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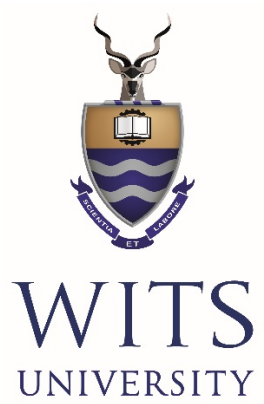

An exploratory study of the intrapsychic and interpersonal uses of mobile phones in a cohort of emerging adults

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

March 2025

Declaration

I declare that:

An exploratory study of the intrapsychic and interpersonal uses of mobile phones in a cohort of emerging adults

is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



Wendy Lee Cain
21/03/2025

Abstract

For approximately the last decade, mobile phones appear to be the technological device of choice - widespread in populations, kept bodily close, and inextricably integrated with many facets of life. Despite this ubiquity, and contrasted to the growing interest in the psychoanalytic community regarding technology broadly, there has been a relative absence in scholarly investigation considering mobile phones specifically. This research sought to explore the psychodynamics of relationships with mobile phones, and specifically attempted to narrate, understand and conceptualize how mobile phones were used by participants in representation, utilization and experience. Eight post-graduate students from the University of the Witwatersrand between the ages of 21-29 self-selected into the study; non-probability, purposive, convenience sampling was used, and ethical approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical). Participants were interviewed using the in-depth psychoanalytic interviewing method, and the data was analysed using a psychoanalytic narrative analysis. Using case study methodology, participant's idiomatic themes were explored, however there also emerged themes of universal developmental tensions across participants. These themes appear to be particularly saliant to emerging adulthood - those which involve conflicts around merger, connection and separation; transitional phenomena; and our ability to use our internalized and real objects. The mobile phone was considered as playing a role in the generation of thirdness. When used as a third it aided participants in thinking, reflexivity and connection. When it collapsed as a third, abilities to reflect, contain, and use it in service of relational aims were compromised. This research adds novel contributions to the small body of pre-existing psychoanalytic research regarding mobile phones, and argues that if we develop increased understanding regarding the conscious and unconscious aspects of mobile phone usage, we may be able to better use and understand our responses to these technologies, and perhaps contribute to public discourses around mobile phones as well as to their development and usage.

Key words: mobile phones, psychoanalysis, emerging adulthood, developmental conflicts, separation, individuation, object relations, reflexivity, thirdness.

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"Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadener. At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing. Let him sleep on. I can't go on." (Beckett, 2006, p. 83). This thesis has indeed been a difficult, yet spectacular birth, and has left me full of light, while still remaining in the dark. To be birthed and give birth, and to find meaning, we need others, and I have been fortunate to have had such steady hands and heads who have helped me, and to whom I am extremely grateful.

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My psychoanalytic parents - two mothers and a father: Frances - my supervisor of many years whose mentorship has allowed me the grace to paraphrase much of her voice making it somehow my own and yet also still hers. We have circled through so many themes and your indulgence for my swirly, associative mind has been a great help in finding my own mind and thus this piece of work too, thank-you. Col: for years of teaching and being, that have found their way into my bones, an example of an embodiment of the essence of the

work. I miss you. Johan: for whom the import of two mothers and a father shall not be lost; thank you for an experience of authentic holding, containment and relating. Our work has been instrumental in finding a way to complete this project, which represents so much more than just an academic endeavour.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The proliferation of mobile phone[1] usage, despite wealth status, has been particularly notable in developing 'digitally emergent' and technologically disparate nations, including South Africa (Cupido & Van Belle, 2013; Wei, 2007). According to census results from 2022, the number of South African households owning a mobile phone in working condition has grown to 92.1% - a vast comparison to 2001 results which was reported to be at 3.3%. Access to the Internet at home through mobile phones or other mobile devices has also significantly increased from 16.3% in 2011 to 60.5% in 2022 (https://www.sanews.gov.za/ south-africa/921-sa-population-owns-cellphone, accessed on 07/04/2024). These are astounding numbers, evidencing a significant increase of technology in people's lives, particularly in South Africa.

In the fields of media studies, marketing, economics, sociology, comparative literature and public health there has been commentary on the proliferation of mobile phones and an account of its presence (Blumenstock, 2012; De Bruijn et al., 2009; James & Versteeg, 2007; Kigambo, 2010; Wei, 2007). In the African context in particular, where migration for job-seeking or education purposes is common, mobile phones have been harnessed for use in the areas of communication and finance, enabling contact with family back home and engagement in the market economy and financial services (Aker & Mbiti, 2010; Lee et al., 2011; Chuma, 2014; de Bruijn et al., 2009). The proliferation of access and ownership of mobile phones in the African and South African context has burgeoned dramatically, despite wealth or poverty, and scholars have begun to research the import of this, particularly amongst the youth (Porter et. al., 2015; Porter et. al., 2018; Chuma, 2014; Kreutzer, 2009; Sooryamoothy, 2015). Mobile phones have also featured in the field of public health, where programmes have been rolled out that use SMS/text message reminders to aid in medicine

[1] Throughout this dissertation, the term mobile phone is used to denote phones described as smart phones, cellular phones, cell phones, mobile phones and cellular technology. When relevant, I note that I am discussing mobile phones that predate smart phones.

compliance, with evaluation of the efficacy of such programmes (Barclay, 2009; Folaranmi, 2014; Nglazi et al., 2013). One public health study researched the relationship between access to mobile phones (and thus the Internet) and HIV knowledge and testing in a large sample of sub-Saharan women (Iacoella & Tirivayi, 2024); the study evidenced that access to mobile phones improves reproductive health knowledge and HIV awareness. However, there is comparatively limited research in the field of psychology and even less so in the psychoanalytic tradition. As the use of mobile phones continues to grow, it is becoming increasingly important to understand their impact on the psyche.

Cundy (2015a) suggests that technological developments of the present day are distinct from those seen in the past, partly because of the speed at which they occur and because of their widespread presence. The choice to focus on mobile phones in this study (as opposed to other technological devices) is based on the diversity of uses and widespread forms of connectivity associated with this form of technology, with applications that allow users to receive and send emails, engage in instant messaging and social media platforms, as well as 'outsource' certain mental functions such as keeping a schedule and so on. While we may see other technological artefacts in the future which function psychologically in a similar fashion as do mobile phones, and in a similar manner as technologies of the past, mobile phones appear to be the interface of choice between subject and object at this time in history.

Past literature has examined technologies such as radio (Garratt, 1994), prostheses (Verlager, 2008), medical technologies (Sanal, 2008), television (Kuritsky-Fox, 2008), and technologies used for thought (Turkle, 2007) (for a comprehensive span of the history of technology from the 1400s to the 2000s, see Thomas Misa's extraordinary 2011 work entitled *Leonardo to the Internet: Technology and Culture from the Renaissance to the Present*). There is also literature that makes interesting predictive accounts of technologies of the future (see Michio Kaku's 2011 book entitled *Physics of the Future* and Ray Kurzweil's 2005 book *The Singularity is Near*). However, at this junction in our history, mobile phones' appeal is something worth exploring, and as such, they are the focus of this study. Increased proliferation and the fact that mobile phones are carried around with us suggests that they have become attached to the body, the self, to a sense of identity and to the mind in a unique manner. Mobile phones appear to carry a special designation in terms of personal

connectivity, being technological objects that appear to be most widely used and kept to hand and on the user's person. Perhaps due to their size and portability, combined with their technological advantages, mobile phones appear to be the connectivity object of choice.

Mobile phones have changed how we communicate. In my own psychotherapy practice, I have misunderstood patients when they have described "chatting" with a person for some time, only to realize later, that they have been chatting via instant messaging or a dating app, and have never met the person 'in real life' (IRL). We could ask, what is 'real life' in this instance? What kind of engagement does this kind of chatting allow for? To what version of the other are they chatting? Is it a part of the person? What part of themselves is doing the "chatting"? An aspect of themselves, a false self, an ideal self, or more evocatively a true self? The now universal accessibility of technology such as the telephone and electronic messaging services like WhatsApp make for important questions in the psychoanalytic field, such as, what exactly is it that we are doing with our mobile phones?

Thus, this study was formulated to investigate the little researched positioning of mobile phones in relation to the self. This was done primarily through exploration of participants' narratives and the metaphors within these narratives, specifically related to the interface between mobile phones and aspects of the self, and with regards to how phones are used in relationships. Furthermore, it was hypothesised that there may be something unique about mobile phones that fits very neatly with the expression of psychodynamics, and this was considered to be a primary guiding discursive aim of the study. In order to operationalize this in the research context and following ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand, I interviewed a sample of eight students at the University of the Witwatersrand. The sample was drawn using non-probability, purposive, convenience sampling. In-depth psychoanalytically informed interviews were conducted, and data was analyzed using a psychoanalytic narrative analysis.

1.2. Aims and research questions of the study

This research aimed to explore the psychodynamics of relationships with mobile phones. More specifically, it aimed to understand how participants experience their mobile phones,

how they represent their mobile phones in their minds as evident in their narratives; and how they utilize their phones, both intra-psychically and interpersonally.

Framed as research questions, these aims can be explored with the following questions in mind:

1. How do individuals experience their relationships with their mobile phones on a psychological and emotional level?
2. How are mobile phones mentally represented by individuals, as reflected in their personal narratives?
3. In what ways do individuals utilize their mobile phones both intra-psychically (internally, within the self) and interpersonally (in relation to others)?

1.3. Rationale for the study

The journey towards this topic began with reflection on my own personal utilisation of my mobile phone, as well as in experiences in clinical practice. Upon seeking out theoretical and clinical writing regarding this, I found that there has been relatively little written in the psychoanalytic literature to theorise these phenomena. While there are case studies examining instances where technology has entered into the therapy room, and some mixed comment on its utility in therapy (Lemma, 2017; Scharff, 2018; Zeavin, 2021), there is far less psychoanalytic literature theorising the representation of mobile phones in the mind as well as their usage interpersonally. Considering there is a whole generation born in the 1990s – the "iGeneration" (Rosen & Samuel, 2015) – which has had technology as an attendant throughout development from birth, it is imperative to consider how technology features, psychologically speaking.

A thorough purview of the current literature evidences the paucity of psychoanalytic writing on technology. In a somewhat dated, but nevertheless relevant article, Lippman (2002) suggests that psychoanalysis has shown only limited and sporadic interest into this domain of popular culture, thereby neglecting an area of human engagement which may have an impact on the development and expression of the mind. Commenting on the Internet, Balick (2012) notes that

> …while a great deal of research has gone into the psychological nature of this use (Internet addiction, adolescent engagement, and the like), little of it has taken a

> psychoanalytic angle or sought to address perspectives on the human motivation to relate and the meanings made from early and contemporary relations within the context of 'Web 2.0' [the Internet] (p. 120).

This has changed in the last decade, however, with authors like Balick (2023, 2024), Boras (2023), Brahnam, (2017), Donner, (2023), Dori (2022), Essig (2015), Ehrlich (2024), Flisfeder, (2021), Frankel & Krebs (2022), Holloway (2021), Johanssen (2019), Johanssen and Krüger (2022), Krüger (2025), Lemma (2017), Medina (2021), Tugwell (2021, 2022), and Turkle et al. (2015, 2017) beginning to engage with technology through a psychoanalytic lens. This study hopes to contribute to this growing body of literature, offering a snapshot into a group of young adults' relationships with their phones.

It has been noted that studying technology from a psychological point of view is difficult because the very thing we are trying to engage with, theorise, and reflect on, we are also immersed in by virtue of participating in contemporary culture (Balick, 2024; Bjöklind, 2018; Essig, 2012). Figueira (1991), commenting as a Brazilian psychoanalyst on psychoanalysis in Brazil, notes that it is difficult to stand outside of a cultural phenomenon when immersed in it. Similarly it may be difficult to see beyond personal blind spots regarding mobile phones and popular discourse. Lupton (2000) described the bi-directional field of technology and its users, where mutually influencing aspects make it difficult to tease out where technological influence begins and ends. Some scholars suggest that "technology is always infiltrative: it is embodied, even when at first glance it would appear to only 'dress' the body" (Marchesini, 2023, p.8). Such scholars suggest, as a result of the infiltration of technology into everyday life, it has effected notable changes to cognitive capacities and at the level of endocrine functioning (Marchesini, 2023), but also changes related to the rewiring of psychological, instinctual drives (Kahoud, 2023), as well as our capacity to perceive and symbolize through imaginational capacities (Bjorklind, 2018). Mobile phones are frequently used technological objects that we carry on our person, so much so that they have come to be utilized as an extension of self (Holloway, 2021; Kahoud, 2023; Sugarman, 2017). This may have something to do with their portability as well as their power – we are carrying in our pockets, mini-computers with an extraordinary capability to connect us with executive functions, knowledge, and with one another. Mobile phones are unique objects that offer multiple dimensions of experience; they are tactile - we carry, hold, poke, press, stroke and thumb

them, we look at them and watch them, we hear them, talk to them, and obsess about how they may in fact be 'listening' to us. Mobile phones allow us to explore our bodies (and other bodies) through photos, information search engines, apps that track steps, location, food intake, and sleep. Yet, despite their ubiquitous presence, relatively little has been written on the psychological imports of mobile phones. There is something uniquely compelling about mobile phones – they are objects which seem so involved in personal and professional life that their presence and import is taken as a given, and so because of their ubiquity, exist somewhat unexamined.

However, it is this 'dilemma of immersion' that perhaps makes psychoanalytic theory uniquely suited to studying this phenomenon. Due to its focus on how unconscious forces, symbolic processes and intrapsychic defensive structures shape human behaviour, psychoanalysis can offer insights into social trends, capturing less rational motivations, desires and investments (Freud, 1921). Psychoanalysis has a relevant and depth-oriented offering to make in relation to this societal and cultural phenomenon, and specifically within the domain of mobile phones.

How psychoanalysis as an institution will respond and grow with this changing face of communication is yet to be seen. However, dialogue and adaptations in this regard are beginning to emerge and to be sanctioned officially by the International Psychoanalytic Association (Scharff, 2010; 2013). Even for those who shun the likes of 'working online' or tele-analysis, our patients, and people more generally, are and will remain swept up in the information age and technology will continue to permeate life. We cannot *not* take the time to think about its place, import, and the losses and gains to contemporary life it affords (Balick, 2024; Essig, 2012).

It is hoped that this piece of research offers a unique contribution to psychoanalytic writing, stimulating further engagement with this important aspect of modern society and culture. In discussing her career exploring technology more broadly, Sherry Turkle (2008) notes that the stories that she has heard often have little to do with the ostensible purpose of the technology being examined. Turkle (2008) suggests that there is so much din surrounding technology that it is difficult to talk beyond ways that don't "follow a standard

script" (p. 4). She suggests that coming to grips with the significance or meaning of what a particular technological artefact holds requires a different kind of questioning and listening, which she explores in light of ethnography, psychoanalysis and memoirists. She notes that when a researcher listens in a particular way, and inculcates an interview environment that is open, safe and not predetermined, the meaning the researcher and participant uncover together is often deeply idiosyncratic, and often surprising and different from conventional wisdoms. Turkle (2008) writes: "[t]echnology serves as a Rorschach over a lifetime, a projective screen for our changing and emotionally charged commitments" (p. 11). Similarly, this research project sought to actively listen to participants and explore this subject matter with a 'psychoanalytic ear', uncovering deeper layers of narrative which are beyond the ordinary discourses currently surrounding technology, society and the self. The fact that this study took place in South Africa is held in mind in order to grasp the various contextual and cultural meanings the participants make of their lives, however, this is not a focus of the study; rather it is the idiosyncratic ways in which the participants represent and use their phones that is of significance and the application of psychoanalytic thought to this. As an aside, however, this study makes a contribution to the evidence base for the utility of applied psychoanalytic theory in a non-Western setting.

1.4. Research Approach

This research endeavour has been psychoanalytically oriented in its approach from conceptualization to operationalization, and in its interpretation of the phenomena being explored. A psychoanalytic approach holds that psychological life is based on developmental processes which occur throughout the lifetime (Waddell, 2002), that these processes and subsequent psychic life are based upon early relational experiences that come to structure aspects of personality (McWilliams, 2004), attachment behaviours and styles (Firestone, 2024) and our psychodynamics, and that there are unconscious processes that occur which can and do remain unknown but which we can infer the derivatives and vicissitudes thereof (Lemma, 2003). Psychoanalysis has gone through what is known as the Relational Turn and this ushered in a shift in the construction of the psychoanalytic space and practitioner. A move away from the professional as the authority on the inner workings of their patients, has "given way to the view that psychoanalytic understanding is intersubjective, growing out of the conversation between patient and analysts" (Leary, 2008, p.86). Thus, with this

intersubjectivity in mind, the concept of thirdness (Benjamin, 2004; Ogden, 1994) has also been utilized extensively in this thesis. In relation to generating theory regarding technological artifacts like mobile phones, I have tried to embody the understanding that knowledge is mutually co-constructed, rather than a top-down interpretation of this cultural object – i.e. that the participants and I have developed meaning together. While their subjectivities have been a focus, my own subjectivity and its role in the understandings found has also been acknowledged through a process of continuous reflexivity (Holmes, 2019).

1.5. Structure of the Research Report

Following the present introductory chapter, this thesis begins with a discussion of my psychoanalytic theoretical framework in Chapter 2. This chapter presents an extensive synthesis of psychoanalytic developmental theory which offers a paradigm for conceptualizing the development of the self, the mind, and relationships. This lays the groundwork for the discussion of psychoanalytic theory in relation to mobile phones which occurs in subsequent chapters. The literature review in Chapter 3 presents an in-depth account of psychoanalytic literature discussing technology, and mobile phones specifically. My methodological considerations and research procedures are laid out in Chapter 4. The findings are presented in vignette form in Chapter 5 and discussed in relation to psychoanalytic theorizing in the Chapter 6. The thesis concludes in Chapter 7 with a summation of the findings, a discussion of the limitations of this project, and lastly a discussion of recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

Historically, there has been little psychoanalytic writing exploring the intersection of technologies and clinical work (Ahumada, 2001; Akhtar, 2003; Ostow, 1995). There seems to have been resistance to its incorporation into the frame, the IPA having previously only sanctioned remote psychoanalysis of psychoanalysts in training in areas where access to psychoanalytic training is difficult (Scharff, 2010; 2013). However, the Covid-19 pandemic forced clinicians and psychoanalysts into using videoconferencing technology to do our work, and this has led to a burgeoning area of research and reflection regarding conducting sessions in this manner (for example see Benzel & Graneist, 2023; Feijo, Strassburger, Barcellos, Nardi. & Serralta, 2023; Hickey, Schubmehl & Beeber, 2022; Kegerreis, 2022; Taylor, Kegerreis, & Rohleder, 2023; Matheson & Kegerreis, 2023; Donner, 2023; Ferguson, 2023). Nevertheless, relative to other topic areas, technology remains a small focus and phones, in particular, remain a new line of enquiry.

While some clinicians continue to resist the inclusion of technology into the frame, many have now embraced using technology in the clinical field, with online supervision and therapy sessions. In South Africa, very little psychoanalytic writing has addressed technology from a psychoanalytic perspective (for exceptions see Kadish et al., 2018, and Knight, 2021 – note that both papers address online psychotherapy). Only two South African researchers for example, have considered aspects of mobile phone usage specifically: a Masters dissertation examined extra-therapeutic frame issues arising with regards to cellular phones (Mohamed, 2008), and another, in a PhD dissertation, the use of SMS and email with adolescents in therapy (Dooley, 2006). This is mirrored in the international literature, where most psychoanalytic writing has focused on technology and its impact on or utility within the therapeutic process. However, there is also a need to develop a deeper understanding of technology as a social and cultural phenomenon – and psychoanalysis has much to offer in this conversation.

Despite research into online psychotherapy, there is a space that exists between our usage of technology and our conceptualisation of this usage. While we may spend time considering how to use technology helpfully with our patients, we have not yet come to formulations of what technology in and of itself means in the psyche. We might believe that a technological artifact, such as a mobile phone, could be considered as *just* a thing – something that is a tool, non-human, and is distinct. However, some authors are making the argument that technology is not merely an external object to us but that "machines have become subjects", to use Turkle's (2004) phrase (p. 16). Goren (2003) proposes that:

> …technology has fundamentally altered the nature of experience, the body, the sense of self in such a way that certain objects, artefacts of technology, have become anthropomorphically endowed with human subjectivity. Conversely, subjectivity, the action of experiencing, has become more objectified and thereby commodified, rendering a quality of detachment to direct experience (p. 487).

Psychoanalysis has shown us that objects can indeed be endowed with meaning and projections, and may serve as metaphors or vehicles for internal processes and dynamics. Mobile phones may hold all kinds of intrapsychic potential.

The objects of enquiry in this exploratory project are intrapsychic and relational processes concerning mobile phones (i.e. how do participants understand the place of their phones in their lives and relationships). Thus, for this subject matter, a psychoanalytic lens is most fitting given the depth-oriented nature of psychoanalytic enquiry as well as psychoanalysis' expertise in the formulation of explanatory systems for how the mind works and for how we relate to one another, both consciously and unconsciously. Leary (2008) writes of how:

> Cyberspace creates new classes of imagination and subjective activity. The question of what is "real" and what is "fantasy" as well as the question of when such a distinction should matter – always a preoccupation for psychoanalysis – has become newly relevant to the culture at large. The living legacy of psychoanalysis lies in exactly the capacity to find in the new a glimpse of the old and to locate in the strange something familiar (p. 95).

In order to frame the understandings gained in this study of the places held and functions served by mobile phones, intrapsychically and interpersonally, concepts from classical (Freud) and postclassical (Bollas, Ogden) psychoanalysis, through object relations theory (Klein, Bion), the middle school (Winnicott), to intersubjective or relational psychoanalysis (Benjamin) will be drawn from. These inform what is being looked at and engaged with within this thesis. While psychoanalysis offers a broad cannon from which to work, much of the later theorising is fundamentally based on classical theory in many regards (McWilliams, 2004), and as such, I have attempted to integrate 'traditions' but also comment on where there might be particular divergence. I have used multiple theories from the psychoanalytic canon, as opposed to just use one particular theorist, as I find that aspects of the different developmental theories best capture different parts of the work. Furthermore these theories, to my mind, are interrelated and pick up on each other, and so reflect the way in which I use theory as an umbrella of comprehension offering specificities that can then be taken up as relevant. Particular tenets and assumptions that underlie all psychoanalytic theory are used as a foundation to examine conceptualisations of mobile phone usage in this study. These assumptions place emphasis on:

- Uncovering unconscious aspects of the mind (Lemma, 2003);
- How early relationships form models of representation and influence anxieties, conflicts and patterns of relating, unconsciously, to ourselves and others in reality and in phantasy[2] (Waddell, 2002);
- How 'ways of being' relate to defensive, superego, and ego structure and functioning (McWilliams, 1994)
- How individuals are inclined towards repetition compulsion (Freud, 1914; McWilliams, 1994).

As a basis, psychoanalysis foregrounds that the expression of personality, as well as pathology, have their aetiology in psychological processes and experiences, and are not only determined by physiological or genetic causes (Fonagy & Target, 2003). Furthermore, psychoanalysis puts forward that psychic life is not only what we are consciously aware of,

[2] A note on the term phantasy: for the purposes of this thesis phantasy denotes unconscious aspects which involve the internal unconscious object world, while the use of fantasy denotes more conscious imaginings which are within awareness (Isaacs, 1948; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973).

but is also, and largely so, unconscious (Fonagy & Target, 2003). Humans find that we follow urges, get pulled in directions, are drawn to particular others, repeat our mistakes, and respond in characteristic ways despite our attempts not to, as well as have processes that whir on at the back of our minds without our awareness. These aspects are linked to repetition compulsion - the repeated unconscious repetition of prior experience which serves a binding function by reducing tension and getting rid of excitation (Freud, 1914; 1920). Repetition compulsion is seen in transferential relationships, and is conceptualised as remembering in action which thereby allows for a kind of 'remembering' - which is a derivative of the experience, without having to verbalise and consciously work through the experience/feeling/conflict etc. (Freud, 1914). It has links to attempts at mastery over experience, the resolution of which are dependent on the passive or active nature of the repetition and if the repetition can occur at a higher organising level (Loewald, 1971), such that involves reflexivity and a thinking, containing, digesting mind.

Christopher Bollas (1987) formulated the concept of the 'unthought known' – it is the idea that we know something on a level but cannot say how or what exactly it is we know – a portion of the experience is out of awareness, in our unconscious as it were, and we do not have the words to describe what we know; we cannot think about it. This overlaps with Freud's (1919) idea of the uncanny, in which we have sense of déja vu (I have seen/felt/experienced this before); it is something we know without knowing it – we know it in our bodies or affective responses, but we don't have the words for it. Freud's (1919) uncanny, however, refers only to old, familiar feelings of fear or anxiety, while Bollas' (1987) unthought known can refer to a broader range of feelings. These impressions can be structuring – and so this belies another fundamental piece of the psychoanalytic puzzle of the development of the mind – that preverbal life, is filled with affective experiences that we take in and that these experiences are a bedrock of development (Maiello, 1995; Waddell, 2002). Bollas (1979) has also written about the 'transformational object', which is the term he uses to denote the internalisation of a process – a way of relating that is first experienced with the mother, before the infant is even able to cognitively acknowledge her as an object. He deems this to be transformational because this first experience of relating

> …is experientially identified by the infant with the process of the alteration of self-experience…as the mother integrates the infant's being (instinctual, cognitive,

> affective, environmental), the rhythms of this process, from unintegration(s) to integration(s), informs the nature of this 'object' relation rather than the qualities of the object *qua* object. The mother is not yet identified as an object but is experienced as a process of transformation, and this feature remains in the trace of this object-seeking in adult life, where I believe the object is sought for its function as signifier of the process of transformation of being. Thus in adult life, the quest is not to possess the object, but to surrender to it as a process that alters the self, where the subject-as-supplicant now feels himself to be the recipient of enviro-somatic caring, identified with metamorphoses of the self (Bollas, 1979, p. 97).

Psychoanalysis posits that what we experience as we grow and develop has a fundamental influencing and organising impact on who we become, how we respond to the external world, as well as what inner resources we draw on to cope with the dialectic between inner and eternal reality (Waddell, 2002).

Whatever one's specific school of thought, psychoanalytic theory holds that the developmental processes that occur are fundamentally shaping of personality, and that there are unconscious processes, structures and dynamics at play within one's personality. One of Freud's (1920) enduring concepts is that of the pleasure-unpleasure principle, which puts forward that we seek to decrease that which we find unpleasurable while also increase that which we find pleasurable (Fonagy & Target, 2003). It has also been theorised that we are structured to move towards psychological safety – contemporary theorists as well as attachment theorists would argue that relational safety is a fundamental driving force in the psyche (a slightly different slant to the pleasure principle) (Benjamin, 1988; Mahler et al., 1975; Stern, 1985; Schore, 2003; Winnicott, 1958, 1965, 1969). Negotiating one's wishes, with reality and with relating comes with internal and external conflict. Lemma (2003) describes this crucible of understanding as such:

> We are beings driven by sexual and aggressive urges, we are envious and rivalrous, and we may harbour murderous impulses even towards those whom we consciously say we love…At its core, psychoanalysis is about the vagaries of desire, our recalcitrant renunciations and the inevitability of loss (p. 4).

On this matter of inevitable loss, psychoanalytic theory sees loss as a fundamental aspect of development, which has important structuring features. Loss can result in normal development as well as pathological development. The first loss conceived of by psychoanalysis is that of losing one's haven in the womb through birth (Freud, 1925; Rank, 1924), a fall from imaginary heaven. Post-birth, loss is involved at every junction of attainment (Mahler, 1972). The entire developmental process can be likened to a fall from imaginary heaven (Trotter, 2020, personal communication). It is a beautifully sad irony that if we were not to experience these losses, we would be woefully unprepared to deal with the vicissitudes of sentient life. So, as a normal part of life and the development of the mind, loss must be and is experienced, however the balance of losses amongst 'good' experiences, and how we are helped to manage loss, lays down the who we become and shapes our capacities.

These ideas of development and the birth of a mind shall be fleshed out below beginning with a note on the self, which is then contextualised in the mother-child matrix which is seen as the bedrock of relating. The importance of the 'other' as a concept is explored and then I move from twos to threes, and consider the concepts of separateness, thirdness and transitionality. Chapter Two ends with a brief comment on the relatively new concept of emerging adulthood - a necessary emphasis on this specific period of development, as it is the period of development of the participants in this study.

2.2. The Self

In trying to capture a definition of the elusive 'self', I considered varying perspectives, from philosophical and broad discursive perspectives to a more specific object relational perspective, and considered the similarities and overlaps in these points of reference. With reference to Gergen's (1991) 'Under Siege', self-cohesion is understood to derive from a capacity for 'interiority' and that selfhood is bound within and dynamically influenced by relationships and society, and thus selfhood is multifaceted and fluid. However, with all of the competing and thrusting social incursions, such as made possible by technological connectivity, our sense of self can become confused and can introduce foreign voices which may enter into our internal world. The Foucauldian perspective would propose that "the self is coerced into existence, not to become an agent but as a mechanism of control where systems of discourse work from the inside out by creating a self-regulating subject" (Callero,

2003, p. 118). Gubrium and Holstein (2000) consider one perspective where,

> the true self is overrun by false selves that have been mobilized to ward off the growing demands of daily living. As outside interests inundate the self, it retreats inward, leaving only uncomfortable false personas directed toward others. We preserve our selves by seeking inner shelter from the social onslaught (p. 99).

This is a narrative wherein a private, insulated, singular self exists. However, in contrast to this idea of a true self hidden within narrative, postmodern critiques argue that the modern self is constructed, re-constructed, seen, produced, and lived out in a "proliferating and variegated panorama of sites of self-knowledge" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 96). Within the notion of a socially constructed self, the social self is developed as an anchoring point, a moral locating point around which social interaction occurs, and parts of the self are displayed in behaviour: "[i]nteraction and communication are key constituents. As we talk with ourselves or with others, we learn and inform each other about who and what we are. In a sense, we talk our 'selves' into being" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 101). The emergence of the self in the world is not an accidental, spontaneous occurrence. Thus, the self - interacting at this time - is a carefully considered, constructed or curated self, chosen for exhibition and engagement at a particular time in a moment of being, in the social landscape. Discursive environments offer a multiplicity in who and what we might be, offering a variegated opportunity to incorporate into the self a multiplicity; a complicated, multileveled construction of self. While in modern terms, the self was considered to be a sort of precious jewel, encrusted in layers of the body, always at risk of intrusion from the external, social world - albeit influenced by the external world, but considered something of an entity on its own - in postmodern terms, the social construction of the self is foregrounded. As stated by Gubrium and Holstein (2000): "While some view contemporary life as saturating the self, it also can be seen as providing countless options for what we could be, markedly expanding our potential for self-expression" (p. 105).

The positive dimension of postmodern existence is the limitless opportunity for multiplicity. While this multiplicity of options of course can be overwhelming, it also offers the opportunity of liberation. However, the moral climate of the postmodern self can also evoke a cage-like social definition of who and what we may be and may display. A moratorium is set on social discourse in terms of personal expression and self-definition. Within this

tension between liberation and moratorium, exist innumerable opportunities for ongoing growth, redefinition and challenging of stayed constructions of self:

> Social life is fully penetrating and engrossing; it completely permeates our lives. We cannot escape the social because it is built *into* our very beings. But the important lesson now is that the social is also built *out* of the eminently variegated going concerns that supply us with identities (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 112).

It would seem that in considering selfhood, it is in the interface between objects, where objects/subjects interact (whether it be with speech, image or written language) that some anchoring points may be found. It is at the interface between self and others that Bohan (2002) proposes the self exists. This perspective holds that the social self and the true self are not necessarily at odds with one another, but rather it is the interface and interaction of the social with interiority which appears to hold most fertile ground in considering what selfhood is. As Winnicott (1960) maintained, there is no baby without mother, no mother without baby. It might be added that there is no self without relationships (Bohan, 2002), and no social world without the selves that constitute it. I agree with Martin and Sugarman's (2000) position regarding selfhood, which avoids a forced choice between modern and postmodern definitions of self, and rather embodies a flexible position. It is a definition of self that does not sit within the set definitions of selfhood which spring forth from the modernist perspective nor the interminable reductiveness of some deconstructionist postmodernist perspectives, but hopes instead to appreciate "the possibility of both self and understanding within a real but contingent physical, biological, and sociocultural world" (Martin & Sugarman, 2000, p. 397).

Similarly, I avoid a forced choice when considering structure or process in regards to the psychoanalytic literature of selfhood, and hope instead to hold the dynamic. Treurniet (1987) helpfully clarifies a structure as a state, and an event as being active and a process. Treurniet sees the two as interrelated in that a structure is like a snapshot of process in action. Structure is a part of process, but it is a static moment evidencing something fortifying of the process. The process reflects a dynamic system of structures but "[a]s soon as we try to catch a concept by isolating it, we risk treating a process as a state" (Treurniet, 1987, p. 511). In this regards, psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic research makes room for a self that is narrated into being (Holmes, 2019). By this we can appreciate that selfhood, and our relations to others, is

revealed in what and how we talk about ourselves and our experiences and that these can also reveal multiplicities to conceptions of selfhood. There has always been a tension in psychoanalytic theory between structure and process, between the idea of fixation, such as developmental fixation in Freud's psychosexual stages, and vacillations along continuums such as the paranoid-schizoid and depressive continuum (Klein, 1935; 1940). In a move out of structural and drive theory, object relations theory holds as most important that which occurs between self and other. Object relations theory takes this interface as the primary site of development in terms of the mind and the self; this of course will have structural and structuring components. It is this interaction between what one possesses genetically (with one's phylogenetic potential and with the external world, between the self and object, which structures both at every step of development (Masterson, 1985)) and objects that comes to structure something internal in a person.

What literature studies call interiority, object relations theory might call selfhood, or identity. In regard to interiority or selfhood in object relations theory, there is an appreciation of the matrix between self and other, and the structuring this imparts, in both directions (Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Benjamin, 1990). There is also an appreciation of the pursuit of the "study of primary experiences of love, loneliness, creativity, and integrity of self" (McWilliams, 1994, p. 29). Object relations theory concerns itself with the experience of objects (which can be people, parts of people such as the breast or penis, but also symbolised artefacts such as a flag or a symbolic 21st birthday key) in a person's life, the quality of these experiences of relations with objects, the internalisation of these aspects, and also how these objects are carried within a person unconsciously in internalised images and representations (McWilliams, 1994). Furthermore, object relations theory is deeply invested in understanding the negotiation between union and separation/individuation between the self and other (Klein, 1935, 1940; Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Winnicott, 1958, 1960, 1969). These experiences with objects are constantly in relation to the developing self and there exists a dynamic inter-relationship (Alvarez, 1998; Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Benjamin, 1990). The theory also holds an appreciation of the powerful capacity for humans to relate and communicate despite a lack of verbal proficiency - so much can be said and received prior to the capacity to talk (Beebe & Lachmann, 2020), and so these exchanges and influences have an influencing effect from early on in psychic life.

According to object relations theory, with time, and in the best conditions for development - the facilitating environment as Winnicott (1965) names it - more and more differentiation between self and others develops and the developing child begins to be able to sort out objects from self, as well as comes to be able to represent whole objects and a whole sense of self (Masterson, 1985). If all goes well, an internalisation of the ego functions which the mother has previously performed occurs and "repression comes to take the place of splitting as the principal method of defense and the capacity for object constancy begins to develop" (Masterson, 1985, p. 26). Masterson (1985) notes the following as capacities of a developed self:

- Having affect which is spontaneous and alive;
- An appropriate self-entitlement which has a sense of deserving;
- The ability to identify one's wishes and to use personal volition in pursuit of these ambitions, and to support and defend them when under attack;
- Being able to acknowledge one's efficacy in coping with something in a positive and adaptive way which then supports adequate self-esteem;
- The capacity to self-soothe;
- A continuity of self where a person is largely the same person from one experience to the next;
- A capacity for committing to others and to pursuits;
- Creativity - particularly in regards to changing the self;
- And a capacity for empathy and intimacy with others in close relationship.

There appear to be two streams of object relational theory, that which is denoted by the 'hard' theories (for example, Klein, Fairbairn, Kernberg) in which predominance of hate and conflict are navigating points, and the 'soft' theories (for example, Balint, Winnicott, and Kohut), which are based on deficit and have love, growth, and progressive unfolding as their turning points. Both streams, however, can be considered part of an overarching object relations model that is "interpersonal…in that it relates the development of the ego and the internal objects to personal relationships" (Fonagy & Target, 2003, p. 119). Internal representations of the other, and the self in relation to the other, are continually modified by

repeated experiences with external, real objects, and so the external world is continually used in service of the internal world or relating. The Relational turn in psychoanalysis has championed how these internal representations are bi-directional, with both parties in a relationship mutually affecting, changing and defining each other, in perpetuity (Alvarez, 2018; Benjamin, 2013, 2022). These representations are understood to find expression through the body, mind and in relationships. In this study, what is under investigation is the relationship between individuals and their mobile phones. The selfhood of each of the participants is understood to be both affecting and affected by their mobile phone and what it has come to represent for them. Leary (2008) writes of how:

> Everyday immersion in cyberspace calls into question traditional ideas about what is public and what is private, what is on the surface and what is deep. In cyberspace, multiple realities and identities coexist and negotiate in new ways. All of this brings new selves and subjectivities into the places where psychoanalysts do their work (p. 86).

2.3. The mother-infant relationship as the bedrock of relating

In psychoanalytic theory, our relationships with our mothers[3] are considered to be the prototype of relating (Abram, 2022; Ferenczi, 1949; Winnicott, 1960). Within these relationships we first learn about unity, connection, and separation (Stern, 2018; Winnicott, 1960). For simplicity, I'll begin with a description of this early period of life when all goes as best as it can.

2.3.1. From unity to separateness

Classic psychoanalytic theory holds that selfhood begins first in unity or fusion typically with the mother (Mahler, 1967). There is disagreement regarding the extent of this (relating to the emergence and timing of the earliest ego structure), however going into this debate is not necessary for the present discussion. I take initial fusion to mean that, broadly, the mother and infant are one psychologically (Winnicott, 1975). The infant is unable to exist or persist

[3] In this thesis, the terms mother and mothers are used and understood as being the primary caregivers to infants, as follows much of psychoanalytic formulations. However, I acknowledge and recognize that other people who are not biological mothers - such as fathers, adoptive parents, grandparents, other dedicated caregivers - may also provide the function of primary caregiver.

without the support of a dedicated, preoccupied other (typically the mother) (Winnicott, 1975), and the mother will feel the baby's annihilation anxiety (Bion, 1967), which is in service of survival. In turn, the mother begins in a distinct and unique state of mind, what Winnicott (1975) terms primary maternal preoccupation. The mother is attuned to the states of the baby – ideally, she can tune into and feel her infant's anxieties, sleepiness, restlessness, or needs through a process of projective identification (Bion, 1967; Klein, 1946) and can duly respond in order to meet the vulnerable needs of the baby. Contemporary psychoanalytic theory explores the complexity of the mother-child relationship within changing contexts and suggests that the mother-child relational dynamics we internalize are coloured by our experiences with both the real and the fantasied mother, as well as our inherent temperaments coalescing with lived experience; it is now acknowledged that these relationships are dynamic and bidirectional (Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Raphael-Leff, 2010; Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001), and to use Benjamin's (in Benjamin & Atlas, 2022) helpful terminology, dialectical. In reality, this is a messy business of working out what it is indeed that the baby needs, and involves sitting with states that are difficult to bear or understand. However, it is in this mix and processing that infants eventually come to internalize a soothing function – this function is borne of an experience of being adequately soothed. Linked to this internalization is the dawning awareness of separateness. The baby's first act in this regard, involves splitting off all that is bad – bad experiences, tastes, the unpleasantness of tummy aches, etc. are out there, not in here, not me – Freud termed this negation (Freud, 1925) and it is the seed of developing a sense of the "I" that is to come later. The baby is allowed to believe that 'it' is all there is, the centre as it were (and for a spell of time they certainly are), where when milk is needed, so it arrives, as if the baby had made or was the milk itself (and in a way this is true – a baby's cry can release the mother's let down response without her control or awareness – a beautiful example of bidirectionality and mutuality). However, through gradual, ordinary frustrations, missed moments of attunement, the baby slowly comes to discover that she is distinct from her mother, as well as her mother being distinct. It is through the loss of this initial state of fusion, through the beginnings of separateness, that the internalisation of a soothing mother and the development of affect regulation occur (this will be linked to notions of the maternal voice, gaze and breast below). This process of becoming an individuated self, Mahler (1975) described as the psychological birth of an infant.

Within these relationships, self-and other- interactive contingency determine our ways of regulating affect alone and with another and define our "procedural expectancies" (Beebe & Lachmann, 2020, p. 313). Alvarez (2018) posits that it is not only distinct objects that come to shape selfhood but also the 'contours': the feel of the holding environment, the shape, the touch of things, first informed by the pre-representational – what she calls proto-representational, and what we understand to be the seeds of burgeoning representation as it were. As clinicians we feel this most keenly in the room, that we all have varying degrees of established yet dynamic selfhood (or put another way, separateness) and that it can sometimes feel murky, or at least malleable (less stable and static as previous theory would have it). Our separateness appears to be contingent on being able to truly see and know that the other is indeed other, and this is considered a developmental achievement.

2.3.2. Mother's voice, the maternal gaze and feeding at the breast

An infant's hearing appears to come 'online' at four months in utero (Maiello, 1995). Research into the role of maternal voice in brain development has found that maternal voice appears to affect auditory fitness which is related to subsequent development of language and hearing (Webb et al., 2015). The infant has a preference for his/her mother's voice and mother tongue, intonations, and the sound quality of his mother's voice (Fifer & Moon, 1994; Hepper et al., 1993; Maiello, 1995). Maiello (1995) theorizes that the sound of the mother's voice, and its absence, in utero, is a 'sound-object' which is a proto-object for what will later become the breast/maternal object postnatally. She writes that in the continuous environ of the womb, the voice is the first sensation that can come and go and is outside of the baby's control, as is the breast, and so the sound-object is a prototype of the breast-object (Maiello, 1995).

After birth, the maternal gaze has also been implicated in the development of the self and can be a source of comfort (Stern, 2018). Winnicott (1967) wrote that when the baby looks at his or her mother, he sees him or herself and, considered the maternal gaze to contain benevolence, concern and love. He implicated this in the foundation of a 'healthy self' (Winnicott, 1967). Gaze communicates the mother's responsiveness, availability and engagement and helps to regulate infant arousal and distress (Beebe et al., 2010). Infants engage in mutual gaze from approximately three months of age (Stern, 2018). However,

maternal mental health disturbances can have an influence on both maternal and infant gaze patterns, with gaze avoidance being noted (Beebe et al., 2012). Importantly, however, maternal gaze has also been implicated in the development of shame in the child; the maternal gaze, in some instances, coming to represent rejection, disapproval, judgment and prohibition (Ayers, 2003; Roth, 2020).

Completing this trifecta of development is the feeding relationship. Feeding can be seen as a developmental model, as well as a metaphor for relationships (Piontelli, 1992). It involves not just that which goes in through the mouth, but how it goes in – the touch, the delivery, the holding, the spirit in which it unfolds, along with how well the 'food' is digested and if digestion can be helped along (contained) by another when met by gases or discomfort (Wadell, 1998). How this relationship unfolds comes to set the stage for multiple aspects of development. The feeding relationship is implicated in the capacity to 'take in' metaphorically and literally (Williams, 1997), to affect tolerance (Waddell, 2002), to one's appetites for life and curiosity - the epistemophilic instinct, (Aguayo, 2000; Klein, 1923; Phillips, 2018), it sets the stage for a thinking mind to develop (Bion, 1962a, 1962b), as well as what capacities one can then provide to others (Waddell, 2002; Winnicott, 1965). Feeding is also implicated in the capacity for aggression, destruction and hatred (Klein, 1937). The feeding relationship, in the broader context of the attachment relationship, is theorised to determine how love and hate are managed and bound to one another (Winnicott, 1949), and subsequent developments, for example the development of a capacity for concern (depressive position functioning) (Klein, 1940). Through good enough provision and care, the baby's feeding becomes located within a matrix of broader care, ministrations, mutual love and bonding, and is a representation of the bond between infant and mother (Winnicott, 1975). In time, through repeated feeds at the real or replacement (bottle) breast the baby comes to take in a felt sense experience of feeding. Over time, the breast comes to be seen as not a part of the self, but as something separate – first a not-me object, and then slowly bit by bit, as a part object (Maiello, 1995), which in time will become located in the whole picture of the mother. As a part of the separating out process, the baby comes to internalise the breast (a part object), and later the mother as a whole object. The mother must have the capacities to loan herself out in this way, to tolerate her own and the baby's hate (Winnicott, 1949) and to give over of herself to the baby so that the infant may come to find him/herself in this bidirectional

process. Bion (1962a, 1962b) linked the proverbial feed to the development of the capacity to think and in the development of the mind. He proposed that the baby comes to develop a thinking apparatus in order to manage and tolerate the realities of its existence. Here, the concept of absence becomes important – thought comes into being by virtue of the experience of there being a gap between impulse/need/want and the provision of what is needed/wanted – thought is born through this - the gap and then the filling of the gap becomes a way to manage what may otherwise be incomprehensible. The mother's treatment of the feeding relationship will inevitably come to influence the capacity for thought and affect regulation in the child, as her ability to manage overwhelming states comes to be a model which is introjected by the child.

2.3.3. Separating and individuating

Mahler beautifully describes growing up – the process of separating and individuating out from the original fusion with the mother – as a "growing away process" (Mahler, 1972, p. 333). With each and every new development, there is mourning involved and the threat of object loss is ever present. Mahler explains selfhood as having an awareness of being out there in the world, but also separate from the world out there. This is an unfolding drama which occurs in relation to one's own body as well as to one's primary love object. She writes: "[a]s is the case with any intrapsychic process, this one reverberates throughout the life cycle" (Mahler, 1972, p. 333).

While Mahler's theory, and in particular, the notion of rapprochement, has been critiqued by attachment theorists as normalising pathological behaviours in mothers and toddlers (Gergely, 2000; Lyons-Ruth, 1991), and by relational theorists as being stage-dependent and uni-directional (Lombardi, 1998), other writers have found the differences between attachment theory and Mahler's (1972) theory of separation-individuation "less critical", noting that, in fact, "closer examination reveals the two theories have much in common regarding what are considered optimal and pathological behaviors and interactional patterns" (Blom & Bergman, 2013, p. 29). Both theories foreground reciprocity in the mother-infant relationship and a balance between relatedness and autonomy, and while attachment theory has made significant contributions to our understanding of the process involved in development, "it has not contradicted the basic steps of development as articulated by

separation–individuation theory" (Bergman & Harpaz-Rotem 2004, p. 557). Benjamin (1990) states that her writing on recognition as the struggle for separation and the gradual development of the capacity "to recognize the other person's subjectivity...[and] for attunement and tolerance of difference" (p. 33) is a reinterpretation of Mahler's phase of rapprochement. Thus, Mahler's (1972) writing regarding rapprochement is particularly fitting to this study and does lend itself to integration with more contemporary ideas regarding the intersubjective nature of development and maturation.

As the child's appreciation of self-other awareness grows, and as the child's berth of exploration grows, the child circles back to the mother for "emotional refueling" (Mahler, 1972, p. 335). In this process of rapprochement, increased separation anxiety is often noted. As the child is physically and cognitively more able to move further away from the mother, he or she experiences the threat to the loss of his or her primary love object more acutely. It is in this stage that the need for the other becomes heightened, paradoxically, and we see active movement towards the object.

Contemporary theorists such as Benjamin (in Benjamin & Atlas, 2022) and Baraitser (2008) would add here that this process of separation is not merely internal and one-sided, but rather it is a process that unfolds in the real meeting of the other in a dialectical interchange, which mutates both parties through the journey. For some mothers, the transition from 'symbiotic holding' to enabling their child's autonomy can be difficult (Mahler, 1967). In this process of separation-individuation, Mahler (1967) explains that mothers sometimes fail their infants "because they find it difficult to strike intuitively and naturally an optimal balance between giving support-and yet at the same time knowing when to just be available and to watch from a distance" (p. 211). These rapprochement difficulties are now understood to reflect struggles with attachment, and highlight the bidirectional process that occurs in negotiating separation. Contemporary theorists argue that the ideas of reverie, holding and containment as developed by Bion and Winnicott offer an idealized version of motherhood and maternal capacities (Baraitser, 2008). Contemporary thinkers put forward that mothers straddle subjectivity and alterity so that they can create intersubjective space which affords the developing child space to realise a self, but that this movement is difficult to bear for all mothers, not only those with impoverished depressive position functioning,

because it involves surviving the child's attacks on the mother's separateness (Baraitser, 2008).

2.3.4. Transitioning and the development of the capacity to be alone

Winnicott (1958) described the gradual back and forth process of gradually coming into contact with reality as development takes place. He introduced the idea of transitional objects and transitional phenomena, which are used to manage the necessary separation and individuation required during development:

> I have introduced the terms "transitional objects" and "transitional phenomena" for designation of the intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral erotism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness (Winnicott, 1953, p. 89).

Having 'created' the object and imbued it with meaning, this transitional object, or "bit of blanket" (Winnicott, 1953, p. 90) is idiosyncratic for each child, with contributions from both "inner reality and external life" (Winnicott, 1953, p. 90). Transitional objects represent shifts from a state of merger to a separate but shared existence, and movement from "primary process to secondary process thinking, from fantasy to reality" (La Mothe, 1998, p. 159). The transitional object serves a number of functions. Alongside providing comfort and security, it offers opportunities for creativity and spontaneity, and a space in which to explore "a subjective and intersubjective sense of identity, continuity, and cohesion" (La Mothe, 1998, p. 159).

Writing on Winnicott's (1953) transitional phenomena, Ogden (2021) highlights that Winnicott's locating of the infant's experience of transitional objects and transitional phenomena between developmental stages allowed for not only a new understanding of development, but for a new way of understanding "experiencing itself" (Ogden, 2021, p.838). The 'space between' or intermediate area of experiencing is:

> "…the intermediate space between what has already happened and what the patient fears is going to happen (Winnicott [1971] 1974); "the potential space … that exists (but cannot exist)" between mother and infant (Winnicott 1971c, 107);

> the intermediate area between the mother's being destroyed and her surviving destruction by the infant (Winnicott 1969); the space between the infant's being alone and his being in his mother's presence (Winnicott 1958b). For Winnicott, the space between is… the place in which a different order of experiencing, at once real and illusory, is created" (Ogden 1985, p.838).

Importantly, much like Mahler considers the intrapsychic process of separation-individuation to "reverberate throughout the life cycle" (Mahler, 1972, p. 333), Ogden (2021) reminds us that transitional objects and phenomena "constitute a form of experiencing that remains long after self–object differentiation has been achieved. Transitional objects and phenomena are an aspect of the journey of the progress towards experiencing …, a part of the evolution of experiencing itself" (Ogden, 2021, p. 4). In describing the letting go process related to transitional objects, Winnicott (1953) explains that the object is not forgotten and not mourned, but rather loses meaning. Ogden (1985) describes this process as occurring through diffusion where the potential of transitional phenomena "spread[s] out over the whole… cultural field [the entire area of creative living]" (p. 841).

Related to Winnicott's (1953) concept of transitional objects are his ideas about the development of the capacity to be alone (Winnicott, 1958). He believed this capacity is achieved through having experienced "being alone…in the presence of the mother" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 417) and that, once achieved, this capacity indicates emotional maturity. Winnicott (1958) wrote that loneliness may indicate an insufficient experience of having been alone in the presence of the mother (Winnicott, 1958). When 'being alone together', the infant can use the illusion offered by transitional objects to begin to tolerate the experience of separateness and aloneness. In this space the infant uses symbol formation to construct an internal object that represents and can serve the function of the mother (Hämäläinen, 1999). The relational turn in psychoanalysis has offered a further developed perspective on this matter, arguing that maternal subjectivity aids the infant in the process of separation. It is argued that the intrusion of the mother's subjectivity (her ordinary desires, love, needs, and feelings) help the infant to recognise separateness but also mutuality – not only of being needy but of being needed (Lombardi, 1998). These features have an import on how a person becomes able to tolerate the facts of separateness and aloneness. Catan (2011) highlights

how maternal capacities for this process are important, and for those babies who have mothers who have difficulty holding their own and their child's separateness, there can be deleterious outcomes for the child, such as having to keep their subjectivity discreet and hidden, remaining in a boxed-in position of merger in order to protect what little germs of separateness they may have.

2.3.5. The capacity to hate and its relation to separation and absence

Winnicott (1949) has written about the utility of hate in the process of coming to terms with separateness and highlights the necessity of the integration of love and hate in healthy relating. During the rapprochement phase, the child struggles with conflicting feelings related to simultaneous needs for reunion with the mother, the fear of losing her and a fear of engulfment by the mother (Mahler et al., 1975). The development of the capacity for recognition of another's subjectivity entails a differentiation process that entails not only separation but also "continual breakdown and repair of mutuality…[which] allows considerable room for the role of intrapsychic fantasy and aggression" (Benjamin, 1990, p. 33). The process of differentiation can be complicated to negotiate, as our internal object representations can become coloured by aspects that are difficult to identify or know. Hatred, separation, and absence are all bound with one another. Additionally, how these states are borne and metabolised by the mother and baby (as all of these states affect both parties and are bidirectional) (Benjamin, 2013), comes to colour a growing infant's capacities to tolerate and manage separateness and also growing independence, which is linked to a capacity to be alone (Winnicott, 1965).

There must be separation from an object for transitional objects to come to stand in for what is not-me and what is between me and the (m)other (Winnicott, 1953). This transitional relating goes awry when the gap is too big, the time too long, or the representations too flimsy, and here Green (1997; 1999) introduces the idea of the negative. In the transitional object's place, a negative is internalized, a "representation of the absence of representation" (Green, 1999, p.209). In discussing a Winnicottian formulation, Green (1999) writes that Winnicott was led

> …to a conclusion about his little patient that he communicated to the mother: 'I explained to the mother that this boy was dealing with a fear of separation,

> attempting to deny separation by his use of a string, as one would deny separation from a friend by using the telephone' (ibid., p. 17). This was an explanation that the mother found silly but that, on second thought, she could use. The string was a positive materialisation of an absent, negative bond (p. 210).

Green (1999) posits that when separation is too much to bear, a negative hallucination fills or becomes the space, and the container capacity of the mind is lost. In this regard, it is a loss without loss and a loss without mourning. The real object may return but the damage is done, and only a negative – nothing – representation now exists.

Mahler (1975) saw aggression as normal in this phase (initially in toddlerhood, but recurring throughout development), as the child attempts to find the optimal distance from the mother. These periods are equally challenging for mothers who experience similar conflict. Writing on mothers' experiences of separation-individuation from their children, Dunbar (2008) notes that mothers'

> feelings of loss, rejection and fear caused by the growing space between themselves and their child were at odds with the need to regain some independence and autonomy. Just as Winnicott's (1963) child was in a difficult state of relative dependence, so too it seems, are mothers (p. 86).

In extreme instances, mothers can become dependent on their children, who then take up psychological care-taking roles in a reversal of the parent-child relationship (Chase, 1999). This needs to be differentiated from appropriate caretaking of older parents or culturally condoned practices. In Dunbar's (2008) study, it was found that cultural expectations regarding mother-child relationships were powerfully determinant. In this study, it is important to bear in mind, that in many African cultures (such as in several participants' cultures in this research endeavour), the care of one's parents by adult children, within limits, is culturally mandated (Mhlongo, 2019).

2.4. The (M)other as other - as object and as subject, and the Other

In the proverbial beginning, the infant first exists in a state of absolute dependence, where omnipotence and the pleasure principle reign supreme (Winnicott, 1960) and the mother/other does not yet 'exist' in his or her mind, as the infant does not yet have the psychological equipment to know any differently. Impulses are satisfied as if the baby had

magicked the solution herself; this Freud (1911) understood as hallucinatory wish fulfilment. In this state of dependence and merger, the infant loans ego-support from the mother, or rather, she loans the infant her ego in order to manage the impingements of the external world but also the sensations produced from within the child – at this junction, the child does not have awareness or a capacity to represent this. Incrementally, the infant experiences necessary and unavoidable frustrations which leads to a splitting off and out into a not-me (Freud, 1925; Winnicott, 1960). From this process, there develops a burgeoning awareness of there being a not-me which later develops into a representation of the other. This sets the stage for the development of selfhood, and separation out from the mother's ego-support (Winnicott, 1960). For Winnicott (1960), the mother's otherness is first experienced as what is 'not me', and this precedes her standing as a separate other. For a time, the mother's and the infant's separateness are two sides of the same coin, which eventually will separate out into two coins. Winnicott (1960) captures the journey towards selfhood (and the fundamental part of responsive maternal care) as follows,

> One half of the theory of the parent-infant relationship concerns the infant, and is the theory of the infant's journey from absolute dependence, through relative dependence, to independence, and, in parallel, the infant's journey from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, and from autoerotism to object relationships. The other half of the theory of the parent-infant relationship concerns maternal care, that is to say the qualities and changes in the mother that meet the specific and developing needs of the infant towards whom she orientates (p. 42).

He notes that the end of the merger period sees the infant as having developed more of his own ego capacities, and thus is less reliant on his mother's ego capacities for managing experiences, and has begun to establish a continuity of being (Winnicott, 1960). With this, comes a dawning knowledge of his mother as a separate other. Klein offers that this sense of the other is gradually built up inside, through the process of internalization. It begins with the infant coming to be able to employ splitting, splitting the breast into good and bad (Klein, 1946). The bad breast begins as Winnicott's not-me, and eventually takes more form and shape as being a part other – the bad breast (this is a projection of, for example, a bad feed, discomfort etc.) (Klein, 1935). The child comes to identify with the good breast part object, introjecting and internalising it, while projecting out the bad breast (Klein, 1935). Over time, the child comes to integrate the good and the bad breast, coming to realise that they are both

representations of the same object – the mother (Klein, 1946). This represents a movement from experience primarily based in the id instincts, in the paranoid schizoid phase where annihilation and persecutory anxiety is present, towards a more cohesive sense of an other through the recognition and representation of part objects, which eventuate in a representation of the whole other (Klein, 1940). This capacity to represent the other is found in depressive position functioning, and for Klein also represents a developmental attainment.

Winnicott (1958) links the internalization of good object relations to the capacity to be alone, and this capacity is viewed as being a developmental achievement and as sign of maturity and psychological sophistication. He proposes that having separateness emerges out of the experience of unity and merger; the experiences of holding and internalising a good enough mother supports the infant's attempts towards selfhood (he explains this as the mother allowing for the infant to begin to signal what is needed and then responding – as opposed to the earlier state of responding through identification and attunement (Winnicott, 1960). The infant will come to have repeated experiences of something true of herself and develops a 'continuity of being' which, when all goes well, she will not need the actual mother in attendance but will draw on a internalised mother or object relation (Winnicott, 1968). Winnicott (1969) points to the development of recognising the object as subject in his paper 'The Use of an Object". He explains that the object becomes placed outside of omnipotent control when it repeatedly survives the infant's destruction, in fantasy. It then becomes 'real' as it were.

Lombardi (1998) critiques classical theory, arguing that its one- and two-person psychologies are incompatible with what is now being increasingly acknowledged through infant research as a bidirectional process of developing selfhood which is mutually affecting to both child and mother. Relational conceptions place the mother's subjectivity as being key to introjection, identification and mutual recognition (Lombardi, 1998). Benjamin (1990) has argued that maternal subjectivity is fundamental to the process of separation that occurs for infant and mother. She lays stress on the bidirectional nature of subjectivity and how the meeting of mother and babe, and allowing for mutual affectations, allows for subjectivity to develop for the infant. She argues that mutual recognition – intersubjectivity, allows for the development of the capacities for attunement and tolerance of difference (Benjamin, 1990).

She makes the case that “Mahler's rapprochement period can be reinterpreted as a struggle for recognition in which the outcome is not simply object constancy, but the beginning ability to recognize another person's subjectivity” (Benjamin, 1990, p. 33). Benjamin (1990) argues that joy (and conflict too) can be experienced with the recognition of subjectivity, that minds can be different yet share similar feeling states. Lombardi (1998)writes that it is not only the receptive and metabolic functions of the mother that are important for the psychic development of the child, but the mother’s subjectivity – the reality that she has her own needs, desires and feelings – and that for the child to know and experience this is healthy, in that it allows the developing child to learn how to move between objective and subjective experience, and also allows for the relational pair to truly meet and be with one another.

As Winnicott is wont to present paradoxes of development, so too does Benjamin (1990), who asserts that the paradox or crisis of rapprochement (and the concept of separation/individuation) is managing the tension between recognition and assertion - recognising the other and being recognised by the other, as well as asserting the self, and having the other assert themselves. With this kind of mutual recognition, external reality is found rather than merely internalised and “to the extent that mother herself is placed outside, she can be loved; then separation is truly the other side of connection to the other” (Benjamin, 1990, p. 42), opening up the possibility of a reality that can be shared. This shared reality, a space co-created by both parties, leads to the use of thirds. Thirdness will be elaborated in more detail below, in the following section.

The mother, and the baby, are subjects (in the baby’s own mind) (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003), however it takes some time for the baby to realise (come to develop the mental equipment) that which will enable her to see that the mother is an object (outside of herself), but also an object with subjectivity, a subject. The meeting of subjectivity with subjectivity opens up the scene for a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of how selfhood and ‘otherhood’ can be represented in the mind of the developing child, and Frosh and Baraitser (2003) contend that coming to recognise the other as a subjective other is what allows a thinking mind to develop. Fundamental to Benjamin’s (2013) conception, which is grounded in infant research, is that there is bidirectionality and that mother and child both have influencing effect on one another, both of whom continue to move and respond in a dance

that has choreography, but also has, at its best, space for attuned improvisation and mutual responsiveness and thus co-creation.

Frosh and Baraitser (2003) add another dimension to the construct of subjectivity. They argue that while mutual recognition is all good and well, that "inside each person there is an unconscious dimension, as we know, but this unconscious does not "belong" to the person, but rather comes inside through an act of miscommunication, a mode of unwitting seduction, in which the parental desire excites the child, without being understood" (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003, p. 783). The other is there, "hinting at its own existence without ever letting itself be fully known" (p. 783), and this leads to the sense of the other, the unthought known, and the unconscious mind as it were (Tauber, 2015). The other, from this perspective, is constitutive to selfhood – there is no self without other (Frosh, 2002). In coming to one's selfhood, there is a grasping for something; Frosh (2002) describe it as follows: "The 'other' that is so intimate inside us—the unexplained message of the unconscious— 'calls out' to the other that is apparently outside, bypassing ego and self, desiring something without quite knowing what it is" (p. 405). What happens here seems to be quite individual, but for some there may here be links to the germination of the Big Other (Lacan, 1977, 1992) – the ineffable other that comes from outside, but whom we find inside, and is unknowable (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003).

There is also the Other who is linked to the concept of the uncanny (Freud, 1919; Frosh, 2002). This Other is continually unknowable yet feared, and rife for paranoid projections. This is the Other that may be conceived as a greedy, exploitative bully who seeks to colonise the mind, "when the other will not let one alone" (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003, p. 783).

2.5. Thinking, thirdness and transitionality

As discussed in section 2.3.2. (Mother's voice, the maternal gaze and feeding at the breast) the capacity to think - to have a mind - grows out of the feeding relationship. As a metaphor, it is our capacity to digest experience, to make sense of what goes on inside, and in relation to what goes on between ourselves and others. Contingent to developing the capacity to think is the presence of thirdness and the related concept of representation. Thirdness is the ingredient that makes being able to regulate another possible – the space and

function it provides is what digests the intolerable and returns it as alpha elements (Bion, 2013). Benjamin (2004) proposed an early form of thirdness "involving union experiences and accommodation", and then later "moral and symbolic forms of thirdness that introduce differentiation" (p. 5). Abram (2022) explains that it is only through the mother presenting the third to the child, at a developmentally appropriate time, that the child can come to find itself and others as separate. It is a developmental capacity to be able to represent, as it denotes a growing understanding of not-me-ness. In order to create a mental picture, symbol or a 'thing that stands in for a thing', a child must have had good enough provision but also the opportunity to be appropriately failed so that these mental structures (being able to represent) may develop. While presented seemingly linearly, the process of coming to be able to think, represent and move from two person relating to three person structures, is a back and forward, rather messy process. Despite this reality, conceptual clarity is important so that when one talks about representation for example, we understand this in the broader context.

The concept of thought, from a psychoanalytic perspective, is not so much about the cognitive and neurological processes but rather concerns itself with the affective links between the body, and experience, and connecting these to form a structure (the mind as opposed to the brain) which can hold, think, process, block, etc., that makes up personality.

Joseph Sandler pioneered the idea that the aim of the ego is not to avoid anxiety, but is rather to establish safety and security (Fonagy & Target, 2003):

> Sandler saw all conscious thinking as embedded within a matrix of feeling states that give direction to all adaptation…feeling states represent subjective states of self in relation to another person…object relationships are thus fulfilment, not only of instinctual wishes, but also of the needs for safety, reassurance and affirmation (Fonagy & Target, 2003, p. 100).

Psychoanalytic writing on thirdness considers different types of thirdness which shall be discussed below, however, broadly speaking the symbolic third seems to denote a third as an object. Examples of this thirdness could be found represented in theory, interpretation, or something like the father in the oedipal triangle – it implies that there is an observing part to

oneself, and that it exists in one subject, or the other. Gerson (2009) helpfully distils three broad categories of thirdness:

1. Developmental thirdness which involves a child's development from a two-person psychology to triadic relating.
2. Relational thirdness holds that self and other are didactic and mutually affecting, and are a part of the process and structuring of the relationship so that the thirdness is bigger than the sum of its parts, but also indistinguishable from its parts. It becomes a co-constructed structure within a relationship.
3. The cultural third involves all the elements that are non-personal but contextual and shaping of the individual.

Thirds offer us a sense-making function, an 'orienting' function (Gerson, 2009). Traumatic loss of this functionality can leave one stranded or even trapped: "the living thirds in which the person was nested now become a nest of dead thirds from which he or she cannot escape" (Gerson, 2009, p. 1343). The concept of the developmental third has already been discussed above: theory which explains the psychological emergence of selfhood from unity into separateness (Mahler, 1967), and how this come about through the primary maternal preoccupation (Winnicott, 1956) then inevitable failure (Winnicott, 1960), the development of a thinking mind (Bion, 1967; Ogden, 2008), and finally a sense of separateness (Winnicott, 1949; 1960; Benjamin, 1990) and object relating (Klein, 1940). Below I focus on discussing the relational or intersubjective position on thirdness, and following this, I note and explain the concept of the inanimate third, which some authors use specifically in the context of technology.

The symbolic third refers to:

> a 'middle term' that stands between symbol and symbolised, between oneself and one's immediate lived sensory experience, thereby creating a space in which the interpreting, self-reflective, symbolising subject is generated. In early developmental terms, it is the father (or the 'father-in-the-mother', Ogden, 1987) who intercedes between the mother and infant (or, more accurately, the mother-infant), thus creating the psychological space in which the elaboration of the depressive position and oedipal triangulation occurs (Ogden, 1994, p. 4).

Where initially in psychoanalytic thinking the third has been conceptualised as a third 'other', that initiates, and then comes to represent, separation and differentiation, the work of Ogden (1994) and later intersubjective theorists has focused on thirdness as a process that is more than the mere third 'other'. Benjamin insists that true thirdness is a function, and one that is generated in dyadic accommodation and recognition of subjectivity, it is not inside one or the other but exists between two but also inside both; it has been made by both parties and also by neither (Benjamin, 2004).

A third cannot be made of an interloper, but is rather something that develops in a shared space: "most crucially, the mother or primary parent must create that space by being able to hold in tension her own subjectivity/desire/awareness and the needs of the child" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 13). Benjamin (2004) considers the third as not a thing in and of itself but rather describes it as a being "a principal, function, or relationship" (p. 7) that offers potential space. It also is indicative of developmental maturation – the recognition of another subject as a subject and not just an object/other is developmental and is difficult (Benjamin, 2004). She posits that to grasp the other's subjectivity, we do so from the third position, a place outside of the dyad – a "vantage point" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 7).

Benjamin (2004) notes that thirdness - "internal mental space" (p. 7), is related to Winnicott's concept of transitional space - a potential space between that allows for symbolic play (Flaskas, 2012). Thirdness allows us to be "immersed in experience in a subjective sense, while still being able to have a relationship to that experience" (Flaskas, 2012, p. 146-7). This space - the third - is co-created when both parties surrender, to use Benjamin's (2004) phrase, so that they may meet in a middle ground in which they can recognise the other and 'feel' the other, while still 'feeling' themselves. Surrender, in Benjamin's terms, does not mean one bestows power or one's selfhood unto the other, but rather that both parties are able to go on being with one another - able to hold the other in mind, as well as the self. Maintaining this 'view' is made possible by the co-creation of thirdness (Flaskas, 2012).

Flaskas (2012) makes the connection between the developmental and the relational third, stating that triadic relating creates the template for reflexive thinking, which fundamentally involves thirdness and relationality. In other words, being able to think about

one's own thoughts while thinking the thoughts requires a third 'place' to do so, and this is linked to being able to hold separateness, difference, and otherness (Flaskas, 2012). Flaskas (2012) reflects that the use of creative therapeutic practices like using clay, blocks, chair switching etc., offers a third vantage point, which facilitates reflexivity between participants (family therapy participants, in Flaskas' paper) and facilitates the generation of language to reflect on the self and the self in relationships.

Thirdness keeps the relationship between two people from collapsing. Collapse can "take the form of merger" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 12) or excessive splitting so that differences cannot be negotiated. Benjamin alerts us that this may still look like a third, but is indeed a negative third where "there is an erasure of the in-between — an inverse mirror relation, a complementary dyad concealing an unconscious symmetry" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 10). She describes a helpful way of recognising failed thirdness: it is a quality in relationships where separation feels like murder or where unity threatens being devoured. I am calling this a collapsed third as it seems to give description to the tumble-down quality of how thinking, reflexivity and digestion become lost when the function of thirdness fails. For a state of thirdness to return, one must be able to contend with one's own participation in the collapse, to get beyond the 'doer and done to' polarity (Benjamin, 2004). For an intersubjective theorist like Benjamin, thirdness involves connection. Its purpose is to facilitate connection between parties. Thus, connecting involves a creation of a shared third realm of experiencing, which involves acknowledging each other's subjectivity and developing a co-rhythm and a capacity for accommodation. When this magic occurs, a third space opens up and this allows for something new to be created and shared.

2.6. Emerging adulthood

A note on emerging adulthood is pertinent as the pool of participants interviewed for this dissertation were in this category. Developmental psychologist David Arnett pioneered the term emerging adulthood in the 1990s. He identified that these individuals are usually within the age grouping of 18 to 29 years old (Arnett, 2014). Research has shown that this grouping experiences a range of common developmental features, namely "identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities/optimism" (Arnett, 2014, p. 158). Developing on from Erikson's (1980) pioneering lifecycle work, particularly

regarding adolescence and early adulthood, Axelrod (2024) extends Erikson's (1980) ego identity period, which was thought to consolidate in the early 20's, to be included in this period of emerging adulthood, which extends upwards towards 30 years old. Axelrod (2024) describes this period of time as one that is uncomfortable, but also results in a greater consolidated sense of being oneself. However, he hazards that:

> "[t]he achievement of ego identity is not a given in emerging adulthood, or for that matter at any point in the lifecycle. It needs to be continually elaborated with changing life experience, and not infrequently the experience of conflicting or poorly defined identity elements, shifting and disjunctive self-states, or problematic self-esteem remain important intrapsychic issues over the course of adulthood" (Axelrod, 2024, p. 129).

While identity explorations begin in adolescence, they peak during this period of emerging adulthood as it is a period of intense decision-making regarding life choices, such as careers, partners and ideologies (Arnett, 2014). With identity negotiations comes related instability in most areas of life, as young adults try out various relationships, career paths, studies and beliefs (Arnett, 2014). At this period of life, these emerging adults are self-focused (Arnett, 2014). This refers to a temporary period of finding out about themselves and expanding their energies on self-development and growth. This period of development has been described as transitory and like a winding road that is in between adolescence and adulthood. It seems to come with a neither-here nor-there quality, with these young adults feeling as though they have some adult capacities but still lacking in other regards (Arnett, 2014). The last facet identified by Arnett (2014) as important to this grouping is the prospect of possibility – a sense that life will continue to improve and will likely be better than their forebears' lives have been. Waddell (1998) describes this period of separation and "finding a mind of one's own" (p. 176) as one in which hope and expectation abound but is a time "for many, also of extreme sadness and distress, and even breakdown for the few that find themselves unequal to the task" (Waddell, 2002, p. 177).

Adolescence and early adulthood are also a time where a re-emergence of earlier developmental tensions and failures may occur (Mahler, 1967; Waddell, 2002). Difficulties with early separations or lack thereof may complicate issues of identity formation (Ogden, 1985). Of consequence to emerging adulthood, are the vestiges of the egocentrism of

adolescence, as described by Elkind (1967). He proposes that because the adolescent is primarily fixated on her own appearance and behaviour, she believes that others are also fixated on her appearance and behaviours. The adolescent thus imagines herself in the minds' of others, and is preoccupied with her presentation of self in the minds' of others – an imaginary audience (Elkind, 1967). Of great import to the study at hand:

> …since the audience is his own construction and privy to his own knowledge of himself, it knows just what to look for in the way of cosmetic and behavioral sensitivities. The adolescent's wish for privacy and his reluctance to reveal himself may, to some extent, be a reaction to the feeling of being under the constant critical scrutiny of other people. The notion of an imaginary audience also helps to explain the observation that the affect which most concerns adolescents is not guilt but, rather, shame (Elkind, 1976, p. 1030).

Elkind (1967) conjures the image of a boy preening his hair in front of a mirror for hours, or a girl applying make-up to get it just right, with the imagining of how such efforts will be seen by the other. If we hold this in mind, we can view selfie-snapping and Instagram-posting of adolescents and young adults with a little more empathy and understanding. Turkle (2008) writes of how adolescents might use technology in service of identity development: "adolescents use life on the screen – social networking, game avatars, personal Web pages, and citizenship in virtual communities – to crystallize identity by imagining the selves they wish to be. An online avatar can come to feel continuous with the self and so offer the possibility of personal transformation" (p. 20). Of the maturing adolescent mind, Elkind (1967) writes:

> …[w]hat appears to happen is that the imaginary audience, which is primarily an anticipatory audience, is progressively modified in the direction of the reactions of the real audience. In a way, the imaginary audience can be regarded as hypothesis-or better, as a series of hypotheses-which the young person tests against reality. As a consequence of this testing, he gradually comes to recognize the difference between his own preoccupations and the interests and concerns of others (p. 1032).

We might then also gain more understanding of why this grouping may be so sensitive to likes and a lack of likes, as well as the shame involved in their tech usage. We might also

appreciate how complicated the nature of this assessment is when your real audience necessarily contains an imagined element as the audience exists in virtual reality.

Ultimately, the negotiation of this period of emerging adulthood is influenced by what has been previously laid down throughout childhood and adolescence, particularly involving the handling of loss (Waddell, 2002). The losses that one accrues on the path of development

> test the capacity to mourn, to feel remorse, to take responsibility, to experience guilt and also gratitude. All such capacities are fundamentally involved in a person's being able to love and all are intimately linked to the nature of the balance between the projective and introjective processes which have been established from the very first (Waddell, 2002, p. 177).

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter made the argument that psychoanalysis has much to offer regarding developing theory and reflection regarding the place of mobile phones in contemporary lives and minds. Thus, in this chapter I presented the psychoanalytic theory that will be used in application in later chapters. Specifically, concepts have been drawn from Classical Freudian and Contemporary Freudian theory, Object relations theory and Post Object Relations theory, as well as from the middle school drawing heavily on with Winnicott, concepts from the Intersubjectivity school of thought have also been considered as an important inclusion. Various concepts have been brought together to describe how psychoanalysis considers the mother-infant relationship as the bedrock of relating and important in the development of a sense of self. Attention was paid to psychoanalytic explorations of otherness, followed by the grouping of the concepts of thinking, thirdness and transitionally. The chapter ends with a description of the relatively recent concept of emerging adulthood, as this is pertinent to the population from which participants were drawn. In the following chapter, I present a review of pertinent psychoanalytic writing regarding technology broadly, and mobile phones specifically.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

In the field of psychology broadly, there have been two trends in relation to research on mobile phones. The first focuses on tele-analysis and psychotherapy work online (Caparrotta, 2013; Ehrlich, 2019; Ehrlich, 2024; Movahedi, 2023, Zeavin, 2021). This line of research found great traction with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and there has been an increase in scholarly work attempting to work out the nuances and experiences of clinicians working in this way (Sampaio et al., 2021; Békés & Aafjes-van Doorn, 2020; Singh & Sagar, 2022; Barker & Barker, 2021). The second trend in writing considering mobile phones addresses the social ills, such as overuse or addiction associated with mobile phone use and 'screen time' (Acheson, 2022; Ding et. al. 2024; Cali, Fernandez-Lopez, Navarro-Zaragoza et al., 2024; Xiumei et. al. 2024). While writing on the infiltration of technology into the consulting room is imperative, as well as writing considering the possible deleterious effects of screen use, it is also important to begin applying a broader, discursive lens to specific cultural objects which are so much a part of modern life, such as the mobile phone. Encouragingly, a group of psychoanalytic thinkers have begun exploring technology and its implications (Balick, 2012, 2014, 2023, 2024; Boras, 2023; Brahnam, 2017; Donner, 2023; Dori, 2022; Essig, 2012, 2012a 2015; Ehrlich, 2024; Flisfeder, 2021; Frankel & Krebs, 2022; Holloway, 2021; Johanssen, 2019; Johanssen and Krüger, 2022; Krüger, 2025; Lemma, 2017; Medina, 2021; Tugwell, 2021, 2022; Turkle et al., 2015; Turkle et al., 2017). In the literature, technologic artifacts have often tended to be grouped together under the broad banner of technology however, there still remains a relative paucity of literature that delves deeper into the specifics of particular facets of the technologies used. Thus, there is a need for depth-oriented writing explicating the manner in which different technologies may function for us psychologically, such as the differences between voice calls and video calls, using tablets or mobile phones, smart watches and laptops.

In a recent special issue of the European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling entitled '*Technology, AI Bots and psychotherapy after Covid',* Aron Balick (2024) offers a synthesising article considering the trends in the special edition. He divides the contributions

into those commenting on the process aspect of teletherapy (the majority), and those offering paradigmatic considerations (the minority), with there being some overlap of the two. It seems that this divide also seems to exist outside of the special edition; that psychoanalytic writing generally examines the process aspect of technology – mostly in the consulting room, while less is written that considers the paradigm of technology and technologically mediated life. It is my hope that my work, which largely sits in the latter grouping, will contribute to psychoanalytic examination of the paradigmatic aspects of technological life, specifically relating to mobile phones, most especially since there is limited writing about mobile phones as a stand-alone topic. I found it surprising that these culturally prevalent objects, ubiquitous in modern life, have mostly only been considered under the broad banner of technology. Thus, this study contributes to this gap, offering a psychoanalytic lens on the relationships that this study's participants have with their phones. As argued in the previous chapter, which outlined the theoretical framework for this study, psychoanalytic thinking and theorizing is well suited as a lens to examine the meanings and functions of mobile phones from an in-depth perspective.

This chapter begins with a comment regarding psychoanalytic consideration of technology more broadly. Then a discussion of the psychoanalytic literature that has attempted to grapple with mobile phones specifically is presented, highlighting the application of theory in trying to understand the import of mobile phones in our lives. The section ends with a presentation of the psychoanalytic literature that has attempted to conceptualise a few of the popular social media applications (apps) that are frequently used on smart phones, and which were discussed by participants.

3.2. Psychoanalysis And Technology

Information technology has been theorised to arise at the "intersection of social and material phenomena" (Leonardi & Barley, 2008, p.160). However, confusion often occurs, where there is conflation of use or concretisation of objects with their ideal use or with their origin (Leonardi & Barley, 2008), which then misses what the object may stand in for. Leonard and Barley (2008) put forward that authors writing on technology get waylaid by either over-emphasising a technological object's material tangibility or tilt in the opposite direction, rather focusing on the object as a concept. They argue that while an object may seem

concrete, it is not, and when it may seem to hold only conceptual application value, that too is incorrect. They argue that technological artefacts can be both material/tangible as well as conceptual/subjective. A technological object is an object for use, whatever form that use may take – physical or psychological or both. This argument is reminiscent of Winnicott's (1971) concept of the transitional object: it is not only the object per say which is of importance, but it is also that with which the object is imbued by the subject. The object itself is not the transitional object, but it is the user's capacity to use it transitionally, to represent something between two things or people, that makes it transitional. Technology, which in its development is shaped by humans, in turn influences us back – changing our actions, our bodies and minds (Lupton, 2000). Lupton (2000) deftly writes,

> Technologies 'texture' their own use as well as their users' perceptions of reality and the social world. The use of technologies is not a purely individualized activity: it always takes place in a sociocultural context that both shapes the meanings of technological artefacts and places limits on the extent to which such meanings can be transformed by users (p. 1852).

Thus, the interface of technology and the body is a site of exchange, where form influences function and function influences form. The emergence of various technologies can also be considered metaphors for processes of interiority as well as the social world. In as much as technologies evolve and enhance, they are developed out of human volition and reflect a need or an attempt to meet something internal: "[n]early everyone in contemporary western societies has developed a close dependency on technologies to function in everyday life, such as using spectacles to see clearly or a car to achieve greater mobility" (Lupton, 2000, p. 1852). The advances of technology are often understood as being based on deficit models. Technology can be life changing and dramatically enhance quality of life, but if it fails, particularly if its use is based on deficit, the user is at even a greater disadvantage, having had a facility and then losing it (Lupton, 2000). The Internet and mobile phones have so permeated contemporary life that we strain to imagine living without them, and struggle in various ways when our phones, in particular, are indisposed. This 'need' of technology suggests an interface beyond the body; that of technology and the mind. While psychoanalysis is uniquely situated to examine this interface, as a discipline it has been slow to engage with technology.

Favero and Candellieri (2017) suggest this slowness to engage is because technology's presentation in the consulting room is "insidious, often subtle and difficult to recognise, or even underestimated or ignored by psychoanalysts outright, in order to preserve the illusion of a complete understanding of what unfolds in the analytic space" (p. 2017). Other understandings have suggested that it is borne out of defensive reasons, which may stem from a fear of the unknown for example, which Essig (2015) has termed simulation avoidance (essentially avoiding thinking and feeling about technology, a foreclosing as it were). Brottman (2012) suggests that those who fear technology may in fact overidentify with it, she writes: "to the highly sensitive, the machine may function as a frightening and uncanny reflection of the rigid, programmatic inflexibility of the human mind" (p. 24). I would suggest that it is perhaps a combination of these – the perceived limitlessness and unknowableness of the Internet and other technologies, alongside our limited ability to know and understand it all, frightens people, much the same as the concept of the unconscious does. Perhaps there is also an overwhelm at the pace of technological advancement that has contributed to psychoanalysis' slowness or even resistance to explore.

This lack of engagement from a psychoanalytic perspective has been highlighted by authors like Altman (2007), Goren (2003) and Essig (2012; 2012a; 2015). Two decades ago now, Goren (2003) argued that in the midst of technological changes "psychoanalysis too has changed radically in certain ways while remaining amazingly unaffected in ways that may be laudable as well as questionable" (p. 503). In 2001 Gabbard lamented how there has "been a paucity of literature attempting to describe the effects of the new developments on the Internet regarding analytic treatment" (p. 719); Essig (2012) cautioned that to remain naïve in this regard would be perilous. The relevance of psychoanalytic thinking was questioned, as Altman (2007) commented that "traditional psychotherapy is out of step with the emerging culture…" and that "psychotherapy goes against the grain of the new postmodern youth culture of the instant message" (p. 11). Jacobson (2008) stated that the "desire for self-understanding through psychoanalytic exploration contravenes the current culture of instant messaging and surfing the Net for quick, albeit questionable, information and knowledge" (p. 303). This debate was soon linked to the issue of the generation gap.

It has been hypothesized that there may be a gap between those born into technology and those who have acquired it, as noted by authors such as Kolmes (2012) and Altman (2007) who make use of the terms 'technology natives' and 'technology immigrants' to denote the generational gap. The way we connect, look for information, even search for a therapist (Cundy, 2015b) has drastically changed in the last two decades, and the different generations may approach such pursuits in vastly different manners. While the most senior psychoanalysts writing in contemporary times are more likely to be technology immigrants, there is an emerging generation of technology natives – the 'millennials', the 'iGeneration', and 'Gen X', for whom technology has always been a part of life. These generations consider technology as a necessity, not a luxury, and as an everyday part of life, unimaginable without it (Koutras, 2006). Interestingly, however, Turkle (Turkle et al., 2017) has found in her research that it is the millennial therapists (interestingly, I am of this generation) who are questioning the effects and influences of technology in the therapy room, while older generations, after some initial resistance, seem to have adopted it with a more wholesale attitude and with less of a critical eye. Essig (2012) has also been writing and hazarding for several years that technology bares thinking about psychoanalytically, as its adoption cannot be uncritically accepted – we need to understand how it functions in relating.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a confrontation with technology, and post-pandemic, there has been a slew of authors arguing for and against tele-analysis (Benzel et al., 2023; Donner, 2023; Feijo et al., 2023; Ferguson, 2023; Hickey et al., 2022; Kahoud, 2023; Kegerreis, 2022; Matheson & Kegerreis, 2023; Taylor et al., 2023) (for a stimulating and positively slanted overview of virtual therapy, see Zeavin, (2021), *The distance cure: A history of teletherapy*)) – some arguing that online psychotherapy is a different beast entirely (Balick, 2024; Brahnam, 2017; Padfield, 2021; Trub & Magaldi, 2017; Roesler, 2017; Russel, 2020). The writing tends to reflect the swift plunging of clinicians into working online and shows the grappling with these matters (i.e. Is this the same as in-person therapy? How is it different? What are the benefits and deficits?). While it is encouraging that more clinicians are now paying heed to these matters, the papers at times fall short on specificities and are sometimes pejorative right out of the gates. However, as previously stated, the discussions in the literature seem to focus on technology in the consulting room, with little attention being

directed towards the everyday person with an object in her pocket that compels so much attention, thought and feeling.

In addition to a slowness to engage, the issue of language has also emerged in relation to psychoanalytic theorising of technology. The language used in psychoanalytic writing on technology in the early 2000s was largely pejorative, reading use of technology as an expression of pathology. This was critiqued by Brottman (2012) and Gabbard (2001), who argued that that passing off of these phenomena and their appearance in the therapy room as "merely a form of resistance or acting out" (Gabbard, 2001, p. 729), was short-sighted and that the language used in psychoanalysis may need revision. Conceptualisations needed to be opened and language used more creatively and thoughtfully, in order to break new ground in psychoanalytic engagement with technology. In its initial thinking on technology, Brottman (2012) believes that psychoanalysis' tendency to focus on the kinds of Internet use (and by extension, mobile phone usage) that can be regarded as expressions of pathology represented defensiveness. She writes, "this very pathologising is a knee-jerk response that prevents us from looking at this very complex issue" (p. 21). Turkle (2004) seemed to encourage an openness and curiosity regarding technology when she convincingly argued,

> People who make the most of their on-screen life will often approach the computer in the spirit of self-reflection, seeking to learn about their desires and connections, reworking old conflicts, discovering new solutions, and playing with unexplored or unexpressed aspects of the self (p. 22).

Essig (2015) suggested holding a 'both-and' kind of mentality in our approach to exploring technology – this involves a deep exploration of what is gained but also of what is lost in our 'screen relations'. For example, mobile phone usage may reveal one's anxieties, interests, mirroring needs, fantasies, phantasies, projected parts of the self and one's strivings and desires for the self, and in relation to others. Humans are not only innately geared towards content but are also sensitive to the form of language in communication (Power & Cundy, 2015), and so an openness to examining these aspects of phone usage may be an area of rich self-exploration.

Despite her early enthusiasm for technology and its potential, however, Turkle seems to have in recent years become more taciturn regarding technology, warning that people are

getting worse at being with and communicating with one another – she blames the central place that technology finds itself in our lives – that we are “closer together, but further apart” (Turkle, Essig & Russell, 2017). Hauke (2009) asked whether email, texts and the mobile phone “enhance and enable communication or do they merely offer the fantasy of doing so” (p. 43). In reflection on the speed of modern communication, Goren (2003) has also argued that the space between the temporal and psychological has been flattened and that demands for immediate responses have become essential to maintaining contact with ‘the other’. These ideas about time were further developed by Favero and Candellieri (2017) who propose that in contemporary culture the experience of time seems to have changed fundamentally – having become sped up, which the authors suggest links in with how people may experience and tolerate (or not) absence or separation. The authors make use of psychological understandings of borderline structures - that instantaneous feedback from the environment is imperative in order to maintain fragile equilibrium – which they argue is a useful analogy of what it is to exist in our world of current hyper speed communication, which involves the idea of potentially always being connected, if we wish to be. In a world of instantaneous communication it is easy to be ‘unmindful’ of this hyper connectedness, and that ironically, leaves us less connected than ever. However, there is a growing awareness of our disconnection, and so we look around to find who is to blame – the Other; Lacan’s Big Other (1977, 1992), who is continually unknowable, and rife for paranoid projections. This is the Other that may be conceived as a greedy, exploitative bully who seeks to colonise the mind, “when the other will not let one alone” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003, p. 783). In what is described as the attention economy (Odell, 2019), in regards to social media and late stage capitalism, this kind of Other is keenly felt as the Big Tech Other that seeks to maximize and draw from us vampirically, often without our awareness; by drawing us into our devices in order to take something out of us. Introducing the “Algorithmic Big Other” (p. 1), Salter and Dutta (2025) highlight the fact that the Big Other to be resisted is now an artificially intelligent machine.

It remains the work of psychoanalysis to bring consciousness to a cultural trend which Goren (2003) situates as being increasingly unthinking. Turkle (2004) suggests that psychoanalysis needs to take into account, think, and theorise a set of new objects - computer related objects. While these are physical, tangible objects, it stands to reason that these objects may take on transferences, representations, distortions, projections, and other

phenomena, which are so germane to psychoanalytic thinking. The last two decades have seen significant changes in our communicative world, and daily living appears to be quite different from what it was twenty years ago – let alone at the turn of the century when Freud was developing psychoanalysis (Cundy, 2015). Modern day life appears to exist at breakneck speed with perpetual technological intrusion. Beveridge (2015) laments that "modern life seems to be working against a sense of attachment and intimacy" (p. 56): response delays are virtually eliminated; the demand for instant response has increased; people don't switch off their phones; feel anxious if they leave their phones at home; and feel at a loss without Internet access (Rosen & Samuel, 2015). Psychoanalysis has an opportunity to apply the rich, complex body of concepts it possesses as a means to examine what is being done psychologically with mobile phone technology and to examine how technological advances like cellular technology affect society. This is an opportunity for psychoanalysis to adapt and grow its theoretical applications to match an evolving society.

3.3. Mobile Phones

There are a number of 'experts' selling many books about how phones affect children and adults and what to do with our phones (for example see Alter, 2017; Carr & Dicey, 2019; Haidt, 2024; Price, 2018). While these books seem to reflect the public's anxiety about the effects of mobile phones, they seem to offer quite definitive ideas about causation (which is impossible at this time to establish), addiction (a term used liberally), as well as offering a plethora of solutions. Haidt's (2024) book, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness,* offers some contextualizing information regarding the emergence of mobile phone and other technologies at a particular time in our socio-political history, but reads heavy on forbiddance and seems deeply skewed with a pejorative agenda. Simply put, it appears that these formulations might be just too reductive and simplistic. While some assertions are based on scientific research, the results are presented with more clarity and certainty than seems justified. We need to develop an appreciation that the "anxious Generation" to use Haidt's term, have not only been brought up in the world of information technology, but that these technologies develop alongside the rivers of changing society, and so the effects must be considered in light of this too.

A well-researched antidote to Haidt's cautions can be found in Etchells' (2024) *The Real Science of Screen Time (and how to spend it better): Unlocked*, in which the author explains the research upon which Haidt's claims are based, as well as the inherent research limitations which challenge the bold claims. Etchells (2024) argues that research in this area is in its relative infancy, our definitions of what we are looking at are imprecise. For example, measures of screen time have been criticised as not being particularly useful as these measures don't delineate what is being done during screen time (then the conclusions are flawed). Often, the correlation coefficients cited in these studies, while suggesting a relationship between variables, are in fact weak correlations, and affected by too much variability to offer precision. Etchells (2024) argues that what one does on one's phone, and in what spirit, offers more valuable information; he encourages self-reflection in this regard. He also offers a challenge to the researchers and scientific writers churning out these books to interrogate the recursive research methods being used (in order to avoid replicating flawed results) so that the production of academic literature (and literature written for the general public) moves out a recursive loop, which results in misleading fearmongering (Etchells, 2024). Balick (2024) writes: "while our tools develop at an exponential rate, our human psychology remains stubbornly palaeolithic – a psychology that has to work harder to accommodate these remarkable contexts in which it operates today" (p. 156). We also have to work harder as researchers and scientists to adequately tease out and capture the exquisite complexity of our psychologies and how this is interacting with the ways we research the exceedingly complex contexts in which we find ourselves.

Qualitative depth research offers a perspective which aims to unearth these complexities, in ways that are more nuanced. For example, Essig (2015) and Favero and Candillieri (2017) both offer that there is something particular at play regarding mobile phones – and that mobile phones add dimensions into consideration that are unique and novel, and can be of help and/or hindrance to people. Favero and Candillieri (2017) present four case studies where the authors show how use of mobile phones expressed individual conflicts, enhanced life and relationships, and also fed into psychopathology. Essig (2012a) wonders at the experience of conducting an online romantic relationship, without the physiological template of the parent-infant relationship. These are great examples of the depth and nuance of qualitative, and particularly psychoanalytic, research can offer.

Additionally, in response to the calls for psychoanalysis to engage more deeply with technology, in the past decade some recent scholarly books, some of which are edited collections, have been published that have the Internet, Social Media, Information Technology, and mobile phones, as their subject matter (for example see Akhtar, 2011; Cundy, 2015; Johanssen, 2019; Frankel & Krebs, 2022; Lemma & Caparrotta, 2014; Krüger, 2025; Weiss & Schneider, 2014; and Weitz, 2014). These represent the beginnings of psychoanalytic thought on the matter, and offer some intriguing ideas.

The next section provides an overview of current psychoanalytic writing on mobile phones specifically, as well as writing on some of the social media applications commonly used on mobile phones, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Tinder.

3.3.1. What is a mobile phone?

When I refer to mobile phones in this thesis, I am talking about smartphones (the defining feature of which is that they are Internet connected). I use the term to include the functions held within them, such as the capacity to make and receive calls using both audio and video, the apps held within them such as social media apps like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp (among many others), games, news, email, photographing and reading apps, and generally anything Internet connected. So that when, for example, a participant talks of their phone, I assume that they may be talking about using any of the features that a phone may have, but also that this may need clarification. This is important because we might consider that these different functions can be used for different psychological processes and that these may represent different things to a person. Thus, a phone may represent a multiplicity of psychological functions and processes, which can be individual, but also may involve real others and others in phantasy. It is important to make this overt as this thesis shows that individuals use their phones in so many ways, and so we should not assume. I have written about mobile phones elsewhere (Cain, 2018), and I provide a quote here that seems to capture the literal but also conceptual framework for how I view mobile phones:

> [C]onceptualising the nature of cell phones as objects requires that the reader hold in mind two states of being, that which is movement and that which is static. The cell phone as a concrete, physical object (with a collection of software), and the cell phone as a changing, dynamic object which to some degree is in flux, and can take on varying

representations at any one moment (such as a hope of connection or a threat when bringing bad news). Treurniet (1987) helpfully clarifies a structure as a state, and an event as being active and a process. Treurniet sees the two as interrelated in that a structure is like a snapshot of process in action. Structure is a part of process, but it is a static moment evidencing something fortifying of the process. The process reflects a dynamic system of structures but '[a]s soon as we try to catch a concept by isolating it, we risk treating a process as a state' (Treurniet, 1987, p. 511). Similarly, when we try to pin down what exactly it is that we are looking at when we consider the cell phone, we risk treating it as a state, and missing what about it is process. We need to hold in mind the still picture as well as the dynamic process, which continues to unfold endlessly (Cain, 2018, pp.17-18).

3.3.2. What has been written about mobile phones specifically, from a psychoanalytic perspective?

As previously stated, I have chosen to use psychoanalytic theory in this project for the depth-oriented lens it offers to human experiencing, as well as its girth – keeping various aspects of the mind in view. As such, I sought to conduct a literature review that specifically examines mobiles phones from a psychoanalytic lens. As will be evidenced, there is a relative paucity in this regard. A PepWeb search (the leading repository of scholarly psychoanalytic writing) using the term 'mobile phone' as a general term reveals 221 results, meaning that the term mobile phone was used within 221 articles. When the term is searched in the article title function, one result emerges, and the result is a poem titled *Mobile Phone*:

'Hello, I'm on a train', she said,
and it was all encapsuled there,
the loud voice baying as we stared,
the details of her life laid bare.
And while the train sped on ahead,
we heard she'd risen at half eight,
dressed in her favourite colour, red,
spent so long at it she was late,
her nails only half done, she said,
ate half her toast, a delish pear

and then spent ages brushing back
that mane of gold that was her hair
and how she'd run to catch the bus
but when she got there it was full
and wasn't life just so unfair,
that kind of thing made her feel ill
and how she hated so and so
but so and so was really cool
and so and so she'd like to know,
but so and so was just a fool.
'The train's stopped in a field,' she said
'and you can see the cows out there.
God, why did I get out of bed,
and why do they just stand and stare?
Can't hear you – is your battery dead?
Speak louder – bloody hell, she's gone!'
The glorious silence grew – then fled.
'Hello, I'm on a train,' he said (Evans, 2011, p. 81).

A clever and nuanced poem, articulating so many things: such as the collective social witnessing (unavoidable eavesdropping) that occurs as we use our phones amongst each other, the shared minutia of everyday life that phones allow us to convey, the relational frustrations – are you there?, the intrusions and the inevitable repetition of something so familiar played out. We could pick apart this poem into a number of subthemes and write a paper on each. How is it that this cultural object which is mentioned in at least 221 papers is not a titular subject of more than one paper? A search for the term telephone in article titles reveals 32 results. Searching articles for smart phone in the title results in two papers. At a cursory level, examining the results for the telephone search, which yielded more results as opposed the smart/mobile phone search, the articles are in most instances talking to the telephone of old - the landline, or referring to the use of modern phones like one would a landline, with voice only (Eckardt, 2011; Gray, 1990; Leffert, 2003; Mirkin, 2011; Zalusky, 1998; Murdin, 2021). However, some indeed appear to be talking about modern telecommunication devices: mobile phones or smart phones (Davies, 2021; Trub & Magaldi,

2022; Sedlacek, 2022). While use of voice calls is of course an important aspect of theorising mobile phones and their usage, the papers were rarely overt about this, and it is for the reader to glean that this is indeed the singular facet being examined, at the exclusion of all the other potential ways phones can used, in and outside of the consulting room. I am labouring this point because it suggests that there is a blind spot in the writing on these aspects of modern life; that writers are authoring papers with a certain degree of clarity and clout, however, they are not fully appreciating the scope of these objects, as evidenced in the lack of clarity. For example, while attempting to offer a considered eye and reflection of experience, a paper by Murdin (2021), entitled *Is anyone there: Use of the telephone and use of the couch*, lacks a very specific and very important detail. The author says: "[t]his paper considers the ways in which the use of the telephone resembles the use of the couch and revisits the value of the couch in order to assess the value of the telephone" (p. 234), however, not once in the paper does she qualify what she means by the term 'the telephone'. In a similar vein, Cohen (2020), in *Hanging on the telephone: Reflections on conducting psychotherapy over the phone during the Covid pandemic,* conjures up the image of Freud's couch and considers the likeness of telephone sessions to using the couch. However again, the author does not explicitly detail what she means by using a phone. Again, it becomes clear through the paper that use of the telephone here refers to voice calls only, as opposed to voice and video. Similarly, Ehrlich (2019) refers to telephone sessions and tele-analysis but does not delineate what this means exactly.

Being of the millennial generation, my association to the 'telephone' is to a landline. My phone is called a phone, not even a smart phone or a mobile phone. It seems these authors may be referring to a throwback of sessions held over the telephone some time ago, where this involves using the voice only, evoking an image of the patient lying on their couch at home cradling a landline telephone in the nook between shoulder and ear. Why am I getting hung up (pun intended) on what we call phones? Because psychoanalysis tells us that the words we use count, that linguistic choices are important and reveal information, if we look and listen. To me, this sort of oversight reveals that this is not easy terrain for the writers, there is not yet fluency. While this is not necessarily problematic as a starting point, what is missing in the articles is the appreciation that the authors might have some gaps (revealed by these sorts of slips), and this is not yet an aspect that can be reflected upon in these papers.

This kind of lapse shows how psychoanalysis can tend to lump these technologies into a bundle which lacks clarity while speaking from a place of relative certainty.

This also evidences a general gap in the literature. You may find writing that has mobile phones as an area of interest, but the reader really has to dig and wade through many cursory remarks regarding smart phones or mobile phones before coming up with a rather limited reading list which specifically considers the mobile phone as a particular subject of enquiry. We can sympathise with these writers, as Balick (2024) quips: "[t]he speed of innovation today is such that even a month or two is enough to give us whiplash; adapting to the rapidity of these innovations is incredibly difficult" (p. 155). Despite this, I argue that we need to begin studying and describing devices, the Internet, corners of the Internet, facilities within mobile phones and so on, more specifically and with more precision. Using a 'telephone' now can involve so many aspects – for example the voice, video, hands that type and scroll, sending information at different registers with hearts and thumbs up and other emojis, communication that happens with blue ticks, with lack of responses, with timing of responses, and so on.

In a mixed method study, which sought to correlate attachment anxiety, an impoverished capacity for solitude, and mobile phone dependence, Bermingham et al. (2021) found that: "attachment anxiety is predictive of smartphone dependency in young adults; those vulnerable to developing unhealthy relationships with other people therefore appear to replicate those patterns with their smartphones" (p. 315) and suggests that: "[m]uch like our relationships with other people, the intrapsychic experiences induced by closeness with and separation from our smartphones appear reflective of psychological well-being, while person-to-person variations in actual levels of smartphone use are more likely attributable to other factors" (p. 315). The authors propose a nuanced view as to mobile phone dependence, stating that mobile phone dependence is likely to reflect pre-established difficulties in relating and separating out from others, and it is unlikely that mobile phones cause the dependence – a subtle but important point. The authors also stress that mobile phone dependency is not equivalent to the quantity of mobile phone usage, but rather is a qualitative reflection that is unique and independent from time spent on the phone. The authors state that "[a]s with human relationships, it appears that one's subjective attachment to the smartphone may vary

from benign to problematic" (Bermingham et al., 2021, p. 312). These are interesting claims, suggesting that not only will attachment anxiety be revealed by the way in which people use and depend on their phones, but that there is a connection to the phone itself, as if it were a person. The study also found that it is indeed deficits in the capacity for solitude that are linked to mobile phone dependence and so it is inferred that those turning to their phones in what is considered to be subjectively disproportionate amounts are those who struggle to tolerate solitude (Bermingham et al., 2021). The authors write that the "current findings therefore provide an important reminder that to flourish, individuals must not only connect with others, but also retain a sense of self as independent from others" (Bermingham et al., 2021, p. 316). These findings corroborate those from Lian et al. (2021) who found that adolescents with a lower capacity for being alone, suffered stronger effects of what the authors term 'mobile phone addiction'. Both studies seem to be onto something regarding solitude, separation, and attachment, however these ideas remain underdeveloped.

There is a dialectical between togetherness and separateness, with the latter being born out of the former. For theoretical neatness, these aspects can represent two poles along a continuum, but the reality of this dynamic tension is that it ebbs and flows and is intricately bound, as opposed to being two ends of a continuum, and are based on not just one object relationship (however, as discussed in the previous chapter, the first relationship is understood as the crucible for all other) (Abram, 2022; Ferenczi, 1949; Winnicott, 1960; Stern, 2018). Rather, our patterns of relating appear to be based on a number of formative relationships, and are also informed by temperament and life experience (Alvarez, 2018; Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Benjamin & Atlas, 2022; Raphael-Leff, 2010; Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001). While these authors, Bermingham et al., (2021) and Lian et al. (2021), are to be commended for attempting to put these complicated dynamics together in a way that may provide 'evidence' as to the nature of smartphone usage, and dependence, being informed by deeply rooted psychological structures and object relationships, the reduction of complex constructs into statistically measurable forms somewhat flattens our understanding. The authors concede:

> [t]heoretically, one's abilities to tolerate and benefit from solitude, to self-soothe, and to experience security in close relationships long predate one's smartphone habits. Smartphone dependency may therefore be better understood as a symptom of

> certain developmental and characterological issues rather than a disorder of its own. The same young people who are excessively dependent on their smartphones might, without those devices, exhibit other dependencies instead (e.g., on romantic partners, substances); or they might show other comorbid dependencies on technology, such as on videogames or television. Rather than emphasizing the dangers and consequences of smartphone use, these results suggest that as a society and as an academic field we turn our attention to root causes of such dependencies in the early caregiving environment (Bermingham et al., 2021, p. 316).

In contrast to the 'flattening' that occurs in quantitative research, some useful case study papers have also been published, that allow for deeper exploration of the complexities of the meanings that phones can take on. In an example of how pre-existing difficulties may be revealed through examining mobile phone preoccupations, Movahedi and Moshtagh (2016) present a case study involving a patient's preoccupation with digital objects. In this case, the patient's fear of breakdown was projected into the digital object, and specifically into the operating system of the mobile phone (being taken over by the Other). The authors conceptualise the operating system as a metaphor for selfhood, and the work of therapy being akin to trying to understand the patient's operating system. Of some use, the paper delineates digital objects as being distinctly different to bizarre persecutory objects because of the ego resources involved in managing boundary loss fears and also in struggles for mastery and control (Movahedi & Moshtagh, 2016). In other words, the perceptions of the digital objects in Movahedi & Moshtag's (2016) paper have been affected by object relations and have come to represent anxieties about relating and loss, despite seeming to be to extremely paranoid anxieties on the surface. The second important point to acknowledge, is that the authors of this paper have made an effort to specify a particular aspect of mobile phones that was important to this patient - the operating system, and how this reflected something dynamic and not concrete (it was not the phone itself but it's operating system, i.e. it was not its body, but rather 'its mind' that was of preoccupation for this patient).

In a carefully detailed paper, Dori (2022) offers a case study of engaging with a patient's use of her mobile phone - how it came to play a part in the therapeutic interaction and how the patient's usage of the phone changed over time: "[f]rom serving as an object

that screened against intolerable psychic pain, the smartphone became an invitation to enter deeper layers of [the patient's] psyche" (p. 234). Tolerating the phone's presence in the room not only allowed for the patient to have her defences, where it was used as "a hard object with screening tactile qualities" (Dori, 2022, p.234), but also facilitated the development of the patient's widening capacities for relatedness. The mobile phone allowed for this capacity to be experienced and reflected, but also showed how the phone itself was a transformative object itself for the patient, and for relating.

Sugarman (2017) provides a cogent and focused paper examining a particular period of development – adolescence – and how smartphones can function as transitional objects. It is an astute paper that argues that prevalent psychoanalytic narratives regarding technology are simplistic and naïve, which preclude further thinking and development regarding two aspects that increasingly go hand in hand (or phone in hand) – adolescents and smartphones. Sugarman (2017) suggests that smartphones may function transitionally in regulatory functions typically provided by the environment, and as such serve a role in the eventual internalization of these functions. He also notes that smartphones can be used defensively in the face of developmental deficits, and in warding off feelings one might encounter in those deficits. He describes five regulatory functions that smartphones offer through transitional phenomena to adolescents: "(1) narcissistic regulation, (2) drive and affect regulation, (3) superego regulation, (4) ego functioning, and (5) self and object representational functioning" (Sugarman, 2017, p. 135). Of particular value is how the author charts the individualized experiences of how these adolescents used their mobile phones, but also how he is able to understand this usage over time in a more complete picture of how phones may function in various processes and also how these functions may also change over time as development progresses. Trub and Magaldi (2022) also discuss how mobile phones can function transitionally specifically within and as an extension to the therapeutic space, stating that "[d]evices offered a transitional space for clinicians to communicate with, contain, and hold their patients between sessions" (p. 253).

Another paper that uses transitional phenomena to conceptualise and interpret mobile phone use explains how mobile phones are used as intermediaries in human object relations, functioning as transitional phenomena:

> [t]he unconscious component of experience in respect of the transitional object is at risk of being forgotten about. Sometimes, the transitional object becomes identified as a 'regressive' object because it is associated with infancy but is used by adults. Yet, in Winnicott's conceptions, the transitional object is a component in normal, ongoing healthy development and is linked with lifelong 'cultural' capacities and creative object relations. Furthermore, focusing on the object and its intermediary function, rather than on the (unconscious) use of the object, can occlude recognition of the pathological meanings and uses that may underlie the activities of intermediation. These misconceptions can arise if the object – as in the example of the mobile – is thought about independently of the connected ideas of transitional phenomena and potential spaces (MacRury & Yates, 2016, p. 50).

Connected to the concept of transitional phenomena, are issues of separation and individuation, and several authors have understood this by exploring the dialectic of closeness and distance. This considers mobile phones as mirrors of ourselves and of our conflicts, and our attempts to negotiate closeness and distance with others (Björklind, 2018; Dori, 2022; MacRury & Yates, 2016). Ostensibly, mobile phones offer portable connectivity, a tool to keep lines of communication open when distance separates: "the mobile phone becomes emblematic of and a useful way to think about our ongoing experience of connection and disconnection within the social world" (MacRury & Yates, 2016, p. 53). However, phones may also offer a useful way to think about our ongoing connection and disconnection with our internal worlds. These technologies may stand in for what is repressed, rejected, allowed, discharged and so on, as well as a fundamental intangibility or un-knowableness, which makes these technologies interesting metaphors for what Rose (2002) calls the 'unknowable unconscious'. This may go some way to explaining both the allure and terror of these technologies, which seems to exist in society at large. However, these modern tools of communication also represent a creative attempt to meet a communicative need (Dryer & Lijtmaer, 2007; Gabbard, 2001; Kantrowitz, 2009), and it may be that the advent, evolution and reinvention of the mobile phone represents the significance of our need to manage our desire for connection and separateness. Trub and Magaldi (2022) found a mixed picture of how digital devices interact in and outside of the therapy hour. They found that devices can be used to create distance with the therapist but can also help patients to share aspects of

their lives with therapists; furthermore, that digital devices offer therapists and patients transitional space as a bridging and containing function between sessions; lastly it was found that devices offer “fertile ground for enactments in the treatment relationships” (p. 253). The fact that mobile phones offer both connectedness and the opportunity for separateness may be what positions them as potential transitional objects (Winnicott, 1953); helping to bridge the divide. MacRury and Yates (2016) explain:

> …the mobile phone is a kind of objectual realization of this conception of a ‘transitional object’, a practical figuration of this ‘special’, ‘first’ object. As a major part of thinking about ‘culture’ and experience, the mobile is also a prop in individuals’ continuing dramatic enactment of another key idea: “potential space”. The mobile phone enacts and dramatizes “potential space” and (as such) it invites interpretations that seek to analyze the (paradoxical) “potential space” spoken of in object relations psychoanalysis (p. 47).

Ferber and Weller (2022) have authored an interesting paper reflecting on the use of technology (such as mobile phones and other digital devices) by patients and therapists during the Covid 19 pandemic. They theorise that these devices are inanimate thirds as they stand between two people who have a shared task of reflection and reverie, and these devices facilitate the ongoing work in these states. They write that the "[e]mbodiment of the patient and therapist may turn the electronic device, the inanimate third, alive, somewhere within the mutual fantasies of the parties in the analytic encounter” (Ferber & Weller, 2022, p. 317). They suggest that a device used in the therapeutic encounter may hold a projected symbolic value of representing both separation and unity and have said that it is a “third participant” (p. 317) in the dyad. It would seem that the potential for a mobile phone to be an inanimate third is contingent on the two parties in a dyad using it as such, and it collapses as a third when reverie becomes limited, or when interactions become too filled with isolation, projection or paranoia. Abel-Malek (2022) describes using inanimate objects, mobile phones included, as a bridge towards transitional relating and the survival of destructiveness, however, points out that what may appear to be usage can also be covert reaction formation, amongst other defences, and so may reveal a failure in thirdness. Crucially, what seems to make an inanimate object embody thirdness is the relational dimension it offers - the capacity

to provide two people the chance to make it ‘come to life’ between them in service of some or other dynamic relational aspect (Zelnick, 2005).

Constant ‘upgrading’ of mobile phones suggests that as physical objects phones are interchangeable, and thus of little attachment value, however, their utility and the content they hold are of salience - it is not only the object per say which is of importance, but it is that with which the object is imbued by the subject. The object itself is not the transitional object, but it is the user’s capacity to use it transitionally, to represent something between themselves and others, that makes it transitional. Mobile phones can be both a transitional object and a transitional space. As a transitional space, phones may be used to hold or to work through tensions that exist in the liminal space between self and other (MacRury & Yates, 2016), and perhaps between parts of the self. Mobile phones also offer an opportunity to externalize or project conflicts in a number of ways (MacRury & Yates, 2016) and seem to offer a unique opportunity for an expression and amplification of our internal dynamics as well as provide insight into the relational dynamics that course between parties. This may be due to the interaction of real and phantasied objects in these powerful opportunities of exchange, making mobile phones and how we use them uniquely interesting objects to observe and consider.

Tugwell (2021) also considers how mobile phones are not only objects in and of themselves, but offer us a window into psychodynamics. Tugwell (2021) suggests that while the mobile phone appears to be an object that captures us with the visual and the obvious, it actually links in with deeper processes of the rhythms of unconscious sexuality. She uses Laplanche’s conceptualizations of charge and tension, as opposed to seeking discharge, to theorize that it is the pleasure of the tension of unsatiated desire which keeps us scrolling (Tugwell, 2021). Tugwell (2021) presents a number of readings regarding what mobile phones might represent. She suggests they pull us into a states of primary narcissism, affording us a sense of mastery and control, and that when things go pear shaped (when our phones die, loose Internet connection, or flummox us with their workings) we bump into the notion of the alienness of the ultimately unknowable other and their enigmatic allure, as well as the parts of ourselves that remain inaccessible because they are vested in the unknowable unconscious (Tugwell, 2021). Tugwell (2021) also suggests that occasions when our phones

fail us in fact offer us opportunities to get in touch with our disavowed dependency. Most powerfully, she suggests that our phones allow us to inhabit within ourselves two sides of a polarity, access to an ever available mother (as well as the mother with subjectivity), but also access to the ever needy baby. She asserts that the power of examining mobile phones, lie in the psychodynamics held therein. She writes:

> Ultimately, the phone is a material device, one which does not come with an unconscious – although its computational workings remain opaque to most of us. However, once the phone is taken on and made our own, we begin to fill it with our own data – and oftentimes this data is erotically charged. What I mean by this is that the photos we take, the Internet searches we embark on, the emails and text messages we send, the music we listen to, the movies we stream et cetera, are often the end point of a libidinal charge. They are imbued with our wishes, fantasies and other such unconscious motivations. In fact, aside from its own algorithmic interior, the phone becomes filled with the residue or traces of our own unconscious as a result of our interactions with it (Tugwell, 2021, p. 177).

Another remarkable attempt to theorize the psychodynamic functions of digital devices, mobile phones included, can be seen in the work of Holloway (2021) who sets out sixteen various psychodynamic formulations, or functions, of how digital technology can be used, in the paper *Psychodynamic Functions of Digital Media within Our Child/ Adolescent Sessions – From Interference to Enhancement – A Benevolent Viewpoint*. The paper refers specifically to therapeutic encounters and suggests this as a model for thinking about technology with one's patients. However, it does suggest these formulations can be used by application in thinking about how people outside of the therapeutic situation may be using their devices. It is a remarkable paper in that it presents a way of being in regards to technology – benevolent, as the title of the paper suggests – that allows for holding in mind and really taking care to think about how each person's use of their device may be expressing a particular aspect of their psychodynamics – and taking care to tease this out can be very useful. Much like taking time to do a case or diagnostic formulation of a patient – i.e. to determine at what level the person is at developmentally, what defences are routinely

deployed and what kind of characterological structuring a person may have – it suggests that digital devices can reveal aspects of this too.

Hollway (2021) suggests that usage can fall into three broad categories: the first considers usage to be facilitative – named enhancing functions. The author lists various subfunctions here, which, essentially, are in the service of opening up psychological development. The second broad level to be discerned is the straddling function, these involve subfunctions that can be both enhancing and defensive and can swing in both directions. The last category is defensive functioning. Here the author suggests that patients who use their phones at this level of functioning are using their technology in a way that is deadening, impenetrable and is very difficult, if not impossible, to use therapeutically. This is a helpful piece of work in that it identifies that how people use their phones is idiosyncratic, meaningful, and can be revealing. It gives an example of how we can begin to develop a theoretical language which describes and theorises how digital devices function psychologically and psychodynamically for their users. It also suggests a both-and kind of rhetoric – that phones can indeed be life and relationship enhancing but can also be deadening or offer retreat that is pathological. Holloway (2021) writes of how using digital tools involves an interaction between self and the digital object/tool, such that form and function meet and become internalized:

> [t]he need to internalize through repetition applies to any tool, from a spoon or a fork to a smartphone. To use any tool or any medium, we must *change* aspects of ourselves. We must internalize, incorporate, integrate, absorb (choose your metaphor) crucial aspects of the medium and make these aspects also parts of ourselves. As a codicil to this, I suggest that the more sophisticated and complex is the medium being used, the more sophisticated, complex, cognitively complicated, difficult and emotionally demanding are the changes likely to be that we need to make in ourselves. Additionally, the greater will be the overlap between messenger and medium, and the greater the blurring between them (p. 375).

This ‘blurring’ captures the notion that, for many, their phones become an extension of the self. Perhaps it is this that allows phones to intrude upon other relationships so easily. Kahoud (2023) and Brahnam (2017) both suggest that the mere presence of a phone while with another causes disruption as it represents a whole other something to which the person is

attached and interested in. Turkle (2011) calls this co-presence: "the belief that we can simultaneously interact with a device and a person who is physically present without compromising either one" (Trub & Magaldi, 2022, p. 253). Brahnam (2017) writes:

> [w]e have grown accustomed to these lapses in our conversations and disappear with distant others without even thinking. But an undercurrent of anxiety remains that is reflected in the way we speak with one another in the presence of our devices. Studies show, for instance, that placing a phone on a table, even one that is turned off, changes what we say and how we empathize with others (Misra et al., 2014). The threat the phone poses that the conversation might be interrupted at any moment appears to activate the phatic mode: 'If we think we might be interrupted,' Turkle (2015) remarked, 'we keep conversations light, on topics of little controversy and consequence' (p. 21); the fact is people are less connected when in the presence of a phone: 'Even a *silent phone disconnects us*' (p. 21) (p. 151).

What Turkle (2011) calls co-presence, others have developed and linked to the concept of thirdness. A few authors have understood mobile phones as a third or as a representation of thirds (Björklind, 2018; Kahoud, 2023; Dori, 2022). Dori (2022) makes an interesting connection between thirdness and absence in regard to mobile phones (in a particular case study); the thirdness was linked to an absent early object (whose absence was difficult to grasp), which came to be represented by the phone and thus accessible to the therapeutic pair. Kahoud (2023) brings together thirdness and smartphones less hopefully. He argues that smartphones are fundamentally influencing the dynamics of relationships, suggesting that this influence is for the worse. He suggests that smartphones are now representative of an intrusive third in relationships, and writes that "we are increasingly headed toward an interpersonal age of digital objects that will serve to artificially connect people more than ever, and simultaneously distance people in terms of in-person human connection" (p. 47). While this warning is worth heeding, perhaps it is an example of the 'broad strokes' writing so common in this literature, and captures only part of the story. I would hazard that many mobile phone users might balk at their WhatsApp chats with intimate others being called artificial. More contemporary, or perhaps liberal, writers might consider that online connection is a facet of relating now, in and amongst others means of connection.

3.3.3. Social media: Audience and gaze

Regarding relating, I will now turn to a brief discussion of a number of social media apps that at the time of data collection for this project were of salience and were discussed by participants - namely WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Tinder. I am particularly interested in what has been written from a psychoanalytic perspective, which unsurprisingly appears to be not much. Most articles take up social media as a whole, less specifically each app, with the exception of Tinder. Under the banner of social media, these apps take as their commonality that their purpose has to do with the social. They allow people to connect and relate. They also allow a more underground form of relating - that of watching, looking and not relating. Balick (2014) refers to Boyd and Ellison's (2007) definition of social media, that is Internet connected services which allow people to make a public or semi-public profile within a particular network, that allow users to use a modern day 'rolodex' of social connections, and that within these systems you can view the 'rolodexes' of other users within your connected network. Balick (2014) adds that what is also germane to social media is that it fundamentally allows users to comment, share and respond to information (such as photographs, headlines, jokes, memes, status updates and so on). Interestingly, Balick (2014) also includes Google as a social media site, as he posits that we use it to gain information about others and ourselves, and indeed, one can think of the burning questions one asks (Dr) Google to see the value in this position. In defining social media, I confer with Balick (2014) and see it as apps that allow people to see/view, connect, share and respond to each other within a particular platform. For my purpose here, I speak more generally about the overarching banner of social media (as reflected in the psychoanalytic literature in general) and present some literature which has gone into some depth regarding specifics.

Kaluzeviciute (2020) confirms the gap in psychoanalytic literature regarding social media and its import to the therapeutic situation. She wonders at the paucity and draws the conclusion that because of therapeutic neutrality psychoanalytic therapists are more likely to have less of an online presence, or perhaps an attenuated presence, and so it may not be of interest or seem particularly pressing to research in this area. However, to contextualize the importance of beginning to understand social media in culture, she notes that "[a]ccording to the Global State of Digital, as of 2019, 57% of the world's population is now connected to the Internet, of which 45% (3.484 billion) are active social media users. Some of the most popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram" (Kaluzeviciute, 2020, p.

303). That is a staggering amount of people using social media. She also surveyed literature that examines virtual impingement and cites a study by Kolmes and Taube (2016), that found "out of 349 surveyed psychotherapy patients, 332 confirmed that they searched and found personal information about their therapists online" (Kaluzeviciute, 2020, p. 305). In the paper, Kaluzeviciute (2020) wonders at why patients look up their therapists online and draws some conclusions, such as: curiosity, or a wish to see that values align (particularly regarding sensitive topics like gender identity, or sexual trauma). She also found that doing so may help patients tolerate the gap between sessions or hold onto the therapist during breaks or when the therapeutic alliance is under strain. She notes however, that there is much to mine and understand, especially from a psychoanalytic perspective. In a lovely reversal of the googling direction in the age of social media, Medina (2021) presents a paper which considers the even less spoken about phenomenon of therapists googling their patients. She offers many thoughtful remarks in this regard, as opposed to a disapproving superego response of oppression. She ends her paper saying:

> The one part that I do not want to leave unsaid is the humanness and the innocence of it all: the simplicity of human interest; our minds being engaged in a wish to know someone better, because of how they touched us or because they haven't quite touched us. We have a desire to look further; we want to be interested in them even when they have not given us enough to be interested. So I will end by going back to the essence of what we actually do, which is asking the patient, perpetually, and in all the ways possible: Who are you? (Medina, 2021, pp. 123-4).

This is a benign interpretation of why social media may hold us all, even therapists, sway – we wish to know the other, 'one way and another', to use Adam Phillip's (2013) phrase.

Boras (2023) presents a paper which holds more caution regarding social media, arguing that social media seems to draw out narcissistic and borderline primitive states, which threatens the broader societal maturation, development and gravitas. Balick (2023) also draws links to the flatness of relating on social media where experience is seemingly simplified, well-defined, and comes to lack ambiguity and complexity. On social media, expression of identity is foreclosed upon, and users are siloed into "disparate online identity-based communities that enforce in-group norms, amplify differences between groups, and

inhibit productive dialogue, empathy, and understanding" (Balick, 2023, p. 24), resulting in what he calls 'careful culture'.

An article by Muchnick and Buirski (2016) explores the ways in which social media might mirror selfobject experiencing, and how it may offer the allure of plugging or correcting painful gaps sought after in selfobject experiences. The authors explain:

> [I]f a person longs for human connection, and what has been available thus far has felt painful, unpredictable, or shaming, social media offers alternatives that seem to carry less emotional risk. As social media is merely a sum of its parts and its qualities represent its users, we can assume that what is built on social media is an amalgamation of what collective users crave and desire (Muchnick & Buirski, 2016, p.146).

The authors insist that while the likes of social media like Facebook can be seen to mirror and perhaps even offer temporary relief for those with shaky selfobject integrity, that the relief is temporary and dissipates quickly once the illusion of relating or twinning fades. The authors write:

> [T]he trap of social media sites like Facebook and Instagram is that the users with whom a person connects cannot jump off the screen and participate robustly and spontaneously in a two-way relationship. If the person seeking selfobject experience is addicted to pursuing the partial and manicured versions of others that are showcased on Facebook, she might miss out on the opportunity to find truly transforming relationships (Muchnick & Buirski, 2016, p. 149).

While this may be accurate for some, the authors seem to be set on a particular view of social media that is fairly flat. They do not take into account that there are indeed spaces, like particular groups of support or shared interests, or friendships made online, where there may be more nuance, depth, and dynamic traffic involved. In a piece discussing Facebook's policing of 'real names' and what this meant for drag queens, a sense of what online spaces mean for many, particularly those with more fluid or unconventional subjectivities, it is written "those selfies and status updates we all share instigate a realness that often transcends the boundaries of the digital" (Lil Miss Hot Mess, 2015, p. 145). This perspective offers that online spaces, such as Facebook, can and do offer people community, identificatory processes, information sharing, and a place to commune. However, this seems to have become more

complicated due to factors arising outside of the users of these platforms and is perhaps indicative of a socio-political climate where the early freedoms of cyber space seem to have become curtailed.

Li (2016), like Muchnick and Buirski (2016), proposes that use of social media is a form of selfobject relating, however, he stresses that it provides a more controllable manner of expression of selfhood in the social setting. He argues that using social media can produce and relieve anxiety, and links this to behavioural addictions (and so possible dependence or addiction to social media) in which a similar pattern is present. Li (2016) writes:

> [The] creative potential [of cyber space and social networks] is primarily afforded by the schizoid-paranoid organization of the SN [social network] platforms and is contingent on the user's capacity to exert enough depressive mode of organization so that the dialectical space is maintained" (Li, 2016, p. 101).

Li (2016) acknowledges that engagement with online spaces like social media are contingent on the user's state of mind, and state of being – if one has mature capacities, it is likely that he or she will approach online life in the same spirit, however, if one struggles with boundaries, with aspects of selfhood, affect regulation, etc., it is likely that social media usage may be difficult and perhaps problematic.

Balick (2014) posits that digital technologies, like mobile phones and the social apps on them, have now become tools of intimacy. Long gone are the hand-written love letters and 'Dear Johns' of old, now replaced by WhatsApp messages, memes and DMs (direct messages). What he stresses is most salient about social media, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google, is that it is relational. He argues that our use of it is dynamic, social and multi-layered, and fundamentally expresses a base need to relate to and with others in service of the need for recognition (Balick, 2014). He writes:

> [T]he variety of recognition that is sought, however, is what might be called 'authentic recognition', and there are a series of developmental obstacles affecting the ability both to accept and to give such recognition. I suggest here that the medium of online relating complicates this process even further (Balick, 2014, Introduction: 'it's more about the why' section).

Social media is a virtual treasure trove of human experiencing, well worth thinking about, writing about and reflecting upon, and as Balick (2014) has argued, psychoanalysis offers a useful conceptual system to use in thinking about the developmental intricacies that shape our needs for recognition and relating. The nature of social media usage is inherently about patterns in self and object relating – the familiar terrain of psychoanalysis. Johanssen (2019) writes of how using social media can involve affective labour, work that goes into representing aspects of oneself online and where social media can be reflexivity enhancing. Johanssen (2019) presents an interesting paradox, that social media involves objectify subjectivity, and this involves imaging oneself in the eyes of an audience – 'the imagined audience' (Balick, 2014). With social media, the other is always at some distance which facilitates the projection of various fantasies, and the projection is based upon the early introjected relations (Balick, 2014). Balick (2014) also suggests that in online presence, the false self (and/or ideal self) can get mixed up with a person's sense of the true self, with the former coming to obscure the latter, but he maintains that pre-existing relational patterns, including narcissism, predate one's use of technology but may find fertile ground for expression with social media. Balick (2014) is however careful to emphasize that the expression of these dynamics is nuanced, and takes a view of personality that is in line with the relational school – that multiple selves exist and our sense of subjectivity (and the ways in which we objectify others) is interactive, the more objectifying one is, the more objectified one has been (this is related to not having been adequately seen for one's subjectivity), and therefore the less mutual bidirectional relating there will be. He also notes that the likes of Facebook and Instagram are akin to what is public; generally people put their best foot forward in public, much the same is seen online where what is critiqued as being narcissistic may be merely an expression of putting one's best self forward to the public, which indeed involves curation.

Writers using Lacanian theory, such as Flisfeder, (2021); Johanssen and Krüger (2022), Killroy, (2015) and Kahoud (2023), posit that what social media, mobile phones and similar technologies do, is that they link desire (which has roots in absence) with the gaze, whose gaze we are talking about becomes confusing in regards to mobile phones as well as social media – like a window which has transparency and opacity, social media represents something that one looks at but also something one looks through (Kilroy, 2015). These

objects that capture our gaze are in fact letting us connect unconsciously with absence, "creating an object for desire to latch onto, not satisfying it, ultimately, but giving it direction" (Reyes et. al. 2015, p. 121). Kilroy (2015) asserts that Facebook has become the:

> dominant social fantasy of our times…within which 'the empty space of the fundamental impossibility' (Žižek, 2008, p. 141) is filled out with an imaginary, fantasy scenario; through Facebook 'the lack in the Other' is re-constituted as a an (sic) abysmal site of 'radical Otherness' (Žižek, 2008, p.232) which is filled by the fascinating presence of a fantasy object, an imaginary Thing which the other possesses (p. 13).

Kilroy (2015) posits that Facebook allows us to realize human desire (the Lacanian definition of which is that one's desire is structured on the other's desire for him): "through Facebook we commodify ourselves for the enjoyment of others" (Kilroy, 2015, p. 14).

The popular messaging app WhatsApp also flirts with absence, and presence. The app has two features which provide awareness cues, to let the sender know if a message has been received and read (grey and then blue ticks respectively), and the last seen function which lets you see when someone was last online. To account for the lack of social cues in the communication environment, "awareness cues are supposed to compensate this lack of social information and thereby support the chat conversation." (Mai et al., 2015, p. 296). Lemma (2017) notes that technology now, as opposed to earlier technologies, is primarily related to portable social connectivity and that in this networked culture, communication is happening through mediation which is disembodied. Standlee (2016) writes:

> While it is true that young adults may be losing traditional social skills, they may be replacing them with an incredibly complex set of interactional tools that are increasingly shaping and reshaping the meaning of relationships and their sense of self. This reflexive process, in which the meaning of technology shapes the interactions between peers, and interactions shape and reshape meaning, has only just begun, and the long-term impacts of technological integration into social behavior are still unclear. Nevertheless, this…may require that we rethink our own understanding of the meaning of technology and even the meaning of being connected to another human being (p. 20).

The way we find and connect with potential partners has also changed, with the likes of dating apps. One American study found that in their representative sample, one third of marriages began online, nearly half of these on dating apps (Cacioppo et al., 2013). Another study suggests marriages that are coming out of online dating exhibit greater sexual and racial diversity than those that emerge 'offline', and that compared to heterosexual couples, online dating is nearly twice as popular with couples who are gay, lesbian or bisexual (Sharabi & Dorrance-Hall, 2024). Searching for Tinder (a popular 'dating' app which is often also used to find casual sexual partners) in the psychoanalytic literature produces a surprising number of results. It seems wondering about sex and sexual practices will always remain in vogue to the public and academics alike. Bandinelli and Bandinelli (2021) hypothesise that the raison d'etre of dating apps is not ostensibly what they purport – finding a partner – but rather is a way of engaging desire without actually having to have an actual relationship with another person. If one of the aims of a psychotherapy is to make itself redundant, the aim of dating apps (at least for the app developers) is to keep users using it endlessly and so it pays to play with unrequited or unfulfilled desire. As Bandinelli and Bandinelli (2021) report, dating apps function in ways that go beyond their ostensible purpose: "dating apps act as a technosocial environment for the performance of the self, which impacts on the ways in which individuals perform their digital identities" (p. 186). The authors articulate a mandate of modern life – one must work on finding love and a partner, and the work of this on the likes of Tinder can be rather unerotic, having become endowed with superego mandates, however, it may satisfy these parts of self. The authors describe how the app makes demands on the user:

> "[T]he app functions both as a void that attacks an array of emotions, feelings and projections, and an object that ceaselessly syphons off our enjoyment; its existence depends less on its ability to 'deliver' a date than to keep us engaged in its ever-promising yet failure ridden enjoyment circuits" (Bandinelli & Bandinelli, 2021, p. 192).

The authors show how the app comes to inhabit the position of a third, and instead of using the app to relate to others, a user ends up relating to the app through the many others one engages with (Bandinelli & Bandinelli, 2021).

Using Tinder as its example, another article deftly illustrates how technology comes to reflect its users – a mirror to our unconscious processes. Narr (2021) explores how racial biases and racism are discretely and unconsciously confirmed and enacted on swipe apps like

Tinder (swiping right for conferment and left for rejection), where the unwitting swiping behaviour of users results in the algorithms perpetuating a system which pushes those of colour down the ranks and "ensure[s] that social death undergirds the perpetuation of privilege, making it easier for a select few to find sexual satisfaction, intimacy, and love" (Narr, 2021, p. 232). The author develops the term the uncanny user unconscious, bringing together the psychoanalytic concepts of the uncanny (that which is familiar but feared and disavowed, known but unnamable) and the unconscious to understand something of collective behaviour and experience (Narr, 2021).

It seems that social media offers a smorgasbord of enacting individual and relational psychodynamics, from offering the opportunity for social support, mirroring and connection, to expanding the opportunity for processes that lean towards the destructive (Barth, 2016). Social media opens channels for genuine connection and networking, but also uses its users, exploiting human desire for recognition and mirroring (and generating profits), and seems to enhance splitting processes that can be destructive. As Lemma (2017) notes, the social world now inextricably includes the digital in relating, and it is high time that psychoanalysis becomes more interested in understanding these processes, as this is the very material which has always preoccupied the discipline (i.e. how people relate, connect, separate, and have self-experiences).

3.4 Conclusion

Psychoanalysis has become, at first seemingly reluctantly and now with more curiosity, increasingly interested in technology and mobile phones. With the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, psychoanalytic writers out of necessity were plunged into increased engagement with matters of technology in the consulting room, and have now begun to examine its role beyond the clinic, including our relationship with technology and its devices. Balick (2024) notes that "our profession, which is so accustomed to looking inward, must do better in applying its understanding of how technologies mediate relationships to the wider world, outside the consulting room" (pp. 156-7). There is so much more area to be explored by psychoanalytic thinkers in regards to technology, and this present study offers one such permeation of the rich application value that psychoanalysis has to offer in understanding the intersection of technology and psychodynamics.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This research project falls within the qualitative methodology paradigm as it seeks to understand the person, phenomenon or experience and espouses qualities such as reflexivity, subjectivity, meaning, and self-definition (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Within this paradigm, this research was philosophically and practically oriented within psychoanalytic theory, practice, and research methods. A 'psychoanalytic attitude' was eschewed throughout the research process. This included using psychoanalytic concepts and philosophies from the point of conception to an immersion in psychoanalytic writing which informed the literature reviewed, the research methodology, findings, and the analysis of the findings, as well as the final discussion. In-depth psychoanalytic interviews (Cartwright, 2004) were used, and a psychoanalytically informed narrative analysis was conducted on the transcripts of the interviews (Cartwright, 2004; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). This analysis paid attention to patterns of relating, defenses, and transference-countertransference that occurred during interviews. The data is presented in a format oft used in psychoanalytic writing and theorizing, the case study (Mackay & Poser, 2004). Each participant is presented as a case study, with in-depth reflection on each participant's relationship and use of their phone. This can be located in Chapter 5. In chapter 6, the case studies are then discussed theoretically and interpretively, as well compared and contrasted as a collection of case studies to identify what is similar and different between participants.

In the present chapter, however, I discuss what psychoanalytically informed research is, describe the psychoanalytic narrative interview and case study methodology, as well as critiques to the methodology. The centrality of reflexivity to this approach is explored, and a discussion of the trustworthiness and credibility of the study is also included. The chapter then moves on to discussing the specifics of the research procedure and ends with a discussion of the ethical considerations of the study and a summative conclusion.

4.2. Psychoanalytically Informed Research

There is much written contention regarding the value and empiricism of psychoanalytic research (Appelbaum, 2011; Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2007). Some criticisms levelled at psychoanalytic practitioners writing academic articles are justly warranted. Some of the issues raised regard the lack of generalizability, the huge dependence on the writer's subjectivity, and the impossibility of separating out 'fact' from narration (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2007; Cartwright, 2004). By their very nature, psychoanalytic concepts and principles are difficult to study with ordinary scientific empiricism. Authors such as Appelbaum (2011) argue that there no place for scientific empiricism in psychoanalytic research, and that trying to embody the scientific method is in fact detrimental to the progress of psychoanalytic research. Others such as Cohler and Galatzer-Levy (2007) stress the movement from viewing psychoanalysis through the lens of experimental psychology, and natural science, to rather be considered a human science. Nevertheless, Cartwright (2004) argues that psychoanalytic research should and can be developed to improve scientific rigor, and verification of findings – with development occurring through the use of a research instrument such as the psychoanalytic interview and its related procedure of narrative analysis.

Psychoanalytic epistemology involves the examination of tricky subject matter such as "wish and intent" (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2007, p. 565), and the "dialogue of unconsciouses, transference-countertransference, unthought known, learning from experience, thoughts without a thinker" (Hollway, 2013, p. 22), which are difficult to define, operationalize, and measure. Hollway, as well as Frosh, make compelling arguments for why and how psychoanalytic research should address these challenges (see Frosh, 2001; 2002; Frosh & Baraister, 2008; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2003; and Hollway, 2013; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). There is a movement in qualitative psychological research that emphasis on whether a study is scientific, a positivist research approach, should be shifted to whether it provides useful knowledge; "justification is replaced by application" (Kvale, 2001, p. 20), as a measure of legitimacy. When investigating psychoanalytic matters, the principles of psychoanalysis should be used to document, describe findings, and most importantly to inform methodological considerations (Kvale, 2001).

More recently, Holmes (2019) has written a comprehensive text about the fundamental role of reflexivity and reverie in psychoanalytic research, and how this may be

operationalized practically. Hollway suggests, based on the prior work of Alfred Lorenzer, that psychoanalytic principles are oft confined to understanding the individual, but that it is in fact possible to access "unsymbolised socio-cultural knowledge, a kind of socio-collective unconscious" (p. 22), which speaks more broadly to a pervasive phenomena which exists in a community. Aligned with this ethos, my research attempted to hold in mind the cultures and contexts of my participants, as well as the milieu in which the interviews were held, but from this explore themes that recurred across cases as perhaps indicative of socio-collective unconscious responses in the participants towards mobile phones. Alongside this, individualised and unique facets to participants' representation and usage of mobile phones were also noted. Epistemologically and philosophically, I took a discursive stance in regards to interviews, viewing the interviewee as a co-researcher (Midgley, 2006), actively engaged in constructing ideas and developing areas of inquiry. Authors such as Hollway, Frosh, and Kvale make the argument that knowledge is developed inter-relationally and is constructivist. This idea was carried through into the interviews as an epistemological ethos. In this paradigm, knowledge is more than what is verbally communicated, it extends into tacit knowing (Kvale, 2001; Tuckett, 1993). This knowledge is informed by training, theory, as well as empathic attunement which provides information above and beyond the verbal – it grounds the verbal in affect, gesture, tone, posture and an embodiment (Kvale, 2001), where meaning-making is furthered by "empathically listening to the many layers of meaning revealed in the embodied therapeutic inter-relations" (Kvale, 2001, p. 24). Hollway leads a similar argument, wherein she makes a call for "scenic knowledge" which legitimizes information which comes *through* the researcher, rather than *to* the researcher.

Central to the themes running throughout this dissertation, is the concept of thirdness. Methodologically, supervision has provided an invisible third – and so it must also be acknowledged that this thirdness, which was something created outside of myself, and outside of my supervisor, but exists between us (Benjamin, 2004; Flaskas, 2012) – as also having a 'voice' in the interpretive process.

4.2.1. The psychoanalytic interview

This study utilised the psychoanalytic narrative interview (Cartwright, 2004) as its means of gathering data. This choice of methodology was selected as it fits with the ethos of

this psychoanalytically informed research. This methodology fundamentally attempts to retain the richness offered by an in-depth approach by examining both the conscious and unconscious aspects of the data. Some proponents such as Hollway (2013), Kvale (2001), and Midgley (2006) in the qualitative research field, make an argument for psychoanalytically-informed research interviewing, as well as for using countertransferential phenomena in the research endeavour. While these authors are helpful in identifying the philosophy and thinking behind such attitudes, it remains difficult to come to grips with exactly what the psychoanalytic interview is and how it looks in the field. Hollway (2013) provides helpfully clear and practical examples of this philosophy to research, where the observed data is recorded, as well as the internal subjective (countertransference) data. She describes the process of processing both forms of data, which then informs a hypothesis. Data analysis then not only rests on a content analysis, but goes deeper by using psychoanalytic narrative analysis (Cartwright, 2004).

Hollway and Jefferson (2000), in their comprehensive text *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*, point out how often qualitative research lacks breadth and depth because of the assumption that research participants are fully aware of their thoughts and motivations and that what is disclosed is the end of the matter – 'the transparent account' as they name it. They stress that researchers need to bear in mind the defences that may be used by participants to defend against anxiety and have formulated a guiding theoretical construct called the 'defended subject'. In order to elicit richer data, and to get underneath defences to the unconscious content, they suggest using open-ended questions, and asking respondents for accounts of a phenomenon, avoiding why questions and using the respondents own phrasing and word order to encourage free associative processes. This, they posit, allows the interview to become richer and allows for unconscious aspects, as well as defensive processes, to emerge dynamically. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) also stress that defensiveness is not one-sided, that the researcher will also have defences and unconscious processes emerging during the interview process. If the researcher can hold both of these prospects in mind, and reflect upon and analyse this matrix, a deeper and more meaningful level of analysis is likely to emerge. The "code and retrieve methods" of qualitative interpretation, such as thematic content analysis, is left wanting as deep meaning is lost in this process. Such methods generalise small bits of data to the larger group, and can run the

risk of dehumanising the individual subject, thereby losing the gestalt. The fundamental defining feature of psychoanalytically-informed interviews, as opposed to the clinical situation, is that in therapy the interpretation occurs in the room on an individual basis. In this type of interviewing, the interpretation is left to the data analysis period post interview, and comments are on psychological positionings in relation to social phenomena rather than purely intrapsychic meaning. This understanding is fundamentally developed in the transference-countertransference matrix, which adds a unique and deep aspect to the data.

With this approach in mind, I paid particular attention to the affective responses of the participants and within myself. These were noted in field notes following each interview, as well as during multiple occasions of listening to and transcribing the interviews, and multiple occasions of examining the video-recordings. Consideration of these notes occurred in parallel to the analysis of the narratives, to which a psychoanalytic lens was applied in order to develop understanding and meaning regarding participants' narratives. The analysis involved the identification of the core ideas being communicated within and between each narrative. Furthermore, narrative structure and coherence, as well as underlying affective tones was paid attention to, in order to explore participants' defensive structures. Triangulation via supervision was crucial to analysis regarding the participants' narrative analyses and countertransferential responses. Such analyses attempt to go beyond the content verbalised by the participants in order to access information and knowledge that is developed subversively by the collective and individual, sometimes without awareness (Strømme et al., 2010).

Hollway (2008) provides an excellent explication of why one should, and how one can, use reflexivity in academic writing. One important facet of this is to retain a sense of dynamic tension between positions rather than splitting the dialogue into this position or that position. In order to digest the data, the researcher makes use of writing and supervision to examine responses in context of the interview. Midgley (2006) describes a process of 'inter-vision' where various levels of analysis occur within a research team. Cartwright (2004) suggests a similar process of verification, where independent evaluators examine the data to arrive at an independent interpretation which is then compared with the researcher's interpretation of the material. Unfortunately, it was beyond the resources available to this research project

to make use of such a team approach to examining data, however, such an ethos was incorporated into the analysis, and this occurred through analysis of the data in supervision, as well as in cohort presentations, paper presentations at conferences, and also through the peer review process of submitting writing for publication.

Midgley (2006) presents the argument that Freud's attitude towards the manner in which he built systems of knowledge and understanding, are indeed very similar to modern qualitative processes, wherein there is a slow evolution of theories and ideas which are always open to revision and further evolution because they are based on a constant interchange of ideas and experience. In the *Introductory Lectures* (1917), Freud explains how the process of psychoanalysis is much like scientific work in that the researcher-psychoanalyst comes in with some preconceived ideas. These ideas and theories need to be held in abeyance. Using observation, we collect data which does not always immediately fit together. As the process goes along, the psychoanalyst puts forward working hypotheses, which are continually reworked and revised as the process goes along. After some time, and because of this process, more robust, generalizable 'theories' emerge. In such a process, there is movement from the micro to the macro, and often times a dynamic interplay between these. This quality builds validity into the process, and eventuates in a "'grounded hypothesis' [which] may be built up, one that begins to link to a more generalizable model. This, in turn, is tested and revised through analytic work" (Midgley, 2006, p. 216). Midgley also summarises George Devereux's attitude towards research and analytic work as being comprised of three important elements: the first involves the subject's behaviour, the second involves paying attention to the effects of observation on the observed, and lastly, the emotional reactions of the observer must also be duly considered. Devereux (as cited in Midgley, 2006) argues that neglecting to consider these responses, or in trying to construct a methodology that removes subjectivity from the process, is fundamentally flawed, potentially meaningless, and may in fact be a defensive response to the anxiety provoked for both observed and observer during the process.

In terms of the practicalities of the psychoanalytic interview, in alignment with Cartwright's (2004) recommendations, participants were briefly informed of the researcher's interest in the interviews and then invited to share their own thoughts on the subject of the

interview, as well as any other information about the participant's history or life that he or she would like to share with researcher, even if it seems unrelated. Cartwright emphasizes that most important is the invitation for the participant to begin at the place wherever he or she would like to. Such freedom in this regard, encourages an associative process so that a narrative shape can emerge that is built up out of conscious and unconscious processes. Cartwright sees the researcher's role at this stage of the process as being a facilitator. The researcher takes mental note of affective responses, feeling states, empathic connection, or disconnection. The analysis occurs at multiple levels, beginning even before the first interview, with the researcher exploring her motivations for conducting the research. This controls for observer bias as well as unconscious determinants that may shape the interview process (Cartwright, 2004). This also aids in teasing out transference-countertransference dynamics which are more related to the interview than to the researcher's unprocessed unconscious content. Cartwright (2004) encapsulates these ideas by directing the researcher to pay close attention to feeling states and perceptions during the research and interview process. A second level of analysis occurs in the search for core narratives (Cartwright, 2004). This involves paying attention to "story lines" and "the actions and motivations of characters" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 228) in the participant's narrative. Added to these repeated themes and story lines, the researcher must pay attention to the 'noise' of the interview – the coughs, pauses, repetitions, digressions and so on, as these aspects are hallmarks of unconscious processes at work and will yield important information when looking for unconscious content (Cartwright, 2004). Paying attention to these aspects allows the researcher to use the selected fact (Britton & Steiner, 1994) and to take in the total situation (Joseph, 1985). This allows for "all aspects of the interview to influence the analysis of the flow of associative material" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 228) rather than basing the analysis on an over-valued idea (Britton & Steiner, 1994). In this way core narratives can be constructed and matched with transference-countertransference material to guide the interview as well as deepen the narrative analysis post interview (Cartwright, 2004). The third layer of analysis involves exploration of identifications and object relations (Cartwright, 2004). Foundational to psychoanalysis is the belief that the self and one's internal representations are reflected in one's narrative accounts. These narratives allow "us to develop an account of the individual's objects, fantasy life, and related defensive organizations" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 232).

4.2.2. Case Study Methodology

The vehicle of the case study has been used to order the data from in the interviews with each participant. More specifically, this study might be considered one that is referred to as a collective case study (Simons, 2020; Shenton, 2004) or an aggregated single case study (Midgely, 2006), "where a theory is built up on the basis of the understanding that emerges from a series of case studies" (Midgley, 2006, p. 138) in a process of "intuitive induction" (Midgley, 2006, p. 138). This approach protects against oversimplification and allows for incremental refinement and reformulations of theories (Midgley, 2006). The case studies are offered as vignettes, which are a common form of presenting material about a person in psychoanalytic literature (most often a patient), which gives a feel of the person and a particular event or phenomenon, as well as verbatim accounts from an interaction with the person (Eagle & Wolitzky, 2011). The case study is the "standard means for presenting and illustrating clinical theory in psychoanalysis" (Mackay & Poser, 2004, p. 171); a method which allows for an in-depth view and narration of a phenomenon under investigation (Mackay & Poser, 2004). Mackay and Poser (2004) state that case studies should embody a scientific attitude and list the following as important to uphold when using this methodology:

> Thus the reporting of a case study should be: systematic, to convey the maximum amount of information about the case to the reader in terms to which other partitioners have access; transparent, in that the reported facts and the inferential processes of the analyst-researcher should be as clear and as explicit as possible and the concepts used to link the material to theory should be defined as sharply as possible; and self-critical - the researcher needs to argue for the theoretical approach taken in explaining the case and justify what he does against other possible explanations and other plausible inferences at the material might yield (Mackay & poser, 2004, p. 172).

Each participant's account of their relationship with their mobile phone was considered a unique event (Simons, 2020) and the presentation of it as such allows for the study of this as a discreet piece of data (each participant's material constitutes a case study) in the wider set of data, where the data from all eight participants constitute the collective case study (Simons, 2020). Examining the data in this way captures each individual's essential account while also allows for a comparison across case studies, to identify similarities and differences (Simons, 2020). Simons (2020) puts forward that the more particular a case study is, meaning

the more in-depth and nuanced it is, paradoxically the more universal significance it may have because it will capture something beyond the data related to human experience. Some of the strengths of the case study method have been noted by Midgley (2006) as such:

> single case studies are often the most relevant way of studying causal influences and mechanisms; that they are a good basis on which to move towards a gradually wider level of understanding; that they are often more clinically meaningful; and they therefore play an important role in helping to bridge the gap between research and clinical practice (p. 126).

The case studies are presented as vignettes in Chapter 5, and then in Chapter 6 I discuss aspects of each case study, as well the relation of themes across the case studies. In this way, the reader is able to get a sense of each participant, and then also, a sense of what kinds of universal themes may be involved in how the participants may relate to their mobile phones; this has application value to a wider comment on how people generally may relate to mobile phones. It is important to note that case study methodology does not promise proof of truths or absolute fact, but rather offers a way of 'making sense' of a phenomenon and offers a vehicle for the application and illustration of theoretical concepts (Mackay & Poser, 2004). The case studies, as I have presented them, do not portend to be the only explications possible but do present conceivable and plausible (Mackay & Poser, 2004) accounts of why mobile phones compel the participants in the ways that they do.

4.2.3. Critiques of psychoanalytic case study methodology

Case study methodology may be critiqued for lacking generalizability, validity, and objectivity and well as being too theoretically driven (Midgley, 2006). Indeed, the small sample size and the nature of the data collected evidence that the research may indeed lack generalizability. However, the research methods and results show that such methodology may be used to plunge for depth, and it offers an example of how psychoanalytic constructs and practices can be applied in the research field. Fundamentally, this research offers depth over breadth and shows how taking a psychoanalytic attitude to research and its findings helps to voice aspects of the human experience that require a conceptual language that can hold the bigger picture, but which can also zoom in to reveal the finer and nuanced brushstrokes. How the research has been structured in this report attempts to illustrate how

research can talk to both the idiosyncratic and the cultural sphere, by retaining the individual within their contexts, but also showing the overlap between participants in shared, broad themes, and how this may represent a broader psychosocial context for culture more generally.

Imposing a positivist research paradigm on this research topic would be inimical to the research aims and the findings of this research. It can in fact be argued that the depth garnered through the object-relations enquiry in research offers some forays into investigating the why (Mackay & Posser, 2004), which may get lost in other types of research paradigms (Midgley, 2006). This type of philosophy in research, offers the opportunity to go beyond and beneath (Midgley, 2006) the discourse, allowing for speculation regarding defences, internal object relations structures and unconscious motivations (Cartwright, 2004). Thus, such speculations, and not hard evidence or results, are exactly what is required of the psychoanalytic position which accepts the concept of over-determination in regards to psychic life.

From within the psychoanalytic realm, criticism has been morosely levelled at the disparate nature of what psychoanalysis has become - with so many contradictory, incompatible theories about purportedly the same concepts (Zepf, 2010). Such divergence of meaning and theoretical positions, as well as each practitioner's own subjective understanding of any particular concept in the canon, makes it very difficult to research intelligibly as no one practitioner appears to be 'speaking' the same language.

Psychoanalysis, as a system of meaning in the research context, has been accused of being an ungrounded expert system (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008) which is used to improve the sense of certainty and coherence. However, both Frosh and Zepf's writing (see Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; or Zepf, 2010 for examples of this discourse) propose that psychoanalysis should be utilised to critically appraise societal developments in ways that challenge the little thought through wisdoms, and should also capture the tensions in society which are in fact present, rather than offering comfortable armchair responses which are easily palatable. Saville Young (2009) proposes that the use of psychoanalysis in research can be used "to *unsettle* rather than to create coherence, moving to a more ethical view of the subject"

(original author's emphasis, p. 3). While coherence did emerge and was imposed on the data and results, also present was a bounty of unresolved questions, areas for examination and what remains unknown, overdetermined, and irreducible (Saville Young, 2009). This captures what both psychoanalysis and discursive researchers hope to do, which is to capture the constructivist nature of making meaning, rather than searching for positivist 'truths' (Saville Young, 2009).

While these critiques apply to psychoanalytic methodologies broadly, a specific critique leveled against case study methodology regards the possibly of confirmation bias in the generation of hypotheses and the concluding findings (Eagle & Wolitzky, 2011). In regard to this study, participants self-selected and so by their willingness to participate, it is assumed they have a vested interest, curiosity, and their own theories about their relationships with their mobile phones – these aspects are likely to provide some counter to what might be considered confirmation bias in my presentation of the case studies. Midgley (2006) identifies three areas of scientific rigor in which psychotherapy case studies are commonly critiqued: 1.) questions regarding the reliability of data, 2.) that the analysis and reporting of data in case reports lack validity and a means to evaluate the 'truth' of hypotheses or interpretations, and 3.) the lack of generalizability from single case studies to broader groupings. He also offers some possible ways to manage these limitations. Because the present study was for research purposes, and not a presentation of case material from psychotherapy, there are some factors from the research process which address these critiques inherently. To support the veracity of the data, the use of audio- and video-recording (easier to do with research than in the psychotherapy case study) allows for a closer recording of what actually occurred and was said verbatim (Midgley, 2006). The video-recordings also offer an opportunity to examine observed non-verbal information (Midgely, 2006) anew which offers the opportunity to triangulate these points of data (verbatim words, non-verbal behaviour and the researcher-analyst's countertransference) (Midgley, 2006). Furthermore, and additional layer of supervisory input in examining the transcripts (as occurred in my study), allowed for the development of a psychoanalytic narrative analysis and presentation that may hold up to increased validity. In terms of generalizability, the use of aggregated single case study methodology may allow for some build-up of understanding that might produce some generalizable findings (Midgely, 2006)

Lastly, fundamental to all research, not just case studies, is anticipating and reporting on the limitations of one's methodology and research processes (Fonagy, 2013; Mackay & Poser, 2004). Thus, the limitations of this research project are addressed in Chapter 7.

4.2.4. The centrality of the researcher's reflexivity

Psychoanalytic research relies a great deal on the kinds of information that are attended to, which is subtly influenced by the researcher's mind and personality, and his or her capacity to describe how information is taken in, thought about, processed and returned, and what is selected for subsequent publication (Tuckett, 1993). The researcher's 'observer bias' as well as internal motivations, feelings and thoughts about the research topic may well have bearing on the direction taken by interviews and analysis. It is for this reason that reflexivity on the part of the researcher is imperative, so as to be taken into account during analysis (Cartwright, 2004). While a researcher can be understood to be a person trained in empiricism, critical thinking and scientific rigour, this education interacts with the researcher's own mind, biases, capacities, self-knowledge and unconscious processes. It has been suggested that these aspects of the encounter are in fact legitimate, elegant and sophisticated sources of inspiration, data collecting and interpretation (Devereux, 1967), but rely on the researcher actively working at exploring and understanding these processes so that they can be usefully, and not dangerously, utilised (Cartwright, 2004; Holmes, 2019).

A note on myself may be helpful at this junction. Part and parcel of the researcher I am, is that I am foremost a clinician, trained in the practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. As such, my way of being and interviewing, leans towards looking for the personal, the complicated and confounding, what may be unconscious, and that which ails. I am also listening and engaging with an ear towards relating, and early childhood experiences in the light of the present. These biases come through and set a tone in the engagements in the interviews. I am personally interested in my own relationship with my mobile phone and how it may reveal aspects about myself and my relationships, and this particular set of naval gazing ideations were the original inspiration for this project (I wondered if others might also find contemplation of relationships to mobile phones meaningful and revealing). It is worth noting that I am of the millennial generation, the generation that had a before and after mobile

phones and the Internet, and this is of course meaningful considering the project. Furthermore, I am white, middle class, and have had the privilege of prior and continued education, in a relatively stable, urban, sociocultural landscape. This may be different from some of my participants, several of whom come from different parts of South Africa (some were from more rural areas), were of varying races, and from varying socioeconomic environments. Like some of the participants, I also have geographical movement in my history. I recall my grandparents moving back to Portugal when I was four years old. I remember awkward dutiful telephone calls with my grandmother, who didn't speak much English, and feeling mesmerized (to this day) hearing my mom converse in Portuguese with her (my mother's tongue was not passed on to me, unfortunately). I now ambivalently feel my own mother's dictate to call. I too moved country, when my own child was four years old. In contrast, being in contact with family and dear friends through WhatsApp and video calls was a lifeline to me and while it has sometimes been painful to be confronted with separateness and distance, I am also able to continue nurturing bonds and relationships through my phone (although at times these invisible strings become more tenuous or thin when life is busy). These factors were held in mind, as one does as a therapist, listening to countertransferential responses and examining what they have to do with the current collaborative conversation, and what may be projective on my part - this is a function of what is known as internal supervision (Casement, 1985). These processes were also aided by the use of external supervision, which occurred with my research supervisor.

4.3. Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Study

Qualitative research is often criticized as lacking trustworthiness or credibility, due to reliability and validity factors that cannot be structured in the same manner that positivist/qualitative research is able to provide for (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) suggests that rigor can indeed be established in qualitative research, by paying heed to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In addressing credibility, my study utilized methods and procedures that are established and well documented (Shenton, 2004), such as those described in literature detailing psychoanalytic research and psychoanalytic interviewing (Cartwright, 2004; Holmes, 2019; Hollway, 2013; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Kvale, 2001; Midgely, 2006; Saville Young, 2009), as well as the psychoanalytic case study (Eagle & Wolitzky, 2011; Fonagy, 2013; Mackay & Poser, 2004; Midgely, 2006; Simons, 2020).

While my sample was drawn using purposive, convenience sampling, and as such lacks the purported gains of random sampling which may allow for generalization to a broader population, my study employed the use of the collective case study (Simmons, 2020; Shenton, 2004) which ensures that "multiple voices, exhibiting characteristics of similarity, dissimilarity, redundancy and variety, are sought in order to gain greater knowledge of a wider group" (Shenton, 2004, p. 65) – the wider grouping in this case could at the least be considered emerging adults attending university in South Africa, who use mobile phones.

Another manner in which credibility can be built into a study, and was so for this study, is by the use of triangulation (Shenton, 2004). This was achieved by linking up narrative accounts with transference-countertransference observation, and with supervisory process. Shenton (2004) stresses that "the credibility of the researcher is especially important in qualitative research as it is the person who is the major instrument of data collection and analysis" (p. 68). I would argue, as a clinician-researcher, I was uniquely placed to have conversations which sensitively plumbed for depth; this combined well with the professional ethos of genuineness, empathy, and the capacity to tolerate uncertainty, which is fundamental to practice as a psychoanalytic clinician. Furthermore, 'thick descriptions' (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004) – as provided in this research - also aid in credibility as it allows readers to evaluate if a piece of work may be an accurate reading of the data. In terms of transferability and dependability, both criteria are met by the researcher providing as fully as one can, information that may aid in others developing similar lines of research work, a prototype of sorts (Shenton, 2004). In this regard, I have attempted to provide as much information as possible (while protecting participant confidentiality) and to be transparent regarding my processes of collection and analysis/interpretation (Cope, 2014).

Lastly, confirmability has been noted to improve trustworthiness. This is a stickier area in regard to psychoanalytic research because as psychoanalysis acknowledges, psychodynamics are overdetermined (and so there is no one singular meaning to be found) (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973), and that one's personal theoretical persuasions will be the lens through which you digest a piece of psychodynamic work (Midgley, 2006). I would argue that in the philosophy and the practice of psychoanalytic research (the tenets of which are outlined above in the section titled Psychoanalytically Informed Research) what is

confirmable is that which shows an "audit trail" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72) of the reasoning behind the theoretical stance (and that this is consistent throughout the research endeavor), the methodological decisions, and the psychoanalytic procedures used to draw inferences and make interpretations about the data.

This allows for the research to meet Cope's (2014) call for 'criticality' (Cope, 2014). Cope's (2014) adjunct for authenticity may also address this sticking point. She writes that researchers should endeavor to faithfully represent the emotions, feelings, and descriptions of participants such that readers are able to grasp the tone, essence, and flavour of a participant's experience (Cope, 2014).

4.4. Research Procedure

4.4.1. Participants

The sample for this research was selected using non-probability, purposive, convenience sampling (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). A call for research participants was sent to various Heads of Schools in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, who then sent the email onto the lecturers who disseminated the invitation on their student broadcast lists. The students self-selected and contacted the researcher directly and interviews were subsequently arranged. The resultant sample population consisted of eight post-graduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand between the ages of 21 and 29. Ethics approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical). Please refer to Appendix A to view the Information Sheet, Appendix B to view the consent document, Appendix C for audio- and video-recording consent, and Appendix D for Ethics Approval. The demographics of participants are located in Chapter 5.

4.4.2. Data collection instrument

In-depth, psychoanalytic interviews (Cartwright, 2004) were used as this offers an opportunity for a narrative to emerge and for the researcher and the participant an opportunity to collaborate in the exploration of this subject (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). The interviews followed the participants' narrative direction and an associative process between participant and researcher occurred. Each participant was interviewed once, which differs from the method described by Cartwright (he recommends conducting a follow up interview).

One interview was sufficient as the data was sufficiently rich and saturated. Each participant was interviewed at a time and day of their convenience. Interviews were conducted in private consulting rooms in the Emthonjeni Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand, and one interview was conducted in my private practice consulting room. Each participant was interviewed for approximately one hour. The interviews were digitally video-and audio-recorded. One video recording was unsuccessful, and one audio recording had brief periods of auditory interference, however all discernable interview material was considered and utilized in the analysis. Additional to the interview data, the researcher took detailed field notes of her own thoughts, feelings, and responses while conducting each interview, as well as while repeatedly listening to and watching the recordings of the interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymised.

4.4.3. Data analysis

Analysis of the data occurred in various ways and was guided by the following principles: maintaining a focus on the research question, surveying the lived experience as it is described, continuously considering emerging themes, and holding the dynamic tension of the themes and the whole of the research (Hein & Austin, 2001). In this process, one moves from "full immersion in the data, to a more theoretically informed position" (Bradfield, 2001, p. 539). Each interview was repeatedly read combing for compelling psychoanalytic narrative themes that had consistency within each interview, which was combined with the examination of field notes, as well as the supervisory experience. By using a psychoanalytic narrative analysis, I looked for representations, affect, defences (for example, denial, splitting, intellectualising, projecting), and patterns in relating (Cartwright, 2004). I looked for dynamics that might reveal unconscious processes at work or dynamics being activated by the interview, interviewer, and the content. Analysis of the data involved a triangulation of examining the narratives and interview behaviours, within the transference-countertransference matrix (Cartwright, 2004). Additional to this, versions of this kind of analysis occurred through the process of presenting anonymized interview material and analyses to my cohort of PhD candidates and staff in my PhD programme (see Long et al., 2017). This furthered analysis in the form of peer and staff review and supervision. Additionally, in preparation for publication of some of the material in journals, my analyses were subjected to the peer review processes of the journals which also enhanced the analysis

via feedback. This multi-layered process of analysis enhanced the identification and analysis of patterns or narratives within the data that are both conscious and unconscious (Cartwright, 2004; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). This methodology acknowledges the role of the researcher as not only reporting the data, but also interpreting it (Braun & Clarke, 2006) - an important aspect given the very subjective and reflexive nature of the topic itself, as well as the collaborative and associative process of the interviews.

4.4.4. Writing up the findings

Various iterations of writing up the findings occurred. At first, I considered each and every participant's material as a stand-alone piece of data. This allowed for a better understanding to come through of what was unique to each participant. As such, the findings are written up as vignettes in Chapter 5. These vignettes begin with some explanation of the participant's way of being in the world and how each participant related to me in the interview setting. The main themes that emerged from each narrative are presented in an attempt to retain a focus on the participant's relationship with their phone. In the writing up of the case studies, I tried to strike a balance between the 'scientific' research requirements of structure and evidence, but also to capture the creativity of the unconscious. Gaitanidis (2011) encourages psychoanalytic writers to "throw themselves deliberately…into the creative play of unconscious intensities and release thus the powers of their imagination" (p. 182). It is acknowledged that each vignette can capture only a particular moment in time, with the thoughts, feelings and meanings pertinent to each participant at that time in their lives. Furthermore, these moments have been captured through my own interpretive lens, a lens which is informed by the rigours of psychoanalytic research and practice, but none the less must be acknowledged as being subjective. It is also acknowledged that there is likely much that could not be captured, as writing a case study includes acknowledging the "fundamentally incomplete, fragmented and inexpressible aspects" (Gaitanidis, 2011, p. 182) of psychoanalytic work.

Then, I attempted to write up the findings as a broad set of findings across all participants (i.e. themes that were shared across participants). This allowed for a grasp on the material as a whole. With the vignettes already in mind, each theme then retains the nuance of each participants' unique coloring of the material. In Chapter 6, these themes are

presented and situated both theoretically and within the existing body of psychoanalytic literature on mobile phones.

4.5. Ethical considerations

4.5.1. Research Process Ethics

Participants were duly informed that participation is voluntary, and that there were no advantages or disadvantages in any way for choosing to participate, or not participate, in the study. Participants were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any point and may refuse to answer any question if it would be preferred not to. Participants were also informed that there are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Contact details and the names of participants were protected and were not disclosed to anyone. Participants were also made aware of accessible psychotherapy resources available at the university, should they be needed.

Confidentiality was assured to participants and upheld. Informed consent was acquired in writing, as was consent for recording (please refer to the Appendixes to view the Information Sheet (A), the Consent Form (B) and the Audio- and Video-recording Consent Form (C)). Protection of participants' identities was ensured by the use of pseudonyms in the transcripts and when writing up the research report. Furthermore, identifying information was omitted or changed in ways that kept the essence of participants alive but protected their identities. Audio- and video-recordings were responsibly stored in password protected cloud storage and handled by the researcher, and during processing only my supervisor and I had access to the anonymized transcripts. Recordings will be deleted after examination of the study, and with the participants' permission anonymized transcripts will be kept in password protected cloud storage by my supervisor and me for future research purposes.

4.5.2. Psychoanalytic Ethical Considerations

The application of psychoanalytic principles in the research context comes with many complexities and ethical considerations. When conducting psychoanalytically-informed research, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) emphasise the importance of honesty, sympathy and respect towards participants. Saville Young (2009) adds to this, the importance of considering

reflexivity and validity. A number of ethical issues will be considered below, as well as some thoughts as to how these tensions can be navigated.

The issue of informed consent is pertinent in this research project. Due to the nature of psychoanalytic narrative analysis and its emphasis on uncovering that which may not be conscious, it is difficult to state exactly what participants are granting informed consent to, as we cannot predetermine where the interviews, and subsequent analyses, may take each participant emotionally and psychologically (Saville Young, 2009) and what will be reflected of each participant upon analysis. In the interview process, discussing relationships included developing a sense of the quality and nature of family, friend, or romantic relationships, which does hold the potential of being emotionally evocative. I was mindful to respect the level of detail offered by participants in this regard and not to probe too deeply into areas that appeared to evoke difficult emotion for participants. I took care to respect the participants' emotional landscapes and did not offer interpretations or suggestions that were of a therapeutic nature during interviews (Saville Young, 2009). Comments or probing from the researcher was in the service of developing the participant's narrative but I was careful not to overstep the mark into fragile territory (Kvale, 2001).

Despite these considerations, I was acutely aware of my dual identity and way of being, as discussed in the reflexivity section above, and worried at times to have overstepped into a more therapeutic voice. In these instances, I did offer information about free therapy resources at the university directly to a few participants who seemed to be unconsciously communicating a wish or need for a therapeutic space (this information was also provided to every participant at the outset of the study in the Participant Information Sheet).

Another consideration involves the write up of research material. Saville Young (2009) recommends that the researcher always bear in mind that the participants may read the results and analyses as the final dissertation will be accessible online, or in journal articles. Given this consideration, I have been careful in the write-up so as not to harm participants indirectly in this manner. I have attempted to be mindful of participants' subjectivities, and attempted to present findings in as respectful a manner as possible, and I tried to

acknowledge where and how the analysis and interpretation were informed by my own subjective experiences (Saville Young, 2009).

Also of consideration is the issue of exposing my own reflexive processes and how this may have ramifications beyond the research project. It seems to me that this degree of considered openness seems to be fair in terms of what is being asked of participants, as well as being part and parcel of being a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and researcher, and does indeed reflect the way in which I work in the room.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology used in this study, namely psychoanalytically oriented qualitative research methodology. I discussed what it means to embody a psychoanalytic attitude and reflexivity in research, which carries through from conception of the project to the theoretical formulations, through to the methodology of in-depth psychoanalytic interviewing and using a psychoanalytically informed narrative analysis, and to the reporting of the findings and discussion in case study format. Critiques of the methodology were considered, how to ensure trustworthiness of the study, as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter 5: Findings – Vignettes

5.1. Introduction

As discussed in the methodology section (Chapter 4), the data from the interviews was organised by participant. Themes were identified within each narrative through a psychoanalytically informed narrative analysis, which looked for both conscious and unconscious content regarding personal and interpersonal dynamics expressed through mobile phone usage and representation. While the themes are organised individually in the vignettes, there is also overlap of themes between participants. The data is first presented in the form of individual participant vignettes or 'portraits' in order to show the varied nuances which came through so richly in the interviews – verbatim examples of themes are presented in italics. The discussion section in the next chapter draws related themes together across the data set and participants.

In each vignette, first, a subjective description of each participant is given (this description was informed by information provided by participants as well as their presentations, and countertransferential material experienced by the researcher). Then follows a presentation of themes relating to each participant's unique relationship to their mobile phone, with supporting evidential quotes. Names and identifying details have been changed in order to protect participants' confidentiality.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Participant	**Race**[4]	**Age**	**Gender**	**Area of Study**
Rachel	White	21-29	Female	Health Sciences
Akira	Black	21-29	Male	Graphic Design

[4] Race is included in the participant demographics because in the context of South Africa, race may have implications for sociocultural, economic and historical realities that have bearing on the subjectivities of the participants, and so, also on their use of their mobile phone.

Max	White	21-29	Male	Graphic Design
Thulani	Black	21-29	Male	Performing Arts
Nthabiseng	Black	21-29	Female	Political Science
Liat	Indian	21-29	Female	Science
Jared	White	21-29	Male	Sociology
Gloria	Coloured	21-29	Female	Journalism

5.2. Rachel (Hebrew: One with purity)

Rachel was a very easy interviewee in some respects. She was reflexive and gave generously of her thought processes, describing the back-and-forth relationship that she has with her phone. She quipped that she was a typical White, middle-class woman from a particular suburban area, also a researcher and post-graduate student in the Health Sciences, and this perhaps made the interview feel smooth as I felt identified with her. There were a few moments of unease in the interview, however, which then became productive. Her reflexivity was unrelenting at times, another point of identification for me.

Rachel's main preoccupation was that her phone was so indispensable to her. She wished that she did not need it so much, however, it is so integrated into her functioning that she feels she has a relationship with it – albeit an ambivalent relationship. What becomes clear in her interview is that her phone also seems to act as an auxiliary part of herself – a defensive part perhaps – that cuts off temporarily from thinking and feeling. While she uses it as a tool in service of keeping up relationships with others, she also uses it as an aid in regulating her affect – intentionally, like using a meditation application, but also in a more 'mindless' way that allows her to cut off or tune out from the external environment. Her need for this 'mindlessness' appeared to perturb her internal environment. Saliant was her wish to do away with her phone, to rely on it a little less, and to be able to cast it off. While she

seemed to wish to get respite from the particular way her mind works – not to think so hard about everything, all of the time, her wish to do away with her phone seemed to represent a wish not to need respite – as if this represented a particular vulnerability on her part. She appeared to be wishing away what it offered her (which often appeared to be a respite from overwhelm). She presented as ashamed that she used it to tune out from her thoughts and the world, as if she should always be in a reflexive, thoughtful state of mind. She grappled with her dependency throughout her narrative; while she appeared to condone her use of her phone to remain connected to friends and family far away, she wished she did not feel quite so compelled to keep her phone switched on, and so drawn to it when needing to escape or disconnect.

5.2.1. Connection to- and disconnection from others

Rachel explained that her phone offers her something very valuable, a means to keep ties with friends and family who live far away or lead very busy lives:

> *It actually, it makes me feel connected to people, and like, so I don't, I've thought about like deleting Facebook and stuff, but I don't, because, I mean that's how I access socially, my phone that's, it's the contact with people, I think. So deleting Facebook would just mean that I have less contact, especially because I've got a lot of friends and family that are overseas…you know a lot of my friends, we use WhatsApp all the time because we don't see each other necessarily all that often but we always voice note or call or message.*

She was aware, however that, in addition to offering the possibility of connection with others, her phone also offers disconnection from the external, and perhaps internal too:

> *I think…it is a, it's a tool for connection and it's also a tool for escape, so it, kind of, because it offers both.*

Rachel had a keen sense of how her mobile phone has the potential to interfere with in-person relating. Her mobile phone helps her keep connected when there is distance with others, for example being on a different continent, but when physically present with another person she felt her phone created distance:

> *…so I try to be very conscious of not checking my phone like when I'm with my boyfriend or with a friend or something. I really, because it does definitely take you away from them and I noticed when, I noticed how when I was, when I was single for a while and*

I'd like spend quite a bit time on the sofa with my mom and we'd be watching a series or something like that and she would really complain when I was like playing Candy Crush or something on my phone and she would be like just watch it and stuff, you know. And I was watching but I know that I'm way more engaged when I'm not playing on my phone, but I struggle to not have something to do with my hands. And sometimes I think it's like, I don't know, being, it takes me a certain amount of relaxation to be able to just, just watch a movie or something not like in a cinema, like that's different, but like at home on the sofa to be fully engaged with that and I get a bit restless and I think it's when, when I'm busy when, when I am a bit distracted I find it hard to just sink into a series or a movie or something like that.

Her phone appeared to provide a site for her restless, perhaps anxious, energy, however, she was very aware of the impact this has on those around her; her focus on her phone revealing to them her preoccupied state of mind and incomplete presence in reality.

5.2.2. Regulation of internal states

The way that Rachel used her phone as a way to shut off from overwhelm was notable. She spoke about using her phone to keep herself informed of events in the external, political world, but finding that she needed to do this in a titrated form to avoid feeling overwhelmed. She also spoke about allowing herself to become lost in games on her phone to escape the upset in her internal states. While both of these are in essence attempts at managing feeling overwhelmed, one involves limiting her phone use while the other appeared to involve a relaxation of these limits.

5.2.2.1. Titrated exposure to external circumstances/protection from overwhelm

She explained how her phone offers her a titrated version of the external, political, strife-filled world:

…that's honestly where I mostly see news articles because I really don't like going on like BBC News or something because I find it's like too distressing sometimes and stuff a bit traumatic so… but I'll see things that are published or whatever through news sites that I have liked or whatever on Facebook. So my phone is kind of that channel to keeping me a bit informed…

She explained how she finds modern life too connected, too informed, and how she needs to limit her exposure to be able to get on with her life:

> *…the world it, it's pretty tough I think because we know so much that goes on and we know so much that goes on that we have absolutely no control over it, at least that's how I feel like. And I get, I get really tired of feeling sort of so helpless about say, there is floods in India or the ongoing things in Syria, and things like this where I do quite strongly feel that a hundred years ago, two hundred years ago certainly people would, those things still happened and sure we're seeing like you know disaster, natural disasters on a, it's a manmade scale which is bigger than this, but terrible things happened, that if I was living in South Africa I would have had no idea, I would have known what's going on maybe in Joburg maybe in greater Gauteng even in South Africa perhaps. But that would have been like the limit really of my day-to-day understanding of what's going on in the world and I, you know, every now and again, read a newspaper with stuff but there's no expectation that I feel the need to get involved with these people. And I feel like there's so much that requires engagement at the moment…but things, things get exhausting as well.*

5.2.2.2. Her phone as boredom buster/attempts at affect regulation

Her phone serves as a space filler and as a way to maximise time in between tasks:

> *I almost don't want to admit to myself but it is, it is true that like, now I've got a game and you know, play on my phone or like check messages or something, like do little admin things so its, it fulfils that same function, like keep me busy while you wait for something or while you're just having coffee on your own or something, but I see everyone doing that especially like in a coffee shop setting or something and certainly if you, people walking around on their own so it feels like I'm part of the norm but just in my mind I have this like ah but I don't want to be like that.*

She seemed troubled that she would use a game (Candy Crush) to manage her internal states, to cut off from her internal states, when she found herself in a particularly unrelenting and overwhelming work experience that required her to absorb disturbing experiences:

> *I noticed when I was…so I was just doing my research in government health settings. At first I was really good with like immediately writing notes but then I was like…put it off to like because I, you know have some time at the end of the day or something, to*

write them then. Because often especially like in the middle when I was starting to feel really quite burnt out, I couldn't face doing anything except just quickly playing a game on my phone and once I finished my research, I'd bare… I've like barely played on my phone. I've like…what are we doing, Candy Crush. Well I can't believe I, you know, I'm so high up on the levels or whatever, because why do I need that? And I think that that is something that it, it was, it was something not… to not think about, not to have to engage immediately with what's just gone on…because like certain things in government health settings like, it's hectic. And sometimes I just needed to be not there and I could do that like sort of through my phone for like a few minutes before the next interviewee came or something. But it's definitely like a, so it's a kind of, when I'm, a level of like tension or anxiety or even like, like trying to start this paper now, suddenly I'm playing Candy Crush.

She went on to explain how her phone offers her a form of escape:

…for me it's very much connected to… ja like a kind of escapism… it definitely gives me an out when I don't want to fully engage and… and I don't want to do something that's you know like reading or something like that or even just sitting around and being a bit bored and kind of just thinking about things or whatever, sometimes that feels like more effort than just going on my phone.

Despite her insight into her need to escape, it seemed that she harshly judges her need to tune out; she calls the games she plays silly and stupid and seems to judge the constructiveness of what she does with her phone:

…that's why I was like, well what am I doing and, sitting in clinics saying, well what are you doing, why are you playing these stupid games? It's not like I don't know it, but it's like silly or like pointless or whatever but I, I just I couldn't think of taking out a book or reading or something like that. I just couldn't and I'd always bring a book, I'd always have access but I just wouldn't, it was too much, it was too much effort. Um so ja, I think it kind of, it's definitely like for me like the opposite of like…like an illusionary like playing in a sense of like kids play, like creative play or exploring things, that I think it… I think it does the opposite of that actually, it allows you to like not be exploring your thoughts about something and not be engaged with everything that there is to be engaged with.

Rachel described a sense of what she feels she should be doing; what her ideal is – to meditate and do breathing exercises, but acknowledged that this requires more work and is just too much:

> *So like if I had to sit and be like okay I'm going to do this breathing exercise… I'm going to do the meditation that's on my phone, it sounds terrible but like it is more effort, initial effort than just quick just like quickly going checking Facebook because it's such a habit. So it's not necessarily the relaxing thing I would like it to be within the actual breathing space that it could be.*

She insightfully added that her mobile phone offers "the path of least resistance". The ease of the disconnect from herself that her phone offers appeared to make her uneasy:

> *…and so I find, I think that they very cleverly have designed smart phones around maybe that need to escape into something. I don't know if that's quite true but that's certainly how it functions for me.*

Her sense that phones are 'designed' to draw us in and then sedate us suggested some wariness in relation to phones and by extension, tech developers. Her fears in this regard extended to phone notifications:

> *…like I think, I'm definitely, like Facebook's target audience in terms of like notifications [in] that [if] there's a little one on my phone like I have to just get rid of it no matter what it is.*

Her fears seemed to link to a worry that tech companies are exploiting 'weaknesses' like her need to escape and manage her internal states, and perhaps her curiosity or need to be 'up-to-date'. This appeared to cause internal conflict for her, as she struggled to allow herself this need. Instead, she wished she could manage the intensity of being fully present with her thoughts and feelings all the time, undistracted by her needs. Rachel's narrative revealed a desperate desire not to be reliant on her phone or connected to it. She said, almost with disgust:

> *I want to be able to say that I don't have a relationship with my phone, um how ridiculous is that, but I also know that that is really not true.*

5.2.3. A wish to be rid of her phone

The ubiquity of mobile phones in everyday life makes it difficult to be without one's phone. Rachel described her fantasy of being able to disconnect from her phone:

I really, really appreciate holidays where there's no signal because it's kind of, it, I do find it really refreshing and I know that so like I always think about that maybe this time I will just, I should just you know turn it off for the weekend or something but I also know I'm not going to do that while I'm in Joburg.

She described how entrenched mobile phones are in her age group, the millennials:

…there isn't really an opt out…the generation that was born without one of these things and then you just never had it so you never participate in it. But for, like our generation, and especially I think the generations coming up now, they've, they've been on the Internet since they were born like all their baby pictures are already on Facebook, so it's like I sometimes feel that's why sometimes I get really irritated with my phone and that's why I'm grateful for like holidays without signal and things like that is because, as much as I don't like to like blame something for my own actions it does feel like I don't have as much choice in the matter as I would potentially like with these technologies.

She then went on to describe how this can be judged, perhaps revealing more about her own fears:

…there is this sort of a perception of someone who's say constantly on their phone or whatever it is like a bit um, it's [like there is] a bit less weight to them.

It seemed that she would hate to be perceived as superficial or less 'weighty', or even worse, as needy. She explored her perceptions of this perceived 'judgment' and how this extends to the kinds of apps used on the phone. Her narrative suggested a gendered dimension to this judgement. She said:

…and of course this often comes from, from men I think actually because… In fact I think a lot because, um, for me it's something also about feeling connected, um and, I mean I see my brother he's a couple of years younger than me, and just I suppose he's, I think, extremely judgemental of like Facebook and things and doesn't, well he you know, thinks that you know it's really silly and things like that, but frankly then he used Snapchat a whole lot which I never, you know really got into, for a while. But it, it is I think, I think it is seen in some ways as a kind of female domain or at least the criticisms of the type of person that comes on Facebook sound to me quite a lot, quite feminised in terms of someone who's a bit needy, ja neediness I think…you know this sort of stereotype of posting sort of, I don't know, needy Facebook statuses.

Links between neediness and femininity were revealed in Rachel's narrative, suggesting conflicts within her about own neediness. As she spoke, it became clearer that it may be her own neediness she wishes to 'do away with', as opposed to her phone. She critically reflected on her shame in relation to the mix-up of internal and external judgements about what one does on one's phone and what it reveals about a person:

> *…that same type of thing goes on where you're kind of shamed for being too much on social media and I don't actually know quite where that comes from particularly, except for perhaps just like, say people like me making disparaging comments about Facebook because of my own wish not to be on Facebook that much. So ja I… and I…. which I think is, is partly because I… it's that dissonance of seeing it as something that is ultimately a bit of a timewaster so I don't want to be on a timewaster but I am and I can't, I can't, I don't quite know why that it is, but it doesn't feel one hundred percent under my control all the time.*

At points, her fantasies of tech companies preying on human frailties and socialisation into the world of tech from a young age appeared to serve a function of externalising the 'blame' for her use of her phone, but left her feeling 'out of control'. At other points, however, she was able to own her use, accepting the parts of her that need escape and to waste time.

5.2.4. Imagining herself in the eye of the Other

Rachel seemed preoccupied with how her phone usage may look to others. This seemed to involve an internalized judgement about her generation:

> *…[t]here's this sort of perception of like millennials on their phones all the time and the youth on their phones all the time and I don't… so I don't want to be like that, but I am I think if I'm really truly honest like, ja, probably I am…. [i]t's not necessarily something that I maybe that I want to do but I'm doing it anyway.*

Despite her uneasiness about having her needs exploited and her phone use feeling a little out of her control, she was also aware that her protestations in this regard felt linked to a need to deny her wish to allow herself to 'indulge':

> *You know what the best analogy I can think of is when people say something like, 'I really shouldn't have dessert' and they make a big show, of being like, 'oh you know, it's so rich, it's so rich', but they actually really want another slice a cake or something like that. And I've always felt in those situations like, enjoy the food, you know, like*

> *that reality is very easy for me to say, like you know what, just own it, just do it. And, and yet, somehow I haven't just, I just haven't quite got there with, with my phone or with Facebook or BuzzView or something like that, because I don't necessarily want to own that I'm a Facebook addict or like, it feels, it feels like it's not congruent with, I don't know, whatever image I have of myself of, of like not, not caring about social media or not being, I don't know, not being someone who's like on their phone all the time or something like that".*

It appeared as if a part of Rachel has a negative view of people who are "on their phone all the time", perhaps seeing them as greedy (wanting more cake). She wants to see herself as different, as perhaps 'not needing' in the same way, but is frustrated with herself for "making a show" and not being able to own her want for the indulgence of disconnect offered by her phone.

> *I would like to be able to just be like 'I have no relationship with my phone' - what a ridiculous thing to say - you know what I mean? But it's like, its actually not the case…actually it is laden and…you can't just dismiss it…in some way or another you do have a relationship with our technology in all forms…there is something that goes on there with shame.*

Rachel's need to sometimes be 'mindless' and removed from herself is seen as shameful; how she judges her phone is a glimpse into what she thinks of herself – she should be engaged, woke, productive, and constructive and she rejects the parts of herself that are vacuous, empty or emptying, that need or like to be tuned out. Overall, Rachel's narrative revealed an ambivalent relationship with her phone – needing it but wishing she didn't. This appeared to reflect a core intrapsychic conflict within herself.

5.3. Akira (Japanese: 'bright, clear or intelligent')

Akira is a graphic design student. My impression when interviewing him was that he seemed to be filled inside with jumping Mexican beans, alive and full of electric excitement. He darted around, topic to topic, thought to different thought; difficult to follow and even harder to penetrate. He could have won the most enthusiastic participant award given that he was so excited by technology, however, the personal nature of the interview excited him less. He had much to offer in terms of opinion and intellectualization, however, he resisted being pressed for more personal and detailed responses regarding his mobile phone usage.

Most salient was his openness to technology and how it could be of service. He seemed to have a clear sense of how he uses tech and what it offers him, as well as how lesser mortals come undone by the trappings of tech. While enthusiastic, he was also vague and it was frustratingly difficult to get a sense of him, or feel like I could develop a 'felt' working connection with him. Occasionally, our time together even felt a little combative – this I think was a result of my pushing for a more personalized narrative. I found myself wishing I could take a peak inside his mobile phone, that somehow that would have given me a clearer sense of who he is, and what he thinks and feels, as if it would have given me a more cohered narrative to work with. Perhaps though, upon reflection, this is Akira, he is the multifaceted human who thinks quickly, and ideationally, who is friendly but whose tendency to become lost in his own thoughts may impede his ability to connect others.

5.3.1. The risks and rewards of technology

For Akira, mobile phones and technology more broadly, have double import – they are a means to progress, that enhance our minds, but also are a hazard to our well-being. He seemed to describe a destructive unconscious pull towards mobile phones which may unravel, undermine and deteriorate our capacities. He began with a statement about how mankind has always used and found tools:

> *The minute we want to do something, we try to make a tool that helps us do it. In making that tool and using that tool, the brain has to make neuron connections with the hands, so that it better learns how to use this tool. When you hold a pencil for the first time, is different to how you hold it now. A similar thing can be said of our phone. A phone is a sort of tool as well.*

He impressed upon the interviewer how significant mobile phones are, even at the level of neurology:

> *The minute our body got introduced to this device and started using it more often, it not only changed the dexterity of our hands, but it literally changed the synapses and the connections in our brain, and those neuro pathways… the phone, can literally change the physiology of your brain. Crazy.*

He went on to describe what frightens him about mobile phones, but did so in a manner that attempted to express indifference to that which frightens him:

> *What does come to mind is how we have developed a form of dependence – that is*

almost disturbing. But at the same time I don't really mind.

He offered an optimistic way forward when saying:

> *I feel like we are working towards a future that involves technology more. So if we can better learn to assimilate technology and be wary of its dangers while working towards its positives, then I feel like we will be working better.*

However, he expressed ambivalence, explaining how others come unglued with technology, how it blithely and perniciously affects them without their awareness:

> *A lot of people don't know what they are getting themselves into…a lot of our generation has a really short attention span. It is because our brains are so used to quick surges of dopamine from scrolling on Instagram and seeing a funny meme…to the point whereby any long-term dedication to a task – like reading a book from cover to cover, or really focusing on any one research topic etcetera, is actually a little bit harder for us than it used to be. It is because of our phone. We are so used to having quick satisfaction and very short-term goals realised, that we don't have a strong concept of long-term dedication spans. It was really scary what I found out.*

How he found this out remained unclear and I wondered whether he was researching phone use too, however, it might be that he learned this in class or even on YouTube. What was striking, however, was his use of the word 'I', which had been notably absent until this point. Throughout his interview Akira refers to 'we', talking in the abstract – we humans. While at times he includes himself in this category, when talking about the dangers of mobile phone use he removes himself – it is others who are at risk. Yet, Akira described the compulsion to check his phone, and how it feels irresistible. He and his friends seem to be trying to understand their preoccupied phone usage, by discussing it with one another:

> *You literally feel an itch when you are not connected…I have had friends of mine talk about having this urge to look and see if their phone has a message on them. Even if the phone did not vibrate, you just want to look; you just want to see; you just want to – I remember reading somewhere that every time we do that, and every time there is a confirmation of a message, it is kind of like – what is the thing I learned in psychology, whereby you don't always get a yes; but every time you do get a yes, it makes you want to look for the yes?*

I asked if he meant schedules of reinforcement and he continued, expanding on just how addictive and dangerous he considers this pull:

> *Yes, yes. Reinforcement basically. It is a simple thing they use in gambling as well. They don't always make you win; but those few times you do win, makes you want to gamble more. Those few times you have a message appearing on your phone, makes you want to stare at your phone, rather than what is actually going on outside.*

In the above excerpt, the 'we' changed to 'you' – as if he was defensively distancing notions of his own dependence or compulsion to check his phone. Significantly, he only used the first-person 'I' when referring to what he learned or thinks, reflective of an intellectual, rather than feeling self. He then turned philosophical and expressed how technology and mobile phones enhance humans; that he considers this to be our next form of evolution, a self-wrought 'levelling up' in our evolutionary history:

> *So the environment doesn't even have a chance to do that on us anymore. So these transhumanists believe that the next step is to use the environment with technology and what we know, to make humans better. We make technology that makes us faster, smarter, live longer etcetera…In a way our phones, I feel like they are dabbling in that transhumanism. People are different; this generation is different because of technology like the phone. So this whole thing with transhumanism was already happening in a way.*

In this excerpt, the first 'I feel' appeared. Although speaking rather intellectually, the idea that phones may be a step towards transhumanism seemed important and to carry emotional significance for Akira. I wondered if the fact he made phones the subject of the sentence, giving them a personified agency as 'aware agents' might be significant and evoke feelings in him. He continued his narrative, mentioning the ethics of progress and technological evolution; that there will be those who cannot afford technology and so are left behind, more vulnerable, because of it:

> *That gap is only getting widened by technology. Very few times is there a technology that actually goes back and pulls those that don't into the have. Those that have not, into the haves.*

Again, however, he pivots and sits on the fence:

> *But you know it is give and take. For every negative thing you can say about it, there is a positive; for every positive, there is a negative.*

Akira perfectly captured the ubiquity of phones, and their part in life despite how one may feel towards them:

One person telling you the worst experience is I have with the phone; the next person telling you the best thing I had. Both of them still having a phone in their pocket.

5.3.2. Connection and disconnection

Akira expressed a great enthusiasm for how mobile phones allow us to make a connection with others, particularly across vast distances:

The way the phone can transmit a person's thoughts and words, across space and time, in like a millisecond, to the point where someone across the world is reading your Facebook tweet the minute you have posted it on Facebook. They can respond. I think that is just the best thing about phones, that connectiveness.

He explained how his mobile phone has helped him make connections:

But just like talking to them, and you are like, this person is cool. Number, boom; there we go. Six months from now we are close friends. Without the phone it wouldn't necessarily be as easy to do that. So technology has helped.

He described how his mobile phone allows him to keep in touch with his mother and family easily but also how it doesn't seem to deepen connection for him:

I can call my mom anytime, and she is halfway across the country. Anytime I need to get help from my friends, it is just there…[but] I don't know. It is hard to tell if it has assisted in these personal connections or not. It has definitely in a way, but like I am trying to think – like if I didn't have my phone. What would change in the relationships that I have now? I feel like nothing much.

He appeared to be suggesting that phones increase access to others but not necessarily depth in relationships. Notably, he uses first-person 'I' to reveal he does indeed call his mother and at times, need help from his friends, and this allows us a glimpse of a self that desires personal connections, but that these seem distant – a problem with which even his phone cannot help him. He explained as follows:

It is hard to tell if it [his mobile phone] has assisted in these personal connections or not. It has definitely in a way, but like I am trying to think – like if I didn't have my phone. What would change in the relationships that I have now? I feel like nothing much. I would still have the same best friend, the same friend. Maybe we would just value the time we have in physical, because we don't have any other means of communication. So maybe the value of the relationship might even go up. But at the

same time, I think yes – the best way to describe it is, I would have a closer network of people here in Johannesburg without my phone, but I would not be able to communicate with all these other connections I have outside there. Whereas with the phone, I can communicate with all these people as well, but now this network in Jo'burg of face to face people that I see, isn't that tight, because I have this person's number, so why should I call that person?

He appeared to hold a fantasy that without his phone he would be more connected within his intimate relationships but that this would cost him the wider, albeit more surface level, social network that he has. He described how mobile phones can negatively impact relationships. He alluded to a negative incident he had experienced:

Phones can get in the way sometimes as well…Because now this person heard this thing that I posted on Facebook six months ago and now it is coming back to me. I am just like, dude it doesn't matter, it was Facebook. But it does matter to them, because they are seriously offended or affected by it. Or like there will be a picture on my phone, and someone will go oh my gosh, how did you get this picture? Boom, relationship over. Like these things can get in the way guys…

My curiosity was peaked and I tried to delve further by asking him what sorts of pictures might be on a phone. Akira responded:

Umm. I don't want to talk about it. Let us just say it is not always good pictures. It is better to not have a phone, because I wouldn't have had that picture.

Akira's avoidance suggested feelings of shame. His story appeared to highlight how what we do with our phones, for example on the Internet, or what private curiosities they store can cause difficulty in relationships when exposed. His defensive situating of the blame onto the phone – 'It is better to not have a phone, because I wouldn't have had that picture' – suggested an unconscious need to deny his own culpability and agency in the scenario. Splitting is also evident in that phones with their idealized potential for connection suddenly become dangerous and bad in his mind.

On the other side of that split, beyond personal relationships with their potential for misunderstanding and hurt feelings, the ability to connect to the wider public held enormous appeal, and it appeared as if Akira felt a part of a much larger process occurring continuously across time and space:

It [mobile smart phones] has taken this whole globalisation thing that we have been

> *nurturing as humans, and it has just made it more real. Like if I had to make a visual metaphor, it is like the brain – and you have got all synapses activating, sending electricity through the brain. You have got the globe, and all these phones communicating to one another, sending electricity signals across the globe. It is like the similar concept. So I think that is the best thing about phones.*

Akira considered phones to be a leap into the future, and spoke of how they may help us access a 'dimension' beyond ourselves or consciousness perhaps, perhaps even another level in a relationship:

> *I am really fascinated specifically with phones, because they keep us – we keep them so intimately close to us…I feel like if we can crack – phones have the potential to crack a fourth dimension that we don't even know is there.*

Talking about how the game Pokemon Go got people to get outdoors and connecting with each other, he said:

> *People that were indoors for days on end were going outside and they were nerds, but they were meeting up with one another and they were forming relationships etcetera, because the phone broke that fourth dimension that we didn't even realise was there.*

While Akira seemed to believe that mobile phones can assist us in breaking through something, in ourselves and with others, he also seemed to grasp that they can impede both of these things. Talking of mobile phone cameras, he said:

> *But now we all have cameras, and I see I happening all the time – where girls will be going out and they are eating; they are having a great time. Then oh no, let us post a selfie; they take out the phone and capture the moment. But in doing so they momentarily stop all laughter; all communication. They forget that they are even in the space, so that we can just take a picture. It is just so weird how technology can play with us…It is already gone; we took it away willingly. I remember a comedian even made a joke about it, about how he went to a kids show or something; all the kids were up on stage. All the parents were busy recording them on their phone. She was like guys your kid is right in front of you; you don't need to look at him through a 2-bit screen of pixels. Just put the phone down and be in the moment. But we don't do that. We are so used to these that we have to capture it here and take ourselves out of the moment in order to capture it here. It is kind of scary when you think about it.*

He seemed to give up thinking about it, acquiescing:

But it is a reality; it is what is happening. I think all you can do at this point is just ride the wave; and make as many cool memories as we can.

5.3.3. Selfhood and phones

Akira was fascinated with phones as an extension of the mind and seemed to regard phones as a tool for expression – a way to get "subjective stuff in here…out there":

…the phone has become an extension of – not only the body, but now the mind for the first time. You have created a tool that takes over subjective stuff in here, and allows us to get it out there… Like scaffolding of the mind being projected outside for anyone else to hook onto and capture, and to take a photograph and share.

Akira described how phones allow us to express a multitude of selves, and how phones have amplified this multiplicity of selfhood:

…This guy takes 3-minute videos, and he makes them look just so cool. He talks about technology and stuff. One of the things he talked about was how as humans, there is always a self, then there is the outside world; then there is the self trying to mediate itself in response to the outside world. You are a different person with your parents, with your friends, with your best friend, with your teacher. Because you are trying to mediate yourself based on this external influence. The minute the phone got introduced, this just changed everything. Because now the self didn't have to be constrained by this physical, but it could be anything. I can post 1 minute, and I am a huge basketball fan. Or I can make another account where I am just reporting news about what is happening in America. I can make another one that is personal; and it is just me. I can make – there are so many – suddenly the multi-faceted human became the super multimillion-faceted human, because of technology.

He described a contemporary sense of self that shifts and changes momentarily, and how mobile phones give us an inroad to seeing or capturing this, but how mobile phones are also limited in not being able to really capture the full extent of a person's complexity:

…everything that I post now, everything that I say now – sure it might reflect who I am, but it might only reflect who I am right now...It is just constantly shifting. Technology allows us to kind of express that shift a little bit better. But I don't think it will ever fully encapsulate myself. This self, or the person in question.

His reflections captured the potential that phones hold in terms of self-exploration. Phones allow access to the Internet as a space of play – of creative self-representation and experimentation with multiple aspects of the self – and perhaps, at times, access to the 'just me', the personal feeling self, as reflected back. However, his acknowledgement of the complexity of the self and technology's inability to grasp or 'fully encapsulate' it, seemed to reflect his own journey of self-discovery – his identity. His grappling with his own desires for real-life connection versus his desires to escape into a world of technology where he can 'master' his complexity and his needs seemed to be revealed in his feelings that "*we need to be wary about these kind of dangers, about where it might take it*". His apprehension about mobile phones extended to fears of a dystopic future where in-person communication is replaced by technology:

> *…with phones, I don't need to communicate with the person next to me. I can just do it here [makes gesture of using phone]. My fear is a society that is so desensitised to reality and just wants to be plugged into a virtual reality, that everything that we know and love physically just degrades. I remember watching Wally. I don't know if you know the animated movie? It is a little kid's movie that is about a future, where humans have left earth because earth…all the humans are in the space part, and their robots do everything for them. But there is one thing you notice at the get go. Every human is fat; they are huge; they can't move; they need to be suspended by technology and taken to places. As the movie unfolds you realise that humans didn't just leave earth because it became hostile; it didn't just become like that suddenly. It is because we got so dependent on technology, that we didn't water the plants. Eventually the oxygen that we know, we couldn't breathe it etcetera. That is the kind of future that I am worried about. One where technology is just so important, that what is actually important isn't important anymore. We forget that...that you forget you have a body almost…We can't have that guys; we can't. We need to communicate with one another as humans. We can't be so glued up on Facebook and WhatsApp, that we don't have a conversation with the person next to us. It is scary…Yes sure you can get connected with really cool people, but you are not hearing. You don't see and we don't feel the [emotion] in the speech etcetera. So the level of depth in connection here doesn't nearly match what is here [gestures to his chest]. A lot of people are focusing on what is here [gestures to his hand as if holding a phone].*

Akira's narrative revealed a highly ambivalent relationship with his phone. Simultaneously stimulated and excited about the possibilities that mobile phones represent, he also feared a future where human reliance on technology might end in a dystopian future. His intellectual wonderings about phones were, however, mirrored in his personal experience with his own phone, where he commented on his dependency on his phone:

> *One experience that comes to mind is the two times I have had my phone stolen. It is weird; it is almost traumatizing to be honest, because these things, they are part of us in ways that we don't realize until it is not there anymore. Oh, let me take a picture; the phone is not there. Let me just call; my phone is not there. Let me just; I can't, my phone. So, it sucks how much they have a hold on us. It is quite scary actually. This is me. The school life. It is all managed here. The phones are actually very intimate, hey? Because if I lose it, like dude it really sucks losing a phone. It sucks so much.*

He notes how mobile phones seem to have become an extension of ourselves, even physically:

> *I have noticed some people literally lose their mind if they can't find their phone. They get off the couch; it is not in their pockets; so they literally throw everything off the couch. They are oh it is in my room; the whole couch is a mess. It is crazy to see how they become so attached to our being; to our physical being.*

He describes his perception of the influence that mobile phones can have on mood and personality:

> *It changes our mood and makes the personality fluctuate even more sometimes. These little mechanical devices. It is crazy. I feel like we have given them so much power as humans. It is kind of like the whole money situation. Like we just give it so much power, as to the point where we are just like, it is too big, beyond us; we can't stop it now…But they are really powerful; they are really capable of changing behaviour.*

He appeared to defend against these fears through separating himself out from the mindless 'we' who 'give it so much power' and allow phones to thwart ambition and self-actualization:

> *I don't want to brag. But maybe with weaker personalities you get to a point where you don't want to be ambitious and see what you can do as a human. Because it is easier to see what everyone else is doing on Instagram. You forget that you have your own dreams and desires, because there is just so much more to distract you because of the phone. Suddenly you take the phone away, then this human – might be*

traumatised for one week, but then after that they can get over it; and self-actualise in ways that they couldn't before.

He seemed to imply that he may be able to use his phone to enhance himself. I tried to clarify this by asking if he uses his phone in service of self-actualization and he responded candidly reflecting the mix of what phones can offer:

No, I am also contributing to the Instagram browsing and the games etcetera. But that question – am I using it better to self-actualise? It is an interesting question, because if I said yes, I would be lying to you; but if I said no, I would also be lying to you. Because there are times I use it to just faff around on YouTube; but there are times that I actually use it to research stuff that helps me in my work, and helps me research things like passive income and financial security, and all these other things that I really do want out of life. And I wouldn't be able to do that without my phone. But then there are times that, like I said, I just faff around on YouTube, and I am looking at top ten scariest monsters. How is that helping me to self-actualise? Yes.

Interviewer: I suppose you could argue it either way, hey? That it might be like reading a book; or that it informs something in your mind?

Akira: It like plants a seed that can then grow in unexpected ways.

Akira's narrative was reflective of his developmental stage – exploring his identity, grappling with his needs, ambitions, desires, and shame. Phones were represented as a means for making and maintaining connections, for self-exploration, as access to knowledge and seeds of inspiration, and as neurons in a globally connected 'super-brain', perhaps reflective of his own intellectual and artistic ambitions, but also as holding the potential to reveal the darker, more shameful aspects of humanity – and perhaps himself. In his musings on 'real' life versus that of a technologically mediated life, he grappled with the irony in that how in our use of technology to connect, keep memories close, and manifest our desires, we miss out on opportunities for real connection.

5.4. Max (Maximus of Latin origin, can be used in the feminine or masculine in various languages: The greatest)

Max ambled into the room, and sat on the couch opposite me, shuffling further away as our conversation continued. He appeared younger than the grown man that he is, sporting a big coiffeur of hair not yet styled into its intended fashion. I experienced him as a poetic

Shelley-esque kind of character, ambiguous more than androgynous, delicate, and a bit pointy somehow. He explained that he is a postgraduate graphic design student. I found his manner to be intellectual, reflexive, endearingly awkward, with a sad undertone. He began the interview by telling me that he is bisexual, perhaps using the opportunity of the 'safe anonymity' of the interview space to practice. Indeed, reading between gendered lines, he did not seem to be two feet out of the proverbial closet but rather inhabiting some transitional position between identity terrains. As we spoke, he soothingly and repetitively rubbed the skin up and down his arm. He later switched to clutching a tissue, wringing it, unfolding it, and at times delicately bringing it up to his chin, as a Victorian woman might. Often looking away from me, I felt very sensitive towards him, gentle almost, responding to a psychological veneer that is likable, easy to talk to, but easily bruised. I wondered about a somewhat tenuous integration of self, which might be easily confused and mixed up by thoughts alone.

Max, living at home with his parents and his sibling, intimated that he comes from a family of modest means, and that he has always had to supplement his student life with part-time jobs as he is not a "trust fund baby with a credit card". He seemed to have acquired life experience from this and was reflexive about his sensitivity to being "taken on dates" and what could be perceived as the transactional nature of dating. His family sounded to be somewhat conservative and traditional, from whom he seems to hide his sexual identity. I imagined him to live a largely interior life at home, coming and going quietly - retreating to his room, with his thoughts, his phone, and his inner conflicts.

Max's narrative revealed that in addition to the everyday use of his phone to schedule work and university commitments, he primarily uses his mobile phone in service of exploring parts of himself as well as relating to others. He uses his phone to explore his selfhood, and sexuality, and to reflect on his thoughts, reactions and how he engages with others in relationships. Interpersonally he uses his mobile phone to maintain and grow pre-existing relationships, and as a way to initiate romantic and sexual relationships.

5.4.1. Socialising

For Max, contact with people through social media and apps such as WhatsApp appeared, to an extent, to mimic socialising that would take place in person:

> *I participate in multiple WhatsApp groups to talk with my friends, to provide, um, like, just like social commentary on like news and like memes or whatever, like we just talk through that…I put my friends in-like you almost put your friends in categories so I have my um friends from [various subjects] from last year. I have my…design friends in third year. And then I have my second year…design friends…I have my electrical engineering friends…from my first year, and all these groups of friends I manage and keep in touch with through my phone, through WhatsApp.*

Through WhatsApp, he maintains membership within several social groups. This contact appeared to be light, and playful and represent something of his development over the past few years – like a catalogue which keeps him connected to parts of himself as represented through the different subjects.

Max described also using his mobile phone when in the literal presence of others, to manage his internal states (like boredom or discomfort):

> *Every time you look at your phone, like, when I'm bored in a social situation. When I'm talking with friends or like the like the conversation just takes a small break, it's very easy to just take my phone out look at the time um scroll check if there's WhatsApp status updates or something and I dunno it's just, it's just weird…I dunno I think it's a way of breaking tension um, when, you want to continue the conversation but you don't quite know what to say it's very easy to, it's, it's very easy to just, okay uh maybe someone else is doing something at the moment so um, let me check if my friend posted a picture about um the drawings she did today or uhhm [long pause] or whatever.*

He reported using his phone to take a pause while with others, to avoid awkward emotional discomfort, to somehow keep the conversation going, but also to regulate himself. His mobile phone also seemed to act as a mediating object or buffer with regards to the expression of more vulnerable emotions with others. Max commented that, at times, a screen can encourage honesty: *"I dunno like I feel like it's easier to be honest with her when there's a screen between us…than…like I could very easily dismissively say hey I'm fine. Um, even if I'm not fine, um I dunno it's just, it's strange" (Max).* While his phone offers him a chance to be

honest about how he is feeling, it also appeared to offer him a way to edit and process his feelings in a reflexive manner:

> *Like when you're, when you're writing an essay almost and you write two or three paragraphs and then you go back and you read it and you're like, um I could actually write it like this and it would sound better and it would be easier to follow my train of thought, um than my first initial draft which I feel like talking to somebody in person would be that first draft almost always, so yeah*.

Interestingly, however, the ambiguity of communication over social media and instant messaging platforms also appeared, at times, to be anxiety-provoking and represent a form of intrusion for Max, where statements or bids for attention from friends could be made with no direct, clear expectation for a response. He spoke about a mentally ill friend who frequently posts memes and status updates that allude to her depression, but who does not ask directly for help:

> *[She] has these phases where she'll post like a hundred, like depressed memes…where she posts these as her WhatsApp statuses um, and then occasionally she deletes them like before the 24-hour thing kicks it off…she uses it to vent about her depression or her anxiety, like I haven't actually had that full conversation with her, which in hindsight I should probably, I dunno, talk to her about it…she uses it to send out like a cry for help and, very recently it's gotten like quite hectic and, it's gotten to a point where she's more self-aware of it - that people look at her WhatsApp statuses but then they don't like talk to her about the problems she's very clearly projecting that she has to other people - it's like people would rather look and then ignore the fact that someone they know is very obviously… saying that she has a problem and she needs some help…and it's kinda scary by the fact that by looking at those photos and those memes and those texts…that I am complicit in a whole number of people that are seeing these things and not actually confronting her about it or talking to her and seeing if she's okay…At the same time I could very easily convince myself that she's posting these images not because of a cry for help but a cry for attention. And like it's a double-edged sword because either way you cut it, it's problematic if you're ignoring this…And it doesn't always sit well with me, talking about it now, either I'm like, what am I doing? I should probably talk to her… so sometimes I guess that the phone can also be a way to send out a cry for help.*

I reflected that his friend's posts seem to be a cry for help that he can't unsee, that 'get at him'. Max then responded in a way which seemed to reveal some avoidance within him:

> *Yeah, but it's very easy to ignore it afterwards, like you've seen it and you know it's there, but it takes much less effort to just not address it and not talk to about it… even though it's in a public space.*

What seemed apparent in the excerpt is Max's conscious grappling with his guilt over not responding to his friend's communications, and his perhaps less conscious discomfort and irritation (*"recently it's gotten like quite hectic"*) at feeling 'set up' by his friend. The form of communication she is choosing is not a direct request to a particular other, but rather a public communication (*"even though it's in a public space"*) that does not have the same imperative of reply. Yet he is aware that his friend is upset by the lack of response she receives (*"she's more self-aware of it that people look at her WhatsApp statuses but then they don't like talk to her about the problems"*). While this scenario related by Max illustrates how social media posting offers opportunities for potential enactments (i.e. Max's friend possibly feeling ignored or rejected), it is significant that Max experienced his friend's posts as intrusive, or even manipulative. The fact that public posts do not have the same imperative of reply makes this kind of communication ambiguous, both real and not real, leaving it open to a multitude of interpretations, with each individual interpreting social interactions from within their own personal, emotional frame of reference.

5.4.2. Sexuality and romantic relationships

Max initially described his phone as a safe space for him to explore his identity and his emerging bi- and homosexuality in online communities, in which his phone appeared to be acting as space in which to enact and work through his internal conflicts:

> *I'm bisexual so like a lot of my um relationships, um kind of revolve around, um, very recently um like apps like Tinder so um….*

He wished to connect with other men in safe, unambiguous spaces, such as Tinder, yet his forays into online dating on his phone had disappointed him. Once connected to a partner, he experienced these relationships as shallow and lacking and found himself avoiding his phone when it was felt that the other needed 'too much' from him. This avoidance was framed as protecting himself from a sense of intrusion and protecting the other from his anger: "*avoiding my phone to avoid confrontation that could lead to an end of a relationship*".

While Tinder was experienced as allowing access to others and as removing some of the ambiguity (related to availability and sexual orientation) that is involved with socialising in person, it was also regarded warily. Max spoke about Tinder as being "*such a strange experience because, you're talking to this person almost anonymously, um 'cause I mean, they, their pictures are chosen, their names are chosen, you can lie about anything*". Max shared reservations he had about a relationship that he had conducted primarily over Whatsapp:

> *…that relationship entirely, occurred over Whats- over Tinder and then transitioned to WhatsApp and from there I think for a total of, for those full two months were constant communication over WhatsApp…where we would be, whenever we were apart we were talking on WhatsApp. If it was slowly message- like even if it was four or five messages a day it would be happening. And that was really interesting to me because by the end of the relationship when rose-tinted glasses wear off, um, I would actually get kind of frustrated by some of the messages, where I would message him back and he would almost immediately respond and I was busy doing something and I found myself actually just actively avoiding my phone…um…especially since it was my first serious relationship in a very long time, where, I dunno, I got to a point where I wanted to end the relationship, but I also kind of enjoyed the relationship, it was like, it was a good and a bad. And I think that, through the phone it was very easy to create this sense of a relationship without actually engaging with each other emotionally or developing a deep relationship with each other. I still feel like even after the relationship ended about two weeks [ago] now, that I didn't intimately know him*.

The connection to him offered by his phone to others, again, appeared to be experienced by Max as intruding into his life outside of the relationship. This was accompanied by a sense that connection and communication through a phone felt superficial. Recounting another connection he made that began on Tinder, he said:

> *It was just very interesting because the first person I met immediately, um, was very um, he was very nice and he was very friendly and like we hadn't really done anything during the date, we hadn't held hands or whatever, and, when I dropped him off at his place because he didn't have a car at that time um, like, we immediately made out for almost no logical reason. I didn't feel like I had an intimate connection with this person. But, that was just like that just happened*".

Here Max seemed to be commenting on a common complaint regarding online dating and 'hookup culture' – that encounters that begin on the likes of Tinder tend to have a solipsistic nature where one thing leads to another by virtue of how the connection was made – that there is an expectation to 'hook up', and that this can be disconnected from an authentic unfolding experience between two people. He reflected at length on what it means to meet on Tinder and to have WhatsApp as a function in relationships. The beginning of the relationships and their evolution with the admixture of in-person body and face-to-face contact with contact online via WhatsApp were experienced by Max as missing depth and ironically, connection. While facilitating of relationships, a lack of authenticity or 'realness' was experienced:

> *…well with Tinder that immediately removed that entire guessing game. And yeah, like it just made it ten times easier to try and get a relationship, even if the relationship was more shallow or less genuine I guess, because I don't feel like I had an intimate emotional, like connection with the people I went on dates with…it was just weird to have that option at my fingertips that I could just repeatedly swipe through um images of, of people that are like attractive, and then [long pause] that was just strange because it felt very shallow and…I didn't feel exactly proud of it, but, you're basically just judging people by their looks and a text box at the bottom…And, it was just so weird because then you get matched and I dunno how to like have that kinda conversation with someone. Where, like you both like hey I think you're physically attractive so we're now matched by this strange application, um I have a general sense of where you live or work or something and, like let's just have a random conversation and we both going to avoid the fact that we here because we kind of wanna maybe have sex. And it's just so, it was so alien to me I didn't know how to deal with it, but yeah…um everything that like gets said suddenly, has subtext, it's like are you trying to just get in my pants? Um, and there's like a layer of trust that you have to build because it took a few days of talking over this application before, we decided okay uh maybe we can meet there, or uh maybe we can meet there or here's my phone number, add me on WhatsApp, please don't send me a picture of your dick*.

It seemed that in searching out safe spaces to explore his sexuality and what it means to be in a relationship with another person, paradoxically, these apps seemed to move too quickly, too shallowly for him. While he went to Tinder to seek something, he expressed exasperation

at what he got – a man who kept pushing for more sexual contact despite Max quite vehemently not wanting sex or the "*romcom holding hands and skipping in public*". He appeared to be seeking a meaningful relationship, with the potential components of friendship and sexuality, but struggling to find this. While this may indeed reflect something of the culture and nature of these apps, this difficulty may also reflect something inside of Max – that he has trouble with beginning and maintaining relationships, in negotiating intimacy, closeness and distance. Of Tinder, he says:

> *I'm probably not gonna download that again um…'Cause like overall I got a positive experience out of it but I didn't feel, happy about it. In the beginning. I didn't feel comfortable with what I was doing, that I could literally just I'm talking to two people at one time and I'm still flicking through pictures of other people so I can get another person to maybe talk to that might be better and that I'm trying to hunt the best, like potential partner in this application based on looks, a name, a very short job description, and then a random description that they can choose. It was just really weird for me*.

Intimate relating appeared to be confusing and frustrating for Max. The struggle is captured in his experience of his partner's texting style, where he would *"get kind of frustrated by some of the messages where I would message him back and he would almost immediately respond*". In this comment about WhatsApp, the limits to Max's desired connectivity became evident. On wanting to end the relationship, he said:

> *I was constantly weighing what would be more painful for him, and actually not caring much about what was important to me, which was, I was getting frustrated every time he messaged me and I would be lying every time I responded to him…And that there's no actual sub-like there's no subtext to an SMS almost. You can't pick up that this person's upset that you're pestering them. And I dunno, it, just towards the end of that relationship, I-like I was actively avoiding my phone to not deal with these, incongruencies with what I was saying and how I was presenting myself to him*.

Again, Max's discomfort with the ambiguity of communication over social media platforms is apparent. While framed as a limitation of text communication, the lack of emotional transparency he bemoans above ("*there's no actual sub-like there's no subtext to an SMS almost. You can't pick up that this person's upset")* could also be seen to reside within Max. He chose not to communicate his frustration at the frequency of communication for fear of

causing his lover pain. The complexity of what was being offered was not lost on Max: he appreciated his lover's concern for him and the opportunity to explore his sexuality, which simultaneously carried a taboo on some level for him, however his acute awareness that his partner's seemingly concerned gestures were also a way to ensure 'digital follow up' from Max so that separation could be avoided, was experienced as smothering at times. The excerpt below captures these multiple levels of relating, and interpretation:

> *…it's also that like being in a relationship, having someone who cares for you, and having someone that when I'm working late, that this person genuinely cares if I get home safe or not, and, something that kept actually coming up in the relationship was that, it was almost like it was a secret relationship. No one that he knew, knew that he was dating me and vice versa even though we did have a mutual friend that actually had no idea that we had a relationship until it ended. And he had this constant fear that if something happened to me or something happened to him, we'd only find out much later, and that we'd just have this like random radio silence from one another…And I never had that anxiety that someone would randomly get in an accident or whatever, but because of that reason he always wanted to make sure that I got home safely, and that was very strange because, it was an act of care…and I saw it as an act of care even though it was a bit annoying. But it also served as a way to continue our conversations. So if I'd leave his home and I'd drive home he'd always tell me to message him when I get home and I'd always jokingly say 'why don't you message me now and when I respond it means I'm home' and, like that was just how it kind of worked out and it was just strange that, that connection where, like at the end of a social physical encounter, there would always be a digital follow-up…that I'm home safe, hey we can continue talking about something…there was never a goodbye in that relationship for better or worse, except for good night*.

While Max's partner's fears are somewhat understandable, given the secret nature of their relationship, Max's resentment at having to manage his partner's anxiety was clear ("*why don't you message me now and when I respond it means I'm home").* Again, a pattern emerged wherein Max experiences social media as intrusive and as a means for the other to 'manipulate' him. It appeared that it may be Max's internal world that contributes to his repetitive experience of online relationships, and it becomes plausible to wonder whether his description of these relationships as distant, where "*it was very easy to create this sense of a*

relationship without actually engaging with each other emotionally or developing a deep relationship with each other", may, in fact, be perpetuated by Max's wariness to engage. By positioning the anxiety and 'neediness' in the other, he avoids his own. It was ironic that the final goodbye to the relationship occurred over the phone on a call.

Towards the end of the interview, Max mentioned a worry he had had when he was an adolescent, he had worried that he had a grave condition for which he wished to get assessment and help. His parents dismissed his worry telling him he couldn't possibly have this condition. He used his phone to turn to the Internet to find answers but these felt unsatisfactory. During the narration of this experience, I had a disruptive coughing fit and choked up. He expressed concern for me and then quickly moved on. It seemed that he came to the interview perhaps seeking some clarity about himself, using the guise of research participation as a legitimizing way to enter a 'therapist's office', but something blocked the (air)ways to truth/resolution.

5.5. Thulani (isiZulu: 'Be Still, Be Quiet')

Thulani is a person of contradiction: tweed coats and bowties evoked in the researcher's imagination when arranging the interview via email; dreadlocks and jeans delivered in person. A performing arts postgraduate student, the expression 'still waters run deep' applies. In his presence his body is so still, contained, so slow as to be almost stilted; you might think him to be very calm. However, when watched closely, his body and speech give a hint as to his paralyzing anxiety and sadness, his aloneness. When he speaks, it is like watching a film where there are slight pauses between frames, little discontinuities which evidence the fragmented nature of his thoughts and words. He seems to be a timeless statue; holding something in his frozen image of thought and concern – like Rodin's statue The Thinker, but a wasted, melancholic thinker. At times, it is as if he is locked in - he has overwhelming thoughts and feelings swirling around inside but can't get his tongue to assist the words out of his throat. Despite staying in residence on the university campus, which presents many opportunities for socializing, he consciously chooses isolation in his room. Inhibited, he prefers to text message his friends and boyfriend, even when in their presence. His boyfriend is reported to express confusion at the split presented by the eloquent, expressive Thulani in WhatsApp messages and the inarticulate, shy Thulani he is in person.

He actively avoids contact with his lecturers and supervisors, preferring to email or WhatsApp instead of meeting for supervision sessions. Schizoid defences seem to predominate in his interaction and his narrative – he feels most himself when alone until he comes undone and then he needs the sound of his mother's voice to help him cohere an unintegrated/disintegrated self. He always is sure to have his phone on his person, and when he forgets it he feels panicked and cannot continue his day until he has retrieved it. He also carries his phone charger and a plug adaptor at all times, so that his phone, and his connection to his mother, never 'dies'.

For Thulani, there was an ever-present theme throughout his narrative, that centred on maintaining a connection with others through his mobile phone. It also involved maintaining some sort of connection to his inner life and sense of self. His phone allows him to access and express himself in ways that he struggles without it. When asked what life was like for him before he had a mobile phone, he described being a "homebody", returning from school and being alone, amidst daily life with his mother and siblings. He described how things seemed to open for him socially when he came to university and got a phone and how he tried many apps that had connecting with others as their primary feature.

5.5.1. Maintaining connection with others

Thulani appeared to struggle with affect regulation and maintaining an internal sense of going-on-being. His phone, because it makes possible communication and connection with his mother in particular, seemed to help him keep his proverbial balance, or help him re-find it when it became lost to him:

> *Uhm especially my mother uhm whom I haven't seen since I left home in Jan to-to come this side sooo, yeah I'm I mean I make-uhm I usually make uuhhm, remarks after if-if I'm with friends and sheee [stumbles for words] I was just conversing with her on the phone and I'm just like, my mothers' voice though, 'cause it-it legit has the thing where it-it when I feel down and I just send her a call back*[5] *and then she-she phones and it-*

[5] In South Africa, mobile phone operators offer a service where one can send a 'please call me' message to another person at no cost. Culturally, mobile phone users understand this as a semi urgent attempt at making contact in the face of having no funds for making a phone call and so the onus is on the other to call back.

ahhhh [loud sigh] just hearing her voice sometimes it it's very it's very calming and I always say to her that, do you-do you-do you understand exactly what your voice has.

Talking to his mother on the phone helps to right his balance, to reconnect him to her love for him which helps him to feel okay because it helps to regulate his internal stability. He said further:

like it has it legit has that thing where it makes me feel [long pause] it makes me feel, valued. It makes me feel loved…cause she-sh-she has a tender tone to-to-to-to like the way she speaks.

While speaking out loud he seemed to realize how profound his need for his phone, and for his mother is:

So, and-and that's-that's-that for me-and I never actually thought of it like that, I think that's-that's why for me [long pause] my phone is-is the thing that I-I-I-I-I, hold very uhm close to me all the time and when I don't have it, it feels weird…wow, the connection that I actually have uh have with-with-with her via my-my cell phone and how [long pause] and to s-to communicate with her as-as-as-as often as-'cause I mean sh-we-we speak once or twice a day, uhm sometimes we do speak less especially when-when I'm busy with school work. And I find that sometimes I-I-I get a bit-a bit anxious when-when say I-I'm I've been busy with school work and then I see a missed call, I'm just like always…so, it's pretty rou-I never actually thought that literally about it and-[so, as] I'm actually speaking now I'm just like realising just how valuable my-my phone is in that it-it helps uhm keep in touch with her and, it's-it's the tool that makes me feel [long pause] through-through it I receive love from her, I dunno how to articulate exactly what I'm-what I'm, what-I'm f-feeling or what (I'm wanting) to-to-to express In terms of my connection with-with my phone.

5.5.2 Managing social anxiety

His phone and the distance that it represents seemed to be experienced as mediating the anxiety of face-to-face contact. Thulani spoke about how his phone allows him to express thoughts and feelings that he would struggle to express in person:

My phone…plays [a] role…in terms of my interactions with people and, 'cause I find it easier, to I mean when I, when I met my partner, it was so much easier for me to say exactly what I was thinking in that moment and for me to express myself uh more

authentically [when messaging]…whereas with the first time I met him or the first couple of weeks that we started um, you know getting into the knowing each other phase, it was quite tough for me to actually speak to him face-to-face…and I would always after our meetings I would always just text that like, this is also what I meant to say but like I couldn't say it, um, to your face so I think it's actually, so ja it helps me 'cause I express myself more confidently, when I'm texting and I'm not really, up close to a person…and the kinds of things that you're able to say, on text, but not face-to-face are the intimacies or loving things… it's usually just um, intimate things some like, sexual things as well where I'd be like, afraid to say them to their face…I mean, he even says, 'but why are you-like', and he says-uh- he said this a couple of times, 'you're different when we are chatting…you sound more confident…you tend to be quiet when we meet'…When I've texted something, or when I've written something, I come across differently, I'm received differently…We have-we tend to have more productive, better conversations when we texting, but when we are together, it tends to be quite awkward in parts. I keep quiet because I don't know how to say what I'm thinking… which is why, I think my phone is-is better. Because I need it, I need it to-to express myself better.

Thulani's clear social anxiety meant that he seemed to need the buffer of the phone to find his words, thoughts and courage to talk. The mobile phone also appeared to act as a buffer during the expression of aggression or in the management of conflict:

Thulani: But I find it easier, um, to express via texting, like there's some, disinhibition almost. I don't have inhibitions when I'm texting. I'm just like, I go in…so this is what I was thinking and sometimes, even arguments, where I'm just like, this was actually not cool blah blah blah, this, what happened here, I actually didn't like it, or, okay um, well even sometimes when I have to apologise, it's easy for me to just, text an apology or voice note an apology…my phone is sort of like the, the…perhaps even like a mask through which I can get to express myself…almost like a buffer, a middle…

Interviewer: Protection almost?

Thulani: Yes, 'cause sometimes you are afraid of receiving like, backlash, um, based on what you have shared or what you have expressed. So rather it be from a distance and, having that phone as your buffer.

5.5.3. Maintaining a connection to selfhood through his phone

In the following quote we see an example of how drastic Thulani's need for his phone was, and how it helps to order and cohere his state of mind:

> *Sometimes I spend the whole ni-like we-we we would be chatting for hours and hours uhm voice note uhm, just general texting conversations and what not so, as cliché as it-as-as it uh may sound but I [stumbles for words] it keeps me sane.*

He described an emotional muddle that can overwhelm him much of the time, and how this has a bearing on trying to communicate his thoughts:

> *I feel tied up inside a lot so, there's like. A collection of thoughts and I have to pick them out uhm carefully, and I think that's why it slows down my my verbal expressions, because I'm also at the same time trying to- to carefully ah-select the right words or the right ways of phrasing certain things, that's [long pause]. And-th-I dunno what the foun-I dunno what the foundation of that is or like what's the source where does it come from.*

But with his phone, he finds his voice, his words, and an internal cohesion:

> *But, yeah and with having a phone I'm just like [clapping hands] yes it's easy for me to or text rather out loud. Uhm, what I'm wanting to say I- I hold back a great deal when I'm-I'm engaging with-with a person face-to-face.*

His mobile phone seemed to help him in numerous ways at a very granular level. He always has it on him, he carries around his charger as his *"battery is pretty dramatic"* so that he can keep his phone *"alive"*. It seemed that his phone offers him a lifeline to stay alive, to keep his psychological battery charged and to make his existence more tolerable and manageable with constant access to music which makes it *"easy"* and *"quite fun as well"*.

5.5.4. Dependency

Thulani's narrative revealed a highly dependent relationship with his phone. Thulani carried his phone, together with his charger wherever he goes, noting that:

> *Thulani: [It] keeps me company…for me my phone is the thing that I-I hold very, um, close to me all the time and when I don't have it, it feels weird…just to ensure that it's always alive and I can-I can use it whenever I feel I need to, and it keeps me company as well…I remember, early this year, I got a scare so I, i-it had died and I tried charging it and it wasn't charging and I remember how, an-and I was actually even studying,*

> *and I-I couldn't, because I kept just trying to leave it and see if it will charge and it wasn't so, that actually threw me off and I couldn't concentrate on what I was doing 'cause I was wanting for my phone to work…*
>
> *Interviewer: Just to know, it's okay, it's alive?*
>
> *Thulani: Yeah and it wasn't, so I was just like, freaking out slightly…*

He went so far as to say: "*My phone is [long pause] my life… [snickers]*". He described the extent to which it is not just something he uses, but how it is something he seems to need profoundly:

> *I don't know, I need it. I don't-yeah I don't know what it is but [long pause] it's-I mean it's a mere device but also the effects that it-it actually has in-and the role that it plays in my interactions, it's actually quite huge, it's actually quite profound…now thinking about it, it's amazing the-exactly what power, um, a mere device, has in my life and my interactions with people. I mean, for a large part it's quite helpful, it's a thing that mitigates, and it helps when, when I-I fail to be quite, uh, in terms of my-my interactions with people and how I express myself*.

5.5.5. Impeding connection

Despite his phone offering him so much, he is also aware of how it interferes with ongoing connections and potential relationships. He describes how he doesn't have many friends, and that his phone also interferes with friends he does have or could be making. He also wondered whether his use of texting or messaging was preventing him from having to develop his ability to express himself in person, stating that:

> *sometimes it's-it's pretty bad for me that it keeps me, um from having sort of like um face-to-face or contact with other people and I find that I'm focused on my phone the whole time, ja you sort of like lose track of time, and you-you don't interact with-with people much because you are busy on your phone and, ja for me that's bad*.

In these instances, phones were represented as 'getting in the way' of face-to-face intimacy in relationships IRL (in real life). The same difficulties were apparent in Thulani's relationship with his partner. It appeared that Thulani's partner experienced the phone as detracting from the development of their relationship in person. For Thulani, his phone seems to offer him a sort of proximal distance which helps him to connect: "*But when, we are away from each other and we are texting, [long pause] it's it-it flows (it's,) like seamless*". He noted that his

partner found his over-reliance on texting frustrating, clearly wishing that he and Thulani could speak more openly and deeply in person:

> *It's a different ways of expressing myself, and…I mean, going back to specifically uh my partner as well, and his frustrations in part, with how I tend to not say certain things when we're together. I text like-send a text…and he's like, okay why are we not having this conversation when we are together?…'cause it's habitual for me…where I finish off my thoughts, via text instead of…I filter a lot when I'm with him. There's certain things that I don't say. There's certain things that I-ja-I just like keep inside and then, the moment I'm, um, away, from him, I then express that, so ja… what actually tends to frustrate my partner in that…he's always-he's always saying um, you are very weird. 'Cause like, it's like you have two different personalities*.

Thulani's phone appeared to represent a lifeline to others, and a buffer in social situations that feel too frightening. His phone seemed to allow him to express parts of himself that he cannot access in person. In person, his anxiety overwhelms and inhibits his self-expression, but with his phone he can be articulate and bold, expressing his needs, desires and anger. He was aware, however, that his reliance on his phone for self-expression, at times hampered his ability to connect in person. At the end of the interview he expressed concern that the interview may have been a waste of my time and how he hoped that there was something useful to me in what he had shared. I found myself wanting to reassure him that the interview had been very fruitful - I truly had found the interview fascinating, delicate, and sort of like a therapeutic conversation (the latter concerned me as I worried about what had been brought up within him without the therapeutic bounds to help him process it, I was also concerned about his potentially delicate psychology and wanting to assist him as a therapist). In my efforts to have him feel valued I was perhaps overly reassuring which then left me feeling that I had come off insincerely and concerned that I may well have confirmed his anxieties.

5.6. Nthabiseng (Sesotho: 'Make me happy')

Nthabiseng is a postgraduate political science student, who has always enjoyed a rich civic and social life. On speaking with Nthabiseng, I was impressed by her activism, and shamed at my own lack thereof. Many kinds of titles seem linked to her – political activist, leader, helper, adviser, diligent student, torchbearer. Ostensibly she is a remarkable person, however it was difficult to connect with her, attune to her - she was a defended subject (an

interviewee whose defences against anxiety thwart conscious meaning making) (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Some clues to her presentation may lie in a divided self. She is in touch with her public self, who is socially and politically well connected, however, she seems disconnected from a private, unacknowledged desire to shed some of the burdensome weight that goes along with all her titles. She attempts to manage this ambivalence regarding connection with others, in which her habitual pattern of relating appears to be 'the capable helper', by limiting her phone usage and contact-ability. She legitimizes this mobile phone withdrawal by letting others know through her voicemail recording that she is unavailable because she is busy with her work. This seems to serve a dual purpose of protecting others' feelings, as well as managing her image as a hard-working, smart woman of the future. In her use of her mobile phone, we see Nthabiseng grappling with the ambivalence of separating from her mother. This plays out in her mother's bids for her attention and how Nthabiseng manages these in the context of forging her own place in the world. She seems in the thick of separating out from her roots and her mother, in what appears to be a developmentally appropriate investment in the self. Waddell (2018), in a nod to Virginia Woolf, describes such a process as finding a room of one's own, internally. However, in doing so, anxiety is provoked, a worry that she may miss an important call or message signalling need for her. Nthabiseng has the additional complication of growing up culturally in a more collectivist culture where there is an injunction to look after one's family when oneself becomes an adult, but also "growing up" so to speak in the Westernized environment of the academy where a more "individualized" identity becomes possible.

5.6.1. The ubiquity of mobile phones

As her studies have intensified, however, she has found her mobile phone to have become intrusive in that others contact her at inopportune moments. Her narrative revealed a struggle to be 'unavailable' to others and some creative managing of others' access to her by downgrading her phone to a very limited phone with no data so that it makes it trickier for others to reach her. This strategy proved cumbersome though, as she then found it difficult to negotiate the admin of her life as a postgraduate student without WhatsApp and ready access to apps that require data. Also, more tellingly, this seemed not really to provide a solution to the intrapsychic conflict she experiences between her wish to be a go-to person for others, but simultaneous resentment of the demands that others then make on her, and

her struggle in saying no when asked for help. Overarching Nthabiseng's entire narrative was her puzzlement at how to negotiate how entrenched mobile phones have become in life, and particularly in her life. At the time of interview, she was trying various ways to minimize the part her mobile phone plays in her life. Her reasons for this are explored more fully below. She went as far as trying not to have a smartphone, which was tremendously incompatible with her work and study situation. So, she ended up using two phones, a simple or 'dumb' phone with no Internet connection, and a smart phone. However, she set up the smart phone to only use university Wi-Fi data (so she is unreachable unless she is near and connected up to free Wi-Fi). She said of current times:

> *[the] digitisation of the world…So, I have realized…basically, [phones] play a very big role in terms of navigating the world …and it is something that we cannot escape though, I think, because opportunities are on your phone.*

Her attempts to go without a smart phone appeared to have sparked critical questions in Nthabiseng's mind about the larger structural, socio-political meanings of phones, and how the access to the world they provide allows one to have awareness and a voice. She commented on how even many impoverished people and communities have access to mobile phones, despite limited resources, but critically perceives that not having decent access to the Internet continues to keep the have-nots at a disadvantage. She said:

> *Because even people who do not have Smart Phones have cell phones…I was thinking about how, what about the people who [don't] have Smart Phones. Do they not have Twitter…You know…there is a lot of people who read the news online. You know, they watch YouTube, you know, they are on their phones. So, I am like what happens to the people who are like in communities, who do not have cell phones? Does that mean that they are not going to know what is happening? You know, but that is also causing a wave in some sort of way to be mobile-ly connected, because that is where, that is where they are going to have a say in what is happening [online]. And then look at their hashtag. If you do not have a Smart Phone, you cannot even take a hashtag Zuma must fall...Like, where is your say? Do you have a say if you do not have a Smart Phone? So, it is one of those things that like the power of you having a voice right…[you] have to be somehow mobile-ly connected… it is unavoidable in terms of where you are like your place in the world…*

Further, her growing separation from her mother as she grows into her own life was revealed

in her narrative regarding her mobile phone, complicated by the opposing cultural mandate to look after one's elders and the academy's westernized pull into a more individualized life. Nthabiseng's account provided an interesting snapshot into the nuanced and complicated identity negotiations that many young South African adults are likely to be making, which include social issues like that of technology, and how to manage both collectivist and individualistic identities.

5.6.2. Unsuccessful attempts to do away with her mobile phone

Nthabiseng had attempted to do away with her phone, but it seemed because of her own 'place in the world' as a political leader at the university, a fledgling professional, and a fledgling child who has left her mother's nest to begin building her own, she remains tied to being contactable. She cannot do away with having a phone. Only two people, her mother and her boyfriend, have the number to her simple phone which she defines as a kind of emergency phone:

> *So, actually a point I would like to make actually before we start, it is something that I am personally experiencing right now. So, because…life is like so hectic right now, I actually detach. So, what that means for me is that I am constantly changing my phone so, I will not be using my Android. I am going to be downgrading. Let me show you [shows the interviewer her two phones]. So, I am downgrading…to a not so smart phone. So, it does not have WhatsApp, but the problem is, I have been trying to let go of my Smart Phone for a while, and I cannot let it go because it has been a process which I am still trying to do… because I figured that like, even if I change phones, but I keep the sim card, people will call me, 'Nthabiseng, where are you?'. 'Nthabiseng, I need your help with something'. So, I feel like if less people have my number then less people can get a hold of me, then the more I can do. So, it is not just in terms of social media, but with calls as well. So, now the thing is that my work is on my cell [phone], in terms of like, I work part-time, and we have a group - work group. So, anytime the roster is done of who is working where, it gets posted on WhatsApp…with your shift…So, already that becomes [difficult]…So, I have been trying to work out how I am going to disconnect from that world…Do we ever have time to ourselves to actually book time out from that world?*

She lamented not knowing how to negotiate not having a mobile phone and how it seems

more socially acceptable if it were broken than if she does away with it:

> *So, I feel like I should not come with a problem and be like, oh, I do not have a phone anymore, so I do not know how I am going to do this, but I need to find a way that can work for all of us. So, I feel like I need to have my voice too.*

The people in her life appeared to struggle to accept her rejection of having a mobile phone, almost as if it were a subversive act:

> *Because you get so many questions, than if your phone works. Like, people do not just accept it because they feel that they can probably influence you just to keep it for work… I forget my phone like at home sometimes or I will be leaving and when I get here, and I say: 'I do not have my phone'. Some people are like 'how do you leave that?'. That is the first thing you look for when you leave the home, but like, I do not know.*

Nthabiseng spoke about how she does not have many social networking applications on her phone, but does use her phone sometimes to keep up to date with the news. She described how she limits her phone usage and her contact-ability:

> *I have not put data in my Smart Phone because I am like, I do not want to buy any data because it is time to detach… So, I was like okay, if I really want to connect with my Smart Phone, I will make a conscious effort to go to one of the Wi-Fi hotspots and do it. And most of the time I am too busy or too tired to do that, but I am saying that if I do need to link up …[I] make a conscious effort to go there.*

She described trying to be present when she is with others:

> *…my phone, you know, not even that I want to, I hate being in a room full of people being on my phone. Sometimes I make a conscious effort not to. So, when I hang out with friends I do not like being on my phone. So, for me it is just one of those things that come naturally for me…*

She went on to explain the feeling of being 'released' from the hold of her phone:

> *I feel so open because the…What is the car that is open with the top of it?... [a] convertible. So, for me standing in a convertible…that is how I see it.*

5.6.3. Connection to others

Despite her wish to be rid of her phone, Nthabiseng described how her mobile phone allows her to keep connected to others, including her mother who lives far away in a more rural area:

…it brings those far from you closer in a sense…so we can actually just talk to them.

Despite this desire for connection, her ambivalence about this was evident. She described how she uses running out of airtime as a boundary, and how this is complicated by Internet calls which improve accessibility. She ensures decreased accessibility to herself by limiting her access to the Internet, using mostly Wi-Fi hotspots rather than mobile data:

> *Time wise, like, you have to make phone calls or Internet phone calls to limit the phone call conversation until the phone call starts so your airtime is done you are like, 'oh, my airtime is done, I have to go'. And then you go and you can get back to what you were doing.*

She describes how she tends to be a point of contact for others and how this can become too much for her. Her recent changes with her mobile phones are an attempt to remain connected to others but with limitations. It seems that it is difficult to say no to others, and so if her phone is out of data, it is an easier negotiation for her than giving an outright no.

> *Jeez so with that, I kind of like try and take precautionary measures so it is not like I have completely disappeared off the face of the earth. Like I am completely disappearing [they cannot get hold of me. So, I laid the foundation [by limiting her contact-ability]…So, for me the distractions are difficult…even my voicemail, they were like, 'Hi, my name is Nthabiseng, I am not available. I am currently away so please leave a message and I will get back to you'. So, there is that revamp thing of 'oh, she is studying'.*

She explains that she has a lot of networks and people often come to her with community, personal or student body issues that they want her involved in, she says:

> *So, I get a lot of those calls… I am the go-to for most people who need something or like, 'oh Nthabiseng I need your advice' or something like that where I feel like how will you know where I am, and it is just like most of the other calls that I am trying to limit…So, I can focus on my studies.*

She reflects on how the person she is informs this cycle where others seek her out, that she has a part to play in the dynamic:

> *I remember when I tried to detach in third year and people said…'we hardly see you'*

and I am just like, actually stop following me around, but then I realise, actually they did not follow me around, it is just the person that I am. You know what I mean. It means that I allow it into my life by providing for these people who are literally following me around…I am still busy…what am I busy doing? And I think that, that is the lifestyle that I live, literally. And ja, right now, I am just always connecting with people and enjoy because I cannot imagine my life without research or like without doing stuff. I remember during that period I met some of my friends, because I socialise with a lot of people…And they were like to me, 'where have you been?' I am like ja, no, 'I am taking a break and stuff' and we always joke like, ja, 'you always try to take a break but you cannot break'…So, it is just that sometimes I cannot control people calling me and asking me, but it is like I would rather not because I just want to do this or that, or disappear in a day to go and live like those around me.

She has limited the people who have her telephone number, but has some guilt about this:

However, the other day it made me rethink that it is just better that I should give it to my close friends. I have like, I like to communicate with my friends. I have like eight people who is generally my close friends. Literally, I am their go-to person. Like when they are in trouble, or they are crying, they phone me. So, with that being said, the other day I remember sometimes I purposefully do not call. Even when they did phone, I did not answer…and I had it on because there was something I needed to do so I was like oh, okay, I am not going to answer. So, the other day, so, even when I answer I really need to concentrate like, ah, my friend called me. One of my other best friends and she was like, 'Nthabiseng where are you? I need to talk to you'. Seriously, like right now?...So, she thought I was just kidding but I repeated it because she did not know what is going on. She was like, 'are you on campus?' So, because I live on res, I am kind of always on campus. So, when I am on campus, I cannot lie to them and say 'no, I will call you back'. So, I am like 'yes, I am still on campus but'… she responded like she was like [needing] cheering up, like, she was really not in a good space. You know, like it was really horrible for her. She was really…She needed a good friend, and I am one of her only good friends. She has other friends but it kind of feels like, I feel like I am the person who understands her the most so she calls me. So, she was really like, joh, she is married, but even though I am not married, she could still call me because she knew I am the person that she can trust to talk to. So after that I felt bad for feeling bad that

I answered because when I answered I was like, 'oh, I never should have answered', but once I have spoken to her I am like, oh, I [am] answering your call because how is she going cope? [The interviewer says 'she needed you']. Yes, she really did. So, then like I remembered she actually really needed me and…just trying to be selfish with my time but it was a good thing that I answered. You know what I mean…So, now I am back negotiating like how do I let go of my phone when there are people who keep phoning me to talk to somebody like my close friend?...Is it really possible with what I am trying to do? Is it going to work? Like, you know, because I realised that I am not the only person in the world. I am sure she could have called her aunt or whatever, but like, I really take that responsibility on myself, but I felt like she needed me to talk to me at that point. She could have called her aunt if she wanted her aunt…but she called me and she wanted to talk to me about that, you know. So, I am just like, okay, like, you never know the purpose of the call sometimes, you know.

It is evident that Nthabiseng's identity is tied up with being the one that people need, however, her mixed feelings about this are evident. It also feels burdensome to be needed. It appeared that her phone is the site where her ambivalence about being needed is played out.

5.6.4. Mobile phone as an ambivalent connection to her mother

Nthabiseng's struggles with managing her mobile phones and the connectivity to her that the phones provides seems to be undergirded but her experiences of being needed but also being burdened by the needs of others. She values being helpful to others, but also seems to resent this. Nthabiseng's ambivalent difficulties with being needed appeared to be linked to her relationship with her mother. Her guilt and anxiety appear to hamper her ability to set boundaries regarding her contact-ability with others, but most notably with her mother. She reported struggling to draw a boundary or not accept her mother's calls because she worries about her. She said:

Even with my mom as well. So my mom is alone, when I'm here she stays alone. So when I'm here, I'm also alone. Now my mom, she likes calling me…she'll be calling me: 'how you doing?' She wants to stay in contact and sometimes I'll be like 'mom, we'll talk on the weekend'. But again my mom is going through a rough time, she suffers from depression, so with that being said, so like I can't totally distance myself. So when her calls comes, sometimes I'm like, does she want to chat or is she like not feeling

okay. You know. And sometimes after a call with my mom, like we've just had a long conversation that we didn't really need to talk about, and like I could have finished my work you know what I mean, and my mom is the kind of person, like ten minutes after we talked she's going to call me again with something else that she wants to talk about so then it becomes a thing. Now I can't ignore that call because we just spoke – she knows I'm not in the library 'cause I just spoke to her… now I don't want to be rude and not take her call when I just spoke to her cause I don't know what will she think …maybe she's sick. Like this weekend I knew she was sick, and then she sent me a text. And…now I'm going to be distracted. And then, so when I responded it was eleven o'clock at night. And she was in serious pain. And now it's like nighttime now and I'm trying to call her and I can't get a hold of her. I don't have a car, I can't drive there, you know what I mean. So now I'm like argh, who do I call because I'm like so now I'm ah, I'm here in Jo'burg, I don't know. Ah you know that whole cross ah, I should have answered, you know. So there's [that] kind of thing, I don't know how to negotiate it. To decipher what kind of call it is, is it just a good call or a serious call? It's a difficult negotiation that I'm discovering now that I'm trying this [where she limits her phone access].

Accessing Nthabiseng by mobile phone allows her mother to make demands on her, which Nthabiseng finds difficult to negotiate in the thick of her academic and personal life as she develops into an adult:

And my mom is like 'aren't you coming home, I've been sick'. And then maybe there's this thing where I, does she think I don't think her sickness is serious, but then I have a paper to hand in which is already a day late. So, she understands and she can tell other people that 'no, she is very busy at school', but when it's time for her, there's that thing, I think. What's that called? She understands, but she doesn't really understand.

She seemed to experience guilt at having to draw boundaries with her mother, which involves deciding whose needs trump the others:

It kind of sounds insensitive, even when I think about it because, shees, she is my mother. So I can't be putting everything on top, above her, but again it's like I'm still trying to negotiate and manage my time. Like so now I was at home yesterday and I've come back today, only to still mark and then I'm going home and come back again tomorrow. I could have just stayed here and do my work, so again I'm like how do I

negotiate my time? My mom wants to see me, and she hasn't been well, okay she's well now 'cause I know she went to the doctor. But she wants me to come and see that she's okay, type of vibe, 'cause she lost her mother so she has that type of void as well. So I also don't want to be like I'm deserting her, it's one of those moments. So it's just one of those things where I'm trying to negotiate my time as well.

Luckily, Nthabiseng seemed to have found a comfortable degree of contact with her boyfriend, who is also very busy with his studies:

So it is like an intense year for him because there is too much pressure. So, for me as well. So, we both are kind of in similar situations and we both understand. So, we negotiate our time…So, you know, there is no spontaneous calls of 'oh, I just wanted to check up on you', so we make appointments to call to each other.

5.7. Liat (Hebrew: 'You are mine')

Liat is a young woman from a conservative family. Developmentally, she seemed to be working on separating from her parents, using her mobile phone to mollify their and her own paranoia that comes with being 'out there in the world'. She uses her mobile phone to become aware of her bodily processes, perhaps representing an attempt at coming to be more in her own body, or perhaps a repetition of an external, constantly monitoring other.

Liat is a postgraduate science student, who, at turns, comes across as an awkward teenage girl and, at other times, an old spinster. She seemed bookishly smart; however, interpersonally she struggled to maintain conversation, often giggling when at a loss for words. She appeared distanced from herself, as seen in her frequent reference to herself as 'you', and at odds with her body - uncomfortable in her skin, her bones, and her weight. She also seemed unable to connect with, be aware of, and make sense of her bodily processes without the use of her mobile phone. She spoke to how she considers her phone an extension of her body, an object which she more often than not has on her person. She uses her phone to track what goes on inside of her body - from vital functions, bodily cycles and movements, to what she puts inside of her body both orally (with food) and aurally (with podcasts and music). It is as if the movements she makes don't count unless they are 'seen' and recorded by her phone, the external other. As an external other, I was keenly aware of her naïveté, and had a felt sense of concern for her, as if she were really quite vulnerable and unable to protect herself both in person and online. So much so was this sense, that I worried that the interview

may have been exploitative somehow, as if I had nudged her into psychological territories without her awareness or consent. Her isolation and loneliness were also palpable during the interview, and felt related to an undeveloped self - a kind of personal and interpersonal immaturity, that seemed to sadly impede her ability to move forward and relate to others in developmentally appropriate ways.

5.7.1. Safety and separation

Liat spoke about her phone facilitating greater safety, with regards to being able to check in with others when away from home, and as a way for others to monitor her whereabouts. Liat appeared to find comfort in her mother being able to know where she was all the time:

> *…you need a cell phone I think, I don't know if it is being female or if it just being in South Africa, or everybody needs a phone…But like as soon as I get to varsity I need to phone her: 'I am here, I am cool', as soon as I am done with the lecture, 'okay fine I have done my lecture, now I am going to go do my interview', after my interview 'I am going to go do some of my research and then I will leave'. As soon as I get in the car, 'Mom I am on my way home', put GPS on…*

Ironically, Liat's mobile phone did not offer her safety from her mother's intrusions. She said:

> *My mom reads my messages. So…when I go bath, it is sort of like, I don't have my phone with me, it is on my bed, and she will go and she reads my messages, and especially with this guy…but I show her the messages, and that is when she is bored, she probably, [its] like a comedy show in there. My phone doesn't have a password.*

She spoke about her conservative parents' lack of understanding regarding her phone usage. In this comment, her parents' fears regarding her socialising emerged:

> *My mom and dad are like, again why are you always on the phone? So I think sometimes you try and use the phone a little less when they are around…*
>
> *I think they look at that and like, you on your phone so you socialising, and I am not, like I will show them, I am not on the social app I am, I will be, there is my journal article, or I will be playing a game but it is not interaction with another human being most of the time that I am on the phone.*

Sadly, despite her parents attempts at protection, Liat also reported having experienced repeated intrusion and harassment by a man on campus, but did not use her phone to gain

safety despite being in contact with her mother with her safety check-ins. It seemed she experienced confusion and ambivalence in this regard. I wondered whether her parents' overprotectiveness and anxiety about her "talking to boys", underscored by their personal traumatic histories involving significant loss, had left her in a tricky spot developmentally. She seemed to need to explore; however, she appeared to have internalized an inhibition in doing so, and so was vulnerable to the likes of this man who seemed to take advantage of her.

5.7.2. Forays into connection with another

While many social apps didn't seem to appeal to her - "*Tinder…it just doesn't feel real"* - her use of her phone, particularly using WhatsApp, had seemed to help her connect with a man. Discussing her relationship with a man that she had met online in a dating app that she reported she had mistakenly thought was a recipe app:

> *…with time the friendship grew and it has never been, we have never dated, we have never met in the 5 years but he is the one person I talk to like every single day.*

Liat explained laughingly that after extended periods of WhatsApp communication, the prospect of meeting in person was anxiety-provoking, as questions like "*how are we going to talk to each other?"* arose. She seemed to find online connection comfortable and found that it seemed to have its own language and cadence, which she did not know how to transfer into real life. She said:

> *It is like hello, hello and then the whole day it is just emoji to emojis, [laughter], there is no conversation, he is like, 'well if we meet in person we cannot send each other emoji's, you need to talk and I don't how to talk to you'. And I am like 'okay, well then, we will be pen pals, and it is pen pals'.*

5.7.3. The mobile phone as an extension of the body

Liat's phone seemed connected to her body, an extension of her body, an object which is very rarely apart from. She explained:

> *I walk around with my phone like it is an extension of your body, and you always have it with you, if you're driving you…, if you're in a mall, [if] you're walking with it, so you can track your steps, and I, I am on diet at the moment so I track what I eat on it. So, it is really, it is like, it is part of my body you know.*

She continued to describe how much of a role her phone plays in her life, she said:

…even when I am at home all my music [on my phone], I have moved away from laptop even...My e-mails I do on my phone, my music I am, listen to music like 8, 9 hours a day…Everything is on my phone, so wherever I am I have got music with me, I am like, humming. I am not really the WhatsApp and Facebook type person… I have like one contact that I talk to all the time, but I am not, like I don't use the phone for the normal like, for phone calls. I make a phone call once a month, if that often, so my purpose of having is very different to the traditional use of a phone.

Liat wondered at others' behaviour with their mobile phones. She puzzled about the function of selfies, but in her narrative also revealed that it is perhaps herself that she doesn't like the look of:

In my life I have taken like one selfie, I hated it, I was like, so what I know what I look like, everybody that is important enough to me sees me in person, so they don't need a photo of me, [laughter]…But I don't understand the selfie craze, talking cell phone and selfies, it is a huge thing and I don't understand it…people are sending pictures of their lunch and I am like why? Like no [laughter]. The whole selfie thing is beyond me, uhm, I don't want to call it narcissistic….

5.7.4. Phone as a companion when alone

Liat described using her phone to escape from particular feelings like anxiety and boredom, but most notably to escape feeling alone. Liat described using her phone when feeling conspicuous or self-conscious in social situations:

…if I meet people and…I don't know anybody I pretend to be busy on my phone and I think lots of people do that.

She also described using her phone to contact a friend when needing to 'fill space':

Usually I have 3 minutes and I don't know what to do with it, so I phone him.

Liat's narrative revealed a highly dependent relationship with her phone:

…so, relax time is on the phone, busy time is on the phone. The phone goes for you to sleep, my phone is my alarm clock (laughter)…like in the middle of the night I cannot sleep, I reach out for my phone and read a little bit or the is what wakes me up, it is yes, the phone is like last thing I see at night, laughter, and the first thing I see the next morning…I don't care what phone I have as long as I can put all my music on and my apps are there …and I just have everything on that compact little phone.

She described how her phone helps her transition into the day, and how she uses it from the minute she wakes:

> *I have a little knapsack that I put my phone in. So when I am running around in the house in the morning making beds, making breakfast, getting ready for whenever then I have my phone with me because my steps are on there…so it is like, those steps need to count [laughter], so I have my phone with so I can like get the steps…And my family wakes up a little bit later, so if I need the time, everything is on that phone…with the music on - that lets me get on with the day, and I think that one hour that I have for myself that I can go down, get my coffee ready, make the lunches, I like cooking…But the fact getting breakfast and stuff ready is therapeutic but the music also just calms me before the storm hits…the hectic day.*

However, her ambivalence towards her phone was also clear. Regarding meeting a potential partner one day, she described wishing to meet someone in a more 'natural' way:

> *I would rather bump into someone, I know life is not the movies, but, both down at the nature sanctuary, bump into someone and…And try and skip the whole technology thing.*

Yet, Liat was aware that she struggles socially and that she uses it to protect herself:

> *…in social situations, I can cringe and I do find…my phone [if] I don't want to socialise…It does allow me to…It is like a, socially acceptable bubble… I think if you sit there really not talking to anybody or not doing anything, people might think of you like as a loner, [laughter], but if you are on your phone, they might think you talking to someone.*

Although aware of her use of her phone to protect herself, Liat appeared to be unaware of the extent of her dependency on her phone to manage her loneliness. This was captured in her comment:

> *I am fine without it, it is more, it's a friend…*

The extent of Liat's struggles to connect and her loneliness, alongside her need to defend against it, may be understood through her history. Insightfully, she explained that for eight years she was an only child, who was cared for a great deal by her elderly, near-deaf grandmother:

> *For the eight years, it is only so much a two-year-old can talk to a seventy-something-year-old, so I grew up with myself, with my music sitting…dancing along with the video,*

> *doing puzzles, reading, that sort of things uhm…And then she had got [worse] later on, so she would be looking at me and she see my mouth moving, but she wouldn't, she wouldn't understand the words that I was saying to her, so…And then she would go from speaking English to Afrikaans and I cannot, it is horrible, and I tried speaking back to her in Afrikaans, but I couldn't even understand myself, so, but there was that as well…That might be why I am shy.*

While her phone appeared to serve as a barrier between herself and others, it seemed this barrier already existed:

> *I have my music on so most people don't bother with me, although there are times I will walk without [it] then nobody bothers me anymore.*

The way that Liat uses her phone seemed to reinforce her interpersonal and emotional struggles. Liat goes online late at night to see who is awake and online but says "it is normally no one". Desperate to connect for friendship and romantic love, her loneliness prevails, unfortunately. She very desperately wants to connect with others, but her pre-existing struggles with relating seemed to extend to how she uses her phone as a tool for connection.

5.8. Jared: (Hebrew: Descent, biblically the sixth descendent from Adam and Eve)

Contact with Jared began at an interesting place. He missed his first scheduled interview, only much later replying to the interviewer's message. He did, however reschedule, and arrived for the second interview. A postgraduate sociology student, imminently entering into a competitive Masters programme, he presented as a 'dorky' kind of character: objectively clever, intellectually defended, interested in the world, with a dose of naiveté. I could picture him a fan of role player games like DnD, and Risk. He was not particularly easy to interview and I found myself trying various ways to prod him into more personal spaces, which sometimes involved a sort of teasing. I wondered if, alongside finding him to be a 'difficult subject', perhaps I was a difficult interviewer, feeling prickly over the wasted time of the first interview hour, and so perhaps setting a combative tone. This was interesting in light of what occurs for Jared in online spaces, where he seems to be more provoking that he intends, eliciting negative responses, and yet convinced of his innocence. In reading, rereading, analysing, and through the triangulation of supervision, I felt more able to come to a sense of him and develop more subtext to a subject who on the surface appears to be more concrete than he is in actuality. This seems to reflect a defended stance which I imagine he

must take, until he trusts the other to let them know him more deeply. Through rereading 'him'. I found myself to feel a more sympathetic kind of affection for him as a subject.

5.8.1. Mobile phones as ubiquitous companionship

Jared described how his mobile phone seems to be something akin to an extension of himself. He says:

When I don't have my phone with me it feels like something is missing.

He described how his phone has many functions for him, it is foremost a companion - something he takes about with him that he can use in multiple ways - for instance, to read, connect with others or access the greater world with the news.

> *I take it out a lot, it's like my little buddy…Um, I'm not sure what's the go to from there, but yeah, I just really do place a lot of value. Because for instance, I have my textbooks for next year that I've started reading on my phone whenever I have those gaps, it helps. Otherwise, I mostly use like social media to keep up with the news, so I use Twitter and Facebook for that. Keeping in touch with friends, I'll use WhatsApp for that and so it's interesting. I feel like I'm learning more and keeping in touch with what's going on when I have my phone with me.*

Jared's 'little buddy' also functioned as a boredom buster for him, as he seemed to use his phone to fill space when he is bored or alone. He says:

> *[if] I'm stuck on my own for brief spaces of time, I'd rather look at my phone, read or go through social media. I read eBooks as well.*

He describes the frustration of being without his phone, and the time before the ubiquity of smart phones arose:

> *If I forget it and I like wish I had my phone with me, I wouldn't be so bored. Whereas in the past when I didn't have my phone or anything like that, I supposed I just like daydreamed or would get bored.*

There are times when he purposefully takes time away from his phone, where "*[i]f it's for, like, an half an hour plus, it's nice, I like having a place to think*" but he is not able to embrace unplanned opportunities of absence: "*if it's like short bursts of time where I have nothing to do, I get irritated".* He seemed relatively unconflicted about his phone's place in his life, feeling in control of his use of his phone. One area where hints of conflict within him emerged

was with regards to social media content that he considered to be akin to "junk food". He noted that if he were reading about celebrity scandals that would be like eating junk food and he appeared to have set rules for himself around this:

> *…the way that I frame it, it doesn't feel like a bad thing or being a bit self-indulgent. Except in the mornings actually, then it's a free for all, all the feeds are read*.

5.8.2. Connection with others

The convenience of instant messaging appeared to aid him in remaining connected:

> *Occasionally if I have a gap I'll message a friend thinking 'oh, I wonder how so and so is doing?' 'Let's do something'.*

The social media aspect of phone use, when shared, was also described as a way of maintaining connection. Speaking about he and his girlfriend both being on social media while spending time together, Jared noted:

> *…we might spend like half an hour next to each other, going through stuff, showing each other videos and pictures.*

This sharing of reactions to social media was also described as a way of increasing verbal communication. Jared described an instance where after his partner was reminded of her deceased father upon seeing a post online about an old man, they discussed her feelings about her father. He described phones in this instance as *"…connecting…and in that case, it's really cool*".

Phones were also described as providing opportunities for expressing affection, when apart or face-to-face:

> *… like my nickname for her [his partner] is Bunny, so when I see a bunny I'll tag her in it, just so she knows I'm thinking of her [laughs] and that's really cool*.

5.8.3. Disconnection from others

Phones were also represented in Jared's narrative as creating distance through a 'sucking in' of attention away from in-person relationships. Jared related that his partner experienced him as distant when he is using his phone and she wants to have a conversation:

> *So, very often if she's talking to me [and I'm on my phone] she feels like she's talking to a wall, it's a lonely feeling. That reminds me of back in the day when my dad would be watching sport at a big family lunch, we'd all be talking about stuff and my dad*

would be looking at the tv, I think it's kind of like that where that person isn't really there.

Interestingly, the same experience was related even when there was no conversation but attention is divided:

…if we're watching series together, particularly one that I don't like, I'll often go on my phone, she hates it, she feels like I'm not doing it with her.

Engagement on social media that was experienced as preoccupying also contributed to feelings of distance in personal relationships. Jared stated that sometimes his phone use felt preoccupying, explaining:

Say for example I am having a political discussion, then it plays very much on my mind and even when I'm out with other people, I'm still thinking about this and sometimes it frustrates my girlfriend. She's mentioned a couple of times: 'Uggh, come back'.

Jared was also aware of the potential his phone has to divert his attention from his partner and was careful to manage this. Most notable in his narrative though was his use of social media as a space in which to test out his intellectual prowess and 'spar' with others in online forums:

…I find politics quite interesting, the way that I look at Facebook… I can't help but look at it almost like as if was reading somebody's essay and I sort of want to be like have you considered this? And I always end up playing Devil's advocate, it's quite crap actually. Like I find it interesting and fun but it's not good for the relationships of people around me. Sometimes it can be…Especially now when I myself with my own bias, when I see something that conflicts with it or I feel it's very oppositional, my instinct is to like be, to cut, go after it and challenge it, you know. I get very, I wouldn't say defensive but I get tense and potentially get a bit aggressive too, and I lose out, there's no engagement. I think preventing that is so important when it comes to political engagement or any kind of discussion over anything remotely controversial. So, it's essential to be able to look at their side of the story, try and see. Very often you could be wrong but try and see where they're coming from….It changes my views…probably my favourite is Reddit with regards to the culture that I identify the most. The engagement is very positive and I really like it when people like challenges each other's opinions, and I can see people changing their opinions and I've learnt so much from it, it's fascinating. … it's like you've found a new treasure trove of something interesting.

Perhaps Jared experienced the freedom of interaction online as a space in which to 'play' with his feelings of competition and aggression. He had, however, reflected on this and appeared to have also used the space to learn important lessons about tolerance of difference and negotiating his need to spar, with others', at times contradictory, needs to express opinions without response. For Jared, the 'illusion of distance' associated with phones that allows for exploration of parts of the self that might not find expression elsewhere, paradoxically, also appeared to make online spaces on his phone less safe. The relative anonymity of the Internet was associated with the expression of potentially destructive aggression that would be less likely to occur in person, he explained:

> *…in person…you're chatting about stuff and you have relationships day to day and you can see each other…there's potentially a bit less animosity because you're not engaging through a screen. So, it's almost like an anonymity effect, even though you know who the person is, if you're engaging through a screen, it doesn't feel like they're there. So, I think people are a bit more honest and potentially a bit more hostile as well.*

Through his phone, and the online spaces he connects to with it, Jared seemed able to test out his intellectual prowess. His intellectualizing appears to be a way to covertly express aggression. These transitional spaces seemed to offer him an opportunity to play with and explore his aggression, however the polarizing feedback and responses he received seemed to surprise and confuse him, and he is left unable to usefully use his aggression in health and so withdraws to safe politically correct responses. This was mirrored in the interview, where I felt a certain sense of combativeness with him, although it left me feeling confused as to who was combative. It seems that Jared may not be very aware of his aggression, and so it goes underground.

5.9. Gloria (Latin: Immortal glory, fame)

A postgraduate journalism student, plump in her personage – Gloria seemed to take up space in her gesticulations, inflections and even in the cadence of her speech. Sassiness shot out from her fingertips with each hand gesture of emphasis. Expressing a desire to recognize herself in articles I may write from my research, an audience seemed important to her, as well as a mirror. She wanted my report on her to reflect something back to her, a way in which she can gauge how unhealthy she is and how far she might have come in 'curing'

herself of her 'bad' mobile phone habits. In her desire to be rid of what she considers bad habits, she may in actuality, have wished to cure herself of need, jealously and insecurity. Perhaps a reflection of my own conflicts around proximity, I experienced her as too close and encroaching. In contrast, with the distance of listening to the audio- and watching the video-recordings I found myself enjoying her more, somehow feeling more interested and compassionate towards her. While this might reveal the phenomena of improved reflexivity related to video watching commonly found in attachment research (Dawson & Bain, 2022), this may also say something about how technology offers us a bevy of refracting mirrors to catch a glimpse of something in ourselves, and in others. Like Freud catching sight of an old man in the carriage window and then realizing it to be himself (Freud, 1919) we gain access to something hard to reach and uncanny, something we wish to un-know, but know nonetheless because it sits deep within ourselves (Green, 1998).

5.9.1. Her mobile phone's relation to dis-ease, harm and badness

> *I am going to be very honest. I think my relationship with my phone is extremely unhealthy. It is constantly making decisions to let it not affect me that much, and it not to be part of my life and relationships that much. I think the second thing I grab for in the morning after my glasses is my phone. So that is crazy, right?...Then you look at your updates; has anyone sent you a message while you have been sleeping? I look at the time; I will switch off the alarm. I look at updates on social media. It is disgusting. The reason why I want to do this with you, was more of me seeing how bad it is, because I know it is bad already. But then literally looking at the data, once you have released your paper or whatever. Almost a reflection – because you will write about this. Once I read it I will be like damn Gloria, that is really bad.*

Gloria was highly disparaging about her phone use. She gave an example of how 'bad' her phone usage was:

> *…last year I was doing my Honours [degree]. There were times where I would be on my phone for 2 – 3 hours just on Instagram. That was time that I needed to work, but I was so consumed with being on social media, that I took the decision to delete Instagram and I deleted it.*

She later revealed urges to check Instagram covertly, by accessing it through her mother's mobile phone. It was as if she has a compulsion to know and to see, and her curiosity cannot tolerate not knowing/seeing. She said:

> *But Instagram I think, was – Instagram was the worst. Instagram is still the worst, and that is why I choose not to have it. Then I would also sneak and take my mom's phone and quickly go through. Then when she checks, then I am like oh there is your phone, type of thing. It has got like – So I don't necessarily have it on my phone anymore; but because the people around me still have it, I will be like oh let me just see Wendy's profile; or let me see the recent updates; let me see what is good on Instagram type of thing…Then obviously – so my partner still has Instagram. So I will check okay what – because we are still in a long – where we are just boyfriend and girlfriend. So I will check what is on his Instagram or something like that. I know that is – god, it is so damn unhealthy.*

It seemed that Gloria's phone taps into something deep and compelling within her, a wish for unity and a denial of separation. She described the frustration of this dynamic as follows:

> *Girl, I am going to get deep with you. Like I remember – oh my goodness – my relationship with my phone is extremely bad. It got to the point where it affected my relationship with my partner, even…somehow I have substituted me not physically being with this person, to me constantly being with him through communication – which is always unhealthy, because I feel like even – and that is what I am learning now. Even us being in a relationship means that he is still an individual; that he still has his life. So he can't be on his phone 24/7. It is so much more easier for me – Like his work is very electronic base, so I would assume you would constantly have your phone on you; you can constantly. And that is not the case; it is not realistic.*

She gives an example of how she would experience his lags in replying to her messages:

> *Like if I see you online and I am online, why are you not talking?*

She goes on to explain how she has changed her WhatsApp settings in order to protect herself and the relationship from her demands for immediate response:

> *So WhatsApp has the ability for you to show your accessibility. Like your blue tick or your last seen. I have had to caution myself to take that off now, because I don't want to be like – Wendy was on at 09:30, and I see you were last, and I sent you a message at 09:00, but you didn't respond, but you were online at 09:30. Do you get what I am*

saying?...So I have now had to take off my last seen. So I don't see his last seen. I have had to take off my blue tick, so I don't see his blue tick – type of thing. So for me that is extremely unhealthy.

She explains that it makes space for uncertainty, not knowing, or not drawing conclusions too quickly:

It brings that I don't know factor in. I don't know has he responded; I don't know has he picked up his phone in the last 3 hours to check. So to me it is helping to put my mind at ease for me not to be like, oh what is he doing? Also to protect myself, because more than anything it was for me to stop; to not be such a control freak. To try and control every situation.

Like with Instagram, she admits to sometimes going into her settings and changing them back so that she can see his last seen and if he has read her messages. This action seems to build some space into the moment because it requires conscious effort and seems to offer a reflective pause. The interviewer presses her further trying to understand what it is she is trying to find by these actions, the pair have the following interaction:

Gloria: So he did receive it; so he is not replying. It gets me an answer that he is not giving me at that moment.

Interviewer: In the absence of his response you get some sort of a response, an answer.

Gloria: You get an answer definitely, I think silence is an answer. So yes.

Interviewer: What does it answer? What does it say? What does it say, the silence – if he reads something and doesn't respond, what does it say to you?

Gloria: I would like to think that he is busy at that moment, but I am just like why can't you respond to your partner. It is so amazing that it is only with him that I feel this way. I think it is just because of the dynamics of the relationship, that we are in a relationship. It is a different thing if my mom didn't respond to my message.

The crux of the anxiety appears when she says:

What are you doing that is more important, that is not allowing you to respond to me?

5.9.2. The Confessional Purge as an attempt to shock her system out of social media

Gloria's narrative revealed a sense of shame about her relationship with her phone and her compulsive behaviour in this regard. Convinced of her uniquely 'bad' reliance on her phone as evidence of something 'disgusting' within her, her narrative positioned me as

researcher as 'judge and jury', wishing for me to reflect back to her an overly harsh picture of her mobile phone 'over-reliance'. She described her screen as being like 'stained glass'. My association, which I shared with her, was to that of stained glass in a church. However, she corrected me, and explained that the glass of her screen becomes muddied with her fingerprints. Internally, I felt as if I might be a priest, to whom she was confessing her sins and was expecting a penance of sorts. Either way, she seemed to want to confess and then to receive some kind of critical mirror that would match her shame with a punishment or rebuke:

> *I will use this as an outlet to tell someone my bad habits, and then they will write about it, and I will read it and see how bad it is... If the first thing you are reaching for in the morning is your phone, that must be – that to me – when looking on the outside and looking at myself from the outside, I feel that that is extremely unhealthy.*

She positioned me as a critical eye and ear, someone who will reflect back to her, her badness:

> *I think because I know you are a psychologist, so I am trying not to sound like a topic. But then again when you put yourself up for this, you are a topic. So – and that is why I am – I want to tell you everything, but I also want to caution you, because that protects me as to what you say in your paper about me; what my relationship of my phone is about me. But I don't think it can be. I feel like – because you are going to pick up on something and this recording will help you pick up on something. Because now we are talking and it is flowing. When you listen to it tomorrow with a critical ear, she said this, 20 minutes later she said something that doesn't add up to that.*

Gloria was acutely aware of being recorded and scrutinised. Her defence presumably was to judge herself harshly, so that no matter what the I thought, it couldn't be worse. However, there was also a wish to be helped with her 'problem', she seemed to hope that her participation in the research might bring about some resolution:

> *That what you grasp from my story, and my unhealthy relationship with my phone is different to other people. I don't – Maybe they aren't different; maybe we all suffer from those highly complex attachments to our phones. But mine was focused, and my relationship with my partner, and how I have had to curb myself from taking off my last seen; removing Instagram. Just being part of the study, I think that is going to be interesting to read at the end. If you use this.*

Towards the end of the interview, she made the link that what she does with her mobile phone is really about her sense of herself and her relationships. She seemed to offer herself

absolution and some forgiveness when she said:

> *I think if anything in this hour that we have spoken…that I now realise I am extremely – and this has always been in my brain – I have always been really critical about myself. My good and my bad. That transcends in relationships with people…I hold people to very high expectations, because I expect a lot from myself and expect a lot from people, and expect a lot from relationships, and all those things…through this conversation, I have realised maybe all the – Oh I have just got such a great energy. Maybe all of that is stained glass. That the glass can be cleaned; it is just stained with hand prints that make it dirty.*

She seemed to begin to entertain the idea that her phone also offers her something in her relationship. She did not articulate this directly, but it seemed that her anxieties relating to her boyfriend's lack of responsiveness revealed anxieties that the couple had in fact been able to discuss, which could be seen as a positive:

> *Gloria: But the thing is that for me, looking at just plain glass – that would be the good in the relationship or in having social media; or having your phone as part of your relationship; what good it brings. Then my constant bad habits of checking last seen creates a stain [and] being on Instagram for 3 – 5 hours, makes a stain. But through this conversation now, we can clean it…it is plain glass that is stained.*
>
> *Interviewer: That got dirty with fingerprints?*
>
> *Gloria: With fingerprints.*
>
> *Interviewer: Hand prints, fingerprints, thumb prints.*
>
> *Gloria: Thumb action. Yes.*

We tried to sort out the projections a bit more:

> *Interviewer: An interesting kind of image to associate here. I suppose if it is dirty with fingerprints, it can obscure your vision.*
>
> *Gloria: Yes… It does. How obscured, innocently him just reading the message, and being too busy to reply. How innocent that is. But because I have conditioned my mind thing that he is busy with somebody else that is more important than responding to my message – how that has stained the glass.*
>
> *Interviewer: And then it stains the relationship, because you have that in your mind?*
>
> *Gloria: Yes.*
>
> *Interviewer: That he was too busy for you.*

Gloria: Exactly. But thank God that he is – our relationship is very grounded, and he is – we have spoken about this, and now it is constantly me trying to rectify my stain. And not that he has ever done anything; it is that I was exposed to his friends' lifestyle and the lifestyle that they have. I am thinking will he do that to me, type of thing…How I was using the phone to monitor him. He is not dumb. He was – I thought I was framing the questions to not sound like I am checking 'where are you?' So recently I have just begun to trust. If he is at home, he says he is at home. I think it is just because we share so much.

5.9.3. Connectivity and connection to others

Gloria is aware that her mobile phone offers her connection to others through apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp. She says:

But at this point where I stand right now, the only social media interaction that I do – that I participate in and that I have is WhatsApp and Facebook. But I think Facebook more on the level of me trying to stay in contact with people I have met overseas. I know there is other ways like email, and stuff like that. But because we are such a progressive people and life is changing constantly, to pick up the phone and do a video call with someone who is in another country, is so much more easier than sending an email. Then obviously WhatsApp. So those are the only two social media intakes that I take. To a certain point I want to eventually, and I did try to stop my contact with Facebook; then only have WhatsApp. But then because I was missing my family abroad that I needed to get back to Facebook.

She described how her mobile phone facilitated her long-distance relationship with her boyfriend as well as kept her linked up with family and friends when she was far away:

Firstly, we were in a long-distance relationship for over a year; that is the way we would communicate with each other. I was abroad; he was here in South Africa. So the way we kept our love alive, and our relationship was alive; it was through a phone. He was very receptive to it. He would manipulate his day according to my day; when I would wake up. It would be like, we were 7 hours apart, so we were literally 1 day apart. But when I would wake up, he would then – we would speak and when I was available, he would be awake. So that is how I relied on communication with my family here, with my parents, with my siblings, with my partner. Then when I got home, we

were still in a long distance – not as long as we were; but he lives in another – he lives in another – so he lives in Pretoria, and I live in Johannesburg. So it still long-distance-ish, but not as long-distance as we were. So I would still rely on my phone for communication with him.

5.9.4. Ambivalence in connection

Gloria seemed to express a discomfort in wanting and needing others to the extent that she does:

Isn't life confusing though? Isn't relationships confusing? Your relationship with your phone – that is very confusing. One day you want it on, one day you want it off, one day you want people to text you; the next day I could be disinterested. I want to be left alone…A love hate relationship with a mobile.

She seemed to grasp something about how her mobile phone reflects her need for others (and her disgust at her neediness):

And keep you close by, so should it ring. And it has got to a point where – and now my phone is constantly on silent; I am not even on vibrate anymore. Because I don't want to hear if I got a message, I don't want to hear a vibrate. Then my attention automatically goes let me just check quickly. So you see I feel like in that spectrum of things, I have begun to really heal and help myself. Taking off my last seen; taking off my blue tick; getting off social media. That for me is okay, I do see an improvement…Let me make sentences for you; Me with a phone is too reliant on other people. Me without a phone is okay, let us be here right now. This is where I am. Me without Instagram – Me without Instagram – I don't even miss it. Me without Instagram, I actually am – and it wasn't even that I was comparing my life to those – but me without Instagram is not wasting two hours of my life. Getting thumb action.

5.9.5. The fantasy of doing away with her smart phone

Gloria's comment above: "*I am not even on vibrate anymore*", suggested an unconscious merger with her phone (the phone is not on vibrate, not her), and it is in this vein when she switches off all notifications on her phone, it is as if she wishes she could switch off the insecurities within herself. She silences her phone, as if to silence her own shameful needs and anxieties. Like Rachel, she spoke about a wish to simplify her life and be more present in

it, and like Nthabiseng, this was represented through a fantasy of swapping to a 'simple' phone:

> *But I didn't want to make this about him, because I am not in control of what he does with his phone. I am in control of what I do with my phone. It got to a point where I was like, maybe I should just get a R150 phone that allows you to call and text; keep it at the basics. If someone really wants to get in contact with me, they will make the means – type of thing.*

Gloria appeared to blame her phone for making her needy, offering the illusion of constant connection and then delivering repeated experiences of separation and disconnection. However, as the interview progressed, she was able to reflect on the fact that her phone was merely the medium through which her own needs, anxieties and behaviours in relationships were being expressed.

5.10. Conclusion

This chapter has presented vignettes of all the participants, demonstrating how relationships with phones are unique. Each participants' physical and psychological 'use' of their phones appeared related to their unique anxieties and wishes related to their relational histories and contexts. The following chapter will discuss the shared themes across participants, in addition to reflecting on the significance of the unique ways in which the individual dynamics of each participant was captured in the relationship they have with their phones.

Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion

6.1. Introduction

This research aimed to explore the psychodynamics of relationships with mobile phones, specifically, how mobile phones are represented, utilized, and experienced in the psyche. The data has been organized and discussed in line with these three broad themes: how participants represented their mobile phones in their minds as evident in their narratives; how participants utilized their phones; and lastly how participants experienced their mobile phones. Shared themes across are participant narratives are discussed under the relevant sections, and where pertinent, themes specific to individual participants are noted. The extant literature is considered and the findings from the study are compared and contrasted, revealing convergences and divergences with current knowledge, and areas where the current study's findings extend our understanding. Gaps in our understanding that remain are also highlighted.

This qualitative, in-depth and psychoanalytically oriented study offers a different perspective to those that explore the cognitive or endocrine effects of technology on the person (Marchesini, 2023). Instead, this study delves into thinking in the psychoanalytic sense, which always involves feeling (Ogden, 2008), and notions of thirdness which include the development of a reflective vantage point in one's own mind but also with others (Flaskas, 2012); transitional space in relationships where cocreation and subjectivity are paramount (Benjamin, 2004); and various processes of othering (Gerson, 2009; Frosh, 2002; Frosh & Baraitser, 2003; Tauber, 2015).

Holding in mind the developmental stage of the participants in this study (emerging adulthood), this discussion uses relevant developmental theory to illustrate how the rich and deep theoretical constructs of psychoanalysis can shed light on a perplexing and gripping phenomenon - the psychological place of mobile phones in the psyche. Furthermore, this discussion section presents an in-depth consideration as to how psychoanalytic concepts can deepen our engagement with individual psychodynamics by examining a few applications

accessed on mobile phones and their usage, through this lens. The discussion section is then concluded with a summation and some reflective thoughts about the research over time.

6.2. Emerging adults and technology natives

The participants in this study were in the developmental and chronological age category now known as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014; Axelrod, 2024). The participants were all young adults at university, and as became clear in the vignettes, were all in certain ways grappling with their identities. This period of life and development is considered to embody the features identified by Erikson (1980) as the ego identity period, a time where the exploration and consolidation of who one is becomes the primary developmental task but has been understood to now extend further in time (Axelrod, 2024). It is a period of exploration and decision making that comes to influence one's identity career-wise, romantically, and ideologically (Arnett, 2014). The period is a time of uncertainty, often a 'winding path' towards full adulthood, with various areas of life where mastery improves but also many areas of life which are still underdeveloped (Arnett, 2014). Also pertinent to this period is a vestige of adolescence, an overvaluation of the idea of oneself in the minds of others (Elkind, 1967). These participants are also largely 'digital natives' (Altman, 2007; Kolmes, 2012), having grown up with the Internet and technological devices such as mobile phones. Some of the participants came from rural beginnings in South Africa, and so this may have meant that access to the Internet may not have been what is was for their Westernized digital native counterparts, however, access to mobile phone technology will likely have been prevalent as mobile phone dispersion has been relatively high in Sub-Saharan Africans (Cupido & Van Belle, 2013; Wei, 2007) for about the last decade (https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/921-sa-population-owns-cellphone, accessed on 07/04/2024).

6.3. Representations of mobile phones

Representation is an important word in psychoanalytic writing and theorizing. As discussed in Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework, at its simplest, representation means one thing - like a word, an image or a concept, standing in for another thing. In psychoanalytic theory, representation most often denotes how we represent ourselves (self-representations), or others (object-representations). The participants in this study represented their phones in various ways. Thulani represented his mobile phone as a lifeline

and a lifeboat; an object he needs on his person because it represents a way to stay afloat when he is overwhelmed. He stays afloat by remaining connected to his mother – his phone allows for this literal connection to continue but the connection is also represented by the phone. If understood in terms of developmental processes, at times, his phone is used as a transitional object (MacRury & Yates, 2016; Winnicott, 1953), but the usage also reveals his struggle to internalize a consistent, available object, and so he has to quite literally get in touch with his mother as he is unable to use his internalized mother adequately. His mobile phone, with its ever-present charging cable trailing along, comes to act as a pseudo-umbilical cord keeping him linked to his mother (Cundy, 2015). Liat also understood her phone to be essential to her, however in a different manner. Liat represented her phone as an object merged with herself; an extension of bodily and mental functions. Unconsciously it seemed to represent a merged maternal object, that keeps her safe and never alone, but also intruded upon (monitored) (Lombardi, 1998). In healthy development, there is an early stage where the baby and mother are psychologically merged. This means that the baby sees itself in the mother's eyes, and the mother (unconsciously) sees herself as an infant in the baby which assists in helping the mother in her provision of care of the baby's needs through a process of identification (Winnicott, 1958). In the case of Liat, it seems that she has struggled to differentiate herself from this place of merger. It seems that in representing her phone as a merged maternal object, alongside the all-access permission she grants her mother to her phone and thus her body and mind, Liat remains in a sort of undifferentiated state from her mother. This may be comforting, however it also comes at the cost of undeveloped and disallowed differentiation (Lombardi, 1998). Thus, as her phone is represented as a narcissistic extension of self, it can be interpreted as a representation of her remaining a narcissistic extension of her own mother, an example of a "safe inside policy" (Catan, 2011, p. 244) where remaining in a foreclosed merged position offers more relational safety and protects what little selfhood there may be. Two other participants – Akira and Jared, also represented their phones as extensions of self, however, this representation seemed quite unrelated to others or to merger, but seemed rather to represent an auxiliary part to themselves - functioning perhaps as a narcissistic extension of self. Akira described an event when his phone was taken and he realised how dependent on his phone he was; without it he felt traumatised – as if a part of himself was missing, gone or taken. Jared also understood his mobile phone as being an extension of himself, he called it a "little buddy", a companion

he always has with him. He seemed to experience it as a narcissistic extension of himself – a part of himself that is with him, and allows him to express his mind and opinions. In contrast to the comforting presence of Thulani's and Liat's phones, Nthabiseng represented her mobile phone as an unwanted intrusion. At a deeper level, this represented the unwanted intrusion of others. She seemed to find it an impossible object – unable to be done away with despite her wish to do so. Rachel also represented her phone as an object of ambivalence; one that allowed for contact, soothing and escape, yet feared for its ability to reveal the parts of her that need this. Similarly, Gloria's phone appeared to have come to represent shameful aspects of herself; her very participation in the study an enactment of a dynamic where she anticipates criticism and rejection from the other for her neediness. For Max, his phone had come to represent distance, or an object 'in-between', that kept him safe from too much connection but then left him disappointed in a lack of 'real' connection. Interestingly, for Thulani, his phone also functioned as an 'in-between', with text messages allowing for space and time for coherent thought in his messages to his boyfriend, that the anxiety he experienced in-person would not allow. Overall, phones were represented as an ever-present object – an other towards which much ambivalence was experienced. This ever-presence was captured in the narratives through their representation as ubiquitous.

All the participants had conceptualized mobile phones as being ubiquitous. Ubiquity denotes an ever-present part of life. This plays out quite practically with mobile phones as they hold several useful and indispensable functions all in one device (Shulman, 2023). This involved a sense that mobile phones have a place in everyday life and experience, practically as an auxiliary tool useful in ordering, organizing, retaining and capturing or holding the pragmatisms of the professional, the personal and the internal. For some like Akira and Jared this ubiquity was very functional, for example, mobile phones were experienced as a tool, or an extension of one's cognition or executive functioning, a thing to be used in various ways in professional, personal, and internal processes. Furthermore, Akira represented his phone as an object that not only is functional but also enhancing. He represented mobile phones as holding endless opportunities, as objects that extend the self – as an auxiliary object, but also as having the potential of extending selfhood into a posthuman state (for descriptions of technology as posthuman augmentation see Brittz, 2024; Lingiardi, 2008; Seckin, 2007; Sexton, 2008; Turkle, 2004; Veronese, 2023; Wei, 2007).

In the participants' narratives, at times, their phones also often came to stand for a particular person. This was apparent in their examples of instances that their phones felt significant, for example, Gloria and her frustrating boyfriend/phone, or Thulani and his much-needed mother/phone, or even Nthabiseng with her 'dumb' phone that seemed to represent her attempt to limit her availability to others, but most especially her demanding, unwell mother. If we were to imagine our phone as an object that is ubiquitous and can represent another person, it stands that we might consider what it is to always have this other with us. Let's first examine the original ubiquitous presence of an other, the mother. There is a time in life when she must be there at all moments, she must be ubiquitous. The irony or paradox of this kind of presence is that the mother, to some extent, offers her selfhood up and goes along with the baby's hallucinatory excitations, letting the baby for a time believe that he or she conjures up the milk that arrives when bodily and emotional processes demand it (Freud, 1911; Winnicott, 1960). There comes a time where the mother as an object comes into view – when the baby realizes, in bits and pieces, and later in chunks that begin to stick together to eventuate a somewhat whole picture of mother and baby being separate, however with these relations having also been internalized into internal object relations (Klein, 1935, 1940; Winnicott, 1965). Now, back to the phone, if we consider the mobile phone as a ubiquitous presence, an other that is always there, what could this mean from person to person? If the phone represents one person, like for Thulani, his mother – his struggle to be separate from her is clear. Like her presence, his phone is calming and reassuring (however we see the limitations of this impoverished 'representation', as of course, the illusion falls away, he is alone, and feeling in bits and pieces). Nonetheless, the phone gives him some reassurance that she is with him when he needs her. For someone like Nthabiseng, she doesn't want her mother's, or anyone else's, ubiquitous presence. She finds it intrusive, as if it hunts her down, wanting something more from her, when she is at a period of life where she is trying to think a thought, herself. For Nthabiseng, we could speculate that the roots of her ambivalence may come from a mother who needed her and needed from her perhaps prematurely and too much.

There seemed to be a link between ubiquity, and connection and disconnection with others. Phones were represented as a means to connect, to keep connections alive and well,

to reach out, take comfort and also to grow and explore with others. However, there was also evidence of ambivalence regarding being connected up and connecting, so much so that some participants were preoccupied with their mobile phones' role in disconnecting, from themselves and others. Mobile phones also seemed to represent a ubiquitous presence in relationships, with their capacities to connect us to others, to be connected up, to be reachable ostensibly at all times. However, this capability of mobile phones was also represented with ambivalence. For example, Max's mobile phone represents a safe way to connect with others, in particular with romantic/sexual partners. He described his phone as offering a clearer, more direct manner of connecting with romantic partners in particular, however, his experience with his phone seemed to contradict this, as connecting through a phone involved more ambiguity, more distance and superficiality, and less satisfaction than he had thought.

Ambivalence towards the degree of ubiquity associated with mobile phones was also described. Despite his enthusiasm for technology, Akira also represented mobile phones with ambivalence: objects that offer much but that can also be costly if one blindly uses them. He represented mobile phones as having the potential to be our undoing as a species and inferred the possibility of his phone being an object of personal undoing. Rachel shared this sentiment, representing phones as an object of late-stage capitalism set on taking advantage of our attention and ourselves. Jared's representation of his phone also suggested the need to be vigilant not to fall prey to the 'junk feeds' made available by the other. Rachel, Gloria and Nthabiseng expressed fantasies of doing away with their phones, they described experiences where they ignored their phones or gave descriptions of how they felt uncomfortable by how much presence in their lives their phones seem to take up. Nthabiseng's wish to do away with her phone seems linked to a wish to be a self-made person, a person who 'hatched' herself – disconnected from her being born of her mother and community. In contradiction to this, however, she also wishes to be a role model and uses her phone in service of this, but she struggles with the demands her followers then make on her, as well as the implication that she does need others. Gloria's ambivalence towards her mobile phone tipped into shame and self-loathing. She represented it as an ambivalent object and as an object which exposes her relational and personal insecurities.

Lastly, with several participants, mobile phones were represented as objects that hold a space in between things, or people. Objects that stand in for something else, often representing liminal space, or transitional space within relationships (MacRury & Yates, 2016; Winnicott, 1953). For example, Jared represented his phone as a connection point to his girlfriend, which he utilized mainly as a third – an object to look at together, as well as a space in which to test out his intellectual prowess and perhaps his aggression. Thulani represented his phone as lifeline to his mother and as a tool to allow for sufficient distance to order and communicate his thoughts. Max's phone was represented as a way to access others safely, at a distance, but then also as a barrier to real connection. Gloria's representation of her phone seemed to shift as her proximity to her boyfriend increased; at first, she saw it as a useful object to remain connected and "keep love alive" when they lived far apart, but as they moved closer to one another she saw her phone as something she needs to get control over or master; an object which fuels her insecurities rather than helping her feel connected and safe. Contrastingly, Nthabiseng represented her mobile phone as a tool in which to set boundaries with others, by making herself unavailable and unreachable.

Interestingly, the participants' representations of their phones appeared to be linked to their speculated developmental capacities and their developmental struggles. The complexity of representations are understood to intensify as development unfolds and developmental attainments are achieved (Blatt, 1974). For example, represented through their phones, we see the struggles of early life revisited by Thulani who is preoccupied with his connection to his mother, by Liat who is merged with her mother, and Nthabiseng who is trying to separate out from her mother. Representation can be considered as revealing a level of registration upon which various other achievements are stacked, such as being able to separate out from the other - from primary narcissism to object relatedness (Waddell,1998), the ability to negate others, parts of self or experiences (Freud, 1925), the capacity to use objects (Winnicott, 1969), to use transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1953, 1971), and the development of defenses (Klein, 1935, 1940; Waddell, 2002), and the sophisticated capacity to be alone (Winnicott, 1958). The participants' conflicts and gratifications in their relationships with their phones reflected their developmental strivings, particularly in regards to notions of individuation and emerging adulthood. Arnett (2014) notes that this period of emerging adulthood involves conflicts and attempts at consolidation of issues regarding the

romantic, career, and ideologies. Examples of this can be seen with Max who is working on how to express his sexuality, and how close to let partners get to him. We see Rachel consider how her phone represents her ambivalence at her involvement in ideologies of late-stage capitalism and Gloria grappling with her sense of herself, and her shame, in the eyes of the other. How the participants in this study conceptualized this act of representation for themselves, did indeed seem to hint at their unique developmental tensions, which were most apparent in the ways that they described using their phones. While strivings reflective of their developmental stage were common amongst participants, their particular personal histories appeared to have coloured these strivings - given them particular direction and nuance (to be elaborated upon below).

6.4. Uses of phones

How the participants used their phones was often linked to how they represented them. Again, as previously defined, the term 'use' was understood in both the common sense i.e. to "make practical and effective use of" (Oxford University Press, p. 1430), and the psychoanalytic sense, which in reference to the 'use of an object' refers to using an object to regulate affect, make meaning of experience and essentially find oneself reflected back and as a separate object (Ogden, 2024; Winnicott, 1969). Everyday synonyms for use/utilization are "to make use of, put to use, employ, avail oneself of, bring into service, bring into play, deploy, draw on and exploit" (Oxford University Press, p. 1430). An object, such as a mobile phone, may be used in a variety of ways. It seems the most fitting conceptualization in this project, is to consider mobile phones as being employed in service of something personal, psychological, and in uses that are both conscious and unconscious. The data revealed that participants utilized their phones in everyday life, in a variety of ways, for example, they practically used them in organising the business end of life as well as for entertainment. Probably the least conflicting theme for participants was the use of their mobile phones as an aid in everyday life; an object used to plan their days, organize work, read textbooks or keep updated on news and podcasts. Most participants also enjoyed using their phones to capture moments using video or photography. Akira was very enthusiastic about how he could utilize his phone to be hyperconnected to the world, information, and other people. He reported living a very hybrid life, using online life as much as in-person or 'real' life to learn and grow, but also to experiment and to put his ideas out there. Jared and Liat liked to have their

textbooks in their "pockets" (on their phones), able to work whenever they pleased. Interestingly, both participants emphasized being able to connect with their intellectual life through their phones, and this seemed to reflect a quality that both valued in themselves. Perhaps books and smarts assist both in navigating the world, a world that Liat, in particular, may at times find overwhelming. Jared appeared to use his intellect online to experiment with confrontation. Liat, at times, used her phone to self-soothe when in awkward moments, especially in the presence of others; similarly, she used it to block out the external and, at times, her internal world. Rachel also described similar use of her phone – enjoying using it for connection but also using it to self-soothe through disconnecting psychologically from the external world. Nthabiseng seemed to utilize her phone to express something about herself to others, she appeared to use it to maintain a particular image of herself as a busy, hard-working person (which she does through her voicemail message, and presumably through her unavailability).

The broadest, yet most complicated theme that arose involved how participants use their mobile phones in relationships. Phones were used to keep connected with others, but also to disconnect from others. Thulani found his phone indispensable in relating to others, using it to create space from the anxiety of in-person, in-the-moment relating. Max similarly utilized his mobile phone extensively to connect with partners, and friends and to explore his identity – particularly his sexual identity. With nuanced differences, Akira utilized his phone to connect with people he knows, but also with strangers around the world. He used his phone to connect with art, entertainment and creativity, and so we could say, with these parts inside of himself. Jared's narrative contained a hint of wariness, having used it as a space to debate and 'spar', and perhaps test out his aggression, he seemed to have discovered that the anonymity of the space meant that he too would have to face the aggression of others. Nthabiseng used her phone to set boundaries with others, however, with variable success. When frustrated with the contact of others, she utilized her phone to both deny and discharge the enraged and overwhelmed parts of herself. She seemed to utilize her phone to negate her need for others, keeping this firmly split off along with her hatred of her own and others' neediness. While again reflecting strivings that are developmentally appropriate to their life stage, much of the participants' use of their phones revolved around the notion of identity-seeking, issues of separation-individuation, and finding their place in the social order (Arnett,

2014; Axelrod, 2024; Erikson, 1980; Turkle 2008). However, participants' use of their phones once again seemed to reveal the dynamics of relating they brought with them from previous relational experiences, as well as reveal ambivalences held about these very relationships. Participants spoke the most about all of the ways in which they used their phones in regard to other people, how mobile phones are utilized in negotiating closeness and distance with others, including developmental tasks like separating out from loved ones, as well as denying separation from others. Mobile phones were described as being used in a particular way to connect with others while keeping them at a comfortable distance.

There were also many descriptions of mobile phones being used to regulate internal states (affect regulation). Winnicott (1969) had much to offer on the idea of use of an object (and this is related to affect regulation), although here his reference to an object is to a person. In his paper, "The Use of an Object" (1969), Winnicott sets forth that it is a developmental achievement to be able to use an object, and this achievement is a result of good enough care which allows the infant to think it created the object but also allows the baby to find the object that was indeed there all along. He furthers that to be able to use an object, one must have the capacity to do so. This arrives out of the baby having had the experience of destroying the object, in fantasy, and the object survives this destruction. The baby can then make use of the object, with continual destruction and continued survival, the object comes to be outside of omnipotent control and exists and is found in external reality – the object can then be made use of – to learn affect regulation and how to be separate (alone) and yet together (Winnicott, 1958). Affect regulation - our ability to feel, manage and process our feelings as well as these internal states in our minds but also bodies - is built upon this ability to use an object. It occurs as an experience of and a process of internalising others who help us to regulate - it moves from an external container to an internal container but remains a capacity for which real others can and must be used (Benjamin, 1990; Mahler, 1967; Ogden, 2008; Winnicott, 1965). While mobile phones were used as objects in the literal sense by the participants in this study, they were also used as objects in the relational sense, in ways that depicted the object relations of each participant – those dynamic relationships they have with others (evident in their descriptions of their relationships, but also felt in the transference-countertransference dynamics of the interviews). Thus, the phone, while an object itself to be used, becomes caught up in this process of using others, becoming, at times, a

representation of those very others. What was observed in this research, is that how participants use their mobile phones, may offer insight into the state of their internalized object relationships and the developmental challenges that they were currently negotiating. The three areas which emerged for this group of young adults, in which they appeared to be using their phones to work through intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics, unsurprisingly reflected their developmental stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014), but also reflected areas of earlier developmental struggles, which often reappear in subsequent stages (Klein, 1940; Mahler, 1972; Waddell, 2002). These three areas were struggles of separation-individuation and the negotiation of the capacity to be alone; the disappointments of transitional space: the experimentation with expression of needs; and conflicts with regards to affect regulation: self-soothing and escape.

6.4.1. Separation-individuation and the negotiation of the capacity to be alone

A primary area of focus for participants in their narratives was what they had noticed in their use of their mobile phones in relationships. This preoccupation seemed linked to negotiations of separation and individuation which are, unsurprisingly, germane to this population – postgraduate university students who are exploring their increasingly adult identities, minds, relationships, and what it means to experience aloneness and/or separateness. What we know, psychoanalytically speaking, is that these conflicts are rooted in early development and are revisited throughout the lifetime at various touchpoints of development (Mahler, 1972) in an ongoing cycle of reworking and development. Thulani offered an example of how he uses his phone in this type of negotiation. He utilized his mobile phone as tool which maintains ties and connection to his mother, as well as others. This allowed him to utilize it to regulate his affect through accessing the real object, his mother and her part objects, i.e. her soothing voice. When in particularly anxious states, Thulani seems to struggle with containing and soothing himself (by accessing his mother inside of himself) and so then finds he needs to contact her in reality. He referred frequently to the sound and tone of his mother's voice, which seemed to feel like literal touch and holding for him, similar to the early experience of infants. The words seemed to matter very little – rather it is the sound, the tone, the manner of delivery, which appeared to touch and hold him, and piece him back together. Like a distressed infant his 'please call me' could be understood to represent a wish to return to a time and space of merger with his mother. She then draws

him up into her virtual embrace using her voice to calm and cohere him again. It is wondered what might Thulani's distressed calls do for his mother? Most likely there is a bidirectional dynamic occurring – perhaps his distress signals confirm her maternal existence and then both can "go-on-being" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 37) having had a moment to re-establish who each is in relation to each other.

Thulani also utilized his mobile phone as a kind of tool to find and use his voice for 'safe' expression. In this regard, the way that he used it seemed to be like a second skin (Bick, 1968; Ulnik, 2008) – something that facilitates connecting to others; but adds a layer of protection - a binding bandage, around his fragile psychological skin, and this helps him to connect with others through his written words in messages. This also allows a part of himself to be known by the other, something he finds unable to express in in-person situations.

Gloria described a more ambivalent picture regarding her mobile phone utilization. She described a 'positive' usage when she utilized her phone to connect with others and to keep connected to others when distance separated. However, she also explained how she utilized her phone to subtly keep track of her boyfriend, trying to stay connected but paradoxically breeding paranoia within herself. Her deep shame about her phone appeared to reflect her fear of abandonment and her shame about her neediness. When her boyfriend read her messages and then didn't reply, not knowing where he was or what he was doing or thinking, appeared to be unbearable for Gloria. With his non-response, it is as if she cannot see his face, or as if his face has become stilled in response to her attempts at communicative flow, and this then engenders an early form of totalizing shame (Goldin & Posner, 2024). Without a benign return gaze to help her ameliorate her feelings (Goldin & Posner, 2024), she is left unmoored in shame and her harsh view of herself intensifies - a view she may fall into easily if in early life her need was internalised as condemning (Goldin & Posner, 2024). The thought that she was not prioritised by her partner or was 'out of his mind' seemed to elicit intense anxiety and shame, to which she responded with aggression. How she treated her phone and its applications - with mercurial judgment and splitting - seemed to be evidence of the way that she treated parts of herself. By deleting apps and deactivating awareness cues, like read receipts, she seemed to attempt to cut off parts of herself which she experiences as needy. Fundamentally, her turbulent relationship with her phone seemed to reveal struggles

with omnipotent control – that she is frustrated at the reality that the object is indeed outside of omnipotent control. It also reveals a difficulty with tolerating anger, which results in a turning of the anger inside and the expression of an overly harsh and critical inner voice (Firestone, 2019), with which she cuts herself down with admonishment and shaming responses.

Liat also used her phone in the service of monitoring – however, the monitoring involved her own self and her internal processes. It also made her mother's monitoring of her movements and engagements with others possible, to which Liat submitted. Mahler (1974) observes that facilitating their child's autonomy in the process of separation-individuation can be difficult for some mothers. This rigidity can result in maternal care that is impinging to the developing child (Winnicott, 1960). In the grip of an overprotective mother who suffered many miscarriages, Liat appeared to struggle to take ownership of her 'self', her body, and her latent desire. Her developmental struggle seemed to be figuring out to whom does she belong and answer to. Her anxious, intrusive mother loomed large in her narrative and it appeared that her phone had taken on the qualities of her mother. Her use of her mobile phone to monitor herself physically seemed to reflect the attention that anxious new mothers give to monitoring their babies' bodies, what was eaten, what went in, when and what came out, when and how much sleep occurred. The child of an intrusive mother cannot escape the role assigned to them by the mother and "exists under the mother's injunction that nothing can change without provoking a breakdown in their relationship" (de Mijolla-Mellor, 2017, p. 62). Conflict is inevitable as development begins to demand increased autonomy, however, this reality is strenuously avoided by both the mother and the child because in her fusion with her mother the child feels that she cannot survive without "dependency upon emotional support from the mother" (de Mijolla-Mellor, 2017, p. 62). As separations become unavoidable, de Mijolla-Mellor (2017) writes that these children "cling to substitutes" (p. 62), and in Liat's case the substitute seemed to be her phone.

Ironically, Liat was not able to utilize these check-ins with her mother to protect herself in the face of sexual advances from a man on campus. Her narrative contained a confused, and perhaps ambivalent account, of repeated encounters with this man, where his advances were described as intrusive and unwanted, yet tolerated. This seemed to repeat

aspects of her relationship with her mother, whose intrusions are apparently blindly accepted as love and care.

In some instances, Liat appeared to be using her phone to communicate to her mother her need for exploration. There seemed to be an attempt at separateness and perhaps a request for recognition of her subjectivity (Benjamin, 1990). I wondered at her mobile phone not having a password, thereby allowing her mother access to her phone. Was she trying to tell her mother that she is growing up and needs to experiment with boys? Yet, the lack of password on her phone allowed for further intrusion. Thus, while it might have been a bid for permission to have a life away from mother, it was also a repetition – once again she invited her mother in. She seemed to enliven the 'bored' mother with comedy stories of dating. Liat unfortunately mired her hints at exploration and her need for separation and individuation in self-ridicule as she presented her experience as a 'comedy' for her mother. Again, she was subject to a shaming maternal gaze. Interestingly, I became anxious in the weeks following the interview that Liat had perhaps experienced the interview process as intrusive or exposing, given her disclosure of the harassment she had previously experienced. I worried at leaving her with this unprocessed trauma, and thus offered via email to help her find a therapy space to work through it, and noted in my email that I hoped this was not intrusive. Liat responded that through her work in a research project involving campus violence, she had attended counselling sessions regarding the project and had been able to talk through her own related experiences during these sessions.

Despite the intrusions that Liat's phone allowed, it simultaneously appeared to offer freedoms. Were it not for her phone she may not have been permitted the freedoms that she is afforded, such as participating in the external, extra-familial world like attending university and work, which appeared to offer her a chance at increased separation from her mother.

Nthabiseng's grappling with the ambivalence of separating from her mother was much more evident in her use of her mobile phone. This played out in how Nthabiseng manages her mother's bids for her attention in the context of forging her own place in the world. Nthabiseng seemed to be in the thick of separating out from her roots and her mother, in what appeared to be a developmentally appropriate investment in the self. Waddell (2018),

in a nod to Virgina Woolf, describes such a process as finding a room of one's own, internally. However, in doing so, anxiety was provoked for Nthabiseng; a worry that she might miss an important call or message signalling need for her. Nthabiseng has the additional complexity of growing up culturally in a more collectivist culture where there is an injunction to look after one's family when upon becoming an adult (Mhlongo, 2019), but finding herself in the Westernized environment of the academy where a more 'individualized' identity becomes possible. Nthabiseng has the additional pressure of falling into the 'Strong Black Woman Schema' (Castelin & White, 2022), which comes with a unique set of gendered expectations and identifications – such as the caretaking of elders and community, but also in the leading of others, and being an exceptional example (Anyiwo et al., 2022). Within this complex intersectionality, Nthabiseng appears to be trying to find her way forward in her life.

Winnicott (1949) has written about the utility of hate in the process of coming to terms with separateness and highlights the necessity of the integration of love and hate in healthy relating. During the rapproachment phase, the child struggles with conflicting feelings related to simultaneous needs for reunion with the mother, the fear of losing her and a fear of engulfment by the mother (Mahler et al., 1975). The development of the capacity for recognition of another's subjectivity entails a differentiation process that entails not only separation, but also "continual breakdown and repair of mutuality…[which] allows considerable room for the role of intrapsychic fantasy and aggression" (Benjamin, 1990, p. 33). Mahler (1975) saw aggression as normal in this phase (initially in toddlerhood, but recurring throughout development), as the child attempts to find the optimal distance from the mother. These periods are equally challenging for mothers who experience similar conflict. Writing on mothers' experiences of separation-individuation from their children, Dunbar (2008) notes that mothers' "feelings of loss, rejection and fear caused by the growing space between themselves and their child were at odds with the need to regain some independence and autonomy. Just as Winnicott's (1963) child was in a difficult state of relative dependence, so too it seems, are mothers" (p. 86). In extreme instances mothers can become dependent on their children, who then take up psychological care-taking roles in a reversal of the parent-child relationship (Chase, 1999). This needs to be differentiated from appropriate caretaking of older parents or culturally condoned practices. In Dunbar's (2008) study, it was found that cultural expectations regarding mother-child relationships were

powerfully determinant. Nthabiseng seemed to be attempting to use her phone to instil some boundaries around separation. In an interesting attempt to manage her anxiety about separateness, and perhaps her rage at dependence (her own and that of others) she described keeping a second phone which is only for 'emergencies'. However, her mother does not seem to respect the rules of engagement with this phone and regularly makes social calls to it. Nthabiseng's difficulty in determining the nature of the calls was evident; "are they serious or just for chats?". What appeared to be trivial calls on the surface were in fact her mother's bids for her daughter's attention. Her mother's needs appeared to intrude and she experienced conflict between her wish to be separate and her fear of losing her mother (Mahler et al., 1975). She feared that by not picking up or taking her mother's calls, she would cause her harm – perhaps that her need for independence and her anger might result in the loss of her object. In this parent-child role reversal, her phone became regarded with the same ambivalence with which she experiences her mother, a mother whose needs are experienced as a matter of life and death, in relation to which space for her own needs is hard to come by and boundaries are difficult to maintain.

Her wish, as evidenced in her use of her phone, appeared to be the ability to 'switch off' to the needs of others. It might also be, though, that Nthabiseng wishes to switch off her own neediness. It seemed that in this dyad, her mother holds all the vulnerability and risk of collapse while Nthabiseng embodies competence. Perhaps her fear of her mother's collapse is a fear of her own collapse. This convoluted and complicated movement towards the depressive position (Klein, 1940), which relies at times on 'primitive' defenses of splitting and projection, appeared to be subtly played out in Nthabiseng's treatment of her mobile phone and her mother on the other end of a mobile phone. The rules she set for this phone (and her mother's breaking of these rules) seemed to permit a more allowable expression of anger - not that her mother's needs impinge on her developmental strivings for separateness and autonomy, but that her mother didn't respect the rules around the second phone. Much like how a child can scold a parent for breaking the rules in a game, this transitional space created with her phones seemed to allow for the expression of her needs and emotions that otherwise might be too threatening to express. Her burgeoning independence seemed to be a process: she moves in and out, as her mother moves in and out, re-establishing and reworking their connection with one another. There is acknowledgment of difference

between her subjectivity and that of her mother and aspirations towards reciprocity in Nthabiseng, in her attempts to pre-empt rupture in her relationship with her mother. Sometimes her mother breaks the rules by calling the emergency phone, and Nthabiseng answers. Perhaps this calling and Nthabiseng answering is all in the mix of a developing, mutually influencing relationship as they negotiate a changed reality. It is suspected that on some level Nthabiseng was aware of her mother's grief at losing her own mother but also the unacknowledged grief of also losing her daughter, so she continues to pick up her mother's calls.

In her experimentation with her phones as representative of her anxious attempts at limiting her availability to her mother, and yet still being available to her, we see Nthabiseng's aspirations toward reciprocity and attempts at tolerating difference in an intrusive mother, which are signs of seeking a higher order autonomy that enfolds separateness in interdependence.

6.4.2. Transitional space: Experimentation with expression of needs

Related to separation and individuation, as well as the capacity to be alone, is the notion of transitional phenomena, which are used to manage the necessary separation and individuation needed for development, and to find a differentiated self separate to the other (Benjamin, 1990). A number of the participants seemed to use their phones transitionally, to creatively play with self-states, identity, self-expression and sexuality. Thulani used his mobile phone to articulate himself to his partner and others; Jared used his phone to 'spar' intellectually with others online; Akira used his mobile phone to imagine himself augmented and 'superhuman' as well as in service of his creative passions in virtual reality technology and the arts; and Max used his phone to play with group identity and as a safe means to explore his sexual identity.

An interesting illustration of this phenomenon was noted with Thulani - his phone, most notably, appeared to serve the function of a transitional object; an object that he can touch, 'hold close', and feel comforted by. Thulani also described carrying his phone charger with him at all times. We could speculate that his charger is like an unsevered umbilical cord, in phantasy keeping him linked to his mother (Cundy, 2015; Ling, 2007). The way Thulani

needs and uses his mobile phone appeared to maintain the co-regulation between him and his mother (Benjamin & Atlas, 2022); he may not have been able to know fundamentally that she can withstand his ruthlessness (in the Winnicottian sense) and thus he cannot tolerate a more individuated self-state. Winnicott (1958, p. 35) wrote that "an infant with a weak ego organization may be alone because of reliable ego support", and so perhaps for Thulani, with his phone in his pocket, he can leave his residence room and go out into the world. The phone's presence, and all that it is imbued with, appeared to help him to survive a degree of distance and separation that may otherwise have been overwhelming, and perhaps even perilous or impossible for him.

Isolated and far away from home, it appeared that Thulani's capacity to be alone wavered at times. Like the adolescents in Lian et al.'s (2021) study, Thulani's rumination appeared to cause him distress. In these moments his mobile phone offered him the opportunity to covertly regress, and signal to the other, to make bids for regulation. When overwhelmed by the internal, increasingly anxious monologue inside of his head, he calls his mother, and in the 'sound bath' of his mother's voice and words, he finds the more cohered and contained parts of himself reflected through her and calmness re-enters. Winnicott (1958) suggested that the capacity to be alone in the presence of another indicates a sophistication in development. Turkle (2011) uses this idea in her book titled *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less From Each Other*. She suggests that while we appear to be more connected than ever because of technology, we may in fact be widening the distance and breeding disconnect. I argue that technology, and mobile phones in particular, hook into our fundamental tensions regarding closeness and distance. What the results of this study seem to suggest is that mobile phones, and technology more broadly, appear to reflect and exacerbate pre-existing relational tensions, and perhaps the capacity to shape relationships might depend on pre-existing structures already present within an individual's personality and psyche. Many of the participants seemed to articulate a negotiation – with varying degrees of success – of this developmental tension. We see how several participants, such as Thulani, Max and Gloria used their mobile phones as bridges in managing togetherness and separateness with others. Others seemed to use their mobiles transitionally to manage being alone, such as Thulani (again), Liat and Nthabiseng. This was to be expected perhaps; reflective of the developmental stage the participants are in - where

they are in a process of a further separating out from family, attending university and finding themselves exposed to and in some cases opening up to different options for thinking and relating.

However, what was also revealed was how the transitional potential can fold into itself and fails. While Thulani felt his mobile phone helps him to transcend his difficulties communicating with his partner, his partner found it distancing and disconnected. Similarly for Max, while at first glance his phone seemed to offer him freedom to play, experiment and engage with his sexuality, his experience appeared to become flattened and he came to find these avenues disappointing; and Akira did not seem to connect deeply, despite his fantasy of being hyper connected (or put another way, he is hyper connected across breadth but the connection seemed to lack depth, rather like a shallow root system). Evidence of failed transitional potential were also found in Jared's experiences with his phone and his attempts at self-expression on the Internet. Suler (2015) writes about self-expression on social media as serving as a healthy "experiment in understanding how others see them, or as a bridge between other's perceptions of their identity as compared to their own self-concept" (Suler, 2015, p. 177). However, Suler (2015) also warns about the disinhibition effect of technology. We see how Jared became perplexed at his interactions on Facebook – it seemed to provide him an avenue to express himself, and to possibly express covert aggression, however it seemed to come at a cost. Here, there seems to be flattening out of experience, a concretization and simplification of thought. He wished to use these platforms to express himself but ended up feeling confused and misunderstood. His communications seemed to become whittled down to a polarized opinion and he could not truly meet the others online in a genuine, robust discussion; a phenomenon that Balick (2023) describes as careful culture which limits identity, amplifies difference, and diminishes social cohesion.

6.4.3. Affect regulation: self-soothing and escape

Several participants described turning to their phones in order to manage internal states. They seemed to be turning to their devices in an effort to regulate affect, with variable success or failure. Liat, Rachel and Gloria for instance used their phones to ease anxiety and discomfort, and to escape unbearable feelings. However, this process of turning away from reality, both internal and external, then appeared to expose the participants to their needs

and anxieties (in variable doses of conscious and unconscious access). While Liat, Rachel and Gloria all used their phones to manage anxiety, each of their experiences seemed idiomatic. Liat seemed at times to use it to be in a bubble of her own, for example, she would do her household chores while listening to music or podcasts. Socially, she would use the phone to block others out, as something to do when awkwardness came up. She seemed to have little insight or curiosity into the whys of her actions but could matter-of-factly describe the instances; her awareness of her needs and significant anxiety appeared to be limited or unacknowledged. Rachel, on the other hand, had a keen understanding of when she was using her phone to manage what felt to be an unbearable and overwhelming reality. She was also able to articulate how it provided her with temporary relief, by offering her a moment of pause or even disassociation, but how it failed to assist her in processing her affect or her experiences. She furthermore articulated anger at 'Big Tech' for exploiting her need for disassociation. Gloria described getting lost in scrolling, and how she would lose track of time in this action. She called this "thumb action" which resulted in a significant degree of shame.

There is a paradox in what the participants describe – using mobile phones in an attempt to feel better, regulate affect, or take a break – and yet not experiencing the desired effect. It is suggested that browsing social networking sites, which most do on mobile phones, can create a sense of flow which is pleasurable and relates to the time loss that seems to happen; this effect has been associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety (Roberts & David, 2023). A meta-review examining studies which have investigated social networking site usage while using brain imagining techniques, suggests that while there seems to be evidence which supports the potential of these networks to be potentially behaviorally addictive, there is a lack of reliable, longitudinal evidence to suggest these networks cause adaptations to the brain and its chemistry (Wadsley & Ihssen, 2023). Other authors suggest the alternate directional link - that pre-existing emotional regulation difficulties may inform problematic device use and even addiction (Amendola et al., 2019). The results of this study appear to support the latter research. Coming from a different perspective as a psychoanalytic researcher and clinician, I am making the case that scrolling may not necessarily work in regulating affect, due to its defensive function. When participants turn to their phones for what they think is affect regulation, they are actually employing a defensive strategy of sorts. They are using their phones to evade what they are feeling in the moment.

The reason they remain un-soothed and dysregulated is not because phones are dysregulating per say, but because what they really need help with – needs, feelings, anxieties – are out of awareness and being defended against. The phones offer them a break from feeling but they do not assist in digesting, processing or even expelling the feeling. Affect regulation is a two-way street, it is not just receptive but requires a back-and-forth processing, often between two parties (and then when one is developmentally a bit further along, an ability to do this for oneself). Affect regulation involves containment, digestion as well as real bodies, minds, and hands. This physicality is more-fold than the two-dimensionality of a phone in one's mind and eye. I am suggesting that the phone does not involve the body enough, it does not offer a full body experience, to be adequately calming. Just like trying to digest something with the mind alone is impossible, you need a mind-gut connection and the hardware of a fully functioning digestive system.

Interestingly, germane to the use of mobile phones and the apps that were mentioned by participants such as Facebook, and Instagram, is the idea of a feed. One's feed provides you with content (or food) that the algorithm 'thinks' you need. While Jared limited his intake of 'junk food' on his Facebook or Reddit feeds, Rachel likened social media to being like cake – one should just enjoy the 'cake', but guilt and denial become involved. Akira thought that humans run the risk of feeding with gluttony, and Gloria expressed disgust and shame at her gorging on Instagram and the like. The interesting thing about feeding and being fed, is that it harks back to our earliest relationships and a time of absolute dependency. I think what feels uncanny here and turns sour for participants is that the feed happens in an echo chamber of one's own clicks and likes, and worst of all perhaps, is that it is also informed by potentially nefarious 'Big Others' who are trying to capture your attention, like the Big Tech Other or the AI-run Algorithmic Big Other (Salter & Dutta, 2025). In the participant narratives, feeding was positioned as a perversion of the earliest feeding relationship - your 'meal' is informed by what you've 'eaten' which is regurgitated, not by an internalized good enough mother, but by an uncanny, unknown other (Freud, 1919; Frosh, 2002). The feed hollows out, causing a loss of creativity, and nutrition, and ultimately a lack of digestion. I argue that it is because of this, which happens at an unconscious level, a degree of dissatisfaction, shame and disgust occurs for participants. The feeding relationship that was internalized, whether adequate or problematic, seems to become corrupted by these uncanny influences.

6.5. Experiences of phones

The third broad level of conceptualization regards how participants experienced their mobile phones, this was sometimes in contrast to how they represented or ostensibly utilized them. Experience involves "practical contact with and observation of facts or events" or "an occurrence which leaves an impression on someone" (Oxford University Press, p. 429). Participants described some of the practical things that happen with their phones but also how they seemed to see their phones as an object, an external other, which acts upon them and their minds. Marchesini (2023) writes that

> [T]he technological factor exerts an appeal that cannot be trivialized as a mere performative need, because *it solicits the subject's intrinsic emotional and motivational systems: in other words, technology can speak directly to people's hearts and guts, even before their reason*. Ontogenetic plasticity [simply, the developmental capacity for neurological or nervous system changes and adaptations] involves experience, a process of integrating environmental elements that translates the initial virtual condition into a specific form. But experience is not a simple exposure to the world: it is an immersive process that requires involvement on the part of the subject (italics added by current author, p. 15).

Marchesini (2023) stresses that experience involves engagement, and this involves a connection between what is in the mind or perception (or fantasy) with how these things take actual form, something that can be represented bodily (perhaps just as trauma becomes represented in the body). Here it seems there is something of a link between knowledge development (Bion, 1962a), where something is experienced, or something about the phones connects one to reality and this has the potential to transform f/phantasy – at its best this experience seems linked to knowledge, albeit imperfect and never fully formed. Lived experiences which were described by participants seem to pull together the fantasies of what phones offer, with the realities, and how this confluence stirs up ambivalences, particularly regarding dependency needs and ambivalence in relationships. In various constitutions, phones were experienced as an entity in and of itself, as a third, and oftentimes a failed or collapsed third.

Kahoud (2023) casts the phone as the mother in an oedipal drama, emitting a warm, perhaps seductive, glow. Thulani's phone was felt to be a comforting object, through which he could access the care of his mother – the phone quite literally acting as a transitional object (Winnicott, 1953), something standing in for, but also between, him and his mother. This object stands as a third object (Benjamin, 2004) in their relationship, but also acts as a symbol of the relationship. To him, this deeply comforting object allowed him to engage in the external world with more confidence. Despite this advantage, however, in his romantic relationship, Thulani's partner resented the phone as the third in their relationship and found it frustrating that Thulani could better communicate through the phone rather than directly with him. It seemed that while Thulani experienced his phone as offering connection and safety in his relationships, this was not always the experience for the other party – in some instances it offered him a third that acted as a bridge or a possibility or transmission (Benjamin, 2004), but at other times it failed as a third in that it impeded and confounded the relating, as with his partner.

At times, participants' phones were experienced as an object in its own right, and not merely standing in for, or representing someone else. In these instances, the phone was depicted as an object which elicits "primitive feelings in the hearts of users, as if smartphones were *beings* in their own right" (Kahoud, 2023, p. 48). This sentiment was expressed by both Liat and Jared who experienced their phones as companions. When problematic, however, phones were experienced as a third that gets between, and that clamors for attention and gets it. Akira and Rachel experienced their phones with more skepticism, seeing phones as the harbingers of a type of dependency that lulls us into fantasy-filled existence and also as objects of control and manipulation by powerful Others, such as tech companies. Similarly, Gloria experienced a wariness of her phone and what it reveals about her, as if it were an entity which could act upon her. She also seemed to experience her phone as being irresistible, as something that compellingly sucks her in. She experienced her phone as an object to be wary of; such that she almost seemed afraid of her phone and its perceived destructive potential.

Max's experiences with his mobile phone as a third object involved both liberation and disappointment; he used his phone to explore and connect but then found the

connections to be lacking, to be superficial. He seemed to blame the phone, as if it had agency, for the disappointing online contact with others. However, this seemed more likely to reflect his own ambivalence as he acknowledged that he experiences a lack of excitement, emotion or attachment to others when with others in person; connection for Max often appeared to lead to irritation and a wish to flee the neediness or clinginess of others. Balick (2023) asserts that because social media platforms "reduce complexity…and amplify the expression of certain psychodynamics (e.g. splitting and projection) while inhibiting others…(e.g. mentalization and empathy): namely by reducing subjects to objects" (p. 25), our performance of social identity has become simplified, restricted and repressive. It is as if the potential offered by the phone to be a third, to offer thirdness, gets flattened and then it fails as a third. When the phone fails as a third, it is not a true collaborator which is in relation to both parties - it may be representative of the thirdness between the parties but when the thirdness collapses the mobile is blamed, whereas it is actually the potential space between two parties that has failed. The thirdness cannot be restored until the parties recognise the function of the mobile: that it holds and represents something of their shared intersubjectivity (Benjamin, 1990; 2004), and that they have reduced/split off/projected into it something that is in fact within the relationship. It is likely that if a person or the dyad could recognise this, the thirdness in relating could be restored and then a mobile, or any other something for that matter, may again be used in service of facilitating thirdness within the relationship. Max's experience might be further understood in terms of Kahoud's formulation:

> as the progression of digital technology marches on, […] smart devices, like people, are becoming the screens we also project our most deeply ingrained object relationships onto, in essence rewiring our most primitive drives – smartphone ids, egos, and superegos (Kahoud, 2023, p. 48).

I would like to understand how phones rewire drives; this is a bold statement – perhaps it is too soon to say. What does seem salient is the idea that mobile phones and social media seem to encourage splitting. This was evident in how participants sometimes held the positive split and at other times split off negative aspects of the experience or representation. Liat for example, saw her mobile phone as on the whole being a positive and useful object to her. She seemed deeply out of touch, having split it off, with how it further impedes her social relating when she uses the phone defensively (like when she busies herself on her phone to avoid awkwardness with others). Max also described using his phone in a similar way, when

awkwardness in relating emerged. He seemed able to see how his phone brings him momentary relief when feeling uncomfortable but seemed out of touch with the cost to the present situation, where taking out his phone to ostensibly connect with others may increase distance and awkwardness in the in-person situation.

Authors Ferber and Weller (2022) suggest that technology can be conceptualized as an inanimate third –something that stands in between people – which can be used as a defense but also a bridge. Take Nthabiseng's experience with her mobile phone as an example of this potential. Despite her desire to simplify the experience of having and using a mobile phone, just like life, it became messy and complicated, riddled with the negotiations of relating. What she seemed to struggle with most in this experience was the neediness of others and her own repressed neediness. This neediness was experienced as being intrusive, which is transferred onto the phone being intrusive. Her experience seemed to show how she struggles to regulate parts of herself and struggles to regulate the people in her system. She used her phone in the service of defence, separating out but also as a means of connection, particularly with her mother for whom she cares deeply. Her phone seemed to offer multiple bridges to multiple destinations, despite the messiness of it all.

The paradox of the mobile phone as an inanimate third is that it links to how phones are used to relate: separation is either denied or phones are used to separate and put up boundaries/barriers to keep others further - depending on the fantasy of the other. Mobile phones can present two sides of the same coin, distance and separation on the one side, unity and connection on the other. In the participant narratives, the mobile phone was experienced as a tool to be used to connect/set boundaries/monitor/protect/express the self/entertain/create a bridge for connection. Each participant had their own flavour for this based on their current conflicts or needs. In some moments, the phone was no longer separate, but rather fused, either with the self, or with the 'Other' – and this could lead to an experience of being bereft or relieved when it was gone (again - how distressed they were at the loss depending on their psychological make-up: Thulani an extreme example, Akira a more moderate example). When the phone was experienced as fused with an 'Other' it posed a threat - another that would expose/take advantage/allow for intrusion etc. but when it was experienced as part of the self/extension of the self/tool, it was not a threat.

6.6. The psychodynamics of mobile phones

Angela Carter's 1972 book entitled *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, tells a story of a world where 'desire machines' cause citizens to hallucinate their desires at every turn, fundamentally shifting reality and the boundaries between inside and outside, the conscious and unconscious. This drives the citizens mad and eventually; the protagonist of the book must choose reality over his own desire and put an end to the madness by destroying the machines, the creator of the machines – Doctor Hoffman, as well as his phantasmal lover, Albertina. Dystopic literature has a way of revealing us to ourselves; helping us to understand fundamental human needs, desires, and conflicts through another lens. Similar to the desire machines in Carter's book, we might consider mobile phones as desire machines too; into, onto, and through which we project and, at times, attempt to meet our desires and needs. As demonstrated above, our dynamics emerge in complex ways, like a screen revealing ourselves. Just as literature offers us a lens to examine the human condition, this discussion section argues that mobile phones can similarly offer a view into ourselves and others, into conscious and unconscious desires. In contrast to Carter's story, it is unlikely that we can do away with our machines, despite how some of the participants in this study do indeed try, and so it seems increasingly important for us to come to a deeper understanding, appreciation and consideration of how technology is intersecting with our psyches in contemporary life. Johanssen (2023) asserts that our interaction online and with technology is not *just* about narcissism as many contend, but is actually about our vulnerability as humans, which, in this discussion, I have connected to the concept of the human condition.

The overarching aim of this study was to explore the psychodynamics of mobile phones. This section offers a more 'meta' discussion of the themes revealed through analysis of the study participants' narratives, namely issues of development, issues of relating, expressions of selfhood, and managing feelings, in particular, shame. These are considered in relation to the current literature in this area. The psychoanalytic framework used in the study offers a unique vantage point when considering technology; due to its straddling of the conscious and unconscious, the personal and the interpersonal, psychoanalytic theory has the words and concepts to describe that which seems hard to pinpoint.

Using smart phones has becomes synonymous with the Internet and also with using the apps contained/downloaded within/on them. Three popular apps mentioned frequently by participants, namely Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have captivated attention and have become associated with ideas of feeding and connection. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the significance of this in psychoanalytic theory is the direct link it makes to our earliest relationship with our mother – the crucible in which patterns of relating are formed (Stern, 2018).

Interestingly, these three apps are all owned by Meta (Facebook Inc. of old). These interfaces give us a sense that we are using them with mastery, that they are within our control and power (Johanssen, 2019), however, this appears to be an illusion as our power as users to shape this is rather limited by what is set out for us to use. However, what has been developed in our technologies seems to reflect something innate, collective and perhaps drive-driven as Kahoud (2023) seems to suggest. The 'family' of Meta apps seem to have a few things in common and the language used with them implies something about connectedness: you can check your 'feed' (harking to our earliest relationship, the feeding relationship), watch someone's 'story', step into their living room/gym/kitchen, or even the bedroom, and you can monitor the communication lines with blue ticks and last seen awareness cues. These apps seem so compelling, I argue, perhaps because they plug into our fundamental desire for connectedness. The techies seem to understand how fundamentally and biologically we are wired towards society and belonging, and that 'feeding' is a way into this. While this is not a cynical lamenting how big tech has taken us captive (for an interesting read about the commodification of users and why Facebook is technically free, but how we pay for it with our information, see Fuchs, 2012), it is an argument that posits that this tech is so compelling because it reaches deep within us and hooks into our 'infernal desires'. Johanssen's (2019) research has made a connection between the affective needs and desires that phones meet – what is sensorial and skin-like, and thus very much relational – and how this has us gripped. These desires are rooted early, in our emergence from primary narcissism (Freud, 1914), in our desire to be back in a fused state (Mahler, 1972; Firestone, 2019), and in our earliest precursor to relating – the feeding relationship (Piontelli, 1992; Winnicott, 1965). As demonstrated by the participants in this study, who appear to dip in and out of this kind of relating with their phones, the illusion does not last. When the fantasy is inevitably

punctuated when using our mobile phones and the applications within, we come face to face as it were with the existential quandary of what Mahler (1972) describes as the lifelong ongoing work of separation.

While applying psychoanalytic theory to an everyday cultural object - the mobile phone – this research has resulted in an engagement with a more philosophical matter – that of grappling with the tensions of closeness and separateness in relationship, or stated another way, grappling with our aloneness in the world. Mobile phones offer us a metaphor to consider a deep desire – the desire for closeness and perhaps even fusion (Firestone, 2019). Bion (1989, p. 37) wrote: "in his mother's womb man knows the universe and forgets it at birth"; we yearn in some way for this experience which we do not have the language for (Cartwright, 2021). It begins with the fantasy of the uterine world – a holding embrace where needs are met, whilst being the diffuse centre of all – a paradoxical place of course because one can only know about this world by losing it. The primordial mind moves from a mind that has thoughts without a thinker (beta elements) to a mind that has the thoughts of a thinker (alpha functioning) (Green, 1997). The primordial mind's first task, from Freud's perspective, is to judge – is this in or is this out, do I keep this as me or spit it out as Other (Freud, 1925; Green, 1998). This process is also captured in Winnicott's notion of movement from the ontological bubble – how a baby comes to know selfhood that is able to recognize a separateness from what is external, or other (Winnicott, 1965). This happens through the intersection of fantasy with reality, with hallucination and wish fulfilment slowly and subtly becoming endowed with reality. The baby finally realizes that there is a me, and not me, and then a me and an other, and then a me and others – the gradual fall from imaginary heaven (Trotter, 2020, personal communication). I understand this to be the awareness of the fact that we are fundamentally alone in this world, fundamentally separate, and that indeed we are not 'The World' but exist in a world beyond ourselves where we are at the mercy of the kindness and attunement abilities of those we find ourselves born to. When we fall from the blissful space – that intra- and extra-uterine world where we are connected; fed, kept safe, warm and snug (if it is indeed (only) blissful - perhaps, again, only in fantasy), it begins to dawn on the horizon of awareness, that there is a me and a not me, which later develops into a me and the other, and then the many others. The realization that we never were the absolute world and centre of the world ushers in protest, denial (negation), and eventual resigned

acceptance, and the depressive position (Klein, 1940). What a species we are, where the height of health is a depressive position – the capacity to hold that multiplicities exist - multiple selves, multiple others, and that we are all constituted of the light and dark, and all the muddy waters in between. Our capacity for psychological health is predicated on the ability to mourn (Klein, 1940; Freud, 1917). This mourning that we are fundamentally separate from others (Winnicott, 1958) paradoxically keeps us connected to good enough internalized object relations, such that in a way we are never truly alone (Galanaki, 2021). If we can attain this sophisticated developmental achievement (Galanaki, 2021), it is hoped that we can celebrate it and even revel in it, and then still find it within to connect with those external to us.

Mobile phones put us in touch with this promise of heaven – of seamless connection – but are simultaneously frustrating, because of course it is never quite the same thing, something we must also encounter in our encounter with Bion's concept of O: "the unknowable, inexpressible truth of one's experience" (Ogden, 2008, p. 16). All the participants' narratives held variations of this negotiation of closeness and separation: hopes that their phones would allow for wished-for or perhaps fantasied connection, only to find that their phones also create distance and disconnection. This negotiation was unique to each participant. The results seem to suggest that our use of mobile phone technology can reflect and exacerbate pre-existing conflicts, as opposed to rewiring us (in contrast to Kahoud's (2023) formulation – perhaps the field of neuropsychoanalysis may in the future, offer further granular examination of the tangible and traceable effects of technology on the expression of drives and changing structures of the brain and mind). What became clear in this study was that mobile phones and the apps discussed can be used as sites of projection to play out unique personal and interpersonal dynamics regarding our fundamental separateness of being in the world. Mobile phones can be the seat of transitional space, allowing for absence which allows thoughts to be thought and feelings to be felt, but they can also be used to deny absence or separateness, to avoid feelings, and to undo thinking and knowing.

6.6.1. Instagram and Facebook: The guilty pleasure of thumb action and the shame of unbridled 'feeding'

There have always been rivals for our attention and love, however, mobile phones seem to make this painful reality patently obvious. Mobile phones appear to be the most ubiquitous object of our times, perpetually present and condoned. An interesting line in Kahoud's paper reads: "the smartphone is the mother; the father; and it is the phallus. It is also a source of sexual and aggressive need gratification, a tantalising source of lack which in turn elicits tremendous desire in us" (Kahoud, 2023, p. 51). Phones have somehow slipped beneath the veil and allow us to take pleasure (or enter into a very private mental state) in a culturally sanctioned manner, and in the presence of others. Indeed, there is something strangely eroticized with mobile phones. Using our fingers to poke, swipe and scroll through a veritable feast for the eyes, offers a new kind of caress to connect. Online dating culture seems to capture the intersection of the visual and what we do with our hands. Applications like Tinder, Grinder, Bumble, and the now defunct extra-marital relationship App Ashley Madison give hints of this. The relationship expert, Esther Perel (2017), talks about how never in human history have affairs been so easy to engage in. Affairs have always existed, but these culturally sanctioned devices make it easier to have affairs, and to get caught having affairs. It is an interesting paradox. This swiping and scrolling can offer something that is compulsive, repetitive and satisfying (but also deeply unsatisfying). Jared likened some of the possible content on his 'feeds' (Facebook and Reddit) to be like 'junk food' and Rachel referred to Facebook as cake – wishing others to have their cake and eat it without guilt, but still somehow judging her own consumption. Akira warned of the risk of gluttony, that our reliance on technology will see us disconnected from our bodies, obese with overfeeding and unable to do things for ourselves any longer. These kinds of descriptions have a pejorative air and there seems to be shame accompanied in taking in a 'feed' in this way. Scrolling on mobile phones may lure us back into a spaced out, undifferentiated, infantile bliss, but also provide something self-regulatory to manage very un-blissful feelings. The noted prevalence of cases of carpal tunnel syndrome (Allen, 2017; Toh et al., 2017), or as it has come to be known: "text claw" (Powell, n.d.) over the last few years might echo the emergence of "glove paralysis" (McWilliams, 1994, p. 306) in Freud's time, however the aetiology may differ - we are now playing with an external 'button'. We can tune in, or tune out, do something private by ourselves or with another through this device. We never have to stop masturbating; everyone is doing it, even in public. Tugwell (2021) suggests that scrolling on mobile phones allow us to access an aspect of our unconscious sexuality which derives pleasure from states of charge

and tension, rather than discharge. One participant, Gloria, hinted at the self-soothing masturbatory quality of scrolling for hours on her mobile phone, calling it 'thumb action'. She gets lost in a haze of Instagram browsing, gorging with eyes and fingers, which seems to produce a state of being where time is lost and the self becomes 'looser', possibly undifferentiated, much like the state that follows binge eating (Elder, 2019) or compulsive masturbation (Neves, 2023). It seems that this kind of browsing draws her into a space that is locked in, and is deep inside herself – a 'somewhere' hidden/locked inside of 'somewhere else' inside herself.

6.6.2. Monitoring the 'Other' and being monitored: WhatsApp features as an attempt to flesh out flattened 2D relating

The popular, and now indispensable, mobile phone application WhatsApp has two features within the application – the 'blue ticking' and 'last seen' features. These are rich sites of projective opportunity as they offer the user various signifiers of registration. Users can elect to use these features; whether one turns them on or off may reveal something about the user. If you elect to use the features, you enter into a tacit social contract agreeing to participate in being seen and in seeing. When one sends a message in WhatsApp, the first register of two grey ticks lets you know that your message has successfully been dispatched from your mobile phone to the other's mobile phone and so has been 'delivered' – the letter is in the receiver's mailbox. These two grey ticks change to two blue coloured ticks when the message has been (ostensibly) read – in reality it may mean that the letter has been taken out of the mailbox, opened, but not yet read, or may be read but the recipient has decided to delay immediate response. The second feature considered here is the 'last seen' feature. This allows participants in a WhatsApp conversation to see when a conversational partner was last using the application. These two features are known as awareness cues, which were created to simulate feedback to a sender that a text message has been seen. These awareness cues were created so that participants in a conversation may get social cues that are missed in texting conversations. Paradoxically, these awareness cues, which are there to indicate attention and presence, are often dismantled in order to avoid being seen. Not answering one's WhatsApp messages can feel like receiving a knock at the door and hiding behind a crack in the curtains. Your visitor knows you are home but are not answering. Our mobile phones offer a potential modern equivalent to this scenario as they increase our visibility in

the virtual world. What does it mean to have the promise of an open buffet of communication, and yet to opt out at times.

Using WhatsApp becomes a social action, that draws a solitary act of responding to stimulation into a social act, it blows up the two dimensional-ness of using a mobile phone and extends its reach into the relational, as aptly described in this quote by Mai et al., (2015, p. 298):

> The seen-function turns reading a message into a social action: It creates a mutual awareness of the fact that a message has been read but not yet answered. This provokes the development of social frames governing these actions— regulating and coordinating them, and indicating social sanctions associated with them…The seen-function thus enables users to develop expectations—knowing your partner has read a message means you can expect her or him to answer it— and expectations of expectations, that is, the feeling that your chat partner expects you to answer right away. These prospects stabilize social norms: Only when you know what to expect others to do, and what others expect, are you able to coordinate your behavior.

WhatsApp features – blue ticking and last-seen features attempt to provide awareness cues between people – to keep conversational participants on nodding terms (I see you and you see me nodding at you, we are in conversation, yes, yes). However, it becomes apparent that they are in fact incomplete awareness clues, there are no bodies in the presence of each other to furnish us with all the attendant details that come through non-verbally with eyes, shoulders, expressions and micro-communications. This obstruction to awareness opens the field for projection. It provides illustrations of how desire and need, and the repudiation of desire and need, are projected into WhatsApp functions and features. Through this exploration we come to a complex picture of how anxieties, ambivalences about being in relationships, and fears of rejection are played out through mobile phones. In these interactions, there is a mixture of the real and the imagined, the social and the private; played out on screens with imagined audiences. What we do in private (responding to a message for instance) becomes a scene of judgement, drawing internalized group norms and the internalized public (Balick, 2023) into a personal superego experience. This process is well illustrated by Gloria turning her blue tick functionality on and off repeatedly. The feature created a space for the projection of her fears and represented an attempt to turn off her

own anxieties about not being held in mind. She then turned against herself in a personal superego experience that seemed full of Old Testament-like fire and brimstone judgement.

Mobile phones, and WhatsApp, seem to offer a space where we bump into a longed for but thwarted type of presence – a wish for unity or fusion with the other. They also offer a both-and mixture of reality and phantasy, where because of the incomplete awareness cues, our fantasies of the other interact with the real responses of the real other. Through using mobile phones as metaphors, this discussion explores what I consider to be an unavoidable part of the human condition - a coming to grips with our essential aloneness and separateness, and our attempts to remedy this. A further feature of Whatsapp is the status update, where temporary profile updates are displayed. These can be monitored to see who has viewed them. This brings to mind Max's experience with a friend who broadcasts her state of need through her status updates. These updates seem to be a bid for care and attention, but since they are not directed personally, the onus to respond seems to become diluted. She is left disappointed at the lack of response she receives, and Max, feeling obligated by having 'seen' the update, feels angry and manipulated. WhatsApp seems to offer the promise of connectivity to others, but at times we wish to connect only with ourselves, or with internalized others; this can be confusing as there is an actual other on the end of the proverbial line. What does it mean to negate communication in this way - to know a bid from another crosses your path and then to un-see it, as it were? What could it mean to negate information and to be the other who gets negated in the transaction? Well, that depends. It would depend on the negator's and the negated's intent, optimal personal proximity thresholds, as well as developmental capacities which dictate how one handles separateness, as well as how their psychodynamics play out in each and every communicative partnership.

These awareness cues are there ostensibly to give a visual cue in a conversation when the absence of the other and their acknowledgment of having heard you is not there to see. However, these cues seem to in fact muddy the waters. There remains still too much that is unseen. We cannot tell if the other is busy, is waiting to respond more thoughtfully, or is indeed ignoring a message. It may feel as if our phones demand something from us, this is the idea of the attention economy (Odell, 2019) - and yes, while we do get notifications that ping us for our attention, perhaps this is why it is so captivating: it draws on this other that is inside

that we feel wants something from us and “will not let us alone” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2003, p. 783).

And so here is where the golden opportunity arises to examine reactions to these interchanges and awareness cues. A hypervigilance to them, or alternatively, a lack of awareness, or lack of seeing, reveals our anxieties and our projections of how we are viewed in the eyes of the other. Our mixed treatment of these two features seems to reveal something fundamental about humans, and that is that we are ambivalent about relationships. We might wonder what are we being made aware of? We might see something of the other in the cues, but also something of ourselves – do they provoke rage, hurt, indignation, or sympathy, worry, or indifference? These two features have the potential to reveal aspects of ambivalence, tacit social contracts, and what it means to know something about the other’s reception of oneself. We seem to wish to engage in conversations where we can alternate between being seen, hiding, and being able to decide which option when. Like Freud wishing to be behind the couch, out of direct eye contact so that he may have his thoughts (and perhaps not be revealed by his eyes?), we need to be able to look and to look away, to be seen and to hide (to use Winnicott’s (1965) formulation).

6.6.3. ‘The Audience’

As mentioned in Chapter 2, wherein the theoretical framework for this study was discussed, the concept of the imaginary audience (Elkind, 1976) is important to those developmentally preoccupied with identity negotiations, usually during adolescence. While the participants in this study are not adolescents, but rather emerging adults, this concept is still of salience given that many of the participants seemed to be grappling with the idea of an imagined audience on the other side of the mobile phone, at the intersection of consolidating their identity negotiations. This imagined audience is linked to the gaze of the other, which can be gratifying, mirroring, or shaming (Firestone, 2024; Goldin & Posner, 2024). Mobile phones represent access to this audience (the internalized other) and reveals how each participant represented or used their objects, as well as what they desired form their objects. The audience was used as something to test out a self/parts of the self with, for example, Jared’s intellectual sparring, Akira putting his creativity out ‘there’ in cyberspace, and Max as a sexual/sexualized object on Tinder. The audience was also conceived as a

demanding other in the cases of Nthabiseng and her followers, and Max and his needy lovers. There was also sometimes an awareness that the participants themselves were the audience, for example with Max viewing his friend's broadcast pleas for attention, Rachel and Akira both expressing cynicism at the Big Tech Other pillaging their attention, and Gloria getting stuck in Instagram scrolling. When the audience as other was represented as being needy, demanding, or combative, the content could get overwhelming.

Kilroy (2015) highlights the place of the image in the audience's eye: that the visual field has a relation to desire – how a veil (or screen) – can reveal or bring us into contact with desire in a way that reality cannot. Similarly, Björklind (2018) proposes that the visual element is of crucial importance to this shift as it "evokes the imaginary register of the psyche" (p. 73) rather than the symbolic. These two authors seem to suggest that there is something about the visual nature of online culture and mobile phones in which a veiling occurs (there is what you see, but there is in fact latent content below the manifest), and because of the veiling we are able to access something unconsciously. However, Björklind (2018) seems to suggest that there is a risk that the audience perceived may lack a true aliveness, and is more informed by projection, and thus may be found lacking in its potential as a third (as discussed in Chapter 2). Similarly, Balick (2023) hazards that a flattened audience may come to be internalized and results in "[o]nline, careful culture [that] is enforced by surveillance of others while offline [and] it is internalized by the subject who incorporates its rules in choosing what is or isn't acceptable to express outwardly" (Balick, 2023, p. 28).

6. 7. Conclusion: The need for connection, the shame of separateness and rejection, and the collapsed third

This study has explored how mobile phones seem to reveal a number of idiomatic aspects regarding the needs, unconscious phantasies, interpersonal and internalised relationships, and anxieties, in a cohort of emerging adults. The flavour and texture of these desires, needs, and phantasies were unique to their personal histories, as evidenced by the data. Despite the unique quality of each participant's account of their relationships with their mobile phones, broad, 'meta' aspects also became apparent, which were salient across the data and across participants. These aspects involved the need for connection, the highlighting of shame experiences related to separateness and rejection, as well as the mobile phone's

potential to be used as a third, and its potential to collapse in this regard. What emerged most strongly in this study is how psychoanalytic thinking about mobile phones and their applications can be used in understanding individual psychodynamics, but also the potential to apply psychoanalytic thought to the technologies (such as mobile phones) which are so intertwined with contemporary life.

Bollas (2015) has leveled much criticism on contemporary society and its technologically driven direction of progress. He writes:

> Aspects of the way we think and communicate in the 21st century can be seen as forms of *psychic flight* from the overwhelming burden of inheriting a world shattered by regions of dumb thoughtlessness resident in the preceding two centuries. The Internet allows psychically systemic flight from the actual, as we live in a virtual reality with varied avatars of the self. We both are and are not deeply involved in communicating our views on the various issues of the day. Avatars allow us to speak through alternate personalities that permit engagement with one another online, but although Facebook seems to be an exemplar of the transparent self, even there our points of view are more like photo snaps of our engagement with the actual world (Bollas, 2015, p. 540).

Critically, Bollas (2015) puts forth that modern life and engagement lack just that – life and engagement; that there is oppression in selfhood and self-expression in the use of texting and the Internet, in the likes of X (formerly known as Twitter) – a chance to share one's thoughts but it can only be tolerated and let out in small bite-sized bits, which results in often cryptic and overly simplified communication of thought. He writes: "iPhones and other such technical devices are *transmissive objects,* prosthetic parts of the contemporary self…the 21st century self identifies himself as *part* of the machinery of communication" (p. 540). Paradoxically mobile phones offer us presence and connection (Björklind, 2018), but in fact can also heighten anxiety. Mobile phones seem to reveal the irreconcilable tension between seeking connection but also disconnection, from others and ourselves. When using our mobile phones, we might not only access particular self-states, but also aspects of two-person relating: anxieties or conflicts we have in relationships, relationships both in reality but also in fantasy (or the internalized). The promise of unlimited connection with others touches on

our deepest, most ardent desire for connectedness, but also reveals our desire for and the reality of our separateness.

Mobile phone technology has ushered in a level of interpersonal contact unheard of in pre-smart phone eras. One of the promises of mobile phones, and especially the accompanying social media applications, seems to be the unlimited and unfettered access to what (or who) we want, and when we want it. Unfortunately, and fortunately, this is not real. We get what we want, but only sort of. Much is left desired and to be desired, and so the search continues; we struggle to put a finger on what it is that we are searching for. Kahoud (2023) presents that smartphones offer us the fantasy that our needs and desires can be fully met and resolved, making us complete. He writes:

> [h]uman desire is limitless. So often driven to complete satisfaction of our desires, we are often left chasing our own tails, following circuitous paths of false logic, on a wild goose chase to fulfil desires that can never fully be satisfied. Our smartphones are sending us unremitting messages, by the minute, suggesting that, on the contrary, we *can* achieve what is essentially an exercise in madness. It is therefore essential to recognize the notion that with the advent of a smartphone in every hand, we now live in a world of ceaseless mirrors, reflecting the unattainable images of ourselves and the objects of our desire (Kahoud, 2023, p. 52).

I would argue here that it is the fact that they don't give us everything we want, that they are objects that cause dystonic reactions, albeit that we might not always know why, that keeps this fantasy alive and, in some ways, brings us closer to the pain of being human. Once we begin to peel back the layers, accounts about mobile phones generally, seem to be about intimacies and separateness – what I understand to be the vagaries of connection, disconnection, being seen and not seen. This technology and it's continued advancements might perhaps reveal a desire to get as close to the 'other' as possible, as close as being in another's pocket (or heart or mind), or most alluringly, in the other's gaze (Kilroy, 2015). If a psychoanalytic lens is applied to the 'problematic' of technologies we find an opportunity to examine, in quite an uncovered manner, the interplay of our desires for connection/disconnection – to be seen, found and heard, but also to hide from and to control our objects. WhatsApp with its blue ticks and the last seen functions, give us the illusion of proximity, but allows signal anxiety (Abram, 2022) to run rampant. Instagram lets us feed for

hours and then feel ashamed. Tinder gives the hope of real connection, but then feels superficial and disappointing. Facebook offers connection to distant others, but then we feel intruded upon by notifications and bids for our attention. The fantasy of connection in a global network seems marred by overwhelming amounts of content, struggles to set boundaries, and shame about needs and behaviours that come to feel compulsive and out of control. Björklind (2018) puts forth that the experience of thirdness and triangulation, which is contingent on

> [t]he necessary conflict between the principles of pleasure and reality is situated in the intersection of presence/absence, gratification/frustration" (p. 72), is now being impacted fundamentally by the ubiquitous presence of mobile phone technology where "we are never completely alone and never completely together (p. 72).

Björklind (2018) asserts that what is fundamentally different is that modern-day life, with its technological presence, insists we must confront absence in presence and presence in absence. Social media apps attempt to solve for the conundrum of absence and presence. It seems to have a double function, at times it fills the gap between the other and the self, and at other times it seems to be holding transitional space so that there may be a gap. This gap in awareness is difficult to describe, to put words to, because it is difficult to put words to something as ethereal/unknowable as absence. On a more profound level, it may also resonate with an existential quandary: we have known this gap before – perhaps because it originates early in our development – it is the basis of hallucinatory wish fulfilment and thought, but may also connect us to a sense of the unthought known as discussed.

Freud (1911), Green (1975) and Bion (2013) offer a lens to consider 'the gap'. The basis of thought begins with absence, whereupon we must think something into existence (Freud, 1911). The absent breast is first thought into being – 'I want milk, ah, there is the milk'. Andre Green writes extensively about the constitution of absence. In his 1975 paper, he writes of the problematic situation wherein there is an absence of absence - if an object has never been absent, it can never be thought. What happens when the gap between oneself and the other is squashed so that there is no room for thought - when a phone is used to close the gap between self and other, leaving little to the imagination (or too much to the imagination)? With social media (WhatsApp, Facebook and the like) impasses and affronts, something undeniable about existence is played out and becomes represented. Something unconscious

and uncanny finds a foothold and we see the derivative expressed. For example, it seems that the absence held in WhatsApp communication is sometimes a representation of absence, and in this type of instance WhatsApp holds a transitional space, and at other times may indicate a lack of absence, a lack of gap, or a desire for there to be no gap, no absence, no separation between self and other. One can also take the proverbial gap, choosing to make space internally by not replying, by blue ticking the other. Other apps also invoke 'the gap', for example, body tracking apps portend to remove the gap in which we used to have to listen to our bodies. Instagram, Facebook, and other scrolling apps, remove the space in which you might sit with your feelings, instead filling the user up with a kind of a 'feed'. Similarly, Tinder seems to remove the ostensible unknown, replacing the act of going out into the world 'out there' to meet potential partners. While these apps on mobile phones offer bridges over gaping gaps, they can also fall down, and become collapsed thirds. The collapse may occur, because as Frosh (2002) explains:

> the other is marked by difference, otherwise it would not be genuinely "other," but this difference is not just external to the subject; it is right there at its unconscious core. There are conditions of insecurity, oppression, and violence, so many of them it seems that they swamp the modern world, under which this internal otherness is not a source of solace and creativity so much as a disturbance…with its grimness and its continual threat of the abyss. When this happens, otherness is attacked (p. 405-6).

Our phones have promised to bridge the gap, so we are no longer grappling with otherness, in ourselves or in others.

Perhaps this is where the mobile fails as a third. The third collapses because is not a true collaborator which is in relation to both parties. It may be representative of the thirdness between the parties, but when the thirdness collapses the mobile is blamed, whereas it is actually the potential space between two parties that has failed. The thirdness cannot be restored until the parties recognise the function of the mobile, that it holds and represents something of their shared intersubjectivity, and that they have reduced/split off/projected into it something that is in fact within the relationship. It is likely that if a person or the dyad could recognise this, the thirdness in relating could be restored and then a mobile, or any other 'something' for that matter, may again be used in service of facilitating thirdness within the relationship.

In the many years it has taken to conceptualise and complete this research project, I have had the facility of time to notice and investigate as the phenomenon unfolds (that of the unprecedented incorporation of mobile phones into life), prior to and then through the Covid pandemic, all the while located in deeply reflexive research examining this phenomenon. Indeed, engagement in this area began earlier in my own education as a clinician and the mandate to never use WhatsApp (patients must pay for their calls, just as they pay for sessions) and how this has shifted over time in my own practice to allowing patients to contact me, and I them, using these tools at our disposal. My excitement regarding technology, like so many others writing in the field, has developed into more ambivalent territory as the tides of technology in my own, and my children's and patients' lives have rolled in unabated. The collective experience of having gone through the Covid pandemic seemed to have fast-tracked us all into a great reliance on technology to keep the proverbial wheel turning. Prior to the pandemic, academic psychoanalytic literature in this field was sparse; the pandemic forced the academy to engage with more heart and head in this regard.

A notable scholar, Johannessen (2023), identifies that what feels unthinking and thus dangerous about technology, is its speed. The speed at which technology operates seems to squash space, and time, as well as reflection. This is pernicious, it seems to get inside us and limits the freedom of time for uninterrupted day-dreaming, idleness, digestion, and consideration, and aloneness. My initial enthusiasm for mobile phones, and Internet technology more generally, had to do with the potential of technology to offer creative space, however, as the last decade and my research has revealed, it seems rather to more easily squash space than hold space, and so with this flattening, comes the loss of true creative potential. Technology is like the ring in Lord of The Rings, 'One ring to rule them all' – these devices harness so many capacities that we can barely go without them, unless one makes concerted efforts to ignore or forget them. When our phones contain all we think we need, it is difficult to leave it behind, forgo it, and go back to a more analogue life. We seem to have forgotten the adage, 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'. We need negative space so that experience does not collapse into flattened pictures, so that our 'thirds' remain in relief. Like the participants of this study, our engagement with technology has the potential to reveal nuanced, interesting and unique things about ourselves – if we can bear to look and to take

the time to reflect. If we can do this, we can also work at making technology work harder for us – the more informed we are as consumers the better we can make technological things like algorithms work for us, but we can also take the time to understand the provocations that our engagement with technology ensues – we have the opportunity to use our mobile phones to deepen our understandings of ourselves.

To conclude, it seems that mobile phones offer us two paths - thinking about our use and what it reveals about ourselves maintains a third position, which allows for thoughtful use that does indeed connect us - to ourselves and others in meaningful ways, or the second path - where the third is collapsed and we engage in mindless phone use where enactments are played out through how we use our phones. We may not need to destroy our desire machines after all – if we can keep holding and restoring space for thirdness and reflexivity, mobile phones may be put back in their place as inanimate objects that may be used in the service of the psychological aims of connecting with ourselves and with others.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. Summary of findings

This research proposes that mobile phones have come to hold a multiplicity of places in people's minds and relationships. It is proposed that mobile phones are used for intrapsychic purposes as well as interpersonally, in reality, and in phantasy. This research sought to explore the psychodynamics of relationships with mobile phones, and specifically attempted to narrate, understand and conceptualize how mobile phones were used by participants in representation, utilization and experience. It was found that participants related to mobile phones, and with them. How mobile phones were represented seems to depend on how participants were relating to the phone in that moment - as an 'other', or as a tool (a part of us/something we can control). When we relate to them, they are other and separate, and then they are either idealized (can connect us, educate us and augment us) or feared as a threat (can tempt/expose/take advantage/overpower). When we relate to them, they become a third, and so splits emerge. When we split them off, this often represents all that we wish to negate – often our own needs and the neediness of others. When we relate with them, we are using them and they are our 'tools' and we are in control/they are part of us, like Liat, Akira and Jared's extensions of self – we use them to connect/express/self-regulate etc. For younger generations, like these emerging adults who participated in this research, it is wondered if technology for these generations might represent an extension of the self, as a new means of communication, which at base - because we have created such technology - is an extension of ourselves, tasked with 'holding' some aspects of ego functioning (Cundy, 2015). When we relate with them, we retain the position of thirdness, and the capacity to think.

The idea of a collapsed third, which was saliant in most narratives, seems to bring all of these notions together. Phones were represented in split ways, like Gloria and her irresistible thumb action, Thulani's lifeboat in contrast to Nthabiseng's intrusion. Despite the splits in representation, some participants could also hold the ambivalence and talk about it, for example, Rachel was able to articulate her struggles with her phone quite clearly and reflexively. Interestingly, despite participants' struggles with their phones seeming to offer a

reflection of themselves, none (except for Gloria in a brief moment of insight) seemed to make this link – that their phone troubles reflect their own personal, developmental conflicts. These conflicts were further observed in the transference-countertransference matrix of the interviews, like Gloria's need for the interviewer to pass judgement, or the intellectually combative nature of Akira's interview, or the schizoid experience of Thulani, or the anxiety regarding intrusion that was experienced with Liat. These examples seem to support the formulation that the conflicts may indeed be pre-existing and not as a result of phone usage. While the expression of conflicts was idiomatic and personal, there emerged universal developmental tensions throughout: that which involve conflicts around merger and separation, connection and separation, as well as transitional phenomena and our ability to use our internalized and real objects. It seems that mobile phones, probably by design, hook these lifelong developmental tensions, it may also be the reason why mobile phones are so compelling.

7.2. Limitations of the study

A limitation of the present study was the relatively small sample size, however for depth-oriented research of this nature this is not an unusual sample size. Data collected would have been advanced by conducting a second follow-up interview, as is proposed by Cartwright (2004). It would also have been interesting to conduct an adult attachment interview, this would add valuable information for corroboration of refutation regarding the interpretations made.

Another limitation regarding the sample concerns the socioeconomic and political elements that came through in the constitution of the sample and in the interview material as well. Emerging adulthood in South African youth, particularly in universities, is often a hotbed of the political and social. While this grouping may originate across the board from poor to wealthy, reflecting the disparate discrepancies existent in the South African landscape, I did not much take up this consideration in the findings and discussion section. While I acknowledge this as being an important area of investigation, these themes and aspects were not that strongly emphasized by participants themselves relative to other data and within the themes which pressed through more strongly individually and collectively in the group. As such, I chose to focus on the areas which seemed to have the most valence, however at a cost to developing thinking regarding these aspects. Furthermore, this study

was very consciously a psychoanalytic research endeavor, and so I prioritized the psychoanalytic framework over the psychosocial, in order to demonstrate how this particular lens can be used to explore meaningful and personal experiences with mobile phones. However, these aspects (the sociopolitical and economic situating of mobile phones for samples of South African participants) in similar or future research, would be important and meaningful work to pick up on.

A further limitation of the study may lie in the age and developmental level of the sample, as well as the fact that the sample was drawn specifically from university students. Because of the life stage of these emerging adults, the themes as well as preoccupations with mobile phones that emerged may not be applicable to other age groupings. Furthermore, drawing a sample outside of the university setting (or perhaps not exclusively from the university setting), would enhance research of this kind. For the purposes of this study however, which aimed to be exploratory and an example of how psychoanalytic theory and thinking can be utilized in understanding the phenomenon of mobile phones in our lives, it was felt that the convenience sample which was drawn was not a damaging limitation but is acknowledged as being a limitation none the less.

The next limitation considers the discursive nature of the study. The findings are not considered examples of positivist research, however this approach acknowledges the interpretive and narrative processes which are fundamental to knowledge development and steps were carefully taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the research endeavor.

A final limitation of the study involves the exploratory broadness of the study which led to a great amount of data, and a myriad of ways to approach the write-up of this data. A methodological solution to this might be conducting individual case studies, in greater depth, across more time. Alternatively, a more focused area of investigation could be fruitful, for example, exploring parent-child interactions over mobile phones, or romantic relationships on dating apps.

7.3. Recommendations for further research

There are real and acknowledged powerful aspects at play in regard to technology and its power to persuade, nudge and manipulate users in particular directions (Bednar & Spiekermann, 2022). We can speculate as to how we make these technologies personal with our individual projections; fantasies; and uses, as this research project has sought to understand and as Björklind (2018) has suggested with the imperative for psychoanalytic research and writing to narrow investigation, focusing on the specifics of this new reality of the omnipresent place of technology, rather than on moralizing and pathologizing.

An avenue for future research could involve a different cohort of participants, for example, it would be interesting to interview parents and children regarding the place of mobile phones in their shared lives, or it might be interesting to interview an older population in a different life stage, to see how mobile phones play a part in their lives. Kahoud (2023) implies that there will be shifts in parent-child relations as a result of parents being 'attuned' to their phones. I would again argue that it is not the phones themselves but what the phones represent, and perhaps rather than it being the phone or the possible projection of desired self and other object relations that is the problem, it is that these desires for others are being made more transparent. However, I do imagine that the preoccupations of different generations might reveal different conflicts. The cohort of participants interviewed were all very much involved in a particular stage of life (early adulthood, at university) and so their preoccupations regarding their mobile phones seem to reveal the conflicts of the developmental period, however nuanced each presentation was.

Another avenue for research is the ethics of app development. It must also be acknowledged that there is a (real) third at play which is independent of the individual but has a bearing on how technologies are designed, used and engaged with (Bednar & Spiekermann, 2022). This third is Big Tech: "[t]he smartphone and other Internet-connected devices become not only an extension of the self outward, but extensions of technology and the interests of the businesses that develop them inward into the self…the smartphone user uses but is also used" (Shulman, 2023, p. 61). Without falling down the rabbit hole of paranoia, this study suggests that there is risk in the speed and thoughtlessness with which technology is advancing into our lives and minds. The field requires more engagement from a psychological, ethical as well as technical (as in, the IT specialists designing these

technologies) to understand the personal as well as the societal role these technologies are playing in our lives. We also seem to need inter-disciplinary engagement so that we can understand these things in context. Kahoud (2023) asserts that mobile phones have the capacity to rewire our id, superego and ego drives, however, he does not explain how this is so. Bednar and Spiekermann (2022) also assert that technology can no longer be considered neutral but is actively designed; created; and changed by our use and adoption of it (they argue that the creation of technology has a moral imperative to do so ethically and with well-being in mind, rather than exploitation). Multi-disciplinary engagement would better inform and enhance the offering of academics and clinicians in understanding the place of this contemporary experience while we are busy with the immersive experience of living through it (Bjorklind, 2018). Increased engagement with the ethics and psychological portent of these technologies may also lead to a design that focuses on gains, benefits and harm reduction (Bednar & Spiekermann, 2022). As Balick (2023) argues regarding social media, if we understand what online spaces can and cannot do, we can make better use of them - perhaps redirecting object usage (Winnicott, 1969) back to the personal, idiosyncratic, and internalized.

Lastly, how might technology be improved given what we've learnt? How can we support the development of mentalization, empathy and nuance in these areas of life? Aside from involvement from an ethics and advisory perspective in the development of technology, what about public education regarding technology, rather than fear-mongering? The same can be said for within the psychoanalytic community; we need to investigate online and smartphone assisted life in all of its variations.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

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To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Wendy Cain, and I am a PhD candidate in the department of Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My PhD is focussed on exploring the relationship a person may have to their cell phone, in regards to the body, mind and relationships with others. I would like to explore with you, the connection you have with your cell phone physically as well as how you make sense of your cell phone and how you use it in your mind and what cell phones can mean emotionally to a person. I am also interested in how cell phones are used to manage relationships with others in reality and in one's mind. In this regard, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study and to share your understanding of your own relationship to your cell phone with me.

Should you agree to participate in this research, participation will entail being interviewed by myself on two separate occasions, in a private consulting room in the Emthonjeni Centre at a pre-arranged date and time that is convenient to you. Each interview will take approximately sixty minutes. In order to maintain a connection to the first interview, the second interview will be scheduled within approximately two week's time. During the interviews, you will be asked to reflect on your understanding of what your cell phone means to you, how you use it, and any other thoughts you might have in this regard. You will also be asked questions about your life and family. At all times, your right to confidentiality will be respected. Confidentiality will be maintained by ensuring that no identifying information is disclosed in the research. The researcher will be the only person aware of your identity and participation in this research. The researcher will only make use of information you share with me regarding your "digital life". The researcher will not make use of any information of yours that may exist on the public domain of the Internet. However,

you are welcome to share with the researcher anything you feel may have relevance to our discussion, whether this be on your phone or via email etc. Please note, that such disclosure will be considered as part and parcel of the interview and will be used in the analysis phase of the research project. As with all other aspects of the interview process, all data will be protected and confidentiality ensured.

Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. With your permission this interview will be digitally video-recorded in order to ensure accuracy in recording and reporting responses, and so that direct quotes may be used in the research report to evidence findings. Your responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you or identify you with your particular responses would be included in the research report. The digital videorecordings shall only be viewed, and transcribed, by myself. Only myself and my research supervisor, Dr Katherine Bain, will have access to the transcriptions (with identifying information removed), and thus these will remain confidential. The interview material (video-recordings and transcriptions) shall be kept in a password-protected file on my computer. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. There will be no repercussions to you should you choose to withdraw at any point in the research project.
If you choose to participate in the study, I can be contacted telephonically at 082 335 4726 or via e-mail at wendycain@protonmail.com. If you choose to participate in this study, please fill in the details on the attached forms acknowledging your consent to be interviewed and your consent to be video-recorded. The findings of the study will be published in the form of journal articles available to the academic community and in a dissertation. Should you wish to see the final results and analysis of the research, please fill in your email address on the consent form, and I will email you a copy of the finalised research document. Your email address will be treated with the same confidential protection as all other identifying information.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. There are no direct benefits or risks predicted as a result of participating in this study. You may find that discussion of your relationship to your cell phone, and in discussing your life, feelings or thoughts might emerge that may need to be further processed outside of the interview space. If you are in therapy you might wish to explore these reactions there. Alternatively, you can access the free Emthonjeni Clinic (011) 717 4513 at the University of the Witwatersrand for counselling should you wish to explore your feelings in a counselling context.

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. My supervisor is Dr Katherine Bain, who can be contacted telephonically at (011) 717-4558 or via email at katherine.bain@wits.ac.za. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind Regards

Wendy Cain.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Wendy Cain for her study on exploring how cellular phones are related to body, mind and relationships with others. I understand that:

- Participation in the interviews is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me or identify me to my responses will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.
- Interviews will be digitally audio- and video-recorded.
- Direct quotes may be used in the research report to evidence findings.
- Images/files/text conversations shown or shared with the researcher will be considered as data for analysis, but will be cleaned of any identifying aspects.
- The results of this study will be published.
- There are no direct benefits or risks predicted as a result of participating in this study.

Signed _____

Date _____

If you would like to receive the final document of this research project, please supply your email address below. Your email address will not be disclosed to anyone.

Email _____

Appendix C: Audio- and Video-Recording Consent Form

School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559

I _____ consent to my interview with Wendy Cain - for her study on the exploring how cellular phones are related to body, mind and relationships with others – to be digitally audio- and video-recorded. I understand that:

- The recordings shall not be heard nor viewed by any person other than the researcher.
- Transcripts will not contain any identifying information.
- During processing, the anonymised transcripts shall only be seen by the researcher and her supervisor, Dr Katherine Bain.
- All video-recordings will be destroyed after the degree is awarded and all publications are finalised. Transcripts will be archived.
- No identifying information will be used in the research report.
- At any point during the research process, I may decline participation and refuse for recorded material to be utilised by the researcher.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix D: Ethics Clearance Certificate

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Cain

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H15/10/05**
PROJECT TITLE	The interface of self and cellular technology: Metaphors of soma, psyche and transitional relating
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms W Cain
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human & Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	23 October 2015
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	07 December 2018

DATE 08 December 2015 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr K Bain

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

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The purpose of the psychoanalytic interview is to access not only content but spontaneous associations participants may have, and thus the researcher is led by the participants' responses and associations. Each interview begins with the following approximate prompt:

> *"As you've read and as you know, my study is looking at how people relate to their phones - with their minds, their bodies, in relationships, with others, inside of yourself. So I'm interested in anything you've got to tell me about that, and anything about yourself, even if it seems irrelevant, I'm interested to hear."*

The responses and follow up question that follow the prompt are informed and led by what the participant has brought up, along with the interviewer's own associations to the material and prior 'hunches' concerning self-other relating and affect regulation.

Appendix F: Turnitin Report

Wendy Cain Dissertation without appendices and ref list-1.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

3%	2%	1%	0%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	www.thefreelibrary.com Internet Source	1%
2	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1%
3	wiredspace.wits.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
4	Submitted to University of Witwatersrand Student Paper	<1%
5	www.tandfonline.com Internet Source	<1%
6	Breau, Margaret J. "Alma mater: The maternal function in Object Relations theory", Proquest, 20111003 Publication	<1%
7	vdoc.pub Internet Source	<1%
8	Mai, Lisa M., Rainer Freudenthaler, Frank M. Schneider, and Peter Vorderer. ""I know you've seen it!" Individual and social factors for users' chatting behavior on Facebook", Computers in Human Behavior, 2015. Publication	<1%
	www.coursehero.com	