

## “A Gift with Strings Attached”: Parents’ Experiences of Teenagers’ Mobile Phone Text Messaging

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**Abstract:** While the rapid adoption of mobile technology became global, the rate at which young people adopted it was even bigger. Most studies focussed on the experiences of the teenagers. In this study the aim of the study was to explore parents’ experiences of their teenagers’ text messages. A qualitative exploratory research design was adopted. The population was parents/guardians (males and females) of teenagers (boys and girls) attending high schools in Cape Town South Africa. Available and snowball sampling were used. All participants were recruited in the Southern Suburbs and Cape Flats of the Cape Metropolitan Area. In total 11 parents were interviewed using an interview guideline. The interviews were transcribed, independently coded and thematically analysed. The results show that mobile phones are no ordinary gifts. They are given with strings attached. Once in teenagers’ hands, the devices serve both communication and monitoring purposes. It comes with a set of given or negotiated rules and new expectations. The study also emphasises the importance of a trusting relationship with teenagers, respecting their privacy, and the disengagement process from their parents. The importance of positive relationships and open communication as well as negotiated rules in the management of the mobile phone is recommended.

**Keywords:** Mobile phone, text messaging, texting, teenagers, parents, parenting.

### INTRODUCTION

The landline telephone was invented in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century [1, 2]. A few years later, the mobile phone was developed as a merger of the landline telephone system with wireless communication [2]. It was only in 1973 that Martin Cooper of Motorola made his first call from a handheld mobile phone in the United States [2]. Since then this technology has continued to grow. In 2002, the number of mobile users worldwide had already surpassed those of landline users [1]. In 2009, The International Communications Union (ITU) reported around 4.6 billion mobile phone subscribers across the globe [3], and, according to a UNICEF study [4], in September 2011, Africa was the second largest mobile phone user in the world, with over 620 million mobile connections. It was further found that South Africa had 100.48 per cent penetration among its population of 50 million, indicating some people have more than one mobile phone [3].

While the rapid adoption of mobile technology became global, the rate at which young people adopted it was even bigger. 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 [1]. 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 [1].

As for text messaging, the origin is situated around the late 1980s. 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, easy and cheap 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. Today text messaging is the most popular service used on mobile phones [5] and function as a prominent communication tool between teenagers with the beneficial impact on their social life [6, 7]. In particular in the South African context, the popularity of the instant messaging MXit among teenagers and young adults has received attention among researchers [4, 8-11]. Another survey done in Langa and Guguletu, aiming at promoting literacy on mobile phones, suggested that MXit users had the opportunities to strengthen ties with their close friends and peers but in all cases excluded their parents [11].

Furthermore reference was made to a survey showing that teenagers have remarkably cut down on talking on phones and on emailing in favour of texting [11]. For this reason, teenagers, also known as ‘Digital natives’ or the ‘Digital generation’ who are media savvy, are dubbed the

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'Thumb Generation', mainly because of the "intense exchange of text messages, which are generated using the thumb[s]" [12].

Furthermore, research 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. Text messaging therefore became a meaningful part of today's teenagers' lives [2].

The literature describes not only the use of text messaging of teenagers to communicate with their friends and enhancing their social life, but also as a parenting tool [2, 13]. It is 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" [2]. At the same time teenagers' increased communication with peers through text messaging raises some concerns for parents [5]. It increases fears that children may be more easily influenced by the peers with whom they seek to identify and that they as parents will be more and more excluded [12, 14, 15]. Moreover, many teenagers 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 house chores or school work, sleeping at night, and even listening to their parents. Text messaging can touch the core functioning of family life and the development of a new paradigm for society [12]. With the proliferation of media technologies in contemporary home settings, parents struggle to keep the balance between the benefits and challenges of these technologies.

With this background the aim of this article, is to describe parents' experiences of the text messaging of their teenagers as well as recommendations made by parents on them how text messaging and mobile phones should be managed. As most of the previous research focussed on the teenagers, this article shares the voices of a group of parents.

## METHODOLOGY

In view of the aim of the study, which was to explore parents' experiences of their teenagers' text messages, the qualitative research approach was adopted. The drive behind this type of inquiry is "to understand human experiences from the perspective of those who experience them" [16]. This is done by providing complex textual descriptions of those experiences as a response to a given research problem [17, 18].

Text messaging has only been in operation for twenty-two years, meaning that it is a relatively new phenomenon. However, 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 experiences of parents have been underexplored. An exploratory research design was therefore adopted [19]. More specifically, the research was conducted in order to gain new insights into this phenomenon from a different perspective [20].

The population was parents/guardians (males and females) of teenagers (boys and girls) attending high schools

in Cape Town suburbs. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to find willing and available parents. Sampling involves selecting informants on the basis of some criteria relevant to a particular study [18]. The criteria for the selection of the parents were:

- Participants had to be a parent (male or female) of at least one teenager (aged 13-19) at the time of this study.
- The teenager should be still attending high school.
- Both the participant and teenager should use a mobile phone in his or her daily communication with friends or each other.

All participants were recruited in the Southern Suburbs and Cape Flats of the Cape Metropolitan Area. The starting point was a Parent Centre based in this area which renders support and counselling services to parents. A total of 11 parents were interviewed using an interview guideline which was tested in three pilot interviews. One participant was included who only provides the mobile phone to the teenager when going to school. The teenager did not own the phone. The inclusion of the deviant sample was important as it illustrates a particular parenting practice regarding mobile phones.

The individual interviews conducted were transcribed and thematically coded and analysed by an independent coder, using the six steps suggested by Creswell [21-23]. Ethical considerations such as validity and trustworthiness of the data were ensured through the triangulation of the data with the literature. Ethical clearance for the research study was obtained from the research and ethics committee of the University of the Western Cape.

## RESULTS

### Biographical Details on Parents and Children

Eleven parents, eight mothers and three fathers participated in the study. They had all purchased mobile phones for their teenagers, except for three. 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 1.

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 children "inherited" mobile phones from their uncles; the other parent said his teenager received the phone from an older sibling and 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 themes:

Theme 1: Parents' experiences that mobile phones grant them "peace of mind"

Theme 2: The use of mobile phones enhances parent-child contact.

Theme 3: Mobile phones enhance contact between teenagers and their peers.

**Table 1. Biographical details on parents and children.**

Parent		Teenager's Gender	Age	Means of Acquiring Mobile Phone
A	Mother	Girl	15	mother bought it
B	Father	Boy	18	gift from brother
C	Mother	Boy	15	mother bought it
D	Mother	Girl	13	received as gift
E	Father	Girl	13	parents bought them
		Boy	18	
F	Mother	Girl	17	mother bought it
G	Mother	Boy	15	father bought it
		Girl	17	father bought it
H	Mother	Boy	17	Didn't have phone; Mother provide phone when going to school
K	Father	2 sons 2 stepsons	between 14 and 18	parents bought them
L	Mother	Son	19	parents bought it
N	Mother	Girl	15	parents bought it

Source: research data.

Theme 4: Parents' concerns about the time mobile phones absorb.

Subtheme 4.1: Concerns about the impact on the relationship between parents and teenagers

Subtheme 4.2: Concerns about the effect on school work

Subtheme 4.3: Concerns that children lose sleep

Theme 5. Parents set rules regarding the use of mobile phones

Theme 6. Parents' guidelines for managing the mobile phones

**DISCUSSION OF THEMES**

**Theme 1: Parents' Experiences that Mobile Phones Grant them "Peace of Mind"**

The parents indicated that the benefit of children having a mobile phone is that they can communicate with them, have some control on the children's whereabouts and peace of mind. The following excerpts support this theme:

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

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

*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.*

Likewise, the mobile phone assists the children to make contact with the parents when necessary:

*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.*

*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.*

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 [2, 13, 24]. They are also about transport arrangements and micro-coordination of plans [2, 3, 12, 25].

Literature further shows that the primary reason for buying mobile phones for teenagers is communication about their safety and security [1, 2, 13, 26]. This easy access is made possible by inherent characteristics of the technology itself, such as its ubiquity, portability and relatively affordable cost [13]. 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 [13, 27]. It looks like the purchase of mobile phones for teenagers is intended for the teenager but surely also for the parents.

**Theme 2. The Use of Mobile Phones Enhances Parent Child Contact**

Parents shared that mobile phones can increase their communication with their teenagers. One parent reported a good family experience with her daughter when they shared jokes that they got from their friends through text messaging. This brought them closer, according to the mother. On the other hand, she added that she is aware that her daughter is selective in what she shares with her mother.

Furthermore, another parent suggested that recognising teenagers as techno experts can be used as a parent-teen communication and bonding opportunity when they teach

their parents technological skills. Similarly, it is regarded that digital technologies increase communication opportunities between parents and adolescents [28]. In this study, one mother reported a particular case where her children were teaching computer and mobile phone skills to their grandmother.

Parents further said that 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 often as the one mother shared:

*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."*

*....because my daughter travels to school and I am at home so we communicate basically [through text messaging].*

Similar attitudes as described above from teenagers' parents appear in the literature [2], while a few authors have emphasised the role of text messaging as more of a monitoring or controlling tool [2, 15, 29].

### **Theme 3. Mobile Phones Enhance Contact Between Teenagers and their Peers**

Parents are seen as the primary agents in the process of socialising their children [29]. In a particular way, teenage years are a time of heightened sociability [7, 30] 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 assist them experience and participate in it [31]. The participants' following accounts reflect that the mobile phone enhances the contact between the teenager and their peers:

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

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

*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.*

The majority of the participants displayed an understanding of the importance of mobile phones in their teenagers' friendships. Participants valued the device in particular for their introvert teenagers.

*I think in my case, it [text messaging] has quite a positive effect. She (daughter) is not quite an extrovert... it is great to know that she is staying in touch with her friends. So that was nice for me.*

Researchers are of the opinion that mobile phones may be simultaneously fulfilling two developmental needs of adolescents of connecting with peers and enhancing peer identity [15]. Much of the literature has further highlighted how this device is instrumental in reinforcing and maintaining peer and romantic relationships [12, 14, 15]. Likewise, in a study conducted in Norway, children viewed the mobile phone as essential for supporting relationships [25]. 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 [1]. 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 [1, 12, 15].

### **Theme 4: Parents' Concerns About the Time the Mobile Phones Absorb**

Parents and teenagers who took part in the survey conducted by The Pew Internet and American Life Project [2] 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" to convey the simultaneous positive and negative sides of the mobile phone [14]. In the previous themes the positive aspects of the mobile phone were discussed. The negative concerns shared by the parents mostly relates to the time the teenagers spent on the mobile phone and that effects other aspects of their lives and relationships. This concurs with the findings of a 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" with the negative effects of less face-to-face communication with parents, spoiled family time and reduced school work time [27]. These aspects were also shared by the participants:

#### **Subtheme 4.1: Concerns About the Impact on the Relationship Between Parents and Teenagers**

Participants expressed concerns about the effect of text messaging on relationships between them and their teenagers due to the time they spend on the mobile phone and the conflict it creates when parents try to manage it. The concerns were mainly linked to overuse and/or misuse that resulted in arguments or conflicts. The following quotes are relevant:

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

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

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 [2].

*...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.*

*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.*

However, participants 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."*

*One of the things about these cell phones, texting... it's not just about teenagers but the whole family.*

*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.*

#### **Subtheme 4.2. Concerns About the Effect on School Work**

Some participants in this study also had concerns about the effect of text messaging on schoolwork in the following two ways:

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

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

*And it actually takes away children's attention from schoolwork.*

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

*...they can stay in touch with homework.*

*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.*

It was found that text messaging is used by teenagers to communicate with their peers about their homework [2]. However, one participant disagreed that text messages can be useful for school work, especially at high school level:

*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 socio-economics of the teenagers concerned. In fact, teenagers

from lower income groups reported never using text messaging for school work [2]. In the same study, around one third of all teenagers said they never texted about schoolwork.

#### **Subtheme 4.3: Concerns that Children Lose Sleep**

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

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

*So you don't even know how many hours of sleep they get, you know, to be fresh for school the next day.*

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

Similarly, reference is made 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 [1].

In summary the major theme is the parents' concern that children wasted a lot of time text messaging.

*The experience that I have with her is that she's on the phone all the time, you know.*

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

From the above quotes, it would seem that the major concern parents had about their children's phones and text messaging is the time it absorbs. 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.

#### **Theme 5: Parents Made Various Rules, Boundaries and Limits About Mobile Phone**

The participants shared that they have realised that when they provide the teenagers with mobile phones they have to reposition themselves to put boundaries or rules in place to manage the new addition to the family life.

*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.*

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

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

*... And no cell phones during meal times.*

Thus it emerged that gifts of mobile phones from parents to teenagers carry rules and responsibility for both parent and teenager. This supports the depiction of mobile phones' role in extending parental control [30]. 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:

*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 are mine and their mom's.*

*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.*

*Very much. I read the children's messages.*

While others suggested some flexibility and trust, 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 [7, 31].

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

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

There were also parents who reported no control and interference.

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

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

*I trust my children to make the right decisions.*

The above excerpts suggest that participants 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 [32].

There was also controversy among the participants 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.

For another parent, it is not the age, 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 a device. Parents' narratives also suggested that parents with little or no education experience challenges monitoring their children's use of mobile phones.

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 decide when to buy airtime for their teenager(s)
- Teenagers do not own a mobile phone at all but can borrow when going out (from one parent)

Research shows that parents have 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 [2]. On the other hand, the scarcity of family rules about young people's use of the mobile phone was highlighted [1]. 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 [1]. 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 [33].

Likewise, few parents in the Pew study reported setting limits for text messaging [2] and revealed gender sensitivity regarding control of mobile phones, with girls (especially younger ones) receiving more rules/limits [2]. Some participants in this study reported a similar situation.

## **Theme 6: Parents' Guidelines for Managing the Mobile Phones**

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 also suggested that parents need to make clear expectations

around mobile phones and remove children's privileges when expectations are not met. This supports the idea about giving privileges to teenagers only when they respect rules given to them [34].

### **Keep Teenagers Busy**

In addition, parents conveyed that teenagers need to be kept busy. This confirms what some teenagers said in the Pew study [2] that sometimes they text out of boredom. Talking of her daughter, one father (Parent C) in our study said that at home, "she must learn to cook; she must learn to clean up." Another parent share *So we do try to get them do other activities.*

### **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 on going communication with teenagers, spend time with them, and make time for them. This communication includes talking about dangers associated with mobile phones [35]. Outside the family circle, schools can also communicate with children about homework.

*I just need to be vigilant. As parents, we need to be informed as to what are out there, dangers and that sort of thing.*

The latter excerpt illustrates the challenge for parents to find effective strategies to prevent teenager's risk behaviour without impeding his or her valued peer social life [36].

### **Parents Should Practise Collaborative Management**

Adolescence is a time when they desire to become independent. Most parents in our 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.

*I think the management of cell phone... 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.*

*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.*

*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.

*... 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.*

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

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of the present study suggest that the popularity of the mobile phone and in particularly text messaging is motivated by convenience and relatively low cost [2, 3, 12, 25, 33]. The findings further support evidence that more and more parents are embracing texting to communicate and stay connected with their teenagers, therefore providing the mobile phone as a gift [2, 15]. As much as texting is embraced for increased communication, it became an additional means of monitoring and control. It seems that in contemporary family life the mobile phone has become an indispensable tool whereby parents can stay connected, monitor, control, support, protect and discipline their teenagers [13, 24, 30, 37]. It transpires clearly that mobile phones are no ordinary gifts. They are given with strings attached. Once in teenagers' hands, the devices serve both communication and monitoring purposes. It comes with a set of given or negotiated rules and new expectations (like constant availability) [2].

The study also emphasises the importance of a trusting relationship with teenagers, respecting their privacy during their process of disengagement from their parents. The importance of positive relationships, open communication as well as negotiated rules in the management of the phone emerged from the study. Parents and teenagers should convey clear expectations about the use of mobile phones at the outset of phone ownership [13]. Above all, parents should model the use of responsible and respectful mobile phone and texting use as the mobile phone became an integral part of family life [38]. It is a connecting and controlling tool, it means security and insecurity; it is a gift that means power; it means freedom and control all in one.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors confirm that this article content has no conflict of interest.

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Declared none.

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