

HAVE A PART IN YOUR KIDS' LIVES AND BE ENGAGED:
PARENT-ADOLESCENT CELL PHONE COMMUNICATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Today more and more teenagers are adopting cell phone communication as the primary way to communicate with their peers and parents (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). Literature is vast on the negative use of cell phones by teenagers such as sexting and bullying (e.g., Draper, 2012) and on the negative implications it has on them and their relationships with peers (e.g., D'Antona, Kevorkian & Russom, 2010). However, it is very limited in exploring how cell phone use affects parent-adolescent communication. To investigate this question, ten parent-adolescent dyads who have used cell phones for more than six months participated in 25-40 minute interviews consisting of 14 open-ended questions about how they use cell phones to communicate. The teenagers' ages ranged from 14 to 18 years of age and the average age of the teenagers was 16.6 years. Transcripts of interviews were analyzed for main themes. I found that parents and teenagers text each other more than call each other. They use cell phones to communicate for practical reasons, such as safety/checking in with each other, as well as for relational reasons, such as staying in touch with each other at a distance and sharing fun information with each other. These devices help the parents and adolescents be available to each other, facilitate quick yet flexible response times, and allow parents to teach responsibility. However, they also face challenges of overuse, which can hinder parent-adolescent communication, and can lead to miscommunication. The results of this study can be used by Family Life Educators to help new parent and teen cell phone users to learn about the benefits of cell phones as well as some of the expected challenges and help them get the most out of their cell phone communication.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my parents who have always been my strongest supporters. I do not think I would be where I am today if was not for their support. I also dedicate this thesis to my sister Lizeth who just recently received her Master of Science in Chemistry in Food, in the Mexico City. I also dedicate this thesis to my beloved brother Jorge Alberto, RIP, who always encouraged me to further my education. I feel that in many aspects of my life, I have been shaped in a positive way by his lessons and his advice.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

We live in a world full of technology, which has resulted in making life easier for us in many ways. In the past, the idea of being able to communicate as instantly as we do today, at the push of a button on a phone we carry everywhere we go, seemed extreme. Thanks to technology, now we can communicate with others almost from anywhere and at any time. According to Lafferty and Goldsmith (2004), most people would like access to the newest technology devices, such computers and mobile phones. There are many applications that can be installed on desktop or laptop computers, which can allow calling and sending messages, just like a cell phone. However, the greater mobility of cell phones allows people to communicate with others while in public areas, elevators, restaurants, or even while trying on a new pair of jeans at a retail store or selecting a product at the grocery store. Even though people sometimes feel awkward or left out when they are next to someone engaged in a cell phone call, this has become the new way people communicate, creating new social norms and etiquette about its use in public (Lipscomb, Totten, Cook, & Lesch, 2007).

As an undergraduate student, I was curious about why my cell phone became almost a necessity to me. After talking to some of my friends, I began to notice that they shared some of the same feelings about cell phones. Some felt disconnected from the world when they lost it. This was in fact, my first motivation to try to understand how cell phones have become so necessary for us that we depend on them.

Igarashi, Motoyoshi, Takai, and Yoshida (2008) found that teenagers around the world carry cell phones and are becoming very dependent on them. I obtained my first cell phone at the age of 19, later than the age that most teenagers now first obtain theirs in America. Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, and Purcell (2010) pointed out that cell phone adoption is popular among high

school students. Between 2004 and 2009, 12-year-olds with cell phones of their own increased from 18% to 58%. For 17-year-olds during that time period, it increased from 68% to 83%. Therefore, it is clear that much of the recent overall growth in cell phone ownership among teens has been driven by cell phone adoption among the youngest teens. Moreover, this tendency seems to be happening in many other parts of the world, as more high school students in other countries are carrying cell phones and are becoming very dependent on them (Igarashi et al., 2008). In a study in Melbourne, Australia, 94% of 317 adolescents ranging from 11- to 14-years- old from 20 secondary schools in the city had mobile phones (Inyang, Benke, Dimitriadis, Simpson, McKenzie, & Abramson, 2010). Males were significantly younger than females at the age of their first use of mobile telephones, and those who had no siblings were more likely than those with siblings, to be younger for their first use of cell phones. Clearly, mobile phones are becoming very popular among teenagers, and therefore, it is reasonable to say that teenagers are participating in a new era of communication.

I began to wonder how this affects communication within families, in particular, communication between teens and their parents. I remember looking around every place I went such as restaurants, the mall, parks, libraries, cultural events, and grocery stores for people using their cell phones. I was surprised when I realized that there was not a place in which there was no one using a cell phone. This happened even in restrooms. It was fascinating to me to see how we seem to need to be connected with others. Later, for several months, I frequently observed the interactions parents had with their teenagers who had cell phones. I saw some parents taking pictures with their teenagers with their cell phones and I heard some parents telling their teenagers to call their other parent and ask a particular question. However, I also saw many parents telling their teenagers to put their cell phones away, turn them off, or leave them in the

car. I saw other parents getting frustrated with their teenagers because they were deeply distracted on their phones. However, I also saw some parents on their phones disregarding their teenagers.

One of the saddest moments for me was when I saw a young boy who appeared to be about 14 years old, sitting across the table from a lady who appeared to be his mother. It was the typical busy place during lunch hour at a fast food restaurant. The mother just kept looking at the boy and asked him question after question. However, the young boy never made eye contact with her, and only replied to some of her questions with single-word answers, like “yes” and “no.” There was a moment when she asked him to put the cell phone away. He did not comply and just ignored her. The mother had a sad look on her face and seemed to feel embarrassed when she noticed I was observing them. She kept talking to him, but the boy stopped answering. She finally gave up and took a bite of her food. He also ate his food, but kept busy on his device. That was the moment that made me think, “What is happening here?” I noticed the same phenomenon in many restaurants. The picture was the same, teenagers and parents who did not have a conversation while at least one cell phone was being used.

Verbal communication with others is an important aspect of the socialization process for humans (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991; Hauser, 1996), and parent-adolescent communication has been identified as a critical aspect of adolescents’ social context and growth (e.g., Keijsers, & Poulin, 2013). Technological devices, such as cell phones and computers, can help with communication within the dyad (e.g., Gao, Rau, & Salvendy, 2010; Morrill, Jones, & Vaterlaus, 2013; Walsh, 2010). However, it seems that they also may create a barrier to communication. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how cell phones affect parent-adolescent communication.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Our world is experiencing a technology revolution and researchers are beginning to explore this phenomenon: from investigating some of the ways individuals advocate for certain policies by using the Internet and technological devices (McNutt & Menon, 2008) to how we use technology in our personal relationships (Keyton, 2012). Technological advantages continue to grow and, of course, this influences our communication styles as well. A significant result of the rise of technology in the U.S. has been a rapid increase in phone communication. In 2003, “approximately 7.5 million Americans had [eliminated traditional land lines] and cell phones represented 43% of all phones in service in the U.S.” (Lipscomb, Totten, Cook, & Lesch, 2007, p. 47). By 2013, the picture was different (Bullian, 2013). “If you live in the developed world, you likely already have at least two of these transportable devices (along with 65% of the people around you) connected all day, every day, no matter where you go, unable to escape...[We have become] the ‘plugged-in’ culture” (p. 1075).

There can be many reasons why adults and young people get a mobile device, such as for social status, to listen to Pandora®, and to use it to connect with others. One the main reasons why parents and adolescents get cell phones is to be able to communicate with each other (O'Doherty, Rao, & Mackay, 2007). However, there are many other ways that these devices can be used. Some devices can be used to send and receive e-mail, play games, gamble, calculate operations, watch videos and movies, listen to and read books, etc.

Today cell phones are very accessible for most individuals, including teenagers (Martin, & Marshall, 1999). Cell phones are a resource for accessing social support networks; for example, reaching out to family members during hard times, to police in an emergency, and to friends in times of celebration. All this makes cell phones desirable for parents and teenagers.

While some researchers see the positive side of using technology to communicate, others focus on the negative side. I will explore both aspects in this literature review.

Advantages of Cell Phones and Communication

A cell phones' mobility allows people to communicate with others no matter where they are – while in both private and public areas, in their cars and restaurants, or even while shopping. Adults may use cell phones differently from their younger counterparts, and young adults might use them mainly to fit into the norm of having a cell phone or applications on them (Lee, 2009) that allow talking to others. Studies (e.g., Morrill et al., 2013) have reported some benefits for adolescents who use cell phones, such as bonding with others and expanding their networks because cell phones make it easier for them to communicate and organize activities with peers. Additionally, it also has been reported that adolescents who have more friends, and longer friendships tend to use online communication more frequently than those with fewer friends (Lee, 2009). Moreover, a recent study demonstrated some gender differences in young people who use cell phones. Females use cell phones to create intimate relationships more than males do (Morrill, Jones, & Vaterlaus, 2013).

Cell phones not only make it is easier for teenagers to maintain interpersonal connections, but also can encourage autonomy and give them social status among their peers. Blair and Fletcher (2011) interviewed 20 Caucasian and African American seventh graders and their mothers. The teenagers reported that having a cell phone felt like part of the transition to becoming adults and that they had a sense of responsibility about cell phone usage and maintaining, not losing, it. Also, those adolescents who had cell phones felt less dependent than before, because they could reach their parents with a call. It seems that instant communication between family members can have its benefits.

Advantages of Cell Phones for Parent-Adolescent Communication

In addition to feeling independent, adolescents' self-esteem might increase when they receive support via cell phones from their parents when they need help. This also can strengthen the parent-teen relationship. Weisskirch (2011) investigated the ways parents do their parenting at a distance. It was found that teenagers who communicated more often via cell phone with their parents reported higher self-esteem than those who did not do so often. Self-esteem also was higher in those adolescents who got help after seeking it from their parents by using cell phones because this allowed teenagers to get the help whenever they needed it. In addition, the results showed that teenagers who seek help from parents more often felt closer to their parents when they needed and received emotional support from them. Adolescents go through many changes (Green, Myrick, & Crenshaw, 2013) and the bond and communication between the parent and the adolescent at adolescence has been found to have an impact in the biopsychosocial development of the adolescent (Everall, Bostik, & Paulson, 2005; Kaye, 2006).

In other parts of the world, mobile phones have been found to allow parents to decrease their levels of worry when their teenagers go out. Pain, Grundy, Gill, Towner, Sparks, and Hughes (2005) explored how cell phones in the UK have become important for the children's safety and the relief experienced by some of the parents because their teens can access them if they are in danger or in need of something. This increased feeling of closeness and connectedness between parents and their teenagers and the ability to be able to access each other if needed. The decrease of worries and increase of trust as a result of cell phones can be beneficial for the parents and their teens, and teenagers can gain more access to go to places on their own and with friends and these requests are usually granted (Weisskirch, 2009). Moreover, in Israel the communication through cell phones between parents and adolescents was found to

increase feelings of connectedness in their relationship (Ribak, 2009). This demonstrates that cell phones can be used as a tool in increasing ties in parent-teen relationships.

In some circumstances it seems that mobile phones can help parents with their parenting role when they are unable to be physically close to their teens. Madianou and Miller (2011) examined how mobile phones can facilitate communication between Filipino mothers who had to work abroad and their children who remained in the Philippines. They found that mobile phone communication significantly improved the ability of a parent who was parenting at a distance. In addition, teens who previously owned a cell phone before their mother left the country to work abroad, felt more connected with their mothers and were able to communicate better with them. Therefore, cell phones show potential to be beneficial for parent-child communication.

It also seems that mobile phones can facilitate parent-teenager negotiations regarding boundaries. Cell phones can be used as a tool for parents when it comes to creating a more connected relationship with their teens. Williams and Williams (2005) conducted qualitative research with 15- and 16-year-olds and single-parent and two-parent families. They looked at how the mobile phone has become increasingly important for child/parent relationships and found that cell phones can allow teenagers to be farther away in distance from their parents. In addition, teenagers and parents reported that accessibility to each other is easier with cell phones than when one must locate a land line phone and parents gain parental authority when their teens have a cell phone because parents can monitor them more (Williams & Williams, 2005). Trust is also important between parents and teens when both have a cell phone because, even though cell phones make it faster for them to communicate at a distance (e.g., Madianou, & Miller, 2011), parents must trust that their teenagers can be accessed quickly if they need them and vice versa (e.g., Pain, et.al., 2005). Therefore, mobile phones are not only a communication tool, but also

can increase parent-teen trust. At the same time, cell phones can decrease trust if the teen uses the cell phone to plan unapproved activities behind their parents' backs (Weisskirch, 2009).

Challenges of Cell Phones for Parent-Adolescent Communication

Parents who provide their teenagers with cell phones should consider talking about some restrictions, risks, and rules. Cell phones give adolescents a sense of privacy and independence. They also have access to private content, and have private conversations, because they see themselves making the transition to adulthood. "Sexting" is one problem that can result from this gained privacy. The term "sexting" is commonly used to refer to the transfer of nude or semi-nude pictures or videos between mobile devices (Draper, 2012). For adolescents, sexting can have negative implications as it can ruin someone's reputation (D'Antona, Kevorkian & Russom, 2010), bring legal consequences (Ferguson, 2011), or serve as the means to bully and harass other teenagers (Sacco, Argudin, Maguire, & Tallon, 2010). For some of these reasons, technology in the hands of adolescents can be risky.

Also, some believe that adolescents are getting addicted to technology (Bullian, 2013). Roberts and Pirog (2013) found that students across the U.S. who are impulsive and materialistic are easy targets of this trend of becoming dependent on cell phone use, especially messaging. These numbers are expected to increase because, according to Bullian (2013), by the year 2015, "it is predicted by other experts that 80% of the world's population will have some sort of mobile device such as a smart phone, a tablet, or a laptop computer" (p. 1075). It seems that we all are entering an era in which our lives cannot be imagined without pocket technology.

Another challenge for parents when it comes to cell phones and open communication with their teenagers is that teenagers can easily turn off the cell phone to avoid any communication or explanation to their parents of their whereabouts or using excuses such as,

“The battery died” (Weisskirch, 2009). Interestingly, Blair and Fletcher (2011) found that teenagers’ cell phones can diminish monitoring and could increase teens’ independence too soon in life. Moreover, communication via cell phone can be diminished when parents do not know how to use a cell phone well, hindering the communication with their teens (Blair & Fletcher, 2011), because, in fact, adolescents very seldom completely turn off their mobiles, even at school, in restaurants, silent compartments on trains, at the dinner table, and so forth—they simply put the phone on “mute” and are able to check the display for incoming messages when the phone vibrates (Stald, 2008).

When parents communicate with their children using cell phones, it can be hard to know if their teens are being honest. Weisskirch (2009) found that, on average, adolescents and their parents speak with each other via cell phone four times each day and that the main reason parents call their teens is to monitor them to see if they are where they are supposed to be and with whom they are supposed to be. Interestingly, Weisskirch also found that when calls from parents to their teens are excessive, the teens can feel as though the parents are being very intrusive and do not trust them. This sense of intrusion and excessive calling from a parent tends to make adolescents less truthful with their parents. Furthermore, when parents are upset and call their teens, it can make teens report less of the truth about where they are or about their activities, which in turn could possibly destroy good communication between them. Interestingly, when it comes to conversations, a negative effect of cell phones was found.

While there are some known benefits and challenges for both parents and adolescents when they communicate via cell phones with each other, there is still a gap in the research on how cell phone communication affects the parent-adolescent relationship, and whether it affects it in a negative or positive way. This study was designed to help understand more about this

phenomenon. It seems that even though we have been using cell phones for more than a decade, some parents are still unaware how cell phones are changing their relationships with their teenagers.

Symbolic Interaction Theory and Cell Phone Use

Theory can help explain the use of cell phones and other technological devices. Symbolic Interaction examines humanity by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviors (Blumer, 1969). These individual meanings are given priority because it is thought that people act based on what they accept as true and not just on what is objectively true. In fact, nothing under the symbolic interaction theory can have an objective meaning. For example, an object, such as a cross, might symbolize religion for one individual, but for another individual it might mean something else depending on the social interaction they had with the symbol of the cross. Thus, society it is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another's behavior and it is through these interpretations that social bonds are formed. Everyone can have a slightly different meaning for a behavior at times, but the overall meaning is shared with others. This perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and is emphasized in the process of social interaction.

Therefore, Symbolic Interaction theory can be used to examine the meaning cell phones have for teens and their parents. While for some teenagers cell phones might mean freedom and independence, for others they could represent dependence and parental oversight. Some researchers have explored how cell phones can give a sense of independence to young students (e.g., Blair & Fletcher, 2011; Peters 1991). According to Peters (1991), there is a relationship between adolescents' financial dependence and their relative emotional independence and cell phones can bring out the adolescents' independent side and help them feel included because cell

phones have become a norm within the younger generation. Therefore, I will use this theory to guide the proposed investigation of the following research question:

- How does cell phone use affect parent-adolescent communication?
- SRQ1: How do cell phones facilitate parent-adolescent communication?
- SRQ2: How do cell phones present challenges for parent-adolescent communication?
- SRQ3: For what purposes do adolescents and parents use cell phones to communicate?

CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

Purpose of the Study

Because little attention has been given to the subject of parent-adolescent cell phone communication, this study will help to explore how cell phones are used as devices or tools for accessing support networks and connecting teenagers with their parents, and how the devices affect communication within the dyad. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the impact cell phone communication has on parents and adolescents. With this in mind, the following overarching question and three specific questions have been developed.

Research Questions

RQ: How do parents and adolescents communicate via cell phone?

SRQ1: How do cell phones facilitate parent-adolescent communication?

SRQ2: How do cell phones present challenges for parent-adolescent communication?

SRQ3: For what purposes do adolescents and parents use cell phones to communicate?

Design

This study was based on a phenomenological approach. As Patton (2002) stated, “Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 104). I am very interested in perceptions; therefore, data were collected with qualitative interviews. These interviews yielded rich data and information about participants’ inner thoughts and experiences. I asked open ended-questions prompting the parents and adolescents to tell me about their communication using cell phones. (See Appendix A). In addition, this study complied with the requirements set by the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) at the Kansas State University with the application for this study approved (#6286).

Sampling Techniques

Criterion sampling was used because I included only those adolescents who have had their cell phones at least six months previous to the date of the interview. I felt this was enough time for the parent and adolescent to realize how this type of communication is affecting their communication. In addition, adolescents had to be between the ages of 12 and 18. In a past pilot study, I found that participating parents gave their children a cell phone at the age of 12, also I concluded that 12-year-old adolescents were able to describe the experience of having a cell phone well. All the participants in this study were fluent in English. Stratified sampling techniques using gender of the parents and teens also were used to recruit participants for 10 qualitative face-to-face interviews with parent-adolescent pairs who were interviewed together. In total I interviewed two mother-daughter pairs, four mother-son pairs, three father-son pairs, and one father-daughter pair. Including different gendered pairs added richness to the data because it is important to hear the experiences of fathers and mothers, as well as daughters and sons.

Parents and teens were invited to participate through personal contacts and word of mouth with an invitation form that was given to possible participants and also to those who participated (See Appendix B). Participation was completely voluntary and no incentive was given. Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research and were given consent and assent forms (See Appendices C, & D).

Interviews

I began by asking them their demographics. This included each adolescent's age, gender, race, and year of school. The unit of analysis is the parent-adolescent dyad. I discussed with the dyad why and how cell phones were being used. I was interested in both of their perspectives.

This was done by focusing the interview questions on both of their perspectives. I began by asking questions focusing on the present, as Patton (2002) suggested, and then moved to past, and ended with future-related questions.

The interviews were conducted at the place of the participants' choice. This helped the participants feel comfortable. Each interview consisted of 14 open-ended questions, and the duration of each interview was between 25-40 minutes. Interview questions were related to the communication between parents and teens via cell phone (See Appendix A). Sample questions include:

- For what purposes do you use your cell phones to communicate with each other?
- What have your experiences been communicating this way?
- What have been some of the challenges of communicating this way, if any?
- What have been some of the benefits of communicating this way, if any?

Sample Characteristics

The final dyad combinations were four mother/son and their sons were 14-, 17-, 17-, and 17-years-old. There were three father/son and the teenagers were 15-, 17-, and 18-years-old. There were two mother/daughter and their daughters' ages were 15 and 18 years. Finally there was one father/daughter and his daughter was 18-years-old.

Protecting the Data

Data were protected from others who were not involved in the study. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts. At the time of the interviews, three recorders were used that had Secure Digital (SD) cards. During the time of process of the study, the three copies of the recorded interviews were stored in various locations. One copy remained at Kansas State University at all times inside a locked cabinet. Another copy remained in my residence locked in

a safe in case any of the other copies are lost. The last copy remained in the office of my major professor on a SD card. After the study, the interview recordings will be erased. Three copies were enough to protect the data record in any case of misfortune.

In addition, I created three hard copies of the transcripts of the interviews. These transcripts do not contain any identifiable record like the participants' name or address. These copies were used for analyses.

Handling and Organizing the Data

Data were organized by doing verbatim transcription of every single interview and any field notes taken during the interviews. I also kept record of my feelings, mood, and thoughts during the whole research process. These notes, hand written or recorded by a digital recorder, were transcribed as well.

Analyses

The analyses were done using an inductive approach. This approach allowed this study to be exploratory and was not led by preconceived ideas directing the analysis. Also a descriptive phenomenological perspective was suitable for this study because I wished to learn about participants' expressed experiences. According to Husserl (1962), descriptive phenomenological analysis helps capture the meanings of the participants' experiences and tries to make connection or interrelationships.

Data Reduction

Patterns and themes were discerned from each one of the transcripts by using a phenomenological descriptive approach, the research questions, and line-by-line coding to divide the data into meaningful analytical units.

Selecting, Focusing, and Simplifying

Each dyad's transcript was treated as a single case, and cross-case analysis were done by comparing the data across other cases. This meant that common themes found in transcripts were related to one another to identify similarities and differences.

Abstracting and Transforming Data

The next step in analysis was to try to reach saturation by finding the causes for similarities and differences and subthemes as well as any quotes that may well represent each theme.

Interpreting in Relation to the Objectives of the Study

Next I described the experiences of the participants using themes, subthemes, and quotes based on the findings. Then, I tried to give genuine voice to the participants' experiences and explain how characteristics of the speaker or speakers account for the existence of certain themes and the absence of others.

Presenting Data

In an organized manner, the results of the analysis were written in a way that helps explain how cell phones affect parent-adolescent communication.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Finally, I was reflexive by noting regularities, patterns, explanations tested for plausibility, robustness and validity, and by determining substantive significance by asking myself the following questions:

- To what extent and in which ways does this study help us understand the way cell phones impact the communication between parents and adolescents?

- Does this study or my information support my findings?
- Was I able to demonstrate that this is a phenomenon that we should be paying attention to?
- Was I able to support and answer my research questions accordingly?
- How can we use these findings to apply them to other members within the family system?
- How can we use these findings to better inform parents about the benefits they can expect from having a cell phone? Does my study demonstrate this?
- Does my study clearly show and demonstrate some of the disadvantages for families and especially for the parent-adolescent dyad that adopt cell phones as a way of communicating?
- Is my study clear in the area that I was trying to explore? How do I know?
- Can the results be explored with the Symbolic Interaction Theory or would other theories fit better? (Patton, 2002)

Validity

Inductive cross-case analysis was used and one co-analyst helped to verify common themes and patterns using the research questions. Triangulation by adding a co-analyst helped to increase accuracy and address bias. The co-analyst is an expert and professor in qualitative methods. She is a parent and this helped to ensure that I could see the analysis from a different perspective than mine. The help of an expert in qualitative methods also added credibility to this process.

Credibility

A strength I brought to this study is that I have piloted this study in the past and this helped me better understand the procedure and identify what information I was looking for more easily than if I had no experience with this topic. It also gave me the opportunity to improve how I asked questions and I synthesized what I have learned. Another strength that I brought to this study was that I am a very well organized individual. Everything must have a place and I easily see patterns that occur. I believe this helped me when I organized and analyzed the data. I also know that this was helpful because I was able to keep all the data and the process of this study organized.

I had to be careful of the social desirability of people trying to look good by saying that their experience with their cell phones had been positive for the most part. Since cell phones are devices mostly controlled by the same individuals who acquired them, they might have been uncomfortable saying these devices are not working for them or that something is wrong about their personal experience. I had to be careful with how I responded to their answers and about the way I asked interview questions. I strived to always be neutral. Because I had piloted this study twice in the past, I learned how to ask questions or use probes in a manner that was empathic and neutral.

In addition, I used thick description to write about the process and the methodology sections, as well as the analysis. Furthermore, the inductive cross-case analysis was assisted by another individual who is trained in qualitative research methods. This created triangulation with multiple analysts. Moreover, my methodology supported my research goal, which was to synthesize the experiences of the parents and adolescents using cell phones.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

To investigate how parents and adolescents communicate via cell phone and what their experiences are this study used a phenomenological approach and it was conducted through qualitative interviews. Ten parent-adolescent pairs participated in this study. The teenagers' ages ranged from 14 to 18. The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes as this was what they all chose.

The focus of this analysis was to inductively identify common aspects within all the participants' experiences. This helped to answer the following research questions:

SRQ1: For what purposes do adolescents and parents use cell phones to communicate?

SRQ2: How do cell phones facilitate parent-adolescent communication?

SRQ3: How do cell phones present challenges for parent-adolescent communication?

Below the results of this study are included. Each research question has been used as a heading. Also using the Symbolic Interaction theory, one of five words -connectivity, flexibility, opportunity, responsibility, and safety- has been used as a subheading to represent the most accurate meanings cell phones might have for the dyad.

SRQ1: For What Purposes Do Adolescents and Parents Use Cell Phones to Communicate?

Connectivity

Several patterns emerged throughout these interviews regarding how and why parents and adolescents use cell phones to communicate. In general, parents and teenagers used their cell phones to stay in touch with each other throughout the day.

The mother of a 14-year-old boy mentioned the following:

Moderator: For what purposes do you call each other?

Son: To like go somewhere. Or just see if I can do something or I need something.

Mother: Yes. He lost a contact once, so he needed someone to bring him glasses.

Moderator: For what purposes do you text each other?

Mother: He usually sometimes just tells me something about school. What is going on in school or I tell him what he needs to do when he gets home.

In addition to using the cell phone to stay connected during the day, the dyads used their cell phones to locate each other and this made things easier for them. A mother of a 15-year old mentioned the following:

I got it [cell phone] mainly for her so that we can find each other. When she needed to be picked up. Or if I needed to find her in the mall.

Besides being able to locate each other, many parents also mentioned that they used their cell phones to send their teenagers reminders about activities the teens had. The following is an example of what the father of a 15-year-old said:

Father: I look at his grades online, so it's nice to be able to look and send him a message saying, "Hey, good job!" Or "I hope you have a great day." Or remind him of something that we need to cover or do. I know that I can talk to him anytime, rather than store everything up.

Flexibility

Equally important is the finding that the parents and teenagers tended to use their cell phones to plan pick-up and arrival times. This allowed them flexibility to move scheduled times around. An 18-year-old teen mentioned the following:

Daughter: When I need her to pick me up. Or sometimes when classes of swimming are over and I tell her so she can come and get me. Or if I need to go run an errand I tell her.

Parents and teenagers used their phones in a way that was convenient for them and cell phones gave them the flexibility in communicating in two different ways, texting or calling. All the participants described that they texted more than they called each other. Here is the example of a mother and her 17-year-old:

Moderator: How often do you call each other?
Daughter: Probably, no more than five times in a day.
Mother: I would say probably four or five .
Daughter: Yeah.
Moderator: How many times in a week?
Daughter: About 20, 30.
Mother: Sounds about right!
Moderator: And text messages, about how many per day?
Mother: So a week it would be about 50 or 60 text messages.

Apparently teenagers and parents were able to get a hold of each other more effectively through texting rather than calling and this gave them dyad flexibility of being able to reach each other by different means. This is described by a mother of an 18-year-old girl:

Sometimes ... when she does not answer, I start texting her because it seems that she gets the text quicker than she would the phone call.

Interestingly, even though parents and teenagers texted more than called each other, they usually and specifically tended to call each other when their conversations were considered very important, or if the topic was sensitive. The following is an example of a mother and her 15-year-old son:

Mom: (turns to son) You don't call me very often.
Son: (turns to mom) You only call me like emergencies or if you need to tell me something very important.

Responsibility

Further, most of the parents did not monitor their teenagers' cell phone activities. However, they described setting up rules regarding the inappropriate use of cell phones, such as sexting and bullying. The following is what a father and his 18-year-old daughter mentioned:

Father: No rules, they just use their best judgment. You have to let them, there are certain things that they know they're not supposed to do.
Daughter: Yes, nothing explicit.
Father: Trust them enough not to do it.
Moderator: What are some of the things that you know they're not supposed to do?
Father: Sexting, and nude shots, and they know that that's a no no!

Besides parents having rules for their teenagers regarding inappropriate use of cell phones, many parents considered cell phone data plans very expensive and risky for their teenagers; therefore, some parents limited or blocked their teenagers' cell phone access to the Internet and downloads. A mother of a 17-year-old said the following regarding data plans being expensive:

Mother: He actually could have data on his phone on our service but I blocked it because I am afraid if we go over, then it would be expensive. And that is just from when we set up the phone originally because he was so young too.

Another father of a 17-year-old commented the following regarding the cost and the risks of a cell phone with a data plan:

Father: He does not have a smart phone for a couple of reasons. One is cost. It costs more to have and to use it with a data plan. The other issue with that is safety, and monitoring and keeping track of what he is doing on the Internet. We don't allow, or we are not supposed to allow Internet use in the bedrooms, only in this room or a "public" room.

Safety

In relation to all these results, it felt imperative to investigate for what specific reasons parents and teenagers initially purchased a cell phone. In general, most parents mentioned that they purchased their cell phones to be able to stay in touch with their kids, to be able to monitor their teenagers' whereabouts and activities, and to be able to reach each other in case of an emergency.

The following is an example of what a mother of a 17-year-old boy said:

I got him a cell phone, so that I can kind of keep in touch, know where he is at. You know he can tell me if he is going to be late or something, or an emergency.

Likewise, one main reason for getting a cell phone among teenagers was to be able to reach their parents in case of an emergency. The following example comes from the statement of an 18-year-old girl:

I only got a cell phone because we lived, we'd moved, to Maryland and I was traveling on the plane back and forth from here and back to Maryland and it was more like for safety. Just to get in touch.

Opportunity

The other main reason for obtaining cell phones for teenagers was to be able to communicate with and fit in with their peers. A 15-year-old said:

I wanted a cell phone because everyone else had a cell phone. But it really has been helpful for getting home, and letting people know things, and scheduling stuff with friends.

On the whole, cell phones offered many opportunities and different reasons for parents and teenagers to communicate with each other. From the parents' side, there were some concerns with the costs of data plans and the way teenagers might be using data over the phones. Moreover, for parents and teenagers the more practical and effective way of communicating with each other via cell phone was through texting. In particular, they called each other only to discuss important issues, otherwise they used texts to communicate. Finally, the shared reasons for the dyad to get a phone were to be able to stay connected in case of an emergency. This understanding of the general uses of cell phones in parent-child communication leads to what benefits they experience from using this form of communication.

SRQ2: How Do Cell Phones Facilitate Parent-Adolescent Communication?

When exploring how cell phones facilitate communication for the dyad, it was noted that it facilitated it in two ways. In one way, the cell phones became facilitators of communication for the dyad because they were used for very practical reasons. The other way cell phones became facilitators of communication was that they helped cultivate the relationship of the dyad. I will discuss the practical way in which parents and teenagers communicated.

Practical Uses

Practical uses mean basically that cell phones allowed parents and teenagers to communicate with each other for practical matters such as scheduling activities, finding each other, and sending reminders. The practical use of cell phones between the dyad was overwhelmingly mentioned during the interviews.

Flexibility

All of the participating teens used their cell phones to let their parents know when they needed to be picked up such as after school and sports practice, or from a friend's house.

Here is an example of a 15-year-old girl.

Usually it is when I need something or I want her to come get me or if practice has been moved or cancelled. That is most of it.

Moreover, cell phones allowed several parents to be able to send reminders to their teenagers about chores and activities.

The following is an example of a mother who through cell phone is able to send reminders to her 14-year-old son:

*Mother: I think now that we have them, we would probably fall apart if we didn't have them. *laughs* It's kind of one of those things that now that we have them*

Son: (interrupts) It makes everything 10 times easier.

Mother: To go back without them would just cause a mess. We've kind of worked our schedule around and that is how we communicate with them.

Son: Like with text messages, she always sends me my chores. So if I ever forget what my chores are, I can just look on my phone.

Connectivity

Above and beyond cell phones allowing parents to know when they need to pick their teenagers up, these devices also made it possible for parents to be able to locate and know their teenagers' whereabouts and activities. This was mentioned by nine of the 10 parents.

Here is an example of a mother and her 18-year-old daughter.

Daughter: Food, going to the store. Or if I am gone with a friend she'd call me. "What are you doing? Where you at? When are you coming home?" That would be about it.
Mother: Yeah. Sometimes we talk about school. Or I need to know where she is. If I see something that had happened - a wreck or something - I will call her to see if she is in that area. Or if I knew that she was in that area. It is for good us. I have to know where you're at

In addition to parents being able to locate their teens and find out what they were doing, eight of the 10 parents also mentioned that cell phones facilitated them to find out, if or when, their teenagers were coming home.

Here is an example of a mother and her 17-year-old son.

Mother: I am not a phone talker (laughs).
Son: Usually we only do when I am coming home from somewhere or something.
Mother: Yeah, I usually want him to text me when he's coming home just so I kind of know when he's going to get home.

Opportunity

Besides parents sending reminders to their teenagers, cell phones also facilitated teenagers to be able to ask their parents for permission to go places, do other things, and be able to change their plans.

The following example is of a mother of a 17-year-old boy:

In a sense it [cell phone] is allowing the freedom that I did not have. I remember I would have to come home and ask for permission and by then, things might have been a little different, and I would have been late to do whatever I wanted to do so I did not get to do it. Now he can just call me and ask for permission and he gets it. It is a lot easier now.

Finally, not only do cell phones permit teenagers to communicate with their parents about being able to change plans but these devices also allowed the dyad to communicate for practical reasons and exchange information with each other instantaneously from anywhere.

The following is an example from a mother of a 17-year-old boy:

Well before he had a cell phone and I had a question I had to wait until he got off from school and until I had come home from work. So it expedites both of our plans. It is much more efficient way to communicate and it is much more efficient because it is fast and we can get our points across almost immediately even we are not next to each other we are

having that exchange of thoughts and a conversation.

In summary, cell phones facilitated parents and teenagers to talk with each other about practical issues from anywhere and at anytime. Such practical matters included exchanging information about the best time to arrive to pick up the teenager, locating and knowing about the teenagers' whereabouts and activities, as well as when the teenagers were coming home. In addition, these devices facilitated parents to be able to send reminders to their teenagers about chores and activities and allowed teens to be able to negotiate permission to change plans with their parents. Next, the findings regarding cell phone use for relational purposes are discussed.

Relational Uses

Relational uses in this study mean that cell phones allowed the parents and teenagers to foster their relationship. Although the intention of using their cell phone for nurturing their relationship was not specifically mentioned by any of the dyads, it was very prominent in the interviews. For example, a bond between the dyad could be created by sharing with each other interesting or fun information or by communicating about their daily experiences via cell phone.

Connectivity

Cell phones allowed parents who travel to be able to be involved in their teenagers' daily lives.

A father of a 17-year-old, who at times travels for work purposes, commented:

For us, it's just the way we talk. It is the way we communicate. Often I don't see him most of the day, even though I work from home, because he is either in school then doing something or he is at rehearsal and then doing something. Another way I have used it is to check in when I am traveling and to see what is going on and how he is doing.

Equally important is the fact that cell phones allowed parents to stay in touch with their teenagers when their teen stayed in a different home.

The following example is from a 15-year-old's father, who is separated from his spouse.

I think that when we call each other is when we are apart and he stays with his mom. We call each other to see how we are doing. Or, if he does not answer my call, he will text me while he is at work or he will call me later when he is at break.

Also cell phones allowed parents and teenagers to stay in touch when they were apart from each other for long periods of time.

The following is an example of a family whose father has been deployed for more than a year and in which the 14-year-old son is able to hear his father's voice over the phone to build the parent-teen communication and relationship:

Moderator: When you call each other about how long do you talk?

Son: About five minutes.

Mom: Yes, about five minutes maybe.

Son: With my dad it is pretty different. With my dad it is literally like 30 min.

Mom: (laughs) Really?

Son: I am not joking. I spend time on the phone with my dad. When he calls we talk for a long time and after we are done I check my phone. And last time was 30 minutes and 25 seconds.

Mom: He loves you! (Nodding her head).

Son: (Nodded his head).

Besides allowing parents and teenagers to nurture their relationships at a distance, cell phones also allowed parents to encourage their teenagers.

A mother of a 15-year-old girl stated:

Sometimes I send her those messages, you know, "Keep it up!" "You're doing great!"

In addition, parents were able to build a relationship with their teens by sharing information that was interesting or fun as a way to connect with them.

An 18-year-old boy said:

*I think we communicate a little bit more now. He'll send me something like, "Hey, I found something cool on the Internet, check this out." Or, "Hey here's something with K-State sports." Or I'll also get texts like, "Hey, you have some chores to do when you get home." *Laughs * But I think it has improved our communication.*

Also, sometimes mobile phones aided the teens and parents in maintaining a conversation at any time throughout the day.

The following is an example of a 15-year-old and his father.

Son: Sometimes we'll just talk when we're both bored.

Father: Yeah.

Safety

Apparently, cell phones also gave teens a sense of security and safety when they could access their parents when they needed help and it can help make the dyad's relationship stronger.

The following example shows a 17-year-old who feels safer now that he has a phone:

Yeah, I felt like I can do a lot more things than before and go many more places with my friends too. I felt safer, like when I went out than before when I had no cell phone. Or I felt it was more safe for them because we were now just a call away or a message

In summary, cell phones facilitated teenagers and parents to foster their relationship through helping them to stay involved in each other's daily lives at a distance, whether they were separated for a long or short period of time. It also allowed parents to connect and build good relationships with their teens by sharing interesting information. Moreover, mobile phones allowed them to engage in conversation at anytime throughout the day. Lastly, cell phones permitted teenagers to be able to access their parents if they were needed, which fostered their relationship.

However, cell phones also posed some practical and relational challenges for the dyad that hindered their communication with each other. These challenges are discussed in the third research question.

SRQ3: How Do Cell Phones Present Challenges for Parent-Adolescent Communication?

During the interviews parents and teenagers mentioned they faced some communication challenges regarding cell phones. Challenges were anything hindering the communication between the dyad. These challenges were also divided between practical and relational. The practical issues are discussed first.

Practical Issues

Practical issues refer to anything associated with cell phones that, instead of making communication easier between the dyad, made it harder. For example, it was an obstacle for parent-adolescent communication when one of them did not hear their phone ring.

Connectivity

The following is an example of a mother who admits not being very good at getting back to her 17-year-old son in a timely manner because she does not hear her phone:

Usually I am not very good because I keep it in my purse in my desk. So if I am away from desk, if I never hear the beep. I never go look to see if I have any messages.

Moreover, another practical issue parents and teenagers faced was not keeping their cell phones charged.

A father and his 15-year-old commented the following:

Father: You expect an answer. Sometimes I won't get an answer and then I'll get a text 4 hours later saying, "Oh, my phone was off." And for my parents, the delay would have been normal, but it makes me think, "Oh great, he's lost his phone." Or when he went on the band trip to Florida, and I was just sure that he was going to lose his phone, and so I'd send messages every once in a while and when I didn't get a message back I was like, "Yep, he's lost it."

*Son: *Laughs* Yes, we rode in a bus all the way to Orlando, and there were no outlets, so it would die, so I couldn't answer him.*

Parents and teenagers also mentioned that they simply were unable to communicate

sometimes because one of them did not have their phone with them, while the other one was trying to reach them.

A mother of a 15-year-old stated:

Mother: (Turns to son) I have been trying calling you and you did not have your phone with you or within the car and there was a time. Yeah, do I remember that! Because I sent your dad to go back to the football field to see if you were still there because you weren't answering.

Son: Yeah, I did not have my phone with me.

Similarly, the dyad's communication was obstructed when their devices or accessories got damaged and made it impossible for them to communicate.

For example, this mother of a 17-year-old mentioned:

When you cannot get a hold of them and you expect to. Also when the cord, it's damaged and then they need a new one and it is kind of like an immediate issue that wasn't before, when they did not have a cell phone.

In addition to the challenge of not getting back to each other quickly, communication between the dyad was also hindered when one of them lost their phone. The following example is from a mother and her 15-year-old daughter.

Daughter: It is just when she does not answer but it does not happen a lot.

Mother: (interrupts) or when, if I lost my phone. That is the one thing when you cannot find the phone. You are depending on it. You know! That could be a challenge; you are still depending on it.

Likewise communication between the dyad was delayed when the parents were not able to reach their teen and had to go through other people first to be able to reach them.

This mother mentioned:

Sometimes I have to hop between brothers. If I can't get one then I'll try the other and one will tell his brother to check his phone and stuff like that.

In summary, communication between the parents and their teenagers was hindered by many practical issues – not hearing, charging, or having their cell phones. This, of course, made

reaching each other take longer or impossible. Furthermore, damaging or losing the device was also a hurdle for parent-adolescent communication.

Relational Issues

Relational issues are those factors, opposite to fostering, that hindered the quality of the interactions or created conflict between parents and their teenagers. For example, overuse of cell phones was considered by most parents as something that could hinder the communication with each other.

Connectivity

This mother of a 17-year-old provided her comments on overuse.

Moderator: Is there anything you dislike about communicating via cell phone?

Mother: No, other than I see, he doesn't so much but sometimes you just see kids just buried on them and sometime it is a little obnoxious... And then a lot of kids have to worry about getting that carpal tunnel, too, from texting.

Not only was over usage of cell phones said to be an addiction for teenagers, but it was mentioned as an issue for parents as well.

A 15-year-old daughter and her mother said:

Moderator: So, what are some of the challenges that you think that a cell phone brings to the communication between a teenager and parents?

Daughter: Getting our attention.

Mother: That is a challenge, because they live on it. It's like a computer, especially the smart phones.

Daughter: But, you know, now a lot of parents are also stuck to the phone. So it's hard for the kids to get their attention.

Mother: Yes, that's one of the main challenges is actually having to put it down.

Daughter: And vice versa.

Another relational issue that could hinder the dyad's communication was mentioned by several parents. Cell phones can create a huge distraction for teenagers from more important activities.

The father of an 18-year-girl stated:

Make sure you got it for the right purposes. Don't just get it because they want it. Have a purpose for it, for wanting to keep in touch with them and stuff like that...Because that's a distraction sometimes, they're talking on the phone, when they should be doing homework and stuff like that.

Going further on cell phone overuse, several parents included some concerns that their adolescents might be losing important communication skills.

A mother of a 15-year-old girl mentioned:

They don't learn how to read people's face-to-face emotions, and so they do things that they don't consider, without having learned, that they don't consider how their actions are affecting other people. I think that kids don't learn how to interact with people if this is all that they've ever known, or if they're overusing it and not having personal interaction.

Safety

Moreover, there were some parents who mentioned some health risks associated with cell phone use. None of the teenagers mentioned or seemed to consider any health risk associated with cell phones.

The father of a 17 year old talked about the possible risks of cancer from cell phones.

I've seen a lot of studies about cell phones starting to cause problems. And they're logical problems. People that are having them on their ears too much, women that carry cell phones in their bras, people that carry them in their pockets. I've seen some studies about that people need to be concerned about that, because those smart phones generate a lot of energy and people don't realize it. A lot of reception and radio waves going through those things.

In summary, these devices can be addictive for either parents or teenagers. They also can be very distracting for teenagers, which can keep them from doing other activities. Moreover, parents worried that their children would lose important communication and socialization skills as a result of cell phone use. Additionally, some parents mentioned the possible development of health related problems such as cancer due to calling and texting each other. All of these factors can significantly decrease the time that parents and teenagers have to cultivate their relationships and create conflict between them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the parents and their teens in this study are using their cell phones in many ways and for many reasons. However, out of all their reasons for using cell phones mainly they utilized cell phones for practical uses such as scheduling, sending or receiving reminders, and locating each other. On the other hand, parents and teenagers made use of their cell phones for relational reasons, such as to connect, being able to share interesting information with each other, sending encouraging messages, and being able to stay involved in each other's lives when they were apart from each other. However, the dyads also faced practical and relational challenges when they used their cell phones and this hindered their communication or may have prevented them from being able to cultivate their relationship.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore cell phone communication within parent-adolescent communication. To investigate this phenomenon three research question were elaborated:

1. For what purposes do adolescents and parents use cell phones to communicate?
2. How do cell phones facilitate parent-adolescent communication?
3. How do cell phones present challenges for parent-adolescent communication?

To better understand parent-adolescent experiences with cell phones, a phenomenological approach was used. Ten parent-adolescent pairs participated in qualitative interviews using a 14 open-ended interview questions to explore their cell phone communication uses and experiences. The interviews lasted about 25-40 minutes and were conducted at the participants' homes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and later were analyzed inductively. Each dyad's transcript was treated as a single case, and cross-case analyses were done by comparing the data across cases. For verification of the cross case analysis the help of a professor as a co-analyst was used.

Some of the most commonly expressed practical uses and advantages of cell phones in this study were that cell phones gave parents and teenagers the opportunity to reach each other to schedule, plan, and share information in a fast and easy way. The most common relational use expressed by the parents was the ability to have conversations at a distance with their teenagers and being able to stay in sync with their teenagers' lives in order to build a relationship with each other.

The most common practical problem that hindered the parent-teen communication was the inability to get in touch with each other immediately as expected. Cell phones have created an expectation of quick responses as many parents and teenagers got frustrated when they tried to reach the other and were unable to receive a fast response. The relational use of cell phones

presented some challenges as well with cell phone overuse by teenagers and parents distracting them from communicating with each other. More detail of these and other findings are discussed next.

Parallel Findings

Most parents in this study did not have strict rules regarding not using cell phones at the dinner table, or turning the cell phone off at certain hours of the night. This could have been because the parents had positive experiences with their teens and cell phones and do not feel the need to have rules. Although there were some rules regarding inappropriate cell phone usage such as sexting, bullying, and nude pictures, these were not a strict set of rules and most of the parents did not monitor their teenagers' cell phones. This might have been because of the age of the teenagers, which in this study all but seven teens were above 17 years of age and only one being 14-years-old. The other two were 16-years-old. This phenomenon could be further examined by including more teenagers between the ages of 12 and 14.

In my study, I found it interesting that parents and teenagers seemed to be able to get a hold of each other more effectively through texting and this might be a reason why they texted more than they called each other. This was parallel to what Reid and Reid (2007) found in their study, which was that young adults prefer texting over calling as they find it as an easier and better way to communicate and build relationships with their peers. Also cell phones have been found to help teens bond with others (Morrill et al., 2013). In my study it was seen that cell phones can also serve as a facilitator for building relationships between parents and teenagers. Perhaps Reid and Reid (2007) and Morrill, et al. (2013) findings can transfer to the parent-teen relationship as well.

In addition, parents in this study were very effective at reaching their teens via texting

and the teenagers' response time was fairly quick. However, the parents tended to take longer to respond to their teenagers via cell phone. One reason that this might be true is because of what Stald (2008) noted in her study that teenagers rarely completely turn off their cell phones, they just put them on "mute" and "vibrate" and are able to check the display for incoming messages or feel the vibration when a new one comes in.

In my study, parents also expressed some risks including that their teenagers could depend on their cellphones too much and this is parallel to other findings (e.g., Igarashi et al., 2008) that teenagers around the world are carrying cell phones and are becoming very dependent on them. However, in this study one teenager talked about her mother being on her cell phone all the time. This is interesting because many times the focus is on teenagers and their addictive behaviors with the use of cell phones, but this can also affect parents and therefore, their communication with their teenagers. This behavior from the parents would be interesting to investigate further in future research.

Also in my study, I found that cellphones allowed parents and teenagers to be able to communicate and stay connected at a distance with each other, whether the parent was deployed, traveling to another state within the United States for work, or lived in a different residence from the one in which the teen lived. This is closely related to what Madianou and Miller (2011) found in a study conducted with parents in the Philippines. In this case they were single mothers who were able to parent at a distance via cell phone which allowed them to stay involved in their children lives.

Moreover, my results also showed that some parents make their teenagers pay for overage fees or damages to the cell phone, which could teach teenagers to be responsible. We do not know if these teenagers have a job or if money is deducted from their allowance to pay for

overage fees or cell phone damages. However, in Fletcher's (2011) study, teenagers reported that having a cell phone felt like part of the transition to becoming an adult, and that they had a sense of responsibility. So in fact cell phones might be helping teenagers in their maturing process.

Cell phones are like having a support system in your hands. Martin and Marshall, (1999) commented that cell phones allow people to access police, family, friends, and other kinds of social support networks. In my study some teenagers expressed they wanted a cell phone for safety purposes such as being able to contact the police or their parents in case of an emergency. This was also expressed by some parents who wanted to get their teenagers a phone so that their teenagers could reach them in case of an emergency. A study by Hughes (2005) demonstrated how cell phones in the United Kingdom have become important not only for children's safety, but also for the relief experienced by some parents because their teenagers are able to access them if they are in danger or in need of something.

This study shows how cell phones seem to be very convenient to use and are often used for very practical reasons. Interestingly, it also shows that parents and teenagers are using cell phones to bond with each other. These devices are tools that are used to help them foster their relationship as well. This encourages us to look at cell phones beyond a simple device that allows us to communicate with each other for practical reasons. Yes, fostering a relationship depends on the individual and if they actually decide to use cell phones for those reasons, but I think it is the practicability of cell phones, because they are so easy to use and carry (Ling, Hwang, Salvendy, 2007), that allows parents and teens to nurture their relationships. Parents would not be able to stay connected with their teenagers as much if it was not for their cell phones.

Consistent with Weisskirch's (2009) findings, many parents and teenagers in this study expressed that they saw cell phones as something that gave them more freedom to do activities,

to plan, and to go places. Also some parents in this study talked about how giving their teenagers a cell phone had decreased their feelings of worry, which is parallel to the findings of others (e.g., Hughes, 2005; Pain et al., 2005). However, most of the teenagers I was able to include in my study were 17- and 18-years-old and this age-factor might have made a difference why teens gained more access to go places and they felt as if they had more freedom. Nevertheless, teenager feeling as if they gained more freedom, parents in this study also expressed feeling worried when they could not find or locate their teen via cell phone. While we do not know exactly what parents in our study mean by worry, we can probably assume that cell phones can decrease but at the same time increase worry for parents because cell phones can create the expectation of immediate response.

Finally, parents also could nurture their relationship with their teens by using a cell phone to send a text message with a simple phrase of encouragement, such as “Great job! I know you can do it!”, or a phrase of support such as an “I am here for you.” Therefore, we need to pay attention to the relationship-building capabilities that cell phones bring to relationships, as well as what kinds of meanings people assign to cell phones.

Symbolic Interaction Theory and the Cell Phones Meaning

Using Symbolic Interaction Theory to interpret the results, we can focus on the meaning a cell phone might have for parents and adolescents. We learned parents and teenagers talk about how their cell phones were used to plan, stay in touch, and to schedule activities, and all this while they are apart from each other. Teenagers also mentioned important benefits of having a cell phone, such as allowing them to be able to reach their parents and to be able to get help in times of need and emergencies. However, these subjective meanings could be different for each participant. While for the son of a deployed father, a cell phone meant the only way to stay in

touch with his father, for the father who used his to exchange interesting information, his cell phone was a way to connect with his son. Other parents described cell phones as an opportunity to teach their teenagers about responsibility. All of these meanings are subjective and interpreted differently because all parents and their teenagers interact differently with each other. However, the overall results suggest that cell phones represent connectivity, flexibility, opportunity, responsibility, and safety.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of the current study was that the parent-teenager dyad was the unit of analysis and they were interviewed together. This was helpful because I was able to learn about their shared experiences. At times, while one answered, it reminded the other of some events they went through dealing with cell phone communication and this enriched their answers. This also opened discussion for how one member of the dyad thought of it differently than the other or helped to corroborate the information they were giving.

Another strength was that the participants were interviewed at their place of choice, which has been suggested by researchers (e.g., Breen, 2006; Fallon & Brown, 2002) as a good way to help participants be comfortable and open. Here, all of the participants chose their homes. This might have made participants feel more comfortable and relaxed because it was their usual environment. Participants also picked the time and day of the interview. This made it convenient for them and allowed them to be able to plan ahead for the interview and to not feel rushed because they were told the interview would take from 25-40 minutes.

Another strength of this study is that it included families from different ethnicities. Three were American-Hispanic parents, two mothers and one father; two were African-American parents, one father and one mother and the rest were American-Caucasian, three mothers and two

fathers. This was also a strength because in total I was able to include the perspectives of six mothers and four fathers. Perhaps in a future study other ethnic groups could be included as well.

One limitation of this study was the fact that there were not many father-daughter pairs who participated in this study. In fact, there was only one. More effort needs to be given to recruiting this dyadic combination. Another limitation of the study was that because the dyad was interviewed together, parents tended to dominate the conversations, even though I would ask the same question to the teenagers. There were times in which the parents interrupted the teenagers and times in which the teenagers interrupted their parents making the conversation shift into another topic. Sometimes when the teenagers were being asked a question, the parent answered for them claiming that their teenager would think in a particular way. Then, teenagers just seemed to agree with their parents and responded in the way their parent thought they should. This makes me wonder if the teenagers could have been led by their parents to respond in a certain way. In future studies this can be eliminated by interviewing the dyad separately and then interview them a second time together. Finally, another limitation of the study was that we were not able to include 12- and 13-year-olds. This is a limitation because it would be important to hear their perspectives as well as see if there are any differences in the way younger teenagers use their phones to communicate with their parents. In the future, we could try to include more teenagers of these ages by recruiting some teens from middle schools.

In addition, it is notable that the participants in this study were recruited in the Midwest. It is important to recognize that each region in the United States has its own culture and therefore it would be important to include other regions of the United States in future studies. It is also important to recognize that these results may vary by including other types of families, such as one-parent families, military families, or divorced families.

Impact and Implications

While the goal of this study was not generalizability, the results of this research can help us better understand the ways in which technology and cell phones might impact the communication between parents and teens. This study has helped us understand cell phones better and that these devices can assist parents to be in touch, involved, updated, and available with their teenagers. This research has also shown that cell phones can be beneficial or challenging for the parent-adolescent relationship and communication.

This research has implications for developing workshops for parents and teenagers regarding learning how cell phones can provide opportunities for them to build their relationships as well as how cell phones could hinder relationships. By being able to teach parents and teenagers some of the challenges that come with cell phones we might be able to help them to prevent some problems that cell phones might create in their relationships and communication.

This study's results could also be used to investigate how cell phones play a role in communication and the nurturing of relationships between other family members such as in the case of siblings, grandparents, and extended family members. This study can also be the pioneer investigation for researchers and practitioners for how crucial it is to teach older generations to use cell phones in order for them to stay connected and build, or maintain, a relationship with their loved ones. Furthermore, it can be used to begin to find out in which other ways cell phone communication might be positively or negatively affecting the way we are able to bond, communicate, and socialize with others, and our loved ones.

Finally, it can be very helpful for communities in which we live to make programs available focusing in helping parents to learn and prevent many of the risks that cell phones might bring to the relationship and communication with their children. These types of programs

could also include workshops aimed to help parents learn how to use cell phones, such as texting, e-mails, and social media apps so that they can stay more involved in their children's lives.

Conclusion

The results of this study brought to light that there are pros and cons of cell phones when it comes to the parent-adolescent relationship. An example of this is that before this study, I did not know that cell phones could either help build or hinder a relationship with a family member, I just saw cell phones as a tool for communication. Applying these findings to the situation of the mother and her son described in the beginning of this document, one can see that, in fact, cell phones can hinder communication. Therefore, many parents might lose the opportunity to foster their relationships with their teenagers while these devices are on and being used. We now know that cell phones have pros and cons, because our participants talked about them. However, some parents might not exactly know how their cell phones can be beneficial or detrimental to building their relationship with their teen. If we give parents in our communities more information about the pitfalls of cell phone use, perhaps we can help them avoid them and help them to be able to start a conversation with their teens about the beneficial use of these devices. I believe that by informing our parents, they can set boundaries and rules with their teenagers that perhaps will help them not to become distant from each other. I believe that in situations like the mother I described with her teen in the restaurant might have been a result of a previous lack of communication between them. However, I also feel that it might have been a lack of understanding of the pros and cons of cell phone use. I feel that by informing parents, they will have the opportunity to make a decision with their teens on how, when, and why cell phones should be used. Giving them a piece of the results of this study might be useful to them. Therefore, education about the possible effects cell phones can have on family dynamics should

be part of parenting classes. Perhaps cell phone companies should also inform parents about some of the cons cell phone use can have on parent-adolescent relationships. Professionals within family disciplines should help move the field forward by investigating the effects that cell phone technology is bringing into family dynamics.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide

() Describes who the question is addressed to

Demographics (Both)

- Gender:
- Age:
- Race/Ethnicity:
- Level of Education:
- Household Composition:

1. What kind of cell phones does each of you have? (Both)

Probes:

- Is that a smart phone?
- Which applications on your phone do you use to communicate with each other?

2. How long have you had a cell phone? (Both)

Probes:

- Since what age have you had a cell phone?
- After having a cell phone is there a period of time that you had not had it?

3. What were some of the reasons that you got a cell phone? (Both)

Probes:

- For what reasons do you use a cell phone?
- When was your first cell phone bought?
- What were some of the reasons you decided to obtain a cell phone?
- When did you realize you wanted to get a cell phone?

- What are the reasons you got her/him a cell phone? (Parent)

4. How often did you call each other on the cell phone in the past week? (Both)

Probes:

- How long do you talk?
- How many times a day do you usually call each other?
- Is this every day? Yes/No

5. How many times do you usually text each other? (Both)

Probes:

- How often do you two text?
- How many times a day do you usually text each other?
- Is this every day?

6. What kind of cell phone plan do you have? (Both)

Probes:

- Does this mean your plan is unlimited? Yes/No
- How many minutes does your plan include on a monthly basis?
- How many texts does your plan include on a monthly basis?

7. What are the family rules you have placed regarding the use of your minutes and texts on your cell phone, if any? (Both)

Probes:

- How many minutes are you allowed?
- How many texts are you allowed?
- Are there any table rules?
- Are there any time limits in which the cell phone should not be used?

8. For what purposes do you use your cell phones to communicate with each other? (Both)

Probes:

- When do you call each other?
- When do you text each other?
- In what ways, between you two, do you use your cell phone the most?
- In what ways, between you two, do you use your cell phone the least?
- What would you say are some of the reasons you communicate with each other via cell phone?

9. What have your experiences been communicating this way? (Both)

Probes:

- What kinds of things have you noticed while communicating via cell phone, texting or calling?
- What are some of the things you have learned since you started communicating with each other through cell phones?
- Since you began communicating via cell phone, what have you noticed has changed in the way you communicate with each other?
- What have you learned about each other when it comes to communicating via cell phone?

10. What have been some of the challenges communicating this way, if any? (Both)

Probes:

- Communicating via cell phone, how do you feel your communication has been hindered?

- What do you dislike, about communicating via cell phone between you two, if anything?

11. What have been some of the benefits communicating this way, if any? (Both)

Probes:

- Communicating via cell phone, how do you feel your communication has improved?
- What do you like about communicating via cell phone between you two, if anything?

12. What else would you like to add that I did not ask? (Both)

13. What advice would you give parents that have recently begun to communicate with their adolescent via cell phone? (Both)

14. What advice would you give other adolescents who just obtained a cell phone? (Both)

Appendix B - Invitation to Participate

Cell Phones and Parent-Child Communication

Invitation to Participate

We are asking for your help with a research project about teenagers and their cell phone use in talking to their parents. Teens and their parents who have had cell phones for at least 6 months are invited to participate.

- ◆ *What is the topic of the research?* We would like to know how often and in what ways parents and teenagers use cell phones to talk to each other. We'd also like to know about how parents and teens feel about the use of cell phones.
- ◆ *Who will be included?* We are talking teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 and at least one of their parents. To participate, you must have read had a cell phone for at least 6 months.
- ◆ *What are participants asked to do?* The teen and one parent will talk to an interviewer about the conversations you have had with each other on cell phones. The interview will be audio recorded. The interview will last about 30-45 minutes.
- ◆ *Why should I do this?* Many people use cell phones as a central form of communication. You may learn more about yourself and what you think. Also, parents and teens may learn from each other. On the other hand, some people are uncomfortable talking about certain topics. Anyone who participates in the study may choose to not answer one or more questions. Also participants may drop out of the study at any time.
- ◆ *What will happen to the information?* The things we learn from the study will be reported to participants in the study, to other general audiences, and to professionals who are interested in this topic. No names or information that would identify you will be included in the reports.

Please fill out the attached form and return it to Isaac Falcon/Dr. Karen Myers Bowman as soon as possible. If you say you are interested in participating, we will contact you. You may change your mind about participating at any time.

Questions? Contact Dr. Karen Myers-Bowman, project director, School of Family Studies and Human Services, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, (785) 532-1491, karensm@k-state.edu.

Contact Information

Name of parent: _____

Phone #: _____

What is teen's age? _____ What grade is teen in? _____

Appendix C - Parent Consent Form

Informed and Parent Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done because we would like to know how parents and teenagers use cell phones to communicate with each other. We would like to know how cell phone affects the ways parents and teens talk to each other and how it affects their relationships.

If you agree to participate, you and your teenager together will talk to an interviewer about the conversations you have had with each other using cell phones. The interview will be audio recorded. The interview will last about 30-45 minutes.

You should not participate in this study if you and your teenager have not had cell phones for at least 6 months.

Risks and Discomforts

You might feel discomfort with one or more topics brought up in the interview. But you may refuse to answer any questions and are free to withdraw from the study at any time

Benefits

Knowing how teenagers and their parents use cell phones to communicate is important to society. This may help other families as they use this form of communication.

Individually, you may benefit because many parents enjoy talking with their children about their relationships. You and your adolescent may learn more about each other. Also, you may learn from each other.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential. Audio tapes of the discussion will be locked in a cabinet in one researcher's office. When the audio tapes are transcribed, no information that identifies you will be included in the transcripts. Pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used to identify individual participants in the transcripts. The list that ties your real name to your pseudonym will be placed in a locked cabinet in one of the researcher's office. After the video and audio tapes are transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;
- * Representatives of Kansas State University (KSU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at KSU.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Dr. Karen Myers-Bowman, project director, Kansas State University, karensm@k-state.edu, (785) 532-1491.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Kansas State University, (785) 532-3224.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- You provide consent for your child's voluntary participation in this study
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_____ Date_____

Printed Name_____

Appendix D - Interview Assent Form

Interview Assent Form

My name is Isaac Falcon Campos/Karen Myers-Bowman. I would like to know how parents and teenagers use cell phones to keep in touch with each other. I would like to know how often you talk to your parents using the cell phone, and how it impacts your communication. If you would like, you can be in my study.

If you decide you want to be in my study, you and your parent together will talk to an interviewer about the way you use cell phones to talk to each other. The interview will last about 30-45 minutes. We will record your interview on a digital recorder.

Many teenagers use cell phones often to talk to their parents. You and your parent may learn more about each other. But you might not want to talk about one or more topics brought up in the interview. If this happens, you may decide not to answer these questions.

Other people will not know if you are in my study. I will put things I learn about you together with things I learn about other parents and teenagers, so no one can tell what things came from you. When I tell other people about my research, I will not use your name, so no one can tell whom I am talking about.

Your parent or guardian has to give permission for you to be in the study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it too. If you don't want to be in the study, no one will be mad at you. If you want to be in the study now and change your mind later, that's OK. You can stop at any time.

My telephone number is 785) 532-1491. You can call me if you have questions about the study or if you decide you don't want to be in the study any more.

I will give you a copy of this form in case you want to ask questions later.

Agreement

I have decided to be in the study even though I know that I don't have to do it. Isaac Falcon Campos/Karen Myers-Bowman has answered all my questions.

Signature of Study Participant/ Date

Signature of Researcher/ Date