services</u>	<u>Respondents: 120</u>
43	47	10	



The usage varied between 5-20 times per day. This did not include the endless checking for messages received. M-mail is part of the new mobile culture of wireless cell phones; the younger the respondent, the more times used. The *original Net culture* of e-mail assumes you have a personal computer and expects the recipient to think about or sift through what has been sent; the *Web culture* provides universal access to rich sources of information; and *M-mail* assumes you are online or at any moment soon will be online as you move about. Due to much cheaper access costs, m-mail is increasingly being used more and more over voice conversations. *E-mail* is much more singular in time and space as the sender/recipient chooses the appropriate time to compose/respond to a message that suggests thinking about. *M-mail* requires the sender to send the right information at the right time, with limited words...about what is happening now. There is little time delay. It is integrated into the present process of life unfolding.

**Question F: "PRIMARY REASON FOR BUYING A CELL PHONE?"**

<u>Friends Have One</u>	<u>No Phone at Home</u>	<u>Convenience</u>	<u>Respondents: 60</u>
56%	13%	31%	

As buying a cell phone is presently a new phenomenon, I would

assume that the "reason for buying" would soon shift away from "friends have one." In an informal poll, I found that choosing the same company with similar/compatible services used by their friends was becoming an important reason for buying.

**Question G: "HOW LONG IS A TALK ON THE CELL PHONE ?"**

Average: 4.5 minutes      Number of Respondents: 60

**Question H: "HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN USING A CELL PHONE?"**

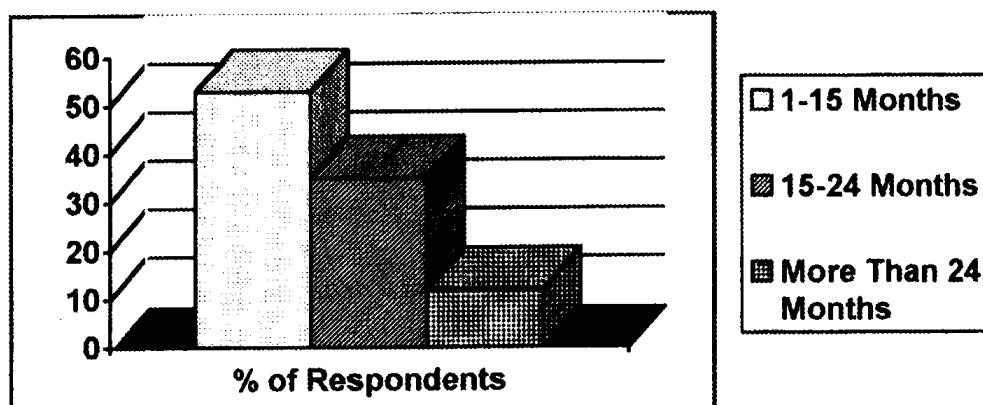
Number of Respondents - 60

1 -15 Months	15 -24 Months	More than 24 Months
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53%	35%	12%
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This number of memory stored cell phone numbers seems to be grow-

**How Long in Use**



Prior to May of 1999, i-mode did not exist. Today, nearly all the *gen why* is buying i-mode capability with their cell phone. **The cell phone** is growing as a natural extension of *gen why* lifestyle: communication that is instant, short, digitalized one or two pieces of discreet information briefly stated, non-intellectual, not too deep in thought and **requiring a minimum of face to face contact.**

**Question I: "WHEN DID YOUR CELL PHONE USE BEGIN?"**

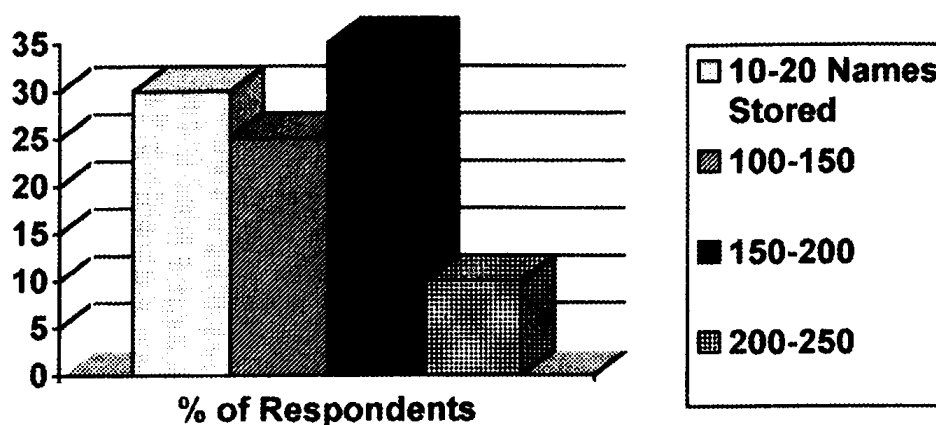
<u>High School</u>	<u>After High School or In University</u>	<u>Respondents: 20</u>
65%	35%	

**Question J: "HOW MANY CELL PHONE NUMBERS DO YOU STORE?"**

Number of Respondents: 30

<u>10 - 20</u>	<u>100 - 150</u>	<u>150 - 200</u>	<u>200 - 250</u>
30%	25%	35%	10%

**Names in Memory**



ing steadily week-by-week. It was commonly expressed that a high number was prestigious and fashionable, especially among the youngest female respondents. It meant that others considered them to be popular and liked; as the *gen why* in the USA say, 'Way cool!'

**Question K: "WHERE DO YOU KEEP YOUR CELL PHONE?"**

<u>In a Bag/Back-Pack/Purse</u>	<u>In a Clothing Pocket</u>	<u>Respondents: 20</u>
75%	25%	

Most women used their purses, while the men preferred their pock-

ets. As a note of importance here, it's becoming **commonplace in the classroom to "store" the cell phone inconspicuously on one's lap.** This position makes it readily available to receive and send messages while appearing to be "listening" to the teacher's lecture. To older generations this appears to be a blatant violation of classroom etiquette. To the *gen why* it's a natural outgrowth of their way of studying, which is *multi-tasking*. Multi-tasking involves the taking in and putting out multi-sensory pieces of information while performing several tasks simultaneously. It's akin to digitalized packets of information sent over the Net...information that is quantified into separate packages. **In the isolation of their room at home this means surfing TV programs at the same time their MD (MiniDisc) is playing full volume as they send an M-mail while munching on chips to grasp the meaning of their Science studies.** To be receiving merely one dimension of information, in this case the auditory mode of listening to a professor, for one and a half hours, approaches the intolerable for a *gen whyer*. Their attention span is short and they move quickly in and out of the different sensory channels of visual, auditory, olfactory, and the kinesthetic feelings of touch and emotions.

**The glazed-eye look of many of the *gen why* students sitting in the classroom today stems from a stimulus vacuum or the presently common attempt to shift into a non-intellectual, kinesthetic accessing of their cell phone.**

An additional question was asked to 300 *gen whyers*, "Is the language that you normally use changed when sending an M-mail?" This was difficult to quantify, but 70% responded, 'Yes,' with pictographs commonly used for expressing emotions and shortening sentences. "I'm happy!" would be ^o^ , ^\*^ 'Good morning,' and zzzzzz 'I'm sleepy.' With the Japanese written language of Kanji having roots in symbolic pictures this makes sense as a way to communicate in today's virtual med-



ium.

As this *mobile culture* has captured the imagination and emotions of *gen why* where has it all come from? To answer this I return to McLuhan and his followers' argument about the electronic media recapturing among people a sense of retribalization; I would agree more closely with Esther Dyson's assertion that the *mobile culture* is moving from "unstructured communications media into structured applications. Instead of an 'unstructured' conversation, with rich information as in e-culture or rich emotion as with voice, there's a form of 'structured' query-and-response messages (in M-mail) that some kind of business application keeps track of in the background."<sup>13</sup> Though Dyson was referring to mobile business practices mainly in the West, this way of communicating has taken on its own form in Japan among the *gen why*. As Dyson has noted, "M-culture (mobile) is real-time and quick, whereas E-culture (loosely, E-mail and the Web) is store-and-forward, delayed gratification, and offers at least the OPPORTUNITY to think before you respond."<sup>14</sup> M-culture, in Japan and in the West, is great for making things happen quickly and sharing messages can often be used for a broad spectrum of people. M-mail tends to be person to person specific...and the content seems to vanish quickly, like a voice conversation. For *gen why* M-mail provides a means to stay in touch, but not too deeply in touch. So often I was told that usually **the content is irrelevant**; it's but an unimportant small piece of information.

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13 Esther Dyson edits the technology newsletter *Release* 1.0 and is the author of the best selling book *Release* 2.0. The information in this paper was extracted from her newsletter *Release* 3.0, June 2000.

14 Dyson has often referred to her concerns, as written in her newsletters, about the challenge of using e-media to assist in communication rather than deaden it. She poses the question about e-culture trends, "When do you stop feeling you're interacting with other humans and start feeling you're interacting with a bureaucratic system?" Here, she was referring to the flat feeling, often machine like nature, of short digitalized communications of information sending and retrieving on a massive scale.

**The number of times for receiving M-mail from as many people as possible was what counted.** It is used emotionally as a confirmation of being loved, feeling worthy, and having many friends.

Typical M-mail messages are: "At the department store. Bye bye." , "Now shopping. Maybe something later. *Ja ne.*" or "Meeting a friend. Good-by." The message is short; the language abbreviated and coded.

**Within this great convenience of instant messaging and fun, lies the more ominous side of avoiding face-to-face contact with others.** It requires too much effort. A common complaint by *gen why* is, "I have so many friends, but I feel so lonely." There is a sense of fear of interaction, especially with those outside of one's most intimate circle. This alienation from main stream society takes the form of distrust of others, lack of respect for authority, little motivation to strive for life goals, a general disinterest in learning the fundamental subjects presented in a school curriculum, and a lack of involvement in character building group activities such as sports or student clubs. In the home talking softly and secretly in their room while on the cell phone is commonplace, whereas in prior times parents knew when and with whom they were talking. For a counter-balance while in a quiet public place, as on a train or in a cafe, many of *gen why* feel little embarrassment in speaking loudly for all to hear. A general pattern prevails of 'notice me, but don't ask me to get involved with you.'

## CHALLENGES

Virtual communication for *gen why* has become in some ways like a drug addict's fix. ***Gen why* are stimulus, multi-sensory junkies.** Communication with the outside world is virtual...TV, computer games, and M-mail. *Gen why* has no idea of how to use a typewriter. The 19 year olds were born the same year as the CD and the 18 year olds as the Walkman. *Gen why* and techno stimulation was a marriage from birth. In communicat-

ing today, first a relationship is established with the M-mail, not with the person directly. The M-mail gives a momentary *high* of being wanted, needed, and loved. Expectations rise and fall in the process. This is reflected in the complexities, complications and difficulties of living in today's world. **Many have become desensitized to the highs and lows of life.** They have seen and heard it all...in the streets and through the virtual mediums of TV, Nintendo, Sega, Sony Playstations, the Internet, and cell phone technology...high drama fantasy entertainment that blurs reality. The American writer, Patrick Giles<sup>15</sup> has written that *gen why* are attracted to opera because it "mirrors the search for the fantastic with its high volume, intense musical expression, and its reliance on spectacle and fantasy." In Japan, this analogy can be made between *Kabuki* and its "modern" counterpart -- heavy metal and thrash music<sup>16</sup> ... all stretching the limits of reality and the boundaries of the senses through an interplay of dramatic costuming, vocals, and radical musical support.

**Disagreements and misunderstandings are avoided.** Conflict resolution is not part of the *gen why* culture. It requires too much energy; feelings are hurt, and the tools for working through the problems aren't taught.

**Confused sense of self.** Regarding this point Japanese *gen why* and American *gen why* diverge. In America, the sense of *I* is the center of attention. That identity of self-importance does not change within the peer group or before authority figures. The other person is valuable and worth my time to be with if (s)he assists in placing me at the 'center of

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15 Patrick Giles, *Opera News*, Feb 2000.

16 Thrash music is nihilistic, abrasive, industrial music whose loud rhythms and vocals move at a furious pace and the lyrics often are flavored with anarchist overtones. A few popular Japanese thrash bands are *Slight Slippers Overcome Pain*, *Taiho*, and *Loudness*.

the world.' In Japan, *I* or *self* is expressed in many different ways, each suggesting a different nuance of formality and relationship: *watashi*, *watakushi*, *atashi*, *boku*...one defines oneself in relationship to another. If one's relationship with others is damaged or non-existent, there is a loss of identity. This can take the form of acting out for attention in public through rude behavior that cuts against the grain of social norms, or for the very sensitive *gen why*, retreating into isolation. In the latter, all contact with the outside world is eliminated, dropping out of school ensues, and classmates are not spoken to. This phenomenon is now known as *hikikomori*. It is estimated that there may be as many as 1 million *hikikomori* youth in Japan. Prior to World War II, privacy in the home was non-existent among the family members. Today, the inner sanctums of the modern Japanese home can be very private...and isolated; a place to withdraw, escape and disappear from the world. My hypothesis is that *hikikomori* youth, in their withdrawal, are in search for their true self, their identity, that is unique and apart from others. For the extremely sensitive virtual reality addicts, Web surfing, computer game simulations and M-mail communications are potential contributors to non-kinesthetic, withdrawal, communication behavior with the outside world.

**Self-expression over self-control.** Often this stems from a lack of self-esteem by calling out for acknowledgement of self. Not liking what is perceived to be happening to oneself, pushed to the edge, and being highly impatient easily foments intolerance, disrespect for the rights of others and, at times, bullying. As a note here, studies carried out by the Japanese *Mombusho* have arrived at similar findings to those in the States by "The Congressional Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence" that studied national student violence issues and prevention options for over six months in 1999-2000.<sup>17</sup>

**Gen why are cynical about words spoken by authority figures** in education and politics, along with advice from their parents. Authority

figures shade the truth for self-serving purposes. Hypocrisy prevails. The older generation has made promises of a greater society in which the quality of life will be greatly enhanced, yet people are overworked, the world rain forests are being destroyed, water sources are contaminated, the air is filled with chemicals, foods are being genetically modified without the consent of the consumers, and workers in impoverished countries are being exploited by the big multi-nationals...all in the name of progress...*why?* *Gen why's* truth meter is running all the time.

For educators and employers, *gen why* are carrying a bag full of skepticism that must be sorted out and addressed. In exchanging information with the highly regarded American educator and youth seminar leader, Eric Chester,<sup>18</sup> the following questions have been identified as common and crucial to forming attitudes of *gen why* in both America and Japan:

1. *Why* should I respect you?
2. *Why* do I need to learn this?
3. *Why* should I care about this school? this place? this job? <sup>19</sup>
4. *Why* do I need to work so hard in school, in this job?

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17 *The Congressional Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence*, co-chaired by Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn and Congressman Martin Frost. Their findings suggested educational climates must foster a spirit of acceptance and care for every child; where behavioral expectations are clearly communicated, as well as consistently and fairly enforced. Also that uncontrollable student behavior in the classroom was on the rise.

18 Eric Chester is a leading authority and keynote speaker of *generation why* in America. He has developed a teaching/training program for teachers, "Whys Learning" and a program for parents, "Whys Parenting."

19 regarding jobs, the concerns differ in the two countries as the prevailing attitude in American *gen why* is 'how much do you need me and what can you give me?' whereas in Japan the prevailing feeling is 'maybe getting a good job is futile, and if I get a job maybe it's hopeless in giving me a bright, rewarding future and besides, your company isn't so interesting anyway.'

5. *Why* do I need to wait to be rewarded, honored, and respected?

Within *gen why* there is an ever-present sense of alienation from mainstream society. Within this past century generation gaps have been often referred to as maturation gaps. The distinguishing element of today is a gap colored by deep hues of cynicism and distrust of those in authority.

### **GEN WHY - COMMUNICATING ACTION**

Having spent a week with 10 *gen why* international organizers and demonstrators for social justice, in Philadelphia, USA during the first week of August 2000 a pattern of common themes emerged. This age group has few highly visible role models. There is a general feeling that neither national governments nor international bodies, e.g. the United Nations, represent them or are interested in their concerns. Our leaders are one or all of the following: incompetent, corrupt, or out of touch with the needs of the common man. The *gen why* is innovatively finding their power within the social/technological structures that have nurtured them. Many similar and diverse interest groups have connected and organized, via the Internet, a worldwide protest network. On a major scale, this was first seen in Seattle in late 1999 where 10s of thousands of demonstrators from many countries filled the streets. Shortly after, this movement re-formed in Washington, DC, then in Philadelphia in August 2000, at the Republican national Convention, soon to be followed by the Democratic national convention in Los Angeles. Though much has happened within the USA, cousin demonstrations have taken place throughout Europe with some sympathy support coming from Japan. On the extreme end of this social action group are the anti-government, anti-authority protestors, the anarchists, who feel violence justifies their end purpose of anarchy. Most though, were advocating non-violent protests in line with

the teachings of M. Gandhi and Rev. Martin Luther King. The one theme that held this disparate group together was that society has been on the track of cultural and biological extinction, pushed along by trade globalization...and their generation was not going to tolerate it any longer.

### **COMMUNICATING WITH *GEN WHY***

On a fundamental level of preparing *gen why* for integrating in a healthy, functioning way into society **presentation/communication skills, manners and appropriate work ethics are required**. This includes how to effectively resolve conflict, appreciation for differing opinions, and enhancing teacher/student, student/student, and student/parent communications. This sounds obvious and natural, yet who is teaching it? The proper place for learning this is in the home and classroom. These days though, it is commonly being left to companies and their new employee 'rules of behavior and attitude training,' a setting where the needs and the state of mind of *gen why* may not be understood. For the educator, to some degree, it's necessary to **experience the *gen why* lifestyle**. This can involve listening to their music, watching their movies and TV shows, and asking them many questions.

As *gen why* is anti-rule and anti-procedure in attitude, **they want to know why they should be doing what is requested of them**. If explained in a clearly understandable way that relates to their life, it removes the attitude of resistance and thereby frees them to unleash their creativity, inspiration, desire to learn and henceforth move towards their goals.

**Present the truth**. This requires not only speaking the truth but also providing a learning environment where they can discover the truth for themselves. Practice the skill of speaking simply, clearly and in a way that they can understand. Of course this sounds practical, but often proves to be the most difficult to do.

**Make each presentation/teaching a grand event.** Use as many media forms as possible: music for discussion or for background during classroom tasks; visuals - Web information, videos, learning demonstrations; storytelling for idea generation; student interaction in problem solving, games for learning, and role playing. Educators and psychologists Bandler and Grinder's (1983) research uncovered how people learn in multiple ways and that each individual has a unique primary learning style to access new information. These learning styles are based upon the tendency of each individual to learn by accessing a primary internal channel. These primary learning channels are: visual, audio, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive (deep feeling). The research in multi-dimensional, multi-sensory settings, in behavioral science terms known as *enriched learning environments* (ELE), has been well documented by Michael Hutchinson.<sup>20</sup> *Gen why* thrive in ELEs.

Upon setting the course direction for the class, briefly outline for the students the plan and the goal for today's lesson, what it looks like and why they are learning it, what the core teachings are pertaining to this subject, then guide them through the process of actively learning for themselves.

**Be flexible and use as many tools as possible.** Teaching is a process of blending the conditions present, regardless of how extreme, with the day's lesson plan.

Provide a framework where-in students can learn to **transform stressful power and control situations into effective emotional, social and relationship interactions.** Initially this would require educators to be aware of the internal process of our ever-changing perceptions, which create our thoughts, and emotions that lead to our actions and often habit-

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Hutchinson, *Mega Brain Power*



ual and sometimes violent behavior. These skills for understanding and changing behavior also include learning how to disagree while at the same time honor the other person. One training program of note is available in America for teachers, parents, counselors and students. It is called, "*Skill Talk*" by Performance Spectrum, Inc.<sup>21</sup>

**Create a *space* that encourages learning.** In the aforementioned text, ideas tested in the rigors of some very tough learning environments e.g. school dropouts, bullies, drug addicts, were provided to grow inspiring external learning settings. An ingredient that is paramount for making everything work is the feeling, the environment, the space created by the educator, i.e., the *presence* of the educator. Though the *presence* of a person is often referred to as an ineffable quality that is subjective in nature, elusive in description, and ever changing in what it represents, *it is what deeply informs the essence of what is being conveyed.* As points of reference, the following definitions are given for presence: "demeanor, carriage, or aspect of a person, especially when stately or impressive,"<sup>22</sup> along with, "self-assured confidence: poise."<sup>23</sup> *Presence* is created by the educator's willingness and skill to be with the students, on their level, in a way that is empathic and understanding, courageous and inspiring, and humble yet strong.

The youth of *Gen why* are demanding that educators be accountable for their own actions, shoulder some of the responsibility for the present world conditions, understand their needs, in turn, guide them to a better

21 "*SkillTalk*", by Performance Spectrum of Bellevue, Washington, USA was created by a group of educators and psychologists. Its purpose is to teach younger people basic relationship skills to successfully manage the interaction between the 'inside' world of their mind and the 'outside' world of what they experience from people and other sources of stimulation from their environment. This leads toward self-management, responsibility, and personal accountability.

22 *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historic Principles.*

23 *Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary.*

tomorrow, and are well versed in the new multi-media technologies of today. This is their state of mind, these are their expectations, and this is the world that they are living in.