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The Experience of Family Adaptation of Hypertechnical Communications as it Relates to Normative Parent-Adolescent Conflict

Robert M. Lawlor
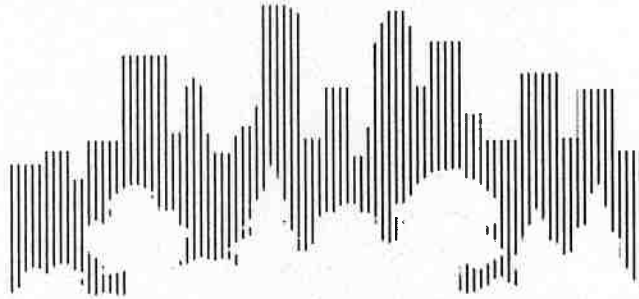*Augsburg College*

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2001

THE EXPERIENCE OF FAMILIY ADAPTATION OF HYPERTECHNICAL

COMMUNICATIONS AS IT RELATES TO NORMATIVE PARENT-ADOLESCENT

CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

THE EXPERIENCE OF FAMILY ADAPTATION OF HYPERTECHNICAL COMMUNICATIONS AS IT RELATES TO NORMATIVE PARENT-ADOLESCENT CONFLICT

ROBERT LAWLOR

JUNE 21, 2001

This exploratory qualitative study examines the impact of hypertechnical communications on parent-adolescent relations. Five families with adolescents responded with their stories regarding hypertechnical communications. A degree of parent-adolescent conflict is considered normative as it relates to adolescent autonomy development. This study sought to understand the impact of hypertechnical communications on the freedom of adolescents and any resulting conflict. Family systems and parenting have changed with the adaptation of hypertechnical communications. Adolescents have been given the power, through hypertechnical communications, to have more divergent agendas from those of the family at large. Adding the power of instant communication and information to adolescent autonomy development has led to a state of *virtual emancipation* for many teens.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of my research, the experience of family adaptation of hypertechnical communications as it relates to normative parent adolescent conflict. This chapter examines the defined problem and background information, and establishes the questions driving the research. In addition the significance of this study will be explored, ending with a summary of the chapter.

Problem Statement

Parent – adolescent conflict often arises over issues related to adolescents seeking greater autonomy (a normative developmental stage). This type of parent – adolescent conflict may be escalating in frequency and intensity due to the addition of high technology (also called *hypertechnology)* communication devices such as *computers, pagers,* and *cellular telephones* to family life.

Background of Problem

Given the personal empowerment these devices afford teens, and adding the given elements in our society of personal autonomy development (beginning in adolescence), including employment and personal transportation, many teens are enabled to assume more adult roles earlier than previous generations. High technology may be enabling teens to achieve a form of *virtual emancipation* from their parents. Hypertechnical communications have linked people like never before, with instant communicating and/or text messaging enabling person-to-person contact without the limitations of geographical distance or constraints of time. What this means to adolescents is that their friends can communicate with them anywhere-anytime. This can also mean that their parents are left

out of the communication loop. An additional concern is that parents may view hypertechnical communications as a helpful adjunct to parenting within the context of busy lifestyles. An article on pager use in Hong Kong refers to some parents as "tele-parents" ("Mobile telephones," 1992). When working with a family, particularly when concerned with parent-adolescent conflict, practitioners may find it helpful to analyze the hypertechnological elements of the given family's communications.

Research Questions

This research study will seek to answer the following questions: *1) How does the use of hypertechnical communications in families, impact normative parent-adolescent conflict; and 2) How does the use of hypertechnical communications in families, impact normative adolescent autonomy development?*

Significance of Study

The results acquired by this research will aid social work practitioners in working directly with families experiencing parent-adolescent conflict as well as policy formulation. The parents of families experiencing parent-adolescent conflict may be better helped to understand how modern communication devices have contributed toward altering their relationships with their children. This study provides a new perspective on the systemic dynamics working within family communications, as it relates to the adaptation of modern communication devices.

Summary

This chapter has examined the purpose of the study and stated the increasing prevalence of hypertechnical communications within familial interactions. The apparent amount of independence and power afforded by hypertechnical devices to adolescents

and the impact this has on parent-adolescent relations is a focus for analysis in this study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the available literature relevant to the study and the

definitions of hypertechnical communications, normative parent-adolescent conflict, and

adolescence. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the study as well as the

conceptual framework; and Chapter 4 describes the methodology to be employed in the

implementation of the study. Chapter 5 presents the findings of this research, and

Chapter 6 presents further discussion of the importance of the findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is a review of the available literature examining topic areas relevant to the study. The chapter begins by defining hypertechnical communications, normative parent-adolescent conflict, and adolescence. Areas of literature review concentrate on the prevalence and power of hypertechnical communications, and normative parent-adolescent conflict and normative adolescent autonomy development. The chapter ends with a discussion of gaps found in the available literature relevant to the study.

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Hypertechnical communications is defined as those electronic communication devices including pagers (or "beepers"), cell phones (or "wireless" phones), personal computers, or any combination of the features of these devices; and including the ability to send and receive text or have Internet access.

Normative parent-adolescent conflict is conceptually defined as that conflict which is a normal part of adolescent development. Adolescent maturation involves the expectation of increasing autonomy. The adolescent's expectations concerning the timing of achievement of those developmental tasks that are culturally determined to be part of the transition to adulthood (i.e. achieving independent selfhood, identifying personal life-goals) can be at odds with the parents' expectations. This discrepancy can lead to conflict between parents and their adolescent(s) (Dekovic, Noom, & Meeus, 1997).

Adolescence is culturally defined (in the US) as that period of time between puberty and the point at which the individual achieves economic independence from the parent. "In contrast to puberty, which is a biological process, adolescence is a cultural

phenomenon, which, in effect, is an 'artificial' postponement of adulthood" (Germain, p. 353). Adolescents for the purpose of this study will be considered to be age 12 to 18.

Prevalence and Power of Hypertechnical Communications

Personal Computers

The preponderance of information available on the subject of adolescents and high technology communication is found in popular literature, with surprisingly little information on this topic found in academic literature.

The use of hypertechnical modes of communication has become an increasingly prevalent (and affordable) element of our society. The use of cell phones, pagers, and the Internet (World Wide Web, WWW), once the domain of business executives, has become a part of the everyday life of American families. The increasingly affordable and highly versatile personal computer (p.c.) has demonstrated its empowering attributes at the recent protest in Seattle, Washington that disrupted the World Trade Organization (W.T.O.) conference. The linkages and spontaneous communications (as well as access to almost unlimited amounts of information) made possible by the Internet, permitted the various groups opposed to the W.T.O. agenda to effectively collaborate and disrupt the proceedings (Stokes, 1999).

There is not much data on the computer habits of teens. We partly extrapolate about the Internets influence on adolescents, from the media stories of tragedies like the one in Littleton, Colorado. In that instance where two young men planned and executed an armed attack on their fellow students and teachers at the Columbine High School, the Internet was used in the communication and planning between the two boys prior to the attack. In fact their thoughts and intended actions were listed on their personal web sites

("The Columbine Tapes," 1999). This is a tragic example of how parents can be left out of the loop when it comes to hypertechnical communication. "Surfing the Net" is proving to be evermore popular with adolescents, with 89% reportedly using computers, 61% accessing the "Net", and 14% admitting Internet encounters that they do not want their parents to know about (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999, p. 127).

Emerging in the early portion of this century, the adolescent demographic entity has developed its own niche within American culture (Leland, Gordon, Underwood, Weingarten, and Figueroa, 1999, p. 44). Within this niche, adolescent mores have taken shape identified by style, behavior, and rebellion against the adult world. This American rite of passage carries with it weighty decisions for adolescents, whether to use drugs and whether to engage in sexual activity for instance. More recently new technologies combined with changes in family structure have widened the divide between the adolescent and adult world. The family power structure has been inverted with as many as 11 million adolescents online and some family computers located primarily in the adolescent's bedroom. The results are what Hill Walker; co-director of the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior in Oregon calls "almost a virtual reality without adults" (Leland, et al., 1999, p. 44).

Pagers and Cellular Telephones

Hypertechnical communications are evolving in their form and function almost daily. Advances in technology and application are responsible for a variety of morphed communication devices. For instance, there is a new twist on E-mail, America Online's (A.O.L.) Instant Messenger dubbed "AIM." It is a free downloadable software that allows users – AOL or not – to carry on private, truly instant online conversations by exchanging

typed messages (text) with a group of AIM pals called a "Buddy List." One user has a "Buddy List" of 150 friends and often chats with up to seven at a time. Parents have become concerned about the amount of time their teenagers are spending on instant messaging (Thomas, 1999).

The most popular product of the 1990s could be the cellular telephone. In 1991 alone, for example, the number of new cellular phone subscribers grew by 43% in the U.S. and 35% in Europe ("Mobile telephones," 1992). The adaptation of hypertechnical communications to family life has brought about changes in family behavior. For instance "[t]he biggest users of pagers in Hong Kong are...'tele-parents.' After equipping their children with pagers, parents feel happy to let them shop and meet friends alone..." ("Mobile telephones," 1992, p. 19). One study suggested that almost 20 % of generation X er's (those born between 1961 and 1981) use cellular telephones to keep in touch with someone they are dating (Ford, 1999).

Behavior Influenced by Hypertechnical Communications

Hypertechnical communications have found favor, both with individuals engaged in illicit activities and with those who are merely following the trend. The Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney Curtis Hazell stated, "[b]eepers are the single most common tool of the drug trade" ("Street smart," 1986, p. 22). A Washington trade association, which represents radio common carriers, noted that it was not "unusual for beepers to be found in schools among both suspect students and those who are merely trying to be hip." Furthermore, as George Vaughn, Chairman of the Detroit School Boards Safety and Security Commission, stated, "if a kid is wearing a beeper, that's supposed to mean he knows what time it is, that he knows what's going on" ("Street smart," 1986, p. 22).

One study addressing telephone usage during adolescence showed that a review of the current literature revealed almost no research on the use of the telephone (conventional) by adolescents. Only two studies briefly looked at telephone use when investigating parent-adolescent conflict (Wild & Chamove, 1999). In those studies telephone use was reported to be a high area of conflict for both males and females, but consistently higher in females (Ellis-Schwabe & Thornburg, 1986; Smetana, 1989). This point is significant because the use of a pager may inevitably be a precursor to using a standard telephone (given that the pager is a device that does not permit instant messaging).

Normative Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Normative Adolescent Autonomy Development

The next part of this literature review concentrates on the crux of parent-adolescent conflict, namely the developmental pursuit of autonomy by adolescents. Parent-adolescent conflict typically increases during early adolescence, remains relatively stable during middle adolescence and decreases during late adolescence (Galmbos & Almeida, 1992; Smetana, 1989). Conflict often results from conflicting expectations between adolescent and parent – "how much" and "how soon" - on independence issues. Parents' perception of conflict frequency is higher than the perception of their offspring, about once every three days on average (Galambos & Almeida, 1992; Smetana, 1989). Females report in 70% more conflict with their parents than do their male counterparts (Montemayor, 1990).

Young people strive for independence from parental influence as they seek autonomy in their lives (Germain, 1991). Youth is to be considered as a temporary

borderline condition or an artificial postponement of adulthood experienced by individuals for greater or lesser periods of time, depending on the moment and the type of society in which we live (Germain, 1991). "Youth terminates with adult integration into society, when the individual achieves the economic and social independence that guarantees not only recognition of adult rights but also the capacity to exercise them" (Fernandez-Cordon, 1997, p. 576). In modern developed nations, the initiation or rites of passage from youth to adulthood have eroded. More and more adulthood appears to be defined (loosely) by the physical trappings of having come of age, and physical mobility. Not surprisingly, such trappings include devices like cellular telephones, pagers, and computers. In the Information Age information is indeed power. In modern industrialized societies the market place demand for flexible labor (young people), as well as a tendency for people to remain in school much beyond the minimum requirement, has led to in increasing ambiguity as to when youth actually ends. Adolescents are thus caught between personal dependency and economic independence. Intermediate phases of development including cohabitation (the gray area between leaving one family and beginning a new one) further blur the ending of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood. (Fernandez-Cordon, 1997).

Given these confused cues put forth by society, it is no wonder youth (in developed nations) are uncertain as to what constitutes adulthood and when it begins (Fernandez-Cordon, 1997). It is in adolescence that we struggle with the concepts of privilege and responsibility. When and how these concepts are played out in adult life has become increasingly blurred in our post-modern society.

One of the primary areas in which teens and parents have conflict over autonomy is dating (Dowdy & Kliewer, 1998). This is also an area in which parents are often left out of the loop when it comes to communication outside of the family. This "extra-familial adult role" can consume a great deal of an adolescent's time and energy, as well as become a significant area of parent-adolescent conflict. "Dating will serve as a catalyst for earlier autonomy development because it provides both the opportunity to practice self-governance and the motivation to do so." (Dowdy & Kliewer, 1998, p. 473). Communications between dating adolescents can mean almost daily contact with an average phone call lasting 60 minutes (Feiring, 1996).

Social Work Practice and Hypertechnology

With information technology expected to become an integral part of social work, what used to be the domain of administration and research, is finding its way into therapy applications, programs for diagnosis, treatment planning, case management, progress evaluation, client education, and outcome assessment. Social work practitioners will have to change the way in which they function. There will be an emphasis on the proper and use of data base variables, as well as promoting uniqueness and differential perspective. This means that the social work practitioner will have to safe guard individual clients care while still demonstrating a flexibility of choice in treatment modalities. It is also important that the social work practitioner continue developing links to the professional environment while promoting autonomy in practice (Cwikel & Cnann, 1991, March).

Gaps in the Literature

There are numerous gaps in the literature where the family adaptation of hypertechnical communications is concerned. There is little research on the adolescent usage of conventional telephones, let alone the hypertechnical variants. There is little research on pager/cellular telephone usage by adolescents, even though there is evidence of a rapidly growing affection for these devices among teens. There appears to be no research available on hypertechnical communications usage by adolescents in reference to economic class differences. The challenges that the normative transition into dating relationships pose to adolescents and to their parents have been addressed in discussions of parent-adolescent conflict and autonomy development. There is no research however on how modern communication devices impact this stage of adolescent development.

Having examined the available literature on normative parent-adolescent conflict, and hypertechnical communications, it is apparent that a degree of parent-adolescent conflict is normative, and that modern communication devices are finding a place in the lives of teens. Within the available literature, there does not appear to be an analysis of how modern communications devices impact parent-adolescent relationships. This study examines the experiences with hypertechnical communications in the daily lives of parents and their adolescents, providing insight into the effect on parent-adolescent relations.

Summary

In summary, two things are apparent from the articles reviewed. First, parent – adolescent conflict appears to originate primarily within the normative development of autonomy in adolescence. Adolescents seek to establish greater degrees of self –

governance in their lives. Conflict often arises over how much autonomy is expected and how soon; the perception of which differs between parent and adolescent.

Secondly, communications technology is impacting our society and becoming an everyday part of family life. Computers, beepers, and cellular telephones are increasingly being incorporated into everyday family operational functions. Not only have these devices found a utilitarian niche with families, but they have also become "trendy." Teens find the devices fashionable and representative of personal empowerment. These high technology modes of communication have been readily adapted to teen culture. Access to almost unlimited information as well as instant access to friends, day or night, has added a major new dimension to the adolescent pursuit of autonomy. In Chapter 3, the theoretical and conceptual framework is presented.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study will be described. General Systems Theory is the theoretical/conceptual framework employed in this study. This theory will be described and applied to the study of the impact hypertechnical communications has on normative parent-adolescent conflict.

General Systems Theory

General systems theory as defined by Hearn (1974) states that: "Perhaps the most significant fact about living systems is that they are open systems with important inputs and outputs. Laws which apply to them differ from those applying to relatively closed systems (p. 602)."

Within General Systems Theory, the family system, without regard to the form (constitution) taken by the family unit is defined herein as providing for the safety, socialization, certain resources, care, and protection of its members (in most cases it is also a source of procreation) (Turner, 1996). The following assumptions can be made about the family (a subsystem of the larger community) (Turner, 1996, p. 606):

1. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

2. Changing one part of the system will lead to changes in other parts of the system.

3. Families become organized and developed over time. Families are always changing and, over the life span, family members assume different roles.

4. Individual dysfunction is often reflective of an active emotional system. A symptom in one family member is often a way of deflecting tension away

from another part of the system and hence represents a relationship problem.

5. Families are generally open systems in that they receive information and exchange it with each other and with people outside the family. Families vary in their degree of openness and closeness, which can vary over time and according to circumstances.

It is this last assumption that pertains most to this study. Who has the information relevant to family matters and how the exchange of that information is affected by hypertechnical communications (i.e. cell phones, pagers, and hybrid devices) will be points of inquiry. *How* family members exchange information with each other and with people outside the family system and how the hypertechnical communications variants have impacted normative parent-adolescent conflict and autonomy development will be a focus of this research. The varying degrees of family system openness and closedness will be examined in the interviews as well as how this has changed with time and with changing circumstances (specifically in relation to normative adolescent autonomy development). "From a systems perspective, every event within a family is multiply determined by all various forces operating within that system" (Turner, 1996, p. 606).

This study will be further informed by how the family (and its individual members) communicates with people outside the family system using hypertechnical communications.

Application of Systems

An attempt to understand the family ecomap (Ashford, LeCroy, & Lortie, 1997, p. 86) will aid in the understanding of how the hypertechnical communications affect

people-in-systems (Ashford, et al., 1997, p. 86). The microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem of the family and its members (Ashford, et al., 1997, p. 85) will therefore be giving consideration when analyzing the interview. By gathering the family experiences with hypertechnical communications, in particular those experiences impacting parent-adolescent conflict, a greater understanding of the function of hypertechnical communication devices may be developed.

Systems theory from a social work perspective is a view of the individual as not existing in a vacuum, but rather in the contexts of the various elements that affect the individual through channels of interactions considered social systems. These systems of interaction may be in flux (dynamic) and are influenced by the environment and culture, and may overlap each other. It is therefore important for this study to determine how hypertechnical communications function with the context of these systems to determine the impact on parent-adolescent relations and personal adolescent freedoms. Within systems there is a constant flow of "input" and "output" in the attempt to establish or maintain "homeostasis" (systems equilibrium). The researcher has attempted to understand this balance (or imbalance) in the individual's outputs (or information and communications) as they flow out to other systems and the individual's inputs (again information and communications) as they flow in from other systems - that are aided by hypertechnical communications (Ashford, et al., 1997).

Summary

In this chapter, systems theory was presented and applied to hypertechnical communications as it relates to normative parent-adolescent conflict and normative

adolescent autonomy development. In the next chapter, the methodology of the research is described.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology used to implement the study. In addition, this chapter will cover the main concepts and variables (operationally defined) as well as discussion on the study population. Measurement issues then will be examined, followed by a description of data collection instruments, data analysis procedures and procedures for protection of human subjects.

Research Questions

This research study focused on the experiences of parents and adolescents as they adapt hypertechnical communications to their family routines. Effects on normative parent-adolescent conflict and normative adolescent autonomy development were central to this inquiry. The research questions raised by this study were: 1) How does the use of hypertechnical communications in families impact normative parent-adolescent conflict; and 2) How does the use of hypertechnical communications in families, impact normative adolescent autonomy development?

Research Design

This is a qualitative study, and as such it is holistic and naturalistic by design and uses an inductive approach. The particular qualitative research tradition emphasized is *phenomenological* which seeks to elucidate the human experience under study as true to the lived experience as possible (case study).

Procedures

Interviews were conducted either at the homes of the study participants or at the Youth Service Bureau office, whichever was most convenient for the participating families. All interviews took place between the months of April and May 2001. A

Human Services office support technician transcribed the interviews. The researcher then analyzed the transcribed interviews for the phenomenological meanings behind the participant responses as well as for emerging themes regarding normative parent-adolescent conflict and normative adolescent autonomy development.

Phenomenology

Interpretive phenomenology would provide the best means of content analysis when conducting research on this topic. Given that there is so little research on high technology communication (hypertechnical communications) and parent-adolescent conflict, the gathering of individual stories concerning this topic would provide a holistic approach. "By engaging in the interpretive process, the researcher seeks to understand the world of concerns, habits, and skills presented by participants narratives and situated actions" (Benner, 1994, p. xiv). The interpretive process allows us to explore uncharted areas resulting in the discovery of the unexpected and incidental.

"The work of interpretive phenomenologists moves beyond traditional logical structures in order to reveal and explicate otherwise hidden relationships..." (Fitzpatrick, 1996, p. 2). Given that the thinking used in phenomenological scholarship is circular and reflective in nature, new information is continually building new lines of inquiry. This method of research would provide the most information on a previously unstudied topic like hypertechnical communications as it relates to normative adolescent autonomy development and normative parent-adolescent conflict.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Design

The open-ended nature of the interview process in this study allowed for consistency and thoroughness while maintaining a minimum of researcher biases. The

process was supplemented with the use of an interview guide, which allowed the interviewer to adapt the wording and sequencing of questions to each particular interview. This also allowed for latitude in probing into unanticipated responses and circumstances. Therefore, overall, the strengths of this design were in the flexibility and adaptability to the varied circumstances of the interview. A weakness of this design is that this flexibility can lend itself to straying from the topic and wasting valuable interview time on irrelevant conversations. The interviewer needed to be prepared to identify quickly what unanticipated topics not to follow up on during the interview (Rubin & Babbie, 1993).

Study Population

This study attempted to discover the impact hypertechnical communications usage has on the familial relations between parents and their adolescents (also in respect to the adolescent normative development of autonomy). Therefore the study was primarily concerned with those families using hypertechnical communication devices in their daily lives. Their experiences with these modes of communication and how it affects interfamilial relationships are a focus of this study. Adolescents for the purpose of this study were between the ages of 12 to 18.

Study Sample

The study sought to establish a homogenous sample or a sample that contained adolescents and parents (or other caregivers) that incorporated the usage of hypertechnical communication devices in their family routines. Therefore, the sample was arranged through nonprobability, purposive (or judgmental) sampling. Family structure can be of any composition and gender and financial status were not factors in the selection process (Rubin & Babbie, 1993).

The study sample was obtained by distributing a letter of introduction to families receiving services from the Youth Service Bureau in Forest Lake, Minnesota (Appendix A). These letters were addressed to parents describing the study and soliciting their interest (establishing the parameters of what comprises a study family) and participation. The letter of introduction was not considered a consent form. The consent form was given to the families selected for the study. Five respondents were selected as study families (participants).

The process of participant selection involved the counselors at the Youth Service Bureau. They provided letters of introduction, from the researcher, to some of the families on their caseloads. Interested families could then leave a message for the researcher at the Youth Service Bureau stating their preferences for the interview place and date.

Measurement

There has been much discussion in the research community as to what constitutes credible evidence, with a strong preference being given to quantitative data. With qualitative research, the credibility of the data will for the most part lie with the skill and objectivity of the researcher/observer (Patton, 1987). This qualitative study seeks to discover the impact made on normative parent-adolescent conflict and normative adolescent autonomy development by the adaptation of hypertechnical communications to family routines – lived experiences. The data collected by this study will be in the form of words, feelings, and experiences and therefore scientific measures of credibility are not applicable. This study is of the phenomenological tradition of qualitative research, and as such will rely on the interview process as a source of data, while being watchful for the development (emergence) of themes. It is important to resist analyzing

or structuring the meanings of the context prematurely. A central point of credibility will be to ensure that the research questions are driving the study throughout its implementation (Rudestam & Newton, 1992).

To better examine issues of trustworthiness and the subsequent consideration of trustworthiness criteria, or internal validity, external validity, and objectivity, Guba's (1981a) proposal, as illustrated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is used in this study. In a qualitative study, Guba has proposed "terms that have a better fit with naturalistic epistemology" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219). The terms he has named are "credibility" (instead of internal validity), "transferability" (instead of external validity), "dependability" (instead of reliability), and "confirmability" (in place of objectivity) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219).

Guba defends the use of credibility by insisting on the acceptance of multiple constructed realities; therefore, there is no ultimate benchmark of reality to which one can turn to verify results. "Reality" becomes a multiple set of mental constructions (of the human mind), which is to the point for a researcher using a phenomenological approach. Guba suggests multiple techniques in the establishment of credibility, however, " peer debriefing"(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308) and "member checks" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) were selected for this study because this research seeks to establish the true meaning behind the participants' stories (phenomenological basis). Peer debriefing relies on the input from a disinterested party to explore aspects of the inquiry process (by being the "devil's advocate"). This technique also allows for the testing of working hypotheses. Member checks use the source of the data as a means to establish its credibility. Member checking is informal as well as formal and can be ongoing

throughout the study. This can take the form of interview summary "play backs" to the person being interviewed for reactions.

Since researchers doing a qualitative study are not concerned with statistical confidence limits, the establishment of external validity is an empirical issue and not possible for a naturalist. Therefore Guba has suggested the use of transferability or the establishment of a "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316) to be used in the attempt at reaching a conclusion about whether a transfer (of the hypothesis to a similar situation) is possible. The establishment of what exactly constitutes a "thick description" is still a matter of conjecture.

In the establishment of dependability and confirmability, a single audit of the study will suffice for both elements. Since there can be no credibility without dependability, the proof of one should suffice as proof for the other. Credibility is established by an inquiry auditor who is concerned with examining the *process* of the inquiry to determine the dependability of the study. The inquiry auditor also examines the product, or study results and conclusions, to establish confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). Lincoln and Guba (1985) give credit to Edward S. Halpern (1983), who established a detailed audit trail consisting of all the items (records) an inquiry auditor should be concerned with when auditing a qualitative study.

Data Collection

Data collection was assisted by the use of an interview guide (Appendix B) during the process of the semi-structured interview. This ensured consistency during the conversational nature of the interview from participant(s) to participant(s). The interview *guide* was pre-tested with the assistance of research peers. Interviews were arranged at the convenience of the participating family members, either at their home or a

prearranged location that ensured privacy. At this time, consent forms (Appendix C) were introduced by the interviewer and then signed by the participants (parents and adolescents to be interviewed). These interviews were audio recorded and a field journal was used to write down observational impressions of unanticipated circumstances and responses during the conversations (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes; transcriptions of the recordings were made later. The study employed a skilled office support person from a local social service agency who has a great deal of experience making transcriptions of recorded interviews. Transcriptions were used in the creation of case records as a means to search for the emergence of themes and patterns.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The data analysis (inductive), or the case analysis, begins with the researcher's field notes and the interview itself (transcribed) as raw case data. From the raw case data, case records on each study family were assembled and the data was classified, edited, and condensed. A study narrative was then constructed giving a descriptive picture of each family experience with hypertechnical communications (holistically). From this data categories, patterns, and themes emerged. The use of multiple methods of measurement (field notes and the recorded lived experiences for the interviews) provided a degree of convergence in the data (Patton, 1987).

<div align="center">Protection of Human Subjects</div>

The Augsburg College Institutional Review Board reviewed this research in its proposal stage (Approval Number 2001-22-1). The proposed research was reviewed to ensure that appropriate protections were afforded to human participants. In addition, all participants will have signed a consent form offering them full disclosure to the intent of

this study (Appendix C). No participant identifying information was included in the final research product or divulged to anyone during the research to ensure privacy. All identifying materials were kept in a locking desk during the course of this study. Participant anonymity and confidentiality of their individual stories were provided. Those individuals who had access to the tape-recorded interviews were the researcher, transcriptionist, and the thesis advisor. All tapes were subsequently destroyed by completion of this study.

Summary

In this chapter, the methodology of the research conducted was discussed as well as the precautions taken to protect the anonymity and privacy of the individual participants. In addition, the handling of the raw data was examined as the research sought to identify emerging themes from the families' stories. In the next chapter, the findings of the research will be presented.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, study results are presented. As the study is a qualitative exploration, themes that have emerged from the data are presented in subheadings. The characteristics of the study population are discussed first.

Five families were interviewed for the study, including parent(s) and adolescent(s) on the topic of hypertechnical communications. In the context of the interviews, the research sought to discover the impact cell phones, pagers, and e-mail have had on normative parent-adolescent conflict as well as normative adolescent autonomy development.

The themes from the research as they relate to the adaptation of hypertechnical communications are: Normative Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Normative Adolescent Autonomy Development.

Characteristics of the Study Population

Of the five families interviewed, 10 participants were male and 11 were female. Ages of the participants ranged from 13 to 44. Participant years of experience with any hypertechnical communication device spanned between 1 and 16 years. All families were currently involved in counseling services from the Youth Service Bureau in Forest Lake, Minnesota. Parents and adolescents were interviewed together.

Normative Parent-Adolescent Conflict with Hypertechnical Communications

From the interviews, it became apparent that there are some potential instances of conflict that result from the family adaptation of a hypertechnical communication device.

Parent and adolescent feelings and perceptions regarding hypertechnical communication devices are presented below.

Parent perception of trust issue with their adolescents

All parents interviewed found their main area of conflict with their adolescents and the use of a cell phone or pager came when their child(ren) did not return calls or pages made by the parents. The thought process for the parent appears to begin with the belief that their child(ren) is more secure with a cell phone or pager when away from home. One stated the purchase of a cell phone was "...for the kids to get a hold of us if we were out. That kind of thing – more of a safety issue." Another parent stated, "Well, because it's the communication – if they need help."

It became apparent during the interviews that the adolescents did not always return their parents calls or pages promptly. One mother talking about her daughters related the following, "But there were some arguments that we had with them – like, I paged you 10 times. You didn't call. Where were you?" The father's response in this instance was, "They learned how to manipulate us." Another mother explained poignantly, "I always think, I wonder if she's – is she having fun – is she ignoring me because I want her to come home?" Parents stated that they often received excuses later explaining why their adolescents had not returned their calls. Adolescent excuses were that the pager had been turned off, they were in transit and could not stop to find a phone (when paged), the pager was in a jacket and the jacket was in a friend's closet, and the device was not functioning properly.

<u>Adolescent peer contact through hypertechnical communications</u>

Often what had initially been a safety device from the parents' perspective became as from one father's point of view, "...more for them [daughters] to get a hold of their friends." Parents often found themselves more outside the communication loop between their child(ren) and their child(ren)'s friends. Four of the parents interviewed displayed frustration with opposite sex interests of their child(ren) who were either paging or calling on cell phones. One mother explained, "Even when they weren't dating, she was paging him [her son] a 150 times." One daughter explained that her boyfriend had paged her prior to the interview and that he was coming to pick her up and would be upset because the mother would not let her go. The mother's curt response was, "That's all right, he can talk to me!" Again, in this instance, communication was taking place outside of the parent-adolescent loop.

One mother discussed how her daughters had devised a way to get messages on their pagers (pagers that did not support text messaging). Some numbers turned upside down resemble letters, for instance the number "7" could be an "L." The mother stated, "And I can remember seeing – picking it up and it would say 'I love you' – and I'd be, who is that from?"

<u>Adolescent's perception of parental influence</u>

Conflict from the adolescent perspective appeared to concentrate on the amount of parental influence over their lives that hypertechnical communications afforded their parents. When discussing her e-mail use, one daughter related that her step dad, "...went into my screen and checked 'em [e-mail messages] before – nosey!" She further shared

that, "Now I have a password, I don't want you guys [her parents] to just go snoopin' in my crap."

One son when discussing cell phones and pagers stated, "If I get a cell phone then my parents will be calling me all the time – and, ya know, like I'll be in the middle of something and then I have to talk to 'em." This perspective was echoed by many of the adolescents interviewed. They felt that their parents' reach was too long and exerted more control than they wanted to accept. This appeared to be the underlying reason for not returning calls or pages, for instance, one daughter stated, "Well, it's hard to call if I like move around everywhere." This same daughter responded to her mother's comment that, "she [her mother] will constantly pager her – like 4 times in a row..." by stating "I'm on edge like every minute when you do that!"

It appears as though the perspective of how soon it is reasonable to return a call or page differs greatly between parent and adolescent. For instance, when asked if he would call back right away when called, a son stated, "Well, pretty much...If I like leave my cell phone in my car while I run into somebody's house – or a gas station or something – and it says [the cell phone], like, one missed call – I'll call the person back, whoever called me." A daughter in reply to her mother's insistence that she ask to pull over (when out with friends in a car) so that she can return her mother's call stated, "No – wait till we get to the next destination." Another example was given by a son who shared, "Yeah, like I'll be like at party or something with some of my friends and they'll call and ya know, I don't want to talk to them right then...I can wait like probably ten minutes...."

Normative Adolescent Autonomy Development with Hypertechnical Communications

From the interviews it became apparent that there are instances where adolescent autonomy is enhanced by the family adaptation of hypertechnical communications. Parent and adolescent perceptions regarding adolescent autonomy and hypertechnical communications are presented below.

Parent perceptions of adolescent autonomy with hypertechnical communications

Parents interviewed indicated that they perceived their adolescents had greater autonomy with the family adaptation of hypertechnical communications. The parent perception of the security seemingly offered by these devices through what they believed would be contemporaneous contact with their adolescents, led them to believe that they would have more influence as parents. One mother stated, "If anything happens, they [children] can get a hold of you. You know how you used to sit and wait by the phone [before hypertechnical communications]?" She also noted, "And, ya know, you feel safer because you know your kids are okay...."

Interviewed parents seemed to believe they have more influence over their child(ren)'s activities. For instance one father stated, "...I think my influence is more constantly present with them having cell phones when they're away from home." He believed that his son could call him regarding activities in which he would like to engage and he (the father) could "...instantly evaluate if [he] think[s] that's a good idea or not and tell him, yes or no." A mother stated, "We felt that we could contact them [children] easier – so, it was easier to let them go." One parent equated her increased influence with improving her parenting role. She stated, "I think its [hypertechnical communications] increased me to be a better parent because of being able to get a hold of each other. It has

helped with the trust issue, because I can get a hold of her. I'm more calm and collected. I know I can stay in touch."

Parents throughout the interviews believed that hypertechnical communications have made it possible for them to permit their children to have greater independence. One mother stated, "I think it helped us to give them [children] independence at a much younger age." Another mother when responding to the question what would be different for her daughter without a pager or cell phone stated, "She would have lost freedom."

Since these parents feel that pagers and cell phones add a dimension of safety to their child(ren)'s lives, they seem to be more prone to leave them alone in the community. One mother stated, "We've left them at ball practice...we feel more secure leaving the kids [with a cell phone]." In another example, a father stated, "We went shopping or like we'd drop them off at the mall and then we'd go to a different store or something and they could call us when they're ready to be picked up."

Increased independence for parents from perspective of their role

During the interviews, it became apparent that hypertechnical communications also offered an increased degree of freedom for parents from the perspective of their role as parents. Parents across all interviews stated that, cell phones and pagers in particular, added a great amount of convenience to their family routines. One mother stated, "It's nice for me to be able to find a sixteen year old [son], ya know." In another example a mother stated, "...it's nice, too, if I go do anything, ...you guys [children], if you need to get a hold of me, I'll have my cell phone – it doesn't matter where you are." Believing that their child(ren) can always contact them has given parents the perception that they can be away from home more. There appears, therefore, to be a greater capacity for

divergent agendas within the family system. One mother stated, "We've been up on Lake Mille Lacs fishing - and the kids have been able to call us when a tornado was down here and let us know...."

Adolescent perception of their autonomy

In relation to increased independence, one son stated that he felt the family adaptation of cell phones and pagers (in particular) had given him greater latitude in his social activities, as he phrased it, "...[my] boundaries have pushed out." He felt that these devices, by virtue of enabling him to check in with his parents, have made it possible for him to go farther and be gone longer. His sister pointed out that she used a cell phone when out in the family boat (this family lives on a lake). In addition, she felt that being able to contact her parents, via their cell phones, made it possible for her to gain permission more readily should, as she noted, "...want to go out and do something."

Interviewed adolescents reported greater ease and frequency of contacting friends. One daughter stated that she does not write letters to her friends anymore since she has e-mail. She finds that she can contact her friends more readily using instant messaging and can engage in multiple conversations simultaneously.

With the increased independence also comes the expectation, as discovered earlier, that the adolescent will check in with the parents. One son stated, "It's kind of like a give and take type thing...you can still do things that you can, but there's restrictions...it's like a restricted growth." One daughter, in another example, stated, "Well, I can go in cars more and like go different places and not have to worry about calling [her mother] right away." When asked what life would be like without her pager

she stated, "It'd suck, cause I wouldn't want to call you [her mother] everywhere I go and you'd get mad. They're [pagers] convenient."

<center>Summary</center>

This chapter presented the findings resultant from the interviews conducted with the participation of five families. The participants described, from their viewpoint, how they felt hypertechnical communications have impacted their families and gave accounts of relevant experiences. Life experiences discussed included parenting issues, adolescent autonomy, dating experiences, parent-adolescent conflict, coming-of-age rituals, and intrafamilial communications.

Chapter six presents a discussion of the research findings as it relates to literature and theory presented in earlier chapters. Implications for practice and policy, and strengths and limitations of the study and suggestions for future studies are discussed.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will present a discussion of the major findings discovered by the research and further examinations through the viewpoint of the literature reviewed. In addition implications for social work practice and policy, strengths and limitations of the study, and implications for further research will be presented.

Major Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact the adaptation of hypertechnical communications by families has on normative parent-adolescent conflict and normative adolescent autonomy development.

To answer these questions, families in the study were asked to describe their experiences and feelings with the adaptation of hypertechnical communications to their family routines. The major findings discussed below focus on the increased independence family members have obtained as well as some limited potential for conflict.

Minimal Level of Conflict

Normative adolescent autonomy development is a primary element of normative parent-adolescent conflict. Normative parent-adolescent conflict occurs as the adolescent matures and as adolescent maturation involves the expectation of increasing autonomy, increasing conflict between parent and child can be expected. The adolescent's expectations concerning the timing of achievement of those developmental tasks that are culturally determined to be part of the transition to adulthood (i.e. achieving independent selfhood, identifying personal life goals) can be at odds with the parents' expectations.

This discrepancy can lead to conflict between parents and their adolescents (Dekovic, Noom, & Meeus, 1997).

What this study has discovered is that parents believe that they are allowing their adolescents an increased modicum of independence with the adaptation of hypertechnical communications. With this independence comes the expectation that the adolescents will respond with increased vigilance in informing their parents of their whereabouts and seeking their permission and advice regularly when away from home. Given this premise a primary focal point of conflict between parent and adolescent occurs with the expectation that the adolescent when called via cell phone or pager by the parent will answer immediately. The adolescents in this study did not feel as though it was important to answer a parent call or page immediately, and as the study discovered often did not respond to multiple calls or pages. This behavior would be consistent with the findings of research discussed in the literature review. Young people will always strive for independence from parental influence (Germain, 1991). Furthermore, in our society, adolescent mores have taken shape identified by a style, behavior, and rebellion against the adult world (Leland, et al., 1999). When confronted by not returning their parents' calls, the adolescents gave various excuses such as the cell phone or pager was temporarily inoperable, or they must have been out of range. Adolescents in the study did not like the idea that their parents had increased influence over their activities in the community by virtue of being able to contact them via their cell phones or pagers. Adolescent maturation involves the expectation of increasing autonomy (Dekovic, Noom, & Meeus, 1997). In contrast, the adolescents stated that they were in frequent contact with their peers at all hours of day and night.

The expectations between parent and adolescent of the purpose and use of hypertechnical communications have appeared, in this study, to be in conflict only some of the time. The adolescent's expectations concerning the timing of achievement of those developmental tasks that are culturally determined to be part of the transition to adulthood (i.e. achieving independent selfhood, identifying personal life-goals) can be at odds with the parents' expectations (Dekovic, Noom, & Meeus, 1997). Family members as a whole see more benefits than negative attributes with the adaptation of these devices.

Independence

Even though pagers and cell phones in family use have not fully met parent expectations, parents remain reluctant to remove the devices from their adolescents. The adaptation of hypertechnical communications to family life has brought about changes in family behavior. These changes included changes in parenting. For example, the biggest users of pagers in Hong Kong are what have been labeled "tele-parents." After equipping their children with pagers, parents feel happy to let them shop and meet friends alone ("Mobile telephones," 1992). This example is consistent with the results of this study. Parents interviewed felt that pagers and cell phones have afforded them a great amount of convenience in their parenting. So much so that even giving the limited success they have in reaching their adolescents (using cell phones and pagers), they are reluctant to remove the devices. Parents described the convenience of hypertechnical communications by relating examples of the enhancement of their own freedom to be away from home. The independence, therefore, parents in the study feel they are allowing their adolescent is concomitant with the freedom they are affording themselves.

General Systems Theory Applications

Microsystems are comprised of the immediate or "face to face" contacts a person experiences in daily life (family members, friends, significant others, etc.). The mesosystem looks at how the various microsystems interrelate. The exosystem is comprised of those systems within the "broader social environment" that affect the individual indirectly (i.e. government institutions). The microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystem exist within the all-encompassing macrosystem. The macrosystem is comprised of subculture and wider cultural environments (Ashford, et al., 1997). It would appear at first analysis that the realm of hypertechnical communications would find its place in the macrosystem, being comprised of wider cultural environments and all inclusive of the other systems defined. With closer consideration this research finds that the behaviors studied more closely belong to the mesosystem, which looks at how the various microsystems interrelate. With the adaptation of hypertechnical communications, the interrelationships between microsystems become more dynamic and extend beyond "face to face" encounters. It is this extension that appears to have an impact on the level of "intimacy" between family members. This may be most notable by the changes in family "spatial" behaviors. Gathering places at home (the family kitchen, living room, etc.) have often been the place where the family's most intimate and meaningful activities take place (Germain, 1991). With the more divergent agendas family members are afforded by hypertechnical communications, these gathering places may be used less. Traditional family time together such as a "sit-down" dinner or gathering for a favorite television program may find less of a place in the individual family members' agendas.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

In this post-modern era, family therapists often find themselves struggling for a definition of the contemporary family. In one examination of this challenge it was suggested that, "The family is a *crossroads* more than a *self-contained system*; in it a minimum of two generations and two genders come together, depending on one another more than the members often care to admit, even though the generations and the genders more and more frequently inhabit different worlds and speak bafflingly different languages" (Parry & Doan, 1994, p. 19). Without abandoning *General Systems Theory* entirely, we may be able to consider this family "crossroads" as it relates to hypertechnical communications. The analogy is apt given the divergent ways members of the study sample families went throughout their day, crossing paths more and more by way of hypertechnical communications.

When considering a family's complexities from a systems perspective, the social work practitioner needs to inventory the hypertechnical communication adaptations the family possesses. These devices are becoming an increasingly significant part of family interactions. Understanding the impact these devices have on normative parent-adolescent conflict and normative adolescent autonomy development may enable the social work practitioner to better understand the family eco-system (or the person-in-environment).

An additional consideration this study has revealed is the increasing willingness for parents to do parenting through the medium of hypertechnical communications. The social work practitioner's understanding of the parent-adolescent relationship and the influence the parent has over the adolescent's decision making processes, may be more

complete with the awareness of hypertechnical communication factors discussed in this study.

<u>Policy Implications</u>

Some family members related experiences they had with the schools in their area and hypertechnical communications. The various schools used by the participating families had been through different policy approaches to adolescents bringing these devices into school. Parents related that initially the schools did not allow pagers and cell phones to be used on grounds. This changed because of the futility in preventing the apparent flood of these electronic communication devices on the campuses. Parents had found that it was convenient to be able to contact their children at school using pagers and cell phone. The policy at school changed to one of tolerating their presence. This is an example how powerfully these devices have made their presence in families.

Policy analysts need to take into account that adolescents will often be connected to family members via a cell phone or pager. Social work practitioners will need to decide how they will be using these devices in their personal communications with the families with whom they interact and provide services. With members of a given family being connected through hypertechnical communications, the social work practitioner will need to consider the ethics involved in discussing family issues over cell phones or contacting clients via their pagers. The spatial distancing between the social work practitioner and the client needs to be considered in future policy determinations. This is especially important when considering the current trend toward "tele-commuting." How practitioners and clients relate to the spatial aspects of electronic communications over distance will influence future policy decisions. How the practitioners and clients will

adapt to how the electronic messages are received will need consideration (Krueger & Stretch, 2000).

<div align="center">Strengths and Limitations of This Study</div>

A strength of this study is the consistency in findings from each of the families who participated in the research. The qualitative design with opened ended questioning allowed the families to freely express their opinions and experiences during the interview process. In addition, other social work practitioners reviewed the questions used in the interview guide. This enabled the researcher to better structure the interview process ensuring that relevant data would be gathered. The research questions were answered by the data collected. The findings were consistent with the research presented in the literature review on normative adolescent autonomy development.

The limitations of this study are primarily due to the small sample size. Five families participated and were all from the same geographical area. In addition, the sample was ethnically homogenous and all participating families were working with a Youth Service Bureau counselor. All families interviewed were involved in counseling at the Youth Service Bureau with a focus on a troubled youth in the family. Therefore, a potential cultural diversity of experiences inherent in a socially more extensive sample was not captured by this study.

An additional limitation of this study would be within the process of interviewing parents and adolescents together. Although the discussions were fairly open and frank, there were instances where the researcher felt that a lot was being left unsaid due to the presence of either the parent or the adolescent. It appeared at times that the parent was controlling the course of the adolescent's discussion - perhaps not to reveal too much

about family matters. Interviews held at the Youth Service Bureau office were often more rigid with less discussion. This may have been due to the formal atmosphere of the office surroundings; families interviewed at home were more open.

<div align="center">Implications for Further Research</div>

During the course of this research other possible avenues of study became apparent. The use and preferences of hypertechnical communication could be examined across cultures. Divining the use of these devices in the family routines of various ethnicities would not only shed light on their attitudes toward hypertechnical communications and adolescent independence, but also the variant ways in which they have been incorporated in their parent-adolescent relations. Variances in family income levels and the adaptation of hypertechnical communications could be studied. As economic conditions in the U.S. fluctuate, issues of accessibility and the impact on the family could be researched. Gender preferences for one mode of communication or another among hypertechnical communication devices could be considered.

The medium of hypertechnical communications is continually in a state of flux. New developments in the form and function of these devices appear to happen daily. The attributes of computers, cell phones, and pagers are being reconfigured to offer new ranges of possibilities for family communications. This will be an area rich in research potential for some time to come.

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Appendix A: Letter of Introduction

Robert Lawlor, M.S.W. graduate student
Augsburg College

March, 2001

SUBJECT: Letter of Introduction to graduate study project request for participants.

ATTN: Interested families.

This is a request for families (parents) who may be interested in giving their stories regarding their experiences with their adolescents use of cell phones, pagers (beepers), or communication devices that contain any combination of features. **Applying families need to include teenagers who have used, or are currently using, cell phones, pagers (beepers), or devices combining various communication capabilities.**

The categorical definition of the communication devices we will be discussing is sometimes referred to as *hypertechnical communications*. This term may arise in the course of the study, so I am defining it here as those communication devices your family may use; such as cellular telephones, pagers (sometimes called "beepers"), or devices consisting of any combination of electronic communication functions. More commonly we will refer to these items simply as communication devices.

Information taken in the course of this study is confidential. Families who wish to withdraw from the study may do so at any time - participation is voluntary. The time required would consist of approximately an hour long interview (by the research student) that will be audio taped. The audio tape will be later transcribed (with permission) to better analyze content. Only the researcher and the thesis advisor (an Augsburg faculty member) will have access to the tapes and transcripts. The tapes and transcripts will be destroyed prior to June 30, 2001. Interviews will be arranged at the participating families convenience and held at the Forest Lake Youth Service Bureau (YSB).

This study aims to compile the experiences of parents and their adolescents in using such devices as beepers, cell phones, e-mail, etc. As the researcher I wish to discover whether there are instances in which these communication devices have helped or hindered family relationships. It is my goal to have you give me your story regarding your families use of these devices.

This study is to be conducted by Robert (Bob) Lawlor in fulfillment of requirements toward the completion of a Masters of Social Work degree at Augsburg College. The Forest Lake Youth Service Bureau has kindly allowed me to use their facilities for the interview process.

Should you wish to participate your family will be rewarded with a Target gift card for your time at the beginning of the interview. To reply please call the YSB in Forest Lake, MN at (651) 464-3685 and leave your name, phone number and a convenient time for Bob Lawlor to call you to set up the interview.

Only five families will be selected from those responding. If your family is not interested, thank you for attending to this matter.

Thank you,

Robert Lawlor

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

1. What communication devices are you currently using?
2. How long have you and the family been using these devices.
3. How did you feel personally with the decision to use these devices?
4. How were the devices used by your family initially?
   a. How are they used now?
5. Can you give me a situation in which a member of your family used the device that caused you concern (or made you question the wisdom of using such devices)?
   a. How did you feel toward that family member?
   b. Did the situation result in a disagreement?
   c. Was the device removed from use temporarily or permanently?
   d. Do you feel that the device affords you an added degree of freedom? How do you feel about that? What advantages/disadvantages do you see with that added freedom?
   e. What does the adolescent(s) in the family do now that he/she did not do before your family adapted to the use of these devices?
6. Has your time together as a family increased or decreased with the adaption of these devices?
   a. Please give an example.
7. There is a study that suggests teens are using these devices to check on each other within the context of a dating relationship. How do you feel about that?
   a. Do you know of a situation in which this has become apparent with one of your teens?
8. Do you carry a communication device on their person?
   a. How often?
   b. During specific events/tasks?
9. Overall, please describe your relationship with your teen(s); with your parent(s).
10. How often is the device(s) used for intra-familial purposes (outings, errands, etc.) (give examples)?
    a. What are the effects on parent-adolescent relations? Adolescent independence?
11. How often is the device(s) used for extra-familial purposes (communication with friends) (give examples)?
    a. What are the effects on parent-adolescent relations? Adolescent independence?

For Parents:

12. Overall do you feel your influence as a parent has increased or decreased with the adaption of these devices?
    a. Please give an example.
13. What times of day/night have you observed your teen receiving/sending a communication via one of these devices and what were the circumstances?
    a. Did you know/discover the content of the message?
       1. If yes, what was the content?
       2. If no, what concerns do you feel with this situation (if any)?

Appendix C: Consent Form

The Experience of Family Adaptation of Hypertechnical Communications as it Relates to
Normative Parent-Adolescent Conflict
Consent Form

You are invited to be in a research study of how the use of cell phones, pagers (beepers),
e-mail, or other such electronic modes of communicating have impacted the relations
between parents and their adolescent children. We ask that you read this form and ask
any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Robert (Bob) Lawlor as part of a Master's thesis in
Social Work at Augsburg College.

Background Information:
The purpose of the study is to determine the effect of communication devices (the use of
cell phones, pagers [beepers], or devices containing a combination of features) on
normative parent-adolescent conflict (expected conflict resulting during the teenaged
years) and on normative adolescent autonomy development (the teenaged pursuit of
independence that is expected at this developmental stage). Families will be encouraged
to relate incidents/anecdotes that involved the use of a cell phone, pager (beeper), or other
such device, explaining how this impacted family relations.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things. Your family
would appear at the YSB office in Forest Lake, MN at a convenient time arranged
between yourselves and the researcher (Bob). Each participating member (parents and
adolescents) would be interviewed either together or apart. The interview will be audio
taped to ensure the accuracy of collecting results. The interviews will last approximately
one hour.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There is minimal risk with study involvement in that families may be asked to recall
experiences that they would just as soon forget. Recalling events may rekindle old
conflict. Participating families will receive gift cards that can be used at local stores or
restaurants at the beginning of the interview. Families who wish to withdraw from the
study may do so at any time, participation is voluntary.

The information taken in this study will help social work practitioners to better
understand how current innovations in high technology communications has impacted
family routines in as much as it contributes to parent-adolescent conflict.

Study participants will be debriefed following the interview to determine whether
counseling services are needed. In the event counseling services are needed following
participation in this study, the family will be referred to Renee Martini at "Family
Psychological Associates." The phone number for Family Psychological Associates is
(763) 689-9007 .

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. Anonymity can not be guaranteed due to the small sample size and selection process through the YSB. Participants may wish to indicate to their YSB counselors that they are participating in this study; to do so would be of their own choice.

Audio tapes made of the interviews will be transcribed by an office support technician. The transcribed records will have no identifying information. Only the researcher will have access to the tapes otherwise.

Raw data collected in this study (including the audio tapes) will be destroyed by August 31st, 2001.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the College or YSB. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conduction this study is Robert (Bob) Lawlor. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact him through the YSB, phone: (651) 464-3685.

The Thesis Advisor for this study is Prof. Phu Phan of Augsburg College. He can be reached at (612) 330-1375.

You will be given a copy of the form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

_____
Signature   Date

_____
[Signature of parent or guardian   Date]

_____
[Signature of minor subject's assent   Date]

_____
Signature of investigator   Date

I consent to be audio taped:

_____
Signature   Date

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document:

_____
Signature   Date