Chapter 4

Socializers: The Technological Social Butterflies

> I am the queen of texting. I have to text. I'm forced to do texting because some of my grandchildren just will not answer the telephone. They have their phones on vibrate so they just will not talk on the phone. So, if I want to ever talk to them I have to text. I'm a great texter and I know all the abbreviations. I make some of them up myself and I have them ask me what they mean. "Huh you're a pretty smart old lady" they'll text me back. I make up my own text words […] I don't know what they say or think about me doing all this texting, but I love to do it. And I have to do it. (Gwen)

Connectors. Communication. Socializing. Bridging generations.

For Socializers, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are devices, applications, and services that connect them to others. Unlike Practicalists, Socializers do not view ICTs as tools, but rather as communication bridges between people. Unlike Enthusiasts, Socializers do not love all ICTs, but instead love those technologies that facilitate and encourage socialization.

Socializers are highly involved in their communities and tend to have large intergenerational families. It is through these intergenerational contacts that they are introduced to new ICTs. Their active lives mean that they prefer mobile technologies that allow communication while going about daily tasks. To Socializers, a valuable technology is one which allows them to build a connection with others.

Formative Experiences

Socializers do not have memories of early mentoring and positive technology interactions that Enthusiasts have. They do not credit having worked in positions that had high contact (direct or indirect) with ICTs as influencing their use, as Practicalists do. Instead, what seems to have shaped Socializers is their natural tendency to be extroverted and their desire to connect with others, something

that these individuals shared was a life-long trait. Technology, throughout their lives, has always represented a means of *connection*.

Introduction to ICTs

While many Socializers encounter ICTs through their work, the ICTs which hold Socializers' interest in their free time are those that serve a communication purpose. Upon retirement, many Socializers simply stop using ICTs which they consider to be non-communicative in nature. Gwen started her career as nurse and later transitioned to being an administrative assistant. Upon her retirement, she concentrated primarily on using social ICTs, such as her cell phone for texting.

Socializers' introduction to new ICT forms happens primarily through their relationships, particularly relationships with younger individuals. Mary shared that many of the things she had learned to do online were influenced by one of her five children:

> I learn a lot from the kids. I see what they use and how they use it. This past Christmas they were here and they were showing me their iPads and their iPhones. And I learn a lot from them about what you can do with the stuff. (Mary)

Socializers respond differently to being shown such ICTs than many of the other types. Whereas Enthusiasts are constantly discovering new ICTs on their own and Practicalists are often introduced though work tasks or colleagues, Socializers are introduced to new ICTs through their relationships with younger people. Socializers are eager to have others show them new technologies, but are specifically interested in being shown new ways to communicate and interact. Gwen speaks about how her children show her their smartphones and tablets, and she is constantly learning new ways to use them:

> I want whatever the grandkids have […] My daughter had an iPad the other day. She showed me her daughters' gymnastics performance on it. I asked her "show me how to use it." I was a bit afraid at first, but she said you just touch it like this. Now I want one. (Gwen)

Like Gwen, Socializers are keen to understand what younger individuals around them are using to communicate. Socializers are deeply embedded in their community: highly involved in religious organizations, in their neighborhoods, and in charity/volunteer work. This community work brings them into contact with individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and these contacts often cross gender, racial, generational, and socioeconomic boundaries. For Socializers, these community contexts can be important introduction points of new ICTs, often given as gifts. Socializers tend to be generous with their time in

these contexts and often find their generosity reciprocated, such as in the case of Gwen:

> So, I went into church the other day, and the pastor said to me, "Some people found out your digital camera was stolen, and they wanted you to have this." He handed me a package and it had a digital camera in it. I couldn't believe it! Now I need to figure out whom to thank. (Gwen)

Gwen's digital camera was stolen at a community event and she was gifted a new camera at church. Because Socializers invest so much into their communities, these communities often want to give back to their Socializers. The gifting of these technologies is often more than a thank you, however; the Socializers' presence in these communities is viewed as *critical* and it is understood that technology facilitates Socializers' involvement. Socializers who are unconnected from their communities cannot participate in them; therefore, it is critical that these communities help Socializers stay connected.

To Socializers, an ICT that connects them to others has value, particularly if it allows them to connect to their multigenerational network of friends, family, and community members. Socializers always want to know what ICTs their young friends, family, and community contacts are using, and how they are using them.

ICT Use

Socializers value constant contact. It was easy to identify a Socializer based on one feature alone during the interview phase: interruptions. Interviews with Socializers were constantly interrupted by phone calls, texts, and individuals' knocking on the Socializer's door. Even when Socializers would silence their phones, oftentimes interviews were interrupted by individuals who knocked on the door, worried about the Socializer being "out of contact" for a few minutes. When Socializers would turn on their cell phone at the end of a three-hour interview, they were often met with a dozen text messages and/or voicemails, announced by a steady stream of pings and rings. Oftentimes Socializers would check these messages quickly before even setting up the next interview.

Socializers are the most eager of all the five types to adapt to "the young's way of doing things" (Mary). Socializers have come to believe that the only way to stay in touch with their youngest contacts is to mimic the younger generation's communication habits, adopting the same technologies. When we re-visit the quote from Gwen at the beginning of the chapter, we see that she is eager to adopt the habits of her grandchildren when it comes to texting:

> I am the queen of texting. I have to text. I'm forced to do texting because some of my grandchildren just will not answer the telephone. They have their phones on vibrate so they just will not

talk on the phone. So, if I want to ever talk to them I have to text. I'm a great texter and I know all the abbreviations. I make some of them up myself and I have them ask me what they mean. "Huh you're a pretty smart old lady" they'll text me back. I make up my own text words. My son, of course, he's a sheriff and he's very busy so I'll text him real quick just "? R u kp" (Are you a cop?) or "?location" (Where are you?). I don't know what they say or think about me doing all this texting, but I love to do it. And I have to do it. (Gwen)

Gwen states that she both "loves" but also "has to" text to stay in touch with her youngest family members. Socializers do not enjoy using any ICT itself as a "toy" (like Enthusiasts do), but rather enjoys the relationships that ICT use helps them to build, facilitate, and maintain. It is important to note that Gwen speaks with the words "have to" much more frequently than "want to." Gwen loved having close relationships with her grandchildren, and she was keen to maintain those relationships. For her, that meant that she needed to learn to text, including learning all of the "text speak" her children and grandchildren used. She did not learn text speak because it was fun in itself (although one can see how she has fun using it) but because she understood its value in communicating with younger people. Older adult Socializers often feel that their use of ICTs is simply mimicking the use of younger individuals. They verbalize that they are adopting communication patterns of younger people – patterns that do not come as naturally to them:

If someone says there's a picture of so and so on Facebook, actually, we jump on and just check it out. We take what we get, whatever is there is what we enjoy. We have found with Facebook though it's been a huge difference in our lives because we do not get information directly even from our children. They forget to tell us because they assume that we have read it on Facebook. But we take what we can get – it's the young's way of doing things. We see this technology thing through old eyes. (Mary)

For Mary, Facebook is important because it helps her to maintain a connection to her children (and, therefore, her grandchildren). Socializers, like Mary and Gwen, often verbalize that they have adopted these ICTs (texting, social media, etc.) because their intergenerational relationships necessitate it. They do not expect young people to adapt to the usage patterns with which they are most comfortable. Instead, older adult Socializers believe that they will create a stronger relationship with young people if their own (older) generation is the one that adapts. Mary enjoys using Facebook, and what she gets from her use of it, because she values her relationships with her grandchildren and children.

Socializers prefer ICTs which allow connections to be made and maintained. This focus on using ICTs to strengthen relationships' permeates across all areas of Socializers' lives and across many different technologies, as Gwen speaks about:

> My cell phones I must have. That's a must. I must stay in touch with my family and my neighbors. So, my digital camera of course would be just for things happening here in the community and with neighbors, with the children. Sometimes not so nice things that happened in the neighborhood when the bad guys were out there, and I take their picture. Sometimes I need to call neighbors and they have to call me or they need to use the cell phone, or I need to call on my community for help. If there's for instance a birthday that one of us is put on the morning news, or someone in the neighborhood, a school age kid or a parent and there's an event, I watch it on TV. Or if someone has been in an accident and we want to hear about it on the TV. The focus is in what is happening in the community. Microsoft Word I use with writing. I send out poetry to people in the community. Facebook I use to just send messages and having fun in the community and among my family. I text for documentation, mainly different things and dates. Making sure dates are right when something bad happens and getting people's name and events, things that have happened for record keeping. (Gwen)

Gwen lived in Section 8 Housing (private low-cost housing with government provided rent assistance) and was often referred to as "Grandma Gwen" by the children living in the complex. She watched out for her neighbors, often speaking about the occasional issues that happened: domestic violence incidents, drug abuse, and criminal activity. In these cases, she used her ICTs, such as her digital camera and texting, to document occurrences, helping to protect her neighbors and build community. She ran a small food pantry out of her hall closet with help from her church, using her cell phone as a means of connecting to those who would otherwise go hungry. Every technology she has in her life, be it word processing, social media, or the television, is used in some way to strengthen relationships.

Mary was also deeply involved with charity work through her religious community and describes how she uses various ICTs to keep her connected to others:

> I'm on the telephone with shut-ins and I email our godchild. We're very pro-life and we're very concerned with all the issues that are going on. I'm always on the computer getting information on all kinds of activities. I have what I call a black book which I've had for probably since 1999, since I got the computer.

> It's full of things that's developed in the news and it was on all
> issues of concern that I had. One of the first things I out in there
> was when Dolly was cloned. It was in the newspaper and it was
> this little article and I cut it out and I showed everybody […]
> I often share things I've kept in my black book with the members
> of the community. (Mary)

Socializers use all the ICTs at their disposal to promote, build, and maintain
their relationships, even ones that many people would not consider communica-
tive. Mary speaks about how she uses the Internet to research issues she is pas-
sionate about, from her pro-life stance to her views on cloning. The purpose of
researching these issues, however, is not for her own benefit, but so that she can
share them with others in her faith community and among family and friends.
Her use of the Internet for research is not a task (as it is for Practicalists) or for
fun (as it is for Enthusiasts) but is meant to *build community*.

Socializers have a unique ability (compared to other user types) to use ICTs
that many would consider non-communicative or non-social to build relation-
ships. Socializers view all ICTs as being potential connectors (if used correctly),
even when other user types would not. Gwen used non-communicative ICTs for
relationship building, including digital photography:

> My digital camera, I just loved it because I could capture, cap-
> ture, capture. I could record. I love to capture moment by
> moment as the storm comes, the sky changes. I would keep the
> date on and the time. I could see from seconds, just really seconds
> to minutes, how things changed. It was just wonderful, just so
> wonderful. I sent my daughter and her husband a card that
> I made for their anniversary back in April. She said "Mom, this
> picture that you took was exactly a year ago on our anniversary!"
> So, the date was there and the time and everything, so it captures
> everything. It lets me be connected to people in a way I otherwise
> couldn't. (Gwen)

Most individuals (who are not Socializers) would not view or use their
camera in the same way as Gwen. She does not use it just as a device to take
pictures, but as a device to take pictures *to share with others*. In particular,
this sharing focuses on relationship building. The card Gwen makes for her
daughter is not made from any picture that her daughter might like, but a pic-
ture was purposefully taken at a specific date important to her daughter. The
picture was not taken because it was pretty, it was taken because it could
build a connection.

It is not the technology itself that necessarily encourages socialization, but
Socializers' unique use of it that encourages such connectivity. Nancy, who lived
in an assisted living center, was limited in the number of ICTs she had access to
by finances and due to her impairments (arthritis and visual). However, despite

having only limited access, she made use of the technologies she had to maintain her relationships, most notably her television:

> I like certain things on the television about India and they have specials on every once in a while. I like the specials that they have. My daughter was calling me and telling me about something that she had seen on the History Channel. Lots of times I'll talk and share what I've seen with my daughter Bette and my friend Danielle. I try to get people to watch TV together in the main recreation room. Danielle and her family donated that TV. I also find out about what my community needs on the TV […] I had seen it on TV that they had a lot of things for needy children for Christmas on the news. But they didn't have anything for young girls, so I had the chance to make a lot of hand crocheted pocketbooks. I made a small purse to go inside and I think there was about 40 or some odd and I sent them in and they had them on the news. I will be doing that again. I saw in the newspaper last year that they needed helmet liners for the troops in Iraq. So, I told another lady here and she was helping me, and we sent close to 300 liners overseas. (Nancy)

Nancy used the television for three social purposes: to connect her with her friends and family by sharing what she has seen on television, to gather residents together to build community, and to find out about various volunteer opportunities. Nancy's television use reflects Socializers' ability to build a community with technology. Many people would likely believe the television is an isolating device, watched in solitude or used in place of a face-to-face conversation. The value in any ICT to Socializers is based upon their own personal views on how they can use the technology socially.

In contrast to Nancy, other Socializers expressed that they had little use for the television – except on the rare occasion when they used it for a social purpose. Gwen found little use for her TV, unless she had her grandchildren over:

> I'm not much of a TV watcher. Sometimes I think I have the TV on maybe just for the noise or I think you're supposed to turn the TV on once in a while or whatever. I don't sit still long enough to watch TV. So, I like to use it for the grandkids. So, when they come […] I'm not interested in that stuff by myself. When they first came out with the TV I remember the living room was like the family place, you know, so nobody was shut off from one another. I mean mom and dad and the rest of the family watched the same thing. It was social. Kids today they have TV's in their own room and whatever. I would never have a TV in a bedroom. (Gwen)

Gwen's active lifestyle interferes with her ability to watch television. Television watching, she states, can be a social process (and in fact, she believes it used to be more social); however, in modern times it is often used in isolation. She has no use for television unless it is being used socially.

It is notable that Gwen had greater mobility than Nancy. Gwen also had greater access to many more ICTs she could use for communication, including a television, landline, computer, the Internet, and a cell phone. Nancy only had access to a television and a landline telephone due to her physical limitations and limited funds. This disparity in access can explain the differing attitudes of Nancy and Gwen toward television. In Nancy's context of the assisted living center, television was often the *only* available ICT many residents could use due to their physical, mental, or financial constraints. Given this context and her restrictions, Nancy prevailed in using the technology she had to foster community:

> We have televisions on all the floors. If somebody is in their room too much, getting too isolated or depressed, I try to get them to come to things we do here that other people like. Bingo is a big thing, and the Wii [gaming system] is a big thing. They have a bowling tournament on the Wii. I like to get other people involved in it. I like for other people to get involved in it. (Nancy)

Nancy used the television and digital gaming as two of the tools in her arsenal to promote socialization among the residents. She had served for years as the residents' elected representative at the assisted living center and had recently declined being re-nominated. Despite this change in her role, she still watched out for the other residents. She commented that many new residents had difficulty adjusting to living in the facility, and she sought to ease their transition into their new home.

A Wii gaming system had been donated to the facility about two years prior to our interviews. Many of the residents enjoyed playing group games, with bowling being a favorite. Nancy frequently encouraged residents to set up virtual bowling tournaments and she would often recruit participants from their rooms to play. She was not an active gamer, but she attended and organized these games. Nancy and Gwen's differing perspectives on television and video games reflect that the importance of an ICT to Socializers is not embedded in the ICT itself, but whether Socializers can use the technology to connect with others and/or build community in their everyday lives.

Despite Socializers' desire to adopt the communication technologies of those around them, such adoption can be limited due to physical, cognitive, and/or financial barriers. Due to Nancy's financial situation, she qualified for a United States federal government provided telephone program, the Lifeline program. This program includes a free cell phone with limited free minutes and data, provided by the government to individuals who receive certain social welfare

benefits (Federal Communications Commission, 2018). The models that are provided, however, are often not designed for an aging population. Several of the participants I spoke with during the study had Lifeline program phones (most commonly through Assurance), but their models were tiny, oftentimes smaller than my digital recorder. For Nancy, who had come to the assisted living center due to her arthritis, this was frustrating:

> I had one of those little [Assurance] phones and that thing drove me crazy. It's so small that it makes it very difficult to try and use it properly because you're always hitting the wrong buttons. I found that if you have arthritis or you have anything wrong with your hands it's almost an impossibility to use a cell phone. So, I wish someone would somewhere along the line think about the elderly and give them a bigger phone, something that they can use on a regular basis. It was too small. I sent it back to Assurance. (Nancy)

Nancy's experience with the Assurance cell phone illustrates that Socializers, like all the other types, are not necessarily free to use the devices they would like to because of physical, cognitive, or financial barriers. In the case of Nancy, her arthritis left her unable to manipulate the buttons despite desperately wanting to learn texting:

> Texting is something that all of the kids are doing right now. My oldest great-grandchild is 13 and she's texting all the time too. I might be a little slower at pushing the buttons, but I would be able to do it if I wasn't overdoing it and hitting two or three at a time. They have the big phones and the large phone numbers for people, but I don't think anyone has thought about keeping the cell phones from going too tiny. There are people that are in their 20's with arthritis and I bet they're having the same problems we elderly are. (Nancy)

Nancy wanted to be able to text her children and grandchildren, a point she brought up in every interview, several times. (Her friends and family that I interviewed also mentioned to me that she wanted to text.) As a Socializer, Nancy wanted to communicate with the youngest individuals in her network the way that they communicated: texting. However, her financial situation and impairments left her with no opportunity to adopt the communication patterns of her grandchildren.

Socializers value constant communication with their large intergenerational family, friend, and community networks. They tend to have busy lives and are often out in their communities. Their need to constantly stay in touch, coupled with their high levels of activity, means they have a strong preference for mobile ICTs.

ICT Display

The more mobile a technology, the more useful Socializers find it. ICTs tend not to have specific places in their homes, but instead move with Socializers. Socializers prefer the cell phone to the landline because it allows them to communicate while doing everyday tasks: staying up to the minute with their social networks. They prefer tablets and laptops to desktop computers because of their portability. They move their ICTs with them around their home and outside of it.

Socializers are so in the habit of taking their communication devices with them that such behavior is automatic. Both Gwen and Mary carried around their cell phones during our tour of their ICT displays in their home. Their involvement in their neighborhoods and communities results in little time to be "chained" (Gwen) to an ICT that is not mobile:

> The cell phone I can walk around with. I'm not confined to sitting. I'm not just sitting while talking on the phone. Instead, I can get a lot of things done. I can make my bed. I can do a lot of things, like hang out my clothes. I can do a lot of things, like go to my car. I spend so much time on the phone that if I couldn't get things done while on it I'd never have clean clothes or make my bed. (Gwen)

Gwen relates that she spends so much of her day communicating that without a cell phone, she would likely not complete simple daily tasks, such as laundry. Socializers shared that they often kept their cell phones with them at the table while eating or in the kitchen while cooking. The motivation for keeping these devices with them is much different from Enthusiasts: Socializers keep ready access to their devices to be available for communication with others, whereas Enthusiasts keep ready access to be able to play with their devices. During our interviews, Gwen kept her cell phone on the coffee table, easily in reach from her position on the couch, despite her having shut it off (Figure 3).

Gwen, who did not own a computer but accessed the computer at the local library (mostly for social media and word processing), had an interest in owning a tablet or a laptop, primarily because they were portable. She had once owned a desktop but had found its stationary nature to be too "sedentary" and incompatible with her lifestyle. Mary and her husband, Cleveland (a Practicalist) owned a laptop they shared. Mary had "finally convinced" her husband (over the course of our meetings) to leave the laptop in the living room (where she spent most of her time at home) rather than placing it in the basement office:

> I like to have the laptop up here, so I can just use it. We used to leave it downstairs, Cleveland likes to use it down there. But I don't see the point of leaving it down there. I like to check my email or Facebook when I feel like it and not having to go down to the basement. (Mary)

Figure 3.   Gwen's Cell Phone Is Never Far From Her Reach.

Mary, as a Socializer, wanted to be able to use the laptop to communicate when she felt like it (which was quite often, she checked her social media and her email before and immediately following our visits together). Cleveland, as a Practicalist, viewed the laptop as a tool that belonged in a tool-specific space: the basement office. It was notable that during my interviews with Mary, Cleveland would often retreat to the basement office with the laptop. He would return at the end of the interviews with the laptop in hand to give to his wife, who would immediately check her email and social media accounts. If Cleveland failed to bring up the laptop from the office, Mary would gently remind him to do so. As a Socializer, Mary wanted her devices easily within reach, so that she could constantly be in touch with others.

Nancy was much more limited in her use of more advanced ICTs due to her arthritis and finances. She owned a flat screen television and a large button land-line telephone. Her room in the assisted living center, while private, was quite small, and therefore, all devices were within easy reach. During our interviews together, Nancy sat in the only chair in the room and I sat on her walker at the end of the bed. She always moved her phone closer to her during our interviews so that she could "answer it if anyone called" − which they frequently did. (Our interviews were often interrupted by five or six phone calls.) Much like Gwen's movement of her cell phone to the coffee table during our interviews, Nancy moved her telephone to always be close at hand.

Despite Nancy's inability to obtain a cell phone that she could manipulate and afford, she made her own mobile technology: a simple small notepad and a pen, which she stored on her walker in a crocheted pouch she had custom-designed and crafted (Figure 4).
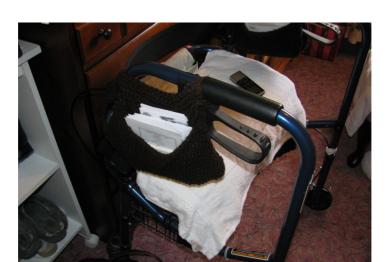
Figure 4.   Nancy's Walker with her Portable Pad and Pen.

Nancy, as a self-appointed "advocate" who watched out for her fellow residents, often recorded incidents that occurred in the assisted living center in her notebook. These included events such as residents not receiving proper medications, staff misbehavior, or other incidents. (This documentation is similar to Gwen's cell phone and digital camera documentation of the "not so nice" events that she saw happen in her own community.) Nancy also took notes on things to relay to her fellow residents' families. During my visits to the assisted living center, I saw almost every walker outfitted with such a crocheted bag and many wheelchairs featured them as well. Nancy made these in custom colors and with customized storage for other residents, who appreciated not having to carry a separate bag. Nancy shared that she would keep a cell phone in her custom bag: "If I could get a cell phone I could use the buttons on, I would keep it on my walker. That way I could text or call people anytime."

For Socializers, the portability of their devices is key to allowing them to stay in constant contact. Carrying their devices with them (and quickly answering calls and replying to texts) sends the message to others that they are always available, and value communication and their relationships. Socializers welcome such constant contact.

ICT Meaning

Socializers' lives center on family activities, religious activities, volunteering and community involvement. Socializers are deeply embedded within their neighborhoods:

I'm on the telephone with shut-ins and I email our godson. On the computer I'm always checking out things I am interested in and causes we're active in. We're very pro-life and involved with our church. We're very concerned with all these issues that are going on so I'm always on the computer getting information on all kinds of activities and things that are happening […] My family is most important to me − we raised five children and they will always be the most important people in our lives. (Mary)

We [the residents] wanted to get a flag for the assisted living center and I had written to our legislation and asked different politicians, and they finally got us a flag. Then we wanted to get a flag pole so we could have one outside and we worked to get that. We wanted to have a gazebo so we did all kinds of things to raise money to get that gazebo on our own. So, there's been quite a few things I guess I was involved with here. That's not even getting into my crocheting for charity and for the residents here. I run the community store. (Nancy)

I think it's kind of natural for me to be involved in the community. I did not intend it to be so much − I've been honored quite a bit you know from different groups […]. I just want people to respect themselves. I just want to help. I'm just Miss Gwen but Miss Gwen has a lot of fingers that reach and a big heart that reaches. (Gwen)

For Socializers, community involvement and family play a central role in their lives. Mary is involved deeply in her family and in her charity work. Nancy undertakes countless tasks to promote community among her fellow residents (from installing a flag pole to running a community store that provides everyday items residents would like at low cost). Gwen is involved in her church, runs a food pantry out of her closet, and is closely involved with her more than 20 grandchildren. The value of an ICT to these individuals is the connection the use of that technology allows. To Socializers, ICTs can deepen existing relationships and form new ones:

Another thing that we really enjoy about the computer is getting pictures sent to us from the children. Our son has muscular dystrophy and he was home for Christmas. While he was home his cousin installed a chairlift at their house. It is wonderful that he has it. We wanted to see what it looks like so our daughter-in-law sent a picture of it over email. It was so tremendous to see how it fit in because of course we're visualizing it taking up the whole stairway and I thought that really was very nice to actually see it when we couldn't travel there. Then we gave a e-reader to our

daughter and she sent a picture of our grandson who is 7 sitting there reading a book on the e-reader. So, I've been appreciating more the connection we get from the computer. (Mary)

Mary, like Nancy and Gwen, frequently used the word "connection." An ICT goes beyond the simple function of communicating to Socializers, to actually deepening and sustaining relationships. The word connection emphasizes the importance of technology in helping to create an emotional bond. This perspective is very different from task-focused Practicalists or fun-focused Enthusiasts. Socializers tend to love their technologies because of their potential to connect them to the people they love and care about.

Socializers' focus on wanting to use the ICTs that their younger friends, family, and community members use is not an attempt to "look young" or "hip." (Although most of their friends and family rate them as much younger than they are, credited in part to their willingness to text.) Instead, this focus on using, learning, and owning the ICTs of "the young" is due to Socializers' deep desire to be in touch with the younger generation.

Socializers place a high value on those ICTs which they view as deepening relationships and strengthening community and have little use (or value) for ICTs which they feel are isolating or intended to be used alone. It is important to note that this judgment of what "brings people together" versus what "separates and isolates" is in the eye of the individual Socializer and is deeply impacted by their context. Nancy, for instance, saw video games (her assisted living center owned a donated gaming console) as fostering community:

I like the Wii. We'll have tournaments on the Wii, and people love it. Especially people who like to bowl but can't physically do it anymore. It really brings the community together in a way that we otherwise couldn't because so few of us can be active. (Nancy)

For Nancy and her fellow residents, virtual bowling was a fantastic community-building activity. Many residents participated, excited that despite their impairments and/or disabilities, they could bowl once again. The gaming console, used in this way, was a socialization technology. Many outside of the context of the assisted living center would likely characterize digital gaming as an *isolating* activity, particularly when compared to undergoing a similar activity in a physical (non-virtual) setting. However, because virtual bowling fostered community in her assisted living center, to Nancy, as a Socializer, it was a *social* technology, not an isolating one.

As stated before, Gwen had a different view on video games and television use. Gwen did not enjoy watching television, preferring to spend her time reading, writing, or socializing. She felt that the television was isolating and the only time she really watched it was when she had guests over to watch a program, particularly her grandchildren. She was not a fan of video games, believing them to be isolating. Both Nancy's and Gwen's very different opinions on the ability

of television and digital gaming to connect them to others reflect the values Socializers' impart to technology: ICTs which are social are valued and heavily used; ICTs which isolate them and cause disconnection are not. While Nancy uses the television to connect to others, Gwen does not; so Nancy is a relatively heavy user of the television while Gwen rarely turns hers on. The meaning of the television is not in the television itself, but rather exists in the meanings the individual assigns the device (Lie & Sørensen, 1996; Silverstone et al., 1994). Socializers, like all the types, cannot be identified by the ICTs they own or use; but by the meanings they ascribe to these ICTs.

Both Gwen and Mary were writers, and they viewed the computer and word processing (upon which they both were writing books) was a way for them to share their faith and beliefs:

> I do a lot of writing […] It's important to me that I write every day I can. Writing is so important. It has helped me heal from the trauma in my life. Writing has helped me heal and has helped me share. Family is just so strong, so strong and so important. Passing history on is very, very important to me. Writing is not only important to me and my family but just passing things on is really important to do. So much of our history [as African Americans] is lost, and it's so important to be passed on. There's a proverb and it says if you have knowledge let others light a candle to it and I certainly believe that is important − that I share my knowledge with others. (Gwen)

> Now I probably would not have written a book if I didn't have Word, because I do not have a good handwriting. I would just scribble it all out. But when we got the computer and Word it was absolutely a huge gift. I really am a big admirer of Word because it has made writing a book so easy to share and write. My book is very important to me, it's about my faith and life as a mother. (Mary)

For both Gwen and Mary, similar themes of the importance of family emerge as they speak about the importance of writing, and the role of word processing in enabling the sharing of their thoughts with others. For Gwen, it is the sharing of a previously mostly oral African American cultural history and tradition. For Mary, it is the sharing of her faith and family values. Their writing is not a task to be completed on a simple tool, but rather an act of *sharing* − a word both women used independently to describe their writing. Word processing is seen as an enabler of this sharing, of building community and family. As spoken about previously, Gwen used her digital camera as a device to build relationships, using printed photos to make greeting and thank you cards. She felt this let her personalize her cards, making them more heartfelt, drawing her closer to their recipients:

> I love photography. I think the skies and the trees tell us such great stories. I make cards out of some of my photographs and I send people out different pictures I take. I write a little poem that goes with the picture. My soul speaks to me and I just write out what comes into my head and pick out a picture that is special to me. It is made for that specific person, made only for them. That makes it special. I love my digital camera, because it allows me to make these special cards. (Gwen)

For Gwen, the value in her digital camera is not that it is a fun toy to play with (as it would be for Enthusiasts) or a great hobby tool to use during leisure time (as it is for Practicalists), but the value lies instead in making a personal and "special" connection to others. She loves her digital camera because it deepens her connection with those she creates these cards for. Creating these cards is both deeply personal and deeply social; it is an act of love. For Socializers, ICTs are valued for enabling, facilitating, and strengthening relationships.

Socializers: The Technological Social Butterflies

Socializers are well connected with their communities, families, and friends; and are often involved in charity, volunteering, and/or their religious communities. This high level of involvement means that they have a large network of intergenerational contacts. They spend a large part of their time socializing and communicating with others. Technology enables such socialization and they can be seen as the "technological social butterflies" of the ICT user types. Key points about Socializers include:

- Socializers deeply value relationships, building community, and sharing knowledge.
- Technologies used for socialization activities are valued, those they see as non-social or isolating, are not.
- In elder age, Socializers are eager to learn the technologies that young people are using, mimicking young generations' use patterns to foster intergenerational relationships.
- Socializers prefer mobile technologies that allow them to be in constant contact with their large intergenerational social networks.
- To appeal to Socializers, one should emphasize the social nature of a technology, or its ability to connect individuals and deepen relationships.

While Enthusiasts love ICTs as fun toys, Practicalists see ICTs as tools, and Socializers value ICTs for their potential to connect them to others, the fourth user type, the Traditionalist, values the ICTs of their youth. We will explore Traditionalists and their nostalgia for these older forms of technology in Chapter 5.