AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PARENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF THEIR TEENAGERS’ TEXT MESSAGING

by

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A mini-thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Child and Family Studies at the UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE FACULTY OF COMUNITY AND HEALTH SCIENCES DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

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September 2014
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this mini-thesis, AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PARENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF THEIR TEENAGERS’ TEXT MESSAGING, represents my own work. All resources used or referred to during the research study have been attributed to their contributors by means of a complete reference list and acknowledgements.

Signature: ........................

Epiphanie Mukasano

Date: 06 September 2014
Dedication

To all parents
Extended hands
Of the Creator
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have encouraged, motivated and supported me on this long journey. Without your help, I would not have arrived. Thanks to you all.

In a special way, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to:

My supervisor, Professor Catherina J Schenck for walking with me, side by side, from writing the proposal to the completion of the study. Thank you for your constant encouragements, your guidance, your patience with me and your invaluable feedback on my work.

My lecturers for challenging me as you widened the eyes of my mind.

All the parents who voluntarily participated in this study. Without you, it would not have happened. I appreciate your kindness.

My parents, Ndumviliye Jean-Baptiste and Subwanone Adèle. In your absence, you continue to inspire me.

Huma Louw, for assisting me in analysing data. I appreciate your collaboration.

Shirley Gunn, Director of the Human Rights Media Centre. Thank you for all your support, especially in allowing me to use the recording material of your organisation.

My husband Pierre for your constant support and encouragements.
My children Irénée, Patrick, Célestine and Fabrice for your support. Every time each of you brought me a cup of tea at the computer was recorded and greatly appreciated.
Abstract

Today the mobile phone plays a vital role in social life across the globe. For many teenagers and young adults in particular, this device forms an integral part of their daily communication, with text messaging being one of their preferred modes of social interaction. Researchers across the globe have studied various facets of this phenomenon but the main focus has been on this mode of communication in peer relationships. From a family systems perspective, the current qualitative study intended to explore how parents experience their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of communication and relationships with their teenagers, and how parents regulate this pervasive practice. To this end, data were collected by means of one-on-one interviews among eleven parents (eight mothers and three fathers) in Cape Town, South Africa, using a semi-structured interview schedule. With the participants’ permission, the sessions were tape-recorded; data were transcribed, content analysed, and patterns and themes identified according to Creswell’s (2009) steps. Participants expressed a range of experiences, from positive to negative, not only of text messaging, but of their teenagers’ use of mobile phones in general. Among the positives, it was the sense of security the devices gave parents, and the possibility of communicating easily, quickly and at affordable cost and at the same time monitoring their children at a distance. The negatives were mainly related to the misuse and overuse of the mobile phones. The study suggests that parents were aware of some of the dangers associated with mobile phones, such as bullying, sexting, texting while driving, overuse at the expense of family, studying and sleeping times, and home chores. It also reveals that girls were more at risk, especially when it came to mobile bullying and sexting. Some parents came up with suggestions on dealing with mobile phones and text messaging-related problems. Furthermore, the study is indicative of a predominantly authoritative parenting style whereby parents successfully limited these dangers by regulating the use of their teenagers’ mobile phones. However, for some, finding the balance, especially between parental control and teenagers’ privacy, proved to be a challenge. Moreover, while expressing the need for mobile internet, especially for teenagers’ school work, the majority of participants showed concern about having it under control. The study concludes that text messaging can be used to enhance communication and relationships between parents and their teenagers. It recommends educating the latter about the dangers of mobile phones and the former to monitor their use, while at the same time negotiating teenagers’ freedom.
Key words: teenager/adolescent, parent, text messaging, MXit, parent-teen relationship, communication, monitoring, mobile phone, generation gap

Definitions of key words

Teenager/adolescent: While ‘teenager’ refers to a young person aged between thirteen and nineteen, UNICEF (Beger et al.:22) defines an ‘adolescent’ as a male or female aged 10-19 years. Despite the big overlap between the two definitions, this study was conceived in view of young people who were at least thirteen or close to this age. On the other hand, in the present context of Children and Families, a child is defined as a person under the age of eighteen (Children’s Act 38 of 2005, 2011:22). Yet, teenagers aged eighteen and nineteen have been included in this study to suggest that parents will continue guiding them in some of their texting behaviours.

Communication: refers to different ways by means of which people connect, convey meanings, interact and express feelings through symbols, talking, writing, reading, listening, voice tone and pitch, and body language. The level and quality of parent-teen communication influences the quality of their relationship. In the current study, communication is mostly understood as that mediated by the mobile phone.

Parent: This refers to the biological mother and/or father, or any other person caring and taking responsibility for the teenager. This could be a stepparent, a guardian, a foster parent, a relative or any other person who is looking after the teenager.

Text messaging (or texting) is a method of communication made by sending electronic short messages generally through mobile phones. It comprises SMS (Short Message Service) whereby messages of up to 160 characters can be sent; EMS (Enhanced Messaging Service) similar to SMS but also including some advanced options such as emoticons and animations; and MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) that allows sending messages with texts, pictures, video and audio (Oosterwyk and Kyobe, 2013:6).

MXit: an MIM (Mobile Instant Messaging) launched in 2005 in South Africa (Jidenma, as cited in Parker, Wills, Aanhuizen, Gilbert, and Wills, 2012). In a UNICEF (Beger and Sinha, 2012: 17) study, MXit is defined as follows:

…a free instant messaging, SNS [Social Network Site] application, operating on multiple platforms and, much less frequently, on computers. With the ability to send text and multimedia messages with one-on-one conversations, chat rooms, play
games, download music, access movie clips and news, and buy cell products contained therein, the MXit user base has grown exponentially.

In the same source (p.16), it is reported that 6.38 million South Africans were active users of MXit in March 2012.

**Parental monitoring:** In the present context, as Weisskirch (2009:1124) suggests, “monitoring requires parents to track what their adolescent is doing, where their adolescent is going, and generally, whom their adolescent is with.” Some degree of parental monitoring is essential in order for children to feel safe, secure and well-adjusted (Roman, 2014:11).

**Mobile phone:** A portable phone. Also called cellular phone or cell phone in some contexts. The following definition provided in a UNICEF study (Beger, Hoveyda, and Sinha, 2011:25) sheds some light as to why a mobile phone is sometimes called a cell phone or cellular phone:

- **Mobile phone:** [a] Portable telephone device that does not require the use of landlines. Mobile phones utilize frequencies transmitted by cellular towers to connect the calls between two devices. [b] A mobile telephone service provided by a network of base stations, each of which covers one geographic cell within the total cellular system service area. (Source: ITU, [http://www.itu.int/wsis/tunis/newsroom/stats/The_Portable_Internet_2004.pdf](http://www.itu.int/wsis/tunis/newsroom/stats/The_Portable_Internet_2004.pdf)).

**Generation gap:** Differences in perceptions, attitudes and behaviours between generations. Teenagers’ text messaging implies new communication patterns such as texting while in conversation. These may not be acceptable by parents (Ravichandran, 2009:41). Furthermore, teenagers’ texting language using symbols, shorthand and acronyms unfamiliar to parents is also an element that can hinder parent-teen communication. Lastly, the increase in communication with peers at the expense of parents is likely to widen the generation gap.
ACRONYMS

1. BBM - The BlackBerry Messenger
2. EMS - Enhanced Messaging Service
3. ICTs - Information and Communication Technologies
4. MIM - Mobile Instant Messaging
5. MMS - Multimedia Messaging Service
6. SMS - Short Message Service
7. SNS - Social Network Site
8. UNICEF - The United Nations Children’s Fund
## CONTENTS

Candidate’s declaration                                           i  
Dedication                                                       ii 
Acknowledgements                                                 iii 
Abstract                                                         v  
Key words                                                        vi  
Acronyms                                                         viii 
Table of contents                                                 ix 

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**                                      1 
1.1 Introduction                                                  1  
1.2 An overview of the origin of text messaging                   1  
1.3 Background for the study                                      3  
1.4 Rationale for the study                                       4  
1.5 Problem statement                                             5  
1.6 Aim and objectives of the study                               6  
1.7 Significance of the study                                     7  
1.8 Theoretical framework                                         9  
1.9 The structure of this mini-thesis                             12 

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**                                 15 
2.1 Introduction                                                  15  
2.2 Adolescent years and parenting practices                      15  
2.3 The role of the mobile phone in teenagers’ communication      17  
2.4 The benefits of teenagers’ text messaging                    20  
2.5 The negative aspects of teenagers’ text messaging             21
2.6 How parents experience text messaging in their communication and relationships with teenagers

2.7 Parental regulation of teenagers’ use of mobile phones and text messaging

2.8 Conclusion

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Methodological perspectives

3.3 Aim and objectives

3.3.1 The research question

3.3.2 The aim

3.3.3 Objectives

3.4 The qualitative approach

3.5 Exploratory research design

3.6. Descriptive research design

3.7 Population and sampling

3.8 Data collection

3.8.1 Methods of data collection

a) Pilot interviewing

b) Before the interview

c) The interviews

3.8.2 Research instrument

3.8.3 Pitfalls in interviewing

3.8.4 Data storage and management

3.9 Data analysis

3.9.1 Methods of data analysis

3.9.2 Methods of data verification

3.10 Ethical considerations
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Biographical details on parents and teenagers

4.3 Themes

4.3.1 Theme 1: Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ use of mobile phones

4.3.2 Theme 2: Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging

4.3.3 Theme 3: Parents’ suggestions on dealing with mobile phones and texting-related problems

4.4 Summary

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Introduction

5.1.2 The construction of the concept of ‘teenager’

5.1.3 Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of communication

5.1.4 Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of relationships

5.1.5 How parents respond to their teenagers’ text messaging

5.2 Recommendations

5.3 Strengths and limitations of the study

5.4 Conclusion

LIST OF REFERENCES

APPENDICES

A. Information sheet
B. Consent form
C. Interview guide
D. Ethics clearance
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging, thus shifting attention from peer-to-peer interaction, as has mainly been done in the past, to parent-teen interaction. This introductory chapter begins by an overview of the origin of text messaging, then it outlines the background and the rationale for the study. Furthermore, the problem statement, the aim and objectives, as well as the significance of the study, are presented. The next part focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter ends with the structure of the work and a summary of the main points under discussion.

1.2 An overview of the origin of text messaging

The landline telephone was invented in the United States in the late 19th century (Campbell, 2005; Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, and Purcell, 2010). A few years later, the mobile phone was developed as a merger of the landline telephony system with wireless communication (Lenhart et al., 2010). It was only in 1973 that Martin Cooper of Motorola made his first call from a handheld mobile phone, in the US (Lenhart et al., 2010; Webopedia, 2008). Since then this technology has continued to grow. Indeed, in 2002, the number of mobile users worldwide had already surpassed those of fixed phones users (Srivastava, as cited in Campbell, 2005:3). In 2009, The International Communications Union (ITU) reported around 4.6 billion mobile phone subscribers across the globe (Porath, 2011), and, according to a UNICEF study (Beger et al., 2012), in September 2011, Africa was the second largest mobile phone user in the world, with over 620 million mobile connections. From the same source, South Africa had 100.48 per cent penetration among its population of 50 million.

While the rapid adoption of mobile technology became global, the rate at which young people adopted it was even astronomical. Between 1999 and 2004, various studies found high rates of ownership
among children in Norway, the United Kingdom, Tokyo and Australia. In the latter case, some children aged between 5 and 9 had a mobile phone while close to half of the adolescents owned one (Allison, as cited in Campbell, 2005:3). Factors that contributed to such a quick adoption were the reduced cost and size of the handsets and the introduction of pre-paid phone card in the 1990s (Ling, as cited in Campbell, 2005:3).

As for text messaging, the origin is situated around the early 1990s (Thompson and Cupples, 2008:98). The first commercial text message was sent from a computer to a handset in 1991, after which period it was scarcely used throughout Europe, Asia and America, with less than 20 billion text messages sent worldwide. It was only in 2001 that usage accelerated, with over 250 billion messages recorded. Text messaging also received special attention from young users who found in it a quick and easy way to stay in constant contact with their friends. By 2003 more than half of all mobile phone users were thought to use the text messaging service (Wisegeek, 2014. Today text messaging is the most popular service used on mobile phones (Wisegeek, 2014; Thompson et al., 2008:98).

Initially, the text messaging service was not intended for general communication. It was strictly designed for mobile phone companies as a way of developing a global system for mobile communications networks (Crystal, 2008; Thompson et al., 2008). Thus, its subsequent popularity came as a surprise (Calcutt, 2001; Crystal, 2008; Porath, 2011; Ravichandran, 2009). According to Crystal (2008), the slow start of text message usage referred to earlier can be explained by the fact that mobile phone companies might have spent time working out reliable ways of charging for the new service for commercial purposes. As for Thompson and Cupples (2008), this lag of time was influenced by difficulties among customers to send messages to each other if they were operating from different networks, and the development of a market among youngsters.

After this brief history of text messaging, the next section gives some background information about the current study.
1.3 Background for the study

Two things aroused interest in the selected topic: observations and an encounter. First, observations of teenagers’ and young adults’ texting enthusiasm in the home settings, on the trains, in the streets and many other places attracted the researcher’s attention. Furthermore, media reports and available literature suggested that it was in fact a global phenomenon. For example, in an article by Tilley (2009), Hafner reported:

They [teens] do it [texting] late at night when their parents are asleep. They do it in restaurants and while crossing busy streets. They do it in the classroom with their hands behind their back. They do it so much their thumbs hurt (n.p.).

However, much of the previous empirical evidence among young people reflected an interest in text messaging as a prominent communication tool between teenagers and young adults themselves. Moreover, in the particular South African context, the popularity of the instant messaging MXit among teenagers and young adults has received more attention among researchers (Beger et al., 2011; Beger et al., 2012; Butgereit and Botha, 2011; Butgereit, Botha, and van der Heever, 2012; Chigona and Chigona, 2008; Walton, 2009) thus overshadowing text messaging. Yet the latter survey done in Langa and Guguletu, aiming at promoting literacy on mobile phones after schools, suggested that MXit users had the opportunities to strengthen ties with their close friends and peers but “in all cases excluded their parents” (Walton, 2009:57). This increase by teenagers in communication with the peer group made easy by text messaging while side-lining parents is likely to widen the generation gap.

Secondly, in October 2012, the researcher’s encounter with a high school learner (girl) complaining about an early headache led to the current study. The researcher asked the learner what could have caused that headache.

“They would not let me sleep.’ The learner answered.
“Who are they?” the researcher asked, thinking that maybe the learner’s parents (or guardians) made her do house chores until late in the night.

“My friends and their messages.” The learner replied.

In this particular case, the girl herself linked her early morning headache to a reduced sleeping time. As this can affect their concentration in the classroom, a parent’s intervention may be required to ensure that the mobile phone does not prevent the teenager from having enough sleep.

Thus, the combination of the above two elements prompted this study.

1.4 Rationale for the study

The advent of mobile phones towards the end of the twentieth century has brought about a revolution in contemporary life across the globe. Since then, these devices have greatly been adopted as communication tools in virtually every domain of human life: agriculture, education, research, health, business, politics and interpersonal relations. Phone calls and voice mails, text messaging, picture/video exchanges, music sharing, mobile micro-blogging and social networking are all different forms by means of which this communication takes place.

Of all these forms, text messaging has gained the greatest popularity recently, especially among teenagers and the youth. Kerr (2012) refers to a survey showing that teenagers have remarkably cut down on talking on phones and on emailing in favour of texting. For this reason, teenagers, also known as ‘Digital natives’ or the ‘Digital generation’ who are media savvy, are dubbed the ‘Thumb Generation’, mainly because of the “intense exchange of text messages, which are generated using the thumb[s]” (Ravichandran, 2009:37).

Furthermore, the Pew Internet Study (Lenhart et al., 2010) established that teenagers (87 per cent) texted five times more than adults with an average of 50 messages sent and received per day, while the average number sent and received by an adult was 10 per day.
Owing to its widespread use in mobile communication, text messaging is fast becoming a parenting tool (Lenhart et al., 2010; Weisskirch, 2009). Indeed, due to the dissemination of mobile phones and the possibility of a message being able to reach many people simultaneously at relatively low cost, schools can now easily communicate with parents, informing them of changes to schedules, children’s absenteeism and other urgent matters. Porath (2011:93) reports that text messaging has cut down absenteeism by half in the United Kingdom by means of school authorities being able to contact parents when students did not show up. Furthermore, the Pew study (Lenhart et al., 2010:30) reported that, as a response to teenagers’ texting enthusiasm, “parents have stepped into the realm of texting a bit more deeply than other adults as a way of keeping lines of communication open with their children.”

Therefore, the focus of this study was to explore parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging, in a South African context.

1.5 Problem statement

Mobile phones can be lauded for making distant communication available at any time. As mentioned previously, this communication can take various forms, with phone calls and text messages being the most predominant (Kreutzer, 2009; Lenhart et al., 2010). In teenagers’ peer relationships, text messaging helps them to constantly stay in touch with each other, which has a beneficial impact on their social life at this developmental stage (Bateman, 2003; Brooks, 1981). On the other hand, as it appears in Tilley’s (2009) citation describing the pervasion of text messaging among teenagers, there are risks and distractions involved with this practice.

Thus teenagers’ increased communication with peers through text messaging raises some concerns for parents. First, it increases fears that children may be more easily influenced by the peers with whom they seek to identify, by adopting undesirable behaviours such as gangsterism, smoking, drinking alcohol, having early and unprotected sex and drug abuse (Bateman, 2003). These concerns can be
heightened by the fact that parents lack knowledge as to whom their teenagers are communicating with via text messages. These may be child predators or bullies, since bullying is reported to be a common negative behaviour promoted by text messaging (Bond, 2010; Ravichandran, 2009; Subrahmanyam, 2008). Moreover, many children may find it difficult to resist the urge to respond to messages, and thus spend a lot of time engaged in texting to the point where they are distracted from attending to other important tasks such as doing chores or school work, sleeping at night, and even listening to their parents when they need to speak to them. In fact, in a study conducted with parents/caregivers conducted in New Zealand, teenagers’ addiction to texting was reported (Ravichandran, 2009) and Davis (2010) speaks of teenagers’ excess of messaging. Another problem associated with text messaging in particular is its likelihood to contribute to widening the generation gap, mainly due to teenagers’ texting language that some view as “secret code” (Bobitz, 2007). Thus text messaging may be bringing closer the younger generation while excluding the older one.

As said earlier, mobile technology is increasing rapidly, changing ways in which people communicate and interact. In this regard, Ravichandran (2009:21) rightly speaks of a new paradigm of society, of which family is still the heart, and the youth the pillars. Due to the proliferation of media technologies in contemporary home settings, parents struggle to keep the balance between their benefits and drawbacks on children. Therefore, in exploring parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging practices, this research also intended to bring some contribution to the provision of appropriate prevention and/or intervention regarding children and families in the context of mobile technologies.

1.6 Aim and objectives of the study

This study sought to explore parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ texting practices. Therefore, its objectives were:

- To explore and describe parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of dyadic communication and relationships;
- To explore and describe how parents respond to their teenagers’ texting practices in terms of regulation;
- To suggest appropriate measures of prevention and/or necessary interventions for the protection of teenagers and families in the context of mobile technologies.

1.7 Significance of the study

Parenting evolves with time. However, when it comes to ICTs, many of these are relatively new, while many teenagers have been exposed to them since their childhood. On the other hand, some parents do not access books or magazines on parenting and they do not access internet either. Therefore, the gap between these two generations is likely to widen.

Furthermore, as adolescents separate themselves from their parents, seeking independence and autonomy, they communicate less with their parents. On the other hand, parental monitoring and support, as well as open and regular parent-teen communication, have been associated with reduced participation in high risk behaviours (Weisskirch, 2009). Therefore parents have to make an extra effort to keep this communication open.

Today, parent-teen communication can be enhanced by the mobile phone as this device offers the possibility of constant accessibility. At times parents may need to call or text their children to ascertain their whereabouts, activities and associates, and to coordinate plans. Subsequently, they may send admonishing or uplifting text messages (Weisskirch, 2009). Likewise, teenagers may call or text their parents when they need help or support. In particular, this mobile-mediated interaction can contribute to positive parenting in the case of absent fathers, a situation considered as a crisis in South African families (Bray, Gooksens, Khan, Moses, and Seekings; 2010, Holborn and Eddy, 2011; Madhavan, Townsend, and Garey, 2008; Ritcher and Morrell, 2008). In fact, some studies have suggested that non-resident fathers can still support their children financially and emotionally (Madhavan et al., 2008) and, given the widespread use of the mobile phone, this device can play a role in helping them to achieve this.
It has been established that the need to stay connected to teenagers is the primary reason why parents buy them mobile phones (Campbell, 2005; Lenhart et al., 2010; Ribak, 2009; Oosterwyk and Kyobe, 2013; Weisskirch, 2009). However, as more and more of these devices become available among young children and teenagers, texting and social networks are commonly used in peer-to-peer communication, with the likelihood of promoting sexting, text and internet bullying when unmonitored or unsupervised.

In the South African context in particular, this study is of significant relevance due to a number of factors. Some points have emerged from a UNICEF research (Beger et al., 2012):

- There is little penetration of fixed-line telephone in South Africa, as is the case in many other countries in the region, due to lack of telecoms infrastructure. On the other hand, mobile telephony continues to be the main ICT communication tool for the population (p.11).
- As in the rest of the world, young people are the primary adopters of mobile technology in South Africa, with nearly seventy-two per cent of ownership occurring among 15 to 24 year olds (p.7).
- South Africa has the highest number of households with one or more mobile phones (56.7 per cent) when compared to other African countries (p.10).
- Internet browsing on mobile phones is expanding in South Africa (p.14). Other authors have also pointed to this fact (Kreutzer, 2009; Oosterwyk and Kyobe, 2013; Walton, 2009).

Undoubtedly, this dissemination of the mobile phone among the South African population, the youth in particular, has a number of social implications. As an example, according to media reports, mobile bullying is on the rise in South Africa and empirical evidence has confirmed this (Beger et al., 2012; Oosterwyk et al., 2013; Unisa Youth Research Unit, 2012). With reference to the latter study, SAPA (2012) reported that the authors drew attention to the emergence of cyber bullying, highlighting its negative impact on young people’s lives, and thus on broader society. They warned that, if ignored, it could reach “crisis levels”. Another point is the growing availability of multi-functional and internet-
enabled mobile phones in teenagers’ bedrooms. Therefore, this study sought to explore and describe how parents experience this growth of mobile technologies as far as communication and relationships with their teenagers are concerned, with a focus on text messaging.

It also aimed at looking at ways parents regulate teenagers’ text messaging. In such a way, it hoped to contribute to the limited research on parenting in South Africa (Roman, 2008), more particularly in a screen era.

1.8 Theoretical framework

Family systems theory has been adopted for this study. This section begins by giving a general understanding of the theory before proceeding onto its application to the current research. More specifically, some aspects of the theory are highlighted, such as power dynamics in parent-teen interaction, time and the social environment.

Family Systems posits that family is a system, a whole wherein the members are interconnected and interdependent. A change that affects one person affects the whole system (McCarthy and Ribbens, 2011:91). According to these authors, this perception of family as a system stems from systems theory more generally applied to “organisms or to machines”. The components of a system can be seen as a structure with different parts linked to each other and interdependent (Tufnell et al., as cited in McCarthy et al., 2011:92). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1989, 2005) conception of families as nested within a series of interacting systems highlights the interaction between individuals and their immediate (microsystem), indirect (exosystem) and wider social (macrosystem) environments; the mesosystem represents interactions between immediate environments, while emphasis on the effect of time on all these multi-layered systems is referred to as chronosystem. Hence, the understanding that social systems are open systems, that is, influenced by factors outside themselves.
Within a system, three assumptions are outlined: (1) given the interconnection of the parts of the system, what happens in one part of the system will have an effect on all other parts of the system; (2) the system needs to maintain a steady state (homeostasis) and will always adjust itself or adapt to try to maintain that steady state; (3) there is a feedback loop within the system, which provides the capacity for change (Goldstein, Specht and Vickery, as cited in Coulshed and Orme, 2006:55).

When it comes to human beings, communication is the string that connects the parts. Yet, in the dyadic interaction, especially as far as parents and their teenagers are concerned, the latter become less communicative (Roman, 2012), and with regard to mobile communication, text messaging is often constructed as alienating parents and their teenagers. It is understood as an “age specific modality” (Ribak, 2009:186) and Oosterwyk et al. (2013: 9) note that “children are now able to communicate in ways that are completely foreign to both parents and educators.” Furthermore, in the Pew research (Lenhart et al, 2010:51), many teenagers viewed their parents as “people outside the loop of texting”. Textism, that is, the language using symbols and acronyms found in teenagers’ text messages, is mainly attributable to this construction.

Within the family, relationships are influenced by societal traditions, power relations, family structure and hierarchical dimensions (Ravichandran, 2009). There are rules, roles and expectations within which family members operate. In the light of family systems theory, the parent-teen dyad can be seen as a family subsystem. Traditionally, parental control is given prominence in a parent-child relationship. On the other hand, one of a parent’s responsibilities in children’s adolescent years is to facilitate the transition to adulthood by promoting autonomy and independence. What happens then when a mobile phone comes into this system?

There is disagreement in literature on this issue. Ravichandran (2009:33) argues that mobile phones, which occupy “the very intimate and private space of a person” are found to be “diluting family relationships”, due to physical and emotional attachment to them. In fact, adolescence is known to be a period of ‘heightened sociability’ (Brooks, 1981), and Lenhart (2012) states that teens are “fervent
communicators.” However, they are prone to communicate more with peers and less with parents from whom they are separating; and the mobile phone is making things easier for them with the possibility of communicating instantly at any time, privately (Paul, 2004:213). Moreover, due to peer pressure during adolescence, teenagers can easily get involved in risky behaviours such as smoking, substance abuse and early sex (Bray, Gooksens, Khan, Moses, and Seekings, 2010). Therefore, with increased peer communication made possible via the mobile phone, there are more fears of loss of parental control at the expense of peer influence from the parent side. For teenagers, mobile phones allow them to break free from parental control, thus satisfying their aspirations to autonomy and independence.

Other researchers have highlighted the role of mobile phones in extending parental control and in negotiating it by teenagers (Bond, 2010; Lenhart et al., 2010). In contemporary society, while many of the teenagers spend much of their time at school, their parents, including mothers, go to work outside their homes. Thus, at a distance, as Weisskirch (2009) suggests, mobile phone communication enables parental monitoring and increased knowledge about adolescents’ activities, whereabouts and associates. Likewise, adolescents can seek guidance and support from parents. When balanced, this parental monitoring has been associated with positive behavioural outcomes (Roman, 2008; Wang, Bianchi, and Raley, 2005; Weisskirch, 2009). It is also suggested that the power dynamics in this relationship are influenced by the person who pays for the mobile phone, with less control when the parent is not the provider of this technological device (Lenhart et al., 2010). The cultural context is also an important variable that plays a role in the influence of this relationship (Ribak, 2009; Walton, 2009). In this regard, Roman (2014:11) noted that behavioural control is especially important when children live in high-risk environments where there is greater likelihood of them participating in gang-related activities and crime, a common phenomenon in South African communities. Therefore, the mobile phone is an addition to the family system, and parents may be experiencing its effects with regard to their relationships with their teenagers. It will require the system to adapt to this new
dimension of the family. In fact, Johnson and Puplampu (2008) have already suggested the techno-
subsystem, a new dimension to Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem, of which the mobile phone is a part.

Figure 1 gives a pictorial representation of this integration of the mobile phone into the family and ecological systems.

![Figure 1: An adaptation of Johnson and Puplampu’s Ecological Techno-Subsystem](image)

The current study focused on text messaging because, as mentioned earlier, it is an outstanding feature used by teenagers to communicate via their mobile phones. How parents use it to stay connected with their teenagers, at the same time preventing its negative impact on their children’s lives, is what the present study sought to explore. Undoubtedly this is likely to be linked to parents’ styles as these reflect how parents balance power dynamics with regard to their relationships with their teenagers.

1.9 The structure of this mini-thesis

This work is divided into five chapters. Each chapter starts with an introduction and ends with a summary of the main points covered in it. The first chapter begins with an overview of the origin of text messaging, followed by the background and rationale for the study. The next section discusses the
problem statement and is followed by a presentation of the aim and objectives of the study as well as its significance. The last section presents the structure of the work.

The second chapter, dedicated to literature review, begins with an overview on parenting adolescents. This is very important because of the different approaches to parenting, depending on the age of the child. The second section looks at the role of the mobile phone in teenagers’ communication before examining the benefits and the downside of teenagers’ text messaging. The next section concerns parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of communication and relationships with teenagers. The last part looks at parental regulation of teenagers’ use of mobile phone and text messaging.

The third chapter discusses the methodology used for the study. It starts by giving an overview of philosophical perspectives underpinning research. Then, after presenting the aim and objectives, the rationale for choosing the qualitative approach, the exploratory and descriptive designs is explained. This section is then followed by the research strategy, comprising a description of the study population, sample, methods of data collection, analysis and verification. The last section is dedicated to ethical considerations for the study.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study. These emanate from interviews with eleven parents about their experiences of their teenagers’ use of mobile phones and text messaging. Various quotations from collected data support the themes and subthemes that emerged and are triangulated according to available literature. The next section provides a table summarising details of the participants and their teenagers before discussing each theme separately.

The fifth chapter is a discussion of the results in view of the objectives intended for the study. The researcher interprets the findings, while at the same time discussing similarities and/or differences with those of previous related research. Areas for further research are also identified, followed by
some recommendations. Thereafter, a discussion of strengths and limitations of the study is provided. The chapter ends with a general conclusion.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In South Africa, substantial research has already been done on MXit, an instant messaging and social networking application which has been popular among the South African youth (Beger et al., 2011; Beger et al., 2012; Chigona et al., 2008; Walton, 2009). However, Walton’s study (2009:57) clearly states that MXit is a communication tool between teenagers, their closest friends and peers while excluding the “older generation”. Moreover, MXit presupposes internet-enabled phones, which some parents might not have. Thus, the present study explores parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging, a new element in their family system. In the light of the above, this literature section is divided into six components. The first one discusses adolescent years and parenting practices; the second one looks at the role of the mobile phone in teenagers’ daily communication and the reasons behind their texting practices; the third examines the benefits of teenagers’ text messaging, while the fourth discusses the downside of it; the fifth part discusses parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of communication and relationships. The last part looks into parental regulation of teenagers’ use of mobile phones and text messaging.

2.2 Adolescent years and parenting practices

For parents, it is important to understand the developmental stages of their children in order to adjust their parenting approach accordingly. Young teenagers are still undergoing physical, intellectual, social and personal changes of early adolescence (Brooks, 1981, 1987). According to Erikson, the famous developmental psychoanalyst, identity formation is the major task of this transition from childhood to adulthood (Brooks, 1981). Along with this are some other key features of adolescence:

(1) separating from parents;
(2) new identification with peers; and
However, there is much controversy when it comes to parenting. It is much influenced by culture and there is no one-size-fits-all. In fact, each parent is unique and so is every child in the parent-child relationship. In addition, there may be different approaches if more than one person are raising a child, as is in the case of a couple. According to Bornstein (1995), such discrepancies are likely to increase parent-adolescent conflicts. On the other hand, there is agreement in literature that positive relationships between parents and their adolescents are associated with mental, social and emotional well-being as well as better academic outcomes. Moreover, such relationships lessen the likelihood that teenagers will exhibit behavioural problems (Moore, Guzman, Hair, Lippman, and Garrett, 2004:3-4).

Therefore, with adolescence, like at any age in the parent-child relationship, researchers have emphasised the need for parents to have clear, firm and enforceable limits, as well as to provide a warm, responsive and cohesive family environment (Brooks, 1981, 1987; Bornstein, 1995). However these authors suggest some degree of flexibility in the adolescent approach to parenting if positive outcomes are to be expected. At this stage, a parent’s task is also to continue to model effective behaviours he/she wants his/her children to have, to provide them with information needed in developing skills that protect them against risk, to be involved in their daily life and monitor their adolescents’ whereabouts without being overprotective (Bornstein, 1995:104). There is also cross-cultural evidence that authoritative parenting, high on responsiveness and demandingness, influences positively children’s outcomes, better performance in school and fewer behavioural problems, irrespective of their age (Simons and Conger, 2007; Sorkhabi, 2005; Steinberg et al., 1991).

In South Africa, there is still limited research on parenting (Roman, 2014:1). However, after twenty years of democracy, Holborn and Eddy (2011) state that families are still influenced by the particular history of the country, characterised by racial discrimination and its effects of family fragmentation,
mainly stemming from migrant labour. Given the increasing numbers of absent fathers in the lives of many South African children (Bray et al., 2010; Holborn and Eddy, 2011; Madhavan, Townsend, and Garey, 2008; Ritcher and Morrell, 2006), the mobile phone may play an important role in maintaining the connections (much needed especially for emotional support) between absent parents, fathers in particular, and their teenagers. The following section looks at the ways the mobile phone impacts teenagers’ communication.

2.3 The role of the mobile phone in teenagers’ communication

Today, the rise in digital technologies has also seen an expansion of the mobile phone and these devices have significantly affected people’s way of life, especially in their interactions with one another. According to Beger and Sinha (2012:4), South Africans are among the highest users of mobile technology and mobile social networking on the African continent, and its adolescents and youth are the first adopters of this technology. This, however, as seen earlier, is typical of teenagers worldwide. These youngsters, irrespective of their socioeconomics, make up a sizable proportion of mobile phones users. In South Africa, for example, a survey carried out among 441 grade 11 students at nine schools in low-income areas in Cape Town, found that only 23 per cent of the children did not have their own mobile phone (Kreutzer, 2009). More recently, Oosterwyk and Kyobe (2013:9) also pointed out that “mobile phones are the most common technological artefacts used to communicate” among adolescents in South Africa.

Depending on the type of mobile phone they own, teenagers can perform various activities: make phone calls, type text or instant messages, surf the internet, browse the web site, connect with friends using social networks, listen to and download music, take and share pictures, play games, access information, movie clips and news, and many more (Lenhart et al., 2010:5). In the context of media and digital technologies, teenagers are now recognised, and they recognise themselves as ‘multitasking experts’ (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 2008; Walton, 2009). Smart phones have
come as a bonus to those who own them as they can do a lot more than was previously achieved on
the computer - often shared by other family members in the case of one at home (Thompson and Cupples, 2008:96). Therefore, more privacy, autonomy and independence seem to have been gained from parents through the mobile device. Despite the various functions of a mobile phone, the primary purpose of having it remains communication with peers, friends and family (Lenhart et al., 2010).

The increase in communication via mobile phones has also seen a rise in text messaging (also called ‘texting’), especially among teenagers and youth. Various studies have established that texting is now teenagers’ preferred mode of communication via the mobile phone (Caronia, undated; Kerr, 2012; Lenhart et al., 2010; Lenhart, 2012; Geertsema, Hyman and van Deventer, 2011; Ling, 2004; Thompson and Cupples, 2008; Thurlow and Poff, 2010). As an example, a study conducted among teenagers in America revealed that texting is the “dominant daily mode of communication between teenagers and all those with whom they communicate” (Lenhart, 2012:2). Another study in Italy reports a similar phenomenon (Caronia, undated:6).

Two main reasons are often mentioned to motivate this choice, namely the low cost of SMSs compared to phone calls, and their discreet method of operation. (Ling, 2004:19; Ravichandran, 2009:38). In South Africa, it can be argued that sometimes a short phone call can be cheaper than a short text message. For example, writing two characters like “No” will be charged the same way as a 160 characters message. Furthermore, the free of charge message “Please Call Me” may be used to solicit a call from someone when the sender is low on or short of airtime (Beger et al., 2012:5). It is also worth noting that MXit has been popular among South African teenagers and youth for some time. Chigona et al. (2008:43-44) pointed to its advantage of being network-independent, unlike many other MIMs in South Africa, and added that a “MXit message may cost the sender around two South African cents compared to 70 South African cents for an SMS message”. Therefore, in the South
African context, MXit received more attention in literature than text messaging in teenagers’ mobile communication.

However, it is important to highlight the fast changing modes of communication via mobile phone. WhatsApp instant messaging may be gaining more popularity among young people and adults alike, although there is not yet evidence to confirm this. Irrespective of which channel they use, it looks like mobile technology will allow teenagers to have a way of increased communication with peers due to a range of technologies and applications they are now able to choose from.

Furthermore, evidence shows that there is more to the economic factor in determining the preference of teenagers’ text messaging over other modes of communication via the mobile phone. According to Ling (2004:19) text messaging has another advantage, that of being asynchronous, meaning that it can be responded to according to the receiver’s convenient time. Other main reasons mentioned in many studies are: building and maintaining relationships (Bond, 2010; Lenhart et al., 2010; Porath, 2011; Ravichandran, 2009) and coordinating events (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ling, 2004; Porath, 2011; Ravichandran, 2009). In their survey, Lenhart et al. (2010:34) mention two other important reasons reported by teenagers for their choice of text messaging: that is, to report their location and to manage school work outside the school.

In relation to their parents, text messaging allows teenagers to keep secrets among themselves and to enjoy freedom from their parents’ control. Their texting lingo (or textism), using acronyms and shorthand, helps them to achieve this. In addition, some children choose to send and receive messages on silent mode. All this contributes to reinforcing teenagers’ peer culture characterised by, among other things, “secrecy towards adults” (Caronia, undated:7), thus serving the accomplishment of the adolescent tasks of separating from parents while identifying with peers.

Apart from the propensity to socialise with peers and friends, teenagers are able to engage in romantic relationships and dating. Thus, for them and the youth, text messaging makes such interactions much
easier as there is no limit to time and space. Moreover, this can be done surreptitiously (Caronia, undated:7). This leads to a more detailed discussion of the advantages of text messaging.

2.4 The benefits of teenagers’ text messaging

The benefits of text messaging for teenagers have been researched from a double perspective, that is, from a teenager outlook on one hand, and from an adult one on the other hand. As discussed previously, the most advantageous point about texting for teenagers is that it allows quick communication and socialisation between them and their peers, classmates, friends and family members (Lenhart et al., 2010). Furthermore, it allows them to gain more freedom from parental control. For older teenagers, it makes flirting and dating easy without being noticed by adults, parents in particular. Another good point about text messaging is that its cost can be easily managed by teenagers as they are in control of the length of messages, unlike phone calls which can be long and difficult to terminate (Ravichandran, 2009). In addition, some researchers have pointed to the special meaning that teenagers may be attaching to text messages by considering these texts as gifts (Taylor and Harper, 2003).

Responding to teenagers’ and youth culture of texting, adults have adopted text messaging to engage with the digital generation. For example, due to the possibility of remaining anonymous with text messages, this channel is being used by health professionals to reach teenagers in addressing some sensitive issues such as sexually transmitted infections as well as other health-related issues (O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Utting, 2004; Porath, 2011). Locally, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) launched an SMS helpline in 2000 for teens in crisis to prevent them from committing suicide (Bosch, 2008; Déglise, Suggs and Odermatt, 2012). In 2008, Bosch reported that the centre received between 30 and 50 SMSs per day, and even more during more stressful times such as exam periods.
Moreover, taking advantage of their enthusiasm towards texting, an emerging body of literature professionals has started looking at text messaging as an educational tool to address issues of concern for teenagers, namely literacy (Braun, 2007; Porath, 2011; Walton, 2009). However, this is still a contested area. In fact, there has been a popular view that texting may be hindering literacy and be harmful to spelling (Geertsema, Hyman, van Deventer, 2011; Tucker, 2009; Thompson and Cupples: 2008). On the other hand, Crystal (2008), a famous linguist, argued that the use of abbreviations in language is not a new phenomenon but has been present for many decades. Furthermore, he asserted that sending text messages does not have negative effects on spelling as people know how to spell before they send messages. In his view, text messaging helps literacy as people become engaged with language through reading. Therefore, according to Crystal (2008), text messaging is particularly useful for school children. Sweeny (2010:3) echoed the same sentiment by suggesting that Instant Messaging and Text Messaging among teenagers can provide opportunities to support “collaboration, learning and productivity”, and Braun (2007) suggests that teenagers today are developing new literacies and learning to use technology in the most effective way. Porath (2011:94) argues that even though schools may still be resisting mobile devices in the classroom, parents may be more supportive.

There is still very limited research on the use of text messaging in parent-teen communication. This point is discussed towards the end of this literature review. The next section discusses the negative side of teenagers’ text messaging.

2.5 The negative aspects of teenagers’ text messaging

Along with the above advantages, the negative side of texting on teenagers has also been researched: cyber bullying, texting while driving, sexting, sleep deprivation or disruption of sleeping patterns, loss of communicative and social skills, talking with and meeting strangers and texting in the classroom.

Hinduja and Patchin (2009:5) define cyber bullying as a “wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cellphones and other electronic devices”. Evidence shows that today, with the
increase of media and communication technologies, cyber bullying, including mobile bullying among teenagers, is a worldwide concern. In a study conducted among adolescents aged between eleven and eighteen, Raskauskas (2010) found that text-bullying (via text messages) was a “growing problem” in New Zealand. Furthermore, Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008:128) referred to a study conducted in the United Kingdom whereby text messaging was revealed to be the most common tool for bullying. Bond’s (2010) study reflected the same concern. In South Africa, due to the widespread use of mobile phones among the youth, it is reported that many girls and boys have been victims of this medium of communication, namely through voice calls, text messaging and instant messaging, MXit in particular (Oosterwyk et al., 2013; Beger et al., 2012; Cilliers and Parker, 2008). Furthermore, as more mobile phones become multifunctional, teenagers may use them to take photographs and/or videos of their peers in their restrooms and share them among themselves (Cillier et al., 2008). Pictures of traditional bullying can also be taken and circulated among peers, leading to more humiliation. In group discussions conducted among adolescents in the United Kingdom, participants referred to this phenomenon as “happy clapping” (Bond, 2010:521).

Many authors have stressed the negative impact of cyber bullying on the overall well-being of children and teenagers. O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) have pinpointed psychosocial outcomes such as depression, anxiety, severe isolation and even suicide. All this has a direct effect on children’s desire to attend school, their ability to concentrate in class, their participation in extracurricular activities and their self-esteem (D’Antona et al., 2010).

**Texting while driving** is another concern among older teenagers. In The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project (Lenhart, 2009:86) survey among 625 teenagers, over one third admitted having texted “behind the wheel”. At the same time, many of the teenagers who reported this kind of behaviour agreed that their parents also call and/or text while driving. On the other hand, some researchers have suggested that texting while driving is more dangerous than calling, and could be more dangerous than driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol. One research conducted among
teenagers by the National Youth Risk Behavior (Burke, 2013) found that almost half of the respondents were driving and texting. Moreover, this texting was strongly associated with drinking alcohol and engaging in other risky motor vehicle behaviours, such as not wearing a seatbelt. The report also revealed that texting behind the wheel is quite common despite the injuries and fatalities that it claims. At the same time, it pointed out the difficulty of enforcing anti-texting laws, suggesting that parents have a big role in educating their young drivers about the dangers of this practice. Even though South Africa is one of the countries in the world that ban the use of mobile phones on the road (Ravichandran, 2009), many people still call and text while driving (Arrive Alive, 2009).

Another problem associated with adolescents’ texting is sexting. Through sexting, teens send and share sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images using text messaging (Haas, 2011). Ostrager (2010:1,2) refers to this behaviour as one of the “latest technological trends” used by teenagers to socialise. In another study (Lenhart, 2009), it was reported that sexting was not pervasive among American teenagers but had serious problems with those involved in it. Girls said they felt pressure to send their pictures to their boyfriends in order to maintain their relationship with them. In South Africa, there have been media reports on sexting (Beeby, 2009; van Wyk, 2011) and, according to SAPA (2012), the results of an inquiry conducted by the Unisa’s Youth Research Unit among high school learners in Gauteng showed evidence of sexting as an emerging growing phenomenon among young people. However, there is still little empirical research in this area thus far.

Much legislation classifies sexting under child pornography and teenagers engaged in it are punished accordingly. However, some countries have already created juvenile laws in this regard in line with the UNCRC (Beger et al., 2012; O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011). For example, the South Africa Child Justice Act, 2008 (Act of 75 of 2008) implemented on April 1, 2010 provides for children who commit criminal offences, including sexting (Beger et al., 2012:26).
Furthermore, literature provides evidence of the likelihood that teenagers will sleep with their phones under their pillows at night, and continue to chat (by voice, more by text) until late (Van den Bulck, 2007). As an example, in focus groups among teenagers, one high school learner reports: “Our friends are texting constantly, and the people will wake me up at like midnight and I have to like wake up and talk to them or like they’ll think I’m mad at them or something.” (Lenhart, 2010: 74). This manifests a feeling of obligation to reciprocate in order to maintain peer relationships (Kasesniemi and Rautiainen, 2002). Older teenagers may be spending many more sleepless nights texting their romantic friends as they seek to reinforce this relationship (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008:128-129). In South Africa, one of the reasons mentioned in a study where teenagers had conflicts with their parents about mobile phones or MXit use, was staying up late in the night (Walton, 2009: ii).

There is still disagreement in literature regarding the loss of communicative and social skills due to teenagers’ intensive text messaging. For example, while some argue that text messages lead teenagers to have difficulties in expressing themselves with appropriate body language (Glotz, Bersh, and Locke, 2005; Mark, 2007; Ravichandran, 2009), Thompson & Cupples (2008:5) find in texting the potential to expand social networks, For some parents, teenagers who text while in conversation are seen as being disrespectful (Ravichandran, 2009; Lenhart et al., 2010; Walton, 2009).

Another main concern for parents when it comes to teenagers’ text messaging, is the communication with strangers. Children, girls in particular, start exchanging texts with people unknown to them, get enticed by them and can end up meeting them physically. In South Africa, this phenomenon has been common in news reports and evidence has been found to support this. Two instances are mentioned in the UNICEF study (Beger et al., 2012:27). One is of a 15 year old girl who, according to a news report in 2010, was drugged and raped by a 27 year old man she met on MXit. The second one involved a 20 year old girl, who, in similar circumstances, was raped by three men in 2011. Another UNICEF study (Beger et al., 2011) found that many teenagers talked with strangers on the MXit platform.
Lastly, despite the ban on mobile phones in many schools around the world, some teenagers still take them to school and even use them in the classroom (Lenhart et al., 2010). The latter study suggests that text messaging in particular could be a possible avenue for distraction and cheating; it reveals that some teenagers may be texting each other while others are busy learning. According to the same study, they may be exchanging answers during exams.

While most of the above focused on text messaging as a communication tool between teenagers, the next section looks at how it presents in parent-teen interaction.

### 2.6 How parents experience text messaging in their communication and relationships with their teenagers

As mentioned earlier, research on mobile phones and teenagers has mainly focused on its use in peer group interaction, thereby leaving its role in the parent-teen relationship underexplored (Ribak, 2009; Weisskirch, 2008). This way, the mobile phone and text messaging in particular, are viewed as contributing to widening the generation gap, either by alienating parents from their teenagers, or by decreasing the power of the former at the expense of the latter (Ribak, 2009). In their analyses of parent-teen mobile phone mediated relationships, Weisskirch and Ribak are more interested in the ways these technological devices redefine the dyadic interactions.

More particularly, Weisskirch sought to understand how mobile telephony enhances or detracts from parent-adolescent relationship in both parties. In a survey comprising 196 dyads (mostly Euroamericans), the author investigated the link between the frequency, duration and nature of phone calls and the perception of truthfulness and family relationships. A four-pronged set of results was revealed: a) parents who called more frequently reported less truthfulness when speaking to their adolescents via the mobile phone; b) from the adolescents’ side, greater frequency in parental calls was associated with less truthfulness as children thought their parents were being intrusive; c) parents who called when upset reported less parental knowledge and poorer family relationships; the same
applied to adolescents; d) adolescents’ calls seeking social support to ask and confer with parents, reported greater perceived parental knowledge and better family relationships.

Likewise, Ribak (2009) examined the mobile phone use as a medium of intergenerational communication, Drawing on an ethnographic study conducted in Israel among teenagers between 2000 and 2006, Ribak looked at the mobile phone as a transitional object in parent-teen interrelationship. It was argued that in this relationship, the mobile phone is important more for the potential of communication that it holds than the actual voice or text that it carries. Furthermore, analysis went beyond previous constructions of the mobile phone as a remote control and umbilical cord, to stress its role in enabling intergenerational distance and intimacy as well as the consideration of specific cultural contexts to effectively describe the relationship.

In the above two studies, more reference is made to call features rather than text messaging of the mobile phone. Similarly, in South Africa where many teenagers do not reside with their biological parents, connections between them and their absent parents are maintained “through phone calls and visits” (Bray et al., 2010:83). On the other hand, in a study among parents/caregivers on the overall perception of mobile phone usage by teenagers in New Zealand, both voice and text features were considered by participants as the “basic required facilities in teenagers’ mobile phones.” (Ravichandran, 2009:ii). Therefore, one of the objectives of the study was to understand the influence of text messaging on teenagers’ behaviours. The main concerns reported by parents/caregivers were: addiction to texting, bullying and abusive messages, interruption of family time, study time and distractions, including texting and driving. Anti-social activities through macro-coordination were also reported. As she was interested in parents’/caregivers perceptions of mobile phone impact on teenagers, Ravichandran’s study did not look at how parents and teenagers engage with each other using text messaging.
Therefore, it is worth examining how parents connect with their teenagers through text messaging. In their survey, Lenhart et al. (2010:46), the majority of teenagers said they preferred calling their parents rather than texting them. There were various reasons behind this choice, but from teenagers’ perspective, two were prominent. Firstly, the rationale is more ‘immediacy’ and ‘fullness’ to voice interaction in comparison to texting (p. 46). Secondly, it is the perception by many teenagers of parents as “people outside the loop of texting” (p. 51). In this context, texting is viewed as a special skill only mastered by “digital natives” as opposed to “digital immigrants”. This perception is mainly due to the texting language – similar to shorthand–used in teenagers’ text messages that parents find unfamiliar to them. Hence, the assumption that communication between parents and their teenagers via the mobile phone only happens through voice calls.

The Pew study (Lenhart et al., 2010) conducted in America among teenagers and parents on their use of mobile phones, on the other hand, deals with both voice and text messaging in a balanced manner. In this study (p.51), it is reported that the majority of parents (71%) texted their children. Likewise, nearly half of teenagers said they texted their parents on a daily basis. However, even though some parents were described as “proficient texters”, it was found to be the exception rather than the rule. In general, parents required the use of traditional formulations by their teenagers to get the message across (p.52). Therefore, due to the fact that text messaging is of primary importance in teenagers’ daily communication, parents cannot avoid using it if they are to stay connected with their children. In this regard, a number of media reports suggest that more and more parents are actually turning to text messaging in order to engage with their adolescents.

For some, the mobile phone is perceived as an ‘umbilical cord’ helping parents and children to stay constantly in communication during periods of spatial distance (Glotz et al., 2005; Ribak, 2009). Indeed, as many children spend a lot of time at school and/or may not reside with their parents, it may become necessary to communicate via text message regarding transport or other urgent matters, when calling would be more expensive or inappropriate. Therefore, some parents may need support in
lessening the digital generation gap between them and their teenagers. This can also help them to regulate teenagers’ texting behaviour. In this regard, a South African parent, Dr John Buswell, Chief Executive Officer of Rape Wise, at a presentation for parents at Kenridge Primary School last year (2012) urged parents to stop being like ‘dinosaurs’ and learn “how to tweet, Facebook and BBM” to be able to check on their children (Erasmus, 2012:3). He suggested that parents let their children teach them those skills. This can also be seen as an opportunity to increase communication between parents and adolescents as the latter intervene to provide help to the former, thus lessening the digital gap between them (Odendaal, Malcolm, Savahl, and September, 2006:4). In such a case, the power relation that often characterises parenting becomes negotiable.

The mobile phone is fast becoming a mini-computer in the teenager’s hands. This results in more freedom and privacy from parents, and the degree of attachment to it as a means of relating to peers and even communicating with strangers may be seen as a challenge to parental regulation.

2.7 Parental regulation of teenagers’ use of mobile phones and text messaging

Today, many teenagers grow up in a media and technological-rich environment including, but not limited to, television, personal computers, laptops, video games, iPads and mobile phones, all found in the home setting. This constitutes the techno-subsystem dimension of the microsystem as suggested by Johnson et al. (2008). Therefore, parents are challenged with keeping the balance between the advantages offered by these tools, such as information, connectedness and entertainment on the one hand, and their negative effects on teenagers’ safety and behaviour, on the other hand. Drawing on strategies long developed for regulating television viewing, Livingstone and Helpster (2008:583), have broadly grouped parents’ strategies into three categories: active mediation, i.e. talking about media content while the child is engaging with the medium; restrictive mediation, meaning that parents set rules restricting the use of the medium; and co-using, i.e. parent remains present while the child is engaged with the medium (co-viewing, for example).
In some ways, parents seem to have applied the above strategies to different technologies. For example, with regard to video games, they have implemented *active mediation, restrictive mediation* and *co-playing* (Livingstone et al., 2008:583). As for the internet (computer-based), a study conducted in the United Kingdom involving parents and adolescents (12-17) found that parents preferred *co-use* and *interaction rules* to *technical restrictions* using filters or monitoring software. However, only parental restrictions of online peer-to-peer were associated with reduced risk (Livingstone et al., 2008:581). For parents, a challenge remains, that is, to find working strategies that do not impede children’s online interactions with their peers. And now, which strategies apply to teenagers’ use of mobile phones?

In their survey, Lenhart et al. (2010) found that many parents check the content of their children’s phones, take these away when rules have been broken or limit their use in the household. It can be argued that taking away phones goes against the main reasons why a phone is bought for the child in the first place, which are: staying in touch with the child and checking on his or her whereabouts. On the other hand, there is evidence that limiting teenagers’ texting relates to lower levels of their texting behaviours such as sexting (Lenhart, 2010) or text bullying.

There is still little research on how parents/guardians control their teenagers’ texting practices, especially in South Africa. In the presentation for parents referred to earlier, Buswell recommended a “collection point in the house for all cell phones, laptops and iPads before bedtime”, and not to give children access to cyberspace too early (Erasmus, 2012:3). When is “too early” remains the question. Moreover, as children grow older, they may purchase mobile phones for themselves. In such a case, it may be even more difficult for parents to control its use.

As mentioned earlier, one of the main challenges for parents of adolescents is to allow flexibility in setting limits in order to allow the child to grow independent and autonomous. Thus, from a teenager’s perspective, the mobile phone itself is a good thing for him/her as it helps to break free from parental
control. This means that checking the content of their messages can be seen as infringing on children’s privacy. In this regard, article 14 of the South African Constitution (Dawes, Bray and van der Merwe, 2007:555) guarantees the right to privacy including, among other things, the right not to have the privacy of someone’s communications infringed. Furthermore, article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Dawes et al., 2007:541) states that “no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.”

Therefore, while regulating their teenagers’ texting practices, parents have to bear in mind their children’s right to privacy which can only be infringed upon when there is suspicion that children are getting involved in risky behaviours (Roman, 2012). This implies creating a mutual relationship based on trust, respect, open communication and emotional support as expressed by the youth themselves (Bray et al., 2010:42). Similarly, in the Pew Research study (Lenhart, 2010:80), teenagers who say they text their parents most often are more likely to have parents who report that they do not regulate their children’s mobile phones in any way. Furthermore, Weisskirch’s (2009) study conducted among parents and their high school-aged adolescents in California confirmed prior findings in parenting that more frequent communication does not yield stronger family relationships. In the mobile phone context, it is suggested that teenagers who initiated phone calls were associated with more disclosure and truthfulness when reporting their whereabouts, activities and associates. All this is indicative of the need to build mutual trust between generations (Lenhart, 2010:80). These behaviours are more likely to present in a similar manner when it comes to text messaging.

2.8 Conclusion

In short, it can be seen that text messaging as the dominant mode of communication between teenagers, their peers and friends, fulfils adolescents’ tasks of identity formation, separation from parents and development of romantic relationships. This is likely to bring about conflict as parents strive to maintain control over their children’s texting behaviours. Parents reading their children’s
messages, for example, can be seen as a violation of their right to privacy. Can then parents trust their adolescents to be texting responsibly? If not, what approach can be used to regulate this behaviour without infringing on children’s rights? Moreover, parents have concerns about teenagers’ text messages that disturb school work, driving, and sleep; promote text bullying; and impede communicative skills. More research is needed to explore how parents can stay connected with their teenagers using the pervasive text messaging while lessening its negative impact and maintaining positive relationships with their teenagers at the same time. The present study sought to bring some contribution towards such an endeavour.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides some details on the methodological perspective and processes that inform the current study. Thus the choices of the qualitative approach, exploratory and descriptive designs are explained. Thereafter the aim and objectives of the study are presented. Furthermore, the research strategy that comprises a description of the study population, sample, methods of data collection and analysis is discussed. The chapter ends by examining the trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations.

3.2 Methodological perspective

Methodology is defined as the “logic of the decision-making process in scientific research.” (Mouton and Marais, 1996:16). In the social sciences – aimed at inquiring social reality- such logic is based on the researcher’s specific paradigm, that is, worldview, or “a systematic set of beliefs, together with their accompanying methods” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:15) and attitudes about the world and how these should be understood and studied. Thus, from the outset, the researcher selects the nature of the paradigm within which he or she will be positioned throughout the research process and makes it explicit. The two main options that the researcher can choose from are discussed below.

On the one hand, there is a viewpoint rooted in positivism philosophy which believes in an objective and external approach to social reality, wherein the researcher remains an outsider to that reality. It is framed on a nomothetic model more interested in making generalisations about social reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

On the other hand, there is a belief that reality is subjective and can only be constructed through the participant’s meaning of his or her lived experience of it. This view is framed on an idiographic model which analyses all the micro events behind a social phenomenon and does not seek to make
generalisations. De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, and Delport (2011:310) note that under this perspective, the same phenomenon could “be investigated, analysed and interpreted differently depending on one’s belief of what social reality is (ontology) and how social phenomenon can be known (epistemology).”

As will be seen in the discussion below, the aims and objectives determine the research approach.

3.3 Aim and objectives

3.3.1 The research question

The research question of this study was: What are parents’ experiences of teenagers’ text messaging?

3.3.2 Aim

The aim of the study was to explore and describe parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging.

3.3.3 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To explore and describe parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of communication and relationships;
- To explore and describe how parents respond to their teenagers’ texting practices in terms of regulation;
- To suggest appropriate measures of prevention and/or necessary intervention for the protection of teenagers and their families in the context of mobile technologies.

As mentioned previously, the aims and objectives of a scientific inquiry directs the approach to be used.

3.4 The qualitative approach
In view of the aim of the current study, which was to explore parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messages, the qualitative approach was adopted. Indeed, the drive behind this type of inquiry is “to understand human experiences from the perspective of those who experience them” (Yegidis et al., 2011:21). This is done by providing complex textual descriptions of those experiences as a response to a given research problem (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, and Namey, 2005:1). This study was guided by some characteristics of the qualitative approach as highlighted by Creswell (2007:37-40):

1. Data collection happens in the natural setting of the participant, in multiple forms;
2. The researcher is the key instrument, meaning that he/she is key in collecting data;
3. The participant is the expert of the phenomenon under study, not the researcher;
4. There is room for flexibility;
5. The researcher adopts a neutral attitude in his/her interpretation of social reality under consideration and attempts to present a holistic view of it.

Thus, in the light of the above, the qualitative approach was adopted as better suited to the current research. More specifically, the need to hear parents’ opinions on their experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging practices is relevant to the family system under consideration in this study. It is also noteworthy to point out that various authors use different terminologies in describing the process of qualitative research to tentatively describe its philosophical underpinnings and research strategy. The current study process was adapted from Berg’s (2007) suggested guide as summarised in De Vos et al. (2011:69) and is detailed as follows:

- Research idea
- Theory/reviewing the literature
- Research project/research strategy
- Data collection and organisation
In this study, the researcher also considered some strategies to examine trustworthiness in qualitative research as well ethical issues. These will be discussed later in sections 9 and 10 of this chapter. The next section discusses the choice of the exploratory design adopted for this study.

### 3.5 Exploratory research design

As seen in the introductory chapter, text messaging has only recently been in operation for twenty-two years, meaning that it is a relatively new phenomenon. However, as already mentioned previously, its impact on the social life of young people in particular has been tremendous and has received remarkable attention in literature. On the other hand, the effect of such technology on parent-teen relationship has been underexplored. Therefore, as suggested by Babbie and Mouton (2001), the exploratory design adopted by the researcher on this particular topic is justified. More specifically, the study was conducted in order to gain new insights into this new phenomenon from a different perspective and to help determine priorities for future research (Mouton and Marais, 1996).

### 3.6 Descriptive research design

Even though the primary goal of this study is exploratory, the researcher also intended to describe parents’ experiences as expressed by the participants in the study. In fact, De Vos et al. (2011:96) suggest that exploratory and descriptive research “might blend in practice”. Therefore, while analysing and interpreting collected data, the researcher strived to describe experiences as they are lived by the participants. This is further explained under the trustworthiness section.
3.7 Population and sampling

A study population is defined as “the pool of people from which research participants are drawn.” (Mack et al., 2005:117). Thus, in the current study, the population was parents/guardians (males and females) of teenagers (boys and girls) attending high schools in Cape Town suburbs. The researcher used two sampling strategies to collect data: purposive and snowball. According to Mack et al. (2005:5), purposive sampling involves selecting informants on the basis of some criteria relevant to a particular study. Therefore, in view of the aim of this research, which was to explore parents’ experiences of their teenager’s texting practices, the following parameters of the population were considered.

- Participants had to be a parent (male or female) of at least one teenager (aged 13-19) at the time of this study.
- In order to make sure that the child was a teenager, parents were asked whether he or she was attending high school. The assumption was that children attending high school in South Africa are at least 13 years of age, as they start primary school at the age of six and spend at least seven years in primary school. Furthermore, they are expected to complete their matric when they are eighteen or nineteen years old after five years of high school. Therefore, these children fit the definition ascribed to ‘teenager’ in the current study. The researcher intended to include both genders in the sample, and to have a multi-cultural diversity that would be representative of the population in Cape Town, which, as suggested by Bray et al. (2010:27), is predominantly coloured, with African and white minorities respectively. Five of the participants were coloured, five were black and one was white.
• Another condition to be taken into account was that the participant used a mobile phone in his or her daily communication with friends and/or other various people with whom he/she interacts. The researcher made sure that this condition was fulfilled by actually asking each potential participant whether or not they had, or used, a mobile phone in their daily life before handing them the information sheet (see appendix A) about the research.

• Recruitment was made among the working parents comprising teachers and some other civil servants. Two part-time working mothers were also studying at tertiary level. The participants’ age range was thirty-five to fifty-four.

In the beginning, the researcher went to the Centre for Parents in Wynberg hoping to access participants there. However, the staff at the centre explained that they had no workshop for parents in the near future. The researcher had been hoping that she would get an opportunity to meet parents on a day that one of the workshops was held, speak to them about the research, and see who would be interested. Subsequently, the researcher started to establish contacts using other social networks, mainly after identifying parents known to her as having one or more teenagers. Nine participants responded in this way. Two of the participants were recruited through snowball.

In snowball sampling, according to Mack et al. (2005:15) “participants or informants, with whom contact has already been made, use their networks to refer the researcher to others who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study.” The researcher used this method after she became aware of the difficulty of finding parents who generally have various responsibilities and limited free time. Among the two participants recruited using snowball sampling, one was a father, which was desirable, due to the researcher’s intent to include fathers in the sample; the other was a mother who was referred to the researcher but was

1 Centre for parents in Wynberg is a counselling service for parents
found unfit to be included in the study because she said that her daughter did not own a mobile phone and did not need one. In the end, the researcher, whose goal was exploring parents’ experiences of their teenagers texting practices, included this mother among participants considering this a “deviant case sampling” different from the dominant pattern, thus likely to enrich the study on teenagers and mobile phones (De Vos et al., 2011:393).

Regarding the size of the sample, in qualitative research, Yegidis et al. (2011:197) point out that it should be understood as the “number of cases” in the sample rather than the percentage of the population or its sampling frame. Therefore, the researcher is interested in getting a rich description of data until saturation is reached, that is, when there is no new knowledge being added to data collected.

One of the participants, who, due to time constraints, found it difficult to meet with the researcher in order to have a face-to-face interview, enquired whether she could answer questions through e-mail. Bearing in mind the greater flexibility of qualitative research, and after careful consideration of the option, the researcher decided to accept this and sent an additional set of questions to complement those found on the information sheet that the potential participant already had on hand. Eventually, the parent only answered questions on the information sheet. It ensued that data collected from this participant were not included in the present study. In this regard, Hunt and McHale in De Vos (2011:354) suggest that a series of face-to-face interviews are needed to validate e-mail interview findings. In this particular case, as said earlier, time constraints could not allow the researcher and the participant to meet physically. Therefore, her answers could not be probed. In the end, the total number of participants who signed consent forms and completed the one-on-one interview was eleven. The researcher decided that this number was sufficient as saturation, that is, the point in data gathering when no more new information is forthcoming, is reached.
All participants were recruited in the Southern Suburbs and Cape Flats of the Cape Metropolitan Area.

3.8 Data collection

3.8.1 Methods of data collection

a) Pilot interviewing

Before moving onto the main study, the researcher conducted three pilot interviews. Their purpose was to evaluate the interview guiding questions and to assess the time needed for an interview. More specifically, the researcher had the opportunity to check the understanding of the questions by the participants and whether the discussion based on them led to the desired effect, which was answering the research question. In other words, the researcher intended to make adjustments and improvements, and adopt different strategies wherever it was found necessary in order to achieve the purpose of the study. Participants were accessed through the researcher’s social networks in the same community as that of the main study. They included two mothers and one father.

An evaluation of the pilot interviews by the researcher, in consultation with the supervisor of the project, led the former to include the results thereof into the main study. Such a decision was made after realising that only minor adjustments were made from pilot interviewing to the main study. They mainly had to do with reflexivity. This point will be discussed further under data verification. The next part gives more details on interview proceedings.

b) Before the interview

After a potential participant had been identified, he/she was contacted by telephone and the person and the researcher agreed on a venue where they could meet in order to provide him/her with an information sheet on the study. However, four participants had to read the
information sheet on the day of the interview before we could start. It had been impossible to meet with them beforehand. The information sheet (see appendix B) provided more details on the research in order to allow the participant to make an informed decision to take part in the study. It explained what the research was about, its purpose, what text messaging is, and what the participant’s role in the study would be. Furthermore, it told the participant about the risks of taking part in the study, about his/her right to withdraw at any stage of the study and of the researcher’s assistance in case the participant was affected negatively.

c) The interviews

The first interview took place on 30 May 2013; the last one was in September 2013. This time period was much longer than anticipated due to the fact that sometimes interviews had to be rescheduled a number of times when parents were not available. On the other hand, prolonged time in the field came as an advantage as it gave the researcher an opportunity to check on the accuracy and trustworthiness of the collected data. This point is given ample discussion under data verification.

To conduct an interview the researcher and the participant agreed on a convenient time and place to meet. Two interviews took place in a private office at a work place; two took place in a private room at a school; the rest of the interviews were conducted at the participants’ places of residence. Verbal permission to use premises to interview parents was obtained each time prior to an interview. Before each interview, the researcher handed a consent form to the participant to be signed. Then she asked the participant permission to record the session. The researcher had a set of pre-determined questions that she used as a guide (See Appendix A). However, some more questions were added during interviews as the need to probe on the answers arose. Initially, sessions were intended to last between one and a half
hours. In reality, they lasted between forty-three minutes and an hour and sixteen minutes when saturation was reached.

While leading the interview, the researcher also jotted down notes on important points as a backup in case the recording went awry, as well as salient observations. Later on, these notes were expanded and entered into the computer to be considered at the time of interpreting data.

### 3.8.2 Research instrument

As mentioned earlier, the research instrument used comprised semi-structured, open-ended questions. Moreover, as just mentioned above, the researcher took advantage of the flexibility allowed by qualitative research to probe on questions in order to prompt the participants to elaborate on answers. Furthermore, many authors suggest that the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative approach (Creswell, 2007; Yegidis et al., 2011). Bearing this in mind, the researcher focused on building rapport with the participants by remaining neutral and non-judgmental in the discussion and by considering them as experts.

At the beginning of each interview the researcher greeted each participant, and thanked him or her for giving of his or her time to be part of the study. The researcher reiterated her appreciation when closing the interview. Interviews ran smoothly amid laughs (especially with mothers), with participants telling unexpected stories that added more insight to the study. However, at one point, one of the interviewees explicitly said that there was some information that he did not want to reveal, and his wish was respected by the researcher. The participant, who was asked whether he had heard about teenagers sending messages with photos where they had posed naked or semi-naked, said he had known cases of this phenomenon but added that he was not going to talk about them. The researcher implied that the parent found the information sensitive.
3.8.3 Pitfalls in interviewing

Even though the overall process of interviewing went smoothly, a few pitfalls that occurred are worth mentioning. Whether in an office or in the participant’s residence, at times, there were minimal interruptions that led the researcher to pause the recordings and resume them sometime later. However, the main concern came when one interview was cut short as the participant had to be collected by a friend earlier than expected to attend a church service. Fortunately, the participant agreed to continue the interview some other day. Subsequently, the researcher and the mother agreed on another time to meet via telephone communication. At first, this experience looked as inconveniencing the researcher. In the end, she found that the second session was also used as an opportunity to double-check on the accuracy of the information collected in the previous session.
3.8.4 Data storage and management

To store the collected data, the researcher followed the recommendation made by Mack et al. (2005:86), which is to use an “archival envelope” (the Jiffy Lite white envelope was used for this purpose), and keep the typed transcripts and expanded notes in it. This envelope and the tape recordings were locked away in a drawer at the researcher’s place of residence. As suggested by Creswell (2009), the recordings will be kept for a minimum of five years before being destroyed by the researcher.

3.9 Data analysis

This analysis was embedded in some facets of the qualitative approach adopted for the present study. More specifically, the methods of data analysis and data verification are described in this section.

3.9.1 Methods of data analysis

Creswell (2007:150) emphasises that data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing process, with no distinct steps in the process from data collection, data analysis and writing the report of the study. This accounts for the underlying motive by the researcher to use probes to elicit more elaborate answers in interviews when deemed necessary, taking field notes and transcribing data. Content analysis of parents’ face-to-face, semi-structured interviews was done. In content analysis, raw data (transcripts of parents’ interviews in this study) are “coded or classified according to some conceptual framework” (Babbie, 2010:338). At this level, the researcher in qualitative research does two main activities: segmenting the data into parts and reassembling them into a coherent whole after identifying some patterns (Boejie, 2010:76). In the current
study, the researcher was strategically guided by the six steps suggested by Creswell (2009:185 - 190).

*Step 1:* The researcher prepared and organised data for analysis by transcribing interviews and typing up field notes. The researcher also printed out the transcripts in order to get some hard copies of the data.

*Step 2:* The researcher read through all data as many times as necessary to familiarise herself with them and to get a sense of the meaning and tone conveyed by the participants. She began writing emerging topics in margins.

*Step 3:* The coding process. The researcher assigned labels (codes) to identified points of interest or segments. These were highlighted in different colours. Similar codes were brought together and organised under a theme using the ‘cut and paste’ facility of the computer.

*Step 4:* The researcher used the coding process to generate a small number of themes or categories that would constitute the major findings of the study. These were displayed from diverse perspectives, and supported by quotations and specific evidence. At this stage, the researcher resorted to the assistance of an independent coder to validate the findings. Her role is discussed later in more detail under peer debriefing.

*Steps 5 and 6:* the researcher presented a discussion with the interconnected themes and made an interpretation of meaning by considering how the findings confirmed or diverged from past information. Field notes were looked into and considered during interpretation of data. The researcher also suggested new avenues for research.
3.9.2 Methods of data verification

As mentioned earlier, qualitative research is rooted in the belief that reality is subjective. Therefore its interest lies in producing culturally specific and contextually rich data from different perspectives (Mack et al., 2005:1). This alone calls into question its validity as scientific inquiry. In other words, the approach to the notion of objectivity, as it manifests in qualitative research, needs to be accounted for. This is called trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Operationalisation of trustworthiness in the present study was achieved through measuring the following: neutrality, credibility and transferability.

- **Neutrality**: According to Guba (as cited in Krefting, 1991:215), this value refers to the freedom from bias in the research procedures and results. To account for this, the researcher adopted the attitude of learning from the participants rather than seeking to control them. In other words, she constantly made a conscious effort to consider participants as experts in the area under study. Moreover, in order to uphold neutrality, the researcher used **reflexivity**, that is, the process whereby the qualitative inquirer reflects critically on the self as a human being and instrument and assesses the influences of his or her own background, perceptions and interests on the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researcher achieved this through peer review examination. Indeed, after an interview was completed, the researcher transcribed it as soon as possible and sent the transcript to the supervisor of the project. In such a way, the researcher constantly received feedback on how to improve the process. In particular, the researcher, being a parent herself, became aware of this throughout the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data and made a conscious effort not to let her perspectives influence the study.
• *Credibility* refers to the compatibility between participants’ constructions of reality and those attributed to them by the researcher (Babbie and Mouton, 2011:277). According to Krefting (1991:215), credibility is obtained by describing human experiences with **accuracy**, as they are lived and perceived by the informants. This aspect of qualitative research is called “truth value” by Guba (as cited in Krefting, 1991:215). In the current study, credibility was achieved through the following procedures as suggested by Babbie and Mouton (2011:277):

- **Prolonged engagement**: As mentioned earlier, the researcher was in the field until saturation occurred. This was assessed on two levels. On an individual level, the amount of time spent with each participant during interviews (forty-three minutes to one hour and sixteen minutes) enabled her to identify and verify recurrent patterns. Second, on the sample level, five months of fieldwork allowed the researcher to check similar and divergent perspectives from the participants.

- **Persistent observation**: The researcher achieved this through multiple tentative analyses and interpretations.

- **Triangulation of data collection**: This procedure refers to collecting data from various sources to produce a variety and a divergence of constructions of reality found in a particular context. In the present study, during interviews, the researcher jotted down salient points regarding non-verbal behaviours and added some more afterwards on what transpired, as well as personal reflections while the information was still fresh in mind. Therefore, semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes as well as literature triangulation were all used to validate the findings of the study.
- **Referential adequacy**: This refers to materials available to document the researcher’s findings. These are: recorded tapes of interviews, electronic files and printouts of transcripts and personal notes.

- **Peer debriefing** is done by a peer who is outside the context of the study. His or her task is to review the researcher’s perceptions, insights and analyses. In this study, an independent coder assisted the researcher with analysis of data. Transcripts of interviews were sent to her, together with a provisional abstract as well as the aim and objectives of the study, and a list of the reduced codes used by the researcher. She came up with her own list of themes, categories and subcategories. The researcher compared identified themes with hers; points of disagreements were looked into, discussed and consensus or compromise reached.

- **Member checks**: This was achieved when the researcher repeated, asked clarifications or paraphrased the participant’s information to check on her understanding of data during an interview. In addition, after reading through the transcripts, the researcher got clarification or confirmation of some points by telephone or, on occasions, when she informally met with the informants after the interview. She also sent transcripts to those who provided e-mail addresses and got feedback on the accuracy of data collected.

Moreover, to allow the reader to assess truth value, the researcher supported findings with some direct quotes from the participants’ accounts.

- **Transferability**: In qualitative research, all observations are context-bound, and as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this type of inquiry does not primarily seek to make generalisations. Therefore, according to Babbie and Mouton, (2011:277), transferability relates to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other
informants or situations. Through detailed descriptions of collected data, the researcher allowed the reader to make judgments about transferability, depending on similarities and differences between the particular context of the current study and received contexts. In addition, the researcher used purposive sampling, which allowed a range of informants, including one deviant case, that is, one that did not fit in the regular patterns of the study.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Social research is done with and intended for humans. Therefore, throughout the process, the researcher needs to be guided by some ethical values. The current study was only conducted after it had been approved by the UWC Faculty Board Research and Ethics Committee, and UWC Senate Research Committee.

Furthermore, the researcher adhered to ethical principles that protect participants in a study against any possible harm (physical or emotional) throughout the process. According to Lipson (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2007:141) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011:64-66), four of those principles are highlighted: informed consent procedures, avoidance of deception, the protection of anonymity of the informants and the safeguarding of their privacy and confidentiality.

- **Informed consent** procedures

Bell (1993:52-53) reminds researchers in the social sciences to bear in mind that they do not ‘demand’ access to participants; they ask individuals a ‘favour’ to take part in a study. Therefore, prospective participants should be enabled to agree to participate voluntarily in research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011:64). In this regard, the researcher in the current study made sure potential participants knew exactly their role in the process, how much time was going to be required from them, and what was going to be done with the information they would provide. This information
was provided in the information sheet handed to the participants before interviewing them (See Appendix A) in simple language (English). Moreover, each participant signed a consent form (See Appendix B) handed to him/her prior to each interview.

- **Avoidance of deception**

This principle entails that researchers in the social sciences avoid making unrealistic promises to prospective participants. Guided by this principle, the researcher made sure that the information sheet was unambiguous about what the participants could expect to get in return for taking part in the study. In particular, one of the things mentioned was the compensation for transport costs to and from the venue of interview. However, the researcher tried her best to minimise transport fees linked to interviews due to a very tight budget. Therefore, most of the participants were interviewed in their place of residence or place of work. In such a way, the researcher had only to take care of her own transport to reach the venues. Furthermore, each of the participants will be provided with the abstract of the study in order to let them know about it outcomes.

- **Protection of anonymity**

One of the conditions mentioned in the consent form (See appendix B) signed by each participant before being interviewed, was that his or her identity would not be disclosed throughout the process. Bearing this in mind, the researcher did not use participants’ real names while transcribing data. Instead, pseudonyms were used. The same applied when another person, such as a family member, a friend or any other name was mentioned by the participant in the course of the interview. Similarly, places of work that might lead to participant identification were not disclosed.

- **Safeguard of privacy and confidentiality**
In the current study, the researcher was bound to this condition mentioned in the consent form signed by each participant. Regarding privacy, participants could only share information that they were ready to disclose. As mentioned earlier on, at some point, one participant decided he would not give out some of his information, and the researcher respected that. As for confidentiality, data collected from the participants could only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor. This also implied careful management of such data. To achieve this, the researcher transcribed in a private space at home and used headphones while transcribing from the audiotape used in the field. Hard copies of transcripts and the coded tapes of the interviews were kept in the envelope mentioned earlier and locked away in a drawer. Later on, the other person who had access to the transcripts of interviews was the independent coder. Caution taken by the researcher to protect participants’ anonymity guaranteed that confidentiality would still be safeguarded through data verification involving a third person in the process.

3.11 Summary

This chapter described the methodology used by the researcher in the current study. It explained that the adoption of the qualitative approach was motivated by the aim of the study, which was to explore parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging practices. Furthermore, the research strategies to achieve this aim were described: sampling procedures, data collection, research instrument and data analysis. The credibility of the research was also discussed as well as the main ethical values that guided the study. In short, the researcher used all possible measures to guarantee the trustworthiness of the data and results.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the current study wherein eleven parents were interviewed about their experiences with their teenagers’ text messaging. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the collected data are supported by excerpts from participants’ interviews and triangulated according to available literature. Before looking at each theme identified, details of participants and their children are provided below.

4.2 Biographical details on parents and teenagers

Eleven parents, eight mothers and three fathers participated in the study. They had all purchased mobile phones for their teenagers, except for three who had not. The teenagers had a range of ages from 13 to 19. A summary of the details of the participants and their children is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Details on parents and children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Teenager’s gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Means of acquiring mobile phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>boy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>girl</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>boy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Themes

From the analysis of the collected data, three main themes emerged. Theme 1: Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ use of a mobile phone; theme 2: Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging; theme 3: Parents’ suggestions on dealing with mobile phones and texting-related problems. Themes 1 and 2 are divided into a number of subthemes with categories and subcategories. A presentation of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data is provided in the table below.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Subtheme 1.1: Parents provided teenagers with mobile phones for communication, monitoring and arrangements with parents.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subtheme 1.2: Parents provided teenagers with mobile phones because they realised teenagers use them to communicate with peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subtheme 1.3: Parents were positive about their teenagers’ use of mobile phones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 1.4: Parents were negative about their children’s use of mobile phones.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 1.5: Parents were positive and negative about their teenagers using mobile phones.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 1.6: Parents were aware that teenagers use mobile phones for multiple purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 1.7: Parents had made various rules and boundaries about their teenagers’ mobile phone use.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 2**

Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging.

| Subtheme 2.1: Parents were not particularly concerned about their teenagers’ text messaging. |
| Subtheme 2.2: Parents had specific concerns about the effect of text messaging. |
| Subtheme 2.3: Parents used text messaging with their children for keeping in touch, making arrangements, monitoring and security reasons. |
| Subtheme 2.4: Parents were aware of various problems related to text messaging but had not experienced them. |
| Subtheme 2.5: Parents exercised different degrees of control of their children’s texting. |
| Subtheme 2.6: Parents mostly agreed with banning of all mobile phones in schools. |
| Subtheme 2.7: Parents had various rules about teenagers’ text messaging. |

**Theme 3**

Parents’ suggestions on dealing with mobile phones and texting related problems.
The next part discusses each theme in detail while at the same time providing supporting excerpts from participants’ interviews and literature.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ use of a mobile phone

According to participants’ narratives, the majority of parents had bought mobile phones for their children’s use. Of all parents interviewed, only three did not buy the devices for their teenagers. One mother said that her teenager “inherited” a mobile phone from an uncle; the other parent said his teenager got the phone from an older sibling; the third parent viewed mobile phones as “trouble” for teenagers, and said that her daughter could only buy herself one at the age of twenty-one. Parents gave various reasons why they had bought mobile phones for their teenagers. These are discussed under the next two subthemes.

Subtheme 1.1 Parents provided teenagers with mobile phones mainly for communication, security, monitoring, and arrangements with parents

Some parents indicated that the benefit of children having a mobile phone is in the fact that they can communicate with them and have some control on the children’s whereabouts. The following excerpts support this subtheme:

C31: I like them having cell phones because then it makes me feel that I can find them when I want to.

G19: So, to be able to know where they are and to know what they are doing, cell phones help me a lot.

Likewise, the mobile phone assists the children to make contact with the parents when necessary:
F137: *She can communicate something that is difficult to approach me about; she can actually text me about it “Mom, I have this problem”, you know. You communicate; she has opened up this conversation.*

K80: *Obviously they [teenagers] get them [cell phones] as they develop and according to their needs because it was easy... because of the communication. It was more of a communication point parent-child if they need to travel from school or times to be fetched, things like that.*

L14: *They can stay in touch about doing things or going out.*

Today, the mobile phone is already exerting an ostensible influence on the parent-teen relationship. As in the present study, available literature shows that the primary reason for buying mobile phones for teenagers is communication about their safety and security (Campbell, 2005; Cilliers and Parker, 2008; Lenhart et al., 2010; Weisskirch, 2009). This easy access is made possible by inherent characteristics of the technology itself, such as its ubiquity, portability and relatively affordable cost (Weisskirch, 2009:1124). In such a way, parents can simultaneously monitor their children by requesting information about their whereabouts, associates and current activities, and provide support for them (Weisskirch, 2009:1124). However, from a psychological perspective, the mobile phone is less of a means for actual communication and more of an object that encapsulates potential for communication. In other words, when it comes to parents and their teenagers in this mobile phone-mediated communication, the possibility of reaching the child at any time is more important than the real communication that actually happens. This is according to a study conducted in Israel that examined the mobile phone as a transitional object in parent-teen interrelationships (Ribak, 2009). Thus far, it looks like the
purchase of mobile phones for teenagers is actually intended for parents. The next subtheme identified in the collected data exposes a different reality.

**Subtheme 1.2 Parents provided teenagers with mobile phones because they realised teenagers use them to communicate with peers**

According to Roman (2014), parents are the primary agents in the process of socialising their children. In a particular way, teenage years are a time of heightened sociability (Brooks, 1981) and peer relations are prominent. Therefore, it is part of the parents’ responsibility to help their children develop into sociable human beings. Today, the mobile phone is part of the youth culture, and parents need to help them experience it and participate in it (Johnson and Puplampu, 2008). The participants’ following accounts reflect this:

L124: **…there is a lot of relationships at school. So after school when you can’t visit one another you can stay in touch.**

L11: **The good is, they can stay in touch with one another and do that from your house.**

K82: **So it wasn’t for them to keep in touch of their friends per se although it is a benefit for them.**

A168: **… she can now ask her friends on Facebook to come. Now, it’s easier to ask a friend.**

The role of the mobile phone in teenagers’ social life has already received great attention in literature. Much of the evidence has highlighted how this device is instrumental in reinforcing and maintaining peer relationships (Bond, 2010; Ravichandran, 2009; Subrahmanym et al., 2008). Likewise, in a study conducted in Norway, children viewed the mobile phone as essential for supporting relationships (Ling, 2004). Another study conducted in New Zealand among high
school students found that talking and texting with friends was the most important reason for using a mobile phone (Campbell, 2005:4). Today, as is reflected in the above excerpts, even social networks such as Facebook can be used to connect with peers, all from a mobile phone. Micro-coordination, that is, the ability to arrange and rearrange social functions, is one important aspect of that social life that is made easier by the mobile phone (Campbell:2005; Lenhart et al., 2010; Ling, 2004). Furthermore, as teenagers grow older, they start developing romantic relationships. Therefore, the mobile phone is ideal for them to gain more privacy (Ravichandran, 2009; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008).

Subtheme 1.3 Parents were positive about their teenagers’ use of mobile phones

This subtheme is divided into three categories:

- Parents felt mobile phones had a positive effect on teenagers.

In the current study, the majority of parents displayed an understanding of the importance of mobile phones in their teenagers’ friendships.

B237: So when it is contact with friends, the cell phone is good.

The above excerpt thus supports the suggestion that mobile phones may be simultaneously fulfilling two developmental needs of adolescents, that is, connecting with peers and enhancing peer identity (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008)

- Parents felt mobile phones enabled them to remain in contact with their children.

N86: Like if I take my child for example, if she needs something from school, she’ll say she has forgotten a book or she has forgotten a task she has to do at home.
Not all parents agreed with the above though. At times, parents’ stories revealed that teenagers did not really need mobile phones. One parent said that mobile phones are a ‘luxury’. Indeed, most parents said that their teenagers could communicate with them using call boxes at their school, or could contact the school’s office if the matter was urgent or there was an emergency. So it was only on their way to or from school, or when they go out at weekends, that they might need to communicate with their parents using mobile phones.

- Parents felt mobile phones enabled children to keep up with the development of technology.

The mobile phone has become an integral part of everyday life, and some researchers have suggested that non-ownership could lead to social exclusion and limit children’s understanding of other communication technologies (Bond, 2010:516). The fact that the mobile phone is part of today’s culture is reflected in the following excerpt.

L135: *I think the way technology is today, we can’t live without the phone.*

Similarly, in many studies conducted among teenagers and young adults, children say they cannot live without their phones.

However, not all parents reported in the current study reported positive experiences.

**Subtheme 1.4 Parents were negative about their children’s use of mobile phones**

Among the participants, one mother viewed mobile phones as ‘trouble’ for teenagers, and said that her daughter could only buy herself a phone at the age of twenty-one. Some of the problems mentioned by the parent were the amount of time that teenagers spend on their phones. She also added that girls “communicate with boys and do nasty things” and expressed that her daughter, who was just turning thirteen, was too young for that.
D18: *There is so much going on with cell phones. [Raising voice] Too many problems.*

Other parents had mixed opinions about their teenagers’ mobile phones.

Subtheme 1.5 *Parents were positive and negative about teenagers having/using cell phones*

Parents and teenagers who took part in the survey conducted by The Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart et al., 2010:5) also viewed mobile phones as a “mixed blessing”, making lives safer and convenient but also having problems linked to them. One parent in the present study used exactly the same words “It’s a mixed blessing” (C85) to convey the simultaneous positive and negative sides of the mobile phone. All this illustrates the complexity of relationships between technologies and people, thus exemplifying the double-edged sword of modernity described by Giddens (cited in Bond, 2010:516). However, most parents reported that the way they raised their children was reflected in their use of mobile phones. This implies that, as parents, they have a responsibility to teach their children the advantages of the device. Their accounts revealed that at times things can get out of their control because the mobile phone has become too personal or because children use them for a variety of other things. The following excerpts translate how parents expressed both the positive and negative aspects of mobile phones all in one.

*B195: The problem is also the bad face of it [mobile phone] when it brings problems. Otherwise, it is a good thing; it helps family contacts.*

*E161: And I tell you, a cell phone is a nice thing to have but it can also bring problems.*

Subtheme 1.6 *Parents were aware that teenagers used their mobile phones for multiple purposes.*

The multi-functionality of contemporary mobile phones as multimedia recording devices and pocket-sized internet-connected computers has been highlighted in the American study (Lenhart
et al., 2010:5). These authors reported that the most popular uses of mobile phones were taking and sharing pictures as well as playing music. Here are the different uses mentioned by the parents who participated in this project:

- Calling and chatting
- Internet
- Twitter/Tweet
- Facebook
- Games
- WhatsApp
- Text messaging
- Music/video/camera
- BBM

Regarding internet, some parents highlighted the importance of having a mobile phone with internet, mainly because it helped in their teenagers’ school work. This corroborates evidence that the mobile phone is bridging the digital divide among the different economic layers in society (Beger et al., 2011; Beger et al., 2012; Lenhart et al., 2010), especially when parents cannot afford computer-based internet. This aspect is even more meaningful in developing countries.

As for social networks, parents reported that this led their teenagers to spend much time on their phones. This concurs with the findings of another study conducted among students attending a high school in Cape Town wherein some of the students, especially girls, reported spending a “considerable amount of time on their mobile phones per day” (Cilliers and Parker, 2008:6), and
the reported negative effects of this behaviour were: less face-to-face communication with parents, spoiled family time and reduced school work time. However, Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) have noted the difficulty in actually assessing the time spent by adolescents on online activities as they often quickly shift from one mode of communication to another one due to the wide range they can now choose from.

Another concern expressed by some parents regarding social networks was that teenagers were getting involved with “too many friends”. They came to question this type of ‘friendship’ mainly on the basis of not being able to see them face-to-face. One parent called it a new definition of ‘friends’, adding that there can never be ‘online friendship’. Subrahmanyam et al. (2008:126-127) have remarked that this redefinition of the word ‘friend’ characterises contemporary peer social life. In the current study, parents became even more worried when teenagers’ friends were older than them, fearing that they could be a bad influence.

Another problem linked mainly with text messaging and social networks is macro-coordination of activities (Ravichandran, 2009). In the current study, one parent in particular raised concern about the role played by social networks in promoting gangsterism. She said that youth gangs in different locations could communicate and meet with each other easily.

It is clear that as teenagers get attracted to the extra features of the multi-purpose phones, parents have to intervene in the regulation of the use of these gadgets.

Subtheme 1.7 Parents had made various rules, boundaries and limits about mobile phone use.

In a contemporary world where media and communication technologies flourish in households, researchers have pointed to the difficulty of governments to regulating related activities when it comes to children and the youth (Livingstone et al., 2008; Oosterwyk et al., 2013). With regard
to mobile phones, the fact that more and more of these devices have internet capabilities is even more challenging for parents (Oosterwyk et al., 2013) and they have to reposition themselves to put boundaries or rules in place to manage the new addition to the family life.

G34: We have rules. When they come from school they have thirty minutes to relax and their cell phones are on. After thirty minutes, it is time for their homework. Then the cell phones are switched off unless they have to search for school work. Otherwise they are off. At night, there is a place where we keep cell phones, all of us because they won’t sleep.

G108: For me, as I mentioned before, try to set up the rules for your child...

K117: I think personally that limits need to be set earlier rather than later...

K56: I think there should be an agreement with the parents and their children or teenagers...

F47: ... and no cell phones during meal times.

Thus it emerged from this study that gifts of mobile phones from parents to teenagers carry responsibility for both parent and child. This supports Williams and Williams (as cited in Bond, 2010:515) depiction of mobile phones’ role in extending parental control. Participants’ accounts reflect different ways of managing their children’s mobile phone use. In general, they stress the importance of setting boundaries by putting in place rules regarding the use of mobile phones.

However, apart from having rules, participants also expressed the need to enforce those rules. In this regard, some participants’ accounts reflect strictness in applying rules while others suggested some flexibility, especially as teenagers grow older. In their view, teenagers need more monitoring when they are still young, and some freedom in their later teenage years. In this
regard, some researchers have suggested setting broad limits while dealing with teenagers, so that they can have a range of alternatives to choose from (Brooks, 1981; Roman, 2012).

In the current study, there was controversy regarding the time when a child is supposed to have a mobile phone as well as the freedom of using it. While one participant strictly relegated her child’s ownership of a mobile to the age of 21, another participant reported that some children in grade 2 had phones. Furthermore, one father still showed strictness in regulating the use of the mobile phone by his son at the age of eighteen. For another parent, it is not the age in numbers, but the maturity of the child which is evaluated and taken into consideration when deciding on the time to give him or her a phone. The child must be able to use it responsibly. Some participants suggested that if a parent cannot control the use of the mobile phone by the teenager, it is not a good idea to buy him or her the device. Parents’ narratives also suggested that parents with little or no education experience challenges monitoring their children’s use of mobile phones. In other words, these parents may see the mobile as a completely harmless device for their children. While theme 1 relates to the mobile phone in its various aspects, the next one focuses on text messaging.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging

**Subtheme 2.1 Parents were not particularly concerned about their teenagers’ text messaging.**

- Some parents expressed that they are not really worried about their teenagers’ texting. They appear to find it a harmless and acceptable practice.

B26: *For me, I don’t really care about them [teenagers] text messaging.*

A91: *For me, it’s [text messaging] something that children do.*

K32: *...I’m not concerned about them sending and receiving messages from their friends...*
Some of these parents did not think text messaging negatively affected relationships and social skills.

C38: Well, I think it’s very positive because I can SMS my children about a lot of things.

C120: It hasn’t been a worry yet. It hasn’t been a major concern [children losing social skills due to text messaging].

H126: So it’s [text messaging] not infringed upon our relationship or the way we live here.

From other parents’ narratives, it transpires that text messaging had and could have a positive effect on both peer and family relationships.

A31: And also like…because my daughter travels to school and I am at home so we communicate basically [through text messaging].

C122: They [teenagers] keep in touch with a lot of friends through text messaging.

L124: It’s good in a way that, OK, there are a lot of relationships at school. So after school, when you can’t visit one another you can stay in touch.

N98: I also communicate with her very often using text messages because my child stays away from me. She’s staying in a hostel. So every day I ask her “How are you feeling?” [or] “How was your day?” And then she tells me how she’s doing “Mommy, I’m writing accounting today, please pray for me.” [or] “Mommy, please call me tonight after studying.”

For this mother, whose daughter was studying far away at the time of the interview, text messaging was very helpful as it kept her in touch with her child and made it possible for her to provide emotional support to the teenager, especially during exam times.
The above advantages have already been identified in previous research on mobile phones, especially when comparing text messaging and voice call features of the device (Bond, 2010; Ling, 2004; Kasesniemi and Rautiainen, 2002). However, not all parents shared this view.

**Subtheme 2.2 Parents had specific concerns about the effect of text messaging.**

- Among these, some participants expressed concerns about the effect of text messaging on relationships between them and their teenagers. These were mainly linked to overuse and/or misuse that resulted in arguments or conflicts.

A48: *You always have this argument about the time they spend on the phone...*

L24: *It does get in the way when you need to do a dinner or something and the phone is going while you’re eating.*

A61: *...it would bring conflicts because maybe from her side she’s not allowed to have a phone that particular time.*

As it transpires from the above excerpts, it is mainly teenagers’ attachment to their phones on the one hand, and parents’ regulation about the use of mobile phones on the other hand, that brings about conflicts. The Pew Internet and American Life Project survey (Lenhart et al., 2010) conducted among parents and teenagers found a similar situation.

- However, in the current study, one parent in particular expressed concerns that the effect of text messaging may not only be limited to parent-teen relationships, but to human relationships in general. Therefore, it may be affecting the broader context.

F 17: *One of the things about these cell phones, texting... it’s not just about teenagers but the whole family.*
F141: You need to balance it [text messaging]. Otherwise, we will be in a society where you go into texting... Domestic workers, everybody... those vibrant conversations that used to happen in public transport, they no longer happen because everybody is actually looking, they are busy with their phones, that part of anti-socialism.

- Some participants in this study also had concerns about the effect of text messaging on schoolwork.

A196: I do think it has got an effect on the spelling and communication for them at that age.

K26: ... Also when they have to study at times you find them sitting on the phones rather than doing their studies or doing their homework.

On the other hand, some parents reported the usefulness of text messaging for teenagers’ homework.

L13: ...they can stay in touch with homework.

A26+: So now they can actually... if there is an assignment due or you don’t understand something you can actually connect with somebody immediately and ask maybe a classmate to assist you with this problem or whatever, or you forgot what homework you had to do, just helping each other.

The Pew Research and Internet Center (Lenhart et al., 2010) also found that text messaging is used by teenagers to communicate with their peers about their homework.

However, one parent in the present study disagreed that text messages can be useful for school work, especially at high school level:
B156: What kind of homework is done with a cell phone? ...Yes, at university perhaps. But at high school, I do not think the cell phone will be much used for homework. It is mainly used to play games, to text as you say, not really for homework.

The above excerpt may be indicative of the socioeconomics of the teenagers concerned. In fact, in Lenhart et al. (2010:36), teenagers from lower income groups reported never using text messaging for school work. In the same study, around one third of all teenagers said they never texted about schoolwork.

- Furthermore, parents were concerned that their children were preoccupied and did not pay attention in various situations.

E77: And it actually takes away children’s attention from schoolwork.

G46: It’s always a big problem especially when you go to the child, you want to speak to him and he is busy sending messages... sometimes he doesn’t pay attention to what you’re saying. So it’s a big fight.

G95: ...I ask my daughter to wash the dishes and if I do not confiscate her cell phone she will do the texting, she will not put it down; she will wash the dishes in an hour instead of fifteen minutes.

- Other parents expressed concerns that their children lose sleep due to text messaging.

G42: Before we put these rules in place once I caught my daughter sending messages at night.

A77: So you don’t even know how many hours of sleep they get, you know, to be fresh for school the next day.
A74: Yes, I know they do that [send and receive messages in the night] because they take their phones to bed, you know.

K35: ... till early hours in the morning they are on their phones sending messages.

Similarly, Campbell (2005:7) refers to a study conducted in Australia in 2004 where young people said that using their mobile phones late in the night was the most common cause of disagreement between them and their parents.

- Parents in the present study also had concerns that children spent/wasted a lot of time text messaging.

A12: The experience that I have with her is that she’s on the phone all the time, you know.

K23: I think the downside number one is that children tend to overuse their messaging.

L15: The bad thing is they spend too much time on their phone.

From the above excerpts, it would seem that this is the mother of all concerns parents had about their children’s phones and text messaging. Participants’ narratives suggest that this overuse interferes with family time (meal times, watching television together, and conversation), sleeping time, doing house chores and school work. This shows in parental intervention in putting in place rules or setting limits in the use of the mobile phone. This is further discussed under subtheme 2.7.

Subtheme 2.3 Parents used text messaging with their children for keeping in touch, making arrangements, monitoring and security reasons.
For most parents interviewed, texting is an additional channel of communicating with their teenagers in contemporary times. Some of the benefits expressed in parents’ accounts were that text messages are seen as a quick, easy, convenient and cheaper method when there is urgent communication to pass onto their teenagers, mainly regarding transport or simply asking their whereabouts for security reasons. This is illustrated in the following parents’ interview excerpts:

A35: *It’s basically for security reasons.*

K71: *…it’s an easy way to get in touch with your kids.*

G53: *And with you [the parent] it is also a very good way to make sure I am in touch with them and I know what they are doing.*

In this phone-mediated relationship, whether by voice or text, most of parents’ communication with their teenagers is about enquiries regarding their whereabouts, their activities and their associates (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ribak, 2009; Weisskirch, 2009). They are also about transport arrangements and micro-coordination of plans (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ling, 2004; Porath, 2011; Ravichandran, 2009).

One parent also reported a good family experience with her daughter when they shared jokes that they received from their friends through text messaging. This brought them closer. This mother, on the other hand, added that this sharing could have been selective, meaning that she suspected that her daughter was not sharing all her jokes with the mother.

Furthermore, one parent suggested that recognising teenagers as techno experts can enhance parent-teen relationship as this can be used as a bonding opportunity when children teach their parents technological skills. Similarly, Odendaal, Malcolm, Savahl and September (2006:4)
argued that digital technologies increase communication opportunities between parents and adolescents. In this study, one mother reported a particular case where her children were teaching computer skills to their grandmother. Regarding mobile phones, it may be implied that it is an easy device to manipulate and would not require particular skills for parents to learn. However the following account disproves this belief:

F111: My husband is not technologically advanced. He doesn’t know many of these types of things and he gets frustrated when he comes in and everybody is on their phones.

As mentioned earlier, previous research on teenagers’ text messaging has focused on in its role in peer relationships, thus leaving the parent-teen side underexplored. Parents interviewed in this study said they were using text messaging as a way of connecting with their teenagers, especially by staying in touch with them when they do not see them. Lenhart et al. (2010) suggest a similar attitude from teenagers’ parents, while other authors have emphasised the role of text messaging as a monitoring tool (Lenhart et al., 2010; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008:135).

However, as was reflected in this study, parents and their teenagers belong to two different generations. Therefore, a mobile phone is another tool that can highlight differences in their technological skills. Text messaging in particular does so even more, because of the jargon using abbreviations and symbols (or textism) used by teenagers when they communicate among themselves. The current study suggests that this is not a main concern because teenagers are expected to use ‘normal’ language when they are communicating with their parents through texting. Failing to do so can hinder communication and be seen by parents as ‘disrespectful’. This supports Kasesniemi et al.’s (2002) findings suggesting that teenagers use more textism with friends and more formal text language when communicating with adults. Porath (2011:89)
also reports that many teenagers know when to use textism. Despite positive aspects experienced by parents in their relationships with their teenagers with regard to text messaging, participants also reported the negative aspects associated with it.

**Subtheme 2.4** Parents were aware of various problems related to text messaging but had not experienced them.

- Parents were aware of harassment through the mobile phone but had not experienced it.

In relation to peer relations, and consistent with recent literature (Beger et al. 2012; Beger et al., 2011; Lenhart et al., 2010; Oosterwyket al., 2013; Raskauskas, 2009), participants in this study reported that text bullying and internet bullying is common among teenagers. Some said that “bullying is everywhere” and the mobile phones in teenagers’ hands are used to extend this antisocial behaviour. Indeed, even though bullying has a long tradition, research suggests that this problem has found new venues through ICTs, with perpetrators finding it easier to target victims anonymously and at a distance (Beger et al., 2011). In South Africa, mobile bullying is on the rise due to increased access to mobile internet (Beger et al., 2011; Oosterwyk et al., 2013). Thus, after school, some children get into the habit of sending insulting, threatening, embarrassing and/or harassing messages to their peers. In other words, text bullying can be seen as an example of the chronosystem’s direct influence of the adolescents’ experiences of the recent increase in mobile technologies. However, apart from hearing this kind of behaviour from other children, none of the parents interviewed reported that his or her teenager had personally experienced mobile phone bullying. This is reflected in the following excerpts.

B95: *What I can say about this kind of behaviour, it is everywhere on the road. It is not only with cell phones.*
There is a lot of internet bullying. Yes, there is a lot of bullying.

I’ve heard that [text bullying]. Not with my children.

They haven’t [told me about cell phone harassment], but I know that these things can happen...

No, we haven’t experienced that [cell phone harassment].

Furthermore, in situations similar to those transcribed in these excerpts, Nathanson, Eveland, Park and Paul (as cited in Livingstone et al., 2008:581) have suggested that parents assume media affects “other people’s children more than their own.” This attitude is found in a variety of contexts:

- Parents were aware of children using mobile phones to cheat in exams but had not experienced it.

I have heard of that. They can do that.

- Parents were aware of teenagers communicating pornography but had not experienced it.

The majority of parents interviewed in this study indicated that they had heard about sexting, but no one reported that his or her teenager had personally experienced it. The following excerpts illustrate this:

My brother had a client whose daughter was involved in something like that. [sexting]

You see how it is easy to access porn.

They download... inappropriate movies, sometimes; inappropriate pictures, sometimes, yes.

- Parents were aware of children texting and losing sleep at night but had not experienced it.
C158: Yes, I have heard complaints about that [texting in the bed]. But again, I trust my children are not doing this.

A74: Yes, I know they do that because they take their phones to bed, you know.

However, one mother had experienced this behaviour with her daughter and taken appropriate measures to deal with it.

G42: Before we put these rules in place, once I caught my daughter sending messages at night.

- Parents were aware of children driving and texting and opposed it.

Parents unanimously agreed that texting while driving is dangerous, with some reporting that this behaviour is found among adults as well.

B58: Imagine now texting. You have to write the message and have to see the buttons to press on the phone.

B54: That is a problem. Not only for teenagers but anybody who is driving.

H150: Again, you can’t tell a child not to do it if you do it, this I can tell you.

G72: That’s trouble. It’s a big problem because nowadays there are many accidents caused by cell phones.

The above excerpts suggest that distracted driving from the mobile phone is a behaviour that is not only found among teenagers. Therefore, this study findings are consistent with those reported in the Pew and Internet survey (Lenhart et al., 2010) suggesting that teenagers text and drive as they see their parents or other grownups do. This is reinforcing the responsibility of teenagers’ parents and in fact all adults, to be role models for children. Otherwise, when “everybody is doing it”, the behaviour becomes a norm, thus implying that one cannot expect teenagers to act
differently. In other words, as one participant indicated in the present study, this is pointing to the collective responsibility as a society.

**Subtheme 2.5 Parents exercised different degrees of control of their teenagers’ text messaging**

- Some parents mentioned very strict control.

E31: *Regularly we check their phones; we check what they do with their phones and they’ve got no numbers on their phones. The only numbers on their phones is mine and their mom’s.*

E92: *But like I’m telling you, we keep an eye on him all the times. Whenever they are busy with their phones, walk to their rooms, walk past us, we get the phones out of their hands and check what they have on them.*

G62: *Very much [I read children’s messages].*

- Other parents practised negotiated control based on trust.

A154: *I think you need to discuss it and come to an agreement.*

A66: *So for instance I say “You can’t have your phone until your homework is done.” You know.*

K119: *Limits need to be set as per agreement or arrangement.*

- There were also parents who reported no control and interference.

B18: *There is no way because when someone is eighteen you don’t control everything he’s doing.*

C18: *And I do remember worrying about privacy issue; I never dared look at these messages.*

C132: *I trust my children to make the right decisions.*
The above excerpts suggest that participants in this study had different parenting styles. These reflect different approaches adopted by parents in raising their children depending on values, beliefs, and goals held by the parents (Guilamo-Ramos, 2007). In the 1960s, Baumrind first identified three types of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Later on, two other types were identified: the uninvolved parent and the traditional parent (Roman, 2014:6).

The authoritarian parent is high on demandingness (obedience, strict discipline, restrictive in communication) but low on responsiveness (warmth, acceptance, involvement, tenderness). The authoritative parent is high on both demandingness (setting limits, rules) and responsiveness (encourages child’s input and involvement in decision-making, provides reasons for rules and expectations). The permissive parent is high on warmth and less on control, thus allowing children more liberties.

The uninvolved parent is often neglectful, indifferent, emotionally distant and offers little or no supervision to children (Roman, 2014:7). The traditional parent adopts a “non-lenient” approach to parenting and discipline, and spends time with the children. He or she seeks to instil family values through various cultural traditions (Roman, 2014:7).

Literature agrees that the way parents raise their children has an impact on children’s behavioural outcomes (Guilamo-Ramos, 2007; Sorkhabi, 2005; Roman, 2014). Many researchers maintain that children of authoritarian parents lack confidence, show aggressive behaviour and difficulty in making their own decisions; children of authoritative parents have better academic performance, strong interpersonal relationships with parents, autonomy in decision-making and a sense of self-regulation, self-development and responsibility (Roman, 2008; Roman, 2014);
children of uninvolved parents exhibit behaviours similar to those of permissive parents, that is, being emotionally withdrawn, fearful, and anxious (Roman, 2014).

Initially, Baumrind studied preschool and primary school-age children from white middle-class backgrounds. Later on, she and other researchers recognised the importance of culture in parenting practices; they expanded her typology to the study of adolescents from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. (Guilamo-Ramos, 2007; Sorkhabi, 2005; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, and Dornbusch, 1991).

**Subtheme 2.6 Parents mostly agreed with banning of all mobile phones in schools.**

Schools across the globe have different approaches to dealing with learners’ mobile phones. Many view them as disruptive and prohibit their use on the school premises; others only allow limited use of the devices (Campbell, 2005; Lenhart, 2010; Porath, 2011). Many participants in this study agreed with the ban of mobile phones in schools. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

B86: *They ban them for many reasons.*

A190: *Yes, I agree with that policy. It [the mobile phone] should not be used in the classroom.*

K85: *I think it is a good start for schools to ban cell phones because of lots of things that you can actually access via the cell phone.*

However, some parents suggested that mobile phones could have a limited use in schools.

K87: *And I think that schools have to work ways around allowing students certain access to their phones. I think it is necessary to do so.*
This is consistent with Porath’s (2011:94) argument that, despite schools’ resistance to the use of mobile phones in the classroom, parents may be supportive. One mother also reported that her child was allowed to take the phone into the classroom under the condition that she switches it off and keeps it on the desk. She also reported that her daughter’s school was tweeting about some lessons to the child.

Some participants indicated that as soon as parents buy mobile phones for their teenagers, rules about their use must be made clear to avoid problems.

**Subtheme 2.7 Parents had various rules about text messaging**

According to the majority of participants, rules/boundaries/limits are imperative to parents’ management of their teenagers’ use of mobile phones and text messaging. They seem to apply restrictive mediation (Livingstone et al., 2008).

Emanating from collected data, a list of some of the ways parents regulate their teenagers’ usage of mobile phones follows:

- Teenagers do not take mobile phones to school
- Mobile phones are kept away from teenagers while they are studying (especially during exams) or doing homework
- Parents take mobile phones away when rules have been broken
- Mobile phones are to be switched off during study, family and house chores times
- Mobile phones are to be locked away before children go to sleep
- Parents decide the ‘right time’ to give a mobile phone to their teenager and monitor its use closely, especially during early teenage years
• Parents check their teenager’s phone content
• Parents buy airtime for their teenager(s)
• Teenagers do not own a mobile phone at all (from one parent)

Similarly, in Lenhart et al. 2010), parents had a range of limits set for their teenagers: taking away the phone as punishment (most common rule), limit time use during the day, limit the number of minutes for talking, use the phone to monitor the child’s location, look at the content of the child’s phone. Some teenagers found that this regulation was “suffocating” them and taking away their space (Lenhart et al., 2010:77-78). On the other hand, Campbell (2005) pointed out the scarcity of family rules about young people’s use of the mobile phone. In one study, more than half of adolescents who participated said they had no rules regarding the use of their devices, while a minority said their parents used to take their phone away (Matthews, as cited in Campbell, 2005). Another study conducted in New Zealand also reported that a few young people said that their phones had been confiscated because they broke some rules (Nescafe, as cited in Campbell, 2004). Participants in the current study expressed how they regulated their teenagers’ use of mobile phone in the following words:

A52: *And we do apply it during exams also when we say “Time out for the phone”, you know.*

G34: *We have rules.*

K56: *I think there should be an agreement with the parents and their children or teenagers...*

L75: *... or trust them to say “It’s your study time now. And so now, you need to decide: you either give your phone or we’re going to shout about this or you’re going... whoever you’re speaking to, they need to be on hold.”*
As is reflected in the above excerpts, there are no specific rules regarding text messaging. Therefore, it falls under the regulation of the mobile phone in general. Likewise, few parents in the Pew study reported setting limits for text messaging. As teenagers had unlimited text messaging plans, many parents did not find it necessary to set any limits (Lenhart et al., 2010:78). Moreover, the latter study revealed gender sensitivity regarding control of mobile phones, with girls (especially younger ones) receiving more rules/limits. Some participants in the present research reported a similar situation. At the same time, parents’ accounts revealed some of the strategies that parents used to counter the negative impact of teenagers’ mobile use.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Parents’ suggestions on dealing with mobile phones and texting related problems

During interviews, as participants relating their experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging were considered as experts in their own right, they ended up suggesting some of the strategies that they thought parents could use to deal with their children’s mobile phones and texting-related problems. Here are suggested strategies according to identified problems:

- Parents should set limits.

Parents suggested setting limits as well as practising overt and/or covert monitoring and control. They indicated that parents need to have some technical knowledge in order to be able to guide their children. They also suggested that parents need to make clear expectations around mobile phones and remove children’s privileges when expectations are not met. This supports Roman’s (2012) idea about giving privileges to teenagers only when they respect rules given to them.

Another suggestion that came from the participants was to give teenagers phones that have fewer applications. In fact, two parents indicated that all their children need for their phones are the
basics for mobile communication, that is, voice and text (SMS). However, another parent (mother) reported an experience she had with her two teenagers when she bought them cheap phones. The children did not want to take them saying that other children would laugh at them. The parent went on to say that after discussion with her husband, they bought upmarket mobiles with internet. This is because the mobile phone is seen as a status symbol for young people (Campbell, 2005).

In addition, parents conveyed that teenagers need to be kept busy. This confirms what some teenagers said in the Pew study (Lenhart, 2010) that sometimes they text out of boredom. Talking of her daughter, one father (Parent C) in this study said that at home, “she must learn to cook; she must learn to clean up.” Here are some examples that illustrate the above:

C135: So we do try to get them do other activities.

B79: Maybe they can buy them cheap cell phones which do not have so many applications.

N308: We actually tell her our expectations when she goes to school. She knows what we’re expecting from her. If you come with bad results, there is nothing we can do for you. We’re not going to give you any privilege you need to get.

- Parents should try to eliminate teenagers’ exposure to negative influences through mobile phones and text messages.

Parents expressed the need to be informed and stay vigilant. In addition, participants stressed the need to have ongoing communication with teenagers, spend time with them, and make time for them. This communication includes talking about dangers associated with mobile phones. Outside the family circle, schools can also communicate with children about homework.
A147: I just need to be vigilant. As parents, we need to be informed as to what is out there, dangers and that sort of thing.

N336: If schools can [could] actually communicate with children through this text messaging like doing school homework through the phone... Instead of communicating with her friend, the child starts to listen to a lesson.

The latter excerpt illustrates the challenge identified by Livingstone et al. (2008) for parents to find effective strategies to prevent teenager’s risk behaviour without impeding his or her valued peer social life.

- Parents should practise collaborative management

Adolescence is a time when children become rebellious and tend to resist control. This stems from their desire to become independent. Most parents in this study seemed to be aware of this fact. Therefore, some of the strategies they suggested include using diplomacy, not imposing rules and involving teenagers in decision-making in order to seek balance between parental control and freedom/privacy. In addition, parents must be able to trust their children.

A153: I think the management of cell phone... [Short pause] should be a mutual thing, you know. To say “This is what’s going to happen” and the child must fall in line. No, it doesn’t work like that.

N452: To be honest with you, I would not advise parents to monitor their teenagers’ text messages. They also need their privacy because they are children. That is my point of view. My philosophy is: the moment you get involved too much in the relationships with her friends, wanting to know what she is texting about, you are pushing these children away from you. You must be able to trust your child. A relationship which is not based on trust isn’t a strong one.
F93: We will go to the internet together and look at these things, you know; talk about porn and the dangers of porn, you know. You actually open it.

- Managing teenagers’ sleep patterns

Parents’ narratives reflect diverging approaches to the issue of teenagers using mobile phones at night. Some let their children take their phones to bed, while other parents indicated that they kept their children’s phones away at night.

G219: … For me, I would recommend that [taking mobile phones away in the night] because cell phones are more than a TV or a computer. You search, you chat, everything.

A74: Yes, I know they do that [texting] because they take their phones to bed, you know.

Once again, to some extent, the above suggestions reflect a variety of parenting styles, with predominance of authoritative parenting.

4.4. Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the current study. It discussed the ranges of experiences that parents had about their teenagers’ mobile phone usage and text messaging practices. Some experiences were positive; others were negative, while others were a mixture of both. Furthermore, the study revealed participants’ various approaches and suggestions to dealing with mobile phone usage and text messaging related problems. The next chapter provides an interpretation of these findings by the researcher, as well as some concluding remarks and recommendations.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Introduction

Given the widespread use of text messaging among teenagers, the current study sought to explore how parents experience this practice by looking at how it affects relationships with their teenagers. Furthermore, as Ribak (2009:183) has suggested, analysis of mobile phone practices needs to consider the specific cultural contexts of users as these have a direct influence on such practices. Therefore, this chapter starts by explaining why it is important to add to the construction of ‘teenager’ in the context of text messaging. This comment is then followed by the researcher’s discussion and interpretation of findings with a focus on each of the objectives of the study and how this integrates in the systems theory. At the same time, areas that need further research are identified.

5.1.2 The construction of the concept ‘teenager’

In this particular context of text messaging, the understanding of ‘teenager’ may not be straightforward. Indeed, in the course of the interviews, when the researcher asked one mother how many teenagers she had, she answered three. Then she went on saying “the first one is not such a teenager but she’s twenty-three; the second-born is a girl, she’ll be twenty-one next week; and then the boy, he is seventeen…” Thus, this mother had been selected to be a participant because of this third child who was seventeen. However, throughout the entire conversation that the mother had with the researcher, she continued talking about texting practices of the three children, suggesting that the 23 year old daughter was texting even more than the other two. The same thing happened with a parent whose son had just turned twenty. This is an indication that
texting behaviours may go beyond the age of nineteen. This means that parents may continue to experience some of the discussed mobile behaviours with their young adults. In particular, more of these youngsters may be driving and having well established romantic relationships. Therefore, parents’ responsibilities will not end when their teenagers turn eighteen; they will continue guiding those older youths as well. However, since the current study was only concerned with teenagers, references made to young adults beyond the teenage category were not included in the current data analysis and interpretation. These would lead to another research question on parents and adult relationships on text message, which is beyond the scope of the present study.

The following is the discussion of the objectives set in the beginning of the thesis and how they were achieved.

5.1.3 Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of communication

In congruence with previous literature, the findings of the present study suggest that the choice of text messaging over mobile phone calls in a parent-teen relationship is mainly motivated by convenience and relatively low cost (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ling, 2004; Porath, 2011; Ravichandran, 2009). In fact, cost seems to be the main factor that determines the choice of the medium of communication. This is the reason why, in South Africa, as explained earlier, MXit has dominated teenagers’ peer communication because it is by far cheaper than an SMS. However, it has been said that the older generation was not part of teenagers’ MXit social networks (Walton, 2009). On the other hand, participants in the current study indicated that their text-based communication with their teenagers was mainly using WhatsApp as they found it ‘cost effective’.
Furthermore, the findings of this study support evidence that more and more parents are embracing texting to stay connected with their teenagers (Lenhart et al., 2010; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). For them, it is an additional means of communication. This confirms Pinquart et al.’s (2004:83) assertion that within the family, intergeneration transmission of values is a bidirectional process, as is the case in all Bronfenbrenner’s nested environmental systems (Jonson et al., 2008). Pinquart et al. (2004) further point out that previous research has rarely investigated adolescents’ influence on parental value. The shift in perspective is very relevant in today’s technologically rich world where, as also revealed in the current study, parents report that they did not grow up with mobile phones while their teenagers did. Yet they were communicating with their teenagers using text messaging. One parent showed the researcher a message that had been sent to the children by their eighty-year-old grandfather. In the message, some of the symbols used by teenagers in their peer-to-peer communication, such as u (you) and ur (your), were found. On the other hand, parents said that while communicating with their teenagers through text messaging, the latter had to use formal language. This becomes an expectation which, when not met, can block communication and be regarded as a sign of disrespect, as one parent indicated. However, there is also a possibility that teenagers may be using less textism in their messages in general due to the availability of QWERTY keyboards that reduces the pressure to use abbreviated texts (Porath, 2011:92). On the other hand, while communicating among themselves, teenagers may deliberately use textism as a symbol of identity, and a means to keep some secrets away from adults (Caronia, n.d.).

Therefore, in contemporary family life where adolescents spend much of their time at school, and where both parents (not only fathers as in the traditional conception of family roles) are more likely to be breadwinners in the household, the mobile phone has become an indispensable tool
whereby parents can stay connected, monitor and support their children (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ribak, 2009; Weisskirch, 2009). Likewise, children can seek support and communicate their needs by using it. As in many other studies across the globe, participants in the present study reported that they buy mobile phones for their teenagers primarily for security reasons. Therefore, one can rightly say that the mobile phone has become an integral part of the contemporary family system as indicated by Johnson et al. (2008). However, in South Africa, due to the common muggings of mobile phones in the communities, buying mobile phones for teenagers can expose them to criminal elements. Therefore, at times, children might have to leave their phones at home when they go out. In cases such as these, as Walton (2009) suggests, the mobile phone becomes less of a mobile, and in some crime-ridden areas, parents may have to weigh the pros and cons carefully before deciding to give mobile phones to their teenagers. This may be one of the reasons why one parent chose not to buy a phone for her teenager, saying that the child, a thirteen-year old daughter, can only buy herself a mobile phone when she is twenty-one. This parent’s attitude may be interpreted in two ways: the fact that her child is a girl, therefore, more vulnerable as mentioned earlier; and/or the fact that she has just turned into a teenager, meaning that she needs more protection. The same parent says that her daughter does not need a phone, but then she says that she gives a phone to the child when the latter goes to church alone so they can know when to fetch her after the service. Furthermore, this mother suggests that her daughter can send her a Please Call Me using an aunt’s phone when she needs to communicate something to her. Still speaking of her daughter, the mother says “She can use my phone and search for school stuff, nothing more, nothing less” (D53). These three instances show that the mothers’ experience was that of a teenager who was in need of a mobile phone in order to communicate with both the parent and the child’s peers. The mother’s choice of not
allowing the child to own a phone can be interpreted as being overprotective, and may be practising traditional parenting style. It would have been interesting to know how the child felt about this decision, and similarly interesting is to see whether the mother is going to stick to her decision for long. Only a longitudinal study can account for this.

Furthermore, in the present study, one parent said that because of lack body language, “a lot of text messaging can be either misread or even not understood properly” (K52 K53). Viewed from this angle, text messaging is relegated to a lower level in the hierarchy of communication, after face-to-face interaction and phone calls. Due to the fact that the receiver of a text message can respond to it at his or her own convenience, teenagers can easily ignore messages, especially when they come from parents. However, in Cilliers and Parker’s study (2008) among teenagers in Cape Town, it was found that even phone calls from parents can sometimes be ignored by teenagers, due to the latter’s desire to gain independence and be accepted in their peer groups.

It is also worth noting that in this study, some parents indicated that with texting and social networks they were experiencing less communication with their teenagers. On the other hand, it transpires from parents’ narratives that a teenager’s ownership of a mobile phone may enhance communication with him or her because it brings about an ongoing discussion and evaluation of the proper use of a mobile phone, while at the same time involving teenagers in discussions about the rules they set about its use and text messaging. Therefore, the researcher argues that teenagers’ ownership of mobile phones is more likely to increase parent-teen communication. Indeed, according to the findings of this study, parents and children should talk, communicate and manage mobile phones together. This implies a change in the power relationship that characterises traditional parent-child relationship.
5.1.4 Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging in terms of relationships

This research provides another example illustrating the complexity of one-on-one relationships between technologies and people, with possibilities both to maintain and destroy human relationships (Bond, 2010:515, Weisskirch, 2009). Similar to much of the prior evidence, participants indicated that they give mobile phones to their teenagers mainly as birthday presents (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ribak, 2009) or as they enter high school (Campbell, 2005; Ribak, 2009). One father said that he bought his son a phone as an award because the child was doing well at school.

However, as it transpires from the study, in parent-teen relationships, mobile phones are no ordinary gifts. They come with strings attached. Once in teenagers’ hands, the devices serve both communication and monitoring purposes. This explains why parents come up with a set of rules regarding the use of the devices. Moreover, this brings about new expectations, namely constant availability (Ribak, 2009; Lenhart et al., 2010). Given the separation task and the peer dynamics in adolescent years, the obligation to stay connected results in new tensions, and teenagers will sometimes ignore parents’ calls or texts.

It also transpired from the present study that parents were the instigators of teenagers’ ownership of mobile phones. However, unlike in Ribak’s study (2009) conducted in Israel where all parents interviewed said they had purchased phones for their teenagers, a few parents in the sample of this study did not buy mobile phones for their children (See table 1 above). This difference may lead to different degrees in the parent-teen power dynamics, as buying the mobile phone can suggest having more influence in regulating its use. This is reflected in the words of one mother’s narrative in this study “If I pay for something, I take it or break it.” Other participants indicated that sometimes teenagers get mobile phones from relatives, “sugar” mommies or
daddies. Older teenagers may even buy mobile phones themselves or get them from their boyfriends (or girlfriends). In the latter instances, parents’ influence when they did not buy phones for their teenager may be an issue that needs further investigation.

One noticeable area that brings conflict in parent-teen relationships is the privacy issue. This is a disagreement where adolescents do not wish their parents to go through their ‘stuff’ while parents feel it is their right to do so (Roman, 2012:51). Due to the intense communication between teenagers and their peers through text messaging, participants in the present study also expressed their right to know “who their child mixes with”, as one of the parents put it. This resulted in some parents reading (overtly or covertly) their children’s messages, to which the children showed resistance. On the other hand, some parents said they did not read their children’s messages, with one mother openly discouraging this practice and advising other parents to respect children’s freedom at this teenage time. Those who shared this opinion suggested parents trust their children on the basis of values they would have instilled in their young people. In a way similar to Weisskirch’s (2009), they suggested that parents make clear expectations from the onset of giving mobile phones to children. Roman (2012:51) also remarked that this privacy agreement may only be broken in case of strong suspicion or evidence that teenagers are engaging in unsafe behaviours.

Ribak (2009) has emphasised the role of the mobile in redefining parent-teen relationships within a specific cultural context. The case of the Jamaican family (p.186), where growing children are sent to live with their parents’ relatives, is referred to as an example, showing that parents and their teenagers can still bond despite geographical distances via the mobile phone. In this study, the case of the mother who continues to communicate with and to offer emotional support to her teenager staying in a distant hostel via the mobile phone supports Ribak’s statement. Similarly,
in the South African context, where the absence of fathers has been seen in the past and is still seen as a crisis in family life (Holborn and Eddy, 2011; Richter and Morrell, 2006) one can suggest that the mobile phone is or may be playing a role in helping absent fathers and their teenagers to bond. This is an area that needs further investigation. It is worth mentioning that our sample did not reflect this crisis as the majority of parents’ accounts suggest that fathers, mothers and their teenagers live in the same household. Again, this may be due to the small size of the sample of this study for qualitative purposes. Therefore, future quantitative research would better account for the situation as it would show differences or similarities between diverse ethnic groups (bearing in mind the multicultural diversity of the South African population). In the same line of thought, some researchers have argued that the mobile phone can assist the non-custodial parent to connect with their child without the other parent’s interference in case of separated/divorced families (Campbell, 2005:6).

Furthermore, from a parent’s perspective, the current study confirms findings from teenagers investigated in Cilliers and Parker (2008) that they spend much time on their phones, including text messaging. Nonetheless, the majority of participants in this study reported less concern about their teenagers’ texting practices. They find text messaging an alternative way of communication with them and their children, as well as between teenagers and their peers. Walton’s (2009: 42) study also suggested that teenagers’ messaging via MXit or SMS was “socially acceptable”, at least in some circumstances. This leads to a two-pronged interpretation: teenagers’ ability to multitask and the role played by parents in regulating the use of mobile phones.

Multitasking is widely known as being characteristic of contemporary teenagers and young adults (Hanson, Drumheller, Mallard, McKee and Schelegel, 2011:2; Subrahmanyam et al.,
Therefore, parents show some degree of recognition of this skill towards their teens. They report for example that their teenagers watch television while texting at the same time. Many teenagers in Walton’s study (2009: 41) agreed to this behaviour. In the current enquiry, parents’ narratives suggest that this only brings conflict when the watching interferes with family time. This can be understood in the sense that usually they have some values that they would like to impart to their children while watching together (Livingstone et al., 2008). In a similar way, parents would not accept that their teenagers text while doing school work or home chores. This confirms Walton’s findings (2009:vii) where a large majority of teenagers reported experiencing conflicts with parents because of their mobile phone or MXit use, mainly “because of late nights, neglected school work, or uncompleted household chores”. Furthermore, even though no parent reported having a teenager who text while driving, participants in the present study would not accept multitasking while driving because this constitutes a danger not only for their teenagers, but also other road users.

5.1.5 How parents respond to their teenagers’ text messaging

The present study reveals that parents mainly use restrictive mediation when dealing with their teenagers’ mobile phones. Concerning active mediation, some parents have suggested that talking to teenagers about the advantages and dangers of texting before giving them mobile phones would deter undesirable behaviours linked to teenagers’ texting. Weisskirch’s (2009) study echoes the same sentiment. In this regard, the present study is also suggestive of a dominant authoritative parenting style in that participants emphasise the setting of limits, while at the same time making room for rule negotiations with the teenagers regarding the use of mobile phones. However, the lack of teenagers’ voice did not allow an adequate assessment of support and warmth associated with authoritative parenting style. Furthermore, the qualitative
approach adopted in this study does not fully account for different regulations that may relate to age, ethnic group and gender. This is an important factor due to the cultural diversity of the South African population. In some cases, for example, trusting that teenagers were making the right decisions reflected flexibility, and sometimes non-adherence to rules showed a different level of authoritative parenting, while remaining within its parameters, as some parents still felt guilty of being lenient or inconsistent in setting rules or in sticking to them.

However, as pointed out earlier, parents who trust their teenagers may not have rules regarding the use of mobile phones. Therefore, the absence of rules in parent-teen relationships in this particular context may be an indication of the level of trust between teenagers and their parents. In fact, some parents have hinted that after they have made clear expectations and, depending on the strong relationship between them and their children, the latter will meet those expectations without being coerced. Furthermore, two parents seem to be very strict with their teenagers regarding using/having mobile phones.

One is the father who bought mobile phones for his two teenagers, a 13 year old daughter, and an 18 year old son. He reported that these devices were strictly for schoolwork (internet) and communication with parents. He also mentioned that he and his wife checked their children’s phones regularly, even for the child who is eighteen. He admitted that his children had no friends. This can be detrimental to these children as they may find themselves isolated by their peers (Bond, 2010:515). On the other hand, this may be a way of protecting his children against bad influences as he has indicated that the family is living in a drug-infested area.

The other parent is the mother who categorically said she will not give a mobile phone to her daughter; that the child will buy herself a phone when she is twenty-one.
In both instances described above, parents seem to be practising psychological control which has been found to be “intrusive” and “inhibitive”. (Roman, 2014:11). On the other hand, behavioural control, described as “facilitative” has been found to be important “so that children can have structure, limits, boundaries and parameters in their interaction with others.” (Roman, 2014: 11). Therefore, both parents may be practising behavioural control, which is deemed important, “especially for children living in high-risk environments where there is the constant threat of being coerced to participate in gang-related activities and crime.” (Roman, 2014:11). The author further (p.12) states that this phenomenon is common in South African communities, which has been confirmed in this research, and reported in Walton’s study (2009) as well. Only a longitudinal study can determine whether the practices referred to in these two instances are part of either psychological control or behavioural control. On the other hand, some parents in the current study suggested that children with high self-esteem will not be easily influenced by their peers, and there is evidence to support this claim (Bray et al., 2010).

Regarding parental control and monitoring, one parent’s account suggested that the more children in the family, the less control and monitoring they get. This is also something that needs to be researched.

It is also noteworthy to mention that parental regulation does not necessarily guarantee the prevention of teenagers’ undesirable behaviours (Livingstone et al., 2008). Surprisingly, it transpires from this research that parents do it successfully. Therefore, there could be a combination of parental regulation and children’s self-regulation as teenagers reported that they “set rules for themselves regarding the use of MXit” (Walton, 2009:71). This means that a similar situation could present itself when it comes to teenagers’ text messaging.
Even though the current study was not intended to deal with the internet, two factors led to the brief inclusion of the topic in this discussion. Firstly, participants revealed that it constitutes more of a worry for them than text messaging; secondly, ownership of mobile phones with internet is increasing, becoming even more challenging for parents to regulate its use. One parent in particular asked the researcher at the beginning of their interview: “Is it just about text messaging or about social networks as a whole?” (F15). This made the researcher realise the difficulty to single out text messaging from the other functions of mobile phones.

Mobile internet is seen as a real problem for parents worldwide, and South Africa is no exception. Participants’ accounts in this study echoed this challenge, confirming similar previous findings (Beger et al., 2012; Oosterwyk et al., 2013). In a former report for example, the Nelson Mandela Bay study among three primary and three secondary schools in the area found that thirty-seven per cent of internet users among students were using it in their bedrooms. Thus, as in the current study, there are reasons to worry about exposure to inappropriate content such as pornography. Similarly, citing Francke and Weideman, Cilliers et al. (2008:8) report that exposure to pornography on mobile phones was found to be a reality among teenagers who participated in their study. Furthermore, in the Nelson Mandela Bay study, just over half of the students who took part in it were found to be using internet without supervision. In this way, the mobile phone could be promoting a combination of cyber bullying activities, through voice calls, SMS and internet. More particularly, in contrast with traditional bullying, where most victims were boys, girls are found to be at higher risk of falling prey to cyber bullying as well as sexting. The prevalence of sexting among young South Africans needs some researchers’ attention as children can be negatively affected, especially due to the fact that their photos can be circulated among a wide audience.
The fact that no single parent reported that his or her teenager was a victim of mobile bullying can be interpreted to be similar to what was found previously. Many other studies have pointed to this phenomenon (Beger et al., 2012; Mishna, 2012), revealing that teenagers prefer speaking to their peers about this problem rather than to adults. When it comes to mobile bullying, the fear of having the phone taken away has been found to be the main reason why teenagers do not want to tell their parents that they are being bullied via this device. It could also be due to the fact that the study used a small sample for its purpose, or linked to the assumption that parents make that “media affect other people’s children more than their own” (Livingstone et al., 2008:581).

Furthermore, some interviewees in the present study reported teenagers’ gangsterism as being promoted by text messaging as well as social networks. This confirms Ravichandran’s (2009) findings on the role played by mobile phones in macro-coordination, with the likelihood of it leading to such undesirable consequences.

The other problem related to social networks and reported by parents interviewed was the fact that their teenagers had too many ‘friends’, thus fearing that these could be a bad influence, especially if parents do not know them or if they are older than their children.

Ways to curb the negative influence of the mobile internet, as found in parents’ narratives, were restrictive, such as not allowing teenagers to sleep with their phones, to check the content, but also to monitor covertly by using the social networks used by their children such as Facebook. However, unlike in the Pew Internet survey (Lenhart, 2012) where around one third of parents said they used technical controls to manage their teenagers’ use of mobile phones, participants in the current study did not report using any of those, except for one mother who said she had heard about software that can be used to filter content but had not started using it on her child’s phone.
at the time of the interview. Parents’ awareness about the use of this software is another area that needs more research in South Africa.

From the above discussion and in connection with children and families, some areas that need further research can be highlighted:

- Adolescents and mobile internet
- Teenagers’ perspectives on parental regulation (or non-regulation) of mobile phones
- The role of mobile phones in connecting adolescents with their absent parents
- Adolescents, mobile phones and health issues
- Adolescents, mobile phones and financial issues
- More research is needed on adolescents and mobile bullying
- More research is need on adolescents and sexting
- Adolescents, mobile phones and the loss of communicative and social skills
- Similar research in more affluent and underprivileged communities as well across different ethnic groups

**5.2 Recommendations**

As discussed previously, the findings of this study suggest that teenagers’ use of mobile phones has a combination of advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, text messaging satisfies their desire to communicate quickly and most importantly, conveniently. As they grow, they value peer relationships and privacy. It is then not surprising to find that they prefer texting rather than calling. On the other hand, as more and more mobile phones become available among children and teenagers, their overall safety is at stake because these devices are promoting some undesirable behaviours such as sexting, texting and driving, text and internet bullying. Moreover,
due to an impulse to stay connected with their peers and the ease of constant accessibility provided by mobile phones, teenagers are likely to spend much of their sleeping and family times satisfying that desire to communicate with their peers. Even though more and more parents are embracing text messaging to stay connected with their teenagers, while at the same regulating the practice, it is equally important to highlight some points that can contribute to reducing the negative impact of text messaging and mobile internet on young people.

From the parents’ side:

- Strive to build and maintain a positive relationship with their teenagers, based on regular, open and close communication. This implies making time for their child, listening to and involving him or her in making rules around the mobile phone use and problem solving. Weisskirch (2009) stresses the importance of getting the teenagers to provide such information without being requested by the parent as this may enhance parent-teen relationship. The same author (p. 1138) suggests that parents convey clear expectations about their teenagers’ use of mobile phones at the outset of phone ownership. These include how to use the device responsibly.

- Strike the balance between parental control and teenagers’ freedom, as becoming independent is part of this developmental stage. Therefore, authoritative parenting style would be ideal to adopt.

- Strive to instil values of respect and empathy in their teenagers’ peer relationships as lack of these is more likely to reflect in their online behaviours and also may lead to the inability to maintain successful relationships in adulthood (D’Antona et al., 2010: 523).

- Strive to be informed and stay updated about the technology used by teenagers. This implies getting support from techno experts from time to time.
• Stay vigilant and find ways to monitor and supervise all virtual communication (D’Antona et al., 2010: 525), and explain some consequences or legal ramifications of certain mobile phone behaviours such as sexting, and texting and driving.

• Strive to know their teenagers’ cellular friends just as they know their friends in the real world. Only open and regular communication with their teenagers can make this possible.

• Model behaviours expected from teenagers such as refraining from calling or texting while driving. This is a new element that parents should include in this relationship. More particularly, it has been pointed out earlier that parents will have greater responsibility in educating their young drivers about the dangers of texting and driving since enforcing laws banning this behaviour can prove difficult to put into practice.

From professionals, the community and the government:

• Alert parents about new technologies and support their effort to protect their teenagers, especially younger ones and girls.

• Include mobile phone safety in school policies and curricula.

• Concerted effort from all stakeholders regarding mobile phone safety: the media, schools and churches.

• Encourage learners to report any kind of bullying experienced personally or by their peers.

• Enforce laws on distracted driving, including calling or texting while driving.

5.3 Strengths and limitations of the study

• One of the main strengths of the current study was to hear parents voicing their experiences of teenagers’ text messaging. More particularly, in South Africa parents
have been sidelined in previous research on mobile phones. In fact, as previously mentioned, most of the studies have focused on MXit, thus involving only teenagers and young adults. Therefore, it was important to have parents’ contribution in influencing policies that affect their lives as well as their children’s.

- Furthermore, while extensive research on the social impact of the mobile phone has already been done in the western world, not much has been done in South Africa. Thus, as one parent suggested in the current study, this impact may not be limited to young people; it could be affecting the broader society. This is also indicative that even among South African adults, mobile technology may be fast expanding thus impacting significantly on people’s social lives. Therefore, more research is needed in this area.

- Lastly, to a large extent, the study achieved its objectives. It revealed that text messaging is being used to connect parents and their teenagers, and can be preferred to phone calls in some circumstances. Therefore, it can enhance this dyadic relationship. Furthermore, even though no generalisations can be made from the findings of the study, the latter has opened doors to prospects for future research.

- In spite of the above, a number of limitations linked to this study are worth mentioning. Firstly, as the purpose of the study was to explore parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging practices, the researcher faced the problem of scarcity of literature, since, as mentioned earlier; the focus in the past had been on the role of text messaging in peer relationships. The few studies that looked at parent-teen mobile phone mediate relationships focussed only on phone calls.

In the current study interviews with parents were useful in gaining insight into parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging. However, literature shows that results
obtained from self-reports are to be considered with caution. In particular, prior studies on how parents regulate media and technical use in relation to their teenagers, have shown discrepancies between parents’ and teenagers’ accounts (Hernández, 2005; Subrahmanyam, 2008). Therefore, as suggested by Weisskirch (2009), it is essential to confirm self-reported information. In relation to the present study, it would be interesting to study how teenagers view parents’ regulation (or non-regulation) of mobile phone use and how this impacts their teen-parent relationship.

Secondly, it is also important to note that, being of a cross-sectional nature, the current study presents limits in evaluating parent-teens’ relationship with accuracy. On the one hand, it is difficult to confirm whether the communication pattern via the mobile phone reflects overall communication pattern outside the mobile phone (before buying the device for example). Therefore, the study is suggestive that in areas which still have low penetrations of mobile phones it would be interesting to study those patterns before and after the introduction of mobile phones. This way, a comparison of results in longitudinal studies is likely to lead to more accurate conclusions. This also holds true in the evaluation of the effectiveness of strategies used by parents in regulating teenagers’ use of mobile phones.

5.4 Conclusion

With the expansion of mobile phone technology, the pervasion of text messaging in communication among teenagers has been the focus of many studies in the past. The current study intended to add to the body of emerging literature on text messaging in intergenerational relationships. The findings support evidence that parents are using text messaging as an additional way to communicate with their teenagers via the mobile phone. The majority of parents interviewed reported that texting can be cheaper and more convenient than phone calls.
Against the common belief that textism may be an obstacle to communication and thus widen the gap between parents and their teenagers, it was found that teenagers use formal language while texting their parents. Therefore, text messaging seems to be contributing positively to the connection of the parts in the dyadic subsystem.

Furthermore, the mobile phone has brought visible change to the dynamics of power and control. This device simultaneously becomes a connecting and monitoring tool. Thus, power comes wrapped in the gift of the mobile itself since the majority of parents purchase these devices. According to the findings of the study, handing over the gift of the mobile to the teenagers goes with putting in place new rules or expectations regarding its use. For the majority of participants however, the rules can be negotiable.

With regard to text messaging, privacy remains one of the main issues that brings conflict when parents feel that it is their right to read their children’s messages, while teenagers’ feel it is a violation of their right to privacy. For some parents, keeping the balance remains a challenge. Another source of conflict is the tendency of teenagers to overuse the practice of text messaging. Parents reported its common interference with family, study and sleeping times. Even though none of the participants experienced teenagers’ texting and driving, parents opposed this practice and suggested that laws enforcing the ban of mobile phones while driving be enforced. Moreover, even though the majority of parents supported the ban on mobile phones in schools, some parents suggested limited use of the devices there.

Regarding asking teenagers’ whereabouts, it is suggested that a positive parent-teen relationship is enhanced when children get into the habit of providing this kind of information without being asked by the parent to do so. Moreover, in a particular way at this developmental stage, it is
important for parents to promote positive peer relationships to prevent text or internet bullying. On many occasions in their interviews, parents have hinted that the way they raise their children could be an influence on their teenagers’ mobile behaviours.

Despite the negatives reported by parents about text messaging, the fact that more and more mobile phones today come with internet possibilities proves to be more challenging for parents. While parents find this feature advantageous especially as an educational tool, they express their difficulty in controlling it. This is suggestive of a need to be supported and of more research in this area.

In the South African context in particular, awareness about mobile phone safety needs to extend to the entire society because it has been found that it is not only parents who buy mobile phones for children. Therefore, anybody who is likely to provide them can have an influence on regulating their use. As a result, a global awareness is needed. Moreover, the present study points to the need to reinforce laws regarding distracted driving, texting and driving in this particular case, but also making and answering phone calls behind the wheel. This is very important because the more this dangerous behaviour becomes acceptable, the more it becomes a norm. In a country such as South Africa, where road carnage may be one of the highest in the world, texting and driving should not be tolerated.
LIST OF REFERENCES


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Odendaal, W., Malcolm C. Savahl, & September, R. (2006). Adolescents, their parents and Information and Communications Technologies: Exploring adolescents’ perceptions on


A. INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Teenagers and mobile phones: An exploratory study of parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Epiphanie Mukasano at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a parent of at least one teenager. The purpose of this research project is to explore the parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging.

What is text messaging?

Text messaging is the sending or receiving of short messages electronically from one cell phone to another.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?
When I have given my consent in writing to participate, I will spend one to one and a half hour in an interview with the researcher, at a time and place convenient to me. I will give permission to the researcher to record the session. If any transport fee is required to and from the place of interview, the researcher will compensate for it.

The following questions will be asked to you:

- What are your experiences of teenagers’ text messaging
- How does the text messaging affect your relationship with your teenager(s)?
- What are the benefits of teenagers’ texting?
- What is the downside of teenagers’ texting?
- What are your feelings when your teenager(s) is/are sending and receiving messages?
- How does the text messaging affect their schoolwork?
- How does text messaging affect their relationship with you as parents?
- How does it affect their relationship with their peers?
- What limits can parents set regarding text messaging?

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, identification codes will be used during data collection and kept in a locked storage area where no one else will have access except for the researcher. Moreover, the researcher’s computer will use a password that will be known to her alone. The taped materials will be stored in a secret place for a minimum of five years, then destroyed by the researcher.
If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible.

**What are the risks of this research?**

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.

**What are the benefits of this research?**

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about parenting in the screen era. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of text messaging among teenagers. You will also be notified of a follow-up workshop on completion of the study so that you can be informed about the outcomes of the research.

**Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

**Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?**

In such a case the researcher will assist you in her capacity; else she will refer to professionals in counselling.

**What if I have questions?**


This research is being conducted by Epiphanie Mukasano in the Social Work Department at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Epiphanie at 29 Milner Road, Muizenberg; Mobile phone: 0725822762; e-mail: emukasano@gmail.com

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department: Prof C J Schenck

Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences: Prof J Frantz

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape’s Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.
B. CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Teenagers and mobile phones: An exploratory study of parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant’s name…………………………

Participant’s signature………………………………

Witness………………………………

Date…………………………

120
Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator’s Name: Prof C J Schenck

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Belville 7535

Telephone: (021)959-

Cell: 0828640600

Fax: (021)959-2011

Email: cschenck@uwc.ac.za
C. TEENAGERS AND MOBILE PHONES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PARENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF THEIR TEENAGERS’ TEXT MESSAGING – Interview guide.

1. Introduction

- The researcher greets the participant and thanks her/him for coming to have an interview.
- The researcher enquires about the demographics of parents’ teenagers.

1.1 How many teenagers do you have?
1.2 Are they boys or girls?
1.3 How old are they?
1.4 Do they have mobile phones?
1.5 How did they get their mobile phones?

2. Parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messaging

2.1 What are your experiences of teenagers’ text messaging?
2.2 How does text messaging affect your relationship with your teenager(s)?
2.3 What are the benefits of teenagers’ text messaging?
2.4 What is the downside of teenagers’ text messaging?
2.5 What are your feelings when your teenager(s) is/are sending and receiving messages?
2.6 How does text messaging affect his/her/their schoolwork?
2.7 How does it affect their relationships with their peers?
2.8 How does it affect their driving (In case he/she drives)
2.9 What limits can parents set regarding text messaging?

3. Conclusion
22 July 2014

To Whom It May Concern

I hereby certify that the Senate Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape, at its meeting held on 5 April 2013 approved the methodology and ethics of the following research project by: Mrs E Mukasano (Social Work)

Research Project: Teenagers and mobile phones: An exploratory study of parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text message.

Registration no: 13/3/12

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape