

# **Let's get mobile**

**Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone  
users**

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# Abstract

The mobile phone is now a ubiquitous object for most young people in New Zealand and text messaging has become commonplace. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship young people have with their mobile phone. I examine both positive and negative aspects of the mobile phone and then emphasise its location in a socio-cultural context. My research takes a Meadian perspective, and uses a qualitative approach, and employs two phases of qualitative data collection. The first phase utilises focus groups and the second utilises unstructured individual interviews. My study included 18 secondary school students (7 female, 11 male) aged between 14 and 15 years. The participants were Year 10 students enrolled in two public, co-educational, high schools from within the Otago region. The key questions underpinning this research are: How is the mobile phone embedded in adolescents' social and cultural worlds? What are the social consequences of mobile phone use and misuse for adolescents? Is text bullying occurring between young people? If so is it a real cause for concern for adolescents? The mobile phone was found to be iconic in reinforcing a teen identity. Social consequences of mobile phone use include social connectedness, teenage group cohesion, and navigation of private use in public places. Mead's concept of self and other was used to understand these findings. Students in my study were aware of text-bullying and were able to relay stories either of self or other in relation to the phenomenon. Text-bullying incidents ranged broadly in terms of severity and the level of concern given was indicative of this, with the more severe incidents involving school counsellors and parents, and more minor incidents being dealt with independently or with aid of peers.

This thesis is in loving memory of Alison Stoddart.  
1980 - 2012

Ali, we shall walk the stage together.

After the clouds, the sunshine; after the winter, the spring;  
after the shower, the rainbow; for life is a changeable thing.  
After the night, the morning, bidding all darkness cease,  
after life's cares and sorrows,  
the comfort and sweetness of peace.

*Helen Steiner Rice*

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# Introduction

The mobile phone is now a ubiquitous object for most young people in New Zealand. The mobile phone and, in particular text messaging, has become commonplace for today's young people. This technological artifact is no longer deemed new, unique, or interesting; rather it has become a banal item which has just become a normal part of an adolescent's social world (Fenaughty 2010; Cupples & Thompson 2010). Today's adolescents are often referred to as the 'txt generation'; they are the first generation to have grown up in a society where mobile phones are an integral part of daily life. The mobile phone is rarely turned off and has become so ubiquitous, commonplace and natural it has been described as an extension of the body. The phone is often attributed with human qualities and has also been referred to as an organic niche in everyday life (Oksman & Turtiainen 2004; Vykoukalová 2007; Stald 2008; Thompson & Cupples 2008). Reading (2008, p. 355) sums this up nicely with reference to the, now commonplace, mobile cameraphone "Over the past 25 years, the 'mobile', 'cell phone', 'handy', 'ketai', or 'pele-phone' has gone from being a sci-fi fantasy to something carried as commonly as the wrist watch." Young people interact via the mobile whilst simultaneously interacting *with* the mobile phone. The mobile phone is a vital communication tool for young people today; it functions like social glue by connecting young people both spatially and temporally but without the constraint of the physical body – for many it is their social lifeline with the immediacy of interaction providing instant gratification in terms of connectedness.

In recent years the New Zealand media has played a part in exposing incidents of cyberbullying such as school fights and assaults that have been filmed on mobile phones and then posted on to YouTube or social networking sites (Stevens 2008; Beaumont and Fitzsimons 2009; Milne & Leask 2009; Maslin 2011; Tahana 2011). 'Sexting' is a more recent craze that involves sharing sexually explicit images through text or Internet messaging and has reportedly occurred in school changing rooms without the subject's permission and causing them undue distress (Irvine 2011).

## Motivation for Research

My motivation for this research is primarily founded on a personal interest. I first became aware of cyberbullying in 2007 in the third year of my Undergraduate degree when I chose to use cyberbullying as a case study for two of my 300 level internal assessment requirements. At this time cyberbullying was just beginning to emerge in the academic arena as a new social phenomenon worthy of research. The few studies that had been completed were preliminary, descriptive and exploratory in nature. I found myself intrigued by this new type of bullying and recognised the importance of new research in a relatively unknown topic.

Upon reflection there are two core reasons for my interest in this topic. Firstly, having been born in 1971 I have experienced a life world without many technological devices that are now considered common place across most demographic sets. In striking contrast to today's youth the first half of my life was devoid of mobile phones, the Internet, PDAs, pagers, instant messaging, social networking sites and email. The second reason is more somber in nature, and not one I am particularly proud of but also not one I will ever forget. I was never really a bully by nature and fortunately never really had to endure intense bouts of bullying, however I do recall this one incident vividly. I would have been fourteen or fifteen years of age at the time when a girlfriend and I took no mercy on another year ten female student at our school, who I will name Chalcedony. For whatever reason (if there even was one) my friend and I followed Chalcedony around C Block whilst verbally picking on her and taunting her. Then I saw her face (and I will never forget it), she was crying and most obviously upset by the abuse being bestowed upon her and most importantly I was made privy to the pain I had caused. The next day I found Chalcedony and I sincerely apologized to her for my more than inappropriate behaviour. Chalcedony accepted my apology and I learnt a valuable life lesson in empathy in the process. As my personal account illustrates, face-to-face interaction can modulate behaviour when emotional responses can be seen; empathy may be induced if the perpetrator/s can recognise the anguish they are causing their victim. This is a feature that is lacking in cyber-world and so, for me, this question bears asking: 'With cyberbullying does the absence of the physical body and social gestures impede adolescents' ability to take on the role of the other?'

## Research and Methods

This research builds on a comparative literature analysis of traditional versus cyberbullying undertaken in 2009. Specifically it explores the experiences and relationships young people (14 and 15 year olds) have with their mobile phones and focuses on the applications and affects of mobile phone use (and potential misuse) for this cohort. Specifically, this research seeks to advance understanding by providing a ‘thick’ description of young people’s mobile phone usage. This is in order to add depth and richness to a topic that is currently under-researched both nationally and internationally. A main concern for this research is to investigate the emergence of text-bullying and determine if cyberbullying via mobile phone (text bullying) is problematic for these adolescents. To avoid bias and risk of manipulation in the data no reference to text-bullying is made in the information sheets or consent forms, nor is the term referred to directly within the focus group questions.

There are three key questions underpinning this research:

- 1) How is the mobile phone embedded in adolescents’ social and cultural worlds?
- 2) What are the social consequences of mobile phone use and misuse for adolescents?
- 3) Is text bullying occurring between young people? If so, is it a real cause for concern for adolescents?

This research uses a qualitative approach and employs two phases of qualitative data collection. The first research method utilised is focus groups, with group discussion (Appendix C) focusing on what young people like best and least about their mobile phone and any problems experienced by self or others that is mobile phone related. The information generated in the focus groups assisted with constructing more specific one-on-one unstructured interview questions (Appendix E). Which were undertaken in the second phase of this research. Having established in focus groups that text messaging is an exceptionally popular means of communication, many of the one-on-one unstructured interview questions related to this. Also cyberbullying is taken up directly within the one-on-one unstructured interview questions. The direct quotes chosen for this thesis have all been left in their original form to ensure their authenticity and thus empower the young participants.

## Overview of Chapters

Chapters One to Three set the context for the research project discussed in Chapters Four to Six. In the first chapter Mead's concept of self is introduced as the theoretical framework that informs this work. The second chapter is dedicated to International and New Zealand research on young people and their relationship with mobile telephones and cyberbullying. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and chosen research methods undertaken to conduct this study. Chapters Four and Five are dedicated to presenting the results, both of these chapters have been organised in accordance with the three key themes that underpin this research project – i.e. sociality, self and identify, and mobile phone use/misuse with a particular interest in text bullying. Chapter Four addresses the results from both the focus group discussions and Chapter Five provides the results from the seven one-on-one unstructured interviews that were conducted for this study. These results will be further analysed in Chapter Six through a lens provided by G. H. Mead's concept of self. From the outset it must be acknowledged that the research questions are intricately linked to each and hence the results do not always fall into discrete categories. For this reason the ordering of my questioning is somewhat arbitrary. However, I believe each research question sets up foundational data for the next question and therefore my analysis has a bottom up effect. Also, due to the limited number of participants in this research project the results cannot be generalised to all high school students in Otago or beyond. Many of my research findings are, however, remarkably consistent with results found in other academic studies pertaining to mobile phone use amongst young people. Throughout Chapter Six I will identify similarities and differences to other academic literature conducted on mobile telephony and youth.

Chapters Four and Five will be based on the three main research questions asked in this study. The first research question is 'How is the mobile phone embedded in adolescents' social and cultural worlds?' Within these two chapters details will be provided on the techno-social aspects of the mobile phone. What impact does this technological device have on the practical and symbolic needs of the young mobile phone user and how do these features play out in everyday mobile communication. The second research question is 'What are the social consequences of mobile phone use and misuse for adolescents?' Emphasis will be given to the social-cultural elements of the mobile phone, what it is about this small

device that enhances or deflates one's sense of self. What are the social and psychological benefits attributed to the mobile phone that have kept them so firmly entrenched in the daily lives of youth? What (if any) negative tendencies prevail? The final sections of Chapters Four and Five will review a darker side of mobile phone telephony, 'Is text bullying occurring between young people? If so is it a real cause for concern for adolescents?' This question tends to speak for itself but in utilising qualitative methods and applying a discourse analysis, a deeper understanding is provided to answer this question. In the discussion that follows, Chapter Six, I add to this theoretical research context with my own research, founded on the 3 key research questions I have identified. I provide an analysis for why young people have so readily embraced mobile telephony, and what the everyday attitudes and experiences are that prevail. The final chapter concludes this thesis by discussing the relevance of this research, avenues for future research and a summation of answers to the three key research questions.

# Chapter 1 - George Herbert Mead

A major aim of this study was to establish if text bullying (a type of cyberbullying) was occurring between young people, and if so, did they consider it a real cause for concern. To date much of the research conducted on cyberbullying has focused on the frequency of online bullying and been primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature. My prolonged interest in this relatively new phenomenon has enabled me to familiarise myself with relevant cyberbullying literature that started to enter academic journals around 2004. It has also offered me the opportunity to keep up to date with new cyberbullying research results as they come to light. Rivers and Noret's (2010) study investigates being bullied by text message and email and is the only longitudinal study currently available on cyberbullying. The authors draw attention to the paucity of theoretical understandings currently linked to this phenomenon, a conclusion I had also come to with my own comprehensive overview of cyberbullying literature. Even more recently, Mishna et al. (2012) have argued the need to establish a strong theoretical model for cyberbullying, a sentiment reiterated by Hemphill et al. (2012) who also stress the importance of more longitudinal studies being required in this area to better grasp the predictive associations linked to this phenomenon.

In this chapter I shall offer one possible theoretical perspective through which to view phenomena associated with text bullying. I shall also suggest that this theoretical perspective provides a lens through which to view the place mobile phones hold in young people's lives, its benefits, and its potentially precarious consequences. My chosen theoretical lens is G. H. Mead's concept of self, especially drawing on Mead's idea of the "generalised other". Mead argues that one's conduct is controlled and modified through the reflective attitudes of others, and one can only understand those attitudes by putting oneself in the position of the other (Pfuetze 1961). Two questions appear relevant at this point in my discussion. First, does Mead's argument fit when considering anti-social behaviours such as bullying? Second, when considering text bullying, are adolescents fully developed in their ability to take the



perspective of the generalised other, or are they still in the learning stages of this process? Detailed answers to these questions will be presented in Chapter Six.

Developmentally, adolescence is a period when the major elements of identity start to fall into place (Ling 2004a). According to Erik Erikson's (1959) view, establishing a coherent identity is the fundamental psychosocial task of adolescence. In terms of identity formation, communicative technology (including mobile phones) offers adolescents the opportunity to develop a sense of self and to play with their identity (Turkle 1995; Chisholm 2006). As Haslett & Bowen note, the development of communication skills is vital to "develop self-identity, establish social relationships with others, and provide the basis for collective social activity" (Haslett & Bowen 1989, p. 27).

According to both psychological and sociological perspectives the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation (Maslow 1970; Baumeister and Leary 1995; Honneth 1995). Adolescents are in the process of developing from a child into an adult, it is at this stage that social networks with peers and a sense of belonging tend to be of the utmost importance, it is a period when adolescents are going through much biological, psychological and social change (Johnsen 2003; Raskauskas & Stolz 2007; deLara 2008; Haddon & Vincent 2009; Burns et al. 2010; Subrahmanyam & Smahel 2011). According to Sibley:

adolescence is an ambiguous zone within which the child/adult boundary can be variously located according to who is doing the categorizing. Thus, adolescents are denied access to the adult world, but they attempt to distance themselves from the world of the child. At the same time they retain some links with childhood...These problems...demonstrate that the act of drawing the line in the construction of discrete categories interrupts what is naturally continuous (Sibley 1995, pp. 34-35).

The mobile phone, sometimes referred to as a "virtual umbilical cord" (Townsend 2000, p. 94; Ling 2004a, p. 100), plays a pivotal role here by affording a degree of autonomy to adolescents whilst simultaneously providing reassurance of safety to parents. Turkle (2007) describes the mobile phone as a 'tether' that keeps parents and children connected at all times, she argues that this 'tethering' may in fact hinder an adolescent's autonomous development given the fact that they are well aware they are never truly on their own.

Whatever the outcome, adolescents may be caught in a paradox, if the mobile phone becomes both the arena of their sociality and the arena of their torture by means of text bullying.

## **The Founding Father of Symbolic Interactionism**

Although George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) is widely recognised and referred to as the founding father of symbolic interactionism, his main interests were philosophy and psychology and he self-identified as a philosopher and social psychologist, not a symbolic interactionist (Schellenberg 1978; Crotty 1998). Symbolic interactionism is the micro-scale theoretical perspective that derived from the philosophy of *pragmatism* which is in turn rooted in the idea that living organisms make practical adjustments within their surrounding environment. Pragmatists are interested in these core questions: What is truth? What is good? What is knowledge? How do we know what the truth is? Pragmatists claim an ideology or truth statement is true if it works in terms of its consequences and use-value, hence leaving impractical ideas to be rejected (Hewitt & Shulman 2011). In this sense ‘the truth’ can never be universal; it will always be in a state of flux relative to the requirements and interests of the given life form. This train of thought is associated with renowned scholars such as Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey and George H. Mead. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective primarily concerned with the development of self and how meanings emerge in human social interaction through the power of shared symbols (Elliott 2008). The most obvious of these symbols is language. However, symbols can take many other forms such as machines, artifacts, apparel, animals, architecture and gestures, all of which can be considered symbols which produce social interaction between actors (Thompson & Cupples 2008). The mobile phone exemplifies one such symbol that produces social interaction – as we shall see in Chapters Four and Five.

Mead’s academic background in psychology and philosophy and his early interactions with Cooley and Dewey at the University of Michigan developed into a focus on Social Psychology and Symbolic Interactionism – a focus that was shared with Cooley and Dewey. Mead’s work also owes much to the ongoing influence of John Dewey and the intellectual environment at the University of Chicago where he worked from 1894 until his death in

1931. The intellectual spirit of The Chicago School was social in essence; the academic thinkers accentuated the social components driving human behaviour and criticised the idea that human action could be explained purely by biology and/or physiology. Hence Mead's overwhelming interest in how people manage to adjust to one another in interpersonal communication (Scheffler 1974; Schellenberg 1978; Powers 2004). It has been noted that Mead "made the most detailed and systematic contribution to [the] theory of the social formation of the self by his analysis of language and symbolic processes" (Schneider 1946, p. 391).

Mead's best known work is undoubtedly *Mind, Self and Society* (1934). A posthumously published selection of writing that was collated, compiled and published by students enrolled in Mead's social psychology paper, a paper he taught at the University of Chicago in the 1920s (Cahill 2007). It is in this selected work that Mead's most salient points in relation to the human self are illustrated: "the self is separate from the body; it arises in social experience; but it is more than a mere product of socially reflected self-images" (Cahill 2007, p. 31). For Mead, social experience is pivotal in understanding the social world. Other books posthumously published by Mead and founded on student lecture notes were *The Philosophy of the Present* (1932), *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (1936) and *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938) (Schellenberg 1978).

For Mead the mind and self could only be explained in a social context, with the environment contributing a great deal to variations in characters. Society and the 'social' individual must be considered in unison to fully grapple the connections between the self and society. Society is influential on the self but simultaneously the self is impacting on society. In Pfuetze's summation: "Individual selves, yes! But not absolute nor exclusive individuals. Society, yes! But not absolute nor exclusive society. The self is a "social self" (Pfuetze 1961, p. 102). Mead was determined to illustrate that psychologically the individual self is in fact "social" by nature. Such views are noteworthy departures from the prevailing belief at the time that any variation in personality or temperament across a population was due to variation in the passing on of genes and therefore hereditary (Schneider 2006). Mead writes, however, that "No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the

selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also” (1934, p. 164). This view has stood the test of time and is echoed in the following quote by Lyotard “A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before” (1984, p. 15).

Mead believed that society was *a priori* to the self, in other words mind and self emerge through society rather than the other way around: “For social psychology, the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole, not the whole in terms of the part or parts” (Mead 1934, p. 7). The self “is essentially a social structure and it arises in social experience” (Mead 1934, p. 140). For Mead an individual is not born with a self, rather the self develops over time and within its particular physical and social milieus, and just as importantly, in relation to the reactions of others residing within that society (Scheffler 1974; Schneider 2006). For example, an infant’s mind will only begin to evolve once s/he has the ability to interact, and recognise consistencies, within their environment. Rapid advancement occurs when the infant begins to learn the shared meanings held by symbols and gestures and experiences the power of self-expression and communication. It is the pre-existing social group which enables the individual to develop an acute sense of self-awareness - in other words to become self-conscious (Ritzer 2008). Mead concluded that only humans have selves and only selves have minds; this claim rests on man’s ability to successfully use language as a primary tool in social interaction, with language considered the matrix of mind and meaning.

## **Symbols of Communication**

For Mead the mind was not some biological tissue located in the brain and bounded by skin; rather it was the execution of significant symbols. And it was only through a social process that symbols would come to materialise (Pfuetze 1961). Symbols by nature are only meaningful because they have a shared meaning and are significant for group members. A symbol can be anything as long as it represents something else to at least two people (McIntyre 2006). This point can be illustrated by means of a concrete example: OMG JTLYK P111 ITRW BBIAB. This is an example of the relatively new text and online discourse being utilised by some and assumingly the given stream of letters and numbers

would be meaningless to many. Non-members would struggle to understand this “lingo” that translates to “Oh my gawd, just to let you know, parent emergency in the real world, be back in a bit” (*Netlingo* n.d.). This exemplifies the significance of shared symbols within groups since to outsiders the text seems nonsensical.

For Mead, symbolism is vital to society, for it is through symbols that human beings are able to interact, and thereby communicate with each other through shared meanings. For human beings, having the ability to use a symbol indicates they have a mind (Pfuetze 1961). “Symbols are social objects used to represent (or ‘stand in for,’ ‘take the place of’) whatever people agree they shall represent” (Charon 1998, p. 47). Communication is rendered possible by virtue of the symbol having a shared meaning for all individuals involved. The most obvious symbol is language; which is essentially a boundless system of symbols. As Mead so eloquently expresses in his writing, how could there be thought or mind without language, how could one adopt the role of others and take the viewpoint of others toward the self without interpreting symbols? People need to learn to cooperate in order to survive and cooperation is hereby facilitated through a shared language. It is symbolism that enables communication and language plays a pivotal role in the development of self (Mead 1934). I believe the following statement illustrates why the mobile phone has gained such wide acceptance in today’s society. “It is because it [the mobile phone] is a tool through which we practice our use of language that it is seen as being alive and we perceive its use as ‘natural’” (Fortunati 2005, p. 213).

Mead also elaborates on the fact that there cannot be symbols unless there are responses, thus a *significant symbol* is any type of gesture that brings about a shared meaning for people. When a response to a given gesture is shared, between the person using it and the person receiving it, we are then privy to a significant symbol. Absolute communication is only made possible through significant symbols and, although physical gestures and vocal sounds can be deemed significant symbols, it is vocal gestures, by means of language, that best fit this category (Ritzer 2008). In the words of Mead himself:

When, now, that gesture means this idea behind it and it arouses that idea in the other individual, then we have a significant symbol. In the case of the dog-fight we have a gesture which calls out appropriate response; in the present case we have a symbol which answers to a meaning in the experience of the first individual and which also calls out that meaning in the second individual.

Where the gesture reaches that situation it has become what we call “language.” *It is now a significant symbol and it signifies a certain meaning* (Mead 1934, p.45-46, emphasis added).

When both the gesture and its meaning are communicated we have language, when only the gesture is communicated we have a rudimentary conversation of gestures (Ritzer 2008). Emphasis must be given here to the vocal gesture, for when we utter a vocal gesture the self, not just the recipient, is aurally stimulated. We can hear ourselves just as the person/s we talk to hears us. Contrast this to when one pulls a facial expression (a physical gesture), such as a smile or smirk; the gesturing individual cannot see themselves unless they are in front of some reflective material such as a mirror. When socially engaged with others an individual is far more conscious of their vocal language than they are of their body language, this enables forward planning and preparation in responding to reactions and reacting to responses (Ritzer 2008). No other gesture or symbol is as successful as the vocal gesture in affecting the speaker as it does the hearer (Pfuetze 1961). This is a significant point if one considers bullying by text message, based on the above supposition it seems reasonable to assume that the perpetrator will not be affected to the same degree as the victim. For the perpetrator text bullying may be virtual and depersonalised, but the hurt inflicted on the victim is far from ‘virtual’. Instead, it has real consequences in terms of emotional distress, public health and educational chances (Patchin & Hinduja 2006; Beran & Li 2007). Mead believed the vocal gesture to be the real source of language, and hence mind. For Mead “it has been the vocal gesture that has pre-eminently provided the medium of social organisation in human society” (Mead 1959, p. 188).

This claim is founded on two main reasons. Firstly, the vocal gesture can have the same affect on the speaker as it does the listener/s. The second reason is that human beings have better self-control over vocal gestures than physical gestures. This is an important feature which is not readily available through texting communication. Significant symbols also allow human beings to think (a trait not possible to lower mammals) which is basically the ability to have internal conversations with self. Human beings can talk to themselves as they would others. As Radley & Billig (1996, p. 223) states “thinking is a socially shared activity.” Cognitive processes and the mind are only comprehensible by virtue of significant symbols (Ritzer 2008). In Pfuetze’s (1961, p. 71) equation “The mechanism: communication, symbols, language. The result: mind.”

## **The Self as Process**

According to Mead only selves have minds. We procure a *self* as we come to anticipate how others will respond to our gestures. Babies and very young children are unable to do this. Having the capacity to see the self through the eyes of others is a disposition that develops with maturation. I argue that adolescents are still in the learning stages of this process. For Mead the ‘minded’ actor has the ability to produce an act whilst simultaneously viewing it from the perspective of the receiver and thereby displaying the dexterity to make an object and subject of oneself concurrently. It is at this point one attains a *sense of himself as a self* and the mind has reached the point of self-consciousness.

For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself...(Mead 1934, p. 79).

This reflective stance, to become an object to self is made possible through language and role-taking, it indicates the genesis of the ‘generalised other’ and the materialisation of the fully fledged *self* (Pfuetze 1961; Scheffler 1974). It is at this point that social norms and societal expectations have become entrenched within the individual. Face-to-face interaction plays a pivotal role in this process, permitting the “focused sort of attention that is necessary for many kinds of learning and for acquiring particular kinds of knowledge and social skills even in the adult years. It is through face-to-face interaction that one learns to cope with others on both a cognitive and an emotional basis” (Williams 2002, p. 87). Such interaction is vital to self creation.

## **The Play and Game Stage**

This emergence of the self as an object is dependent on two stages: the play stage and the game stage. It is during these stages that the child learns the social etiquette that covertly governs and regulates behaviour (Tucker 2002). The play stage occurs around about the time the child starts to acquire and comprehend language. This stage is when the child first begins to role-play in a most primitive and unsophisticated form, “there is a simple succession of one role after another” (Mead 1934, p.159). This is when, in solitary play, the child plays at being the various roles they have so far encountered: mother, father, teacher, doctor, nurse,

bus-driver, clown etc. and in effect develop their own personality. The child has effectively acquired various sets of stimuli that will evoke the same responses to self as they will to others. As children try on different roles, even in the most simplistic of forms, we witness their ability to figuratively step into the shoes of another - albeit objectifying the self. The play stage is crucial in developing a sense of self, for it is during this stage that children first learn to appreciate how others think, act and feel. They learn to sympathetically and empathically interpret the actions of other (Tucker 2002). A salient point to consider here is that much of this social and cultural learning is accomplished through face-to-face interaction with significant others (Williams 2002). In pretending to be others, the young child becomes themselves (Pfuetze 1961). A conversation of gestures becomes evident as “the child says something in one character and responds in another character” (Mead 1934, p. 151) this ongoing dialogue is impulsive and unorganised - indicating some sense of self but also indicating that the fully unified self is yet to develop (Schneider 2006). In essence this process is termed ‘character building’ it is work in progress in reference to personality and illustrates the simplest form of being another to one’s self – this stage is superseded by the game stage. It is noteworthy that “role-playing” is not strictly limited to the play stage but continues throughout one’s life. Consider the author of a novel who puts himself in the place of the reader, or the tertiary student who writes an essay envisaging the lecturer marking it, or the text-bully who sends a malicious text message having imagined how the text-victim would feel upon receipt. Each of these examples indicate the ability of the first person to take the role of the other.

It is in the game stage that the organised personality comes to light. One “must be ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in the game and these roles must have a definite relationship to each other” (Mead 1934, p. 151). It is at this stage that the participating individual is able to consolidate all the other players’ attitudes and orchestrate a subgroup and it is the structure of this subgroup which governs the response of the individual within (Mead 1934). The ability to take the attitude of all the others involved in the game is the key difference between the play and game stage. To take the role of multiple others infers the child is accomplished in simultaneously taking the attitude of others. It is at this stage the young person is able to see themselves in relation to multiple others (Schneider 2006). Societal expectations are being entrenched and group membership achieved as the individual



carves his/her organic niche within that society. Self-control, responsibility and self-expression are being dictated by the individual taking on board the attitude of the other (Mead 1934). A game of hockey can be used to exemplify this point. To reach the common goal of winning a game, every player on the hockey team is required to know not only their positional role but the positional roles of the other ten team members. Having this complete structural overview of game play and awareness of each player's responsibilities in reference to each other and in accordance of the common goal allows for insight into how any individual might respond to a situation. By the game stage the child has advanced developmentally in terms of his/her ability to take all the other players attitudes on board and synthesis them as a whole unit (Mead 1934). Mead argued that in games,

[the child] is controlled by his being everyone else on that team, at least in so far as those attitudes affect his own particular response. We get then an "other" which is an organization of the attitudes of those involved in the same process. The organised community or social group which gives to the individual his unit of self may be called the "generalized other." The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. (1934, p. 154)

The hockey team mentioned above is a social group bound by rules and regulations which are common and known to each individual player. Hence, the hockey team would operate as the generalised other (Mead 1934). The game is used as a blueprint to illustrate what continuously happens throughout an older child's life. The child is constantly taking in the attitudes of those around him/her, especially his/her significant others. Pfuetze claims "Having put ourselves in the other person's shoes, we are in a position to sympathize with him, to see his point of view, to know his troubles and limitations, to understand why he acts as he does, to make his interests our own interests" (Pfuetze 1961, p. 86). For Mead this was the foundation for 'social sympathy', with the more roles one assumes contributing to a broader range of sympathy. Mead believed that for the self to develop to its full potential, it is essential to be able to take the view point of the generalised other – this coherent self being the final stage in the development of self. As Mead argues:

If the given human individual is to develop a self in the fullest sense, it is not sufficient for him merely to take the attitudes of other human individuals toward himself and toward one another within the human social process, and to bring that social process as a whole into his individual experience merely in these terms: he must also, in the same way that he takes the attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another, take their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which, as members of an organized society or social group, they are all engaged...only in so far as he takes the attitudes of

the organized social group to which he belongs toward the organised, cooperative social activity or set of such activities in which that group as such is engaged, does he develop a complete self. (Mead 1934, pp. 154-155)

It is the generalised other that determines and influences the behaviour of the individuals in any given society, for it is through the generalised other that we learn what is expected of us, all the while discovering who we are. As Mead states, “It [the generalised other] is that which guides conduct controlled by principles, and a person who has such an organized group of responses is a man whom we say has character, in the moral sense” (Mead 1934, p. 163). Failure in the development of a full self will result in a person unable to take the viewpoint of the social norms common to their community, they will be inept in their ability to tell right from wrong, and they will not develop into a moral being. For some, lacking a social conscience will result in deviant behaviour (Musolf 2003).

Individuals are not strictly bound to a singular generalised other. Through their education, travel and work they may come into contact with an array of *other* groups with differing worldly perspectives, creating a colourful cultural backdrop upon which to base numerous generalised others. It is at this point that the self reaches full and complete development (Schneider 2006). It stands to reason that the number of generalised others accumulated for any given individual will increase with age as life experience and exposure to differing forms of media develop. For some individuals their life path will continue to bring them into contact with an assortment of other subgroups and thus the collectivity of generalised others is a lifelong process. However, it may be a naïve attitude to assume that one can so readily take the role of the ‘other’ especially if one is from a counter-hegemonic group or from culturally and racially diverse groups. A problem with Mead’s work is that he mostly overlooked role-taking between heterogeneous groups and rather tended to focus on the premise that role taking took place within homogeneous groups. This is an oversight fraught with difficulties when considering social behaviour that is founded on prejudice, discrimination and exclusion (Williams 2002).

## **The I and the Me**

Mead saw the self as a dualism consisting of two phases: the “I” phase and the “Me” phase, together they constitute a personality. Young children become a real self when they develop

the ability to contextually use the terms “I” and “Me” (Pfuetze 1961). As Mead explains “The two are separated in the process but they belong together in the sense of being parts of a whole” (Mead 1934, p. 178). As aforementioned, the self is both object and subject simultaneously, the active subject is the “I” component and the object of conscious knowledge is the ‘Me’ component (Pfuetze 1961). The “I” is the spontaneous self in action; it is “the [uncertain] response to that situation as it appears in his immediate experience” (Mead 1934, p. 175). This is when the self is the least self-conscious, whereas the “Me” is the derivative of self-consciousness. As the individual assumes awareness they enter the “Me” phase of the self. As self-minded individuals we are continually switching in and out of self-consciousness and it is this that marks the transition between the “I” and the “Me” and makes for novel experiences (Tucker 2002). Internal conversations occur between the “I” and the “Me” and it is that internal conversing with self that allows for reflectivity. “The “I” of this moment is present in the “Me” of the next moment” and so the “Me” is constantly living in memory of the “I” (Mead 1934, p. 174).

Therefore, the “Me” is massive, it is our historical past, the “Me” is each and every action the “I” has previously committed. Whereas the “I” acts in an instantaneous, impulsive, immediate and novel manner the “Me” is the social aspect of the self that is defined by others. It is “the organised set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes” (Mead 1934, p. 175) and this is how self-consciousness arises - the self is aware of the self. So the “Me” is continuously reflecting on its actions and considering how they would appear from the view point of others and quintessentially becoming the generalised other to self (Mead 1934). The action of the “I” is so immediate and momentary that it can never truly be known in advance which sometimes results in an action even surprising the self. For example if a penalty strike is awarded in the game of hockey mentioned earlier, the striker cannot predict with guaranteed certainty the outcome of that strike, she may score or for what ever reason she may not. The “Me” in this example is the striker assuming the attitudes of the other team members, which in this instance would be to score the goal, the “I” is the striking of the ball – this is the response (Mead 1934). And so we only come to know the “I” post-action, it is our past which is held in our memory bank. In Pfuetze’s words, “both “I” and “Me” are essential to the self in its full development. An object involves and implies a subject, and vice versa. One without the other would give an extreme and one-sided self. If the self were

only a “Me” the self would be nothing but a reflection of the social order. Yet a “Me” is inconceivable without an “I” (Pfuetze 1961, p. 91).

Ritzer (2008, p. 229) highlights the four main reasons Mead gave such emphasis to the “I”:

First, it is a key source of novelty in the social process. Second, Mead believes that it is in the “I” that our most important values are located. Third, the “I” constitutes something that we all seek – the realization of the self. It is the “I” that permits us to develop a “definite personality.” Finally, Mead sees an evolutionary process in history in which people in primitive societies are dominated more by the “me” while in modern societies there is a greater component of the “I”.

This last sentence in the above quote leads to the following question. Are today’s young people spending more time in the “I” state? This “I” state being the point where the individual is at their least self-conscious? Is communication by mobile phone (especially text messaging) a less self-conscious form of interaction and therefore young people are spending less time reflecting on their actions and how they appear from the view point of others? Are young people from modern societies becoming less self-aware and do they have less self-control?

It must be noted that Mead’s self is more than a passive and docile receptor of stimuli that is conforming to group expectations at each and every act (Pfuetze 1961). Mead recognised that each individual self has a varying degree of agency which is constantly being demonstrated through one’s ability to change the flow of events through social interaction and in turn impacting upon and shaping one’s environment (Powers 2004). It is the “I” within that allows for this sense of social liberation, free-will and initiative. “The situation is there for us to act in a self-conscious fashion. We are aware of ourselves, and of what the situation is, but exactly how we will act never gets into our experience until after the action takes place” (Mead 1934, pp. 177-178). Indeed every individual is unique to a degree in terms of his/her values, morals, and viewpoints. It is the conglomeration of these individual perspectives and the cooperative interaction within that make for a society (Pfuetze 1961). So although selves share a common structural framework, each and every self is also distinctive in terms of their idiosyncrasies and autobiographies. As Ling (2004a, p. 106) states, “We find a blending of the longing for individual statement and the simultaneous and opposite desire for group identification”.

Mead was not so naïve to believe in a utopian society revelling in complete harmony, he appreciated that the interaction of individual selves, entrenched with personal interests, desires and duties, could also harbour conflict. Stress may prevail over acquiescence, resulting in violent behaviour and illustrating a situation where the “I” becomes the dominating agent over and against the “Me” (Mead 1934). Mead argued that it was this conflict, vexation, dysfunction and unrest in the environment that brought about evolutionary societal change (Pfuetze 1961). Furthermore, there is not one grand overarching generalised other that rules over all, rather there are many generalised others in society, for every group a self belongs to equates to a generalised other. In light of symbolic interactionism the “generalised other” is the symbol that represents society, humanity, and each and every whole community (Pfuetze 1961). Having multiples generalised others allows each self to have multiple selves and assume multiple roles (Ritzer 2008).

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight G.H. Mead’s concept of self and the process of role-taking. Mead (1934) suggests that having the ability to take the role of the other is how a self emerges. In relation to this research project, and in particular text-bullying, this raises questions that challenge an early adolescent’s (age 13-15) cognitive ability to fully understand other peoples’ feelings and perspectives. I believe many young adolescents are in the midst of a developmental metamorphosis, from a relatively egocentric individual to an individual who is able to integrate the feelings of others. In light of Mead’s “I” and the “Me” it may be for this very reason, that in contemporary society, there appears to be a greater component of the “I” evident. For Mead face-to-face interaction was crucial to social and cultural learning. Nowadays a mobile phone is often used as an interface in this communicative transaction and so, does this hinder the learning process? And so the work of G. H. Mead will be further examined to explore this study. The following chapter is dedicated to a literature review that includes international and national data on young people and their mobile phone use.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Recent literature on the positive and negative consequences of mobile phone use in youth culture provides a descriptive account of the breadth of research studies in this area. In order to understand how and why young people are using mobile phones a review of relevant research literature is conducted and presented in this chapter. This literature review has been divided into three parts. The first part reviews research about WHY young people have so readily embraced mobile telephony? What are the social benefits attributed to the mobile phone that have kept it so firmly ensconced in youth culture and everyday life? The second part draws on research that links the mobile phone to social identity and development identity. Finally, the third part of this literature review is dedicated to a more sombre account of mobile phone use and that is text bullying, a form of cyberbullying. International and national prevalence rates of text bullying and cyberbullying will be established in this section.

### **A Sea-Change in Telephony**

With the exception of party lines, land-line telephony telephone use was once considered a private affair, generally confined to within the home or office. Mobile phones came into widespread use and acceptance in the mid 1990s, achieving iconic status in the period between 1990 and 2005 (Ling 2008). Within a couple of decades, we have witnessed the mobile phone advance from a machine the size of a house-brick to devices that are thin, lustrous, and light, enabling them to easily be carried in pockets or handbags (Reading 2009). In order to understand the speed with which the mobile phone has entered our daily lives it is necessary to look at some statistics. In the past two decades we have witnessed a sea change with an estimated 6.8 billion mobile phone subscriptions worldwide compared to 1.2 billion fixed line subscriptions as of 2013. By contrast in 1995 mobile phone subscriptions were a mere 0.09 billion and fixed lined subscriptions 0.7 billion (International Telecommunications Union, 2013; Pearce 2009).

Individuals live in this phonespace – they can never let it go, because it is their primary link to the temporally, spatially fragmented network of friends and colleagues they have constructed for themselves. It has become their new umbilical cord, pulling the Network Society's digital infrastructure into their very bodies (Townsend 2000, p. 94).

The mobile phone was only recently considered a luxury and/or a symbol of success, but has now infiltrated into most societal strata and demographic bands and has been deemed a necessity by many (Stald 2008). This statement is supported statistically by the International Telecommunication Union's (2010) claim that the mobile market is nearing a level of saturation in developed countries, with a ratio of 116 subscriptions to 100 inhabitants at the end of 2010. The New Zealand situation is similar with New Zealand home to more mobile phones than people. As of February 2010 there were over 5 million mobile phone accounts nationwide with a population of 4.32 million being recorded in June 2009. Mobile phone subscription rates in New Zealand are higher than the OECD average and call prices are expensive by international standards. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that New Zealanders are high-end users of pre-paid mobile phones and SMS (short message service) messaging (Thompson & Cupples 2008; *New Zealand Official Yearbook* 2010). These statistics support the claim that telephone use has undoubtedly come to simultaneously represent our public spaces whilst bridging the private and public spheres (Fortunati 2002; Oksman & Turtiainen 2004; Srivastava 2005; Campbell & Park 2008; Heirman & Walrave 2008; Schneider 2009). We are communicating whilst on the move; the mobile phone diminishes geographical distance. We can talk to others regardless of where we are, or where they are for that matter. Grinter & Eldridge (2001, p. 219) propose that we can think of mobile phones as "mini-terminals for text-based communication". Many private conversations are now taking place in public places; within ear-shot of friends and family, acquaintances, colleagues and complete strangers (Walsh & White 2006; Campbell & Park 2008). However, the omnipresence of mobile phones is not viewed favourably by all, with mobile phone noise pollution, involuntary subjection to other people's conversations and texting whilst in the company of others, considered offensive and annoying by many (Ling 2002; Fortunati 2005; Höfllich & Gebhardt 2005).

## The Texting Revolution

Today's adolescents are often referred to as the 'text generation'; they are the first generation to have grown up in a society where mobile phones play an integral part of daily life. Mobile phones have become a device widely adopted by adolescents. In many ways mobile phones have become so engrained and so pervasive to daily life that they are taken for granted, they tend to be carried everywhere without a second thought and are hardly even noticed until they are not there (Oksman & Rautiainen 2003; Fortunati 2005; Stald 2008). Communication by text messaging is prodigiously popular among young people. In fact the young took to texting like fish to water and actively created the texting explosion. Initially, SMS text messaging was designed so Telecommunication Networks could advise customers of network problems, promotions and the like. The service was never originally intended to have customers communicating with each other (Thompson & Cupples 2008). The statistics in Table 2.1 show the exponential global growth in text messaging over the past decade. The 8 trillion text messages sent annually equates to approximately 260,000 text messages being sent every second (Derived from Ling 2004a; International Communications Union 2010; McVeigh 2012).

**Table 2.1:** Upward growth in text messaging use worldwide (annually)

Year	Number of text messages sent annually
2000	4 billion
2002	366 billion
2007	1.8 trillion
2010	6.1 trillion
2012	8 trillion

## The Good and the Bad for Mobile Phone-Using Youth

Adolescents value their mobile phones for the immediate communication they provide, and for their ability to cut across space and time. The mobile phone is equally valued for the opportunity of self-expression it allows in terms of social identity, social status and social desirability within the peer group (Srivastava 2005; Patchin & Hinduja 2006; Campbell & Park 2008; Sanderson 2009; Thurlow & Poff 2013). Mobile phones tend to be highly



personalised by young people. Personalised props such as screensavers, stickers, ring-tones, charms, and/or photos can be directly linked to forms of self-expression, highlighting how people manage their impressions in daily life in order to convey a personal identity to others (Goffman 1971; Green 2003; Oksman & Rautiainen 2003; Ling 2004b; Oksman & Turtiainen 2004; Srivastava 2005; Castells et al. 2007; Campbell & Park 2008; Stald 2008; Schneider 2009). In reference to the mobile phone and in the words of Castells et al. “*It is not just fashion, but identity*” (2007, p. 254 emphasis added). Cunningham and Lab (1991, p. 11) suggest that, “Clothing helps to define our identity by supplying cues and symbols that assist us in categorizing within the culture”. I suggest the mobile phone now plays a similar role.

Friends and family and their contact details are ever present symbolically in the mobile phone and thus the mobile phone also comes to represent social networks and communities, giving one a sense of belonging (Fortunati 2002; Oksman & Turtiainen 2004). Two studies conducted in Finland categorised youth aged seven and under through to 18 years of age into five different brackets according to their relationship with mobile phones. Adolescents aged between 13 and 15 (the age of my research participants) made up the fourth category, it was at this age that teenagers were found to have quite clear attitudes towards mobile telephony. These attitudes tended to vary between functional and pragmatic uses of the device and/or a more emotional and affective meaning. It was also at this age that personification of the handset peaks and the aesthetic nature of the phone was given more importance (Mante & Piris 2002; Oksman & Rautiainen 2002, cited in Castells et al. 2007).

Like most of the communication technology tools preceding it, mobile phones have also been found to have both negative and positive consequences. The mobile phone tends to be held in high regard by young people due to the psycho-social benefits attributed to it, such as social inclusion, social status, connectedness and reassurance by imparting feelings of safety (Internet Safety Group 2005; Walsh & White 2006; Ling 2004b; Lodge & Frydenberg 2007; Heirman & Walrave 2008; Kowalski, Limber & Agatston 2008; Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, Solomon 2010). However, problematic mobile phone use is also common amongst young people. For instance:

- Using the mobile phone whilst driving increases the risk of accidents;<sup>1</sup>
- theft occurs when stealing phones or money to top-up mobile phone credit;
- Sexting - the exchange of illicit images of a sexual and pornographic nature;
- disruptive environments maybe created when mobile phones are used inappropriately (Williams et al. 2011); and one of my main areas of interest
- the phone maybe used as an interface through which to bully peers (Internet Safety Group 2005; Walsh & White 2006; Hinduja & Patchin 2008).

Concerns have also been raised that mobile phone use is destroying face-to-face communication (Srivastava 2005; Vaidyanathan & Latu 2007; Thompson & Cupples 2008; Williams et al. 2011; Allen 2012) and that the text messaging discourse is wreaking havoc with the ‘true’ written language (BBC 2004, Castells et al. 2007; Humphrys 2007; Feilo 2010). Meredith Caisley believes that the texting revolution has inhibited the ability of New Zealand adolescents to interact through the written or spoken word. In her words “I would say it [texting] compresses the use of language” (Caisley, cited in Gibb 2009). Having shown that mobile phone usage is now ubiquitous in most Western societies, I shall now review an array of research that has been undertaken to date on young people and their relationships with mobile telephony.

## **The Social Benefits of the Mobile Phone**

To begin, why have young people so readily embraced mobile telephony? What are the social benefits attributed to the mobile phone that have kept them so firmly entrenched in youth culture and their everyday life? Common themes emerge across studies when looking at the positive facets of mobile phones for young people: micro-coordination, teen emancipation, parental surveillance, social networking with peers, and the benefits of texting.

One small scale study conducted by Grinter and Eldridge (2001) investigated teenagers’ text messaging practices and provided insight into why teenagers have so avidly adopted this method as their preferred form of communication. The English students who participated in

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<sup>1</sup> Even though using a cellphone whilst driving was officially outlawed four years ago “New Zealand Transport Agency statistics show cellphone use has been cited as a factor in 424 crashes on New Zealand roads since 2009. The figures included 15 fatalities and 24 crashes resulting in serious injury.” (Lewis, 2012b).

this study were required to log their incoming and outgoing text messages for one week and participate in a focus group discussion (n=10; age 15-16 yrs). Text messaging was predominantly used by this group for micro-coordination, in other words to organise meeting up with friends in person, to reschedule arrangements with peers, and to set up times to chat with friends via the landline – this meant they could avoid talking to other household members who might answer the phone. Access to the participants’ text messages via the logging system also highlighted, however, that texting was often used by this group purely to chat. This finding was consistent with one of Johnsen’s (2003) observations, that message content was relatively unimportant compared to the actual act of communication being carried out. The benefits attributed to text messaging were that it is quick and cheap, it is a way to avoid long conversations, it is a discrete form of communication and a handy means through which to flirt. Two problems associated with text messaging that emerged in Grinter and Eldridge’s (2001) study were the evolving text messaging discourse being used and nuances in abbreviations meant text messages were sometimes difficult to decipher. Secondly, participants acknowledged that text messages could easily be misinterpreted in terms of their intent.

Thompson & Cupples (2008) conducted research using the actor-network theory and a series of six focus groups with young New Zealanders (age = 11-18 yrs). Their research explored the interaction between teenagers and mobile phones, with a specific interest in text messaging. They found text messaging was frequently used to orchestrate face-to-face meetings and to initiate and establish stronger relationships. For these young people communicating via text messages was considered private, comfortable, easy and effective.

Mobile phones were also found to be inextricably linked to social networks and feelings of social connectedness. Like Stald (2008), Thompson & Cupples (2008) suggested thinking of teenagers and their mobile phones in terms of cyborgian subjectivity; in other words where wo/man meets machine in fusion fashion. This is a concept undeniably taken up by Finnish teenagers who do not call their phones “mobile phones” but affectionately use the words *känny* or *kännykkä*, which can be interpreted as meaning “an extension of the hand” (Mäenpää 2000, p. 147). Reading (2009) concludes that it is the adornment of the mobile phone that leaves it quite unique when compared to other interactive media devices “This

*wearability*, as opposed to the portability of the laptop or camera, means that the phone is increasingly being used as, and experienced as, an extension of the embodied self” (p. 82 original emphasis).

Wei and Lo (2006) also found empirical evidence that supported the notion of the mobile phone as an extension of the body, referring to it as a ‘second skin’. Here I must acknowledge Katz’s (2003) catchy book title *Machines that Become Us* where the use of the word ‘become’ is used in three entirely different ways. Firstly, it is used to express how technologies “become” symbolic of the communicator, to the communicated, given the broadened ability to transmit across space and time. Secondly, how technologies “become” corporeally amalgamated with the user’s clothing and body. Finally, how technologies are used as fashion markers and accessories, in other words, how they are “becoming” to those adorned. These themes were all made evident in my study, certainly with reference to teenagers seeking comfort in the knowledge that their mobile phones were worn on their bodies.

Given that mobile phone communication promotes feelings of social connectedness it could be assumed that lack thereof may produce the opposite effect. Smith and Williams (2004) conducted a controlled experiment with mobile phone text messaging in order to determine if ostracized individuals would experience negative effects by being socially excluded. The participants were individually brought into a lab and instructed to converse via SMS with two other participants in another room (who were actually confederates) (n=43; mean age 19.76). Participants were either assigned to the inclusion group, where the confederates interacted via text message with the participant for 8 minutes or alternatively the ostracism group, whereby the participant received no text messages. The results indicated that participants assigned to the ostracism condition were significantly more likely to experience negative feelings of self-worth and a lack of belonging. In sum, those participants who were ostracised found it an emotionally painful experience to endure.

Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) conducted 168 individual and group thematic interviews with Finnish teenagers in order to ascertain the meaning that young people attribute to their mobile phone and to understand their everyday experiences with the mobile phone. Their qualitative

data made evident some common themes deriving from the relationship young people had with their mobile phones:

- The mobile phone was regarded as a necessity by these young people and its pervasiveness in youth culture deemed natural.
- The participants considered the mobile phone as a liberating device, enabling greater freedom in their relationship with their parents.
- The mobile phone was highly valued given its ability to allow users to easily stay connected with social networks.
- Text messaging allowed a private, quiet and simple way to maintain social networks absent from parental surveillance.

Oksman and Turtiainen's (2004) participants explained how text messaging allowed them to present themselves well and to plan their message content. Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) also found that the mobile phone facilitated many romantic and flirtatious messages that may not have been delivered in face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction. Chapter Six will offer further insight into why my research participants placed so much value on communication by text message.

Vaidyanathan and Latu (2007) employed a mixed-method research approach to determine the positive and negative social impacts of mobile phones for teenagers. The 22 participants were made up of ten parents and twelve adolescents. As with other research, the most popular facet of the phone in this study was undoubtedly the ability to text message, other features such as the camera and video were utilised but not considered necessities. As we shall see, similar opinions were expressed by my research participants. Parents confirmed that mobile phones were valued for their ability to keep in touch with their children's whereabouts, hence reflecting the concept of Townsend's (2000) aforementioned 'virtual umbilical cord'. However, 80% of parents argued that the phone was detrimental to communication within the family.

Having reviewed relevant literature on mobile phone usage by young people some common themes are apparent. Many of these themes are in keeping with key research findings that emerged throughout my research, including prominent themes such as profuse texting with

peers, micro-coordination, functional and emotive benefits, perceived independence and social connectedness. Not only are these themes remarkably consistent across research studies, but they also indicate the importance of the mobile phones in the lives of young people. That importance is underpinned by the links between the mobile phone and socially desired identity. It is to this aspect we now turn.

## **The Mobile Phone and Social Identity**

Firstly, it must be noted that adolescence is a period when young people have an enhanced interest in developing an identity and a stronger sense of self (Erikson 1959; Giddens et al. 2003). The mobile phone and texting offers a platform for young people to experiment with what it means to be a teenager (self-identity) whilst simultaneously discovering how they fit in within the broader group (social identity). The following section will explore the literature on how the mobile phone promotes social identity and the positive impact this has on young people.

A mixed-method research design was used by Vykoukalová (2007) to ascertain the primary characteristics of mobile communication among young people, the symbolic value they placed on mobile phones, and how mobile phones affected young people in terms of parental control and intimate relationships. The participants were from the Czech Republic (n=78; age = 17-18 yrs). The results indicated that mobile phones were highly personalised and text messaging was the feature predominately used by this cohort, with the majority of texts being sent to friends and partners. The majority of adolescents would have their mobile with them at all times and rarely switched it off. The phone was highly valued in terms of the social cohesion it symbolised. Text messages comprising of a 'feel-good' factor were often stored and revisited for the positive emotions they invoked. The three main conclusions drawn by the authors regarding the meaning of the mobile phone were:

- (1) It has a high intimacy rate
- (2) It is strongly associated with self and identity
- (3) For most participants loss of the phone would undoubtedly generate feelings of panic and anxiety.

This third finding was also confirmed in Thompson and Cupple's (2008) research, where young people considered their phones to be irreplaceable and indicated experiencing separation anxiety if separated from their phone. Vykoukalová (2007) also found the mobile functioned as a tool that enabled parents and adolescents to stay in touch. However, adolescents displayed resistance by employing various methods that avoided parental control via the mobile. In keeping with other research results young people in relationships tended to use the mobile phone as a tool to deliver emotionally and intimately loaded text messages to their partner, narratives they would often be too embarrassed to express face to face (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008; Davis et al. 2009).

Schneider's (2009) ethnographic research materialised during his employment as a secondary education substitute, his informal data was obtained by means of participant observation. Whilst working in this highly regulated institution Schneider discovered that young people were exemplifying agency by actively and creatively using mobile phone music ringtones to express themselves and to define themselves in terms of developing their social identity. In this example, musical ringtones can be seen as sign vehicles to purposely convey meaning and certain information within the peer group, all the while affecting and shaping social interaction within the group (Goffman 1971). This is echoed in the research conducted by Haddon and Vincent (2009) who identified similar dynamics.

Cassidy's (2006) survey of English undergraduate students investigated mobile phone use from a social identity perspective (n=172; age = 18-53 yrs; mean age 24.4). His results indicated that mobile phone users were perceived as having many positive personal identity traits such as being happy, spontaneous, and confident and social identity traits such as fun, popular, successful and attractive. These results are very similar to findings from studies which have investigated the roles of social identity and image formation in smoking behaviour. Although Cassidy acknowledges that evidence is inconclusive, he highlights the possible link between an increase in mobile phone use and a decrease in adolescent smoking, suggesting a negative addiction is being replaced with a positive addiction. This finding is thought provoking in light of Stewart's (2006) work that outlines many parallels between mobile phones and cigarette smoking. For instance, both are used in times of boredom, they can both distract from nervousness, loneliness and insecurity, they can be seen as anti-social,

they can be lent and borrowed, they can be addictive. It is necessary to emphasise the older age of participants in Cassidy's (2006) study. The mobile phone was positively linked to image formation and social identity, and notably the younger participants were more likely to hold this view than the older participants

Walsh, White & Young's (2007; 2008) study of Australian youth deployed focus groups to explore the possibility of mobile phone addiction (n=32; age =16-24 yrs). The most common benefits attributed to the mobile phone were its ability to cut across space and time enabling ease of contact. Participants also claimed having a mobile phone made them feel safer should an emergency situation arise, this was especially true for female participants. In using Brown's (1997) behavioural addiction criteria some young people displayed signs of behavioural addiction. They went on to utilise these findings to found a much larger quantitative study. A survey measuring levels of mobile phone use, gratification and uses items and items assessing symptoms of addiction was completed by young Australians (n=946; age = 15-24 yrs). Text messaging was the most common form of mobile phone use, with participants on average sending and receiving approximately seven texts per day – a figure which is exceedingly low when compared to the volume of text messages my research participants were sending and receiving. Three gratifications were found to underpin young people's mobile phone use, these being self, social and security. The most popular reasons given for gratifications, in order of importance, were:

- being contacted or contactable in the case of an emergency and for arranging transport (1-security);
- contacting family/friends and organizing social activities (2-social);
- and for fun and for entertainment (3-self).

Participants reported feeling lost when without their mobile phone which is perceived as an indicator of addiction. However, the results in relation to mobile phone addiction were not conclusive; they merely highlighted the fact addiction tendencies prevail. In this study the mobile phone was not valued by participants as a fashion accessory or status symbol.

Using data from the qualitative component of the study above Walsh, White & Young's (2009) went on to explore young people's perceptions of connectedness, belonging and social



identity in relation to their mobile phone use. Their data revealed that mobile phones were predominantly valued by participants for their ability to stay connected with friends and family, which in turn led to a sense of belonging. Feelings of connectedness and belonging can both be attributed to enhancing psychological well-being through increased self-esteem. As Lee et al. argue:

People with high connectedness tend to feel very close with other people, easily identify with others, perceive others as friendly and approachable, and participate in social groups and activities...People with low connectedness tend to feel interpersonally distant from other people and from the world at large. They often see themselves as outsiders, feel misunderstood by others, have difficulty relating with the social world, and are uncomfortable in social situations. (2001, p. 310).

In the above study non-mobile phone users (out-group) were considered out-casts by the mobile phone using participants (in-group) this finding supports the social identity theory. Social identity theory states that positive preservation of self is upheld through a sense of belonging, which is ascribed to group membership of an in-group and often at the expense and detriment of the out-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Walsh et al.'s. (2009) study revealed that mobile phone use amongst youth provided the opportunity to be part of their social group and engage in normative behaviour. A strong link was found between mobile phone use and social identification.

In Taiwan, Wei & Lo (2006) used the gratification and use framework to investigate the role the mobile phone plays in maintaining the user's personal and social relations. A questionnaire was administered to college students of which 96.9% were mobile phone users (n=909; mean age 19.76). A gendered difference emerged in terms of mobile phone use and maintaining social ties. Where females were more likely to use the phone for emotional work, males were more likely to use it for pragmatic purposes. Similar findings have been confirmed in other research studies (Oksman and Turtiainen 2004; Geser 2006). The mobile phone was seen to strengthen ties with family and friends and therefore played a major role in terms of participants feeling socially connected. However, a curious pattern emerged in this study where less socially connected participants were more likely to have the phone for its symbolic value which fulfilled a commodity fetish rather than use it to be accessible and stay connected with friends/family. Personally, I believe another possible explanation for this is

that ownership of a mobile phone may give the illusionary perception of being in social cohesion with others and is thus used as an impression management tool. Despite the older cohort here, these findings are consistent with studies investigating the links between social connectedness and mobile phone use with younger participants.

Walsh, White, Cox & Young (2011) carried out an online survey with young Australians to advance their understanding of the psychological determinants that drive young people's mobile phone behaviour (n=292; age = 16-24 yrs). The researchers were specifically interested in discovering any correlation between self-identity, in-group norms, belongingness, self-esteem and mobile phone use and mobile phone involvement. Their results revealed that self-identity was positively linked to mobile phone use and involvement, whilst in-group norms effected mobile phone involvement only. There was no significant relationship between self-esteem, the need to belong, and mobile phone use or involvement. In sum, those people who consider that using the mobile phone reflects who they are tend to use and be more involved with their mobile phone. Younger participants used their mobile phone more and reported higher levels of involvement. As found in other studies, including my own, for this cohort sending and receiving texts messages was favoured over making voice calls.

When taking the above research findings into consideration, using the standpoint of symbolic interactionism becomes a feasible choice in applying a theory to the case study of young people and their relationship with their mobile phones. Symbolic interactionism has traditionally been grounded in the belief that face-to-face interaction is the most primary and fundamental form of communication between people (Oksman & Turtiainen 2004). Höfllich & Gebhart's (2005, p. 15) claim "that face-to-face communication is nearly universally of central significance and also preferred over all forms of medial communication". This is an interesting case in point as we witness the heightened popularity of faceless forms of communication, such as text messaging, among young people. As aforementioned this form of communication filters out social gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and body language (Vykoukalová 2007; Oksman & Turtiainen 2004). This raises the question, is there a discrepancy between what young people express face to face as opposed to through texting?

Is it easier to text than talk and if so why? Answers to these questions will be sought through my research.

If, as I have proposed, mobile telephones provide an illusion of social cohesion and an impression management tool, is this always a positive experience? Given recent highly publicised cases of bullying using new technology, it would appear that the experience is not always so positive. It is to this potential darker side of mobile telephone we now turn.

### **The Mobile Phone and Text Bullying**

Text bullying is a relatively new phenomenon. Text-bullies use text messages and/or photos and videos on mobile phones to communicate aggression onto their victims. Liz Carnell, the director of the UK charity organisation *Bullying Online* claimed that complaints about text bullying escalated following the Christmas of 2000 when many teenagers received mobile phones as gifts. The number of “death threats and hate messages” being distributed by text messages was so overwhelming it became necessary for the charity to dedicate a Web page solely to mobile bullying (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2002). This relatively new way of bullying is both a relational and verbal form of bullying and studies examining the prevalence and social consequences of text bullying are still limited to date (Raskauskas 2007; Marsh et al. 2010; Raskauskas 2010; Sakellariou et al. 2012). The three media typically under consideration when referring to text bullying are through mobile phone text messages, mobile phone pictures/photos or video clips and mobile phone calls. A more recent form of bullying by mobile phone is ‘happy slapping’ which entails one or more teenagers walking up to someone and assaulting them; all the while this violent act is being filmed on a mobile phone by an accomplice. Hence, happy slapping is a combination of face-to-face physical bullying and cyberbullying. The video can then be downloaded on to the internet for an unlimited audience. Happy slapping and organised fight-like clubs have received much media attention just recently in New Zealand (Dykes 2005; School Fight Club 2010; Hannan 2011; Maslin 2011).

These various new forms of bullying behaviour are commonly referred to as ‘cyberbullying’. This term refers to bullying via electronic communication devices such as mobile phones

(many of which include cameras and videos and can therefore send digital images), e-mail, instant messaging, chat-rooms, Web pages, social networking sites (such as Facebook, Myspace, Bebo), and blogs (Web logs) (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston 2008). The main technological vehicles used to cyberbully are the Internet-enabled personal computer and the mobile phone. A succinct definition for cyberbullying is “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (Patchin & Hinduja 2006, p. 152). Imperative to this definition are the key words ‘willful and repeated harm’, isolated cases of online victimisation, or cases where maliciousness is unintentional fall into the much broader category of ‘online harassment’ or ‘cyber-teasing’ (Vandebosch and Van Cleemput 2008; Burgess-Proctor, Patchin & Hindjua 2009). Cyberbullying in its entirety remains a form of bullying, a form which can essentially be placed within the indirect bullying category. Electronic technology now provides an opportunity for traditional bullying to surpass real life and enter into the virtual world of communication (Popović-Čitić et al. 2011).

From the outset I must acknowledge why, in my research, I concentrate on just one stream of cyberbullying. Cyber-bullying research needs to be specific in terms of the technological tools being used to bully others. The various means through which cyberbullying can occur are each quite unique and so the procedures and outcomes should be considered separately for each device. Fenaughty (2010) found that participants distinguished between cyberbullying and text-bullying and discussed text-bullying as the more serious of the two due to it being more difficult to manage. Personalisation of the mobile phone was also thought to make text-bullying more distressing than bullying over the Internet. Ortega et al. (2009) also found that text bullying evoked more fearful responses for victims than internet bullying. Due to the rapid speed with which new and advanced technological tools and applications are being introduced and continue to flood the market (Kowalski & Limber 2007; Smith et al. 2008; Topcu & Erdur Baker 2010), research that lumps all cyberbullying together because it shares a technological bond will be somewhat futile (Smith et al. 2008; Sanderson 2009). Moving forward, it is necessary to frame cyberbullying research in ways that recognise the different categories and mediums being used. Establishing bullying prevalence rates specific to mobile phones, social networking sites, e-mail, web pages, and instant messaging will provide more fruitful information than is currently available (David-

Ferdon & Hertz 2007; Kowalski & Limber 2007; Lodge & Frydenberg 2007; Juvonen & Gross 2008; Smith et al. 2008; Raskauskas 2010).

Such specificity is more complicated than it sounds, however, considering the rapid advancement and availability of technological tools abound. Take for instance the multiple media-related innovations now accessible on many mobile phones such as the Apple iPhone; the camera, the video, television, Internet-access. Even in the short timeframe cyberbullying has been recognised as an issue, there is now murkiness in linking specific behaviours to specific technical mediums. One now has the ability to log on to a social networking site (or any site) from their mobile phone, a relatively new feature in terms of mobile phone capabilities (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008; Haddon & Vincent 2009; Thurlow & Poff 2013). Accessing the Internet by mobile phone is not yet commonplace for young people (and may never be) due to the economic expense entailed – nevertheless ‘logging on’ becomes as mobile as the phone itself and is as simple as sending a text. Reception of the communication can be achieved just as easily and as portably.

While cyberbullying shares identifying features with traditional bullying, such as aggressive behaviour, intent, repetition and power imbalance, it continues to create its own additional stresses. These include the perpetrators’ ability to remain anonymous, the rapid and far-reaching circulation of material, the ability to harass others 24/7, the furtive nature of this type of communication, and the lack of paralinguistic cues and emotional feedback available in online communication (Raskauskas & Stolz 2007; Willard 2007; Heirman & Walrave 2008; Mesch 2009). This last point leads me to ask the following questions with regard to cyberbullying: Does the absence of the physical body and social gestures impede adolescents’ ability to take the role of the other? Does the depersonalised nature of cyberbullying, and the ease with which abuse can be dispatched, play a large part in cyberbullying participation? With face-interface-face communication via the mobile phone does the interface status of the mobile phone improvise as a type of shield one can hide behind? I sought answers to these questions within my research project.

Cyberbullying research conducted to date suggests that while the bullying may be occurring in a virtual environment the consequences in terms of health, education and delinquency are

real (Patchin & Hinduja 2006; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak & Finkelhor 2006; Beran & Li 2007; Hinduja & Patchin 2007; Raskauskas & Stolz 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf 2007; Sourander et al. 2010; Tyne et al. 2010; Litwiller & Brausch 2013). In a recent self-reporting student survey Patchin & Hinduja (2010) found that both cyberbullying victims and perpetrators suffered from lower self-esteem than their non-cyberbullied peers (n=1,963; mean age 12.6 yrs). Hay & Meldrum's (2010) recent study with high-school students found a significant positive relationship between both traditional and cyberbullying and self-harm and suicidal ideation (n=426; mean age 15 yrs). It is therefore important that cyberbullying, as a form of bullying, is not downplayed or overlooked as a social and human rights issue.

International research conducted on cyber and text bullying will now be presented; these will be followed by academic research studies that have been carried out in New Zealand. Both international and national studies on technological bullying have been examined to get a sense of where New Zealand is situated in this particular phenomenon. Given young New Zealanders are high end users of texting, it is important to establish if this behaviour contributes to higher incidents of cyber-bullying specific to this mode of technology, when compared to other countries. Given the paucity of national cyber/text bullying research, my interest has mostly been sparked by international research, in particular the negative repercussions caused by victimisation, the reporting (or lack thereof) of cyberbullying incidents, and a lack of qualitative research in this area.

### ***International Research on Cyber and Text Bullying***

The three most common forms of cyberbullying experienced by young people are being targets of 'mean' text messages, receiving intimidating or malicious pictures or statements via e-mail or text message, and being made fun of on the Internet (Campbell 2005a; Heirman & Walrave 2008; Hay & Meldrum 2010). The majority of research conducted to date has occurred under the umbrella term of 'cyber-bullying' and has been predominantly preliminary, descriptive and exploratory in nature (Raskauskas 2010). Hoff & Mitchell's (2008) research examined, for instance, the question "*What types of cyberbullying do students face and what are the perceived causes*" (p. 654). 56% of their undergraduate sample (n=351, mean age 19.9 yrs) had experienced cyberbullying prior to attending college and one medium used to do this was the mobile phone. However, specific incident rates of

mobile phone bullying were unavailable. Cyberbully victims reported a range of negative psychological effects including anger, powerlessness, sadness and fear (Hoff & Mitchell 2008). These results may be inflated due to the long time frame given for when cyberbullying could occur (elementary and secondary school) and repetition has not been mentioned as a tenet for cyberbullying behaviour. It is therefore unclear if students are reporting on a single incident or multiple incidents of bullying behaviour.

Hoff and Mitchell (2010) re-examined the above study using a secondary data analysis to determine if gendered norms and gender-appropriate behaviour influenced the responses given by participants thereby skewing the data. The results of their second study, suggest gender socialisation did affect their data with males more likely to substitute a “friend” for “self” when reporting incidents of cyberbullying, meaning that males were essentially avoiding the more feminised role of victim. Girls in comparison were more likely to admit to victimisation but less likely to confess to aggressive behaviour and thus conformed to the passive social role attributed to femininity. Whereas boys tended to ‘other’ being a victim, girls by comparison ‘othered’ being a perpetrator. Hoff and Mitchell (2010) conclude their article by stating:

Cyber-bullying is a serious issue for students, and schools are relying on emerging data to help create policies to respond appropriately. Yet studies that just report means and percentages may not reveal the complicated ways in which this social phenomenon is grounded in students’ sense of self and their insecurities about how they are seen by others. In order to “know what we know” about cyber-bullying, it is therefore important to understand how it affects boys and girls differently, looking beyond what is being openly reported. (p. 63)

Lodge & Frydenberg (2007) surveyed Australian teenagers and discovered that 21% of participants had received nasty messages via email or SMS (n=652; age 12-17 yrs). Their research also indicated that cyberbullying was more prevalent in independent schools than in state schools, 26% of students at independent schools are from high-income families compared with 8% of students at Australian government schools, with high-income families having the greatest access to technological tools. Again, in this study we see ‘catch-all data’ being collected on cyberbullying which is not specific to the technology used, an approach many researchers have employed (Beran & Li 2007; Li 2007; Dehue, Bolman & Völlink

2008; Vandebosch and Van Cleemput 2008; Dilmac 2009; Mesch 2009; Mishna et al. 2010, Twyman 2010).

One of the earliest studies to look into electronic bullying was conducted by the National Children's Home Office (2002) in Britain. Having surveyed 856 participants they found that 25% of the youth aged between 11 and 19 were victims of cyberbullying; the mobile phone was the medium most frequently used to bully others, with Internet bullying being the 2nd most prevalent method. An unpublished Australian study by Campbell and Gardner revealed that more than 25% of the students participating knew someone who had been cyberbullied, again texting was the most common means used to target victims (n=120; age = 13-14 yrs). Patchin & Hinduja (2010) conducted an online survey involving 3,141 adolescent girls to explore their cyberbullying experiences. In order to get a deeper understanding of what cyberbullying meant to this cohort, qualitative open ended questions were included alongside the quantitative questions. There was a 38.3% response rate to the statement "I have been bullied online" and just over 10 per cent of this group had been victimized by means of mobile phone text message. It is noteworthy that this response may be deflated due to the wording used in this question; many young people may not associate mobile phone activity with 'being online'. The results also implied that many of the incidents reported as "cyberbullying" were in fact more typical of "online harassment" behaviour due to the absence of repetition. Another online survey conducted by Hinduja & Patchin (2008) revealed that approximately 4.4% of the adolescent participants reported online victimisation and approximately 1.7% reported online offending via mobile phone text messages (n=1,378; mean age 14.8 years). However, I believe bullying and victimisation statistics may under represent what is actually happening in the real world, a point I will return to in Chapter Six.

Raskauskas & Stolz's (2007) U.S. participants completed questionnaires in relation to their involvement in electronic and traditional bullying (n=84; age 13-18 yrs; mean age = 15.4). Text messaging was unquestionably the most common form of electronic victimization (32.1%), followed by Internet or website (15.5%), and picture phone (9.5%). The most common forms of electronic bullying were text messaging (21.4%) followed by the Internet at 13.1%. The first hypothesis presented (a) that traditional bully victimisation would predict



victimisation in electronic bullying was supported whereas hypothesis (b) that victims of traditional bullying would be perpetrators of electronic bullying was not supported.

In a recent study, Finnish adolescents completed a questionnaire relating to cyberbullying (n=2,215; age = 13-16 yrs). The results indicated that 4.8% were cybervictims only, 7.4% were cyberbullies only, and 5.4% had been both cybervictims and cyberbullies. The most popular locations of cyberbullying were instant messaging services (18%) and discussion groups (13.8%), followed by text messaging on mobile phones (8.2%) (Sourander et al. 2010). Agatston, Kowalski & Limber (2007) conducted focus groups to ascertain the impact of cyberbullying for their young cohort (n=148; age = 12-17 yrs). The results indicated that most cyberbullying incidents occurred outside of school with the exception of bullying by mobile phone. The majority of female participants viewed cyberbullying as a problem. However, they were unlikely to report incidents to school personnel especially as much occurred via mobile phones and they were contravening the school's ban on mobile phones by using their phones during school time. This fits with the following claim made by Raskauskas & Prochnow (2007. p. 100).

Banning mobile phones at school may make students less likely to report bullying. The Internet Safety Group (2005) found that 29% of adolescents used their mobile phone at least once during the school day when they were not allowed to. This study found that many students did not report the bullying because they did not want to get into trouble for having their mobile phones at school.

Rosenberg (2009) also suggests that banning mobile phones from the school maybe counterproductive to the learning environment;

We need to actively teach students right from wrong – regardless of technology, but perhaps more carefully because of the power of technology. Will we prevent all problems? No. But blaming the technology is not the answer. If a terribly mean-spirited, student-composed note were intercepted by a savvy teacher, you wouldn't ban the pen, would you? (p. 95).

Two studies conducted by Smith et al. (2008) with young people differentiated between the seven mediums used to cyberbullying; those being bullying through text messaging; pictures/photos or video clips; phone calls; email; chat rooms; instant messaging; and websites. The first study found bullying by mobile phone calls and text messaging to be the most common forms experienced (n=92; age = 11-16 yrs). With 6.6% reporting they had been bullied often in the past couple of months, 15.6% reported being cyberbullied once or twice,

and 77.8% never. In study two, phone-call bullying and instant messaging tied for the most frequent types of bullying, with text message bullying claiming third place (n=533; age = 11-16 yrs). When students were asked how long ago they had been cyberbullied, 5.3% reported in the last week or month, 5.1% replied within the school term, 3.7% within the school year, 3.1% over a year ago, and 82.7% never. Cyberbullying was found to occur less than traditional bullying but was still appreciable.

In summary the international research indicates that it is common for approximately one in five participants to have experienced some form of cyberbullying. Most often this occurs via mobile phone. Text-bullying that occurs at school tends to go unreported as students are breaching school rules by using their phones. Having presented existing international research available on cyber and text bullying I will now turn to the research that has been conducted in New Zealand to ascertain if the International picture applies to New Zealand cyberbullying.

### ***New Zealand Research on Cyber and Text Bullying***

As indicated, global trends suggest that approximately 20% of young people fall prey to cyberbullying. Although limited research has been conducted in New Zealand, the studies that have been completed would suggest that New Zealand's rate of cyberbullying is slightly higher, with around 25% of adolescents experiencing victimisation. Again the mobile phone features as the most popular technological tool used to engage in this type of bullying. New Zealand has a high rate of texting when compared to other countries, it has become the default way of communicating for young people. Partly, this may be due to the economic differences between sending a text and making a voice-call and may be a driving force for the higher rates of text-bullying in this country.

In New Zealand the Internet Safety Group (2005) surveyed students about their mobile phone use, and found that 73% of adolescents owned mobile phones, 23% had received an offensive or threatening text, and 14% had sent offensive or threatening texts to others (n=1,528; age = 12-19 yrs). The main reason given for using the mobile phone was to talk and text with friends (56%), followed by safety (23%). In one of the first studies to examine the relationship between young people and text bullying Raskauskas (2007) recruited children

from 22 classrooms at three intermediate schools in New Zealand (n=565; age = 10-13 yrs). The participants filled out self-report questionnaires relating to their experiences of text bullying and traditional bullying within the past 12 months. The results indicated that 15% of the sample group had fallen prey to text bullying, with girls being nearly twice more likely to receive unwanted texts than boys. In comparison 64% of participants had experienced traditional bullying. A notable finding was that 95% of the text-bullying victims were also victims of traditional bullying suggesting that only a very small group are behaving exclusively as text-bullying victims. The likelihood of enduring text-bullying is strongly correlated with enduring traditional bullying. This double-whammy could be particularly harmful psychologically for those who are persecuted.

Raskauskas & Prochnow's (2007) survey adds to this picture. This research examined mobile phone use and participants' experiences of traditional and text bullying (n=1,153; age = 11-18 yrs). Of the study population 41% of participants reported having been text bullied, with 53% of this group experiencing text-bullying as a one-off situation and 14% experiencing text bullying on multiple occasions. The majority of text-victims knew who the perpetrator was and many also reported falling prey to traditional bullying. Students who had been text-bullied or traditionally bullied were more likely to report experiencing depressive symptoms. This condition was exacerbated for students subjected to both forms of bullying.

Palmer & Raskauskas (2010) cite personal communication with John Fenaughty about a 2008 Convergence Generation Research Project conducted by Fenaughty and administered in New Zealand by Netsafe. In this communication, Fenaughty indicated his preliminary findings that 10% of student participants reported being bullied on the Internet and 20% had experienced text bullying. Further details emerge in Fenaughty's (2010) thesis, which focused on contemporary cyberspace and the role it plays in the lives of 12 to 19 year olds in Aotearoa/New Zealand. He focused particularly on how they experience and manage the challenges presented to them within computer-mediated communication (CMC). Data was collected in two phases, and methods employed were qualitative and quantitative respectively. In phase-one of his research Fenaughty identified that his participants distinguished text bullying from cyberbullying and for this reason he addressed cyberbullying via mobile phones and the Internet separately when collecting his quantitative phase-two

data. The participants who took part in the second phase of this study were recruited from five high schools around NZ and represented a diverse range communities (n=1,673; age = 12-19 yrs). Nearly all participants (93.1%) had used a mobile phone within the year and 24.5% of participants reported being cyberbullied by mobile phone in the past year. Females were more likely than males to report mobile bullying with older females being even more likely than younger females to report this behaviour. Of those young people who had been bullied by mobile phone 53.7% of them said at least one instance had produced distress.

Another text-bullying study recently conducted takes a cross-cultural perspective. Sanderson (2009) interviewed girls from New Zealand and Canada to determine which personality traits were related to text bullying (n=209; age = 13-14 yrs). Participants were required to respond to sample text messages that fell under two conditions, hostile and less hostile. Under both conditions the New Zealand and Canadian participants both indicated they would be very unhappy were they to receive a text like the sample texts that were provided. However, nearly 50% of those participants said they would send a text, similar to the sample texts, to a friend. Even more staggering approximately 70% felt justified in sending a nasty text to a friend had that friend been treating them badly or made them angry. Such a retaliation mentality is striking in light of Mead's work, because it seems that one is taking the role of the other but in a negative capacity. This is why I question the full maturation of a self during the adolescent years, and instead consider the self to be work in progress during these years, as it seems, on moral and ethical grounds, the common attitudes of the community are still yet to be wholly internalised. When it comes to bullying are young people consciously dismissing empathic and sympathetic tendencies and instead taking the role of the other by considering how they can really hurt the feelings of others? Sanderson's results indicated that a lack of impulse control was one of the main contributing factors linked to text-bullying. Of interest no rural schools were represented in the top 10% of most hostile students, which begs the question 'Does growing up in a rural community reduce the chances of bullying?' The girls in this study also indicated that communicating by text messages was central to their social networking.

An online survey completed by students in the Otago region of New Zealand was conducted by Marsh et al. (2010) to investigate the relationship between text bullying and other forms of

bullying (n=1,169; age 16-17 yrs). During the school year 47% of students reported having been bullied “sometimes or often” and for 11% of this group this was by means of having unwanted texts sent to them. In comparison 37% of students reported having bullied others “sometimes or often” and 7% of this group sent unwanted texts to others. The results revealed that victims of text bullying were also significantly likely to be the victims of more traditional forms of bullying. A strong correlation was found between victims of text bullying and feeling unsafe at school which often led to students missing school.

A recent exploratory self-reporting survey study in New Zealand was conducted by Raskauskas (2010) to investigate the nature and prevalence of text-bullying among adolescents. The results indicated that 43% of the 1,738 participants reported being text-bullied, of whom 23% identified as having been text bullied three or more times. Gender did not feature as a significant demographic when linked to text-victimisation. Text-bullying was found to be more prevalent in the secondary grades than intermediate grades. Curiously, trends suggest that traditional bullying decreases with age (Olweus 1993a) and cyberbullying increases with age (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004; Cross et al. 2009; Mesch 2009). Does the covert nature of cyberbullying actually lead to an increase in this sort of behaviour as adolescents develop a more comprehensive appreciation of what constitutes moral behaviour? Do they consciously and intentionally turn to this more subtle form of bullying because it is not as easily detected or identified by direct observations? An overlap between text-bullying victims and traditional bullying victims was also discovered by Raskauskas (2010). Text-bullying victimisation, like traditional victimisation, was also found to be strongly linked to depressive symptoms such as anxiety, low self-esteem and depression.

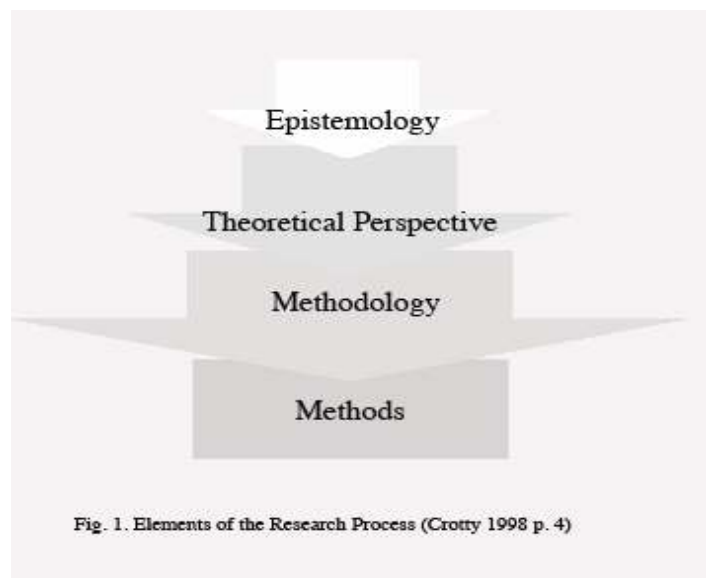
The preceding national research substantiates that New Zealand, when compared to other nations, has a slightly higher rate of text bullying amongst young people. It becomes apparent from this data that those who experience text-bullying are highly likely to also suffer traditional bullying. Repercussions of being bullied were strongly aligned with various symptoms of psychological ill health and school avoidance, both elements that are potentially damaging to an individual’s life chances.

Over the course of this chapter I have reviewed the current literature on young people and their mobile phone use. To achieve a more holistic understanding of how the mobile phone is situated in young peoples' lives, research literature has been examined under the three broad themes underpinning this research project, i.e. sociality, self and identity, and mobile phone mis/use. The focus of the following chapter is the social research process employed to conduct this study.

# Chapter 3 - The Research Process

Within this chapter the social research process I undertook in this project, to determine the relationship young people have with their mobile phones, will be illustrated. Drawing on Crotty's (1998) 'scaffold learning' framework for the social research process, I shall provide detailed justification for the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods chosen for this particular study as depicted in Figure 1 below.

The framework proposed by Crotty is exceptionally useful and accessible for budding researchers. To those about to embark upon social research Crotty offers insight to how these four elements (epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods) complement each other and how this formula makes for sound and convincing research. Crotty (1998, p. 1) acknowledges that: "It [the framework] is to be seen as in no way a definitive construction of the social research process but merely a framework for the guidance of those wishing to explore the world of research". He goes on to explain that "Its [the scaffold framework] aim is to provide researchers with a sense of stability and direction as they go on to do their own building [of a research proposal]; that is, as they move towards understanding and expounding the research process after their own fashion in forms that suit their particular research purposes" (Crotty 1998, p. 2).



Based on this four-step process, I shall then highlight the relationship between the four elements that Crotty indicates are vital to the research process and provide insight into how they inform one another within the scope of my study. Having provided this framework for my project, I shall discuss the methods used, the ethical processes and considerations undertaken, the participants and settings chosen, and the analysis techniques employed. Finally this chapter will conclude with my discussion of the limitations and strengths identified in my project.

### **Epistemology – 1a**

An epistemology is a philosophical theory of knowledge that gives explanation and comprehension to *how we know what we know* (Crotty 1998). “Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard 1994, p. 10). Given the range of epistemological approaches available, and the fact that this research has been founded on the opinions and views of young students, the study has been situated within a constructionist paradigm. Constructionism gives great emphasis to participants’ viewpoints and opinions, the setting where participants expressed those views, and to their personal histories and lived experiences (Creswell 2005). According to Guba and Lincoln (1981) a constructionist paradigm abandons objectivity, those working within the constructionist realm tend to connect directly with their participants – not discovering findings from them but rather negotiating with them to create findings.

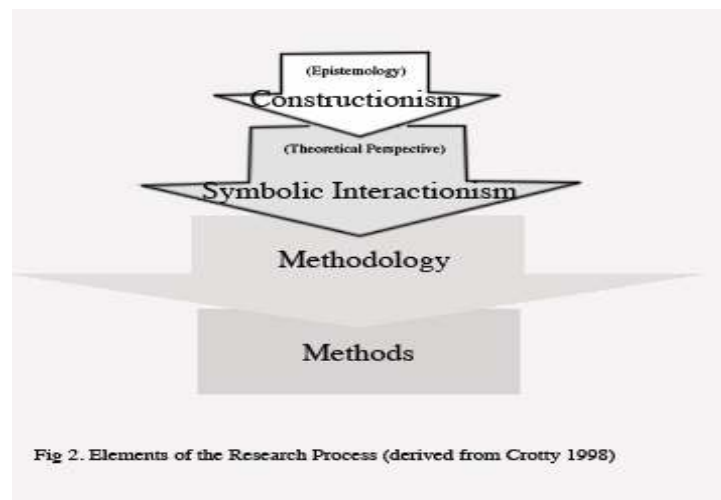
Constructionism takes the epistemological stance that meaning and knowledge are socially constructed rather than discovered. Fundamental to this viewpoint is the fact that meaningful reality is created, sustained and maintained through the interaction of human beings and the social world they engage with. For constructionists, a meaningful world can only emerge through the power of consciousness; it is therefore considered that it is the human mind that gives our world/s meaning (Crotty 1998). A premise echoed in the work of Mead (1934).

We as human beings are the active creators of our own meaningful reality; this is an ongoing and fluid process that materialises through social interaction. It is a perpetual process where



culture and other different demographic traits can constantly infer different meanings from the same reality. As Crotty suggests “What constructionism drives home unambiguously is that there is *no* true or valid interpretation” (1998, p. 47, original emphasis). We are all born unsocialised into an *a priori* culture which already has meaning ascribed to it and culture is the pivotal driving force that governs our behaviour and categorises our lived experiences. It is purely through interaction with our significant others, who pass on what Geertz refers to as a “system of significant symbols” (1973, p. 49), that we incur meaning and therefore the ability to be social beings. Constructionist research is therefore open to various interpretations of meaning and experiences. Open-mindedness, from researchers, is key when it comes to ascribing different meanings to different objects. It is this flexible and unbiased approach that allows for new and unique themes to emerge in constructionist research, offering even more depth and richness to meaning (Crotty 1998). Having described the first element (epistemology = constructionism) in Figure 2 below I shall now shift my focus to the second element (theoretical perspective = symbolic interactionism) of the model.

### Theoretical Perspective – 1b

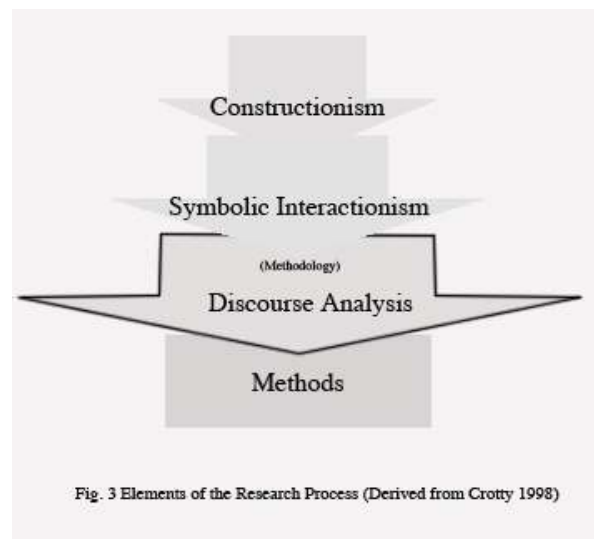


The underpinning theoretical basis this research falls under is symbolic interactionism, a theory that focuses on the meaning ascribed through social interaction, and how language, thoughts and behaviours act as symbols of communication. As I have outlined in chapter one, symbolic interactionism is the micro-scale theoretical perspective heavily influenced by pragmatism and which primarily emerged through the work on the concept of ‘self’ carried

out by George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Symbolic interactionists are concerned with how ideas transpire through social interaction. Symbolic interactionism is firmly grounded in the premise that one must be able to take the place of the other individual and see things from their perspective. Symbolic interactionists are interested in how people construct their social worlds and hence this theoretical perspective is strongly related epistemologically to the constructionist paradigm (McIntyre 2006).

Mead believed “We are continually reconstructing the world from our own standpoint” (1936, p. 417). The following example highlights the fluidity of symbolic interactionism, it illustrates the state of flux brought out by ‘things’ having different meanings for different strands of people. The mobile phone is likely to mean different things to different people – the social meaning applied to the mobile phone will vary considerably for a 14, 34, 54 and 74 year old as will mobile usage (Ito & Okabe 2005; Kim et al. 2007; Lenhart et al. 2010). Having described the second element (theoretical perspective = symbolic interactionism) in Figure 2 I shall now shift my focus to the third element (methodology = discourse analysis) of the model as shown in Figure 3 below.

### Methodology – 1c



The methodology employed for the purposes of this research project was discourse analysis. A methodology that aims to gain an in-depth understanding and awareness of texts and the

meanings attributed to them by the users. This methodology offers a perspective on the very nature of language and how it allows for the understanding of our social world (Wood & Kroger 2000). This is comparable to symbolic interactionism and the constructionist paradigm, which are both firmly grounded in the view that society is actively and creatively constructed by means of social human engagement. As Wilkinson concludes, “People build their ideas, understandings and world views in *interaction* with others, in a *social context*” (Wilkinson 1998, p. 338, original emphasis). In discourse analysis it is essential for researchers to reflect on what the text is doing and what it is achieving (Wood & Kroger 2000). Paltridge (2006) provides a clear and concise summary of this methodology below:

*Discourse analysis* focuses on knowledge about language beyond the word, clause, phrase and sentence that is needed for successful communication. It looks at patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Discourse analysis also considers the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse. Discourse analysis examines both spoken and written texts (Paltridge 2006, p. 2).

Consider, for example, the growth of the relatively new discourse that has been created by young people via the Short Message System (SMS) and is otherwise known as ‘texting’. This new discourse derived from the simple fact that text messages were limited to only 160 characters and as Ling explains “we have pared down our messages into a cramped telegraphic style that may be more linguistically akin to speech than to writing” (Ling 2004a, pp. 147-148). This acronym and emoticon loaded discourse is a perfect example of ‘language in action’ that can be applied to every point made by Paltridge (2006) above. This new discourse is being shaped and created by a young population and is very much distinct to this historical epoch. “I’ll text you later” is a phrase commonly overheard today that would have been unheard of twenty years ago. Contemporary youth are creating a new way to express themselves, an acronym loaded cryptic code that can be difficult for adults to decipher. So what makes this texting discourse so popular with young people? Three of the major attractions of texting for young people are that it is a relatively cheap (and easy to budget for), convenient, and an unobtrusive way to communicate whilst simultaneously it can

be considered a cornerstone for young people when it comes to maintaining social networks (Ling 2004a).

## **Research Design – 2a**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship young people have with their mobile phone. This study was conducted over thirty-two months (March 2010 to December 2012) and employed two phases of qualitative data collection. The key questions underpinning this research are:

- 1) How is the mobile phone embedded in adolescents' social and cultural worlds?
- 2) What are the social consequences of mobile phone use and misuse for adolescents?
- 3) Is text bullying occurring between young people? If so is it a real cause for concern for adolescents?

The research was conducted using focus groups and one-on-one unstructured individual interviews. The two-phase data collection design enabled the collection of 'rich' data in which participants expanded and explained their experiences in relation to their mobile phone use. Eder and Fingerson (2003, p. 44) suggest "Using both single and group interviews in conjunction can be an effective method for uncovering social phenomena among young people". In this research project the initial utilisation of focus groups was imperative in the generation of material that could then be followed up in one-on-one interviews (Wilkinson 1998).

## **Participants & Setting - 2b**

This study included 18 secondary school students (7 female, 11 male) aged between 14 and 15 years. The participants were Year 10 students enrolled in 2 public, co-educational, high schools from within the Otago region. Students self-reported on gender, age and ethnicity. The ethnic distribution of the participants included New Zealand European (83%) and Maori (17%). In the present study 100% of the Year 10 students owned at least one mobile phone. Focus groups were conducted at one high school with all participants enrolled at that high school. Two mixed gender focus groups were conducted, with the first focus group consisting of eleven participants (four girls and seven boys) and the second was made up of five participants (three girls and two boys). Seven students (three girls and four boys) elected

to take part in the second phase of this research, five of whom had also participated in phase one of this research (three girls and two boys). One student requested an email interview and the remaining six chose to be interviewed face to face and during school time. At each school data collection was conducted during Term 4 (11 October 2010 to 14 December 2010).

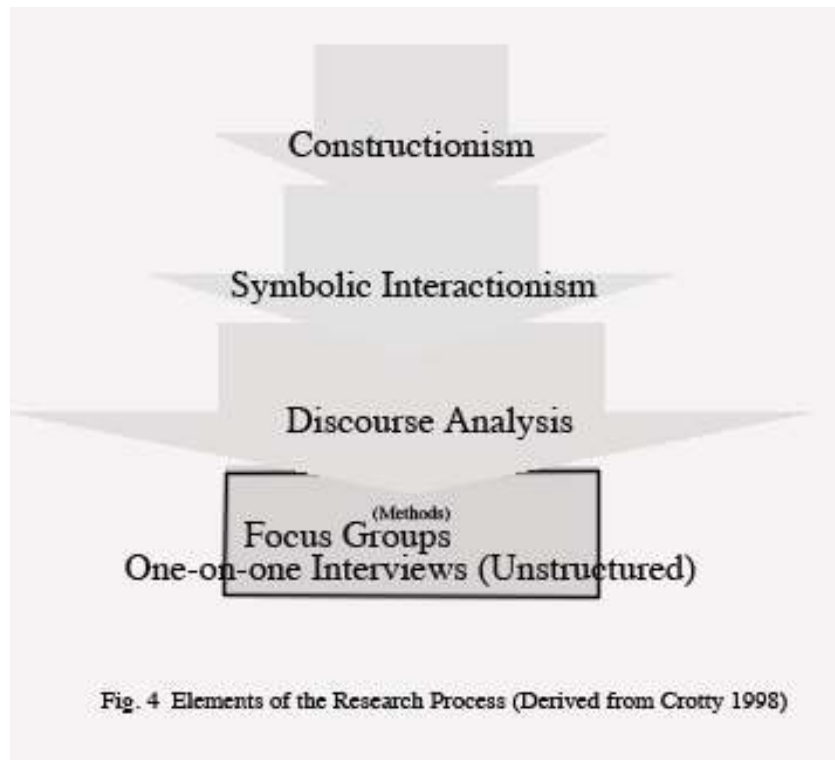
Focus groups were held within school hours and on the school premises. The focus groups were conducted in a meeting room that had previously been used as the Board Room; this was a relatively neutral and non-threatening location and a place not prone to interruptions or disturbances. The room was already set up with an executive like boardroom table and chairs and so the students could sit around the table that had the audio recorder placed in the middle.

When conducting focus groups with young people homogeneity is recommended with respect to gender (Greenbaum 1993; Hoppe et al. 1995). Mixed gender groups may impede group efficiency as young children often dislike members of the opposite sex whereas older children and teenagers are often very interested in the opposite sex (Greenbaum 1993). With this in mind the focus groups in the current study were purposely intended to be separated by gender. However, due to school timetable demands and the school principal organising focus groups during class times this prerequisite was unable to be fulfilled. Age is another demographic that needs to be considered as part of group composition. A large age range may hinder group discussion; with younger children feeling intimidated by older children (Hoppe et al. 1995). All participants in the current study were from the same year at school and therefore age was a homogenous demographic.

All except one of the one-on-one unstructured interviews were held within school hours and on the school premises. The school personnel had arranged for the majority of the interviews to be held in the school counsellor's office and the remaining were conducted in the office of the deputy school principal who was absent on the day of interviews. The school counsellor's office was quite large and provided a comfortable, informal and easy space in which to talk, although students may have frequented this space previously with certain issues, they all seemed quite at ease in this environment. The deputy school principal's office was considerably more formal and staid; it is also possible that students may have had

negative connotations and/or experiences associated with this space. However, this did not seem to impede on the quality of the interview data collected.

## Methods - 2c



### ***Phase One - Focus Groups***

Krueger (1994, p. 6) defines focus groups as “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment: where participants share and respond to comments, ideas and perceptions.” In this project focus groups provided an ideal situation in which to obtain a collective viewpoint of the issues pertaining to young people’s mobile phone use and thus to acknowledge the participants as highly informed experts in this particular realm of mobile telephony (Alderson & Morrow 2004). The ontological stance taken here considers young people to be active and accomplished agents in shaping the social world in which they are immersed (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher 2009). The focus groups provided an opportunity for the participating young people to give voice to their world and enabled the research to be written up with their interpretations and thoughts in mind (Wilkinson 1998; Heary & Hennessy 2002).

Using focus groups allowed the participants to express the things that they thought were significant about their mobile phone use. Establishing salient issues surrounding this topic was incredibly useful in identifying areas of concern and interest (Pickard 2007). Group discussions have a high acceptability among young people, as they represent a familiar part of their daily lives both in social and educational settings. Just like in real life, participants are influencing and being influenced by others, they are responding to and fleshing out the viewpoints of others (Krueger 1994; Hoppe et al. 1995; Litosseliti 2003). The fact this type of interviewing represents a more natural environment, than some other research methods, is paramount in reducing the power differentials between the researcher and the young participants (Barbour & Kitzinger 1999). Interaction within focus groups is also likely to evoke authentic narratives, as participants must justify their statements to their peers, this is especially true if the participants are known to each other and communicate on a regular basis, as was the case in the current research project (Eder & Fingerson 2003; Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005; Flick 2009). One may argue, of course, that focus group participants might purposely tailor their comments to be in keeping with what they think their peers think and would approve of.

Focus groups have been shown to be appropriate when there is a gap in age or experiences between the researcher and their audience, as was the situation in this research project (Litosseliti 2003). Using focus groups as the pre-cursor to individual interviews was paramount for myself (as the researcher) to familiarise myself with the discourse being used by this young research population (Hoppe et al. 1995). The focus groups also placed the participants in a position of power as they outnumbered me (as the researcher); they were conducted within their peer groups and in a setting familiar to them (Procter & Wartho 2007). The focus groups were purposely chosen as the first phase of data collection in order to have participants familiarise themselves with the topic, the researcher, and the interview process. This method was also chosen in the hope the focus groups would allow some sort of rapport to be established between myself (as the researcher) and the young participants, putting them more at ease and confident when it came to the second phase of this research with the one-on-one unstructured interviews (Eder & Fingerson 2003).

In the planning stages of this research project careful consideration was given to how much information participants would be given in relation to the nature of this project (Litosseliti 2003). Although a specific aim of this research was to investigate if cyberbullying via mobile phone was a cause of concern for adolescents, to avoid bias and risk of manipulation in the data this was not stated in the information sheets or taken up directly within the focus group interview questions – which were kept deliberately open-ended. The motive behind this decision was that if bullying via the mobile phone was a social phenomenon directly affecting these young people then this theme would emerge throughout the group discussions by their own admission. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of youth and their mobile phone use, for example the positive psychosocial attributions of the mobile phone and, apart from text-bullying, other disadvantages associated with the mobile phone. During discussions participants were also asked if they knew of anyone else who had experienced problems when communicating with other people via mobile phones<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Phase Two - One-on-one Interviews***

Unstructured interviews take a somewhat informal approach to interviewing, with questions not necessarily limited and set. It is an interviewing technique that allows questions to be changed and adapted ad-hoc. The researcher guides respondents into particular areas of interest, yet the respondent is given freedom of speech to decide where that road leads (Cohen & Crabtree 2006, Fielding & Thomas 2008). Unstructured interviews permit the interviewee to be treated as the knower, allowing for personal feelings, narratives, and experiences to be acknowledged, and therefore giving emotive depth and breadth to the research (Opie 1992; Davidson & Tolich 2003; Pickard 2007). These one-on-one unstructured interviews provided an opportunity for the young people who did not participate fully in the group discussions to have a voice. They were also imperative in order to allow participants to disclose more personal or sensitive information, information that they may have felt uncomfortable divulging in a group situation, especially a group well known to each other (Litosseliti 2003; Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005). For example if issues related to

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<sup>2</sup> The motive behind this question (which was asked in both phases of the research) was inspired by Hoff & Mitchell (2010) who identified data discrepancies in their own research when it came to young people reporting incidents of cyberbullying. They found a pervasive pattern where many cyber-victims, especially males, tended to ‘other’ the problem. So instead of disclosing that they had been subjected to cyberbullying they reported these incidents as having happened to “friends” and hence distanced themselves from the experience.



stigmatized areas of mobile phone use, such as text bullying, happy-slapping or sexting were to emerge they would be more likely to do so in individual interviews. The one-on-one unstructured interviews also allowed the researcher to investigate individual's attitudes, opinions and experiences and to use this information to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the material generated in the focus groups. A weakness acknowledged with focus groups is that group dynamics and peer power can lead to members of the group conforming to the views of those that hold the most social status (Hennessy & Heary 2005). The inclusion of individual interviews, as a second phase of data collection, can work towards alleviating this problem by providing a cross-check in terms of the consistency of opinions and beliefs generated in both group and individual discussions (Michell 1999; Eder & Fingerson 2003).

### **Discourse Analysis – 2d**

In both focus groups and one-on-one unstructured interviews I deployed discourse analysis as my primary form of data analysis. In both cases I chose thematic coding through which key themes were established. Key findings were initially marked up in the data and then assigned to a broad research theme, the final stage of coding involved specifying to which research question the theme related. The rationale behind using discourse analysis as a methodology is in part due to the fact it empowers young participants by giving them a voice and an opportunity to be heard. This is most important in terms of this research project, as today's adolescents are the first generation to experience everyday life in which the mobile phone plays such an integral part. For most young people in New Zealand the mobile phone has become a ubiquitous, invaluable object and an integral part of their daily lives (Raskauskas 2010). It is therefore essential to listen to what they have to say, as they are the experts when it comes to understanding the world of mobile telephony. Using this methodology offers the opportunity for young people to maintain their idiosyncratic language and terminology and thus preserves their personal voices (Eder & Fingerson 2003). This is especially true when considering the narrative generated through interaction in the focus groups.

The transcripts produced in this research project have been treated as 'talk' which enables the interaction to be analysed with the end result of keeping the conversations in context. Much

of the group narrative has been presented by means of detailed data excerpts, a technique that provides interactive data by highlighting group interaction and shared meaning within the group (Wilkinson 1998). This method of reporting findings also compliments the discourse analysis methodology employed in this research project. A methodology that strives to explore how “language-in-use” influences social interaction and group cohesion (Gee 1999). Discourse analysis in the spirit of symbolic interactionism strives to understand the shared meanings derived by texts to their users.

### **Ethics – 3a**

Due to the fact that this project would recruit members of a “vulnerable population”, a Category A approval was sought from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of this research project. This is in accordance with the institutions’ Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. Vulnerable populations are those individuals or groups who, due to age, poor health (mental or physical), minority status, incarceration or any other disempowered position in society may be in danger of exploitation. Children and young people are among those considered a vulnerable population (University of Otago n.d.). Data on ethnic identity was collected in this study and consultation was undertaken with Maori prior to data collection in accordance with the Otago University’s Policy for Research Consultation with Maori. As per Ngāi Tahu Research Consultation Committee’s request, a copy of this thesis will be provided to relevant National Māori Education organisations and Toitu te Iwi at Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. Having been provided with age appropriate information sheets (Appendices L, M and N), the School Board of Trustees’, the School Principals’, the participants legal guardians’, and the participants’ were required to sign an informed consent form in which their rights were clearly outlined (Appendices G, H, J and K). In recognition of a need-to-know basis the Year 10 teachers, the Year 10 Dean and the school counsellors were provided with information sheets only (Appendix I). Only students with signed informed consent from a legal guardian were able to participate in this research. It was made very clear to students that they did not have to participate in this research even if parental permission was granted. Students were repeatedly advised that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage and that withdrawal from the project would not disadvantage them in any way.

Each focus group session commenced with a discussion about what was expected of participants – including respect for each person’s opinion, not talking over the top of each other, the fact there were no right or wrong answers, they could choose not to answer a question if they so wished, and most importantly the issue of confidentiality was addressed. It was stressed to students that whatever was discussed within the group remained within the group, however, students needed to be made aware that disclosure may occur and therefore confidentiality could not be absolute (Barbour & Kitzinger 1999; Hennessy & Heary 2005).

Student participants were reminded that the material generated in the group and individual interviews would be used to write up a thesis and that the results may also be written up in academic journals and/or discussed at academic conferences. They were also reminded that data collected would be securely stored and only the researcher and her supervisor would have access to this. Under no circumstances would the school or student participants be named or identifiable in the transcripts. In order to conceal the identity of the research participants pseudonyms have been allocated to each participant. Other than the researcher – any name mentioned in this project is fictitious. All female names have derived from a list of precious gemstones and all male names have been sourced from the periodic table of chemical elements. A caveat was written into the information sheets and consent forms advising students that text-bullying, if threatening grievous bodily harm or death, is illegal in New Zealand. It was also made known that in the event of disclosure of illegal activity the stated disclosure protocol of the school concerned would be followed.

### **Procedure – 3b**

Initially five School Principals from public, co-educational, high schools within the Otago region were sent a detailed letter outlining the nature and methodology of the proposed research and asked to consider my request to recruit Year 10 students from their school for this project. Of these five schools three schools agreed to participate. I then arranged to meet with each of the School Principals in person to discuss the project in more detail and consider the most appropriate way moving forward.

The three<sup>3</sup> participating schools were from within the Otago region, with one school being rural and the other two urban. All students in Year 10, attending the schools, were invited to participate in either one phase or both phases of this research project. A one-page summary (Appendix A) of the research was distributed to all Year 10 students advising them to contact the researcher directly (via the secure e-mail address provided) if they wished to participate in this study. It was clearly stated that, given parental approval, participants would be included on a first-in, first-served basis, until both gender quotas for the focus groups were met. Two weeks prior to the day of data collection students (and their parents) who had shown an interest in the project were provided with a copy of the information sheet and consent form (Appendices J, K, M & N) to read and sign if they (and their child) decided to participate.

Times and dates were scheduled for the focus groups upon receipt of information registering student interest. Each focus group lasted a maximum of 60 minutes with refreshments provided. Before the commencement of the focus groups permission was obtained from the participants to audio-tape the sessions. The participants were made fully aware that this was for the purpose of capturing comments accurately and then transcribing the data. A second facilitator was present to help set up the room, record the data by means of note-taking, and ensure the recording equipment was fully operational. Field notes were jotted down during the course of the group discussions so as to account for visual cues, such as body language and facial expressions, unable to be captured on an audio-tape. Focus group discussions were transcribed and coded by the researcher. Firstly, key and unique findings were marked up in the data, secondly, these key themes were clustered into broad themes and finally, the themes were applied to one of three appropriate research questions (refer Table 3.1).

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<sup>3</sup> All Year 10 students from the three participating schools were invited to take part in this research. However, one school registered no student interest and so the participants were from the two remaining schools.

**Table 3.1:** Discourse analysis coding criteria

<b>Data</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
Make & model mobile	Pragmatic/functional	Question 1
Texting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micro-cordination</li> <li>• Safety &amp; security</li> <li>• Boredom</li> <li>• Saving messages</li> </ul>	
Texting versus talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Impression Management</li> <li>• Terminating relationship</li> </ul>	
Texting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Networking</li> <li>• Ambiguous content</li> <li>• In full versus txt language</li> <li>• At school</li> <li>• Etiquette</li> </ul>	Question 2
Personification of handsets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teen identity</li> </ul>	
Parental texting flaws		
Texting versus talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romantic Interests</li> </ul>	
Gifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social networking</li> </ul>	Question 1 & 2
Texting – Quantity sent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status symbol</li> </ul>	
Gossip / Rumours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relational Bullying</li> </ul>	Question 3
Organised fights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying</li> </ul>	
Text bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Othering</li> <li>• Physical repercussions</li> <li>• Reporting</li> <li>• Response to...</li> </ul>	

All focus group participants were given a form to fill out asking them if they were interested in taking part in phase two of this research and, if so, offered the choice to have the one-on-one unstructured interviews take place face-to-face, over the telephone, or via email. Open-ended questions were used to facilitate focus group discussions, this approach allowed issues to materialise that were salient to the young participants. Questions were asked about what students liked best and least about their mobile phones, and if they or anybody they knew of had experienced problems with other people when communicating via their mobile phone (Appendix C). This line of questioning was administered to establish if text-bullying was a phenomenon familiar to the participants and understand if/how the mobile phone enhanced social wellbeing. Prompting for further discussion was also encouraged on several occasions throughout the focus groups.

One-on-one interviews were conducted three weeks following the focus group sessions. Having employed the *general interview guide approach* a two-page interview guide (Appendix E) consisting of open-ended questions, was drafted prior to one-on-one interviewing. The draft acted as a basic checklist to ensure all relevant areas of interest to this topic were addressed (Pickard 2007). Because the issue of text bullying arose in both focus group discussions, questions specific to text bullying were included in the interview guide. Questions directly related to texting were also asked. For example were text messages sometimes misunderstood? Did a lack of text communication lead to feelings of social exclusion? Was it easier to text highly emotive narrative than discuss in person? This line of questioning was undertaken to get a sense of difference between face-to-face interaction and face-interface-face interaction. Each one-on-one unstructured interview lasted a maximum of 60 minutes. Having gained permission from the participants the one-on-one unstructured interviews were audio taped for the purpose of capturing comments accurately and transcribing the data – no participant requested that their interview not be taped. Participants were advised that they could ask to have the tape-recorder switched off at any stage during the interview but none did so. Field notes were also jotted down during the course of the interviews so as to account for visual cues unable to be captured on an audiotape, such as the body language and facial expressions. Each participating student received a pack of chocolate fish as a small token of appreciation for their time and efforts. Individual interviews were transcribed and coded. Firstly, key and unique findings were

marked up in the data, secondly, these key themes were clustered into broad themes and finally, the themes were applied to one of three appropriate research questions (refer Table 3.1).

A debriefing session was held at the end of each focus group and individual interview. During these sessions the participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns (Appendix F). A cyber-safety information pack (Appendix D), taken from the Netsafe (2010) Website, was given to each participant at the end of the debriefing sessions.

### **Discourse Analysis – 3c**

Data analysis for both individual and group interviews were conducted through the use of thematic coding. Having transcribed the interview data, the transcripts were read and re-read multiple times in search of patterns and regularities. Not only was it necessary to read the text, it was also essential to revisit and include the context of an utterance or a conversation held in the interviews. For example it was common practice in the focus groups for one participant to make a relatively bold statement that prompted evidence of a shared agreement within the group – these sorts of responses (incl. body language and facial expressions) had been noted during the course of the interviews. Each time the original transcripts were read they were also marked-up with notes that highlighted interesting and/or unique themes in the data. These themes were then allocated to one of the three main research questions pertaining to this research project. This planned approach worked relatively successfully. The only notable complication was relatively minor, and stemmed from deciphering which research questions some themes were best placed into as they did not always fit neatly into discrete categories. In such cases the categorisation has been left to the author’s discretion and in some instances themes were allocated to multiple research questions. Table 3.1 presents key findings found in the data and the application to themes and the main research questions.

### **Limitations - 4**

As Kaler & Beres (2010) wisely state “Data collection can be one of the most tenuous parts of the research process; it is a time when your research goals hinge on the generosity of

others” (Kaler & Beres 2010, p. 15). The most prominent limitation in this study was the small sample size, with only seven individual interviews and two focus groups conducted. The initial research proposal had anticipated two out of the five schools invited to participate in this research would agree to take part and a total of eight focus groups (maximum 8 participants per group) would be held, with two gender specific focus groups carried out at each school. The majority of volunteers for one-on-one unstructured interviews would be drawn from those focus groups. It was encouraging to have three schools finally agree to participate in this study. However, there was very limited interest from the targeted student population with approximately 290 Year 10 students invited (and sent a reminder) to participate and a mere eighteen students consenting to be included. In hindsight, this lack of interest could have been due to a number of reasons such as the location of study (in a highly researched area), the scheduled timeframe for data collection (towards the end of the final school term when many other extra-curriculum activities were being held), no incentive being offered in terms of payment or reward, the method of recruitment may have been perceived as too onerous (students were given a handout and asked to email their interest to researcher), a wariness towards the research topic and/or the researcher who was an outsider to the group, and finally the social status of students may have impacted and influenced the group. If the popular students were feigning nonchalance towards the proposed research this may have had a domino effect with their peers.

Another unanticipated obstacle that may have had bearing on this research was mentioned briefly in a preceding section and that was in relation to conducting gender specific focus groups. To accommodate the school timetable, the school personnel allocated specific 60-minute time slots for both the focus groups and one-on-one interviews. On the day the focus groups were to be held I arrived at the school to be advised by the deputy principal that specific classes had been arranged to participate at the dedicated times, and hence I had no choice but to conduct mixed gender focus groups. This facet also impacted on the number of students involved in each focus group. As eleven students opted to participate in the initial focus group which was held during their mathematics class. As a novice researcher and virgin moderator, stepping into the field for the first time, this was a somewhat daunting start. The second focus group commenced after interval, 15 minutes after the first focus group had ended, it consisted of five students and was much more manageable.



The novel experience of participating in a focus group coupled with missing a school curriculum class left many students excitable. This was especially true at the beginning of the focus group and made evident by the participants bantering, laughing and talking over the top of each other. The students did become more accustomed to the situation in the second half of the group interview which was when the most relevant data started to emerge, unfortunately though the 60 minute time slot allocated for the focus group was dictated by the school bell which indicated the end of period and hence the end of the interview. I believe the above issues may have impeded the quality and quantity of data collected in the focus group especially regarding the less confident participants.

The qualitative methods used in this research were considered a strength but, with hindsight, the researcher recognises they may have simultaneously been a weakness of this study. The face-to-face nature of both focus groups and individual interviews may have impeded participants from being forthcoming with personal narratives and experiences. The students may have withheld stories they believed would embarrass them, or shed them in bad light, in front of their peers or a researcher they barely knew. Using self-reporting questionnaires as a first phase to research with adolescents, followed up by a second phase which employed interviewing, may provide a more honest account of mobile use and misuse with this age group.

Another factor worthy of mention, and pertinent to the one-hour interview timeframe, was rapport between the moderators and participants. Having entered the field as a complete outsider there was the challenge of establishing rapport and extracting rich information with the immediacy required. In hindsight it may have been advantageous to have conducted some participant observation sessions at the schools prior to interviews in order to establish rapport and to become a familiar face around the schools.

Transcribing the content from the large focus group was exceptionally challenging, and proved problematic as many parts of the interview were left inaudible; this was partly due to participants talking at the same time and partly due to the recording equipment not picking up the voices of students situated at the far ends of the table (Liamputtong 2011). Even though participants were asked to state their name and favourite text acronym at the beginning of the

interview, deciphering the voices of the individuals at the time of transcription was a difficult feat (Bryman 2008).

Another identifiable weakness with this study relates to the second phase of recruitment. At the end of the session the students involved in the focus group were asked to complete a form providing demographic details and their willingness to have an individual interview. Given that students were with their peer groups much discussion was had between them about participating in stage two of the research. Conversations overheard by the researcher indicated that the decision to take part or not take part was highly influenced by others. As a result the participants who opted to also be interviewed individually were all from the same focus group and genuinely tended to be the most assertive and outspoken members of the group. This left the voices of those less confident students virtually unheard, which can be one of the pitfalls when utilising this method (Procter & Wartho 2007). Additionally, some students from the focus groups who had voiced being bullied via their mobile phone did not opt to take part in the one-on-one interviews and thus their stories could not be scrutinized more thoroughly.

The school principals and deputy principals were all exceptionally accommodating in relation to the logistics of this research project, such as meeting with the researcher, promoting the research and providing interview rooms and times. The researcher and school personnel were in agreement that it would be less disruptive for participating students to hold focus groups and one-on-one interviews consecutively on the designated interview days. This decision did however leave a very limited 5 to 15 minute break between the focus groups and individual interviews. In hindsight I appreciate this eliminated any possibility of iterative questions as no timeframe was available to reflect on the interview data collected and as a result I did not have the opportunity to reassess and/or better improve my interview questions. Also, as a novice researcher it was quite an exhausting process to hold two focus groups consecutively and then at the later date to conduct five individual interviews in quick succession.

This qualitative study was made up of a small non-representative sample group of Otago secondary school students from a specific age group, with the majority attending a rural

school, and therefore the results cannot be considered generalisable to all high school students in Otago or beyond (Hoppe et al. 1995). However, this research does provide insight for areas where future research may be worthwhile. Finally, due to a hiatus from my study, the data collected is now two years old and, considering the speed in which young people adopt new communication technologies, research findings may well be called into question in terms of their current application to young people.

## **Strengths - 5**

Despite the limitations just presented, my research process has identifiable strengths. There has been limited academic research carried out in New Zealand that relates to young people and their mobile phone use/misuse and so this study adds to the sparse national research currently available. It would be naïve to assume all young people's experiences are the same, for this reason the current research project was purposely designed with a holistic approach in mind so as to provide an overarching understanding of where the mobile phone is situated in the lives of young people. Both positive and negative attributes of the mobile phone were explored so as to help develop and understand the mobile telephony phenomenon in its entirety. Of late the media has been instrumental in feeding information surrounding extreme inappropriate mobile phone use to the public; issues such as text bullying, organised fight clubs, happy slapping, and sexting. The cases portrayed by the popular media generally tend to be extreme, tending to sensationalise mobile phone misconduct. This current research therefore offers another illuminating perspective by exploring the everyday attitudes and experiences students have towards and with mobile phone use.

Having a keen interest in cyberbullying, and having reviewed the literature extensively, the researcher purposely chose to use qualitative methods. This was due to the researcher having recognised a gap within cyber/bullying research, where little research conducted had used these qualitative methods, a conclusion confirmed in Burn's et al. (2008) and Allen's (2012) research. The qualitative approach seemed appropriate to use here because if text-bullying was to emerge as an issue then these young people's thoughts and feelings on the subject could be tapped into. The use of qualitative methods in a two-phase approach was another strength in this particular study that enabled the researcher to capture the voices of the young

people. As was demonstrated in my research, by a lack of student interest, adolescents tend to prove a relatively hard to reach group. Recruitment of participants was therefore difficult. These difficulties can mean that researchers may avoid this population. And yet researchers can learn a lot from these young people who are neither considered children or adults (Burn's et al. 2008). I believe my research offers the opportunity to empower adolescents by listening to their personal narratives and this engagement substantiates that their voice *is worth listening too*. Holding focus groups initially provided the opportunity for the researcher to develop some sort of rapport with the students who then took part in the one-on-one interviews.

So far I have offered a theoretical perspective on social phenomena related to mobile telephony, reviewed relevant New Zealand and International research literature on such phenomena and indicated some research limitations. I shall now turn to my own research project to show how Meadian understandings can assist in further understanding how the mobile phone is embedded in young people's social and cultural world, the social consequences of mobile phone use and misuse for adolescents', and if text bullying is occurring for this group, is it a real cause for concern? The following two chapters are dedicated to the results of this study, with each chapter specific to the methods utilised. Chapter Four presents the results of the focus group sessions and the one-on-one unstructured interview results follow in chapter Five.

# Chapter 4 - Results from Focus Groups

In this chapter I shall present the results from the focus group discussions. The results have been organised in accordance with the three key themes that underpin the research project – i.e. sociality, self and identity, and mobile phone use/misuse.

Focus group participants were first asked to state their name and their favourite text lingo as a type of ice-breaker exercise. This questioning took an “around the table” approach. This approach was purposely applied, partly for the purposes of identifying participants responses when it came to transcribing the group discussion and partly as an aid to get participants comfortable engaging in the group session. The most popular text acronym used by this group was LOL (laugh out loud), which was followed by LMAO (laugh my arse off). Other popular acronyms used were ROFL (rolling on floor laughing), OMG (Oh my gawd), JJLOL (Just jokes, laugh out loud) and GTG (Got to go). Four of the 16 participants claimed they did not really have a favourite text acronym.

Thompson & Cupples (2008) claim that many young people own two phones so as to maximise the deals provided by the two major telecommunication networks in New Zealand, Telecom and Vodafone.<sup>4</sup> To verify if Thompson and Cupples’ claim was fitting to this group the participants were asked how many mobile phones they owned and how many sim cards they each had. Here I again took an “around the table” approach. Seven of the participants reported having one phone and one sim card. Nine participants owned more than one mobile phone but only had one sim card. The most common reason for having more than one phone was that participants still possessed older model mobile phones that had since been replaced by newer phones; they did not tend to use the older phones. Only three of the participants reported having more than one sim card. Although this found trend is far from generalisable, in this particular case the results would indicate that switching between mobile phone networks to maximise deals specific to the various mobile phone networks is not a high priority. One could also assume that this young group is not clandestinely using a dual sim card system to communicate with others in a way that can bypass the chances of parents or

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<sup>4</sup> As of 2009 a new company called Two Degrees also entered the mobile phone market.

significant others viewing their text message content. Although it must be acknowledged here, were participants to covertly use a second sim card for furtive purposes they may not disclose this information in a focus group discussion with a moderator they had no established rapport with.

The group discussions primarily focused on what participants liked the most and least about their mobile phones. Focus group discussions were also centred around any problematic experiences involving mobile phones that participants had either encountered personally or were aware of others enduring.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Social Benefits of the Mobile Phone**

When asked what participants liked the most about their mobile phone the most frequent response was having the ability to text message. Various reasons were given for why texting was so valued by this group. The following discussion by focus group participants illustrates this point:

*You can text (Emerald)*

*You can text anyone whenever (Diamond)*

*I need mine if I am going into town after school (Neon)*

*Yeah and in an emergency (Opal)*

*You can find out all the gossip, what is going on (Neon)*

*Yep and see what all your friends are up too (Opal)*

*I text my Mum if I need to be picked up from somewhere (Topaz)*

*I don't call people (Diamond)*

*I don't really call people either. (Opal)*

The camera function, playing music, Bluetooth (a feature which enabled friends to swap and share files), the alarm clock, and being able to access the Internet (although not all participants had mobile phones so advanced that they offered this feature) were also positively attributed to mobile phones. However, no other feature came close to surpassing

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete overview of research questions asked in the focus groups please refer to Appendix C.

the capacity to text. As illustrated in the above dialogue texting was used as a means to stay socially connected with peers and as a form of micro-coordination with both friends and family. These young people would text their parents to tell them where they were and to arrange being picked up from places. Hence, as suggested by Townsend (2000) the mobile acted as a type of virtual umbilical cord. When asked who they mainly texted the general consensus from focus group participants were firstly friends from school, which was followed by family members. This is hardly surprising as social networks are likely to be somewhat limited at this age. This conversation led on to a discussion regarding the number of texts these young people would send on a daily basis.

### ***Quantity of Text Messages Sent***

Claims were made by participants that they may send anywhere between 50 and 300 texts per day. Most students were on a prepaid deal where for \$10 they could send up to 2000 texts per month. The majority of participants had used their 2000 (or more) text quota by the end of each month. The participants in focus group two initiated the idea to check and provide their text message balance during the group discussion. The numeric data for the number of text messages being sent on a daily basis by these participants is presented below in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1:** Daily average of text messages sent by focus group two participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>No. of texts sent</b>	<b>No. of days</b>	<b>Average per day</b>
Diamond	1,413	15	94.2
Opal	1,700	21	81
Topaz	1,775	21	84.5
Neon	1,932	21	92

The eagerness exhibited in divulging this information amongst the group suggests that the number of text messages being sent by individuals' acts as an indicator for social connectedness and popularity amongst peers, hence symbolizing social status, and for this reason could well be exaggerated. Considering most of these texts were being sent between

peers who were interacting on a daily basis at school, and not meant to be texting during the school day, the volume of texts being executed seemed vast. Thus the question arose:

*What do you talk about, cos 100 messages a day it seems to me like heaps but maybe not to you guys (Ana)*

*Well you have three texts just saying hello to each other (Carbon)*

*You won't even notice if you send 100 texts by the time you finish a conversation (Argon)*

They mainly go like this *'hey what you up to?'*

*'oh not much'*

*'how are you?'*

*'good'*

*and then back and forth like that. (Emerald)*

In terms of symbolism and a positive social status more emphasis was given to the quantity of text messages being sent as opposed to owning the most up to date and expensive model phone. The following dialogue provides evidence for these particular young people's attitude towards a 'flashy' mobile phone being superfluous.

*Opal you are probably like the only one that has got like a flash new phone (Diamond's comment directed at Opal).*

*Well no [the female participant was visibly embarrassed by this unwanted attention] (Opal)*

*I've got a budget one – but they are good for texting (Diamond).*

*And can you afford to have the latest phone or newest phone (Ana)*

*I don't (Sapphire)*

*I don't (Opal)*

*I reckon some people, some people really care about if they are buying like the latest phones and others just don't. (Emerald)*

*I don't (Morganite)*

*Yeah I don't (Sapphire)*



*As long as you can text on it and then what does it matter – look at mine!!!*

**[pulls out her old model phone.]** (Emerald)

***But other people are more into their phone and having the latest one?***

**(Ana)**

*Yeah some people are more like gotta have the latest one and stuff.*

(Emerald)

### **Texting versus Talking**

Having determined the popularity of texting, these students were then asked what it was they liked about texting. Also, given they barely made voice calls on their mobile phone, did they think some things were easier to say in a text as opposed to face-to-face or voice-to-voice? And if so, then what sorts of things were easier to discuss in a text rather than talk about in person? The participants were in agreement that it was easier to tell someone you liked them through a text mainly because:

*You can say stuff that that you wouldn't normally say* (Neon)

*Yeah it is easier to send a text than saying it to their face sometimes. If you like them then it is hard to say face to face aye. It is easier because if you get shut down and if you just get embarrassed then it is not so bad*  
(Opal)

*Yeah it is not so bad* (Platinum)

***Why do you think that is?*** (Ana)

*I don't know just the way – I don't know I guess it is just now it is hard to explain I don't know cos if your oh I don't know.* (Opal)

*Yeah it is quite hard to say something to someone, and then they are like, if they don't feel the same way or something* (Neon)

*Yeah that is the awkward thing* (Diamond)

*It is not as awkward by text* (Platinum)

*Then there is that problem where you don't text someone and tell them you like them and then they say that they like you but you know - that is kinda – well you just can't be sure.* (Neon)

As well as finding it easier to text whilst initializing a potential relationship, these young people also found texting a useful tool for terminating relationships as outlined below.

*Yeah dumping people (Carbon)*

*Do you dump people over texts? (Morganite)*

*Yeah (Argon)*

*That is really sad. [Because you are] too pussy (Morganite)*

***Is it easier to do over a text message? (Ana)***

*Easier to do if you don't see them. (Carbon)*

### ***Impression Management***

Another reason given to why texting is sometimes better than talking lends itself well to Goffman's (1971) theory of Impression Management and is illustrated in the following conversation had in the first focus group.

*You can think of really smart stuff, if you are talking like one-on-one you can't think of smart stuff to say (Erbium)*

*Yeah, you have time to think about what you are going to say (Morganite)*

*If you text you can take your time (Emerald)*

*You can look up things in a dictionary, write them in a text, and then people go 'oh my gawd you're so clever' (Sapphire)*

***So you can plan it? (Ana)***

*Yep (Nickel)*

***A bit easier than just having a... (Ana)***

*It is not just so on the spot. (Emerald)*

Having picked up on this curious finding the second focus group were also asked how they felt about being able to forward plan the content of their text messages. Where value is also ascribed to being able to plan and draft text messages, Neon also recognises the potential for text messages to be misconstrued.

*I think you can think about what you are going to say in case you are going to say the wrong thing (Opal)*

**Yeah (Ana)**

*Yeah, but then you could also be taken as saying the wrong thing as well because of not like being face-to-face. (Neon)*

## **The Mobile Phone and Social Identity**

### ***Texting - A Unique Language?***

The possible ambiguity of text messages is a compelling case in point here. Like the students in Allen's (2012) US study, these students were also well aware that a text message could be read the wrong way and misinterpreted due to the lack of paralinguistic cues and emotional feedback that is usually present in face-to-face or voice-to-voice communication. They were also all in agreement that symbolic emoticons, such as the smiley face “:-)”, the smiley winking face “;-)”, the awkward face “:\D”, the cheeky face “:P” or the upset face “:-(”, were best used at the end of text messages to convey the intended emotion. Also common initialisms such as LOL “Laugh out Loud”, JJ “Just Jokes”, or JK “Just Kidding” were used in text messages to communicate the message content as humorous. However, the following comment leaves one wondering if this communication technique can always be regarded as sincere.

*If you send a really harsh text and you write LOL at the end it is ok. If you write something that some one doesn't want to hear but you write LOL at the end then that is alright – cos it is like “Oh, you were only joking”.*

(Emerald)

The focus group participants also highlighted the fact that using ‘text language’ could be problematic and annoying when it came to deciphering text message content. Although this young generation has been accredited with creating a unique type of shorthand language conducive to text messaging and computer chat it may not be as widespread as once thought. In keeping with symbolic interactionism, symbols by nature are only meaningful because they have a shared meaning and are significant for all group members. A high percentage of

focus group participants claimed they mostly wrote text messages using full words to ensure their text messages were understood by the receiver. The following conversation suggests that not being able to understand a text message immediately is irritating.

*I've stopped now though [using text language] – mine all make sense*  
(Sapphire)

*Some people are really bad at it – like you get some people who are really bad at it and do everything in capital text<sup>6</sup>. Then you get people who will pretty much spell out the whole word. Which is better cos then I can understand it* (Emerald)

*That is what I do* (Iron)

*It is really hard when someone makes a mistake too cos then you feel like a retard because you have to ask them what they said* (Sapphire)

*I hate when ya parents try to use text language – like it was real weird this morning cos they sent me a text and [I] didn't even know what they meant.*

*I was like 'what?' and then I finally figured it out.* (Nickel)

### **Texting at School**

Focus group participants were also asked what they liked least about their mobile phones, again a general consensus prevailed. As indicated in the following quotes the one thing these students really disliked about their mobile phones was the fact the number pad buttons produced a loud, tell-tale, clicking noise when texting.

*Oh yeah the buttons are really loud - yeah they are really like clicky. I'd show you but.....* (Opal)

*You can't be texting in class anyway but...* (Nickel)

*My buttons are really loud and I don't like it...Yeah Mum gets annoyed cos I just sit there going like this [indicates texting with her hands] and then Mum goes can you go somewhere else and do that.* (Diamond)

***So buttons are too loud for texting?*** (Ana)

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<sup>6</sup> Texting in capital letters infers shouting.

*Yeah if you are at school and cos we are not allowed them and if you are texting the teachers might hear. (Diamond)*

***What about at school? (Ana)***

*We are not allowed them (Diamond)*

*You are not allowed them but um you still have them (Neon)*

*How many people actually take any notice I've got mine on me right now!*

*(Platinum)*

This particular school had a blanket ban on mobile phones during any part of the school day, including intervals and lunch time. Any student found using their mobile phone during school time would have it confiscated. The incriminated student's parents would then be telephoned and advised they were required to pick up their child's mobile phone from the school office. However, thirteen of the sixteen focus group participants were able to produce their phones during the sessions, one boy had his phone at school but it was in his bag which he did not have with him, and two students did not have their phone with them at school. When asked if they texted whilst they were at school the majority of students admitted they did and one student claimed "at interval heaps of people text".

*It is amazing how many of us actually have phones at school (Morganite)*

***Yeah? (Ana)***

*Yeah seeming we aren't allowed them (Opal)*

*Why don't we pull them out and show her [referring to researcher]*

*(Rutherfordium)*

***Do you mind, that would be cool. (Ana)***

### ***Personalisation of Handset***

What became evident at this point was the personalisation and unique identifying markers each individual had applied to their mobile phone. One male participant had scratched the back of his phone, a female had purple love hearts and smiley face stickers on her phone, another had a little fox sticker, and one female claimed she would switch the back cover regularly. In keeping with Scheider's research (2009) participants all tended to download favourite music tunes for ringtones. Most of the participants had screensavers that helped

portray, convey, and reflect a sense of self-expression to others. Screensavers included a logo of a favourite rugby league team, a photo of phone-owner with friend, a horse shoe, a pet dog, a 'stoned' spongebob square pants and All Blacks player, Sonny Bill Williams.

*I have Sonny Bill Williams [as a screen saver] (Opal)*

*Yeah I sent it to her via Bluetooth (Diamond)*

***Did ya? (Ana)***

*That is me and Opal [photo as screensaver]. (Diamond)*

The brief focus group discussion pertaining to the Sonny Bill Williams (SBW) screensaver is significant as it highlights the act of gift-giving. "Generally, gift giving is described as the exchange of material objects that embody particular meanings. It is also viewed as subject to the obligations to give, receive and reciprocate, and available as a means to demonstrate social ties and allegiances". (Berg, Taylor & Harper 2005, p. 273). Social ties are demonstrated between these two friends through the social practice of exchange. To break this down even further; Diamond sending the SBW screensaver file to Opal shows an act of giving, Opal receives the files and accepts it as her screensaver, finally reciprocation cements this transaction with Diamond calling attention to the fact her screensaver is a photo of her with Opal.

When asked if there was anything else they did not like about their mobile phone a common response was that it goes out of service all the time. This was not surprising, considering the focus groups were held shortly after a, much publicised, time when Telecom's XT service had had major disruptions to its service, with customers nationwide being without service and coverage for hours on end. Also, these students attended a rural school and some lived quite a distance from the school in a remote area which received poor mobile phone coverage. Another dislike mentioned by some participants was the fact that they used their phone as an alarm clock and sometimes it never went off. This point led into the following discussion:

***So you use it as an alarm clock, do you have your phone off at night or do you have your phone on all night? (Ana)<sup>7</sup>***

*No it is always on silent, so it won't wake me up if anyone texts. (Neon)*

*If anyone texts it won't wake you up. (Diamond)*

***So anyone else keep their phone on all night? (Ana)***

*I always keep mine on, on charger (Opal)*

*I always keep mine on (Diamond)*

*I always keep mine on, it is on charger. Mine is always on vibrate just in case something happens (Topaz)*

*Yeah, I'd keep it the same. (Opal)*

***So do you get woken up from text messages coming through late at night? (Ana)***

*Yeah but sometimes you need to if it is like an emergency, like someone said something and then you see if they are like alright (Opal)*

***Oh ok, like what sort of emergency? When you say emergency do you mean like someone has had a car crash? (Ana)***

*No just like a friend problem. (Opal)*

### ***Always On – Always On You***

What becomes evident in the above discussion is support when referring to the 'always on' generation. Turkle (2008) refers to the mobile phone as "always on, always on you" technology – a phrase that bodes well with terms created such as 'digital native' and 'Net Generation', terms created that reflect our belief that young people today are a new breed. All focus group participants left their phones turned on through the night, and most would have their phones on the charger in their bedroom. One male student claimed "it gets annoying if it starts going off at night". In a similar vein another male participant states:

*Or otherwise it can just be really annoying like someone texting just to see who is still up and that can be really annoying, like you are just getting to sleep and then you are woken up by a text.*

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<sup>7</sup> A mobile phone can be set as an alarm and even if the mobile phone is turned off the alarm will still be activated.

Of course one may ask if this really is so annoying then why do they not turn their phones off at night or better still not have them in bedroom. The practice also raises concerns regarding broken sleep and sleep deprivation.

Having firmly established what participants liked and disliked about their mobile phones, participants were then asked if they could imagine not having a mobile phone. How would they feel if they were told they could not have access to their mobile phone for three days? Considering all these young people felt the need to have their mobile phones with them during the school day and turned on and accessible during their sleeping hours some of the responses to this question seem somewhat paradoxical.

*Nah, I live too far away for that* (Sapphire)

*Yeah I could do that easy* (Nickel)

***So if you were told for the next three days you can't have a mobile phone – that would be no problem?*** (Ana)

*Yeah depends what three days it is – if it was Friday – no* (Sapphire)

*If it is the weekend it is different* (Rutherfordium)

*That is what Facebook is for* (Emerald)

*I didn't have one for like a month – I hated it* (Argon)

*My parents take my phone off me at 800 o'clock every night* (Morganite)

*Nope – I need it* (Diamond)

*It would be difficult but....* (Neon)

*I reckon I could do it but it would take awhile to get use to cos...* (Opal)

*I would just hide it* (Diamond)

*I wouldn't mind* (Topaz)

*I would use my old one* (Diamond)

*I couldn't go without it* (Opal)

*I would not mind too much* (Neon)

*Yeah I could do it as well* (Platinum)

*Yeah like some days in the holidays I don't even use my phone I am too busy out on the farm and doing stuff* (Topaz)



*So what would be the worst part about not having it? (Ana)*

*You can't text anyone. (Diamond)*

The above dialogue shows an array of responses ranging from it would 'be easy' through to it would 'be difficult' not having a mobile phone for three days. Of course the question asked is a hypothetical one and so not too much weight can be given to responses. However, the reference made to the social networking site, Facebook, is one worth unpacking as it offers an alternate way to stay socially connected with peers and family.

### **The Mobile Phone and Text Bullying**

One of the key questions underpinning this research project was: Is text-bullying (a form of cyberbullying) a cause of concern for adolescents? Rather than explicitly asking participants this question, participants were instead asked if they had ever experienced any problems from other people whilst using their mobile phones. The motive behind raising this issue in such a way was that if bullying via mobile phone was a social phenomenon directly affecting these young people then this theme would be likely to emerge throughout the group discussions by their own admission. From the outset Nickel asked "What like text bullying?" Many participants responded that they had not encountered any problems. However, one male participant revealed he had once received a text message from a girl he knew.

*She said she was going to take a dump in my mouth and stuff it like a haggis. (Argon)*

More detail will be given to this incident in the following chapter as Argon took part in the second stage of this research as an individual interviewee.

### **Textbullying - An Extreme Case**

Initially focus group one's conversation revolved around the stupidity of their parents' mobile phone knowledge and their inability to decipher text message lingo. However, it then turned to a girl at the school who had been text bullied by another female student. The perpetrator sent menacing text messages to the victim and a physical attack followed. The

victim of this attack was a focus group participant in the second group discussion held and so the incident unravels in focus group two.

***What about when you are using your phone have you ever experienced any problems with using your phone with other people? (Ana)***

*Oh yeah well kinda (Opal)*

*What do you mean by problems? (Neon)*

***Like anything where you think that wasn't very nice or (Ana)***

*Text bullying???* (Opal)

***Yeah something like text bullying (Ana)***

*Isn't that why they stopped having the phones at school? (Topaz)*

*Why you looking at me for? Yeah that was my fault – well actually that was all Amethyst's fault (Opal)*

*Why what did ya's do (Topaz)*

*She said she was going to kill me (Opal)*

*She was a bully (Diamond)*

***Did someone bully you is that what this is about? (Ana)***

*Yeah Amethyst did (Opal)* [In the back ground Platinum can be heard saying– “text bully”]

***And did you reply (Ana)***

*Yeah (Opal)*

**Laughter from group**

*I had to stand up for myself (Opal)*

***So someone texted you and said they were going to kill you (Ana)***

*No well it wasn't a joke she is real, this girl, she is real abusive (Opal)*

*She is like real like (Diamond)*

*She is all about violence and stuff and that is the only way to sort things out (Opal)*

***Was that a bit scary getting a text like that (Ana)***

*Yeah (Opal)*

***Did you tell anybody? Did you report it? (Ana)***

*Yeah to the guidance counselor (Opal)*

***So was something done about it by the guidance counselor? (Ana)***

*No, she came and hit me (Opal)*

***Did she? How long ago was this? How many years ago? (Ana)***

*I was year 8 and she was year 9 – we are friends now though. (Opal).*

***What about anyone else, has anyone had problems like that or do you know of anybody else (Ana)***

*I've had a little bit but that was from Coral (Topaz)*

***Can you tell us a little bit about what happened (Ana)***

*Oh it was just over, she was texting me like one day and calling me all these names and saying she was a completely different person to what she was – then I ended up finding out all about it and went to the guidance counselor about her (Topaz)*

*Was it me and her? (Opal)*

*Yep (Topaz)*

*It was me and her (Opal states in confirmation).*

The above discussion illuminates a number of things worthy of further discussion. First, incidents of text bullying did prevail for this participating group. Second, in all cases the tormenters were known to those on the receiving end of the text-bullying messages and in most cases attended the same school. Third, in two of the three aforementioned incidents the school guidance counsellor was involved. Fourth, one encounter that started off as text-bullying escalated to a full-blown physical attack. That particular incident also involved a death threat being sent by text, which in New Zealand is an illegal activity. Finally, both the girls who had been prey to text-bullying were at the time of the focus groups now friends with the 'had been' bully, which illustrates how fickle friendships can be at this age. Friendships can often be very unreliable, unpredictable and inconsistent or as Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck put it friendships can be likened to rollercoaster patterns due to their instability, particularly but not exclusively for girls (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck 2010). Later in the focus group discussion Platinum was overheard asking Topaz the following question "Is Oynx still text-bullying you?" to which Topaz responded "No". This brief exchange between participants was not picked up by the researcher during the focus group

discussion; it was only identified as a secondary conversation upon transcription of the data. It does, however, reiterate the occurrence of text-bullying in this group's lives.

### ***Rumours versus Gossip***

Related to texting motives is the issue of "gossip". Referring back to the beginning of this chapter Neon commented that one of the best things about texting was being able to find out all the gossip. Gossip was a facet that featured regularly in the focus group conversations, an observation that was also concluded in Allen's (2012) text messaging research. Towards the end of one of the focus group, the students were discussing how frustrated they got when people gave out their phone numbers and then they started receiving random texts from random people, this was when Emerald claimed "and sometimes people text, like talk, about people behind their back through texting." This statement prompted the following discussion:

***So kind of spreading gossip or rumours? (Ana)***

*A lot of gossip goes through texting (Sapphire)*

***Does it? (Ana)***

*Yeah (Sapphire)*

*You get like "did you hear this?" – "did you get that?" (Nickel)*

At this point a synchronous buzz of 'yeses' is reverberated within the group.

*And everyone finds out about it eventually (Emerald)*

*And sees it on Facebook (Nickel)*

***So what do they do then – do you 'send to many'?<sup>8</sup> (Ana)***

*Well say you've had a fight with someone, well you like gang up with someone else and...and then like say it was me, then I would like probably text Morganite and tell her and then I would probably text Nickel and tell him and then everyone else would find out and then everyone would be texting each other about it and it would be like... (Emerald)*

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<sup>8</sup> Referring to a feature on mobile phones that allows one text message to be sent to many people simultaneously.

*Well it is like good gossip for like about a day or two (Nickel)*

*Yeah until you find something else to talk about. (Emerald)*

This resulted in the relaying of an actual incident that had happened to a boy in another class recently. The subject of the text messaging rumour had the misfortune of having, unbeknownst to him, exposed himself in class by failing to do up his trouser zip. One girl commented:

*We didn't want to be mean to Platinum so we just texted about him – then he won't find out and then it's all good. (Sapphire)*

However, the group confirmed that in this instance, Platinum did find out what had happened.

Having conducted multiple interviews with teenagers regarding bullying, researcher, danah boyd (2010) claims there is a disparity between adults' and youths definitions of bullying.

They didn't see rumors or gossip as bullying, regardless of whether or not it happened online. And girls didn't see fighting over boys or ostracizing one another because of boys as bullying. They didn't even see producing fight videos as bullying. So then I started asking them what bullying was. What I learned was that bullying was when someone picked on someone or physically hurt someone who didn't deserve it.

### ***Filming Fights on Mobile Phones***

Towards the end of the second focus group the students were asked if they had ever had a video or picture image taken of them on a mobile phone and then uploaded on to a social media site or YouTube. In keeping with danah boyd's comment above regarding fight videos the conversation that followed was enlightening.

*That is exactly why phones aren't allowed at school cos in Year 7 me and Mercury were going around and doing stuff and then Copper started videoing us and all that. (Platinum)*

*I got in trouble too cos I put that thing of Garnet up (Opal)*

*Oh yeah the chair thing (Diamond)*

*We had like this fight that happened at school (Topaz)*

*Like a boxing fight (Platinum)*

*Yeah like with boxing gloves and that (Opal)*

*My brother was in that and um they videoed it for a guy and the teacher came around [to the fight location] and we just all ran for it. (Topaz)*

*It was like an organised fight but not very legitimate. (Neon)*

*It [the time and location details] was on Facebook and everything (Diamond)*

*It was behind the gym – it was my brother fighting and then there was other people but it was all on Facebook [fight details] like a week or two before it happened so all the teachers saw it. (Topaz)*

*Mrs Peridot [teacher] is the one that saw it – cos she is on Facebook and I was her friend [on Facebook] before I came to this school and she went and told all the teachers about what was happening with everyone and she you know how Lapis Lazuli's Mum said all that stuff about Mr Silver being a really bad teacher (Opal)*

*Did they? (Diamond)*

*Yeah on Facebook and then Mrs Peridot found out about that too (Opal)*

***So that fight you were talking about it was an organised fight and then did someone video it. (Ana)***

***A general consensus of yeses from the group.***

***So did the video go on Youtube? (Ana)***

*No he was going to put in on Facebook but he got caught [by teachers] and he had to delete it. (Topaz)*

The above incident highlights how mobile phones may be used inappropriately at school. However, this organised fight was infiltrated by teachers prior to it taking place – which is also significant. One of the schools teachers was befriended on Facebook by a student and was therefore able to track the progress of the fight and was privy to the time, date and location of the fight. Opal authenticates this piece of knowledge further by informing the

group that, through Facebook, this same teacher knew of a parent who had been bad-mouthing another teacher. This last incident substantiates the fact that students are not the only ones in danger of being cyberbullied or harassed online. A recent report in the Otago Daily Times would strongly suggest this is not an isolated case, with the New Zealand School Trustees Association's general manager Ray Newport reporting a number of incidents throughout the country where school staff had been attacked by parents through the use of social media (Lewis 2012a). Videoing a fight on a mobile phone was also an experience Platinum had encountered. In this instance the fight was not organised but when it did break out a bystander videoed the altercation on their mobile phone. Before this chapter draws to an end, Platinum relays his story below:

*And last year when I got angry at Boron (Platinum)*

*Yeah that was funny he got flung around like a little fish (Neon)*

***What happened? You got angry and someone videoed it (Ana)***

*Yep (Platinum)*

***On their phone and then did they upload it? (Ana)***

*They were going to upload it yeah but then the teachers found out.*

*(Platinum)*

***What did the teachers say? (Ana)***

*They deleted it - that is about it (Platinum)*

***Did they tell your parents? (Ana)***

*Yeah they did. I got suspended for that (Platinum)*

*You and Boron did aye (Topaz)*

*Yep. (Platinum)*

In relation to young people's mobile phone use the focus group discussions allowed for the participants' personal feelings, narratives, and experiences to be acknowledged. The information generated within these focus groups was drawn on to determine and develop the interview guide specific to the one-on-one interviews. Some of the questions asked in the focus group were also asked in the second phase of this research, this was a tactic purposely employed as it acted as a cross check to verify information provided in focus groups whilst it also allowed an opportunity for participants to elaborate on an incident and/or disclose

personal or sensitive information outside of the group setting. The following chapter presents the results from the one-on-one unstructured interviews thereby providing further insight and depth to mobile phone activity for this particular cohort.



# Chapter 5 - Results from One-on-One Unstructured Interviews

This chapter will present the results from the one-on-one unstructured interviews. As was done previously in the focus group discussions chapter these results are also categorised in accordance with the three themes that underpin this research project, these being sociality, self and identity and finally use/misuse of mobile phones with a particular interest in text bullying.

## **The Social Benefits of the Mobile Phone**

Like the sharing of Bluetooth files identified in the previous chapter, text messages can also act as a form of gift-giving, whilst simultaneously signalling popularity and being ‘loved’ (Berg, Taylor & Harper 2005; Campbell and Park 2008; Cupples & Thompson 2010). Srivastava claims:

Teenagers tend to save mobile messages they cherish on their mobile phone. Text messages are a form of gift, in that they have value... Young users are proud of the SMS they have stored in their phones. They often re-read positive messages from loved ones and peers, and keep those messages in reserve that might come in handy in a future argument with a partner or friend. (Srivastava 2005, p. 121)

## ***A Diary Substitute?***

Here the mobile phone acts somewhat like a personal diary, where important milestones are recorded, and emotionally loaded texts, humorous texts, feel-good texts and/or flirtatious and romantic texts are archived by the receiver and can be revisited easily (Vykoukalová 2007). However, this permanence of text can have its downside. It has been argued that some people, especially those with lower self-esteem, have a tendency to revisit derogatory material sent to their mobile phones. Also, the text can act as a permanent record in such a way that the subject of a negative text can be shown the content (Allen 2012). To get a sense if my participants were using text messages on their phone as a kind of diary substitute I asked them if they saved their text messages. Krypton did not save texts because they all just

related to micro-coordination. The other three boys Nickel, Argon and Copper said the only texts they tended to save were jokes and forwards. For this cohort forwards/jokes may correlate with a positive social status considering Emerald told me “Yeah I get real good forwards, and then I text them around and everyone is like ‘*oh, where do you get them from*’”.

Argon also expressed being quite amused by one of his female friends who saved all the messages she thought were funny or really nice. He went on to tell me this particular friend archived her messages into different folders; the happy face folder ☺, the sad face folder ☹ and the confused face folder :-/. Morganite told me she saved nice messages she received from boys. Sapphire responded with “Yeah I save some – the important ones like volleyball times and jokes. I save some that I think Morganite might want to read –yeah and texts from boys - I save those ones.” Finally, Emerald told me she kept “Yeah any of the cute ones [from boys] and I will read over them a couple of times – ya keep them for a bit.” However, Emerald also went on to explain that she would then delete these ‘cute’ messages because in her words:

*Like [you delete] those really nice ones or something like gossipy that you don't want anyone else to see or know – so you sort of pretty much delete those ones straight away cos if you forget about them and leave your phone around and someone could read them – they would be big things.*

Given the privacy attributed to a hardcopy personal diary and the fact there was some evidence that my participants were using the mobile phone as a personal digital diary I asked them how they would feel if anyone touched their phone. This was on the premise that to have someone read a personal diary containing inner feelings and secrets would likely bring about a sense of violation. Research conducted by Reading (2009) found that women would avoid looking at or answering their partner’s mobile phone due to the private material stored on them. Following are the responses from my research participants:

*Not too worried –I give it to people – nothing really interesting on it*  
(Sapphire)

*Annoyed, because I have private messages on it (Copper)*

*Well if they are my friends I tend to trust them cos I mean most of my friends are trustworthy, if they are not trustworthy then they are really not much of a friend (Argon)*

*I don't really mind cos I don't usually have many private texts on there anyway so I'm not minded but some people can get really paranoid about it. (Nickel)*

And finally:

*It depends, what text messages I've got on it, it is a really bad thing to say but... (Emerald)*

Apart from Krypton who due to having his iPhone stolen would not let anybody near his new phone, the above responses were all clearly in relation to text messages stored on the participant's individual phones. Participants were much more nonchalant with other people touching their mobile phone if the messages stored were mundane. However, those who had private messages on their mobile phones were more apprehensive. Emerald mentioned earlier that she tactfully chose to delete personal text messages just in case anyone read them.

### ***The Importance of Mobile Phone Make and Model***

The mobile phone has been suggested to act as a status symbol in terms of its make and model. In the current research project, other than Krypton, who due to his passion for technology owned an iPhone, and Morganite, who told me she tended to get a new phone every year because "it is just not cool anymore and I want an upgrade" very little value was given by the other participants when it came to owning the most up to date mobile phone – value was given more to functionality. Nickel explained he would use his mobile phone until it went 'dead' he did not feel compelled to upgrade his mobile phone regularly. Argon told me his Mum owned an iPhone and that both his parents thought he should upgrade his old phone to an iPhone. When I asked him if he wanted to get a new phone he told me:

*No not really it is not such a worry – I have got other things I would rather spend my money on like motor bike parts and stuff – if I was going to get an XT it would just be one of those cheap ones cos I actually bought a decent shock proof, dust proof, heat proof and water proof one and I dropped it on the grass and it broke –so so much for being shock proof [he laughs].*

Emerald was of much the same mind as Argon, she told me:

*Everyone else really cares about their phone and what it looks like and they have to have the latest phone and I am like as long as I can text I don't care. Yeah, I am sure you will find in one class they all have touch screens for their phones and everything and I am just like well 'no'. Like yeah my last one lasted me about four years but see because I am outside a lot I dropped it on the road, I dropped it in the mud, I dropped it in the hay, I had a horse like snot all over it and it still goes, I had a horse stand on it, I left it out in the rain for about an hour and it still went...: I mean I don't care what other people think about me so I don't care what I look like – they are all like you need to get a new phone and I am like I don't care – [laughs] – I mean it costs a lot too I mean I think a good touch screen can be about \$400 – so not for me and they break so easily.*

Even though Argon, Emerald, and Nickel were not interested in owning the most fashionable mobile phones they all expressed that 'other people' were into keeping up with trends, what Nickel would suggest as "owning the latest and greatest." and Argon put down to 'showing off'. Emerald explained how another girl in her year "thought she was way cool and had to have the newest cell phone and everything." Both Argon and Emerald also made reference to how much a new phone cost, which is hardly surprising as participants in this age bracket are more likely to have a limited disposable income.

### ***A Virtual Tether***

Many of these participants were involved in outdoor extra-curriculum activities such as sport, dirt-bike riding, horse-riding as well as having jobs and responsibilities they were expected to do around the family property. Emerald for example participated in a variety of sports teams and was also a keen horse rider; she had explained that a lot of her time was dedicated to the two horses that she was responsible for looking after. Hence, the following reply when asked why she felt lost without her mobile phone.

*Um I suppose cos I do a lot of outdoors stuff and Mum is always texting trying to find out where I am and like she keeps track of where I am and stuff like that and just if you don't have it like in case something important comes up and people know I usually have it so if something important comes up and then you haven't got it.*

The one student who advised he did not always have his phone with him was Krypton, a 14 year old boy from the participating urban school. This was the school that allowed students to have their mobile phones at school as long as they were used responsibly and not during class times. The reason Krypton did not always have his phone with him was also the answer to another key question asked of participants, which was if they had ever experienced any problems with other people regarding their mobile phone. Within the last 12 months Krypton had had his \$1,200 Iphone stolen from the school changing rooms. When asked if he had bought the phone himself Krypton replied “Yeah I’ve got a job at the dairy down the road – I am a bit of a techno geek, so you know I have to buy my own stuff.” Following this incident Krypton no longer brought anything of value to school, this included his new replacement Iphone. Krypton did not know of any other student at his school that owned an Iphone, he explained “for some reason New Zealand has really expensive prices so not a lot of people my age have them.” Krypton did not consider it essential to have his phone with him at all times but deemed it necessary when he was in town, or the like, and needed to liaise with his parents to arrange being picked up from somewhere. However, having had his initial Iphone stolen, left Krypton feeling somewhat dubious when using his phone in public as he explains below:

*After my original one being stolen I don't let anyone else use it - not even my sister. So you know, usually if I have to take it out if I am in town I won't stand in the middle of the street using it I will kinda just shuffle to the wall and discreetly use it because I am a bit paranoid about it!*

### ***Imagine Not Having a Mobile Phone***

Given that most students tended to have their mobile phones with them day and night one of the questions asked in the focus groups was if these young people could imagine not having a mobile phone. This question was repeated in the one-on-one interviews to see if more detailed responses could be obtained from participants. The students were also asked if they thought they would feel socially isolated if they did not have their phone. Both Morganite and Copper said they could not really imagine being without their mobile and were in agreement that it would leave them feeling cut-off from their peer group. Copper said "it would be weird and hard to keep in touch with friends at other schools and I would feel lonely if I couldn't use my phone". At the time of the interview Morganite had her mobile phone tucked into her bra. When asked how she would feel if she went to get her phone and it was not there she replied "Oh no it gives you like a mini heart attack because it is like one of the most important things and you don't want to lose it". However, the remaining students were of the mind that it was certainly possible for them to live without their phone. The reasoning's for this are stated below:

*I would just ring people off a normal phone. It would be alright – usually an optional thing. I see the people I am texting most of the time anyway. Yeah I could live without a mobile phone. Usually there is always something to do like feeding animals and writing so I don't text as much. I usually text people to catch up and then we catch up so don't need to be texting them because I am with them. (Sapphire)*

### ***So can you imagine not having a mobile phone? (Ana)***

*Yeah like I'd do it I don't mind like I'm not that type of person who would text 24 hours a day sort of thing it is I usually just to text people to see how they are going and what they are up to sort of thing. (Nickel)*

***Mm hm – what about then you say you don't text 24 hours a day what about if someone said to you right you can't have your mobile phone for I don't know a week. (Ana)***

*Yep I'd do it I don't mind – like it is not one of my 'need-be' things sort of thing. I live out in the country so there is already stuff to do anyway. Like we've got a twenty acre farm and then my Granny, across the river and across the railway line, has got a two hundred acre farm so me and my brother have both got motor bikes so it is not like it is a real 'must have' thing cos I can always find something else to do other than text. (Nickel)*

***Can you imagine not having a mobile phone? (Ana)***

*When I broke my shock proof one, I didn't actually have one for three months and actually thought it was better for me, I used to text about 2000 texts a month but now I only send about 200. (Argon)*

***So you've reduced the amount? (Ana)***

*Yeah, I don't text as much - it is real unsocial as well – cos one simple text - people can take it the wrong way and before you know it you are in here [referring to the guidance counselors office where interview is taking place] fighting with someone (Argon)*

***What at school? (Ana)***

*Yeah – I remember someone actually dragging me in here for saying 'hi' to them too much I think. (Argon)*

***So if you were told you were not allowed to use your mobile phone for the next week how do you think that would make you feel? (Ana)***

*That is what Facebook is for. Um I would probably use the home phone it is just I probably wouldn't go out and do as much because first question [from Mum] is “**Do you have your phone?**” and it is like “**yeah**” and if it is “**no**” then you have to go back and get it. (Emerald)*

***So do you think you would feel socially excluded or isolated from your friends if you didn't have your phone? (Ana)***

*Um I don't really care what my friends think – laughs – Like I say you've got friends and then you know who are your good friends and your good friends will keep you informed on all that stuff and the other ones will talk behind your back so it doesn't really matter like if they had something to tell me then they would ring me [infers on landline] but otherwise I don't really care it is usually a load of gossip so I don't really care. (Emerald)*

And finally, the following conversation with Krypton highlights how he believes he could survive without a mobile phone

*Yeah - because I am not that addicted to it where I always have to be constantly connected to it. It is just there for communication. (Krypton)*

***So how would you feel if you were told you couldn't use your phone for the next week? (Ana)***

*Well I also have my laptop so if it were just my phone I would be ok, I wouldn't feel sad or anything like that. (Krypton)*

***Do you think you would feel socially excluded if you didn't have your phone? (Ana)***

*No, no because I mean now days all my friends communicate through Facebook so I mean the only thing we use texts other than when we are in town or something is um – cos a couple of our friends still don't have a Facebook [page] so if we organise something we send it over text instead of Facebook. (Krypton)*

The above comments when unpacked are thought provoking. For instance Sapphire and Nickel both made reference to the fact they had outside interests and responsibilities that kept them busy and so they did not need to rely on their phone as a form of entertainment. These comments are enlightening when reflecting on the question previously asked; is texting being used as an activity to fill in time and alleviate boredom? The two female participants Emerald and Sapphire indicated they would use the home landline if a mobile phone was not available to them. However, Emerald believed she probably would not go out as much as she would not have the means so readily available to let her Mum know where she was – this



comment reflects the ‘*virtual tether*’ and portable advantage held by the mobile phone. Emerald also made reference to using the social networking site ‘Facebook’ as an alternate option for staying in touch with friends. Krypton also saw Facebook as a viable option; he proceeded to tell me he was also the administrator of the school Facebook page and that he had taught the teachers how to use the networking site. Although not mobile phone related an illuminating point was made in this conversation with Krypton regarding the school using popular means of communication to disseminate information to their students.

*The school has recently got one [a Facebook page]– cos the whole point of it was to advertise, so I’ve set up on it say; a tab for new students, a tab for the reunion next year. Currently we are running this competition where people can add their camp photos to it and which ever photos get the most ‘likes’ they get a canteen voucher and it is just – well we found that if you say something on the Facebook page it gets to everyone quicker than it does saying it at school. So it is kinda like a means of advertising.*  
(Krypton)

***Right – so it will get around quicker than say saying something at a group assembly or (Ana)***

*Yeah, because like a group assembly we only have one every three weeks. Where as with Facebook because all the pupils are a fan of it, it [information] just pops up on their wall instantly.* (Krypton)

This highlights the use of social media being used in cost effective and positive ways to communicate messages to cliental, who in this case are high school students. In a modern world saturated with technological communication devices young people today are learning important social skills in a mediated landscape. boyd claims “Rather than demonizing social media or dismissing its educational value, I believe that we need to embrace the environments that youth are using to gather and help them learn to navigate the murky waters of sociality” (boyd 2009, online).

## The Mobile Phone and Social Identity

### *Texting versus Talking*

Interviews reiterated that the mobile phone was most commonly used by all participants for texting people, followed by listening to and downloading music. Given the extent to which young people are using the phone to text the interviewees were asked if it were sometimes easier to say things through a text rather than face to face (a question also asked in the focus group). No new material came to light in this phase of the research. They referred often to the fact that people broke up relationships via texts, indicated romantic interest to others, and sometimes would divulge information that would be too embarrassing to discuss in person. For instance Morganite told me “You can say more things and not be embarrassed about it, like how you feel about someone.” This sentiment was echoed in Emerald’s response:

*Yep – you can get all nervous when face to face and then when you text you actually have time to think about what you wanna say –and they can’t tell if you are lying or not. (Emerald)*

***What sort of things would you rather say over a text than face to face?***

**(Ana)**

*Um I don’t know say someone likes you and it will be through texts cos it is probably easier because the boy is too shy to say it face to face. (Emerald)*

Flirting via text messages was quite common, but these texts could prove problematic if the interest was not reciprocated, or if in fact they were misinterpreted by the receiver as flirting. This was made evident in Argon’s comment below:

*Well like lots of the girls say ‘xxo’ [kiss, kiss, hug] at the end of their texts and one kid in my other class, Osmium, he took it the wrong way from Sapphire and yeah he has been like in love with her for the last two weeks and saying that Sapphire doesn’t like him. So yeah real easy to take the wrong way – like real easy.*

When asked why it was easier to say things in a text, the general consensus amongst participants was that you don't have to look at them and so you could avoid emotion, feeling embarrassed or those awkward silences. Krypton told me:

*Well text to text doesn't have any emotions in the words so you know for instance breaking up over texts is considered the wuss's way out because you don't have to deal with the crying or the emotions or anything like that – you know it is just simple and to the point.*

Like Krypton, other students were in agreement that dealing with some of these issues via texting was cowardly and may inflate one's self confidence.

Participants were also in agreement that one of the positive things about texting was that you could preplan what you wanted to say, which they found was sometimes easier than the spontaneity of face-to-face conversations. As Argon explains “Yeah, usually you have a good think about it [what you text] rather than if you are talking in a conversation like you can't just really say ‘oh yeah give me a minute to think about what I should say next!’”. Sapphire's response echoed Argon's but she also recognises that these messages could be misinterpreted as she explains below:

*Yeah you like have more time to think about what you are going to say – so what you say can be more thought through. But if it was face to face you could ask them what they meant so there is less chance of taking it the wrong way. I guess it is easy for someone else to take the wrong way but you know what you mean.*

This point is echoed in Nickel's comment “Well face to face you probably wouldn't misinterpret it [the content] cos of the emotions and like what they are showing on their face and whatever.” The potential for ambiguity of text message content is heightened considering the lack of visual and aural cues normally present in face-to-face interaction. Therefore the students were asked if text messages they had sent, or been sent to them, had ever been misunderstood or misinterpreted. Morganite said she never had because people

(including herself) would always put LOL (laugh out loud) or a similar initialism at the end of the message to indicate they were joking. Krypton said occasionally he had taken a text the wrong way because “you can’t really understand sarcasm during a text cos it is just words and you don’t understand the tone of the words”. Sapphire had also received texts she had taken the wrong way and, when prompted to explain why she thought texts were sometimes misunderstood, she explained that “When someone says something in a text there is no emotion – so you can’t like tell if it is sarcastic cos there is no emotion – and it gives no expression in the way it is meant – talking in person is easier.” Sapphire and Emerald used the same technique as Morganite to avoid their texts being misunderstood and Sapphire went on to explain how a text with little content can be taken the wrong way.

*Yep –usually if you send a text like ‘wot’ people think you are angry and I use that a lot. Using LOL and smiley faces – helps get the right expression across. Sometimes if you just write a short message that is taken as being angry!*

Using acronyms, emoticons and other techniques (such as text messages written in capital letters infers shouting) to indicate to others the intended mood and/or emotion of text messages was common to this group and clearly provided evidence for a shared understanding. Given that there are many other acronyms in existence that are used as a kind of short hand text message language, the participants were asked if they preferred to text words in full or if they mostly used text lingo. Nickel told me he tended to use text language and that his friends would text back using text language. By comparison Morganite would text her messages in full, when asked why? Her response was “Cos I can’t understand text language and if I write it in full then they will write back in full.” Emerald also mainly used full words in her text messages, she explained that this was due to the fact that she now used predictive text which decreased the number of times she had to press the keypad buttons. Had she not switched to using predictive text she said she would definitely use text lingo because it was quicker. Emerald went on to list many acronyms and what they stood for; she obviously had a good grasp of the text lingo unlike her Mother. “It is like ‘up2’ –yeah like that is retarded. Some people make me laugh with their texting aye – like you have Mum and she is really bad at interpreting them.”

## **A Texting Etiquette**

There has been some discussion by other researchers that young people abide by a certain texting etiquette. For example there is an expectation that they reply to a text message within a certain, and relatively short, time frame (Campbell 2005b). Communications are also designed around turn-taking and exchange (Ito & Okabe 2005; Spagnolli & Gamberini 2007; Cupples & Thompson 2010). This is made evident in the quote below:

*Oh I was texting Palladium, and this is funny, as I left my house and I texted him and he texted me back and I texted him back and then I went and had a shower and I don't think I texted back for like half an hour and then um I looked at my phone and I had another text saying **"YOU HATE ME"** – and I was like **"um I was having a shower"** and he was like **"oh that is all good then"**. (Emerald)*

To get a sense of texting etiquette the participants in this phase of the research were asked how long they usually took to reply a text message. Six of the students said they tended to respond in less than one minute, unless they were busy or texting a detailed message that took longer than one minute to draft. Here is the response from Argon “Um probably seconds – in the seconds to a minute range – it depends how deep of a text message it is really”. The response from Krypton (a self-confessed techno-geek) was quite unique when it came to this question as illustrated in the following dialogue:

***What about when you receive a text message how long do you usually take to reply? (Ana)***

*When I am at home I don't have my cell phone on me so it is just if I casually turn it on and see that there is a text there, but if I am on it, like if it is in pocket and if I am talking to someone I will finish what I am saying then take it out – you know I won't feel it [vibrate] and instantly take it out and read it. (Krypton)*

***That is funny – well not funny but nice (Ana)***

*Yeah well I've had people kind of talking to me they get a text and they are reading it but they are still talking to me but they are reading and talking so (Krypton)*

***Yeah and how does that make you feel? (Ana)***

*It just feels like ok so your phone is more important than me. (Krypton)*

***That is why I asked that – because that is exactly how I feel when it happens to me. (Ana)***

*Yeah like you are just having a casual conversation, then they just whip out their phone and start replying yet they are still talking to me but not really listening to what I am saying. (Krypton)*

Krypton expresses how he feels 'second-rate' to the person he is conversing with if they pull out their mobile phone and address text messages mid-conversation. His ability to take the role of the other is made evident when he explains how this makes him feel and thus through his self-reflection and sensitivity is discouraged from treating others in this way. In doing this, Argon indicates the ability to make an object of oneself and represents a significant development of self.

When asked if they needed to look at their keypad whilst texting all the participants expressed they did not, with the exception of Krypton who owned an iPhone which had a full computer key pad with a touch-screen mode. The reasoning behind asking this question was to get a sense of if text messages could be drafted covertly at times when mobile phones were not meant to be in circulation, such as during class, or at school in general. Sapphire did provide evidence for clandestinely using her mobile phone when she said "Yep I sometimes text in class – can be good to text answers in a test – it is real easy!" One of the schools that took part in this research had a complete ban on pupils having mobile phones at school, the second school allowed mobile phones at school on the proviso they were used responsibly and not during class times. It was previously determined, through the focus groups held at the one school, that the majority of students were contravening the school ban by carrying their mobile phones on them. Most of the students in the one-on-one unstructured interviews confirmed that they tended to always have their phone with them. Here are some of the responses given when they were asked 'Why?'

*It feels funny if you don't have it, like you are missing something*  
(Morganite)

*To get Mum, like if I need her or get in trouble or something – or usually just to text my friends just to tell them what we are up to or whatever*  
(Nickel)

*Yeah I tend to [have it at all times] just because, like I had one time where my Mum actually had a car accident and she couldn't get hold of me because I didn't have my phone on me – yeah so that was really annoying cos I had to like push my bike another two and half kilometres* (Argon).

*Yeah – I feel lost without it.* (Emerald)

### **The Mobile Phone and Text Bullying**

Of course the speed and viral spread of information can also have its down side when it comes to more anti-social behaviour. This is highlighted in the comment made by Emerald when asked if friends would forward personal messages on to others.

*Say you are having an argument with someone and then um they'll be friends with someone else (the person you are arguing with) and then you will send them real rude messages and stuff and then they will send it on to their friends showing them what they said and then you get talked about behind your back and all that cos it goes around so fast.*

### **Rumours and Gossip**

As mentioned in the previous chapter rumours and gossip were two things frequently mentioned in the focus group discussions. To try and get a better sense of to what degree youth problematised rumours and gossip the young interviewees in this project were asked if they had ever had a rumour spread about them or spread a rumour about someone else via their mobile phone. Copper told me he had rumours spread about him and that he had spread a rumour about someone else and sent it on his mobile phone as a forward. Morganite told me “I just talk to my close friend about what other friends were doing or who they were

trying to get into”. When asked if this spread to other people she replied with a laugh “Yeah probably, everything gets around fast here”. Here are some of the other responses to these questions.

***Have you ever had a rumour or gossip spread about you by text message? (Ana)***

*No not that I know of but usually if I did find out about it I would go and see the person that started it and say “what is the story here because it is not true” or whatever – so like get right to the bottom of it. (Nickel)*

*Yeah I got drunk on Friday night at this party and was seen kissing someone, someone spread the rumour around and it was all spread around by Saturday. I don’t remember anything about it so I don’t really care. It happens a lot with the more private things – you only feel like you are telling one person but then it keeps getting passed on. (Sapphire)*

*Yep – I remember one day, one chick, you know that Citrine chick I was saying about she was walking around one day all on her own and I like said “oh hey” and we just walked around for one lunch time and before you know it everyone has texted each other before you know it the whole school knew that I was going out with her even before I did – so yeah apparently I was going out with Citrine [he laughs]! (Argon)*

*Um no – most of the people that would spread it are my friends – that sounds really bad but... (Emerald)*

***Have you ever spread gossip or a rumour about someone else via your mobile phone? (Ana)***

*No I don’t like to do that that I don’t want to like aggravate people or get them annoyed at me – I’d rather keep people on side than off side. (Nickel)*



*Yeah sometimes –I would text Morganite or someone like that or if it is really important I will ring them. (Sapphire)*

*Not really if I hear something I will tell my mate like face to face but I will say it is probably not true it is probably another one of those rumours going around – I've had rumours done to me like I said and it sux – it is annoying...Like I went to this party recently and there were all sorts of rumours just flying around so quick – like you are tempted to turn off your phone the next day! (Argon)*

Emerald's response to this question was more detailed as she provided two actual examples of gossip that other people at her school had encountered. Her response clearly indicates some sense of empathy and Mead's 'generalised other' as she differentiates between varying types of gossip. The following narrative is that pertaining to the question asked of Emerald "Have you ever spread rumours or gossip about someone else via your mobile?"

*Yeah probably um that sounds really bad but it depends really what it was. Like one of the boys like one of my friends was going to have sex with someone from Year 12 and he pushed her away because he had an STI (Emerald)*

***Oh ok (Ana)***

*And I found out but another girl was going around spreading it around the school and shouting it out the window "Oh, Tantalum has got a STI" like I knew ages before the other girl but I didn't tell anyone – like I won't spread stuff like that - that is just personal (Emerald)*

***So you wouldn't spread stuff like that cos it is personal (Ana)***

*No I would never spread something that could really hurt the person like I mean apparently this party last week – 'the big 16' and there was lots of drinking and apparently everyone was kinda hooking up with everyone sort of thing and this girl said she only hooked up with one guy sort of thing but there is a rumour going around that she hooked up with a lot*

*more. So that is like I'm mentioning what someone else has told me but yeah I am not going to say that I know for sure. (Emerald)*

***Do you think sometimes people spread some gossip and it is a bit of a joke and then it gets serious? (Ana)***

*Yeah lots of people do that - like if there is something that goes around about you there is not much you can do really. (Emerald)*

Rumour spreading also came up in conversation with Krypton when he was asked if he knew of anybody who had experienced problems when communicating using their mobile phone. A focal point here, is that every other participant could recall an incident which involved rumour spreading or gossip yet no other participant identified with this under questioning related to problems involving self or others when it came to mobile phones, questions that were asked in the initial stages of this interview. Hence, here purely by omission may lay the answer to my question 'To what degree is gossip and rumour spreading problematic for young people?' With students tending to agree that this was not such a big thing and you just had to deal with it. Of course, it must be noted that the message content was not tapped into in these particular interviews and thus it is difficult to determine how malicious these rumours were, if at all. Further analysis of the language youth are using is required to determine if words such as "gossip" serve multiple purposes. Krypton told me:

*Yeah like fights have broken out because someone has texted someone something and it has spread basically. (Krypton)*

***What sort of thing? (Ana)***

*Oh I can't remember it was a while ago but it is just rumours – because rumours spread a lot quicker on a cell phone. (Krypton)*

***Was that at school? (Ana)***

*Yeah (Krypton)*

***So then you were saying that someone texted someone did it then turn to a physical fight? (Ana)***

*No it was just like – it was between girls so it was just like a fight and because with cell phones if you are spreading a rumour around then instead of telling one person you can um- I know with the cheap phones,*

*that most people have at school, you can send a message to 30 people at once – so it spreads!* (Krypton)

### ***Problems Encountered with Mobile Phones - Self***

When asked if they had ever experienced problems with other people whilst using their mobile phones, the responses are interesting from a gendered perspective as the three girls stated they had not experienced problems, the boys by comparison all had an incident to report. Nickel had received texts late at night, Copper had had people picking fights with him through text messages, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter Krypton had had his Iphone stolen from school. Argon relayed two personal encounters he had experienced. Argon had been in text communication with a girl from his school, and later on when he was with his Dad, he received an angry phone call from one of her friends.

*I said [to Dad] “I just got a phone call and some chick has just gone a bit nuts at me” and Dad was like “oh yeah just ignore it” and then the phone rang again and Dad was like “oh I will take care of this one hey” and Dad is taller than the school principal, bald, big sunglasses, rides Harleys so rather threatening really (laughs Argon)*

***So what did your Dad say? (Ana)***

*He just told them to “piss off” and they did - laughs – as soon as he talked they hung up it was actually really funny. (Argon)*

But the incident did not end there for Argon; it involved a trip to the guidance counsellor who also made phone calls to the respective parents.

***So what was her reasoning for taking this to the guidance counsellor– you texted her twice? (Ana)***

*She was saying that apparently I had a big thing for her but we had been quite good mates I remember one time I had a fight with my Dad and she actually even offered for me to go to her house for awhile we were like really good mates and then I texted her twice in one day and you know... (Argon)*

From experience Argon is well aware that text messages can be taken the wrong way and over thought, in fact it was one of the things he identified when asked what he liked least about his mobile phone. Argon explains:

*I don't like the effect that simple things can have, like saying simple stuff can become such a big deal. Like if you are texting someone and they say something like um "what you been up to" and I say "sorry I've gotta go I'm just about to go for a dirt bike ride" – and it is like oh yeah whatever you are actually just going to go and play on the computer or something you just don't want to talk to me and then you have a fight at school and then yeah.*

The second encounter for Argon also mentioned in the first focus group session. Argon explains how he received a text from a girl he used to go to school with in Central Otago.

*She was up in the North Island and she decided to send me an abusive text at random she said "she would take a dump in mouth and stuff me like a haggis". (Argon)*

***Right and then how did you deal with that one? (Ana)***

*I am pretty sure I gave her a ring actually and asked her why she said it – and she said she thought it would be funny ya know – but I would like to know how she would feel if I said that to her. I actually have another mate that lives in the same place as her and he went and gave her a tune up. (Argon)*

Later in the interview, Argon revealed that he had gotten all his friends to 'text bomb'<sup>9</sup> the girl that had sent him the abusive text.

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<sup>9</sup> Text-bombing is when one or more people spam another's mobile phone. Multiple text messages are sent to one phone in one short motion meaning the phone's memory reaches capacity and cannot be used again until all the incoming spam messages are deleted.

*I actually got everyone in my class to text bomb this chick so yeah she got like 4,000 messages sent to her over the course of two days when she had her phone taken off her. When she turned it back on it didn't go for like three days I think because of the text bombs and she is one of those people who can't live without her phone. (Argon)*

***You said she had her phone taken off her (Ana)***

*Yeah she had it taken off her cos my friend that went around to her house dobbed her in! (Argon)*

### ***Problems Encountered with Mobile Phones - Other***

The participants were also asked if they knew of anybody else who had experienced problems whilst using their mobile phones. All but one interviewee had an incident they could recall in response to this question. Copper said 'One of my friends got harassed by their girlfriend's ex'. Morganite talked about a friend from another school who had been text-bullied quite a lot. When asked if she knew the content of the text messages Morganite replied:

*Yeah, they were making up stuff like she slept with her Uncle or something – they sent it around as a forward. (Morganite)*

***Oh, did they? (Ana)***

*Yep and then everyone started texting her and giving her shit about it. (Morganite)*

Nickel also knew of people that had experienced text bullying:

*Yeah like some of my friends have been text bullied and that. (Nickel)*

***Yeah – can you tell me about that? (Ana)***

*Um they just get texts from people, like they keep texting them and then they say "go away" and then they won't go away and then it just escalates and it gets to the point they are like I don't really want to speak to you sort of thing – so (Nickel)*

***Is that males/females or both? (Ana)***

*I've got a few girlfriends and it is usually them and it usually gets into...ahhh... text bullying with other girls and yeah. (Nickel)*

***So your male friends don't tend to the same way? (Ana)***

*No not really no. (Nickel)*

And finally this is Emerald's story:

*This friend of mine from another school went out with this girl, they had gone out for almost a year and then he dumped her. (Emerald)*

***By text or ? (Ana)***

*Yeah [by text] because yeah he is not very good at that sort of stuff. Then she got like really obsessed with him and now he has got another girlfriend and she still just texts him constantly and says that she loves him and calling him "babe" and all that stuff and then last time when he rang Telecom to block her number they told him that he needs to get in contact with the police about it and he didn't want to do that so he has to keep having her texts. I told him well give it to me I will do it. (Emerald)*

***What you mean you would ring the police? (Ana)***

*No I would just ring Telecom cos I've blocked a number before and they haven't told me to ring the police (Emerald)*

***Why did he not want to ring the police? (Ana)***

*Cos he is only 13 so I just don't think he really wanted to get involved in that kind of stuff. (Emerald)*

***So he just thought he will have to keep putting up with the texts from the ex. (Ana)***

*Yeah she is like twelve and she is obsessed, literally. (Emerald)*

Emerald went on to advise that she thought the ex-girlfriend had stopped sending her friend text messages because his current girlfriend and her mates had verbally told 'the ex' off about her actions.

In two of the incidents mentioned above friends of the victims took matters into their own hands and dealt with the perpetrator. This is by no means uncommon; a recurring trend in both traditional bullying and cyberbullying is that if bullying behaviour is reported, youth are most likely to tell a friend in the first instance, followed by a parent or caregiver, with the least likely confidant being a teacher (Hunt 2007; Dehue et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2008; Cross et al. 2009; Bauman 2010; Li 2010). In a recent study, Fenaughty (2010) found that many young people preferred to deal with cyber issues themselves rather than reporting them to adults who may “over react” and confiscate the technological tools. However, participants did maintain they would tell a parent/guardian should a situation get very serious and run the risk of grievous bodily harm. I asked my interviewees what they thought they would do if they were receiving nasty or inappropriate text messages. Sapphire told me “I don’t really care – if they say it by text it doesn’t really mean much anyway cos they didn’t have the guts to say it to my face”. Four of the participants said they would probably call their network provider and get the person’s phone number blocked. This is a positive response that infers young people have an awareness of what action to take if being bullied this way. Three participants said they would just deal with the situation themselves. In fact Argon told me that another boy in his year had come up to him and punched him in the head, and then he started sending Argon really abusive text messages. Argon confronted the culprit face-to-face and told him “*If you have something to say say it to my face*”. This confrontation brought a stop to abusive texts and Argon acknowledges “Yeah but if I had texted him back it would have been a big long debate and we probably would have had another fight at school.” When they were asked if they would report it to anyone, three of the participants said they would probably tell their friends. The only mention of telling a parent came from one boy who said he would probably tell his best friend in the first instance and then maybe his Mum. Another boy said he would only report it if the messages continued. And Nickel explains how he would only report the text messages if they were “really nasty”.

*Like maybe threatening sort of thing or like “**I am going to come and punch you at school tomorrow**” or whatever or something like that but I’ve never ever went that far so doesn’t bother me.*

The response from Emerald, when asked what she thought she would do if she was receiving nasty texts messages, is worth quoting at some length.

*Depends who the person was if it was someone I didn't like I would probably ring up and block their number or just signal them but if it were like one of the persons in my class like friends, but not sort of friends, I would text them back and have a go at them [laughs]. Like everyone knows in my class that I am going to stick up for myself I'm not one of those little girls that ohhh someone has a go at you and I've gotta run away – everyone knows that I will stick up for myself so they tend not to do it to me. (Emerald)*

***What about you said you would text back and have a go, what about alternatively, would you face up to them and say something as well. (Ana)***

*Mmmm well it depends who it was – like that is a hard one – I don't think I would do it face to face because then they would say get the upper end of ya – then you don't know what to say and then it kinda embarrasses you in front of all your other friends. (Emerald)*

***Would you report it to anyone? (Ana)***

*Like bullying? (Emerald)*

***Yeah (Ana)***

*Um I would probably tell my friend - like I've got one bestie [friend] and she is a real bestie she is not just a friend sort of thing you can tell her sort of anything and you know she won't say anything. But as I said not many people bully me because I am not one of those people that gets bullied like I will stick up for myself and there is not much really to bully me about sort of thing. (Emerald)*

***Yeah (Ana)***

*Like you get some of those really unfortunate people who have something wrong and it is like yeah - but then I will stick up for them too – like this girl in our class - she is 16 she was held back a year – don't take this the wrong way but she has got a straight across fringe and she's got hair that*



*goes down to here [gesticulates with hands] and kinda really looks like a ghost and she is 16 and she doesn't shave or use moisturizer or anything and um yeah um she has got something wrong with the way she talks, she kinda sounds weird and yeah um she is really white and stuff and the boys are really quite mean to her so I will always have a go at them for her.*  
(Emerald)

***Oh ok, so the boys have her on a bit do they have her on by text? (Ana)***

*No one has her number. (Emerald)*

***Does she have a phone? (Ana)***

*Yeah not being mean but no one really wants her number. (Emerald)*

This detailed discussion illuminates some key points worthy of attention. Emerald explains how her actions in dealing with inappropriate texts would be determined by who was sending them. She is well aware she can block phone numbers if necessary. However, if the perpetrator is an acquaintance from school she would be more inclined to 'have a go' at them – she goes on to explain that she would probably do this by text so as not to be left so vulnerable in a face to face confrontation. Emerald, who could be described as an alpha girl, goes on to explain she is unlikely to be a victim of bullying and compares herself to Alexandrite one of her more 'unfortunate' peers. Emerald clearly exhibits sensitivity towards Alexandrite when she says she sticks up for her when the boys tease her, therefore indicating a significant development of self. What is striking in this dialogue is the final comment made by Emerald that nobody wants Alexandrite's mobile phone number. As we have seen the mobile phone defines teenage social cohesion, and in this instance Alexandrite may avoid being text-bullied but at the expense of social exclusion (which is often categorised as a form of relational bullying).

In this chapter the role the mobile phone has for young people has been further advanced through the one-on-one unstructured interviews conducted in this research. These interviews provided the opportunity for participants to elaborate on and provide more detailed accounts of the information generated in focus groups. As in the preceding chapter, the data discussed here has been presented verbatim so as to both deepen our understanding of the topic in hand and to allow the participants' to have a voice and thus demonstrating the value of what they

said. The following discussion chapter will further examine the results by means of analysis. G.H. Mead's concept of self will be employed to further our understanding of young peoples' mobile phone use.

# Chapter 6 - Discussion

The mobile phone and in particular text messaging has become commonplace for today's young people. This technological artifact is no longer deemed new, unique, or interesting but has become instead a banal item, a normal part of an adolescent's social world. "Wireless communication has emerged as one of the fastest diffusing mediums on the planet, fueling an emergent "mobile youth culture" that speaks as much with thumbs as it does with tongues" (Lenhart et al. 2010, p. 15). In the discussion that follows, and founded on the three key research questions that underpin this study, I provide an analysis of why young people have so readily embraced mobile telephony, and what the everyday attitudes and experiences are that prevail. This chapter combines results from both parts of this study with G. H. Mead's concept of self. Not all of the current findings fall directly within Mead's theoretical perspective, however, and in some cases other theoretical concepts may briefly be applied where useful for explanatory purposes. Although the ordering of the research questions is somewhat arbitrary, I believe each research question sets up foundational data for the next question and therefore takes an organic approach. Although my results are far from generalizable to all high schools in Otago or beyond, due to the limited number of participants in this research project, many of my research findings are consistent with results found in other academic studies pertaining to mobile phone use amongst young people. Throughout this chapter I will note where similarities and differences lie in comparison to other academic literature conducted.

## **The Social Benefits of the Mobile Phone**

### ***A Virtual Tether***

Unsurprisingly, and supporting the ubiquity of the mobile phone, all participants in this study owned at least one mobile phone. The most popular feature of the mobile phone for this group was texting, aligning my results with those of Grinter & Eldridge 2001; Johnsen 2003; Ling 2004a; Oksman & Turtiainen 2004; Vykoukalová 2007; Walsh et al. 2007 and Thompson & Cupples 2008. The benefits of texting were strongly associated with keeping in touch and chatting with friends, maintaining and strengthening relationships, positive self-

presentation and micro-coordination with both friends and family. For this group the mobile phone could indeed be likened to the ‘virtual umbilical cord’ idea proposed by Townsend (2000), with the phone allowing a degree of freedom to young people whilst simultaneously offering parents security assurances in terms of their teenagers whereabouts and safety. This was supported in the previous chapter with Emerald explaining how having her mobile phone was a prerequisite to her leaving the house. Emerald, also spoke of using her phone more now that she was a bit older and tended to be out and about more. Given the considerable amount of time Emerald spent outside and often in isolation, when out horse-riding, it was expected by her Mother and important that Emerald had her phone with her before she left the house. Emerald explains ‘why’ she needs her phone “Yeah for keeping track of people and so Mum knows and if something goes wrong when you are out riding or something. Yep so you’ve got your phone to ring people – I mean like the emergency numbers are free to ring so”.

Many of the participants made reference to the fact they needed their phones in case something unexpected happened or went wrong and they needed to contact their parents – hence Turkle’s (2007) ‘*virtual tether*’ prevails. Most participants in this study lived in a rural area, with some travelling over 30 minutes to school. Given public transport or walking home were hardly viable options for this cohort it is to be expected that micro-coordination in terms of parental pick ups and drop offs would need to be scheduled. This was often done by mobile phone, illustrating one of the pragmatic benefits of mobile telephony. Ling & Yttri (2002) propose that the mobile phone is key in allowing real-time adjustments to previously scheduled agreements; a proposition supported in my results.

While the parents in Vaidyanathan & Latu’s (2007) study appreciated being able to keep in touch with their children via mobile phone they also saw it as a device detrimental to familial communication. When students in this study were asked how their parents responded to their persistent texting many made reference to the fact that the activity tended to irritate their parents, especially the constant noise produced by the keypad buttons and incoming message alerts. Some parents had established ground rules such as no texting at mealtimes or after 8:00pm. Neon claimed that his Mother would take the phone off him if he ignored her too much. Opal [whose parents were separated] attributed boredom as a cause for the increased

texting that annoyed her mother: “My Mum says I’m addicted to it but I text when I am at her house because there is nothing to do – so that is why I text and then she goes I am addicted to it and I don’t text when I am at my other house”. The question arises then, is texting being used as an activity to fill in time and alleviate boredom?

### ***Texting – A Form of Entertainment?***

Lenhart et al. (2010) found that 69% of their 800 participants aged between 12-17 years claimed their mobile phones helped entertain them when they were bored. Opal and Argon (whose parents are also separated) both seem to confirm that this is the case as they infer that texting is a relatively inexpensive way to entertain oneself when there seems little alternative. Remember Argon is the boy who has reduced his text messaging monthly quota considerably and referred to text messaging as anti-social. His viewpoint was following a negative experience when a couple of mundane texts he had sent to a girl at school had been taken the wrong way and resulted in the school personnel being involved. For this group, and in the absence of physical bodies, the mobile phone bridged one’s sense of self with friendship networks and thus complemented the innate human drive of sociability.

***So how many texts do you think you would send a day? (Ana)***

*It depends, if I am at Mum’s I get real bored so I can send easily 1000 in a weekend – yeah cos I get real bored (Argon)*

***Oh really? (Ana)***

*Yeah well all she does is go shopping and leave me at home so (Argon)*

***What about just on an average day? (Ana)***

*Average day, probably about ten yeah. (Argon)*

Some researchers have proposed that texting is addictive but this term does not have to necessarily be taken negatively (Walsh, White, Young & Ross, 2007). Obviously message content would need to be considered here as young people have admitted cyber-bullying purely because they are bored or just for fun (Li 2010; Nicol 2012). It has been argued that the mobile phone is in fact a positive addiction due to the benefits provided by feelings of social connectedness (Cassidy 2006). This demonstrates the functional role the mobile phone plays in preventing feelings of boredom, isolation and loneliness. Many of my rural-dwelling

participants spoke of involvement in extra-curriculum recreational activities and also responsibilities on their family property leaving them with less downtime. Sapphire makes a direct reference to this point when contrasting rural and urban teenagers and suggesting urban youth are more “obsessed” with their phones which they “can’t seem to live without”.

*Always seems to be the town kids that really value their mobile phones – like people at school in Dunedin – they can’t seem to live without it. They seem to put more value on their mobile phones – you ask them what they are doing and it is usually like “oh nothing just texting people” but they have everything there. Usually here there is always something to do like feeding animals and writing so I don’t text as much.*  
(Sapphire)

### **A Rural Location**

Currently insufficient research exists that explores the mobile phone and texting activity of adolescents who live in different geographical and topographical locations. I propose that many rural youth develop a heterogeneous social circle, and strong sense of belonging, within their community, leaving them less vulnerable to peer group pressure than their urban counterparts. Definition of a situation may well vary, therefore, depending on one’s social interaction and location. On more than one occasion participants in this study mentioned not caring what their friends thought of them – a mature response given the age of these participants.

Another finding in this study relating to rural location is the importance ascribed to the make and model of mobile telephones. Some research suggests that teenagers, especially those aged between 13-15, tend to place more value on the style of the phone and on the personalisation of the handset (Mante & Piris 2002; Oksman & Rautiainen 2002, cited in Castells et al. 2007). My findings reveal that although personalisation of phones was highly visible by means of ringtones, screensavers and decorative nuances, the majority of students actually placed very little significance on the mobile make and model type. Krypton (an urbanite) was certainly the exception to the rule, he had saved relentlessly in order to own his Apple Iphone and with his passion for technology the thing he liked most about it was the

software design. However, the majority of students referred to robustness as a highly valued requirement of their mobile phones. For this group practicality far outweighed aesthetics. This was mostly due to their rural dwelling and lifestyle, where through experience older model phones had proved more durable when for example they were dropped whilst out horse-riding or motor-bike riding. For these participants having a particularly sought after model did not appear to enhance one's social standing within the peer group. However, there was a degree of 'othering' evident in discussions where participants claimed some people really did care about having 'flashy' and fashionable phones.

### ***Texting, Texting and More Texting***

For this group the ability to send text messages was the most fundamental feature of the mobile phone. The make and model of mobile phones were given much less emphasis by the majority of this group – as long as you could text it did not matter if you did so on a budget phone or an old phone. There are several possible explanations for this result, for instance 14 and 15 year olds are less likely to have substantial purchasing power when it comes to owning the most up to date mobile phones. Argon certainly claimed he had better things to spend his money on and Emerald illustrated a monetary appreciation for the expense of a touch screen phone. Most of this group did not own the most up to date mobile phones and thus made up the majority in their circle, alleviating the desire to own the latest and greatest mobiles. Indeed, in the second focus group attention was brought to the fact that Opal was the only student who owned an expensive phone. And it was clearly obvious that Opal felt somewhat self-conscious about being the minority. Adolescents are also more likely to be pre-paid customers and own a mobile phone outright as opposed to a contract customer who is able to upgrade their mobile approximately every two years. This creates another avenue for further research: To explore whether class stratification factors into a student's choice and ownership of mobile phone.

For this group it appears that positive social status is linked to the quantity of text messages able to be sent rather than to the make and model of one's mobile phone. The following conversation infers the more texts one has the better and note two participants use the term 'only' implying 'merely':

*I am only on Boost 2000 – so I can only send 2000 [a month] (Neon)*

*I can only send 2,500 (Diamond)*

*I am on 2000 (Platinum)*

*Well I am on unlimited so I can send as much as I like (Opal)*

*CAN YOU????!!! Man I wish I had that. (Neon)*

Focus group two participants also provided their text message balances of their own accord. The eagerness exhibited in divulging this information amongst the group suggests that the number of text messages being sent by individuals acts as an indicator for social connectedness and popularity amongst peers, hence symbolizing social status, and for this reason could well be exaggerated. My participants rarely made voice-calls and claimed to send approximately 100 texts per day. Similarly half of Lenhart et al.'s (2010) United States participants would send more than 50 texts a day and 1/3 would send more than 100 texts per day, yet for this group voice calling was still an active and important function. These are significant amounts compared to the seven texts per day sent quoted by Walsh et al.'s (2007) participants. Or even compared to Korean, Danish and Norwegian teens who send around 15-20 texts daily (Lenhart et al. 2010). For young New Zealanders, the avidity of texting is essentially dependent on their mobile phone plans, which will vary according to national telecommunication plans. The financial advantage of texting over making voice calls has been identified as a major reason to send a text (Ling 2004a). In this study the vast majority of participants were on pre-paid plans where for \$10 a month they could send 2,000 texts,<sup>10</sup> an economic advantage compared to a voice minute which comes at the cost of \$0.44 per minute. So in true 'user-pays' fashion why not use your monthly quota of texts if you have paid for them.

The following focus group dialogue illuminates another point of interest when considering text messaging practices. Young people need to and do manage/calculate their text messaging activity accordingly if on limited texting plans. Texting has been classified into two rather distinct categories. The first is social, with a premise of conversational banter presumably between friends. The second is functional, whereby adolescents can liaise with parents in times of need or merely for micro-coordination. This supports Ling and Yttri's

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<sup>10</sup> On this particular plan any texts unused at the end of the month would not be carried forward to the next month.



(2002) claim that “in addition to the simple coordination of where and when, the device is employed for emotional and social communication. People chat with each other” (p. 140). The following conversation illustrates both the two distinctive categories of texting and an appreciation of this shared understanding between participants.

*Well text me tonight and I will text you back (Opal)*

*No, I've got no texts (Neon)*

*Oh fine then – your loss not mine (Opal)*

*Then why are you taking your phone to town if you've got no texts?*

*(Topaz asks Neon)*

*Oh, cos I've got texts but they are spare ones but not enough to have a conversation (Neon)*

*Not enough for a conversation? (Opal)*

*Oh - emergency texts! (Topaz exclaims understandingly)*

Although outside the scope of this research this presents an avenue for further research, where pricing plans and mobile phone activity amongst teens is compared nationally to establish if the economics of mobile phone subscriptions are the main drivers behind teen texting patterns.

### ***Texting – An Evolving Language***

On December 3, 2012 the text message celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday (Text Messaging Turns 20 as Popularity Drops, 2012). And in those 20 years the text message can be accredited with its users creating a somewhat unique and distinct literal discourse tweaked to enhance the brevity and speed of talking/chatting by text (Castells et al. 2007). Text messaging critics claims it is destroying the ‘true’ written language and hindering young people in terms of literacy development. This new discourse, although used at large by most mobile phone users, is actively being shaped, created and shared by a certain young population and is distinct to this historical epoch. Due to the 160 character capacity of a text message and the economic incentive to optimise each text message, contemporary youth have created a new way to express themselves, a cryptically coded language made up of acronyms, initialisms, and contractions (Ling 2004a). Alongside these, are the emoticons which are used to deliver

and communicate the emotional content of the message leaving them less open to misinterpretation. Walther and D'Addario (2001) defined emoticons as graphic representations of facial expressions that are embedded in electronic messages. Some widely recognised acronyms, initialisms and emoticons are listed below.

- lol = laugh out loud or lots of love (initialism)
- m8 = mate (letter/number homophone)
- B4 = before (letter/number homophone)
- Bro = brother (shortening)
- Msg = message (contraction)
- :- ) = smiley face (emoticon)
- :-( = upset face (emoticon)

More obscure examples are not so easily deciphered however, and rely on in-group knowledge. For example:

- POS = Parent over shoulder (initialism)
- BL = Belly laughing (initialism)
- JJWY = Just joking with you (initialism)
- Tog = together (contractions)
- %- ( = ??? (open to interpretation!) (emoticon)
- :-p = (???? (open to interpretation!) (emoticon)

I question how text messaging discourse is really being used by young people? Has it truly become commonplace and inherently integrated into their everyday language? Are young people using text abbreviations to communicate with each other in order to maintain a collective youth identity? My research has thrown up some intriguing results in this area. My data indicated that many young texters preferred to text words in full and often combined with emoticons. This is in appreciation of the fact that by not using SMS language their messages, and the emotional content, can be understood by the receiver. This is thought provoking in light of Mead's claim that symbols are only meaningful because they have a shared meaning and are significant for group members (Hewitt 1988). Text lingo and cryptic

text messages will potentially have little significance or meaning if the content cannot be appreciated by all concerned parties. Much time can potentially be wasted if the recipient has to spend ten minutes trying to translate a message.

When participants were asked to share their favourite text acronyms the commonality of the acronyms being used by this young cohort was immediately notable. Even as a ‘digital immigrant’<sup>11</sup> I was familiar with all the acronyms this group provided. This matches Thurlow & Poff’s (2013) finding, that counter to popular belief, a ‘texting code’ was not really in sanction. In fact, their young participants were using a limited amount of non-standard or non-decipherable word items. In my research project the acronyms being used were also quite unremarkable with all but two of them featuring in the Top 50 popular text and chat acronyms as cited by *Netlingo* (n.d). Why, then, were some of the more obscure acronyms not being widely used by this group?

The answer is simple and is in keeping with one of the problems associated with text messaging which was found in Grinter & Eldridge’s (2001) small-scale study. My participants recognised that texts loaded with abbreviations, acronyms and initialisms were not always easy to interpret. Mead (1959) would argue that these nuanced text messages were hindering social interaction and shared understandings. Also, given that text messaging is favoured as a means of communication due to the speed in which it can be conducted it is logical that time potentially wasted trying to decipher a message would be rather irksome. And time is of the essence when it comes to texting – with brevity and speed highly valued. This was made clear when Emerald explained her reasoning’s for texting in full – she had recently started using predictive text reducing her keypad strikes considerably. Had she not changed to using predictive text then she would use text language because that was quicker than texting words in full. With spelling functions and keypads constantly changing and advancing it seems that so too are the texting styles which have become highly dependent on maximising swift message drafting. This idea is summed up by Thurlow & Poff who claim, “These changes serve to remind us that, like language in general, the language of text messaging is constantly changing” (Thurlow & Poff 2013, p. 130). Hence, symbols, in the

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<sup>11</sup> The term digital immigrant refers to the people who have experienced life prior to technologies such as the mobile phone and the Internet, by comparison digital natives is a term used for those who have been immersed in technology from childhood.

form of text messaging language, are essentially influencing human interaction and behaviour (Hewitt 1988).

A number of participants in the current study spoke of not having a good grasp of text language. Emphasis was also placed on the evolving and nuanced nature of text messaging and the frustrations linked to this in terms of de-coding content. This had caused these participants to write their text messages using full words and then they explained the receiver would tend to text back in full. Nickel was the only participant who spoke of more readily taking up text language – a method he shared with his mates. This implies that a sense of style and form is quickly established and reciprocated between texters. Thus, the art of texting can be relatively idiosyncratic depending on who is doing the texting and with whom. This resonates well with Mead's (1934) argument that one's behaviour is regulated and tempered through social interaction and the imagined attitude of others.

My participants also recognised that text message content could be left quite ambiguous for the receiver. The significance of face-to-face interaction must be noted here. In face-to-face interaction people have the added advantage of aural cues, gesticulation and tone of voice to determine or transmit the emotive exchange of verbal transactions. Young people continue to communicate face-to-face (F-F), but with increasing frequency we now see a face replaced by an interface (Oksman & Turtiainen 2004). With texting for example, communication equates to face-interface-face (F-I-F). The mobile phone is being used as an interface, one that tends to eradicate aural and visual feedback and therefore enhances the chances of a discrepancy between the way things were intended (by sender) and how they were perceived (by receiver). Mead placed the utmost importance on the vocal gesture, deeming it the real source of language, for the utterance aurally stimulates the speaker as it does the recipient. This important feature is not readily available through texting communication. However, as illustrated in the previous chapter, the participants in this study worked to overcome ambiguity by regularly employing the use of standard emoticons and standard initialisms e.g. lol (laugh out loud). Krypton's response below acknowledges why he tends to text the same way he talks.

*I have to [use full words] because I just don't understand the abbreviations – when I am texting I will use capital letters [for nouns] and proper words. The problem is some people make up abbreviations that you don't understand and it is kinda like reading something in a different language. I use emoticons occasionally but if I want to laugh I will text 'ha ha ha' not LOL – you know cos if I was reading something and I said LOL well yeah it is just not the same as you know 'ha ha ha'!*

### **The Mobile Phone and Symbolism**

The mobile phone lends itself to becoming a defining symbol on multiple levels; social status can be ascribed to the mobile phone depending on make and model, as can a personal sense of style and taste through the use of ringtones, screensavers etc., and thus symbolizing pro-activity in the identity formation of self (Katz & Sugiyama 2002; Oksman & Turtiainen 2004; Vykoukalová 2007; Stald 2008; Ling 2009; Schneider 2009). Owning a mobile phone also symbolises being socially connected to others and infers active communication and social acceptance or lack thereof may be taken to symbolise exclusion and/or unconnectedness (Green 2003; Ling 2004a). According to Oksman & Rautiainen (2003, p. 298) “Teenagers’ perception of the mobile phone as a living thing is related to their tendency to see the mobile phone as symbolically representing the friends they contact through the device.” For young people amidst the transition from childhood to adolescence owning a mobile can symbolise a degree of independence in terms of managing one’s social network whilst simultaneously portraying emancipation from parental control (Green 2003, Ling 2009). Communicating via text messages is a symbolic activity directly linking one’s identity to teen group membership. Sharing files amongst friends via Bluetooth, and receiving and sending text messages can also symbolise gifting. Teenagers are well schooled in the ritual of texting as a form of gift-giving. There are stringent rules employed that are founded on the duty to give, receive, and give back - with the act of gift-giving taking precedence over the message content (Green 2003; Johnsen 2003; Stald 2008).

My own research findings indicated that the sheer volume of SMS texts being sent by individuals symbolised an element of status by means of popularity within peer groups. Popularity can also be quantified by the number of contacts in one’s mobile phone address

book, or qualified by having the 'right' names in the address book (Green 2003; Ling 2009). Ling (2004a, p. 99) claims that "The ownership, display, and symbolic use of the mobile telephone are - in many cultures - an essential part of being an adolescent. Just as the symbolism of the car goes far beyond simple functional transportation for many American teens, the mobile telephone is packed into a much broader symbolic universe." As illustrated my research findings suggest varying degrees of the aforementioned symbolic values attributed to the mobile phone can be found among young people. This is hardly surprising if one considers the subgroup of 'teenagers' as a heterogeneous population rather than a homogenous one. Not all teenagers consume in the same way, not all teenagers socialise in the same way, not all teenagers share the same degree of self-esteem or self-confidence, not all teenagers possess the same levels of resilience, and by all accounts not all teenagers text in the same way. Like any other age group, teenagers also display diversity and difference within their youthful communities (Stald 2008).

If we examine these findings through a lens created by Mead's ideas of interpersonal relations we see that in contemporary society the mobile phone works to strengthen social bonds whilst simultaneously symbolising the social aspect of self. A shared understanding of mobile phone language was repeatedly illustrated by participants in this study. For this particular group the mobile phone also symbolised teen identity and a personal sense of self. Communication via text messages symbolised peer friendships and popularity within the peer group. With the ease in which a young person can send a text, I have at times suggested that young people may spend more time whilst texting, in the 'I' (unconscious) state than the 'me' (conscious) state. My research results would suggest that this is not always so however, . students often expressed the need to construct text messages carefully to ensure they were not misconstrued and to provide a positive impression of self to the other. These ideas guide us towards placing the mobile phone within a social and cultural milieu. The following section will identify the mobile phone's power as an inanimate object to evoke in us emotive feelings and a sense of social connectedness/ belonging to peer groups, even in the physical absence of others.

## **The Mobile Phone and Social Identity**

The mobile phone has become a necessity in terms of youth culture. It has become so entrenched in our lives that to go out without one's mobile phone could be likened to going out without one's wallet or wristwatch. The young research participants in Vykoukalová (2007) study expressed feeling anxious at the prospect of losing their phone. Similar results were found in Thompson & Cupples (2008) study – their research participants further expressed a sense of discomfort to be without their phone. A few years ago to lose one's mobile phone and SIM card (essentially losing all one's contact numbers in the address book) would be highly inconvenient and potentially problematic. By contrast, when this group was asked how they would feel were they to lose their mobile phone and contacts details Sapphire responded by saying: “Yeah or you put it on Facebook or somewhere [that you have lost your phone] and everyone will just text you their numbers – so yeah you say “*this is my new number text me your number and your name*””.

### ***Mobile Phones and Facebook***

Facebook was mentioned more than once during data collection in this study. Commonly Facebook was seen as an alternate way of keeping in touch with friends. When asked how they would cope without their phone for three days many responded it would be ok because they could stay socially connected with friends on Facebook. This begs the question in reference to adolescents; has the mobile phone decreased in the popularity stakes due to other digital media? Or do various digital media simply function independently in providing different features and requirements for different spatial and temporal settings? With the advancement of technology we are beginning to see more and more multi-media gadgets, such as the smartphone. In this study, Facebook was certainly popular with participants, and those who were able to access the Internet via their mobile phones, would regularly log on to Facebook via this medium – although this did come at a cost of a dollar a day. This use of multi-media is a significant finding that suggests for many young people the mobile phone has become portal rather than exclusive when employing communication driven technologies. However, it was agreed that text messaging took preference over Facebook when discussing more private issues, as the information was less public. Lenhart et al. (2010) also found their participants accredited social networks with interpersonal interaction

in contrast to mobile phones which were used for more personal information. My participants also claimed that to forward these private text messages on to a third party would be wrong and disrespectful, a value laden claim contradicted by some of the participants who admitted showing texts to other friends when it came to gossip. Although most of the focus group participants had stated that they could be mobile free for a few days, they all tended to agree that they did not like to be without their mobile phones. This point is reflected in responses to my question “Would you feel like something was missing if you didn’t have your phone?” As outlined below the consensus was that “yes’, they would feel some discomfort or even panic in such a situation and they would feel far less safe without their mobile phones.

*Definitely* (Iron)

*Yeah cos you always check your pockets* (Rutherfordium)

***So you always check, basically check, in your pockets to make sure it is always in your pocket?*** (Ana)

*Yeah and if it is not there I ahhhhhh* [**takes a deep breath to indicate panic**] (Emerald)

*Yeah and if you check your pockets and it is not there it is like “oh no, where is it?”* (Sapphire)

***So if it is not there, there is a feeling of panic?*** (Ana)

*Yep like a panic attack* (Iron)

*You feel unsafe like cos then if I get in trouble or something I can’t call anybody. I just feel real unsafe.* (Opal).

Their responses to my question indicate that the mobile phone remains important from an adolescent viewpoint. The majority of participants would go to bed at night with their mobile phone beside them and on charger – with most participants using their mobile as their alarm clock.

### ***The Salience of the Mobile Phone***

Another motivator for sleeping with ones’ phone was the eventual connectivity it provided. It seems these young people feel obligated to be constantly available to their friends. Opal



verifies this by expressing the need to sleep with her phone in case an emergency occurs, when prompted this was redefined as a ‘friend problem’. This practice substantiates Fortunati’s claim that “The usefulness of the mobile rests on the presumption that you should always be reachable. Thus, if you are unavailable your network of relations may feel that they have the right to protest.” (2005, p. 210). What is somewhat concerning here is that this type of social practice and mobile phone etiquette is being learnt and embedded from an early age – hence it seems natural by the time one is older that one should be forever contactable. Some male teens in the focus groups commented that it was annoying to have the phone going off during the night and so the expectation was that if they did get a call or text late into the evening, then it would be something important. Also, allowing 24/7 accessibility would be abusive for someone victimised by harassing text messages.

Salience of mobile phones is further reinforced by most of the participants contravening school rules and having their phones on them during the interview sessions. Opal actually responded to an incoming text message during the second focus group. It was established in both lots of interviews that students texted against the school rules and that they were skilled in their ability to do this without looking at the keypad. The most cited dislike about one’s mobile was the clicking of the keypad buttons – a giveaway to prohibited texting at school. However, sleeping with one’s phone under the pillow or using one’s phone when forbidden is far from remarkable when considering similar research findings (Matthews 2004; Ling & Yttri 2005; Grinter et al. 2006; Agatston et al. 2007; Lenhart et al. 2010).

### ***The Mobile Phone – An Evocative Object***

In support of Thompson & Cupples (2008) and Wei & Lo’s (2006) research the above dialogue also provides evidence for the cyborg concept with these young people expressing the need to have their mobile phones close to their body. Turkle (2003) would view the mobile phone as an ‘evocative object’ because “...users experience them as carriers of meanings and ideas, even extensions of themselves” (p. 44). This was made even more evident on the day the one-on-one interviews were held, this particular day was a school

mufti-day<sup>12</sup> and during an interview one female participant produced her mobile phone that was tucked into her bra. Morganite went on to explain this was necessary due to the fact her mufti-day clothes choice was bereft of pockets. Wearing one's phone in close proximity to body parts reinforces this cyborgian relationship. Also in keeping with the cyborgian idea comes the following comment from Platinum:

*My Mum reckons it is an extension to my hand* (Platinum)

***Do you think it is like an extension of your hand?*** (Ana)

*I suppose so – walking around the house texting away.* (Platinum)

### ***Mobile Phones and Bonding Capital***

In terms of the mobile phone and its relationship with young people, I will now illustrate the main ways the technological device is being used by young people to foster their social relationships with peers. Four key practices with mobile telephony that nurture teen group solidarity and promote bonding capital for this particular group are texting, gifting, mobile phone etiquette and social niceties. Bonding capital is a term taken up by Putnam (2000) who advances on Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital by introducing 'bonding' capital and 'bridging' capital. Bonding capital encourages exclusive interaction and homogeneity whereas bridging capital brings together a mélange of people and represents heterogeneity.

Again, texting features first and foremost when it comes to maintaining relationships and social networks. Chatting by text message was commonplace for this group. This is similar to findings in other research (Grinter & Eldridge 2001; Johnsen 2003; Thompson & Cupples 2008; Lenhart et al. 2010), and agrees well with Thurlow & Poff's (2013) claim that "The use of texting in building and maintaining relationships has been a key aspect of research which goes a long way to confirming the essentially social function of the technology" (Thurlow & Poff 2013, p. 128). In the current research many text conversations seemed to take the form of friendly banter – back and forth tête-à-tête with little informational substance - implying the medium and the sense of connection are more important than the message. This is made evident in the following conversation:

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<sup>12</sup> Mufti-day is when students make a gold coin donation for the privilege of wearing their choice of casual clothes instead of school uniform.

*Sometimes you can just get on with people so well like me and Diamond.  
Last Friday after school I texted her and we must have sent like 80 texts  
to each other (Opal)  
And we didn't talk about like anything it was just like (Diamond)  
Yeah like there was nothing important there was nothing that needed to  
be talked about. (Opal)*

However, this idle type of text chit-chat amongst teens is not really so extraordinary. Given twenty or thirty years ago inane chatting with friends would have merely taken another form of communication such as talking face-to-face, or telephone calls made on landlines (Fischer 1992). What is unique, in this instance, is the portable and personal nature of the mobile phone. No longer are young people restricted to 'chatting' on the family landline telephone – a pastime that is easily monitored and regulated by parents – nowadays as children within families get older they are more likely to own their own mobile phone. This allows teenagers a degree of autonomy to chat and outside of the parental regulating radar.

The young people in this study clearly displayed a collective youth identity via the act of texting. Consistent with Lenhart et al.'s (2010) research, a generation gap was made visible with many references made to the stupidity of parents' mobile phone and texting knowledge. Participants agreed that parents were hopeless at texting, that they didn't really like texting, and that they found some text messages difficult to decipher. As Sapphire explains "I'll send Mum a message and then she will text me back and be like now in English and I'm like ah yeah." Participants also agreed that it was not 'cool' for parents to use text language, "I hate when ya parents try to use text language – like it was like real weird this morning cos they texted me and I didn't even know what they meant. I was like what??? and then I finally figured it out!" (Nickel). It was also quickly established that one of the biggest texting faux pas a parent/adult can make is verbalising an initialism, as expressed below:

*Mum walked into work and my sister must have said something and she  
walked out and said "LOL" and I was like [pulled face] (Sapphire)  
**So it is not cool for parents to use text language? (Ana)***

*It is so embarrassing you don't say LOL. If you're talking to someone in a conversation you don't say LOL at the end. (Morganite)*

*Yeah no you don't. (Emerald)*

As with other research findings (Grinter et al. 2006; Lenhart et al. 2010), this cohort had an unwritten texting etiquette in place. Many of the participants chose to reply to a text message within a minute of receipt for example. This practice bodes well with Goffman's (1967) concept of daily rituals within social interaction. For this group the swift exchange of text messages between actors can be considered as adhering to their particular shared ritualistic and ceremonial rules. However, an important difference to note is where Goffman focused on ritual interactions predominant within face-to-face behaviour we are now accustomed to using the mobile phone as a technological interface between these face-to-face social encounters. Also, from a Meadian perspective of self in relation to other the immediacy expected between texts can lead to young people being pressured to conform to this practice. Nevertheless, some participants were unconcerned with social expectations. As Emerald explains:

*People get really annoyed with me cos I just don't text back. I get sick of texting and then I come to school the next day and they are like "oh you never text me back" and I'm like I don't care and that is like a good enough reason. Some people are so obsessed with their phones ... Everyone is always texting! And it is just like oh cos I have got a life I go out and do stuff and I don't have time to text and they get really annoyed because you take ages to text back and then you just don't text back at all [laughs].*

The social practice of exchange and gifting via mobiles phones further reinforced group cohesion. Participants would exchange photos, music files and chain messages (e.g. forwards or/and jokes) via their mobile phones. Argon had previously expressed feeling socially outcast if his peers were all discussing a forward/joke that he had not received. Text messages also fall under gifting and for this reason contributes to the saving of text messages. In this study clear gender differences emerged in reference to saving text messages. The girls

all acknowledged saving emotionally loaded messages, whereas none of the boys did. By comparison 75% of the boys expressed saving humorous text messages. This finding falls neatly within gendered norms, if in fact the boys did save emotional type text messages they may not have wanted to compromise their masculinity by admitting this (Phillips 1996; Lehr 2001; Green 2004). Further, it seems social niceties are also social expectations when it comes to texting, as Sapphire explained earlier a short message such as 'WOT' could be read by the receiver as blunt and indicate anger.

### ***Self Presentation via the Mobile Phone***

Another finding that came to light in this study was strongly linked to self-presentation and Goffman's (1971) theory of Impression Management. In keeping with Lenhart et al.'s (2010) research, reference was made on more than one occasion by my participants that being able to preplan and edit text message content was a feature these young participants valued and appreciated. They believed this enabled them to cleverly construct messages, including the use of complex words, which enhanced their perceived intellect and in turn impressed the receiver. This was a factor not so readily available in voice-to-voice or face-to-face communication. As Argon stated in the previous chapter it is uncommon in the midst of a 'talking' conversation to stop and state '*Oh yeah, give me a minute to think about what I should say next.*' Although not consistent with a Meadian view, this finding still rests firmly within symbolic interactionism when applied to Goffman's (1971) ideas about the presentation of self and how that comes to define relationships /or the situation *per se*. In this sense the mobile phone can be used as a platform to explore a "front stage" (public self) / "back stage" (private self) model of information via text messages. Goffman differentiated the two stages by the presence or absence of an audience. In the back-stage the texter can compose and edit messages carefully, a feature not readily available with spontaneous face-to-face interaction, leaving the front stage accessible to the audience i.e. the recipient of the well rehearsed and 'choreographed' text message. Also, even when physically alone, the mobile phone creates an illusion that the self is 'always present' or 'never absent' in relation to others. Licoppe (2004, p. 135) suggests this state of 'connected presence' is due to the continuity of communication experienced both spatially and temporally through texting.

Again, a number of the participants recognised that these text messages could easily be misinterpreted by the receivers and that this would be less problematic in an actual conversation where visual and aural cues would quickly diffuse any confusion. In keeping with other research (Grinter & Eldridge 2001; Oksman & Turtiainen 2004; Höflich & Gebhardt 2005; Yykoukalová 2007; Cupples & Thompson 2010; Lenhart et al. 2010) when participants were asked if there were certain things that were easier to say via a text than face to face, there was a general consensus that it was easier to flirt and indicate romantic interest via a text. When prompted why this was the case, this group was of the mind that if the romantic interest was not reciprocated then having been 'shut-down' by text would not be as embarrassing. Therefore indicating the text message is acting as a type of shield which enables teenagers to maintain self-preservation and self-respect. By using the mobile phone as an interface it is perceived that one is able to protect oneself or save-face in an otherwise potentially risky situation (Goffman 1967).

In the previous chapter Argon also explained girls commonly use xxoo (kisses and hugs) in texts and sometimes the receiver may take these as being more affectionate than intended. Text messaging was also used by this group to terminate relationships or 'dump someone'. This was put down to the fact that then the terminator did not have to deal with any emotional backlash they may have had to encounter. There was some lively discussion in the group sessions regarding 'dumping by text', with some participants adamant that this was a cowardly method to ending a relationship. In the previous chapter Argon clearly recognised that some people present themselves in a bolder and more self-assured manner when texting than they would in person. In Argon's words: "If you ring someone you can hear their tone and tone says a lot. This is what I notice about texting – it is real funny – because some kids are real frigid when talking to people and they are not when they are texting – that is really funny".

In light of the above it can be concluded that texting plays a central role among friendship groups for youth and encompasses teen identity. Other social practices, such as gifting, also play a major part in maintaining cohesion among teenagers. The mobile phone is shown to be instrumental in terms of self-presentation and is often used to communicate messages that are more difficult to express in person. The mobile phone, although in competition with

other technological social utilities, still plays a vital role in teenagers' lives. Having looked at many of the positive facets the mobile provides for young people, text-bullying, a negative form of mobile phone use will now be discussed.

### **The Mobile Phone and Text Bullying**

The third and final section of this chapter is now dedicated to text bullying and seeks to find answers to research question number three: Is text bullying occurring between young people? If so, is it a real cause for concern for adolescents? This research project was quite unique given focus group interview questions were purposely designed so as not to include any questions in direct reference to text bullying. Although text bullying was of major interest to the researcher it was also important to extract any data pertaining to this phenomenon by relatively natural measures. In other words if students had an awareness of, or experiences with, text bullying then this information would be delivered without direct enquiries being made by the researcher. This approach is unmatched and quite remarkable considering all studies referenced in the third section of the literature review involve questions specific to cyber-bullying. Whereas this study endeavoured to source information related to text-bullying by asking about 'problems' encountered with mobile phone use. This was in the hope that a true sense of text-bullying behaviours could be obtained without prompting. Which in turn would go some way towards substantiating whether or not adult fears pertaining to cyber-bullying are exaggerated (Cesaroni et al. 2012).

#### ***Text Bullying and a Social Desirability Bias***

When participants in the first focus group were asked if they had encountered any problems from other people when using their mobile phones – Nickel swiftly replied “What like text bullying?” therefore indicating an awareness of the issue. It quickly became apparent that all participants were well aware of text-bullying behaviour. The majority of students initially claimed that they had never experienced any problems with their mobile phones. However, most students were able to relay a text-bullying incident that somebody else had encountered. Their ready awareness begs the question is text bullying being under-reported? Hoff & Mitchell (2010) have previously questioned the extent to which ‘othering’ maybe occurring in cyber-bullying research.

I believe social desirability bias may be at work here with respondents replying in a manner they believe will be acceptable to their peers. In order to maintain one's positive self-presentation and self-identity participants may under report their role as bully or victim. Certainly in this study a female victim of text-bullying was identified in a background conversation while transcribing data, this particular student was not forthcoming with her story during the group discussion, nor did she choose to participate in the second research phase. It is reasonable to assume that bullies may not want to acknowledge their deviant behaviour and victims may be ashamed or distressed to recall these memories (Raskauskas & Stolz 2007). Not only might both bullies and victims under report, but they might also differ on their definitions of what constitutes bullying (Adair et al. 2000; Rigby 2008; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput 2008). danah boyd (2010) brings attention to this issue in her experiences of researching bullying, explaining how young people and adults tend to identify bullying behaviour quite differently. For example she found young girls did not consider gossip or rumour spreading to be a form of bullying. Nor did they see producing fight videos as being directly linked to bullying. Similarly, students and staff interviewed in Allen's (2012) study referred to gossip and rumour spreading as drama as opposed to bullying. They went on to acknowledge that talking about other people behind their backs could lead to bullying. These points illustrate the relevance of shared meaning for all concerned group members as expressed by Mead (Hewitt 1988). They also highlight a potential flaw in text-bullying research if researchers and participants are not consistent in their definition of text-bullying.

### ***Rumours and Gossip***

Participants in this study frequently mentioned gossip/rumour spreading via text messages, a finding strongly aligned with Allen's (2012) research. Krypton & Copper explained that sometimes gossip/rumours via texts led to physical fights. Below are two responses given to why my participants preferred to text gossip.

*Cos, it is easier and it is funny and no one hears. (Opal)*

*Cos it doesn't really matter what you say sometimes so much.*

*(Diamond)*



These responses are alarming given that they imply the content of a written text is not as brutal as its verbal equivalent. The first response also infers one may not employ any sense of inhibition when texting, and this is partly due to the covert nature of texting and not being overheard, by a third party, partaking in undesirable behaviour. Texting may well lead to negative mobile phone behaviour for young people, because with this interfacing practice they are disinhibited from taking into full account that they are in the presence of another human. It is also less intimidating to send an abusive text than it is to verbally convey the same message. Texting on a mobile phone does not offer the visual and aural social cues we take from face-to-face interactions. Social cues which tend to modulate our behaviour because we read the emotional responses of others; empathy may be induced if one recognises they are causing anguish to another (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston 2008; Smith et al. 2008; NPR 2012). Participants in this study regularly acknowledged some things (not necessarily negative) were easier to say in a text than in person.

Emerald explained that if you were the target of gossip then there was little you could do other than 'ride it out'. Although gossip and rumours may seem relatively harmless to the people spreading the material, the person being singled out at the time is much more likely to take the incident seriously and see it as a personal attack on the self. This point is recognised by Emerald:

*Yeah the people who it is about can take it really bad when it is not that bad like some of the things that go around are not that bad but just because it is going around hiding through texting and they don't know about it and then they find out about it then that is when they kinda get upset about it because there is not much they can do about it and that sounds really mean but like that is one of the negative things about texting is that stuff does go around.*

The above quote can be unpacked through Cooley's (1922) concept of the looking-glass self. Cooley argues that our self-feelings are determined by how we perceive others to see us, he suggests just as we look in the mirror and pass a judgment on self we also use other people to form a self-image based on reflection. We imagine how they see us and the judgments they

pass, and so our sense of self-feeling is being reflected through the eyes of others. “A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (Cooley 1922, p. 186). As children spend increasing amounts of time with their peers, they begin to evaluate themselves in relation to others (Harter 1999). It is reasonable to assume that a victim of gossip/rumours perceives that others are viewing her/him negatively and this has adverse affects ones self-esteem and feeling of self worth. It is worth noting here that the imagined perception, although not necessarily in sync with the actual perception, can still be most damaging. The preceding point is supported in the research data by my participants acknowledging rumours can be hurtful with some expressing their lived experiences of being gossiped about. Having a rumour circulating that claims you have slept with your uncle is surely going to produce personal pain even if others just think it is funny. According to Elkind (1967) adolescents abstract thought processes are still maturing leaving them susceptible to adolescent egocentrism. They create an “imaginary audience” in their mind and believe they are being watched and judged constantly by others, assuming that others share their preoccupations. This ‘imaginary audience’ can be likened to Mead’s taking the role of the other. Mead builds on Cooley’s looking-glass self; by suggesting that to be self-aware we must develop recognition for how others see us, i.e. we must be able to put ourselves in the shoes of others and see the world from their perspective. The ability to take the “role of the other” was demonstrated by Kypton who explained he would not reply a text in the midst of a personal conversation because he did not like when people did this to him and Argon who said “...I would like to know how she would feel if I said that to her” in regards to a girl that had sent him a disgusting text message. However, the frequency that rumour spreading and gossip were mentioned in interviews suggests that not all young people are so advanced in their ability to fully take the perspective of the generalised other. I believe the early adolescent years are crucial in learning appropriate social behaviour and boundaries, including empathy and sympathy development. It may be those students who have experienced victimisation first hand that are more inclined to experience feelings of discomfort towards another’s suffering. Mead suggests one’s behaviour is governed by the attitudes of others. I suggest when it comes to bullying via text message, and in the absence of the physical body, the phone acts as a barrier that impedes social sympathy.

Message content is also going to have an impact on the seriousness of gossip/rumours. Consider the differing texts mentioned earlier, one was 'sent to many' and contained a vicious rumour about a young girl sleeping with her uncle, the other was about a young couple 'going-out' because they were seen walking around school together. Obviously one of these rumours is far more vindictive and potentially detrimental than the other. Also, being the victim of text-bullying occasionally may induce the response of just having to deal with it. However, if a student is constantly at the centre of gossip and rumours then this may have more serious ramifications on their sense of self and self-esteem. In these sorts of cases, and in terms of seriousness, it may be necessary to try and differentiate incidents of text-bullying from incidents of text-drama. "Drama is social interaction that is characterized by overreaction and excessive emotionality (Allen 2012, p. 109). The young people I spoke with in the individual interviews were all self-assured, strong-willed, well-rounded and confident teenagers. I would describe these boys and girls as belonging to the alpha group. In hindsight these qualities may have been central to their volunteering to participate in phase two of this study. These qualities also may act as a buffer against enduring bouts of bullying from others, and if they are to endure text-bullying then these qualities will more likely stand them in good stead in terms of resilience. Patchin & Hindjua (2010) found whereas some girls were quite resilient in terms of their online victimisation experiences, others suffered from severe stress. Results from other studies have also found a large range in the levels of distress caused by cyberbullying (Lenhart et al. 2010; Li 2010; Sakellariou et al. 2012). A couple of girls I spoke with individually claimed they did not really care what other people thought of them, and Emerald explained there was little to bully her about. This led to a very detailed account of a less popular girl who was traditionally bullied – for better or worse - it came to fruition that this girl was not text-bullied because no one wanted her mobile phone number. What does this say about her social capital?

### ***Social Exclusion***

Considering the social benefits attributed by young people to the mobile phone, such as social inclusion and social connectedness with peer groups then to not be an active member in this community would infer social exclusion (a form of relational bullying which is strongly linked to social manipulation) and isolation from one's peer group. Results from the

controlled experiment conducted by Smith and Williams (2004) found that participants purposely excluded from a texting activity had negative feelings of self-worth. Williams (cited in Purdue University 2011) explains “Being excluded is painful because it threatens fundamental human needs, such as belonging and self-esteem.” Attesting to this is Argon who mentioned feeling socially excluded if his peers were discussing a forward that he had not received. In this example we see a reflection of Mead’s theory of the individual self being social in essence, with people having a universal and innate drive for perpetual social contact. As Campbell (2007, p. 359) claims “This is not to say communication practices are the same for different societies, groups and individuals, but rather that there are latent aspects of human communication that run deep and pervasive.” Hence, it would stand to reason that to be rejected and socially outcast by others would be emotionally damaging to one’s sense of self. Unfortunately, in this study none of the quieter students from the focus groups opted in for phase two of the study. Thus, I did not get the opportunity to discuss text-bullying or problems associated with mobile phones with non-alpha students.

In further reference to text bullying, one focus group participant commented that:

*It just goes around all the time but nothing really serious cos you just like sort it out yourself sort of or you text them back yourself and you sort it out. I think it is just like if you are text bullying it is like you are not really strong enough to actually say it to their face like. (Opal)*

What stands out in the above quote is the rather nonchalant attitude towards text bullying, especially considering that it came from Opal who had previously experienced a death threat via text message and was then violated in a physical attack by the perpetrator. This particularly grim instance was not sorted out amongst the peer group but instead involved school personnel. This was one incident of ‘nasty bullying’ that had led to the banning of mobile phones at the school. Text bullying, like any form of bullying, tends to present itself on a continuum of seriousness with incidents such as the one mentioned above being represented at the high end. It is reasonable to assume that the seriousness of a text-bullying will correlate with the likelihood to report the incident to an adult. What did become apparent in this study was that students would deal with more minor text-bullying issues

themselves. Participants expressed a variety of techniques, ranging from confronting the perpetrator face-to-face, text bombing in retaliation, involving friends who sought revenge on behalf of victim, to ignoring the messages. Similar responses to being cyber-bullied have been identified in other studies (Li 2010; Fenaughty 2010).

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this section I conclude that in the experience of this particular group, text-bullying does occur between young people. However, responses were varied in terms of how serious these students perceived text-bullying to be. It was established that gossip and rumours commonly occurred via mobile phones and that if you were the target of these then little could be done other than ride it out. A couple of the aforementioned text-bullying incidents had been taken up with the school guidance counsellor, indicating they were taken seriously at the time. Anecdotally, the Year 10 dean at one participating high school expressed that a lot of resources were being used up dealing with text-bullying incidents. Participants recognised that disagreements via text messages could easily evolve into bigger issues. A couple of male participants explained it was for this reason that they would tackle such incidents face-to-face and avoid escalation. The videoing (via mobile phone) of organised and impromptu fights at school were also mentioned in discussions, but students did not link this to bullying nor did they identify it as particularly serious.

In reviewing the cyberbullying literature I have noticed that where mobile phones are being included as a medium through which to cyberbully, much of the terminology being used in the research instruments is strongly aligned with Internet access and activity. Significantly in such cases, the online discourse being used may in fact be unintentionally creating a bias by means of reducing text-bullying incidents. Participants may be disregarding inappropriate mobile phone activity due to the loaded language used in favour of the Internet. Even the term 'cyber' infers online activity, as supported by Vandebosch and Van Cleemput's (2008) study where the majority of the 279 focus group participants when asked to provide a description of cyberbullying, equated it to "bullying via the Internet" (p. 500). These authors concluded that, "when referring to bullying that occurs via electronic means in general, it might therefore be worthwhile to consider the use of a more appropriate term (e.g., electronic bullying, digital bullying)." (Vandebosch and Van Cleemput 2008, p. 502). My research

avoided this trap by using a technique that clearly kept the mobile phone within the frame of questions asked. There were several advantages in doing this, mainly it allowed the participants to define their own view of text-bullying and to indicate the relevance of text-bullying within their peer group.

In summary, in this chapter I have has applied Mead's concept of self and, in brief, some other theoretical concepts as a means to understanding how the mobile phone is embedded in young peoples' social and cultural worlds. Mead's work provided a viable lens through which to examine both the benefits and pernicious consequences of the mobile phone for youth. The results from both focus groups and one-on-one unstructured individual interviews have been explored and it is primarily Mead's work that informs my data analysis here. The following chapter will suggest avenues for future research and provide closing summaries for the three key research questions underpinning this research.

# Chapter 7 – Conclusion

By way of conclusion this chapter will discuss the relevance of the my research and highlight key areas for future research on young people and their mobile phones. This will be followed by a summation for each of the key research questions underpinning this research. My study supplements and advances the current research available in New Zealand on this particular topic. Having looked at both positive and negative aspects of the mobile phone, this thesis emphasises the location of the mobile phone in its social context.

## Relevance of the Research

This study is key in understanding the role the mobile phone plays in the lives of teenagers in New Zealand. This particular cohort have not experienced a life where mobile phones are not commonplace and so it is invaluable to talk with them and establish the impact this tiny device has on their social lives. The two-phase qualitative approach employed is unlike other research carried out in New Zealand and thus advances upon the quantitative studies by providing a ‘thick’ description of young people’s mobile phone usage. This approach and the decision to include interview transcripts verbatim also works to promote the young participants. This research study builds on the limited text-bullying research that has been conducted in New Zealand. The participating students were all well aware of text-bullying even if they had not experienced it first-hand. Positively, they seemed to be well schooled in how to deal with text-bullying and expressed knowledge in blocking numbers etc.

Somewhat alarmingly, is that most students declared they would not report text-bullying to an adult, but instead would tell a friend. Many instances were given where friends had ‘helped’ sort out issues relating to text-bullying. The positive function the mobile phone fulfils in promoting a sense of social connectedness seems to far outweigh the negatives of text bullying. No student who had experienced text-bullying suggested it would be best sometimes not to have a phone. Not reporting incidents of text-bullying maybe in avoidance of parents suggesting they go without the phone, alternatively they may run the risk of having to disclose they were using the phone during restricted times. This would suggest that

parents and teachers have to be more sensitive and less authoritarian when issues pertaining to mobile phone misconduct arise.

### **Future Research Avenues**

Through the duration of this research project a number of areas were established which could potentially be expanded upon. This is hardly surprising considering the limited research that is currently available on young people's mobile use in New Zealand. The majority of my participants were rural-dwelling youth and they frequently expressed their involvement in sports and other interests and parents expectations that they help out on the family property. Further research is required to discover if there are significant differences in mobile phone activity depending on where young people live; and in particular between rural and urban settings. Also, do students committed to an array of extra-curriculum activities and responsibilities spend less time texting due to limited "free-time"? References were often made to texting if one was bored, or by comparison not texting because one was busy.

Participants in this study tended to own practical and budget style phones – as long as one had the capability to text little concern was given to the phone type. This creates another avenue for further research: To explore whether class stratification factors into a student's choice and ownership of mobile phone. For instance do students who attend more affluent schools own more expensive mobile phones? Does familial wealth impact on the model of a young person's mobile phone? Are adolescents' from higher socio-economic families more likely to own the more expensive models of mobiles, phones that feature advanced functions, and thus serve as status symbols indicative of familial wealth? Research that compared mobile phone ownership in public and private schools would potentially tap into this question.

As aforementioned, New Zealanders love to text and it is a cheap form of communication when compared to making voice calls on the mobile. Although outside the scope of this research this presents another avenue for further research, to compare pricing plans and mobile phone activity amongst teens on a multi-national scale. This would establish if the economics of mobile phone subscriptions act as a main driver behind teen texting patterns or



is it a more cultural element at work. This line of questioning arises having spoken anecdotally to people from England and Mexico who have witnessed respectively different patterns of young people communicating via mobile phones. Also, the literature reviewed suggests the volume of text messages sent by young people varies considerably depending on the country in question.

Gender was not an explicit focus of this particular research project. However, some gendered patterns did tend to emerge. The males displayed a more pragmatic attitude towards the mobile phone whereas females expressed a somewhat more emotive viewpoint of the phone. This was most obvious with females 'saving' emotional text messages. Also, several boys in this study spoke of dealing with a volatile issue face-to-face, as opposed to texting, in appreciation that this would potentially bring the issue to a head. In this particular study the boys tended to be the ones that expressed their ability to take the role of the other, a finding I had not expected considering that the literature suggests girls mature at a faster rate than boys. These gendered findings offer lines of questioning that could be explored in greater detail.

Participants in this study were all in Year 10 (age 14-15). Future research might consider comparing attitudes of students with a slightly older cohort. This would be particularly insightful when questioning problematic mobile phone use and empathy considering delinquent activity peaks between 13 and 16 years of age (Carroll et al. 2009) and empathy research shows that empathy increases with age (Eisenberg et al. 1991; 1995). Alternatively, a longitudinal study could be undertaken to examine changes in empathy and anti-social behaviour with age.

Finally, the participants who completed both phases of this study were all exceptionally confident individuals. In the group discussions they tended to be the most dominant and outspoken. This led to some of the quieter students not voicing their opinions and it was these students who did not sign up for an individual interview. This provides another avenue for future research, to engage with students from different groups within the peer group structure to get a more balanced account of attitudes and experiences regarding text-bullying.

## Closing Statements

I will conclude by returning to the three key research questions underpinning this project:

- 1) How is the mobile phone embedded in adolescents' social and cultural worlds?
- 2) What are the social consequences of mobile phone use and misuse for adolescents?
- 3) Is text bullying occurring between young people? If so, is it a real cause for concern for adolescents?

In response to question one it can be concluded from this study that the mobile phone is iconic in promoting teen identity. As a cultural artifact, the mobile phone surpasses its practical function and becomes much much more. The mobile phone comes to symbolise many things; social connectedness, social status, personal style and independence to name a few. Texting was by far and wide the most valued feature of the mobile phone for this group, given its ability to 'chat' with friends. Participation in this type of communication is generally more symbolic than the message content – the act of texting is what counts for this young group. Even when considering other forms of digital media it was made evident by this particular group that the mobile phone is still highly valued and considered a more appropriate means to convey certain information on a more personal level. The mobile phone serves many functional and practical purposes from imparting feelings of safety, micro-coordination, positive impression management to a tool that can alleviate boredom. The phone also functioned to allow students to express things that they would find difficult to express in person, this disinhibition is not always positive if one considers text-bullying.

The social consequences of mobile phone use for young people are many, including it provides an alternate form of social connection, it requires a navigation of private use in public places, and it is a tool that aids in the form of teen identity and new representations of self. The mobile is often highly personalised, it can be worn on the body, and it is often regarded as an extension of the self. In this study teenage group cohesion was made evident by regularly referring to their parents 'idiotic' texting practices. This group shared the common practice of using emoticons to convey the intended emotion of a message; this was in the shared appreciation that sometimes text messages could be left quite ambiguous. Cryptic text language was uncommon for this group, they only tended to use common

initialisms, the reason being texts were then easier to decipher. A common theme in relation to this was the chosen style used to send a text tended to then also be employed by the receiver. Four key practices with mobile telephony that nurture teen group solidarity and promote bonding capital for this particular group were established during discussions. These shared practices were texting, gifting, mobile phone etiquette and social niceties. The importance of the mobile phone is illustrated by them keeping the phone on and taking it to bed, also by using it at school when mobiles are prohibited.

Finally, was text-bullying occurring between the young people in this study? It was made evident from the beginning that the participants were all well aware of text-bullying as a phenomenon. This information was disclosed in the focus group discussions without direct references being made to text-bullying in the interview questions. A technique that had been purposely employed to maintain if students were aware of text-bullying behaviour and would refer to it in questions framed around problematic mobile phone use. Whilst a couple of participants relayed stories of text-bullying that they had personally encountered, all of the students were able to provide an example of someone else they knew who had been text-bullied. Of course in a focus group situation there may have been students who had suffered text-bullying but were not confident discussing this in front of their peers. The text bullying that was disclosed was mostly restricted to students attending the same school and anonymity of the bully was not apparent. Both planned and unplanned fight videos were discussed in the focus groups and they had occurred at the school. Gossip and rumour spreading were commonplace for these students. However, students did not tend to problematise this type of behaviour there was almost a resigned acceptance that that is just the ways things are and you have to deal with it. This certainly highlights a discrepancy between what young people and adults define as bullying. The reporting of text-bullying to an adult was only really considered necessary in dire situations. In most cases the young people were dealing with it independently or friends of the victim would step in. To a degree this seems a reasonable response, as students are probably not going to be rewarded for involving parents in minor tittle-tatter. Three male participants explained that they would confront the text-bully to their face, this was in recognition of the fact that this would often put an end to an incident that otherwise would potentially escalate through texting. So, is text bullying a cause of concern for young people? My conclusion is that many variables need to be considered here and that

each and every incident is going to vary in terms of a response to this question. The seriousness of the incident, the power dynamics between students, the resilience of the victim, and the longevity of bullying are all going to impact the level of distress caused for victims. In this particular study a number of participants represented a significant development of self in expressing their ability to take the role of the other in terms of being bullied.

In summary, this thesis unveils positive and negative experiences attributed to mobile phone use for adolescents. I believe the mobile phone is strongly entrenched in teenagers' social worlds and a pivotal tool in fostering teen identity development and promoting bonding capital between peers. Indeed, the mobile phone may not be the cornerstone of a world saturated with technological communication devices but they are still considered a valuable tool. Text-bullying was a phenomenon known to this group, but given my small data set I am still left pondering the question is text bullying a 'real' cause of concern for young adolescents? More research needs to be conducted before I can answer this question more confidently.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Letter to Year 10 Students

**Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.**

Dear Year 10 students

My name is Ana Hoseit. I am a Sociology Masters student from the University of Otago in Dunedin. This year I am doing a Masters Thesis project, this involves collecting information from young people about their mobile phone use and then later in the year writing up a report on my findings.

Did you know you are first generation to experience everyday life in which the mobile phone plays such an important part? Did you know you are the first generation to experience life where the mobile phone is so common it is just taken for granted? When it comes to mobile phones, you are the experts and I would like to hear what you have to say.

Participation involves taking part in a focus group discussion with other year 10 students from your school (this is like a group discussion involving about 6-8 people) and/or a one-on-one interview. You can choose if you would like to have one-on-one interviews in person, by phone, or by email. You can take part in a focus group and have an individual interview or you can agree to just take part in one phase of this research.

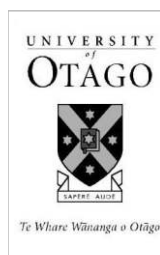
If you are interested in taking part in this study could you please email me directly at my personal and secure email address - [hosan504@student.otago.ac.nz](mailto:hosan504@student.otago.ac.nz).

It is very important that you talk to your parents about this study before you sign up for it, as only students who have the permission of their parents will be able to take part. If you sign up for this study, you and your parents will be provided with a more detailed information sheet and asked to sign a consent form which indicates you understand what this study is about.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this summary and for your consideration.

Best wishes

Ana Hoseit - Researcher





## Appendix B: Research Participants' Bill of Rights

- It is for you to decide if you want to participate.
- Before you decide whether to join in, you might like to talk about this project with your parents or a friend.
- You can take time to decide if you want to participate; don't rush to make a decision.

You do not have to say yes.

- If you do say yes, you can change your mind at any time.
- If you say no, you do not need to give a reason.
- If you say no, you will not be punished in any way.
- We can stop, or take a break, whenever you want to.
- You can say you do not want to have individual interviews taped, or you can ask at any time to have the tape recorder switched off.
- If you do not want to answer questions or participate in activities, you can just say pass.
- I keep tapes and notes of the interviews and focus groups in a safe place.
- When I talk about my research and write reports, I change people's names to keep their views anonymous.
- I would not talk to anyone you know about what you have said, unless you talk about the risk of someone being harmed. If so, I would talk with you first about what could be done to help.

Research participants' Bill of Rights. Based on Alderson (2004)  
(Freeman & Mathison 2009, p. 48).

## Appendix C: Focus Group Research Questions

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

Focus Group Research Questions

- *Introduce self and thank participants for taking part*
- *Asking participants to introduce themselves: their name*
- 

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Questions

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Question 1            How many of you own one or more mobile phones? Do you own more than one sim card?

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Question 2            Tell me about your mobile phone?

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Question 3            What do you like best about your mobile phone?

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Question 4            What do you like least about your mobile phone?

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Question 5            When using your mobile phone, have you ever experienced any problems with other people? If so can you explain what happened?

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Question 6            Has anyone you know of experienced problems when communicating with other people via their mobile phone? If so can you explain what happened?

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Question 7            Has anyone you know experienced unwanted cell phone contact?

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## Appendix D: NetSafe Cyberbullying Information and Advice for young people

# [netsafe.org.nz](http://netsafe.org.nz)

### What to do if you are being text bullied

If you're getting scary, mean, rude, or bullying texts from someone, you can report these messages to your mobile phone company. Your phone company can send a warning message to the bully and even cut them totally off the network.

To make a complaint:

- 1.) Don't reply to the messages or contact that number.
- 2.) Make a list of the exact date and time you received at least four bullying or harassing messages from that person. To show that the messages are unwanted, the call list can only start from when you stopped replying.
- 3.) Call your mobile phone company's customer service centre. For Vodafone call 777 from your mobile- it costs \$1 but this is refunded for calls about harassment and bullying. If you have the necessary 4 unreplied to texts and don't have credit you can text "bully" to 4001 and someone will call you back within two working days.

For Telecom call 0800 809 806 between 9am and 4pm Monday to Friday.

For TelstraClear phone 0800 299 500

For 2degrees phone 200 from your mobile, or 0800 022 022 from your landline.

If the messages are from someone at your school or another school talk to the deputy principal, guidance counsellor or a teacher about how they can help stop the bullying.

If the messages include threats to hurt you physically (like threats to "get you" or punch you, etc.) they are breaking the law. Save these messages on your phone. Show the messages to the police and ask to make a formal complaint about receiving threats on a mobile phone. Record your complaint number and contact the Police if there are further threats. You can also make a complaint to your mobile company as above about threatening messages or calls.

If you need further information you can contact us on 0508 NETSAFE.

If you need support you can call Youthline on 0800 37 66 33 or Free TXT 234 or email/[MSN talk@youthline.co.nz](mailto:talk@youthline.co.nz)

# Cyberbullying information and advice for young people



The information in this guide appears online at

<http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/youngpeople/>

## **What is cyberbullying?**

Cyberbullying is bullying. It's using the internet, a mobile phone or other technology like a camera to hurt somebody or embarrass them.

## **What does cyberbullying look like?**

Bullying on the internet or mobiles can include many things, like being sent anonymous text messages to your phone, posting nasty or threatening comments on your Bebo or Facebook page or sending mean or embarrassing photos or videos of you to other people.

Cyberbullying can involve people spreading rumours about you and scaring you.

Sometimes people may try to stop you from communicating with others or they may hack and steal passwords for your online accounts.

## **Is cyberbullying a big deal?**

No one likes to be bullied or harassed.

Cyberbullying takes many forms and some of these may be harder to deal with than others.

Depending on the situation, some young people are able to sort it out quickly, or simply shrug it off.

Other situations may be more serious. About 1 in 5 New Zealand high school students say they have been cyberbullied and many say it makes them feel scared, depressed, angry or ashamed.

If you get sent nasty messages outside of school time sometimes it can feel hard to escape the bullying. Some people say it's worse if you can't tell who the bullying messages are coming from.

Posting mean or nasty pictures or videos of people online can embarrass them in front of their school and spread quickly out of control.

If you post altered pictures of people online these can exist long after you delete them and can also be used as evidence by teachers and police.

### **What can I do to prevent cyberbullying?**

- Be careful who you give your mobile number to and don't pass on friends' numbers without asking them first.
- Don't respond to texts from people you don't know. These can often be sent randomly to find people to bully.
- If you witness cyberbullying try to help the victim. You can offer them support, or report the bullying anonymously if that feels safer.
- Don't post revealing pictures of yourself or others online - they may get sent on and used to bully you or other people.
- Keep your online identity safe - create strong passwords with a mix of lower and upper case letters and numbers. Pick difficult answers for your "secret question" on your accounts that people who know you wouldn't easily guess.
- Don't share your password with anyone - even your friends.

### **What can I do if I am being cyberbullied?**

- Tell people you trust - a good friend, a parent, or a teacher. They will want to help you stop the bullying quickly and safely.
- Do not reply to the people bullying you, especially to text messages from numbers you don't know.
- Save evidence of all bullying messages and images. You can save messages on your phone and take screen shots of bullying on websites or IM chats. This may be used later if you report the bullying to your school or the police.

If the bullying online or on your mobile involves physical threats, like threats to hurt or fight you, contact the police. Making threats of harm is criminal behaviour in New Zealand.

Bring in any evidence you have when you meet with the police (messages stored on your phone or print outs of screenshots). If you are worried about your safety contact the Police immediately.

### ***Cyberbullying at your school***

If you think the people bullying you are at your school tell the Principal or Deputy Principal as soon as possible. Schools in New Zealand want all students to be safe and teachers want to help stop bullying.

### ***Cyberbullying on your favourite websites***

Report internet cyberbullying to the website where the bullying took place - usually there is a "Report Abuse" button or "Safety" link.

### ***Cyberbullying on IM***

If you can, block the bullying messages coming through.

Take screenshots of any nasty messages sent to you and save them as evidence.

### ***Cyberbullying and your mobile***

If you are being bullied on your mobile contact your phone company.

Report the abuse and ask them to take action.

## **What can I do to help someone being cyberbullied?**

If a friend comes to you for help reassure them that they've done the right thing by talking with someone.

Tell them not to reply to mean or nasty messages.

Make sure they save the bullying messages on their phone and/or take screenshots of website and chat abuse. This is important so that proof of the bullying is recorded and can be used as evidence later on.

If you see that someone is being cyberbullied, contact them and let them know that you support them. This can help them feel less isolated. Reporting the cyberbullying to someone who can help, like an adult you trust or to the website where the bullying is happening. You can do that anonymously if you want to protect your identity.

### ***Cyberbullying on websites and IM***

If they are being bullied on a website or instant messenger help them to block the bullying and report the abuse to the website.

### ***Cyberbullying on mobile phones***

If they are receiving bullying text messages or calls they should tell their mobile phone company.

If they already have evidence of bullying texts the company should be able to take action.

### ***Cyberbullying at school***

Does the bullying involve people at school? If you think so tell the Principal or Deputy Principal as soon as possible. Schools in New Zealand want all students to be safe and teachers want to help stop bullying.

### ***When to call the police***

If any cyberbullying threatens harm - like hurting or fighting - this breaks the law. Save the evidence and contact the Police.

## **What if I'm scared about getting involved?**

If you witness any form of cyberbullying but are worried about helping you can still do the following:

- If you see cyberbullying online then report the problem anonymously to the website where bullying takes place.
- You can also try to talk to the target of bullying away from an audience. Bystanders who support people being bullied can make that person feel less isolated.

## **'At a Distance' – standing up to cyberbullying**

Watch the New Zealand made short film about cyberbullying at

<http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/at-a-distance-film/>



## Appendix E: Research Questions for Unstructured One-on-One Interviews

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### General Outline of Research Questions for Unstructured One-on-One Interviews

Please note this is only a general outline of the proposed research questions. The questions have deliberately been drafted in a vague form so as to encourage young people to divulge both their positive and negative mobile phone use experiences. Information generated from the focus groups will be insightful in constructing more specific one-on-one interview questions.

Topic	General Mobile Phone Use
Question 1	What do you mainly use your mobile phone for?
Question 2	Do you need to look at the keypad when you text?
Question 3	Do you always have your phone with you? Why – how does it make you feel?
Question 4	How do you feel if someone else touches your phone or gets hold of your phone?
Question 5	Can you imagine not having a mobile phone? What would it be like? How would you feel if you were told you could not use your mobile phone for the next three days? Do you think you would feel socially excluded if you didn't have your phone?

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Question 6	What do you like least about your mobile phone?
Question 7	Is it sometimes easier to text rather than say something face to face? What sort of things would you rather say over a text than face to face? Why do you think that is?
Question 8	When using your mobile phone, have you ever experienced any problems with other people? If so can you explain what happened?
Question 9	Has anyone you know of experienced problems when communicating with other people via their mobile phone? If so can you explain what happened?
Question 10	When you receive a text message how long do you usually take to reply?
Question 11	How do you feel if you have not been contacted for awhile on your phone by your friends?
Question 12	Do you save your text messages? Which ones do you save, which ones do you delete?
Question 13	Have you ever sent a text message to someone when you were angry with them? What did you say? Did you regret it afterwards?
Question 14	Have you ever been text bombed? How did it make you feel?
Question 15	Have you ever text bombed someone else? Why?
Question 16	Have you ever received a text which you took the wrong way – misinterpreted? Why do you think texts are misunderstood?

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Question 17      Have you ever sent a text to someone which they took the wrong way – misinterpreted?

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**Topic**                      **Cyberbullying**

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Question 18      What do you think you would do if you were on the receiving end of nasty or inappropriate text messages? Would you report it? If not...why not?

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Question 19      Have you ever had a rumour or gossip spread about you by text message? Have you ever spread gossip or a rumour about some one else via your mobile phone

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Question 20      What do you think your parents would do if they found out you were receiving nasty texts from someone? What do you think they would do if they found out you were sending nasty texts to someone else?

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## Appendix F: Debriefing Information Sheet

**Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.**

### Debriefing Information Sheet

*To be read out to the students after they have completed focus and individual interviews.*

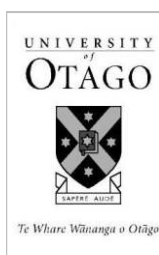
Thank you very much for participating in this study and for sharing your mobile phone experiences with me. I really appreciate your time and effort in helping me with this project. Your input has been invaluable especially, as I have already mentioned, your generation is the first to have grown up in a society where the mobile phone plays such a pervasive and essential part – so really you guys and girls are the experts here.

Does anybody have any questions they would like to ask or any concerns they would like to raise? If you do think of any questions about this study at a later date, or if you have any concerns, you can email me at [hosan504@student.otago.ac.nz](mailto:hosan504@student.otago.ac.nz). Also if you are interested in taking part in the second stage of this study, which is a one on one interview, could you please email me. Interviews can be done by email, over the phone, or face-to face, which ever suits you best.

I will stress again that it is really important to respect each other and not disclose what has been said in this focus group discussion. What is said within the group remains within the group, this condition of confidentiality applies to me just as much as to you. Remember the results of this project will be published in a report but the data that I collect will in no way be able to be linked to any of you or the school.

Mobile phones are sometimes used inappropriately to bully. This is called cyberbullying and like all other forms of bullying it is unacceptable. I have provided you each with a cyber safety information pack from Netsafe. This provides advice on what to do if someone is being bullied via their mobile phone. It is important that you are aware that making threats of harm, online or on your mobile phone, is illegal behaviour in New Zealand.

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee.



## **Appendix G: Information Sheet for Board of Trustees**

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to allow your students the opportunity to participate. If you decide your students may participate I thank you. If you decide your students may not take part there will be no disadvantage to the school (or the students) of any kind and I thank you for considering my request.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

Ana Hoseit, the researcher, is currently enrolled as a Masters student at the University of Otago. This project is being undertaken for the purpose of collecting information and writing a 40,000 word Masters Thesis in Sociology.

The research is being undertaken to explore how the mobile phone is embedded in adolescents' social and cultural world. Specifically, the research aims to understand the social consequences of mobile phone use and potential misuse for adolescents. Problem areas pertaining to mobile phone use will be explored. This research aims to advance understanding by providing a 'thick' description of young people's mobile phone usage. Depth and richness will be added to a topic that is currently under-researched.

The project involves gathering two different types of information. Participants will be asked to partake in a focus group session. They may also choose to partake in individual unstructured one-on-one interviews. Students are invited to take part in both phases of this research or one phase only.

#### **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Approximately thirty female and thirty male Year 10 students are being invited to take part in the following project. Participants will be recruited from two public, co-educational, high schools within the Otago region. The participants will be recruited into a focus group that is separated by gender. Up to four focus groups will be held at each school; two for girls and two for boys.

#### **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should you agree that your Year 10 students can take part in this project, they will be asked to attend a single focus group meeting lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Agreement to be in these focus groups is strictly voluntary. Focus group participants will be asked to discuss general open-ended questions about their mobile phone. Focus group participants will also be asked to email the researcher directly if they wish to volunteer to partake in an unstructured one-on-one interview with the researcher at a later date. One-on-one interviews will also take between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews can either be done face-to-face, by phone, or by e-mail. It is perfectly acceptable for students to opt in for one-on-one interviews only.

Participants are free to choose not to discuss a question or topic posed during group or individual interviews. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Any identifying indicators that would reveal information about the school and/or the participants will be changed. Pseudonyms will be allocated to differentiate individual responses. The researcher will instruct all group members to keep confidential what they hear in the group discussions.

The precise nature of the questions to be posed in group and individual interviews has not been fully determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interviews, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event of a line of questioning developing in such a way that makes a participant feel anxious or uncomfortable they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that they may withdraw from the project at any stage without disadvantage to themselves of any kind.

Mobile phones have been identified as having both positive and negative repercussions for young users. A debriefing information sheet will be read out to students after they have completed the group and individual interviews in the event that they (or a friend) have been privy to mobile phone misuse. Participants will also be given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns they may have. Any participant who experiences stress or discomfort during the interview process will have the opportunity to attend a debriefing session. A cyber-safety information pack, taken from the Netsafe Website, will also be handed out to all participants.

Please note that text bullying if threatening grievous bodily harm or death is illegal. In the event of disclosure of illegal activity the stated disclosure protocol of the school concerned will be followed.

#### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

You may withdraw permission for your students to participate in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to the school (or the students) of any kind.

#### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

Having gained permission from participants the focus group discussions and one-on-one, face-to-face, interviews will be recorded and transcripts made of the recorded discussion. The school, group or individual participants will not be named in the transcripts. Results of this project will be published for the purpose of the researcher writing a Masters Thesis and presenting at an academic conference but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant or the school. Upon completion of this project a hard copy of the results will be made available to the Board of Trustees and the School Principal.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only Ana Hoseit (researcher) and Dr Lesley Procter (supervisor) will have access to it. The names or any coded information pertaining to the identity of the school, group or individual participants will not appear on typed transcripts. For analysis purposes random numbers will be allocated to research data. No list will be kept detailing which number has been allocated to which data set. If any further analysis is conducted

with the study, further ethics approval and your approval will be sought. At the end of the project, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of this project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and destroy data gathered by email. However, the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed. Caution is advised in the electronic transmission of sensitive material.

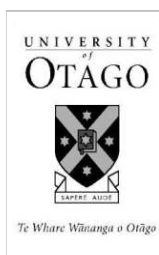
**What if the Board of Trustees have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Dr Lesley Procter – Supervisor  
Department of Anthropology, Gender and Sociology  
University of Otago  
University Telephone Number:- 03 479 8745  
Email: Lesley.procter@otago.ac.nz

Ana Hoseit - Researcher

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.



## **Appendix H: Information Sheet for the School Principal**

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to allow your students the opportunity to participate. If you decide your students may participate I thank you. If you decide your students may not take part there will be no disadvantage to the school (or the students) of any kind and I thank you for considering my request.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

Ana Hoseit, the researcher, is currently enrolled as a Masters student at the University of Otago. This project is being undertaken for the purpose of collecting information and writing a 40,000 word Masters Thesis in Sociology.

The research is being undertaken to explore how the mobile phone is embedded in adolescents' social and cultural world. Specifically, the research aims to understand the social consequences of mobile phone use and potential misuse for adolescents. Problem areas pertaining to mobile phone use will be explored. This research aims to advance understanding by providing a 'thick' description of young people's mobile phone usage. Depth and richness will be added to a topic that is currently under-researched.

The project involves gathering two different types of information. Participants will be asked to partake in a focus group session. They may then also choose to partake in individual unstructured one-on-one interviews. Students are invited to take part in both phases of this research or one phase only.

#### **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Approximately thirty female and thirty male Year 10 students are being invited to take part in the following project. Participants will be recruited from two public, co-educational, high schools within the Otago region. The participants will be recruited into a focus group that is separated by gender. Up to four focus groups will be held at each school; two for girls and two for boys.

#### **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should you agree that your Year 10 students can take part in this project, they will be asked to attend a single focus group meeting lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Agreement to be in these focus groups is strictly voluntary. Focus group participants will be asked to discuss general open-ended questions about their mobile phone. Focus group participants will also be asked to email the researcher directly if they wish to volunteer to partake in an unstructured one-on-one interview with the researcher at a later date. One-on-one interviews will also take between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews can either be done face-to-face, by phone, or by e-mail. It is perfectly acceptable for students to opt in for one-on-one interviews only.



Participants are free to choose not to discuss a question or topic posed during group or individual interviews. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Any identifying indicators that would reveal information about the school and/or the participants will be changed. Pseudonyms will be allocated to differentiate individual responses. The researcher will instruct all group members to keep confidential what they hear in the group discussions.

The precise nature of the questions to be posed in group and individual interviews has not been fully determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interviews, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event of a line of questioning developing in such a way that makes a participant feel anxious or uncomfortable they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that they may withdraw from the project at any stage without disadvantage to themselves of any kind.

Mobile phones have been identified as having both positive and negative repercussions for young users. A debriefing information sheet will be read out to students after they have completed the group and individual interviews in the event that they (or a friend) have been privy to mobile phone misuse. Participants will also be given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns they may have. Any participant who experiences stress or discomfort during the interview process will have the opportunity to attend a debriefing session. A cyber-safety information pack, taken from the Netsafe Website, will also be handed out to all participants.

Please note that text bullying if threatening grievous bodily harm or death is illegal. In the event of disclosure of illegal activity the stated disclosure protocol of the school concerned will be followed.

#### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

You may withdraw permission for your students to participate in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to the school (or the students) of any kind.

#### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

Having gained permission from participants the focus group discussions and one-on-one, face-to-face, interviews will be recorded and transcripts made of the recorded discussion. The school, group or individual participants will not be named in the transcripts. Results of this project will be published for the purpose of the researcher writing a Masters Thesis and presenting at an academic conference but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant or the school. Upon completion of this project a hard copy of the results will be made available to the Board of Trustees and the School Principal.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only Ana Hoseit (researcher) and Dr Lesley Procter (supervisor) will have access to it. The names or any coded information pertaining to the identity of the school, group or individual participants will not appear on typed transcripts. For analysis purposes random numbers will be allocated to research data. No list will be kept detailing which number has been allocated to which data set. If any further analysis is conducted

with the study, further ethics approval and your approval will be sought. At the end of the project, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of this project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

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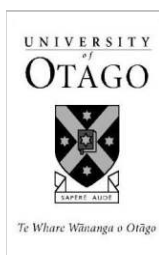
**What if the School Principal has any Questions?**

If you have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

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Department of Anthropology, Gender and Sociology  
University of Otago  
University Telephone Number:- 03 479 8745  
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Ana Hoseit - Researcher

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## **Appendix I: Information Sheet for the Year 10 Teachers/School Counsellors/Dean**

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR YEAR 10 TEACHERS / SCHOOL COUNSELLORS / YEAR 10 DEAN**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

Ana Hoseit, the researcher, is currently enrolled as a Masters student at the University of Otago. This project is being undertaken for the purpose of collecting information and writing a 40,000 word Masters Thesis in Sociology.

The research is being undertaken to explore how the mobile phone is embedded in adolescents' social and cultural world. Specifically, the research aims to understand the social consequences of mobile phone use and potential misuse for adolescents. Problem areas pertaining to mobile phone use will be explored. This research aims to advance understanding by providing a 'thick' description of young people's mobile phone usage. Depth and richness will be added to a topic that is currently under-researched.

The project involves gathering two different types of information. Participants will be asked to partake in a focus group session. They may then also choose to partake in individual unstructured one-on-one interviews. Students are invited to take part in both phases of this research or one phase only.

#### **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Approximately thirty female and thirty male Year 10 students are being invited to take part in the following project. Participants will be recruited from two public, co-educational, high schools within the Otago region. The participants will be recruited into a focus group that is separated by gender. Up to four focus groups will be held at each school; two for girls and two for boys.

#### **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should it be agreed that your Year 10 students can take part in this project, they will be asked to attend a single focus group meeting lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Agreement to be in these focus groups is strictly voluntary. Focus group participants will be asked to discuss general open-ended questions about their mobile phone. Focus group participants will also be asked to email the researcher directly if they wish to volunteer to partake in an unstructured one-on-one interview with the researcher at a later date. One-on-one interviews will also take between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews can either be done face-to-face, by phone, or by e-mail. It is perfectly acceptable for students to opt in for one-on-one interviews only.

Participants are free to choose not to discuss a question or topic posed during group or individual interviews. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Any identifying indicators that would reveal information about the school and/or the participants will be changed. Pseudonyms will be allocated to differentiate individual responses. The researcher will instruct all group members to keep confidential what they hear in the group discussions.

The precise nature of the questions to be posed in group and individual interviews has not been fully determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interviews, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event of a line of questioning developing in such a way that makes a participant feel anxious or uncomfortable they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that they may withdraw from the project at any stage without disadvantage to themselves of any kind.

Mobile phones have been identified as having both positive and negative repercussions for young users. A debriefing information sheet will be read out to students after they have completed the group and individual interviews in the event that they (or a friend) have been privy to mobile phone misuse. Participants will also be given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns they may have. Any participant who experiences stress or discomfort during the interview process will have the opportunity to attend a debriefing session. A cyber-safety information pack, taken from the Netsafe Website, will also be handed out to all participants.

Please note that text bullying if threatening grievous bodily harm or death is illegal. In the event of disclosure of illegal activity the stated disclosure protocol of the school concerned will be followed.

#### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

Participants may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to themselves of any kind. The School Board of Trustees, School Principal and Parent/guardian may withdraw permission for their students/son/daughter to participate in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to the school (or the students) of any kind.

#### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

Having gained permission from participants the focus group discussions and one-on-one, face-to-face, interviews will be recorded and transcripts made of the recorded discussion. The school, group or individual participants will not be named in the transcripts. Results of this project will be published for the purpose of the researcher writing a Masters Thesis and presenting at an academic conference but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant or the school. Upon completion of this project a hard copy of the results will be made available to the Board of Trustees and the School Principal.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only Ana Hoseit (researcher) and Dr Lesley Procter (supervisor) will have access to it. The names or any coded information pertaining to the identity of the school, group or individual participants will not appear on typed transcripts.

For analysis purposes random numbers will be allocated to research data. No list will be kept detailing which number has been allocated to which data set. If any further analysis is conducted with the study, further ethics approval and your approval will be sought. At the end of the project, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of this project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and destroy data gathered by email. However, the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed. Caution is advised in the electronic transmission of sensitive material.

### **What if a Year 10 Teacher or a School Counsellor has any Questions?**

If you have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Dr Lesley Procter – Supervisor

Ana Hoseit - Researcher

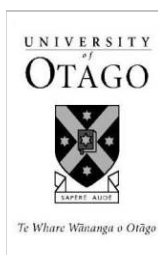
Department of Anthropology, Gender and Sociology

University of Otago

University Telephone Number:- 03 479 8745

Email: [lesley.procter@otago.ac.nz](mailto:lesley.procter@otago.ac.nz)

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.



## **Appendix J: Information Sheet for Parents / Legal Guardians**

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS / LEGAL GUARDIANS**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to agree to allow your son or daughter to participate. If you decide your son or daughter can participate I thank you. If you decide your son or daughter can not take part there will be no disadvantage to them of any kind and I thank you for considering my request.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

Ana Hoseit, the researcher, is currently enrolled as a Masters student at the University of Otago. This project is being undertaken for the purpose of collecting information and writing a 40,000 word Masters Thesis in Sociology.

The research is being undertaken to explore how the mobile phone is embedded in adolescents' social and cultural world. Specifically, the research aims to understand the social consequences of mobile phone use and potential misuse for adolescents. Problem areas pertaining to mobile phone use will be explored. This research aims to advance understanding of young peoples' mobile phone usage.

The project involves gathering two different types of information. Participants will be asked to partake in a focus group session. They may then also choose to partake in individual unstructured one-on-one interviews. Students are invited to take part in both phases of this research or one phase only.

#### **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Approximately thirty female and thirty male Year 10 students are being invited to take part in the following project. Participants will be recruited from two public, co-educational, high schools within the Otago region. The participants will be recruited into a focus group that is separated by gender. Up to four focus groups will be held at each school; two for girls and two for boys.

#### **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should you agree that your son or daughter can take part in this project, they will be asked to attend a single focus group meeting lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Agreement to be in these focus groups is strictly voluntary. Focus group participants will be asked to discuss general open-ended questions about their mobile phone. Focus group participants will also be asked to email the researcher directly if they wish to volunteer to partake in an unstructured one-on-one interview with the researcher at a later date. One-on-one interviews will also take between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews can either be done face-to-face, by phone, or by e-mail. It is perfectly acceptable for your son or daughter to opt in for the one-on-one interview only.

Your son or daughter is free to choose not to discuss a question or topic posed during group or individual interviews. Your son or daughter is free to withdraw from the study at any time. Any

identifying indicators that would reveal information about the school and/or the participants will be changed. Pseudonyms will be allocated to differentiate individual responses. The researcher will instruct all group members to keep confidential what they hear in the group discussions.

The precise nature of the questions to be posed in group and individual interviews has not been fully determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interviews, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event of a line of questioning developing in such a way that makes your son or daughter feel anxious or uncomfortable they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that they may withdraw from the project at any stage without disadvantage to themselves of any kind.

Mobile phones have been identified as having both positive and negative repercussions for young users. A debriefing information sheet will be read out to your son or daughter after they have completed the group and individual interviews in the event that they (or a friend) have been privy to mobile phone misuse. Participants will also be given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns they may have. If your son or daughter experiences stress or discomfort during the interview process they will have the opportunity to attend a debriefing session. A cyber-safety information pack, taken from the Netsafe Website, will also be handed out to all participants.

Please note that text bullying if threatening grievous bodily harm or death is illegal. In the event of disclosure of illegal activity the stated disclosure protocol of the school concerned will be followed.

### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

Your son or daughter may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to themselves of any kind. You are free to withdraw your son or daughter from participation in the project at anytime without any disadvantage to them. Please also be aware that your son or daughter does not have to participate even if you grant parental permission.

### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

Having gained permission from participants the focus group discussions and one-on-one, face-to-face, interviews will be recorded and transcripts made of the recorded discussion. The school, group or individual participants will not be named in the transcripts. Results of this project will be published for the purpose of the researcher writing a Masters Thesis and presenting at an academic conference but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant or the school. Upon completion of this project a hard copy of the results will be made available to the Board of Trustees and the School Principal. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you so wish.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only Ana Hoseit (researcher) and Dr Lesley Procter (supervisor) will have access to it. The names or any coded information pertaining to the identity of the school, group or individual participants will not appear on typed transcripts. For analysis purposes random numbers will be allocated to research data. No list will be kept detailing which number has been allocated to which data set. If any further analysis is conducted

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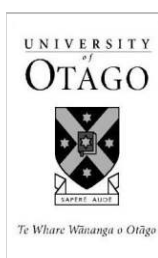
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Department of Anthropology, Gender and Sociology  
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Email: Lesley.procter@otago.ac.nz

Ana Hoseit - Researcher

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.





## Appendix K: Information Sheet for Adolescent Participants

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR ADOLESCENT PARTICIPANTS

Hi, my name is Ana Hoseit. Thank you for showing an interest in my project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. You might like to talk about this project with your parents or a friend before you make a decision. If you decide to take part then thank you. If you decide not to take part you do not have to give a reason and you will not be disadvantaged in anyway.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

I am a Sociology Masters student from the University of Otago in Dunedin. This year I am doing a Masters Thesis project, this involves collecting information from young people about their mobile phone use and then later in the year writing up a report of my findings. I will give a copy of the report to your school so you can easily find out the results of this research.

Now days most people your age own a mobile phone, I am interested in how, why and when young people use their mobile phones. I want to get a deeper understanding of young peoples' everyday use of mobile phone. Discussions will also address the positive and negative things that can arise from mobile phone usage.

This is a two stage project. Firstly, students will be asked to take part in a focus group session. A focus group is like a group discussion, usually with about 6-10 participants involved. Students may also choose to take part in individual one-on-one interviews and this is the second stage of this project. Students are invited to take part in both phases of this research or one phase only.

#### **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

Approximately thirty female and thirty male Year 10 students are being invited to take part in this project. Students will be recruited from two public, co-educational, high schools within the Otago region. Students will be put into a focus group that is separated by gender. Up to four focus groups will be held at each school; two for girls and two for boys.

#### **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

If you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to attend one focus group meeting lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Agreement to be in these focus groups is strictly voluntary, this means you do not have to take part if you do not want to and you can stop taking part at any stage without having to give a reason why. If you decide to take part in the focus group you will be asked to discuss general questions about your mobile phone. You will also be asked to email Ana Hoseit if you want to volunteer to take part in a one-on-one interview with her at a later date. One-on-one interviews will also take between 60 and 90

minutes. The interviews can either be done face-to-face, by phone, or by e-mail. If you like you can decide to only take part in the one-on-one interviews.

You do not have to answer any particular question or topic asked during group or individual interviews. You can pull out from this study at any time. Any identifying details that would reveal information about who you are or what school you attend will be changed. False names will be allocated to participants in the report, by changing your name your views will be kept anonymous. Ana Hoseit will instruct you and all the other focus group members to respect each other by not talking to anybody about what you hear in the group discussions. These discussions are to be kept confidential.

Ana Hoseit is interested in the relationship young people have with their mobile phone. The questions she will ask in the focus groups and one-on-one interviews will be about young people and their mobile phone use. If a question makes you feel anxious or uncomfortable you will be reminded that you do not have to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may pull out of the project at any stage without any disadvantage to you of any kind.

Mobile phones have been identified as having both positive and negative outcomes for young users. A debriefing information sheet will be read to you once you have completed the group and/or individual interviews in case you (or a friend) have experienced mobile phone misuse. You will also be given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns you may have. If you experience stress or discomfort during the interview process you will have the opportunity to attend a debriefing session. You will also be given a cyber-safety information pack, taken from the Netsafe Website.

It is against the law in New Zealand to send death threats by text message or text messages that threaten to physically hurt people. If you have received or sent these sorts of messages and choose to talk about it in focus groups or in one-on-one interviews please be aware Ana Hoseit will have to advise the school and the school rules relating to this sort of behaviour will be followed.

#### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

If you decide to take part in the project, you can change your mind and pull out of the project at any time and you do not have to give a reason why. Please also be aware you do not have to participate in this study even if your parents say you can.

#### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

If it is ok with you the focus group discussions and one-on-one, face-to-face, interviews will be recorded. Ana Hoseit will then listen to the tapes and type up the recorded discussion, this is called a transcript. The school, group or individual participants will not be named in the transcripts. Later in the year Ana Hoseit will write up the results from this project for her University work. The results may also be written up in journals and talked about at conferences. My name, or my school's name, will not be on anything that Ana Hoseit writes about this project. Ana Hoseit will give a copy of the report to your school so you can find out the results of the research.

The paper and computer file with my answers on it will be securely stored, only Ana Hoseit and her supervisor, Dr Lesley Procter will have access to these. Ana Hoseit and Dr Lesley Procter will keep what I say private.

Ana Hoseit will do all she can to protect and destroy any data she receives by email. However, the security of information received by email cannot be guaranteed. Take care when writing and sending emails, communicating this way may not be as safe and secure as you think.

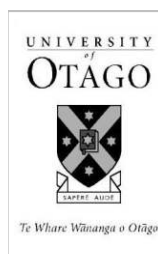
**What if Participants have any Questions?**

You can ask any question about this project any time you wish, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Dr Lesley Procter - Supervisor  
Department of Anthropology, Gender and Sociology  
University of Otago  
University Telephone Number:- 03 479 8745  
Email: Lesley.procter@otago.ac.nz

Ana Hoseit - Researcher

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## **Appendix L: Consent Form for Board of Trustees / School Principal**

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### *CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES / SCHOOL PRINCIPAL*

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

- The school's participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
- I am free to withdraw permission for my school's students to participate from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
- Personal identifying information such as audio tapes, transcripts and computer files will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed;
- This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes questions relating to the relationship young people have with their mobile phone. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that any Year 10 student feels hesitant or uncomfortable they may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or they may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
- If any Year 10 student experiences stress or discomfort during the interview process a debriefing session will be made available if they should require it.

- Text bullying if threatening grievous bodily harm or death is illegal. In the event of disclosure of illegal activity the stated disclosure protocol of the school concerned will be followed.
- The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library but every attempt will be made to preserve Year 10 students' anonymity.
- Focus group participants will be under strict obligation to keep focus group discussions confidential.

I agree for my Year 10 students to take part in this project. I agree for my Year 10 students to take part in:

A focus group

A one-on-one interview

(please tick the aspects of the project you would like to participate in)

.....

(Signature of BOT Chairman/School Principal)

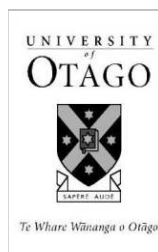
.....

(Date)

.....

(Name of school)

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## **Appendix M: Consent Form for Parents / Guardians**

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### *CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS*

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

- My son or daughter's participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
- I am free to withdraw my son or daughter from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
- Personal identifying information such as audio tapes, transcripts and computer files will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed;
- This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes questions relating to the relationship young people have with their mobile phone. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that my son or daughter feels hesitant or uncomfortable they may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or they may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
- If my son or daughter experiences stress or discomfort during the interview process a debriefing session will be made available if they should require it.
- Text bullying if threatening grievous bodily harm or death is illegal. In the event of disclosure of illegal activity the stated disclosure protocol of the school concerned will be followed.

- The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library but every attempt will be made to preserve my son or daughter's anonymity.
- Focus group participants will be under strict obligation to keep focus group discussions confidential.

I agree for my son or daughter to take part in this project. I agree for my son or daughter to take part in:

A focus group

A one-on-one interview

(please tick the aspects of the project you would like to participate in)

.....

.....

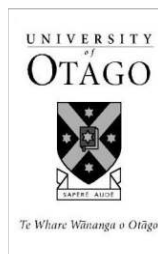
(Signature of parent/guardian)

(Date)

.....

(Name of child)

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## Appendix N: Consent Form for Adolescent Participants

*Let's get mobile: Unearthing issues of importance for adolescent mobile phone users.*

### *CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS*

I have read the Information Sheet, which tells me about this study, and I understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered in a way that makes sense to me. I understand that I can request further information from Ana Hoseit at any stage.

I know that:-

- My participation in the project is voluntary, which means that I do not have to take part if I do not want to and nothing will happen to me if I refuse;
- I can also stop taking part in this project at any time and I do not have to give anyone a reason why. I will not be disadvantaged if I do decide to pull out of this project;
- Ana Hoseit will use a tape recorder in interviews so that she can remember what I say, but the tape, her typed notes and computer files will be destroyed at the end of the project.
- Ana Hoseit is interested in the relationship young people have with their mobile phone. The questions she asks in the focus groups and one-on-one interviews will be about my mobile phone use. I know that it is ok for me to say I do not want to answer some of the questions.
- If I feel stressed or uncomfortable during the interviews I can talk about this with Ana Hoseit and attend a debriefing session if I want to.
- It is against the law in New Zealand to send death threats by text message or text messages that threaten to physically hurt people. If I choose to talk about threatening text messages that I have received or sent I know that Ana Hoseit will have to advise the school and the school rules relating to this sort of behaviour will be followed.
- Ana Hoseit will write up the results from this project for her University work. The results may be written up in journals and talked about at



conferences. My name, or my school's name, will not be on anything that Ana Hoseit writes up about this project.

- I must respect the other students who are taking part in the focus group by making sure I do not talk to anybody about the discussions that took place during the focus groups.

I agree to take part in this project. I agree to take part in:

A focus group

A one-on-one interview

(please tick the aspects of the project you would like to participate in)

.....

.....

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

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