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THE TELEPHONE YEARS:
The Relationship Between Adolescent Telephone Use and
Parent-Adolescent Conflict

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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“Daedalus the wise and skilled craftsman constructs wings of wax and feathers by which both he and his son can escape from their tower prison. The father carefully instructs Icarus on the proper use of the wings and tearfully kisses him before they both set out on their flight to freedom, a flight that ends fatally for Icarus who impetuously disobeys his father and flies too close to the sun, melting the wax and plunging the boy into the ocean. If one side of the moral of this story is that to disobey one’s parents may have disastrous, even fatal consequences, the other side is that the young must discover this for themselves. Thus the conflict - life must be experienced and the knowledge of the old may serve as only a partial guide for the young, to the continual dismay of parents.”

(Montemayor, 1990, p. 130)

ABSTRACT

While almost no published research has been completed on adolescent telephone use, it has been found that adolescents report their telephone use to be an area of conflict with their parents. Data was collected from 160 adolescent high school students aged around 14 years and some (88) of their parents/caregivers, using a questionnaire designed by the researcher. The results showed that female adolescents had more telephone use and more parent-adolescent conflict than did male adolescents. Both males and parents of both males and females reported that telephone use was strongly related to parent-adolescent conflict, but female adolescents did not report such a relationship. We can conclude that telephone conflict is seen in males, but is only a source of conflict in females as viewed by parents. Further, when males use the telephone it is correlated with the independence they desire, but telephone use has no parallel relationship with independence for females. However, high adolescent telephone use is related to the control a parent would like to have over the telephone, most especially for female telephone users. When females were independent and parents wanted to control their daughters telephone use, conflict levels were high. In contrast, conflict levels were high for parents and their sons when males wanted independence because parents had control of their telephone use.

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