9-30-2025

The Lived Experiences of Mothers Facing Phubbing From Their Adolescent Children

Mye Alexis
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Mye Alexis

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Michael Langlais, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Matthew Hertenstein, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Mothers Facing Phubbing From Their Adolescent Children

by

Mye Alexis

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

Widespread use of technology, particularly smartphones, introduced new challenges involving parent–adolescent attachment. Although existing literature primarily examines parental phubbing of adolescents, there is a significant gap in research exploring the experiences of mothers who are phubbed by their adolescent children. To address this gap, the central research question guiding this study was: What are the lived experiences of mothers who have been phubbed by their adolescent (ages 14-18) children? Grounded in Bowlby's attachment theory, this phenomenological qualitative study aimed to deepen understanding of the emotional impacts of phubbing on mothers' emotional wellbeing, emotional bonding, and mother–adolescent attachment. A homogeneous convenience sample of eight participants was recruited for in-depth semistructured interviews between 45 and 60 minutes in order to explore their experiences. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was then applied to identify emerging themes. The five group experiential themes were a) feelings of dismissal and emotional disconnection, as adolescent phubbing weakens recognition, respect, and feelings of being valued and loved; b) use of emotion regulation, boundary-setting, and self-care as coping mechanisms to manage adolescent phubbing; c) frustration with communication barriers that weaken emotional bonding; d) rational acceptance and emotional adjustment to generational and cultural shifts caused by adolescent phubbing; and e) struggles and desires to maintain meaningful connections and fulfill attachment needs. Findings may inform positive social change through intervention strategies, policy development, and educational initiatives that are aimed at managing digital technology use in the home.

The Lived Experiences of Mothers Facing Phubbing From Their Adolescent Children

by

Mye Alexis

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

Walden University

November 2025

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Digital media and smartphones revolutionized communication, fostering greater connectedness; however, this has led to significant concerns about their impacts on face-to-face interactions, particularly within parent–adolescent relationships (Hong et al., 2019; Tariq et al., 2022). One such concern is *phubbing*, the practice of disengaging from or ignoring someone to focus on one's smartphone or other technological devices instead of engaging in face-to-face conversations (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). Phubbing, particularly when adolescents engage in this behavior with their mothers, may lead to feelings of emotional neglect, isolation, and attachment-related distress (Bae & Nam, 2023; Mi et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). For mothers whose roles as emotional support systems and primary caregivers are intricately linked with attachment security, these disruptions involving communication may undermine emotional bonds that form the foundation of their attachments with their children (Kerr et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2019). Although there is substantial research on parental phubbing, much less is known about how phubbing impacts mothers, particularly in terms of emotional bonding and security of mother–adolescent attachment.

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of mothers who feel phubbed by their adolescent children. The research examined how they perceived and emotionally responded to being phubbed, emphasizing emotional and attachment-related implications of such experiences. Although existing literature primarily focused on parental phubbing of adolescents, the current study, guided by Bowlby's attachment theory, aimed to provide valuable insights regarding emotional impacts and attachment

dynamics according to mothers' perspectives. The study explored how they perceived and were affected by digital distractions in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of how phubbing influenced their emotional well-being and attachment security. This chapter provides an overview of the topic, problem, purpose, research question, theoretical framework, scope, and significance of the study.

Background

Due to the increasing prevalence of smartphones and their integration into daily routines, the dynamics of family interactions, particularly between mothers and adolescents, may have been further complicated, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased reliance on smartphones during periods of social isolation may have intensified the prevalence of phubbing. During the pandemic, the need for virtual social connection, compounded by Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), led to increased screen time, particularly among adolescents, as they sought to stay socially engaged with their peers through digital means (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Amran & Jamaluddin, 2022). As a result, increased screen time may have disrupted face-to-face communications between mothers and adolescents, creating emotional distance and potentially weakening attachment security. Although phubbing disrupts communications involving romantic relationships, emotional effects on parent–child attachment during the pandemic exacerbated by FoMO have not been sufficiently explored (Gao et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2022).

Although adolescents practicing phubbing behaviors is a concern, it may also indicate a deeper issue involving problematic technology use (Vossen et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2019). Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2016) found phubbing may be a predictor of smartphone addiction, with individuals perceiving phubbing as socially acceptable behavior. This relationship creates a cycle: excessive smartphone use may lead to phubbing, which reinforces the addiction. In this context, phubbing serves as a proxy for problematic technology use, suggesting a cyclical dynamic in which technology use and disrupted attachment may diminish face-to-face interactions and mutually reinforce each other (Han et al., 2022; Hikmah et al., 2023; Tong et al., 2023).

Moreover, phubbing correlates with problematic technology use, particularly among adolescents between 12-18 (Barbed-Castrejón et al., 2024; Garrido et al., 2021; J. Liu, 2024). Frequent phubbing is often associated with excessive screen time, such as social media and gaming (J. Liu, 2024; Nielson et al., 2020; Tariq et al., 2022), which may further emotionally isolate adolescents from face-to-face interactions, particularly with their mothers. Over time, this pattern of behavior may impede emotional bonding processes and negatively affect attachment dynamics between mothers and adolescents (Han et al., 2022; J. Liu, 2024; Hikmah et al., 2023). In this context, phubbing may diminish the quality of meaningful mother–adolescent attachments and undermine attachment security. The more adolescents prioritize digital devices over face-to-face interactions, the more likely they are to engage in superficial rather than emotionally supportive and authentic interactions (Sbarra et al., 2019).

Despite extensive research on links between phubbing, technology addiction, and social interactions, particularly in the context of romantic relationships, social interactions, and adolescent behaviors (Hong et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2020), there is insufficient empirical studies examining how these behaviors affect family dynamics, especially mother–adolescent attachments. This gap in literature highlights the need for a deeper exploration of how adolescent phubbing influences mothers' emotional wellbeing and attachment security.

Knowledge Gap

Although existing literature on parental phubbing explores effects on adolescents (David & Roberts, 2017; Geurts et al., 2022), there is insufficient research focusing on emotional wellbeing of mothers who are phubbed by their adolescent children. Current studies primarily address how phubbing influences adolescents' social and emotional development (Bae & Nam, 2023; Hong et al., 2019), excluding an unexplored dimension of the issue in terms of how these behaviors affect mothers' emotional wellbeing. This was a knowledge and research gap.

There currently is insufficient understanding of how mothers perceive and emotionally respond to being phubbed by their adolescent children. There is limited insights regarding emotional neglect and rejection they may experience, how they perceive their adolescent's behaviors, and long-term effects they may have on their emotional wellbeing and attachment bonds. Additionally, there are no studies that focus on mothers' lived experiences involving phubbing, with most research focusing primarily on the impact of phubbing on adolescents (David & Roberts, 2017; Geurts et al., 2022).

Hong et al. (2019) suggested the need to explore the effects of phubbing within parent–child relationships, as there is insufficient research in this area compared to phubbing in social interactions or romantic relationships.

This gap in literature is particularly relevant to the present study, as it aligns with the research question, which seeks to explore how mother–adolescent interactions, particularly during instances of phubbing, affect emotional bonding and attachment. Addressing this gap, this research aimed to provide valuable insights into how being phubbed influences mothers' emotional well-being and how it influences the mother–adolescent attachment.

Furthermore, the existing literature predominantly focuses on the adverse impact of parental phubbing on adolescents (David & Roberts, 2017; Hong et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2019); however, there is a need for additional research exploring the experiences of mothers who are phubbed by their adolescent children. In addition to the content gap, there is a methodological gap in the research. Most studies on phubbing relied on quantitative methods, which may be insufficient to capture the depth of mothers' emotions, personal experiences, and attachment dynamics. Relatively few qualitative studies explored the emotional and attachment experiences of phubbing, particularly within the mother–adolescent attachment dynamic, which is essential for understanding how phubbing influences emotional bonding, especially within the family setting (Hong et al., 2019).

This study may have addressed this gap by using a qualitative approach to explore how mothers perceived and emotionally responded to being phubbed by their

adolescents. Through this approach, the study may have provided an in-depth understanding of their emotional experiences and how these experiences impacted emotional bonding and attachment. Qualitative methods are particularly valuable for exploring subjective perceptions and emotions, which may be underexplored in quantitative research. Furthermore, this study explored how phubbing behaviors emerge in mother-adolescent attachment and their potential influence in terms of attachment security between mothers and their adolescents.

Problem Statement

The issue prompting the search of the literature is that in today's digital era, smartphones serve as dual sources of entertainment and communication, leading adolescents to become increasingly consumed by their devices. Consequently, this behavior interrupts meaningful parent–adolescent connections (Geurts et al., 2022; Vossen et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Phubbing, a behavior involving prioritizing mobile devices over face-to-face interactions in social settings (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016), may significantly affect the attachment bond between adolescents and their parents. Adolescents phubbing their mothers during key bonding moments may lead to disrupted communication, diminished emotional availability, and weakened emotional connections (Kushlev & Dunn; Wang et al., 2023). These disruptions may contribute to the deepening of insecurity within an already insecure attachment between adolescents and their mothers.

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of mothers phubbed by their adolescents. The existing literature primarily examines the adverse impact of parental

phubbing on adolescents (Bae & Nam, 2023; Bai et al., 2020; Geng et al., 2021: Wang et al., 2022); however, there is insufficient detailed research focusing on mothers' lived experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. Although current studies have highlighted how parental phubbing influences children's socio-emotional development and overall emotional bond between parents and children (Bae & Nam, 2023; Hong et al., 2019), the specific experiences of mothers being phubbed by their adolescents remain underexplored. This study aimed to address the gap in scholarly research and may have provided valuable insights into the unique experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to provide understanding regarding the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. I used an (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) IPA approach to collect data about the experiences of mothers. Although there is current literature on parental phubbing, there are no studies focusing on mothers' experiences of phubbing. This study may have filled the gap in research by using this qualitative approach to gain insight into the experiences of mothers phubbed by their adolescents.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of mothers who have been phubbed by their adolescent (ages 14-18) children?

Theoretical Framework

This study employed Bowlby's attachment theory as the theoretical framework. Bowlby (1969) posited children are biologically programmed to form emotional bonds with their caregivers, which are vital for emotional and social development. Central to the theory is the concept of the primary attachment figure (typically the mother), who provides a secure base for the child to explore the world and form new relationships.

Considering the pivotal role of the primary attachment figure in fostering secure emotional bonds (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1979), it is essential to consider how new factors, such as the rise of technology, impact the dynamics of parent–child relationships. The rise of technology, particularly smartphones, has introduced new disruptions in parent–adolescent attachments (Gong et al., 2022). Attachment theory, with its focus in terms of the importance of a secure emotional bond and caregiver's role in providing a secure base, provides a particularly valuable framework for exploring the emotional challenges faced by mothers as they navigate the evolving mother–adolescent attachment.

This study explored attachment theory in relation to the emotional bonds between mothers and adolescents, focusing on how these bonds influence their behaviors and emotional well-being when they were phubbed by their adolescents. Attachment theory highlights the critical role of secure emotional bonds between mothers and their children for healthy emotional and behavioral development. During adolescence, these bonds remain foundational for emotional sensitivity and regulation (Bowlby, 1969). In contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic may have disrupted these essential bonds, particularly for

mothers, as they faced increased physical and emotional withdrawal from their adolescents due to isolation measures (De Figueiredo et al., 2021).

In conjunction with Bowlby's attachment theory the study employed an IPA approach. Considering the study's focus which explored mothers' lived experiences, IPA was an appropriate methodology for this research. IPA is well-suited because it may have provided a detailed and interpretative approach to understanding the lived experiences of mothers who feel phubbed by their adolescents, allowing for an exploration of the meaning-making processes mothers engaged in as they navigated their emotional responses and attachment dynamics. This approach focused on the subjective meanings mothers attributed to their experiences, considering their specific context. Methods such as semistructured interviews allowed mothers to articulate their feelings and thoughts freely, which provided opportunities for deep, personal explorations of their lived experiences (see Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). The flexibility of IPA's data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) provided an ideal environment for mothers to openly share their emotions. IPA's capacity to identify unique experiences and shared themes may have allowed for a nuanced exploration of this issue. IPA's reflective, detailed, and interpretative approach enabled mothers to reflect on their experiences, which may have deepened understanding of the emotional and attachment-related impacts of adolescents' phubbing.

This study integrated Bowlby's attachment theory, IPA, in addition to exploring the emotional and attachment dynamics that influenced mothers' perceptions of their emotional bonds with their adolescents. The primary objective of this study was to

provide insight into the emotional and attachment-related impact of phubbing on mothers, focusing on how they perceived and responded to this behavior. Using attachment theory, the study explored the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, highlighting how they perceived and responded to these experiences within an attachment framework. This theoretical framework and qualitative methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of the mothers' experiences. Further details are provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study used a phenomenological design exploring the lived experiences of mothers who felt phubbed by their adolescents, focusing on the meaning-making processes they engaged in as they navigated their emotional responses and attachment dynamics. I conducted IPA to understand the meanings mothers attributed to their experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. Participant selection was a homogeneous convenience sampling that engaged with 8-12 mothers who met the inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for this study were individuals who were 18 years or older, identified as mothers of adolescents aged 14-18, and experienced phubbing. The semistructured format ensured a consistent interview flow, facilitated a focused conversation regarding key themes, and allowed mothers to elaborate on their emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and interactions with their adolescents. Semistructured interviews were conducted to gather rich, detailed accounts, which allowed for flexibility and depth in exploring each mother's personal narrative. This approach, guided by IPA, led to an understanding of the themes emerging directly from the data, providing a deep

exploration of the lived experiences of mothers as they navigated their emotional responses and attachment dynamics. In this study, the application of IPA involved several distinct steps to ensure a thorough analysis of the mothers' narratives such as conducting semistructured interviews, establishing rapport, recording and transcribing interviews, familiarizing with data, taking initial notes and identifying experiential statements, developing personal experiential and cluster themes, engaging and interpreting in the double hermeneutic process, writing up findings, reflecting on ethical considerations, and evaluating rigor and credibility (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Smith & Nizza, 2022)

Definitions

Adolescent: An individual in the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, typically between 10 and 19 (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Attachment Object (AO): A concept suggesting an object may act as a proxy for the maternal attachment figure, offering a temporary sense of comfort and security in the absence of the mother's emotional sensitivity and availability (Bowlby, 1969; Lee & Hood, 2021).

Anxious Attachment: Individuals with anxious attachment display heightened sensitivity to perceived abandonment or neglect, often seeking proximity to their attachment figure and emotional closeness to alleviate fears of rejection and ensure emotional security (Bowlby, 1988).

Avoidant Attachment: Individuals with avoidant attachment often prioritize independence and tend to avoid seeking comfort or emotional support from attachment figures, minimizing their emotional and attachment needs (Bowlby, 1988).

Mother–Adolescent Attachment: Emotional bonds and relationships between mothers and their adolescent children, characterized by mutual affection, trust, and support, with mothers serving as a secure base for adolescents' explorations of the world (Bowlby, 1969; Li et al., 2023)

Phubbing: The practice of disengaging from or ignoring someone to focus on one's smartphone or other technological devices instead of engaging in face-to-face conversations (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016).

Assumptions

In this phenomenological study, which employed IPA and homogeneous convenience sampling, several key assumptions underlie the approach. First, I assumed that participants' experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents were deeply subjective and influenced by their unique perceptions, emotional responses, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts of their family dynamics. The use of a homogeneous sample consisted solely of mothers of adolescents. I assumed that the participants shared similar experiences that allowed for a focused exploration of the emotional implications of adolescents phubbing their mothers. This approach emphasized depth over breadth, with the aim of revealing emotional and personal significance mothers attributed to their experiences, particularly in the context of emotional bonding and attachment dynamics, as described in Bowlby's attachment theory.

Another assumption was that mothers would provide accurate and thoughtful responses during interviews, which was pivotal in ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, the study assumed that mothers would

recall relevant details of their experiences, as the phenomenological method relied on reflective personal narratives (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Although the study sought to capture rich, detailed responses, I acknowledged the possibility of biases, such as social desirability bias or retrospective biases, which might have influenced how mothers described their experiences. Furthermore, the study assumed that the emotional responses of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents would be central to understanding their lived experiences. I assumed that IPA allowed for the identification of shared patterns and themes, while recognizing the importance of the mothers' perceptions of experiences. By exploring the meaning mothers attributed to their experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents, this study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how these phubbing behaviors influence mothers' emotional well-being and attachment security. Although the findings from this study were not intended to be broadly generalizable, homogeneous convenience sampling allowed for an in-depth examination of the experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. By focusing on mothers who were phubbed, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into their unique emotional responses and attachment dynamics, which may inform future research and interventions for this population.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to provide understanding regarding the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. The recruitment process included sharing a link to the participant qualification assessment via SurveyMonkey on social media platforms like Facebook. An

example of a group where permission was requested to share the invitation was ‘Momspace’ (a support group for mothers) on Facebook. Mothers who met the inclusion criteria were contacted via email, as provided in the qualification assessment, and invited to participate in the interview process. The rich, detailed accounts that IPA generates allow readers to assess how the findings may apply to other settings, which may foster the transferability of insights about mother–adolescent attachment and emotional bonding in the digital age. This study provided a clear framework by outlining the inclusion criteria and the sample population which were supported by relevant literature and theoretical foundations to develop semistructured interview questions; however, it is important to acknowledge that although each mother’s experience was unique, the use of a homogeneous convenience sample limits the broad generalizability of the findings. Insights gained from these focused narratives provided a deeper, interpretive understanding of the phenomenon, which may enrich the broader discussion of the impact of digital media on mother–adolescent attachment.

Limitations

This study acknowledged several limitations, particularly those related to participant recruitment and potential biases. First, challenges that might have occurred regarding the willingness of mothers to participate due to time constraints, including busy work schedules, as well as the sensitive nature of the topic. Mothers may have felt discomfort in sharing personal experiences, especially those involving emotions such as frustration, anger, or vulnerability regarding their adolescents’ phubbing behaviors.

Additionally, concerns related to confidentiality, privacy, and social desirability biases might have affected the willingness of participants to provide candid responses.

Further limitations arise from the potential for retrospective biases. Mothers may have experienced difficulties accurately recalling or fully expressing their emotions related to past experiences. This may have affected the depth and accuracy of the data they provided, which may have impacted the richness of the study's findings. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge my potential biases in this study. Although I do not share the same life experience of being phubbed by an adolescent, my personal views on technology use and attachment dynamics may have introduced biases during data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Recognizing this possibility was crucial to ensure transparency. As this topic may have led to discomfort, mothers' hesitance might have further influenced the quality and depth of the information shared. Although this study employed a homogeneous convenience sample of mothers, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of their unique experiences, it is important to note that the transferability of these findings to other contexts is limited. The specific nature of the sample may restrict the generalization of the findings beyond the group studied.

Significance of the Study

This study may have contributed valuable insights into the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. By exploring how these experiences affected emotional bonding, well-being, and mother–adolescent attachments, the study provided mothers an opportunity to reflect on the influence of adolescents' phubbing on their relationships and emotional well-being. A deeper understanding of how phubbing

impacted their emotional connection may help mothers foster more meaningful and supportive relationships with their adolescents. Additionally, this process of meaning-making and reflection may empower mothers to better navigate the ways in which technology affects their attachment dynamics and emotional well-being.

This study's findings may have significant implications for developing interventions and resources aimed at strengthening mother–adolescent attachment and supporting emotional bonding in the digital age. These insights may inform policy and practice, guiding the creation of educational initiatives focused on managing technology use at home. These programs may help mothers establish healthier digital boundaries, promoting more authentic, face-to-face interactions with their adolescents and supporting mothers' emotional well-being. Furthermore, incorporating parental control features in digital devices may provide mothers with tools to mitigate the emotional disconnect associated with phubbing: fostering stronger, more supportive family connections. This study was significant for its contribution to understanding the influence of phubbing regarding mother–adolescent attachments, and its potential to inform strategies that promote healthier emotional bonds and strengthen attachment between mothers and adolescents in an increasingly digital world.

Summary

This study focused on the unique experiences mothers had when they were phubbed by their adolescent children. The significance of this study is found in its potential to deepen understanding of how phubbing affects emotional bonding, well-being, and mother–adolescent attachments. Additionally, it has the potential to inform

strategies that promote healthier emotional connections and strengthen attachment between mothers and adolescents in an increasingly digital world. Adolescents phubbing their mothers during key bonding moments may lead to disrupted communication, diminished emotional availability, and weakened emotional connections (Kushlev & Dunn; Wang et al., 2023). These disruptions may contribute to the deepening of insecurity within an already insecure attachment between the adolescent and mother. By exploring these experiences, the study may increase awareness regarding the emotional bonding challenges mothers face when phubbed by their adolescents. This awareness is critical, because it may lead to more informed interventions and strategies aimed at fostering stronger, more supportive mother–adolescent attachment in the context of technology use (J. Zhang, 2024). Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, exploring the existing literature and challenges mothers face when phubbed by their adolescents. The study then transitions to the methodology employed to examine these issues.

Chapter 3 includes the research methodology used in this study, providing a comprehensive overview of the research design and the rationale behind its selection. The chapter details the role of the researcher and provides an in-depth explanation of the methodology used throughout the study. Additionally, Chapter 3 addresses concerns related to trustworthiness, outlining the steps I used to mitigate potential biases. A thorough discussion of the nature and approach of the study is also included, with an emphasis on ensuring the trustworthiness and rigor of the research, particularly within the context of the homogeneous sample.

Chapter 4 focuses on the data collection and analysis process. It will describe how data was gathered, including the specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the analysis, offering clear insight into how the data was processed and interpreted. Any discrepancies encountered during data collection will be addressed, and the chapter will discuss how the study ensured trustworthiness, emphasizing the credibility, transferability within similar contexts, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Finally, Chapter 4 will present the study's results, providing a detailed view of the findings obtained from the collected data.

Chapter 5 will interpret the findings of the study, considering the implications of the results in relation to the research's objectives. The chapter will also address the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for future research, grounded in the strengths and weaknesses of the current study. Additionally, Chapter 5 will explore the potential for positive social change, particularly at the family level, and discuss how the findings may influence broader societal impacts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Digital media and smartphones has revolutionized communication, increasing connectedness; however, this has led to significant concerns regarding their impacts on face-to-face interactions, especially within the parent–adolescent relationships (Hong et al., 2019; Tariq et al., 2022). Phubbing frequently results in emotional neglect, emotional isolation, and attachment-related distress, particularly among mothers whose adolescent children favor their devices over bonding and interactions (Bae & Nam, 2023; Mi et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Phubbing by adolescents may impair attachment security of mothers whose roles as emotional support systems and caregivers are intricately linked to the emotional bonds that form the foundation of attachment (Kerr et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022).

Smartphones serve as dual sources of entertainment and communication, leading adolescents to become increasingly consumed by their devices. Consequently, these behaviors interrupt meaningful parent-adolescent connections (Geurts et al., 2022; Vossen et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). As adolescents prioritize mobile devices over face-to-face interactions in social settings, this behavior, known as phubbing, may significantly affect parent–adolescent attachment (H. Zhang, 2024; Tong et al., 2023;). Adolescents phubbing their mothers during key bonding moments may lead to disrupted communications, reduced emotional availability, and weakened emotional connections, potentially leading to the diminishing and fragmentation of parent–adolescent attachments (Kushlev & Dunn, 2019; Wang et al., 2023).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. Bowlby's attachment theory posits emotional security is significantly influenced by attachment bonds between mothers and children (Bowlby, 1969). Phubbing may lead to mothers experiencing feelings involving insecurity and frustration, as adolescents divert their attention from their mothers to technology. This shift in focus may cause mothers to perceive weakening of emotional attachments, which may compromise relationship stability (Tufan et al., 2024). Over time, emotional disconnections may lead to degradation of attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1969).

This chapter includes the strategy for the literature review, gaps in literature, and Bowlby's attachment theory, which was the theoretical framework. I review literature on problematic technology use and phubbing, providing a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents.

Literature Review Strategy

I initially used EBSCOHost to begin searching for keywords. The keywords and databases I explored included: *phubbing, problematic smartphone use, social media, problematic internet use, adolescents, parenting styles, mother–child relationship, and parent–child relationship.* Afterward, I used APA PsycINFO to find peer-reviewed articles specific to my discipline. As I reviewed the articles, I expanded my search by incorporating additional keywords relevant to my study, such *as parental phubbing, problematic mobile phone use, technoference, parent media use, and parenting*. Additionally, I accessed the Directory of Open Access Journals, Academic Search

Complete, Medline, SocINDEX, and Complementary Index databases to further refine my search.

Research Gap

The significance of this study may have filled the research gap of providing a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. Considering the nature of phubbing, which is inherently linked with technological influence and personal interactions, its meaning and impacts may vary depending on social settings and cultural contexts in which it occurs (Lv et al., 2022; Niu et al. 2020; Vanden Abeele et al. 2019, Xie et al., 2019), highlighting a significant gap in literature regarding the influence of cultural and contextual factors in romantic, professional, and parental relationships (Lv et al., 2022; Roberts & David, 2016; Xie et al., 2019).

Vanden Abeele et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of further investigation, proposing that examining local and regional cultural expectations, which may influence how phubbing is perceived and accepted, alongside the significance of contextual factors (such as the formality of the environment) is crucial. The identified gap in literature is particularly relevant to this study due to cultural expectations related to technology use and parenting and the social settings in which these interactions occur (Lv et al., 2022; Niu et al. 2020; Vanden Abeele et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2019). These factors may influence how mothers perceive their adolescents' behaviors and emotional consequences of being phubbed. Exploring these aspects may lead to deeper insights regarding their

experiences and how phubbing impacts emotional bonding and the mother–adolescent attachment, which remains underexplored in existing literature.

Furthermore, Xie et al. (2019) suggested that to gain insight into how cultural influences affect the relationship between teenage smartphone addiction and parental phubbing, research is needed to examine how these behaviors vary across different cultural contexts. Considering that cultural beliefs and norms influence interpersonal behaviors, exploring this research gap is relevant to this study because this exploration may provide valuable insights regarding how these aspects shape mothers' experiences. This research may demonstrate the extent to which cultural beliefs and norms affect their perceptions and reactions to their children's technology use, and how these responses subsequently influence emotional bonds between themselves and adolescents.

In addition, McDaniel and Radesky (2017) suggested exploring the connections between contextual variables, such as family stressors, parenting styles, and emotional sensitivity, and their impact on children's behavioral issues and parental phubbing. The identified gap in literature is relevant to my study because even though this research focused on the impact of parental phubbing on young children, the emotional consequences and mechanisms of parent–child attachment may also be applicable to mothers. Although a mother's emotional responses may differ with adolescents compared to younger children, phubbing may affect her attachment and emotional bond with her adolescent. For example, emotional sensitivity plays a crucial role in influencing maternal responses and formation of emotional bonds (Bowlby, 1969). Mothers who are emotionally sensitive may perceive their adolescents' phubbing as an indicator of

emotional detachment, which may lead to feelings of emotional isolation, frustration, undervaluation, rejection, and resentment. These responses may lead to emotional neglect, hurt, and diminished emotional bonds or attachments with adolescents.

The methodological approach is an additional gap in literature regarding mothers' experiences with adolescents who are phubbed by their children. Research on phubbing has predominantly been quantitative, with few qualitative studies exploring the emotional and attachment experiences involving phubbing, especially in terms of parent–child dynamics (Hong et al., 2019). This qualitative research explored the experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, which may have provide an in-depth understanding of mothers' perceptions of being ignored by their adolescents due to technological usage. The qualitative approach was used to address potential impacts on emotional bonding and attachment, which may be difficult to capture using quantitative methods. Additionally, the current study provided an opportunity to examine how phubbing behaviors emerged within mother-adolescent attachments and potentially affected attachment security.

Hong et al. (2019) suggested exploring the impact of phubbing in parent–child relationships because there is a limited amount of research in this area compared to phubbing in social interactions and romantic relationships. This gap in literature is relevant to my study as it aligns with my research question, which explores how mother–adolescent interactions affect emotional bonding and attachment, which may provide valuable insights into the influences on mothers' emotional well-being and the mother–adolescent attachment. Current literature mainly focuses on parental phubbing of

adolescents (Bae & Nam, 2023; Bai et. al, 2020; Geng et al., 2021: Wang et al., 2022), and based on identified research gaps, there is a need for further studies to explore the experiences of mothers who are phubbed by their adolescent children.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed Bowlby's attachment theory as the theoretical framework. Bowlby (1969) posited children are biologically programmed to form emotional bonds with their caregivers, which are vital for emotional and social development. Central to the theory is the concept of the primary attachment figure (typically the mother), who provides a secure base for the child to explore the world and form new relationships. Bowlby (1969) argued that attachment behaviors are evolutionarily programmed, with humans having an innate tendency to form these bonds for survival. A strong attachment to the caregiver ensures the child's safety, care, and security.

Considering the pivotal role of the primary attachment figure in fostering secure emotional bonds (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1979), it is essential to consider how new factors, such as the rise of technology, impact the dynamics of parent–child relationships. The rise of technology, particularly smartphones, has introduced new disruptions in parent–adolescent attachments (Gong et al., 2022). Attachment theory, with its focus in terms of the importance of a secure emotional bond and caregiver's role in providing a secure base, provides a particularly valuable framework for exploring the emotional challenges faced by mothers as they navigate the evolving mother–adolescent attachment.

This study explored attachment theory in relation to the emotional bonds between mothers and adolescents, focusing on how these bonds influence their behaviors and

emotional well-being when they were phubbed by their adolescents. Attachment theory highlights the critical role of secure emotional bonds between mothers and their children for healthy emotional and behavioral development. During adolescence, these bonds remain foundational for emotional sensitivity and regulation (Bowlby, 1969). In contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic may have disrupted these essential bonds, particularly for mothers, as they faced increased physical and emotional withdrawal from their adolescents due to isolation measures (De Figueiredo et al., 2021).

Emotional Security

Bowlby identified specific attachment behaviors, such as seeking proximity to the caregiver, clinging, and crying, intended to keep the child close to their attachment figure for care and security (Bowlby, 1969). These behaviors are most prominent during times of fear or anxiety, as they help ensure that the child receives the emotional and physical comfort necessary for emotional regulation. Bowlby's attachment theory emphasizes the importance of physical proximity and the ability to receive comfort from an attachment figure during times of fear and anxiety (Bowlby 1969; Bowlby, 1973). Although a smartphone may provide emotional support, it lacks the presence of a human attachment figure, touch, and physical warmth that foster secure attachment bonds. A smartphone may act as a device for emotional bonding; however, it cannot fully replace the emotional availability and responsiveness provided by a caregiver. In the modern context, adolescents may direct attachment behaviors toward objects, including digital devices like smartphones particularly during times of physical or emotional separation from their primary caregivers. In these cases, smartphone function as Attachment Objects (AOs)

(Bowlby, 1969; Lee & Hood, 2021), suggesting smartphones may act as a proxy for the maternal attachment figure, offering a temporary sense of comfort and security in the absence of the mother's emotional sensitivity and availability. Nevertheless, attachments to smartphones cannot replicate the lasting, responsive emotional connections of caregivers.

During times of increased fear and anxiety, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents often relied on their smartphones for social communication and as a source of emotional support (Parent et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Smartphone became more than devices for casual or social communication; they may have evolved into AOs compensating for physical presence and emotional comfort typically provided by primary caregivers, particularly mothers (Bowlby, 1969; Lee & Hood, 2021). In this context, smartphones may have become central to the emotional lives of adolescents, potentially offering comfort, connection, and emotional regulation in the absence of face-to-face interactions with their caregivers, particularly their mothers.

As digital devices continue to play a central role in adolescents' emotional landscapes, how relationships are managed, particularly in terms of attachment, becomes even more critical. Secure attachment plays a vital role in how mothers and their adolescents connect and regulate emotions. When adolescents have secure attachments, they are likely to seek emotional support and comfort from their mothers, as a secure base (Bowlby, 1988). Knowing that their mothers are reliable sources of support cultivates trust and emotional security, which strengthens the attachment bond. As a result, phubbing may be less prevalent in adolescents with secure attachment, as they benefit

from the emotional closeness and consistent, responsive caregiving provided by their mothers (Sun & Miller, 2023). Furthermore, rather than relying on digital devices for emotional avoidance, adolescents with secure attachment may engage in open conversations to address their emotional challenges. This ability to express themselves may reflect the emotional security they gained from their secure base, which may enable them to better navigate difficult emotions without resorting to withdrawal (Bowlby, 1988).

Insecure Attachment

In contrast, when adolescents lack secure attachments, the dynamics shift, and phubbing may become a more frequent response to emotional challenges. Adolescents with insecure attachments, such as anxious or avoidant attachment, may engage in phubbing as a coping strategy (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988; Sun & Miller, 2023). For example, phubbing may serve as an emotional distancing tactic for adolescents who are avoidant. Considering their preference for autonomy, adolescents with avoidant attachments may frequently rely on smartphones as an AO, using them to withdraw emotionally from social interactions (Bowlby, 1969; Lee & Hood, 2021; Sun & Miller, 2023). Dependence on digital devices may serve as a temporary source of comfort, although they do not fully compensate for the emotional connections that are insufficient due to their mothers' emotional unavailability. Consequently, adolescents avoid face-to-face conversations and intimacy, withdrawing from direct emotional connections (Sun & Miller, 2023). This avoidance may reflect insufficient emotional security in the mother–adolescent attachments, reinforcing their tendency for emotional

withdrawal and reliance on smartphones as a source of comfort and coping (Bowlby, 1988).

In contrast, adolescents with anxious attachments display heightened sensitivity to perceived abandonment or neglect, seeking proximity and emotional support to alleviate their fears of rejection (Bowlby, 1988). Adolescents with anxious attachment styles often experience heightened emotional responses to attachment threats, such as perceived abandonment, which may lead to anxiety and anger. This anger may lead to an adaptive response aimed at protecting attachment bonds or preventing perceived abandonment (Bowlby, 1988). This emotional response may be driven by fear of rejection and a desire to re-establish proximity with attachment figures, particularly mothers. For adolescents with anxious attachments, phubbing may be viewed as a response to insecurity and underlying fears of rejection, which may reflect their heightened sensitivity to attachment threats (Sun & Miller, 2023). Adolescents with higher levels of anxious attachments may engage in phubbing to cope with their anxiety, seeking reassurance or comfort using digital interactions while perceiving it as a form of protection from fears of rejection and insecurities related to attachment, particularly in the context of digital device use (Sun & Miller, 2023; Tufan et al., 2024).

Adolescents with anxious attachments may form attachments to their smartphones, using them as an AO to regulate anxiety, driven by their heightened emotional responses to perceived threats of abandonment or neglect (Bowlby, 1988; Lee & Hood, 2021). Adolescents' attachment to digital devices may serve as a coping mechanism to mitigate anxiety related to perceived abandonment or insecurity.

Adolescents' separation from smartphones may lead to fears and anxieties similar to separation anxiety experienced with primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1973). Phubbing may serve as a perceived form of self-protection for adolescents with anxious attachment, allowing them to seek comfort and attempt to regulate their anxiety. This behavior may reflect their attempt to seek reassurance and maintain proximity to a source of comfort, while anger may also emerge as an adaptive response to the perceived threat of abandonment or rejection. Although it often involves emotional distancing from direct social interaction rather than engaging with others, phubbing may reflect a complex dynamic of seeking comfort, which adolescents may perceive as a way to shield themselves from feelings of rejection or abandonment (Sun & Miller, 2023). As a result, although phubbing may serve as an adaptive coping strategy, it may also become maladaptive due to attachment-related anxieties associated with digital device use in adolescence.

Adolescent Attachment Styles and Their Impacts on Maternal Responses

The attachment styles of adolescents play a crucial role in shaping how they interact with their primary caregivers, particularly regarding behaviors such as phubbing (Sun & Miller, 2023). For adolescents with anxious attachment, their heightened emotional responses to attachment threats and their need for reassurance may lead to anxiety in their mothers (Bowlby, 1988). This may lead to anxious responses from the mothers, if they feel compelled to provide constant reassurance, potentially leading to a cycle of emotional tension and pressure. The emotional dynamics between adolescents and mothers in the context of anxious attachments are complex, influenced by reciprocal

emotional responses and behaviors. Adolescents and mothers may exhibit heightened emotional responses to attachment-related threats due to bidirectional patterns of emotional interactions. Phubbing may be perceived as a coping mechanism for the adolescents' fears of abandonment, while simultaneously leading to emotional responses from their mothers (Sun & Miller, 2023).

Inconsistent caregiving or episodes of emotional withdrawal, especially when accompanied by explicit threats of separation or rejection, may exacerbate the adolescent's fears of emotional abandonment and lead to anger at the perceived emotional absence of the mother (Bowlby, 1988). This emotional arousal may increase the likelihood of phubbing behaviors, as adolescents attempt to cope with their fear of losing emotional connections with their mother while also expressing frustration with her emotional unavailability. This anger may serve as a protective response from the mother, as she attempts to re-establish emotional proximity and prevent perceived abandonment, further reinforcing the bidirectional nature of attachment dynamics (Bowlby, 1988).

In contrast, mothers of securely attached adolescents may feel more equipped to manage behaviors such as phubbing, maintaining security and emotional availability without being overwhelmed by their adolescents' temporary distraction. Secure attachment may help mothers manage behaviors effectively, providing a foundation that promotes emotional regulation and a balanced, nurturing relationship. This emotional security and understanding may foster a secure bases that support adolescents' emotional development. This study provided insights regarding how attachment dynamics influenced maternal emotional responses to behaviors such as phubbing, which may have

helped to reveal the nuanced ways mothers navigated feelings of frustration, rejection, and emotional withdrawal.

Maternal Responses Based on Adolescent Attachment Styles

As these attachment dynamics influence adolescent behaviors, maternal responses, particularly in the context of attachment styles, play a key role in the adolescents' emotional development. The following section explores how maternal responses to phubbing behaviors are influenced by the adolescents' emotional needs and attachment styles, highlighting how these responses vary according to the specific attachment challenges mothers face. For example, mothers of adolescents with avoidant attachments may encounter a range of challenges, particularly as their adolescents use deactivation strategies to maintain emotional distance (Sun & Miller, 2023). Adolescents may experience emotional withdrawal in response to what they perceive as anxious or emotional unavailability behaviors from their mothers (Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby, 1988), which may create a cycle of emotional withdrawal and misunderstanding that further reinforces their need for autonomy (Sun & Miller, 2023). This may lead mothers becoming frustrated or experiencing emotional disconnection, as their attempts to provide support and engagement are met with resistance. In these situations, maternal responses may vary; however, mothers with secure attachments may demonstrate enhanced emotional regulation and availability, helping to maintain a secure base, modeling balanced emotional responsiveness without overwhelming their adolescent. Mothers' responses, whether anxious, avoidant, or secure, play a key role in navigating the emotional and attachment-related challenges that emerge from their adolescents'

attachment behaviors. This study explored how these dynamics develop regarding mothers' perspectives, focusing on how they experience and respond to their adolescents' phubbing behaviors within the context of attachments.

Literature Review

The literature review begins by examining the broader impacts of the pandemic regarding smartphone use, establishing how smartphones became integral to daily life. The review then explores how these devices function as AOs and their implications for mother–adolescent attachments. The review further discusses adolescent phubbing as an observable indicator of problematic technology use, highlighting its role as a proxy for deeper issues of problematic technology use. Each section of the review contributes to linking phubbing by adolescents to disruptions in mother–adolescent attachments, emphasizing how phubbing impairs emotional bonding and attachment. The review applies attachment theory as a framework, demonstrating how phubbing creates an environment that impairs attachment security, which may lead to a mothers' emotional neglect, rejection, and emotional isolation. By examining existing literature on parent–child attachment, technology use, and phubbing, the review emphasizes the need to explore the emotional impact of phubbing regarding mothers. This review links existing research to the central research question, demonstrating how adolescent phubbing affects attachment and emotional bonding between mothers and adolescents. This structure contextualizes the existing literature and provides a theoretical foundation for exploring emotional impacts of phubbing on mother–adolescent attachments.

In exploring how adolescents' phubbing impacts the emotional and attachment dynamics between mothers and their adolescents, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of mothers whose adolescent children engaged in this behavior. The disruption of traditional family interactions during the pandemic may have led adolescents to rely more heavily on digital communication (Schmeer et al., 2023; Shutman & Gershv, 2022), particularly smartphones, as a means of emotional bonding, prioritizing digital interactions instead of face-to-face conversations with their mothers (Dwyer et al., 2017). These shifts may have played a role in smartphones becoming AOs, for many adolescents, serving as perceived sources of emotional security during a time of uncertainty (Lee & Hood, 2021). Conversely, this shift may have complicated mother–adolescent attachments because emotional withdrawal may have been exacerbated by phubbing and may have led mothers feeling emotionally disconnected, rejected, frustrated, angry, undervalued, or neglected. This literature review explores how smartphones function as AOs and emotional consequences for mothers when these objects disrupt attachment bonds. The review focuses on the impact of phubbing by adolescents as an indicator of problematic technology use, highlighting how this behavior impairs emotional bonding and security in mother–adolescent attachments. Through the lens of attachment theory, the review will highlight how mothers navigate these challenges and the emotional impacts they face in their attempts to manage attachment dynamics with their adolescents.

Disruption of Family Dynamics During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant disruption involving family dynamics (Gayatri & Puspitasari, 2022; Lebrow, 2020), particularly for adolescents who became more isolated from their primary caregivers, particularly their mothers. Due to lockdowns and physical distancing, adolescents increasingly relied on digital communication (Shutman & Gershv, 2022) for emotional bonding. Before the pandemic, smartphones were primarily devices for socializing and casual communication; however, as physical proximity to caregivers, particularly mothers, became limited, smartphones may have been transformed into a primary source of emotional bonding for many, including adolescents and mothers (Parent et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Adolescents increasingly relied on these devices for social connection, which may have helped to fulfill their emotional needs during a time of increased anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. The pandemic's emotional impacts likely prompted adolescents to experience increased anxiety, fear, and loneliness (Li et al., 2021).

In the context of Bowlby's attachment theory, as the attachment system is activated during times of fear and anxiety, individuals typically seek proximity to attachment figures, such as primary caregivers (Bowlby 1969; Bowlby, 1973). With this in mind, with the onset of the pandemic, this dynamic shifted. Before the pandemic, smartphones primarily served a social function. In contrast, fear, anxiety, isolation, and loneliness caused by the pandemic introduced an emotional dimension, transforming smartphones from devices for social connection into integral components of attachment systems. They became vital sources of emotional support, fulfilling an attachment-related

role. In essence, attachment to smartphones may have been significantly intensified by the pandemic. For example, adolescents and mothers may have developed stronger emotional bonds with their smartphones, which came to symbolize comfort and security during periods of fear and anxiety (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973; Lee & Hood, 2021)

Increased smartphones use, in conjunction with increased social media engagement, allowed adolescents to maintain connection with friends and family members; however, this may have resulted in decreased face-to-face interactions with their mothers (Dwyer et al., 2017). As Bowlby suggested, the emotional bonds formed with primary caregivers are essential for emotional security and regulation. During the pandemic; however, these bonds may have been disrupted, as mothers became less emotionally available to their children, often due to caregiving responsibilities, demands of remote work, and emotional impacts of the pandemic (Yan et al., 2022).

For adolescents, smartphones may have increasingly served as AOs and may have temporarily addressed the emotional needs due to physical and emotional separation from their mothers (Lee & Hood, 2021). Smartphones may have become more than a social tool; it may have transformed into a source of comfort, offering emotional security in the absence of the physical proximity, which Bowlby identified as essential for healthy attachment development (Bowlby, 1969). This shift in attachment behaviors may have mirrored that of attachment to primary caregivers, as adolescents may have begun to rely on their smartphones for social connection, emotional regulation, and bonding. The emotional and social attachment to smartphones may have become pronounced during the pandemic, as adolescents sought emotional stability and connection from their

devices, which may have led to smartphones becoming an increasingly central part of their daily lives.

Shifts in Attachment Behavior and Emerging Challenges

Increased attachment to smartphones also led to certain challenges involving family dynamics. As adolescents became more dependent on their smartphones to manage the emotional impact caused by isolation (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Shutzman & Gershv, 2022), a concerning shift occurred in their relationships with primary attachment figure particularly with their mothers. Although smartphones initially served as a device for social communication, growing emotional dependence on these devices may have led to behaviors such as phubbing, in which adolescents began to prioritize interactions with their phones over face-to-face connection with their mothers (Bajwa et al., 2023). Phubbing may have led to emotional withdrawal and disrupted communication, as adolescents, consumed by their devices, may have neglected their mothers' emotional needs, which may have resulted in frustration and emotional neglect.

According to Bowlby (1969), attachment behaviors such as seeking proximity to an attachment figure are key to emotional security and development. During the pandemic, smartphones may have become AOs, fulfilling the emotional needs of adolescents in the absence of proximity with their mothers. For mothers, this shift may have represented a new challenge in mother–adolescent attachments, as emotional bonds with their children may have been increasingly mediated through digital devices. Smartphones which had once been a device for casual communication, may have become critical components of adolescents' emotional lives, which may have offered a source of

comfort during a time when physical closeness to their primary caregivers was not possible.

Pandemic Impacts on Attachment and Emotional Isolation

As adolescents were increasingly isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic, their attachment behaviors may have shifted in response to insufficient physical proximity to their mothers and primary caregivers. According to Bowlby's attachment theory, the absence of a secure base, typically provided by the mother may lead to anxiety, prompting attachment behaviors to regain security and comfort (Bowlby, 1988). During this time, smartphones may have become a primary AO, which may have fulfilled the emotional needs adolescents typically sought from their caregivers. Adolescents, who experienced increased anxiety and loneliness, may have relied on these devices to bond with their social networks, which may have offered them comfort and emotional security. Consequently, this dependence on smartphones as AOs, may have disrupted the emotional bonding between mothers and their children, potentially leading to emotional isolation.

Emergence of Phubbing and Emotional Withdrawal

As adolescents became increasingly dependent on smartphones, face-to-face interactions with mothers may have diminished, leading to a behavior known as phubbing prioritizing smartphones use instead of face-to-face communication (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). Phubbing may have created emotional neglect and frustration, as mothers found themselves physically present; however, emotionally unavailable to their children (Bae & Nam, 2023; Kushlev & Dunn, 2019). This emotional distance may have

become particularly challenging when mothers were navigating their own fears and anxieties related to the pandemic, such as balancing remote work, caregiving responsibilities, and health concerns (Yan et al., 2022).

Emotional bonds that Bowlby describes as essential for emotional regulation may have been disrupted, as adolescents, consumed by their digital devices, became less sensitive and available to their mothers' emotional needs. This shift in attachment behavior, in which the smartphone served as an AO, may have exacerbated emotional neglect and resentment. Mothers may have felt undervalued, disconnected, and frustrated due to emotional distance increasing between themselves and their children (Shen & Xie, 2024).

Adolescents' Emotional Needs and AOs

Adolescence is a time of significant emotional change, marked by the need for comfort and security as adolescents navigate complex transitions, such as social isolation. Bowlby posited attachment behaviors emerge in response to anxiety and fear, with adolescents seeking proximity to attachment figures during times of anxiety. In contrast, during the pandemic, physical separation from mothers created anxiety, which may have prompted adolescents to form attachments to smartphones. These devices may have served as AOs, which offered comfort in the face of anxiety and loneliness. Smartphones may have become an emotional support system, which offered adolescents perceived security during uncertain times. This emotional dependency on smartphones may have mirrored the role mothers typically play in providing comfort and support, reinforcing the

concept that attachment behaviors may extend beyond human figures to include objects that may offer emotional security (Lee & Hood, 2021).

Cycle of Dependence and Emotional Detachment

Bowlby's attachment theory emphasizes the cyclical nature of attachment behaviors, (Bowlby, 1980; Bowlby, 1988) where emotional dependence on AOs may reinforce and deepen the bond over time (Bowlby, 1988). In the case of adolescents during the pandemic, their reliance on smartphones to manage fear, anxiety, and loneliness may have led to an intensification of their attachment to these devices. This cycle of seeking comfort using smartphones, rather than their mothers, may have further disrupted emotional bonds between the adolescents and their primary caregivers. As adolescents relied on their smartphones for emotional regulation, mothers may have experienced emotional detachment, disconnection and undervaluation. Emotional neglect, stemming from the adolescents' increasing attachments to their devices and their mothers' emotional unavailability due to their own pandemic-related pressures and challenges may have created a reinforcing cycle of frustration, isolation, and resentment (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1980). Increasing reliance on smartphones for emotional comfort may have reinforced adolescents' detachment from their primary attachment figures, deepening emotional disconnection between mothers and their children.

Secure Base and Emotional Regulation During the Pandemic

Bowlby (1988) emphasized the role of an attachment figure is to provide a secure base for exploration, providing comfort and emotional security as needed. During the pandemic, smartphones may have functioned as proxies for secure bases, which may

have provided adolescents a form of emotional regulation and attachment in the absence of proximity to their mothers. Nonetheless, increased attachment to smartphones as AOs may have contributed to a reduction in the security of attachment between mothers and their children, as these devices may have temporarily functioned as attachment figures in the absence of mothers. Although mothers attempted to maintain their role as primary caregivers, their ability to respond to their children's emotional needs may have been compromised by the increased demands of the pandemic, such as remote work and caregiving duties (Yan et al., 2022). Insufficient emotional responsiveness, in conjunction with adolescents' attachments to their smartphones, may have led to emotional disconnection and further emotional isolation.

Consequences of Attachment Disruptions

During the pandemic, the emotional consequences of this shift in attachment dynamics were significant for mothers and adolescents (Parent et al., 2021; Zhang et al. 2022). Adolescents who relied on their smartphones for comfort and emotional bonding may have experienced a form of emotional withdrawal from their mothers. Concurrently, mothers may have felt neglected, undervalued, frustrated or angry. Bowlby's theory highlighted how disruptions in attachment, such as emotional neglect (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1980) or behaviors like phubbing, may significantly affect emotional well-being. Emotional neglect by their adolescents may have led to anxiety in mothers, which may have hindered their ability to respond effectively to their adolescents' needs. Similarly, adolescents' reliance on smartphones for emotional comfort may have contributed to increased emotional isolation, as they remained digitally connected to their

peers (Parent et al., 2021); thus, smartphones became a device for communication and may have become an AO (Lee & Hood, 2021), potentially reinforcing the emotional disconnection between adolescents and their mothers.

Phubbing

An overview of phubbing is essential to this literature review because it explains the impact of increased smartphone use and shifting social dynamics regarding bonding and parent–adolescent relationships. Although the term phubbing was coined relatively recently in 2012, the behavior of ignoring someone in person by focusing on a phone instead of engaging in conversation (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016; Pathak, 2013) existed for longer. Gergen (2002) explained that absent presence occurs when an individual is physically present; however, mentally disengaged or distracted, often due to technological stimulation, such as a screen or device.

Although Gergen's concept of absent presence highlights technology's capacity to disconnect individuals from their social surroundings, McDaniel and Coyne (2016) coined the term technoference to describe the disruptions in romantic relationships and daily life caused by technological usage. Recently, technoference, or phubbing (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019), has received heightened attention as smartphones have become a prominent aspect of individuals' private and social lives, affecting communication patterns and frequently disrupting face-to-face interactions within interpersonal relationships. As a result, recent empirical research on phubbing has begun (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). Phubbing developed concurrently with the pervasive integration of smartphones and social media, has led to concerns regarding their effect on

the quality of relationships and social interactions in private spheres and occupational settings (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016).

The term phubbing initially referred to issues in romantic relationships; however, it soon became recognized as a broader societal issue significantly affecting various types of relationships, such as crucial bonds between adolescents and their parents. (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016; Niu et al., 2020; Zhang et al, 2023). Phubbing in families, particularly between mothers and adolescents, is an increasing concern as it may disrupt secure bases, undermine emotional bonds, and negatively affect parent–child attachments (Bae & Nam, 2023; Bowlby, 1969; David & Roberts, 2017; Geurts et al., 2022; Niu et al., 2020). As technology becomes more integrated into daily life, the dynamics of family interactions have significantly shifted (Matthes et al., 2020).

With increasing prevalence of smartphones and their integration into daily routines, dynamics of family interactions, particularly between mothers and adolescents, have been further complicated, especially during the socially isolating period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased reliance on smartphones during periods of social isolation may have intensified the prevalence of phubbing. During the pandemic, the need for virtual social connection, compounded by FoMO led to increased screen time, particularly among adolescents, as they sought to stay socially engaged (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Chen et al, 2021; Amran & Jamaluddin, 2022). Digital interactions and distractions may have disrupted face-to-face family dynamics, particularly between mothers and adolescents.

FoMO, exacerbated by the pandemic, may have significantly increased phubbing behaviors among adolescents, disrupting family dynamics and mother–adolescent attachment (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Chen et al., 2023). During the pandemic, the enforced physical separation due to lockdowns, coupled with remote learning, resulted in many adolescents feeling disconnected and isolated from their peers and primary attachment figures. As a result, adolescents experienced increased anxiety, fear, loneliness, and FoMO regarding social connections; thus, began increasingly relying on their smartphones. Smartphones may have provided a form of temporary comfort, in an attempt to regulate their emotions and fulfill their emotional needs caused by absence of direct, face-to-face interaction with their caregivers, although they were unable to offer the security and warmth of a primary attachment figure. This reliance on digital devices, may have intensified instances of phubbing, in which adolescents increasingly prioritized their online social connections instead of face-to-face interactions with their mothers, which may have weakened security of mother–adolescent attachments. FoMO may have contributed to a reinforcement cycle of increasing anxiety (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Chen et al., 2023), as adolescents sought emotional comfort from their devices rather than engaging in the emotionally responsive interactions necessary to maintain secure bonds with their mothers.

Research indicated phubbing adversely affects romantic relationships (David & Roberts, 2021; Zhan et al., 2022), friendships (Stevic & Matthes, 2023; Tufan et al., 2024), employee-supervisor relationships (Roberts & David, 2017; Xu et al., 2022; Yasin et al., 2023), and parent–child attachments (Hong et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2020), often

resulting in diminished emotional bonding, intensified feelings of neglect, and communication breakdowns. Parental phubbing may weaken parent–child attachments and reduce emotional bonding, resulting in adolescents feeling neglected or rejected (David & Roberts, 2017; Hong et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2019), becoming more prevalent with the proliferation of smartphones and digital communication platforms.

Although the term has gained attention in recent years, research regarding phubbing remains limited (Garrido et al., 2021; Zhan et al., 2022), particularly in terms of the experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. Research regarding phubbing has focused on various facets, including internet addictions, smartphones, and social media (Bajwa et al., 2023), which often influenced phubbing behavior, and the negative impacts of these behaviors on individual well-being and relationships (Garrido et al., 2021). Additionally, studies focused on the negative effects of phubbing regarding romantic relationships (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016; Zhan et al., 2022) and parent–child relationships (Geurts et al., 2022; Mi et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023), particularly its role in disrupting these relationships.

Although existing literature regarding phubbing focused on its effects in romantic relationships, particularly how it impacts relationship satisfaction and communication (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016; Zhan et al., 2022), the influence of phubbing in parent–child relationships, particularly between mothers and adolescents, remains understudied. Research consistently demonstrated that phubbing may result in adverse effects in various types of relationships, including employee-supervisor,

friendships, and particularly parent–child (Lui et al.; 2024b; Niu et al., 2020; Roberts & David, 2017; Sun & Samp, 2021; Tandon et al., 2021; Yasin et al., 2023: Zhang et al., 2023). Phubbing may lead to emotional disconnection, intensified feelings of neglect, and disruptions in communication, potentially diminishing emotional bonds and attachments between mothers and adolescents. With the continual integration of smartphones and digital communication platforms into everyday life —and its associated consequences— has increased. Despite the growing recognition of its impact in these other relational contexts, there exists a significant gap in research addressing the experiences of mothers who are phubbed by their adolescents, highlighting this as a crucial area for further exploration (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Chen et al., 2023).

Although phubbing has been shown to disrupt communication in romantic relationships, the emotional effects on parent–child attachments during the pandemic, exacerbated by FoMO, have not been sufficiently explored (Gao et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2022). These dynamics are uniquely complex in family settings, in which parents, particularly mothers, are often navigating their emotions and their adolescent's emotional needs. This literature review aimed to examine the emotional and relational impacts of phubbing. By synthesizing existing research, the review sought better understanding of the lived experiences of mothers phubbed by their adolescents and the broader implications of digital media regarding mother–adolescent attachments in the digital age.

Problematic Technology Use

Phubbing, or the act of phone snubbing, occurs when adolescents ignore face-to-face interactions, particularly with their mothers, in favor of their smartphones or other technological devices (Tong et al., 2023). Although this behavior is a concern, it may also indicate a deeper issue of problematic technology use (Vossen et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2019). Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2016) found that the act of phubbing is a positive predictor of smartphone addiction, influencing individuals' social perception of phubbing behavior in social settings. Furthermore, phubbing behavior may also be a direct consequence of smartphone addiction (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). In this context, phubbing may act as a proxy for problematic technology use, establishing a cyclical relationship wherein excessive smartphone usage leads to phubbing behavior, which subsequently reinforces the cycle of addiction and increased technological dependency (Han et al., 2022; Hikmah et al., 2023; Tong et al., 2023).

Researchers found that phubbing, as part of increased screen time and technology use, may contribute to problematic technology use among adolescents, particularly those between 12-18 (Barbed-Castrejón et al., 2024; Garrido et al., 2021; J. Liu, 2024). Frequent phubbing among adolescents may indicate a dependence on electronic devices or excessive screen time, which may be associated with issues such as gaming, social media addiction, and emotional disconnection from face-to-face conversations in social settings (J. Liu, 2024; Nielson et al., 2020; Tariq et al., 2022). Furthermore, phubbing behaviors in adolescents may suggest issues associated with problematic technology use (Garrido et al., 2021; Garrido et al., 2024; Han et al., 2022).

Prolonged engagement with social media or online gaming may diminish meaningful face-to-face interactions with family members, particularly mothers. Persistent phubbing behavior may indicate that technology is distracting adolescents' time and attention, impeding bonding and hindering secure attachments (Han et al., 2022; S. Liu, 2024; Hikmah et al., 2023). Furthermore, phubbing serves as a proxy for problematic technology use, demonstrating a tendency to prioritize digital devices instead of having authentic interpersonal involvement, substituting genuine interactions with superficial connections (Sbarra et al., 2019).

Numerous existing studies focused on how phubbing is linked to technology addiction, particularly in the context of romantic relationships, social interactions, and adolescent behavior (Hong et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2020); however, there is insufficient empirical studies examining the full scope of its impact within family dynamics, specifically in parent–adolescent relationships (Niu et al., 2020). One of the criticisms of current literature was that it generalized the effects of problematic technology use without fully addressing the nuances of how these behaviors emerge in different family contexts (Kildare & Middlemiss 2017; Stockdale et al. 2018). For example, many studies overlooked the distinction between the various types of technology use—such as social media engagement, gaming, or general smartphone use—and their differing impacts on family interactions and emotional bonding (Kildare & Middlemiss 2017). In particular, the role of phubbing in parent–adolescent relationships have not been sufficiently explored, leaving a gap in understanding unique effects of phubbing on mothers and their emotional well-being.

Moreover, although some studies emphasized the connection between phubbing and technology addiction, there is limited research on how this addiction specifically diminished emotional bonding and attachment security between mothers and their adolescents (Zhang et al., 2023). This is particularly significant, considering that emotional sensitivity and responsiveness, as described in attachment theory, are crucial for maintaining healthy family relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Considering these gaps, future research may investigate deeper into how phubbing directly contributes to the disruption of parent–adolescent attachments.

Phubbing in Parent–Adolescent Relationships

Marino et al. (2021) examined 13 studies regarding the correlation between problematic social media use (PSMU) and problematic smartphone use (PSU). The authors found the strongest correlations were between PSU and general PSMU or problematic WhatsApp use. The effect sizes of the relationships between PSMU and PSU varied from moderate to substantial across the studies. The review concluded that the frequent use of smartphones for social media, particularly instant messaging platforms, suggested a partial convergence between PSMU and PSU, as the behaviors often overlap regarding how smartphones are used for both activities (Marino et al., 2021).

Studies have highlighted the convergence between technology-related behaviors and their impact on children, particularly from the perspective of mothers. These behaviors are often linked to issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Bozzola et al., 2022; Steinsbekk et al., 2020). In addition, cyberbullying and social comparison exacerbated disruptive behaviors, including challenges with self-regulation,

attention, and academic performance (McDaniel & Radesky, 2017; Shutzman & Gershy, 2022). These challenges may hinder children's ability to engage in face-to-face social interactions, which potentially led to decreased empathy, social isolation, and deficient communication abilities (Bozzola et al., 2022; Muppalla et al., 2023). For example, studies suggested that mothers frequently interpreted phubbing by their adolescents, as a clear indicator of problematic technology use (Bai et al., 2020; Geng et al., 2021; Li et al., 2024; J. Liu, 2024; Niu et al., 2020; Qiao & Liu, 2020; Stockdale et al., 2018)

Adolescents consistently ignoring their mother's presence in favor of digital devices may have led mothers to perceive their conduct as an indication of their child's dependence on technology, suggesting a more profound concern regarding screen time and its adverse impact on the mother–adolescent attachments (Braune-Krickau et al., 2021; J. Liu, 2024; Muppalla et al., 2023). As a result, mothers' observations of problematic technology use may have revealed its interference with bonding and family interactions, which may have weaken mother–adolescent attachments and led to perceived emotional withdrawal within the family (Bae & Nam, 2023; Geurts et al., 2022; Marino et al., 2021). For mothers, greater social networking was associated with increased perceptions of problematic phone use in their children (McDaniel et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of phubbing in parent–adolescent relationships had gained attention due to its potential to undermine family communication and emotional bonding (Chen et al., 2023; Hong et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023). Although much of the existing literature addressed phubbing in general or its effects in terms of romantic relationships (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016; Zhan et al., 2022), there was limited

research that examined how mothers specifically perceive their adolescents' smartphone use in the context of phubbing and the emotional consequences it generates. Many studies focused on the adolescents' perspective or behavioral outcomes of phubbing (Tong et al., 2023; Yue et al., 2024), rather than exploring the mothers' subjective experiences and emotional responses due to being phubbed by their adolescents.

One criticism of the current body of literature was that it often overlooked emotional dimensions of parental experiences with phubbing (Chen et al., 2023; Garrido et al., 2021; Hong et al., 2019; Lv et al., 2022). For instance, although studies acknowledge that adolescents may feel neglected or emotionally isolated when phubbed (David & Roberts, 2017; Geurts et al., 2022), they have not sufficiently addressed how mothers may perceive of their own emotional withdrawal in response to their adolescents' technological distractions. There was insufficient comprehensive research that lnked phubbing to emotional neglect from the mother's viewpoint, particularly in relation to how mothers perceived their adolescents' behaviors and its influence on their emotional bonds and attachments. Additionally, although numerous studies explored family interactions, they often overlooked intricacies of parent–adolescent attachments, which experienced significant changes as family dynamics evolve throughout adolescence (Stockdale et al., 2018). For instance, adolescents may become more autonomous, participate in additional digital activities, or spend increased time with friends, which may result in misunderstandings between adolescents and parents. Nevertheless, these nuances are frequently overlooked or simplified in current studies

regarding phubbing, creating ambiguity about how this behavior impacts the mother–adolescent attachments (Stockdale et al., 2018).

Mother–Adolescent Attachment and Emotional Bonding

Parental phubbing was significantly positively correlated with social withdrawal in young children aged 3-7, primarily due to the conflict and negative emotions it generates within the parent–child relationship (Zhang & Wang, 2025). The perception of mothers regarding their adolescents' phubbing behaviors may have reflected broader concerns regarding problematic technology use, which may have led to emotional isolation (Lv et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2013). The observation of adolescents' preoccupation with technology may have resulted in mothers feeling excluded from meaningful conversations or interactions, which may have hindered bonding and exacerbate isolation (Garrido et al., 2024; Lv et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2013; Zhang et al. 2023); thus, phubbing may act as a proxy for broader disruptions in the parent–adolescent relationships resulting from excessive technology use (J. Liu, 2024; S. Liu, 2024).

Studies shown that parental phubbing, had a significant impact on parent–child relationships, particularly in terms of emotional withdrawal and social disconnection. For example, one study found that parental phubbing was positively correlated with social withdrawal in children aged 3-7, primarily due to the conflict and negative emotions generated within parent–child relationships (Zhang & Wang 2025). The finding highlighted emotional impacts of phubbing, potentially leading to social and emotional isolation. As children become older, these dynamics evolve, and the effects of phubbing in parent–adolescent relationships may become more pronounced. When adolescents

become preoccupied with technology—particularly in ways reducing face-to-face interactions—mothers may feel emotionally neglected, which may disrupt the formation and maintenance of secure attachment bonds (Pancani et al., 2020). As mothers observe their adolescents' preoccupation with technology, they may feel excluded from meaningful conversations or emotional bonding, which may lead to feelings of emotional neglect (Garrido et al., 2024; Lv et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2023). The emotional withdrawal may exacerbate feelings of emotional isolation; insufficient emotional availability may weaken the emotional bonding process essential for fostering secure attachments (Bowlby, 1969); thus, phubbing may act as a proxy for more significant disruptions in the parent–child relationship caused by excessive technology use (J. Liu, 2024; S. Liu, 2024). The insufficiency of emotional bonding may lead to mothers feeling undervalued or rejected, as the emotional bonding necessary to nurture secure attachment bonds is compromised (Stockdale et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2023).

Cultural Influences on Technology Use in Families

Cultural norms and values played a significant role in shaping how technology use was perceived and practiced within families, and these norms may influence how mothers experience and interpret phubbing (Pivetta et al., 2024); Zhang et al., 2023). In certain cultures, technology is viewed as a device that enhances connectivity and communication within families. In contrast, other cultures may see excessive technology use as a form of emotional detachment or neglect, particularly when it disrupts face-to-face interactions. (Błachnio et al., 2021; Long et al., 2024; Pivetta et al., 2024). For mothers who experience being phubbed by their adolescents, cultural expectations

regarding emotional availability, family cohesion, and family time may influence how they perceive these interactions. For example, in collectivist cultures, in which strong family bonds and emotional closeness are central, phubbing may be perceived as a form of emotional neglect, and mothers may feel rejected (Błachnio et al., 2021; Pivetta et al., 2024; Garrido et al., 2024). In contrast, in more individualistic cultures, in which independence and autonomy are emphasized, the same behavior may be seen less negatively, potentially leading to a less intense emotional response (Garrido et al., 2024).

Summary

The goal of this study was to gain understanding of the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents and the broader implications of digital media on parent–adolescent attachments in the digital age. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant disruption in traditional family dynamics due to lockdowns and physical distancing. During this time, adolescents increasingly relied on digital communication (Shutman & Gershv, 2022) and became more isolated from their primary caregivers, particularly their mothers. This shift may have caused adolescents to rely more heavily on digital communication, especially smartphones, as a means of emotional bonding, prioritizing digital interactions instead of face-to-face conversations with their mothers (Dwyer et al., 2017). Consequently, smartphones may have become AOs for many adolescents, serving as a perceived sources of emotional security during a time of uncertainty.

Nevertheless, this shift to smartphones as AOs may have had emotional consequences for mothers, disrupting and complicating emotional bonding and security

in the mother–adolescent attachments. The emotional withdrawal created by phubbing may have led mothers to feel disconnected, rejected, frustrated, angry, undervalued, or neglected. Although studies acknowledged that adolescents felt neglected or emotionally isolated when phubbed (David & Roberts, 2017; Geurts et al., 2022), they have not sufficiently addressed how mothers perceived their emotional withdrawal in response to their adolescents' technological distractions. Understanding mothers' lived experiences with phubbing by their adolescents is significant because it serves as an indicator of problematic technology use, potentially suggesting a broader issue of impairment in emotional bonding and security within mother–adolescent attachments. In Chapter 3, the research design and methodology will be discussed, including data collection and analysis, and the researcher's role in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. Data for this study were gathered through semistructured interviews via Zoom . Participants included mothers who were 18 and older and experienced phubbing from their adolescent children who were between 14-18. Chapter 3 includes research approaches, provides selection and rationale for choosing the research design, my role as the researcher, methodologies, and trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Tradition and Question

Using a phenomenological qualitative design, I sought to provide detailed information on mothers' personal experiences regarding being phubbed by their adolescent children. The central research question guiding this study was: What are lived experiences of mothers who have been phubbed by their adolescent (ages 14-18) children? A qualitative approach was suitable for exploring these lived experiences, as it involved addressing rich and in-depth information from a population who shared common experiences (see Creswell, 1998). This methodology allowed for the exploration of complex and nuanced emotions and reactions, providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Butler et al., 2021; Zelčāne & Pipere, 2023). Utilizing naturalistic data collection methods, such as in-depth semistructured interviews and field notes, qualitative research constructs explanatory frameworks and comprehensive descriptions that

facilitate a deeper understanding of mothers' emotional responses, perspectives, and language (Butler et al., 2021; Butler-Kisber, 2018).

Additionally, I may have addressed the research gap that was identified in Chapter 2 by offering a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, and broader implications of digital media regarding mother–adolescent attachments in the digital age. Quantitative methodology was not suitable for this research, as it focuses on statistical analysis and numerical data, which may overlook the rich and nuanced experiences (Creswell, 1998) of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents.

Interpretative Phenomenological Qualitative Research Rationale

Considering the study's focus on exploring mothers' lived experiences, IPA was an appropriate methodology for this research. IPA is suitable because it may have provided a detailed and interpretative approach to understanding the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, which allowed an exploration of meaning-making processes mothers engaged in as they navigated their emotional responses and attachment dynamics. Unlike traditional phenomenology, which primarily focuses on describing how individuals experience the world (Moustakas, 1994), IPA advanced this approach by exploring how mothers make sense of these experiences and how I interpreted those meanings. This interpretative focus is central to IPA, because it involved revealing meanings participants attributed to their lived experiences (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), which was essential for understanding emotional and attachment-related impacts of phubbing. Additionally, researchers play an active role in interpreting

participants' narratives, offering insights regarding their thoughts and feelings, while general phenomenology involves more objective representations of experiences with minimal interpretative involvement (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

IPA emphasizes individuality of participant experiences through idiographic approaches (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) allowing for a detailed exploration of the personal nuances and meanings unique to each mother. Unlike traditional phenomenological approaches which may aim to identify common structures or essences across experiences (Moustakas, 1994), IPA prioritizes understanding how participants uniquely makes sense of their lived experiences. This approach focuses on the subjective meanings mothers attribute to their experiences, considering their specific contexts. Semistructured interviews are used for participants to articulate their feelings and thoughts freely, providing the opportunity for deep and personal explorations of their lived experiences (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Researchers engage in interpretation, recognizing participant and researcher perspectives contribute to understanding these meanings. This makes IPA uniquely suited to capturing the complex emotional responses and attachment dynamics involved in phubbing, which may not be as effectively addressed by general phenomenology or basic qualitative research.

IPA is used for in-depth exploration of complex emotions such as rejection, undervaluation, emotional isolation, emotional neglect, and frustration which are central to understanding how mothers perceive their relationships with their children. Focusing on subjective meaning-making, IPA captures the personal significance that mothers attributed to their experiences, acknowledging that each mother interprets her

adolescent's behavior uniquely. Additionally, IPA emphasizes the importance of context (see Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) considering societal influences and family dynamics, which were crucial for understanding how phubbing is perceived. The flexibility of IPA's data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) provided an ideal environment for participants to openly share their experiences. Its capacity to identify unique experiences and shared themes allowed for a nuanced exploration of this issue. IPA's reflective and detailed and interpretative approach enabled mothers to reflect on their experiences, thereby deepening the understanding of the emotional and attachment-related impacts of phubbing.

Integrating Bowlby's attachment theory into this approach provided a theoretical framework to better understand the emotional and attachment dynamics that influence mothers' perceptions of their emotional bonds with their adolescents. The primary objective of this research was to gain insight into the emotional and attachment-related impacts of phubbing regarding mothers, capturing the complexities of how they responded to and perceived this phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my role in this study was to understand and interpret lived experiences of mothers were phubbed by their adolescents using Bowlby's attachment theory. Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of secure emotional bonds between mothers and their children, which are essential for children's emotional security and development, and the emotional wellbeing of mothers. Mothers and adolescents rely on

these bonds for attachment security, emotional regulation, and overall attachment quality. Throughout the study, I maintained a reflective and interpretative approach to understand the emotional complexities that mothers experienced (see Ravitch & Carl 2019), particularly regarding their perceptions of their relationships with their adolescents in the context of phubbing.

My role was observer-participant in that I collected data through semistructured interviews, engaging meaningfully with participants although remaining mindful of how my personal connections with the topic may have influenced the research process. As the primary instrument of investigation, I was directly involved in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data. My primary goal was for participants to share their experiences, understanding how they interpreted and responded to feeling neglected or ignored by their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. I have a personal interest in this study because I recognize the emotional impacts mothers experience when they perceive their attachments with their children are weakening. Mothers are central to the emotional development of their adolescents; however, in the context of phubbing, they may feel their efforts to nurture and connect with their children are being undervalued. This may lead to anxiety, frustration, anger, and emotional neglect, as they may blame themselves for not being good enough, especially if they are balancing work, caregiving, and emotional labor.

During interviews, I actively listened to participants' verbal responses and carefully observed nonverbal cues such as body language and facial expressions to capture the full scope of their emotions and perspectives. Additionally, I used silence to

help mothers reflect and provide thoughtful answers. Building rapport was essential to this process; I began by reminding participants of the study's purpose, their rights, and how their identities would remain confidential. This encouraged a trusting and open environment and allowed mothers to share their personal narratives more freely. I remained mindful of how my personal experiences with phubbing may influence my interpretations and actively managed this through reflexivity. Considering the emotional complexities associated with maternal attachments, it was essential to consider how attachment theory informed interpretation of mothers' experiences of phubbing and its potential impact on the mother–adolescent attachments.

According to Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, attachment and emotional bonding are crucial to the development of children and mothers. As a result, when adolescents used smartphones as proxies for maternal attachment figures, as forms of temporary comfort and security in the absence of their mothers' emotional sensitivity and availability, it may lead to weakened attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1969). For adolescents, smartphones may have increasingly served as AOs and may have temporarily addressed their emotional needs due to physical and emotional separation from their mothers (Lee & Hood, 2021). This may be particularly challenging when mothers felt they could not address their adolescents' emotional needs, as their attention was divided, which may have resulted in the adolescents seeking emotional dependency on smartphones, mirroring the role mothers typically played in providing comfort and support (Lee & Hood, 2021)

This behavior may have resulted in adolescents developing an attachment to the smartphone, in which mothers may have experienced helplessness, as their children may have appeared more connected to the digital world than to them. This disruption of what is traditionally a secure and nurturing relationship may result in feelings of rejection, undervaluation, and attachment insecurity from mothers' perspectives, which may have led to emotional disconnection between mothers and their adolescents. The impact of the pandemic may have exacerbated this issue, increasing isolation and contributing to fewer face-to-face interactions and more screen time. Some adolescents may have become more digitally engaged driven by a need for virtual social connections and FoMO (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020; Chen et al, 2021) further disrupting family dynamics. Attachment dynamics may have been disrupted further, and phubbing may have become more ingrained as part of the family's daily routine, which may have been more challenging to navigate.

Considering the sensitive nature of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, I had no prior professional or personal relationships with mothers in the study, which helped minimize any conflict of interest or power imbalances. As the researcher, I was mindful of power dynamics to ensure that mothers felt comfortable sharing their experiences without fear of judgment. Participation was voluntary, and mothers were informed that they may withdraw at any time without repercussions.

Although I do not share the same life experience of being phubbed by adolescents, there was potential for bias in this study due to my personal views on technology use and attachment dynamics. As a researcher, I recognized that my

experiences, social identity, and positionality, may influence my interpretation of the data and interactions with participants (Ravitch & Carl 2019). To address this, I continuously engaged in reflexivity and documented my thoughts and emotions throughout the research process. I ensured that my analysis remained grounded in mothers' lived experiences, rather than influenced by my personal beliefs.

To mitigate potential biases and power dynamics, I maintained a research journal to document my reflections and decisions during the study. This journal served as a tool for self-reflection and helped ensure transparency in my methodology and provided a clearer understanding of how my positionality influenced the research process (Ravitch & Carl 2019). Additionally, I sought peer feedback throughout the study to minimize any unintended bias and ensure rigor in data analysis.

Methodology

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. This qualitative, IPA research focused on understanding the experiences of mothers who faced this behavior, using homogeneous convenience sampling to select participants. Upon receiving approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board, I conducted in-depth semistructured interviews to gather firsthand and detailed accounts from mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. This section includes participant selection process, sampling strategy, research protocol, data collection methods, and data analysis.

I used IPA as the primary method of data analysis, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of mothers' perspectives. IPA is suited to exploring and interpreting the lived

experiences of individuals, allowing the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Considering the research focused on mothers' experiences of phubbing by their adolescents, IPA may have facilitated the identification of the nuanced meanings and key themes mothers attributed to the phenomenon, especially concerning emotional bonding and attachments. Data analysis involved the detailed transcription of interviews, followed by a systematic process of identifying and interpreting minor and major themes that reflected the essence of the mothers' experiences.

Participant Selection and Protocol

Participation eligibility for this study included individuals who were18 years or older and identified as mothers of adolescents aged 14-18 who experienced phubbing. Phubbing is the practice of disengaging from or ignoring someone to focus on one's smartphone or other technological devices instead of engaging in face-to-face conversations (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). To recruit participants, I used social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. I created a post including the study's objectives (a copy of the social media post is provided in Appendix A), and a link to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire for mothers interested in participating. The form was used to screen participants and collect their email addresses, allowing for contact to schedule interviews and provide the consent form. Social media recruitment was conducted with prior approval from group administrators, who granted permission for the study invitation to be posted in relevant groups. An example of a group that permission was sought to share the invitation was 'Momspace' (a mom support group) on

Facebook. The invitation provided a detailed overview of the study's criteria and primary objectives, allowing recipients to make an informed choice about their participation. It included a link to the SurveyMonkey online screening survey.

In addition to outlining the eligibility criteria and recruitment methods, it is important to highlight the rationale for using SurveyMonkey for this qualitative study on mothers' lived experiences. This platform offered advanced question logic, enabling customization based on specific responses. including follow-up inquiries for mothers who have strong feelings regarding specific aspects of being phubbed. Furthermore, SurveyMonkey's data reporting and analysis tools facilitated the organization and analysis capabilities that enhanced the organizing and examination of qualitative text responses, which is essential for depth and complexity in research. The capacity to tailor the survey improved the study's professional presentation, thereby fostering a more distinct research identity.

Upon reviewing the post on social media, mothers who decided to participate chose the option to access the link to SurveyMonkey, which was used to identify and select eligible participants for interviews in the study. To align with the research question, the screening survey included questions designed to gather detailed information about mothers' lived experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. One question the screening survey asked was whether the potential participant was a mother of an adolescent aged 14-18. Another question inquired whether, since the pandemic or within the past year, did the mother frequently feel phubbed (ignored in favor of her adolescent's smartphone use). An additional question asked mothers to describe their emotional

responses when they felt phubbed, with radio button response options provided for selection. The screening survey helped determine whether mothers met the criteria to participate in the interview process (a copy of the screening survey questions is available in Appendix B).

Using SurveyMonkey, I developed an online screening survey to expedite the participant recruitment process. A copy of the consent form is available in Appendix B. This tool featured informed consent, ensuring that participants fully understood the purpose of the study, confidentiality details, and an explanation of the study's criteria, the nature of the questions, and associated risks. The screening questionnaire also requested mother's email addresses to arrange interviews once they met the inclusion requirements (a copy of the screening survey questions is available in Appendix B).

After completing the screening process, I evaluated the responses and identified participants who met the eligibility criteria for the study. Mothers who did not qualify were contacted through email, in which I thanked them for their time and informed them that they would not be moving forward with the study. Participants who met the criteria received an email invitation to participate in an approximately 45–60-minute virtual interview conducted via Zoom. The interview was scheduled at a mutually convenient time. The session was audio-recorded, and I wrote additional notes using a reflexivity journal to document my reflections and observations. Upon completion of the interviews, I expressed my appreciation for the participants' time and confirmed their interviews would be transcribed. The transcribed data was then utilized for analysis.

Sample

The sample size for this study consisted of eight participants, with each participant completing one interview. The participants were mothers aged 18 years or older who were experiencing phubbing by their adolescent, aged 14-18. The inclusion criteria for the study were mothers who met the age requirement and had experienced phubbing. Mothers whose children were under the age of 14, did not own smartphones, or did not regularly use them were excluded. Additionally, mothers who had not experienced phubbing or who did not speak English were also excluded from the study.

Homogeneous convenience sampling is a suitable method for selecting participants, which enabled a focused exploration of a specific group (Jager et al., 2017) of mothers who shared experience of being phubbed by their adolescents. This sampling strategy may have minimized variability, allowing the study to gain deeper insights into the shared experiences the mothers faced (Patton, 2014), particularly regarding phubbing by adolescents, emotional bonding, and mother–adolescent attachment security. Focusing this specific subgroup, the data collected was directly relevant to the research question, ensuring that insights gained were meaningful and aligned with the study's objectives. Using social media for recruitment facilitated the identification of mothers who met the criteria, enabling a more efficient and practical exploration of the lived experiences of this subgroup.

Considering the focused selection of participants through homogeneous convenience sampling, the next critical consideration was reaching saturation. Saturation is the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews

(Patton, 2014). The concept of saturation should align with the research questions, theoretical framework, analytical approach, and the overall study's objective (Mason, 2010; Saunders, 2018), ensuring that the sample size is adequate to fully explore the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescent children.

This study was well-defined, focusing on the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. The participant pool was homogeneous, consisting of mothers aged 18 and older who shared the experience of being ignored in favor of their adolescents' smartphones. Considering this focused criterion, mothers were expected to share similar experiences related to being phubbed by their adolescents, emotional bonding, and the security of mother–adolescent attachments. The homogeneity of this group ensured that the data collected was directly relevant to the research question, allowing for an in-depth exploration of these shared experiences (Jager et al., 2017). Saturation was reached when no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews (Lowe et al., 2018; Patton, 2014; Ravitch & Carl 2019). which was expected to occur with a sample size of 8-12 participants (Lowe et al., 2018).

Instrumentation

I used data collection instruments such as a semistructured interview guide to explore relevant topics and allow for probing and follow-up questions to gain deeper understanding of mothers' lived experiences. The questions were developed based on key concepts from current literature and was informed by the theory and research objectives, and the principles of IPA. Considering that the research question is: What are the lived experiences of mothers who have been phubbed by their adolescent (ages 14-18)

children? IPA's focus on understanding individuals' unique lived experiences and the meaning they attributed to these experiences (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) aligned well with the aim of this study. The interview questions functioned as a prompt for mothers to articulate their individual experiences, either confirming or challenging existing literature, and potentially introducing novel ideas concerning being phubbed by their adolescents and attachments. Each qualitative question was designed to explore different dimensions of mothers' experiences, providing rich data regarding emotional responses, behavioral dynamics, and relational interactions (a copy of the Interview Guide is available in Appendix D).

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, which allowed for audio recording. This approach ensured the accuracy of mothers' responses although also allowing for the documentation of non-verbal cues (cameras were on; however, only audio was recorded). Mothers were given informed consent forms that outlined the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and confidentiality measures.

The semistructured format ensured a consistent interview flow, allowing mothers to elaborate on their emotions, behaviors, and interactions with their adolescents. The format also supported flexibility, which is important for IPA (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), which allows the interviewer to probe further into personal narratives and clarify points that may be particularly relevant or emotionally significant. Establishing rapport with participants was prioritized to create a comfortable environment in which mothers felt valued and safe. This rapport-building is essential in IPA, as it fosters openness, allowing mothers to share their experiences in a meaningful and authentic way (Smith &

Fieldsend, 2021). The introductory statement was emphasized that there was no specific response expected, and the interview was intended to understand the unique experiences of mothers. Probing and follow-up questions were used to encourage mothers to reflect and elaborate on their experiences more deeply, although remaining sensitive to their emotional responses. This enabled a more thorough understanding of the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents (a copy of the Interview Guide is available in Appendix D).

The questions were developed with insights from existing literature, specifically addressing gaps or recommendations for future research. These questions were crafted to prompt rich descriptions of mothers' experiences with being phubbed by their adolescents, ensuring that the data collected aligned with the research objectives and provided a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment

Participant recruitment for this study was facilitated through an online screening survey hosted on SurveyMonkey. The survey provided a brief overview of the study, along with essential confidentiality information and informed consent (a copy of the consent form is available in Appendix B). To be eligible, participants were mothers aged 18 or older who were phubbed by their adolescents. The sampling strategy (see Patton, 2014) used was homogeneous convenience sampling, which was suitable for the study as it enabled the recruitment of a subgroup of mothers who shared the experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. This approach may have minimized variability (Jager et al.,

2017) and allowed a focused exploration of the mothers' lived experiences. The goal was to recruit 8–12 mothers, a specific subgroup, who would participate in 45–60 minute interviews conducted via Zoom at a time that was convenient for them (a copy of the Interview Guide is available in Appendix D).

Participation

Participation in this study was limited to mothers aged 18 or older who experienced being phubbed by their adolescents. Interested mothers completed a screening process via SurveyMonkey to assess eligibility. Once eligible, they were contacted for an interview. Prior to the interview, mothers were reminded of the informed consent process, which included signing a consent form. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview without any repercussions. Additionally, all personal identifying information was not shared and remained confidential.

Data Collection

Following the informed consent process, the data collection phase proceeded with a consistent procedure for each participant to ensure reliability and clarity in the responses. Once the consent process was completed, the data collection commenced using a standardized approach for each participant to maintain consistency and ensure the accuracy and transparency of the responses. During this stage, all mothers completed the screening survey through the SurveyMonkey link shared via social media platforms. When mothers met the eligibility criteria, they were contacted via email which they included in the screening survey. After they agreed to participate voluntarily in the

interview, the session was scheduled, and a Zoom link was sent. The interview was conducted through Zoom, in a secure and private meeting space. The interview followed a semistructured format, enabling administration of primary and follow-up questions and lasting approximately 45-60 minutes (a copy of the Interview Guide is available in Appendix D). The interview was audio-recorded to accurately document mothers' responses verbatim.

During interviews, I actively listened to participants' verbal responses and carefully observed nonverbal cues such as body language and facial expressions to capture the full scope of their emotions and perspectives. In addition to the interview recordings, I wrote field notes during the interviews to document non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, which provided further insights into the emotional state of the mothers and their lived experiences. These field notes complemented the verbal data captured in the interviews and contributed to deeper understanding of the participants' responses. I used silence to provide participants with additional time to reflect on their answers and elaborate on their thoughts. Rapport building began by reminding mothers of the study's purpose, their role in the research, and ensuring them that their identities would remain confidential. Participants were encouraged to ask questions or request clarifications at any point during the interview.

The interview protocol included the study's purpose, informed mothers about the recording process, and explained that their responses would contribute to conclusions drawn. I provided my contact information for any follow-up questions or concerns.

Furthermore, I explained the data analysis process and informed mothers that they may be contacted to confirm accuracy of the themes derived from their interview responses.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the data collection process was completed, the focus shifted to analyzing the interview responses to gain a deeper understanding of the mothers' lived experiences and perspectives. IPA was used to explore the socio-emotional dimensions of mothers' experiences, capturing the emotional responses and social dynamics involved in being phubbed by their adolescents, as these interactions may have disrupted attachment bonds and influenced the emotional security of the mothers and adolescents (Bowlby, 1969). IPA is designed to explore the detailed and subjective narratives of how individuals interpret and make sense of their world, with particular emphasis on their sense-making processes (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). This method enabled deeper understanding of mothers' unique experiences and meanings they attributed to those experiences.

Semistructured interviews were conducted to gather comprehensive and rich data, allowing for in-depth exploration and flexibility in exploring each mother's personal narrative. The semistructured format facilitated a focused conversation regarding key themes while permitting mothers to elaborate on their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in relation to their experiences. Each interview was conducted via Zoom to facilitate audio and video recording, ensuring accurate capture of mother's non-verbal and verbal cues.

Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, I hand coded each transcript, identifying patterns and meaningful

statements related to mothers' lived experiences. The codes generated through IPA formed the foundation for recognizing significant themes that reflect the underlying meanings of the mothers' experiences, which was then analyzed to understand how the mothers make sense of being phubbed by their adolescents. In the data analysis phase, I used NVivo, which is commonly used in qualitative research for managing large datasets. I organized and coded the interview transcripts efficiently by using this software, ensuring a systematic approach to identifying themes and patterns (Dhakal, 2022; Lumivero, n.d.). NVivo assisted with categorizing and tracking responses, facilitating a transparent and organized process for analyzing mothers' lived experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. Following the identification of key themes through IPA, the analysis proceeded systematically through a series of steps designed to ensure thorough and nuanced interpretations of the mothers' narratives.

In this study, the application of IPA involved several distinct steps to ensure a thorough analysis of mothers' narratives: establish rapport, conduct semistructured interviews, record and transcribe interviews, data familiarization, initial notetaking and identifying experiential statements, develop personal experiential and cluster themes, engage and interpret in the double hermeneutic process, write up of findings, reflection on ethical considerations, and evaluate rigor and credibility (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Smith & Nizza, 2022).

To ensure a thorough analysis of mothers' responses, the following steps were used in applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). First, semistructured interviews were conducted to gather rich, detailed accounts, allowing for flexibility and

depth in exploring mothers' personal narratives. It is essential to establish rapport with the participants by creating a comfortable environment that encourages trust and openness, enabling mothers to share their experiences without hesitation (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Smith & Nizza, 2022). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, ensuring that all verbal responses were captured accurately for detailed analysis. After transcribing, I familiarized myself with the data by reading and re-reading each transcript multiple times to fully understand the context and significance of mothers' experiences. The initial note taking was done by reviewing the transcripts line-by-line, highlighting key comments, concerns, and significant experiential statements that reflect the core of the mothers' experiences. These statements were then grouped into clusters based on their shared meanings, from which personal experiential themes were developed for each participant.

The next step involved interpreting the mothers' responses through a double hermeneutic process, considering their perspective and my interpretation to understand the deeper meaning behind their words (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). I then wrote the findings, providing a detailed narrative supported by verbatim quotes, ensuring that the themes reflected mothers' lived experiences accurately. Throughout the process, I reflected on ethical considerations and safeguarded participant confidentiality. (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Finally, I evaluated rigor and credibility by critically assessing how well my interpretations aligned with mothers' experiences, ensuring that the analysis provided a comprehensive and authentic representation of the data.

Embracing IPA, this study sought to explore mothers' rich experiences, deeply understanding their narratives of being phubbed by their adolescents and interpreted meanings they attributed to their interactions. Through a careful application of the IPA steps, the study may have revealed the socio-emotional complexities inherent in mothers' lived experiences. The IPA approach aimed to provide nuanced insights into how mothers make sense of the impacts of phubbing by adolescents on emotional bonding and mother–adolescent attachments.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Credibility

Qualitative research provides a unique opportunity to explore and interpret the details of lived experiences, and in this study, IPA was used to capture the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. Interviews, a key method in qualitative research, provided an effective way to explore the subjective perspectives of mothers, which may allow the researcher to gain deeper insights into how mothers may experience and make sense of this phenomenon; however, conducting interviews presents certain challenges, particularly around ensuring the trustworthiness of the data. These challenges may be addressed through the application of key criteria of qualitative research quality: dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). These criteria were essential for establishing the trustworthiness and integrity of findings, ensuring that the study accurately reflected experiences shared by mothers. Rigorously addressing these quality standards enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings, ensuring that the research provided dependable and credible insights into mothers' experiences with being phubbed by their adolescents. Consistent with the

criteria for establishing trustworthiness, the use of NVivo provided an audit trail of the data analysis process, which may be revisited to ensure the accuracy and rigor of the coding and theme identification (Dhakal, 2022; Lumivero, n.d.).

Credibility

To address credibility challenges and enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I used key approaches grounded in qualitative research best practices. First, reflexivity played a crucial role in ensuring the findings were not influenced by my personal experiences, assumptions or biases (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Throughout the research process, I engaged in continuous self-reflection to identify and mitigate any assumptions I had regarding the phenomenon of phubbing by adolescents. This continual self-examination helped me interpret mothers' experiences accurately and with minimal personal bias, aligning with IPA's focus on the researcher's awareness of their role in the interpretation of the data.

Second, I employed member checking to verify the accuracy of my interpretations and conclusions (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). After data analysis, I shared key themes and findings with mothers to ensure their experiences were captured correctly and aligned with their perspectives. This allowed for necessary revisions to be made to more accurately reflect the mothers' lived experiences. This iterative process of engagement with participants aligned with IPA's focus on producing nuanced interpretations that remain grounded in the participants' accounts and reflected how they make sense of their lived experiences.

To provide detailed rich descriptions (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022) of the mothers' experiences, I provided detailed, context-rich narratives describing mothers, their attachments, and the intricacies of their interactions with their adolescents. This depth enriched the data and may helped readers understand how findings may apply to similar contexts, which may enhance the transferability of the results. By providing a nuanced description of individual experiences, the study allowed for a deeper interpretation that captured the complexity of maternal experiences in the digital age. Additionally, I engaged in peer debriefing throughout the research process to gain external feedback on my study design, data interpretation, and overall findings (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). This collaboration with colleagues allowed for a thorough review of my work and helped to ensure that my interpretations were rigorous and grounded in the mothers' lived experiences, aligning with IPA's emphasis on interpretative rigor and the researcher's responsibility to maintain objectivity in the analysis. Finally, continuous consent was maintained throughout the study, ensuring that participants were aware of their rights and felt comfortable withdrawing from the study if they wished (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). This respected their autonomy and helped foster a supportive and open research environment. By incorporating these strategies, I aimed to uphold the credibility of the study, ensuring that the findings were trustworthy and meaningful, and that experiences of mothers who were phubbed by adolescents were accurately represented.

Transferability

To enhance transferability of this study's findings, I implemented approaches that increased the contextual richness and applicability of the results, concurrently adhering to the principles of IPA, which emphasizes capturing detailed and individual experiences and understanding the meanings participants attributed to those experiences (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). One of the core strategies was detailed rich descriptions (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022), in which I provided in-depth and detailed accounts of mothers' experiences who were phubbed by their adolescents. This included a comprehensive description of the research context, mothers' backgrounds, and specific dynamics between mothers and adolescents in the digital age. These detailed descriptions enable readers to assess the extent to which these findings resonate with their contexts (Ravitch & Carl 2019; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Additionally, rich and detailed accounts that IPA generated allow readers to assess how findings may apply to other settings, which may foster the transferability of insights regarding mother–adolescent emotional bonding and attachments in the digital age.

Contextual information was pivotal, with an emphasis on describing socio-emotional factors (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022) that influence mothers' experiences. These contextual details allow readers to evaluate how mothers' narratives may relate to their lived experiences or the experiences of others in comparable situations. Aligning with the IPA focus on individual experiences, I used homogeneous convenience sampling to select mothers who shared common experiences of being phubbed by their adolescent children. This approach ensured that

mothers had comparable and relevant experiences, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their shared phenomenon. By focusing on a more homogeneous group, I aimed to capture a nuanced and detailed understanding of how mothers perceived and navigated challenges of being phubbed by their adolescents. Although this sampling method does not aim for broad generalization, the insights gained from these focused narratives may have contributed to an in-depth, interpretative understanding of the phenomenon, which may have enriched the broader discussion on the impacts of digital media on mother–adolescent attachments.

Considering IPA's emphasis on deeply understanding each participant's perspective, participant engagement was a key element in ensuring that findings reflected mothers' lived experiences accurately. I engaged with mothers throughout the analysis process, through member checking or feedback regarding preliminary findings, which allowed for refining my interpretations to ensure they aligned with mothers' perceptions. Finally, transparency regarding the study's limitations and the unique conditions under which the research was conducted was maintained. Acknowledging the boundaries of the study ensure readers understand the specific context in which the findings were generated and may assess the potential transferability of these insights to their setting

Dependability

To ensure dependability in this study, I implemented strategies that maintained consistency and transparency throughout the research process. First, I maintained a comprehensive audit trail that documented steps of the research process, including decisions made, any changes in methodology, and the rationale behind them (Taquette &

Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). This transparency allow others to track the progression of the study and assess the dependability of the findings. Second, I applied consistent coding practices during the data analysis phase, ensuring that coding schemes were applied uniformly across the dataset (Ravitch & Carl 2019; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). To further enhance the dependability of the study, I collaborated with colleagues to review and refine the coding schemes, allowing for peer debriefing and cross-checking of interpretations. This collaborative approach aligns with IPA's methodical and iterative approach to analyzing and interpreting participant data (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). By adopting these practices, I aimed to maintain the dependability of the research and provide a clear, transparent process for others to understand how findings were derived.

Confirmability

To ensure the confirmability of this study, I implemented approaches to minimize researcher bias and maintain transparency in the data analysis process. As IPA requires active researcher engagement in interpretation, I engaged in reflexivity throughout the study, regularly reflecting on how my personal experiences and assumptions might have influenced the findings. I addressed and documented any biases that emerged during the analysis by documenting them through a research journal.

Additionally, I maintained a clear audit trail to document decisions made throughout the research process, from data collection to coding, ensuring that others may follow the analytical process and verify the link between the findings and the data. To further enhance confirmability, I employed peer debriefing, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected mothers' lived experiences. By integrating these approaches within

the IPA framework, I aimed to ensure that findings were grounded in the mothers' experiences and perspectives, and not influenced by personal bias, which may support the confirmability of the research.

Ethical Procedures

In planning and executing this research, I gave careful attention to ethical concerns to ensure the maintenance of confidentiality and protection of participant privacy throughout the study. Safeguarding confidentiality was a critical aspect of the research design, and I will address these ethical safeguards at the outset, particularly in the introductory section of the screening survey. Mothers will be informed of the procedures in place to protect their personal information. Although confidentiality is a priority, it is important to note that, based on legal requirements, there are limitations to complete confidentiality. Disclosures involving potential harm to oneself or others, or information related to child abuse or neglect, must be reported in accordance with legal obligations.

Confidentiality remained a cornerstone of the research process, and I clearly outlined this commitment in the introductory section of the screening survey. Mothers were reassured that their personal identities would remain private. Additionally, mothers received a clear explanation that the interviews were conducted for scholarly research, along with a statement of the purpose of the study. To ensure the security of confidential data, information was stored in password-protected locations, and any written notes would employ pseudonyms known solely to the researcher. No participant names was used to identify individuals, including when quoting from data transcripts. Only myself,

my Dissertation Committee, and peer reviewers would have access to the data, and no identifying information was revealed. I would continue to store data in a secure location upon the conclusion of the research for up to five years so that it may be retrieved for future research endeavors. Data was securely stored in password-protected systems and accessible only to myself and peer reviewers involved in the analysis. Identifiable details was removed from all transcriptions, and no real names appeared in any published findings. Upon completion of the study, all data was securely stored for up to five years, allowing future researchers to access it although maintaining full privacy.

Considering the sensitive nature of the study, in which mothers shared their personal experiences of phubbed by their adolescents, I prioritized the ethical principle of do no harm (American Psychological Association, 2017). I respected the mothers' autonomy, allowing them to refuse to answer any questions or to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. Should any participant express emotional distress or discomfort during the interview, I would have immediately stopped the conversation. My priority was to ensure that participants felt safe, respected, and empowered throughout the research process.

Ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2017) guided my conduct, ensuring that the study upholds the dignity and respect of all participants. I maintained a non-coercive, non-intrusive approach during interviews, ensuring that participants' experiences were shared freely, without undue influence or bias from my personal beliefs. In the rare event that any ethical issues occurred during the research process, I would have sought guidance from the Walden University Institutional Review

Board or the research committee to ensure that ethical standards were rigorously followed, and participants' rights were fully protected.

Summary

This phenomenological qualitative study explored the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, focusing on the meaning-making processes they engaged in as they navigated their emotional responses and attachment dynamics. The study employed a semistructured interview protocol, with a debriefing process, to gain insights into the participants' perspectives. IPA served as the primary research method, guiding the data collection and analysis. The research design and rationale aimed to understand the experiences of mothers whose adolescents (aged 14-18) engaged in phubbing. I designed the interview questions, conducted the interviews, and analyzed the data. To minimize bias and enhance data accuracy, several strategies was implemented, including continuous self-reflection, maintaining a reflexivity journal, peer debriefing, member checking, providing rich descriptions, and maintaining an audit trail.

Participant selection followed a homogeneous convenience sampling approach, enabling an in-depth exploration of a specific group of mothers who shared experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. The study included 8 participants, with each participating in one interview. Eligible participants were mothers aged 18 or older who were currently experiencing phubbing by their adolescents aged 14-18. Exclusion criteria included mothers whose children were under 14, did not own smartphones, or did not use them regularly, as well as mothers who did not experience phubbing or did not speak English.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, with audio recordings made available for transcription and subsequent analysis. To maintain ethical standards, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and measures were implemented to ensure protection of their privacy. IPA served as the methodological framework guiding the research process and the analytical technique used to derive meaningful insights from qualitative data. The analysis focused on identifying and exploring key concepts within the mothers' experiences. This study aimed to provide detailed insights into the emotional and attachment dynamics of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, enhancing readers' understanding of how these experiences influenced mothers' perceptions of emotional bonds with their adolescents. Ethical procedures were rigorously followed to ensure well-being and confidentiality of participants, although upholding the trustworthiness, dependability, and credibility of the research findings.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative study aimed to explore lived experiences of mothers who reported being phubbed by their adolescents. The study explored how they perceived and responded to phubbing behaviors using the attachment theory. I conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The research question guiding this study was: What are the lived experiences of mothers who have been phubbed by their adolescent children (ages 14-18)? Chapter 4 includes a comprehensive overview of the research setting, participant demographics, data collection and analysis procedures, discrepant cases, and strategies to establish trustworthiness. Additionally, the chapter includes a detailed discussion of findings and concludes with a transition to Chapter 5.

Setting

Interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom, which was selected for its ability to record audio in order to ensure participants' responses were accurately captured for analysis. The online format enabled inclusion of participants from the United States. To ensure security and privacy, private meeting settings were used, including a waiting room feature that allowed only intended participants to be admitted via unique ID numbers and passwords for access. Interviews were conducted in my home office, and headphones were used to minimize distractions and safeguard confidentiality. Cameras were on during interviews; however, only audio was recorded.

Demographics

Participants were individuals who were 18 or older and identified as mothers of adolescents between 14 and 18 who had experienced phubbing. To protect

confidentiality, I omitted any characteristics that were not relevant to the research question. Additionally, all participants were fluent in English, with proficiency in terms of reading, comprehension, and speaking. Participants' occupations varied, including roles in education, business and information technology, and caregiving as stay-at-home mothers.

Data Collection

Data collection commenced following approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB #06-05-25-1179552). To receive IRB approval, I used member checking and sent a copy of interview transcripts within 1 week of participant interviews in order for them to correct or edit any information for clarity, and I allowed 1 week for participants to provide feedback on transcripts. Additionally, I included demographic questions involving age, gender, race/ethnicity, and number of children. I included contact information for free counseling services in the consent form. I used Microsoft Word for data analysis.

I recruited volunteers through social media using a Google form link. I used an online screening and demographic survey. The first page of this survey featured the informed consent form, and volunteers were asked to indicate their consent before proceeding. The consent form included the purpose of the study, confidentiality details, an explanation of study criteria, the nature of questions, and associated risks. Next, participants answered inclusion questions; when they answered no to any of these questions, they were automatically directed to the end of the survey, with a message that thanked them for their time and informed them they did not qualify for the study. Then,

participants answered some demographic questions, and the survey ended with a request for their email addresses to schedule interviews once they met inclusion requirements. A total of 12 volunteers responded to the online screening survey, two of whom did not meet eligibility criteria, and two did not respond to follow-up emails to schedule interviews.

Upon completing the survey, which included the informed consent form, participants were invited to schedule audio-recorded interviews via Zoom. Interviews were conducted at times that were mutually agreed upon by participants and me. Prior to beginning each interview, I thanked participants for their involvement in the study. Then, I inquired whether they had any questions regarding the consent form and reassured them they could pause or discontinue interviews at any point if needed. Additionally, I clarified their identities would not be disclosed to ensure confidentiality and protect their privacy. I informed participants interviews would last approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and most interviews adhered to this time frame, which depended on length of participants' responses. Average duration of interviews was 46.48 minutes, with a standard deviation of 6.70 minutes.

I conducted all interviews in my home office using a secure laptop. Interviews were audio-recorded via Zoom and securely downloaded onto my laptop. Audio recordings and email consent form responses were stored in a password-protected file on my laptop. The only identifying information was provided through personalized email addresses, which were collected as part of the informed consent process via Walden University's email system.

A total of eight interviews were conducted, at which point data saturation was reached. Data collection and analysis continued until no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews. At this point, patterns across participants had sufficiently addressed the research question, confirming that the sample size was adequate for exploring the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. Strong convergence was observed regarding core emotional experiences and meaning-making processes related to adolescents' phubbing behaviors.

Upon initiating recordings, I proceeded with questions as outlined in the interview guide until interviews were concluded. At the close of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to provide any feedback and additional information regarding the interview process. Following interviews, recordings were stopped, thereby marking completion of the data collection process. No significant issues were encountered aside from minor interruptions caused by children of a few participants.

Data Analysis

Consistent with the study proposal, Interpretative phenomenological analysis was employed to analyze collected data. IPA is designed to explore detailed and subjective narratives of how individuals interpret and make sense of their world, with particular emphasis on their sense-making processes (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). I used Zoom to generate written transcripts and audio recordings for interviews. I read and manually coded each transcript multiple times to become familiar with data and developed a comprehensive understanding of participants' unique experiences. This process involved deep reflective engagement with data through annotation, which facilitated identification

of experiential statements. I followed the six-step IPA approach as outlined by Smith and Fieldsend to guide an idiographic analysis of participant narratives as well as personal and group experiential themes.

Step 1: Familiarization With Data

I immersed myself in each transcript, reading and rereading interview data to develop a deep familiarity with participant accounts. The initial phase of immersion in the data enabled me to become attuned to the unique meanings, emotional tone, and contextual nuances embedded in each participant's lived experience of being phubbed by her adolescent. To ensure transcription accuracy, I replayed the audio recordings and made detailed corrections to verify consistency between the audio and text. Then I reviewed each finalized transcript multiple times while simultaneously listening to the corresponding audio, paying close attention to the participant's rhythm of speech, emotional tone, and expression. The iterative engagement deepened my familiarity with each mother's narrative and maintained the idiographic focus of IPA.

Step 2: Initial Noting

I conducted manual coding by making detailed annotations in the margins of each transcript using Microsoft Word. My notes included descriptive statements related to the content of the mothers' narratives, linguistic observations regarding how they articulated their experiences, and conceptual comments that reflected their emotional responses and the attachment-related disruptions grounded in their accounts (see Figure 1).

Table 1

Excerpt From Notes of Participant 1 Analysis

Participant Statements	Notes
"More so just frustration and maybe disappointment in terms of him not understanding where I'm coming from in terms of phone usage."	The mother expressed frustration and disappointment that her adolescent is unable to understand her concerns about smartphone use, which may reflect emotional disconnect, as she felt her maternal position was not valued or recognized by her adolescent. Her frustration highlights the struggles she faced in reconciling her desire for more face-to-face interaction with her adolescent's attachment to his device.
"I'm trying to connect with you, and then you're more interested in something else…It's harder for me to be able to communicate or find the correct words, to be able to draw you back in to communicate with me. So it's a little bit of frustration."	The mother felt emotionally disconnected from her adolescent, who seemed to favor his smartphone over engaging with her. This created a challenge for the mother, who struggled to find the right words to gain her adolescent's attention. Her difficulty to connect with her teen in these moments led to growing frustration, as she felt her efforts were met with the adolescent's belief that he could multitask and a lack of awareness of how his phubbing behavior is impacting her.
"I often feel that way in the car, going back and forth between school or different… events… or even just in the house trying to watch a movie or something of that nature. The phone seems to be more interesting than having conversations."	The mother felt phubbed by her adolescent during car rides and watching movies, as her child is distracted by their phone rather than engaging with her. This highlighted an emotional disconnect between the adolescent's focus on digital distractions and the mother's desire for face-to-face interaction, particularly during key moments of engagement. The contextual may highlight broader concerns about how technology affects emotional connection and mother-adolescent attachment.

My annotations facilitated a reflexive engagement with the data and supported the identification of meaningful patterns within each mother's narrative. My goal during this stage was to remain as close to the mothers' verbatim accounts laying the foundation for the development of experiential statements in the next phase. During the initial noting phase, I maintained a reflexive journal to record my analytic decisions, emotional responses, and interpretative insights. Maintaining the journal allowed me to identify and lessen potential biases, while deepening my engagement with the mothers' narratives. Reflexive journaling supported a thoughtful and transparent coding process that remained grounded in mothers' lived experiences.

Step 3: Creating Experiential Statements

Following initial noting, I transformed my detailed annotations into concise experiential statements that captured most meaningful aspects of each mother's account. The step involved refining linguistic, descriptive, and conceptual comments into focused statements that reflected how each mother made sense of being phubbed by her adolescent child. Throughout the process, I remained closely aligned with the original data while interpreting the significance of mothers' experiences within the context of mother–adolescent attachments.

The experiential statements served as a bridge between the raw data and the development of personal experiential themes (see Appendix E). For example, in the initial coding process, I identified the code frustration to capture moments in the mother's narrative in which she expressed feelings of frustration regarding her adolescent's

behavior. For instance, the mother stated, “I think that’s frustrating to me the most because it goes back to what I said about giving me my 5 min.” The experiential statement reflected frustration due to insufficient emotional connection or face-to-face interaction with her adolescent, which was the reason it was categorized under this code. The inclusion criteria for this code were any statements in which mothers expressed feelings of irritation, annoyance, or anger by their adolescents’ behavior. By systematically revisiting the transcript, I ensured that the statement authentically represented the mother’s emotional experience, and I reexamined my interpretation to ensure it was the most accurate representation of her meaning. The iterative process helped refine the themes, ensuring they authentically reflected the mother’s lived experience.

Step 4: Developing Personal Experiential Themes

Building on the experiential statements from the previous phase, I clustered related statements to construct personal experiential themes each reflecting key aspects of how mothers made sense of being phubbed by their adolescents. To support this, I created tables of personal experiential themes for each mother, systematically grouping their statements (see Appendix F). For example, in this phase of the IPA analysis, I systematically grouped the verbatim statements from each mother into personal experiential themes. The personal experiential themes represented the core aspects of mother’s lived experience as they described it. For example, in the case of Participant 3, the first theme, emotional disconnection and hurt due to adolescent’s favoring smartphone over face-to-face interactions, was identified from the mother’s

statement: “He's on his phone the entire time…can you just put down your phone…while we're in the car…Let's just have a conversation…we don't really get to talk.” The statement reflected her frustration and emotional struggle in attempting to communicate with her adolescent during a moment that may have fostered emotional connection. The second theme, unmet attachment needs and yearning for engagement, responsiveness, and emotional availability, was derived from her reflection: “Just wanting…to feel like I'm more involved in what he's thinking and feeling. Having that, you know the one-on-one engagement with my teen just connecting with him.” The theme illustrates her desire for emotional availability and connection with her adolescent. The final theme, frustration and repeated efforts due to adolescent’s lack of engagement and communication was derived from the statement: “I'm having to tell you two and three times. So that's…why I get angry and frustrated.” This theme captured her frustration with her adolescent’s phubbing behaviors, which challenged communication and engagement. By organizing the mother’s statements into groups, I identified and illustrated key emotional challenges the mother faced in her interaction with her adolescent.

Step 5: Developing Group Experiential Themes

In the next phase, I developed group experiential themes by comparing the personal experiential themes across mothers using Microsoft Word. I synthesized the personal experiential themes identified in the previous step into broader group experiential themes that captured how mothers made sense of being phubbed by their adolescent. I identified shared group themes, while remaining attentive to the unique

aspects of each mother's lived experience, ensuring the analysis captured patterns across mothers and individual differences (see Appendix G). For example, after I identified the personal experiential themes for each mother, I examined for patterns that emerged across all mothers. One recurring group theme was frustration with communication barriers that weaken emotional bonding. Many mothers described feeling frustrated by the difficulty of communicating with their adolescents, often feeling that their attempts to emotionally connect were interrupted by barriers, such as distraction by adolescent phubbing. For example, one mother expressed, "Just missing some of those connections…like some frustration that you know you can't put this [smartphone] down for a few minutes…to engage in this conversation?" Another mother shared, "The phone seems to be more interesting than having conversations" "I think that it creates a disconnect because I'm trying to connect with you, and then you're more interested in something else" By grouping these personal themes, I identified that communication challenges were a shared concern, which may have led to weakened emotional bonding between the mothers and adolescents. Although each mother's experience was unique, some felt more emotionally neglected, while others expressed frustration or disappointment, the common theme was that the communication barriers led to mothers feeling emotionally disconnected. The group theme process resulted in five group experiential themes and 23 personal experiential themes.

Step 6: Write-Up and Findings

In the writing-up phase, I presented a detailed account of the interpretative findings, focusing on the final formulation of the group experiential themes, which had

been developed through an iterative analysis of the transcripts. The group experiential themes were supported by direct quotes from mothers, followed by my interpretative analysis of each quote. The write-up stage provided an opportunity for reflection regarding the meanings embedded within transcripts and allowed me to articulate how mothers made sense of and emotionally navigated experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. Additionally, the analysis and write-up phase provided an opportunity for new insights to emerge as I revisited the transcripts and refined the interpretative findings, Throughout the analysis process, I maintained detailed analytical memos to document my interpretations, reflections, and evolving thoughts regarding transcripts. Memos helped me clarify my understanding of themes and ensured the analysis remained grounded in mothers' lived experiences.

Discrepant Cases

In qualitative data analysis, researchers may identify discrepant cases which may conflict or complicate the broader interpretation of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Additionally, researchers may actively search for discrepant cases to ensure their findings are grounded in an unbiased and comprehensive analysis of data. Although each mother in the this study had unique experiences of their adolescents' phubbing behaviors, these experiences were consistent within the attachment framework. While experiences varied in intensity, no cases fundamentally contradicted core themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research provides a unique opportunity to explore and interpret the details of lived experiences, and in this study, IPA was employed to capture the lived

experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. Interviews, a key method in qualitative research provided an effective way to explore the subjective perspectives of mothers, which allowed me to gain deeper insights into how mothers experienced and made sense of being phubbed by their adolescents; however, conducting interviews also present certain challenges, particularly around ensuring the trustworthiness of the data. These challenges were addressed through the application of key criteria of qualitative research quality: dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The following sections provide a detailed discussion of each criterion.

Credibility

The credibility of this study was ensured through the adoption of IPA, a method particularly suited for capturing mothers' experiences in alignment with attachment theory. Considering the emphasis on understanding lived experiences of mothers, IPA served as the primary approach for data analysis, facilitating an in-depth exploration of their perspectives. IPA is suited to exploring and interpreting lived experiences of individuals, allowing the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

I employed several strategies to enhance the study's credibility, including member checking, reflective journaling, peer debriefing, and maintenance of an audit trail. These strategies ensured accuracy of transcript interpretations and helped mitigate potential personal assumptions or biases. Reflexivity played a critical role throughout the research process; I continuously documented my thoughts and emotions in a journal to ensure that my analysis remained grounded in mothers' lived experiences, rather than being

influenced by my personal experiences, assumptions, or biases (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Additionally, I engaged in peer debriefing throughout the research process to gain external feedback on my data interpretation and overall findings. Moreover, I maintained an audit trail and recorded the steps of the research process, including decisions made and the rationale behind those decisions (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Furthermore, I conducted member checking by sending a copy of the interview transcript within 1 week of their interview, which allowed participants to correct or edit any information for clarity. I allowed 1week for participants to provide feedback on the transcript. Finally, I used Microsoft Word to manually record codes and themes, allowing for transparent and methodical documentation of raw data, which contributed to a comprehensive account of mothers' lived experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents and enhanced the trustworthiness of my research.

Transferability

In IPA, contextual information is crucial for enhancing transferability. To achieve this, I implemented several strategies to increase the contextual richness and applicability of results, focusing on describing the socio-emotional factors that influenced mothers' experiences. One core strategy I implemented was the use of detailed, rich descriptions (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022), in which I provided in-depth and detailed accounts of mothers' experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents. I included a comprehensive description of research context and specific emotional bonding and attachment dynamics between mothers and adolescents in the digital age. I aimed to enhance the transferability of the research by providing rich,

contextual details that enable readers to assess how the mothers' narratives may resonate with their lived experiences or those of others in similar contexts. To further support this, I grounded the study in attachment theory as the relevant theoretical framework and integrated critical concepts from relevant literature to guide the development of open-ended interview questions. Additionally, I incorporated vivid direct quotes from each mother, providing deep insights into their lived experiences; thus, strengthening the transferability of findings.

Dependability

To ensure dependability of this study, I implemented strategies that fostered consistency and transparency throughout the research process. I began by reviewing audio recordings from Zoom interviews and transcribing them for member checking, providing copies to participants for feedback. In addition, I maintained an audit trail to document the research process, including key decisions and reasoning (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). During the data analysis phase, I applied consistent coding practices, ensuring coding schemes were uniformly applied across the dataset (Ravitch & Carl 2019; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Dependability of my findings was further supported by relevant participant quotes and interpretative commentary (see Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

Confirmability

To ensure the confirmability of this study, I employed strategies to minimize researcher bias and maintain transparency throughout the data analysis process. Since IPA involves active researcher engagement in interpretation, I practiced reflexivity,

consistently reflecting on how my personal experiences and assumptions might influence the findings. I addressed and monitored any biases that emerged during analysis by documenting them in a research journal. Additionally, I maintained a detailed audit trail to record decisions made throughout the research process, from data collection to coding, allowing others to follow the analytical process and verify the connection between the findings and the data. To further strengthen confirmability, I used peer debriefing to gather independent feedback on my interpretations, ensuring findings accurately reflected mothers' lived experiences. My goal was to ground findings in the mothers' perspectives, minimizing the potential for personal bias and supporting confirmability of the research.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of mothers who are phubbed by their adolescents. Using semi-structured interviews, I conducted a comprehensive exploration of firsthand accounts of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. The interviews comprised of 17 open-ended questions, providing mothers with the opportunity to share their perspectives in their own words. The questions were developed to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of mothers who have been phubbed by their adolescent children (ages 14-18)? The following sections present five group experiential themes derived from the IPA analysis of these interviews. The themes demonstrate the emotional and behavioral aspects of mothers' experiences with adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Additionally, the themes highlight the individual meaning-making processes and shared emotional challenges, all anchored in the language of mothers and grounded in Bowlby's attachment theory.

Group Experiential Theme 1: Feeling Dismissed and Emotionally Disconnected as Adolescent Phubbing Weakens Recognition, Respect, and Feelings of Being Valued and Loved

Theme 1 explored emotional hurt mothers experienced when their adolescents' phubbing disrupted their expectations for emotional connection, availability, and responsiveness: fundamental components of bonding that support secure mother-adolescent attachments. Mothers often interpreted their adolescents' phubbing as forms of emotional disconnection and undervaluation, or rejection. Adolescents' phubbing behaviors are often perceived as disregard, which may have impeded bonding and hindered maintenance of secure mother–adolescent attachments.

Attachment-Related Disruptions and Emotional Undervaluation

Several mothers described feeling dismissed, ignored, and disconnected due their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. The experiences were not interpreted as only frustrations; rather, they reflected deeper emotional needs for recognition: as mothers sought emotional connection, responsiveness, and love within mother–adolescent attachments. For some mothers, repeated instances of phubbing led to perceived diminishment of recognition and respect, which were essential to maintaining emotional responsiveness to support secure mother–adolescent attachments.

The perceived emotional unavailability of adolescents, when they appeared to prioritize their smartphones instead of engaging with their mothers, led to feelings of disappointment, hurt, emotional disconnection and undervaluation among mothers, particularly during daily interactions that may have fostered emotional connection. One

mother reflected on the emotional disconnection she felt and expressed: “The phone seems to be more interesting than having conversations. I think that it creates a disconnect because I’m trying to connect with you, and then you’re more interested in something else” (Participant 1). Another mother similarly expressed, “It’s like he would rather be on the phone than spend time with me” (Participant 8).

Respect Is What Love Does

Participants framed phubbing as a breach of respect, a quality they considered essential to being emotionally valued and central to their maternal identities. In this context, respect for mothers was intertwined with preservation of maternal identity, emotional availability, and love. When adolescents disregarded, ignored, or dismissed maternal attempts to connect, it was often perceived as deprioritization and disrespect, which often led to attachment-related disruptions. As one mother explained, “Even if it is on a phone, the fact that you didn’t respond is seen as a sign of disrespect… Why are you not responding? You know that’s feeling disrespectful” (Participant 7). She continued, “So when you ignore someone [a parent] who’s trying to make sure that you’re okay or assist you in life—someone who loves you and respects you—it’s also nice to be able to give that respect back.” For many mothers, the act of being ignored during communication, particularly regarding adolescents’ phubbing behaviors, indicated a lack of respect that was essential for attachment security. Disrespect mothers referred to suggested that emotional disconnection they experienced was not only a temporary frustration; however, a constant disruption that may have threatened the stability of mother-adolescent attachments.

Mothers shared what respect meant to them and how they intentionally communicated this to their adolescents. Participant 5 explained:

> I feel like respect is the minimum that a human deserves. So I think that's very important to me. And not only that—it's something that you do. So one of the phrases that I love to tell my children is… I always say, 'Does love do that? Is that what love does?'… I'm trying to be intentional about not directly attacking them as a person but showing them that this is what love looks like. This is what love does. This is what respect looks like.

For many mothers respect was viewed as a demonstration and an active practice of love. Additionally, respect was deeply connected to emotional availability, with expectations emotional connections were reinforced through intentional, respectful behaviors.

Participant 5 explained:

> But for myself… well, you know, that's something [respect] that I give. So that's something that I require—to engage with anyone, let alone… at the very minimum—let alone if you're my child. So I feel like that's something we should—that's an exchange. I model that, so I expect that from them, as well.

Furthermore, these reflections illustrated how some mothers constructed respect as a modeled practice, essential to their emotional expectations and to their maternal identities within mother–adolescent attachments.

Reflexivity

Bowlby (1979) stated that the universal human longing for love and care is an innate desire that persists throughout adulthood, beyond earlier developmental stages.

Consequently, the demonstration of these needs is a normative feature of adult behavior. In the context of attachment theory, although mothers are caregivers and authority figures, they also possess a deep and intrinsic need to be recognized and loved. The need for recognition and emotional connection was essential to their maternal identities and vital for maintaining secure mother-adolescent attachments.

In my initial coding of maternal frustration, I interpreted emotional tone as anger: an interpretation influenced by my upbringing, in which immediate obedience to parental authority was expected, and respect for parents was non-negotiable. This led me to perceive parental expressions of frustration as anger, which was reinforced by my childhood experiences. On the other hand, upon re-engaging with data, I began to interpret deeper emotional layers, such as sadness, hurt, and fear, beneath outward expressions of frustration. The shift in perspective led to my reconsideration of emotional tone, prompting a re-evaluation of my interpretation within the context of IPA.

Through reflexive process, my perspective evolved. I viewed mothers as authority figures and human beings who yearned to be emotionally recognized and respected by their adolescents. The need for recognition was expressed through verbal communication, shared time, and emotional availability. The dynamic between mothers and adolescents was viewed as one in which love was sought through respect, emotional connection, and undivided attention that phubbing denied.

Group Experiential Theme 2: Regulating Emotions, Setting and Enforcing Boundaries, and Self-care, as Coping Mechanisms to Manage Adolescent Phubbing

Although the preceding accounts highlight the emotional impact of phubbing as attachment-related disruptions, many mothers did not remain in a state of emotional hurt. Instead, they engaged in a range of behavioral and emotional coping strategies to manage attachment-related distress and preserve mother–adolescent attachments. Theme 2 explored the adaptive shift, including mothers' efforts to regulate their emotions and establish and reinforce boundaries.

Navigating Attachment-Related Distress

Many mothers described using intentional emotional regulation strategies to manage distress caused by their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. The strategies focused on reinterpreting situations and emotional control in attempting to reduce emotional reactions, particularly in response to perceived emotional disconnection. For example, Participant 7 emphasized the importance of pausing and thinking before responding: "I just had to take a deep breath and say, okay, let me think about exactly what's happening and how I'm going to approach it and handle it, because… we can't continue down this road." The mother's reflections revealed how delaying emotional responses served to process emotional disconnection and preserve the mother-adolescent attachment. Strategic pauses aligned with attachment theory by promoting self-regulation before reacting impulsively, fostering emotional availability needed for a secure attachment. The process of emotional regulation through reinterpreting emotional reactions or intentional pausing helped mothers maintain emotional availability, an essential factor in ensuring

secure attachments, particularly when phubbing behaviors threatened to disrupt emotional bonds.

Understanding Adolescent Development and Phubbing

Several mothers reinterpreted their emotional reactions by grounding their responses in developmental perspectives, which allowed them to reduce emotional hurt and increase tolerance for their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. For example, Participant 3 reflected, *"*I remind myself that they are kids… he's a child. He's a teenager, and the brain is not fully developed yet." Reinterpreting adolescents' phubbing behaviors as part of their developmental stage, helped mothers avoid interpreting phubbing as an affront (or insult), enabling composed responses which may have supported mothers' emotional balance and strengthened mother-adolescent attachments.

Additionally, mothers framed phubbing by their adolescents within a broader sociocultural context, which suggested that their adolescent's phubbing was influenced by environmental factors such as living in a digital era. For example, Participant 4 shared, "This is part of who they are… this is how they do their homework… how they had to do their classes." This reflected a cultural shift toward digital dependence, which mothers interpreted not as maternal failure or perceived disrespect rather indications of broader technological changes. As Participant 8 highlighted, school reliance on technology only reinforced this behavior: "The school also promotes them using the device… all the coursework is digital. So I think it also promotes him using the phone and devices more." Recognizing institutional contexts, mothers adjusted their emotional responses to phubbing and viewed their adolescent's phubbing as part of a larger social

phenomenon, rather than an affront (or insult). The adjustments may have reduced conflicts and increased emotional regulation and availability, which may have fostered a deeper connection and promoted secure attachments.

Emotional Regulation and Attachment Preservation

Beyond emotional regulation strategies, many mothers described coping behaviors aimed at managing emotional disconnection due to their adolescents' phubbing. Mothers engaged in proactive measures to preserve their well-being and maintain secure attachments, in the face of perceived disconnection or dismissal, rather than retreating into emotional detachment. Participant 5 explained:

> I have different ways that I deal with it, but my biggest thing is just do what makes me happy… whether it be taking a walk or going to exercise or taking myself out—to not frustrate myself—and then just trust that as time goes on they'll learn the importance of engaging a little bit more with family.

Similarly, Participant 1 shared, "I just find something else to do. I listen to an audiobook… I go for a walk. I find a movie to watch on my own, podcast… the same time that he is [on his phone]." Mothers' reflections demonstrated strategies that allowed them to avoid escalation of emotions that may have stemmed from continued engagement with their adolescents during phubbing moments. Focusing on their well-being, created environments for them and their adolescents to engage more constructively, which reflected commitment to emotional regulation which helped to maintain secure mother-adolescent attachments.

Boundary-Setting

In addition to emotional regulation, many mothers employed boundary-setting to manage attachment-related disruptions and restore emotional availability within mother–adolescent attachments. Strategies were designed to encourage emotional connection and foster emotional engagement. Participant 3 exemplified the use of setting boundaries: "If you don't know how to take a break from your phone… then I'm gonna have to make you take a break, and so I'll just take the phone." Mothers intervened to limit their adolescents' phubbing behaviors, which aligned with attachment theory by reinforcing the need for emotional availability. By setting boundaries regarding technology use, mothers proactively protected security of the mother-adolescent attachments.

Similarly, other mothers used mealtime boundaries to ensure emotional connection. Participant 6 explained: "Usually when we eat dinner, they don't have [phones]... That was an expectation that we had early—no tablets." Boundaries reflected intentional efforts to create environments for emotional connection, in which the absence of digital devices fostered more meaningful interactions and deeper emotional engagement.

Group Experiential Theme 3: Frustration With Communication Barriers that Weaken Emotional Bonding

The theme explored the increasing frustration experienced by mothers due to communication barriers in facing their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Notwithstanding mothers' emotional regulation efforts, many continued to face persistent communication barriers, which deepened attachment-related distress. Communication barriers reflected

more than superficial misunderstandings; they highlighted mothers' feelings of being unrecognized, emotionally disregarded, and ignored within the mother–adolescent attachments.

Emotional Strain of Competing for Connection

Participants expressed significant emotional strain in their efforts to maintain connection during shared family activities, particularly as their adolescents' phubbing behaviors disrupted quality interactions. For some mothers, the repeated need to ask for attention led to disappointment and frustration, as Participant 1 explained, "Because I'm asking you to give me this time, and you're more interested in whatever it is that you're looking at… I think my frustration is—I don't want to have to ask you." The constant challenge to engage, met with her adolescent's phubbing, contributed to a deeper emotional fatigue. Another mother often asked her child, "Can you just put down your phone …while we're in the car, you don't need to have your phone. Let's just have a conversation" (Participant 3). These reflections highlight how adolescent's phubbing impacted activities and may have deepened the emotional disconnect between mothers and their adolescents. Mothers' initiation and efforts to engage, paired with partial, delayed, or no responses, led to feelings of being unrecognized and emotionally disregarded, which may have further impacted mother–adolescent attachments. These challenges were particularly significant when considering that according to Bowlby's attachment theory (1979) emotional availability and responsiveness are essential for the maintenance of secure attachments.

Attachment-Related Distress and Emotional Heightened Responses

For some participants, competing with their adolescents' devices for attention led to heightened emotional responses. The repeated need to initiate engagement, often met with phubbing, fostered frustration, anger, and verbal escalation. Participant 2 reflected: "I would probably have to really snap them out of it… maybe raise my voice. I probably would be angry… if I had to compete with the device, they're on." Many mothers expressed how raising their voices became an inevitable strategy to gain their adolescents' attention during instances of phubbing. Participant 8 explained, "When we get into that moment, right? That moment is like a more contentious moment. So now I'm feeling frustrated. I'm feeling like negative emotion, because now this exchange is not a positive exchange… My voice, my tone is getting higher." Although there was immediate success of raised voices, many mothers reflected on the negative impact it had on their interaction. For example, Participant 7 acknowledged: "When he was doing it, I was yelling and screaming, which is not a good strategy."

The reactive interactions demonstrated by raised voices and emotional distress illustrated the significant emotional strain of disconnection in mother–adolescent attachments. According to Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, attachment-related distress elicits defensive responses aimed at regaining emotional responsiveness and emotional connection. In the context of adolescents' phubbing behaviors, mothers attempted to regain recognition through heightened emotional responses, which while aimed at emotional connection, may have unintentionally increased tension and further emotional disconnection.

Emotional Withdrawal

Although most mothers expressed frustration and emotional strain, one participant described a withdrawal response because of sustained emotional disconnection. The emotional withdrawal highlighted the cumulative emotional strain of her adolescent's phubbing behavior and reinforced the concept that emotional strain led to lack of engagement. Participant 8 shared, "If I'm trying to redirect him to use the phone less… he'll start getting frustrated. And then… it makes me want to interact less." The mother's emotional withdrawal reflected a coping mechanism in response to repeated emotional hurt, in which she chose to disengage to preserve emotional well-being when attachment repair felt increasingly unattainable.

Impact of Pandemic on Emotional Connection

Additionally, Participant 8 observed changes in her son's behavior during the pandemic and explained, "Since the pandemic there's been a decrease in socialization…with us. He'll go in his room and he'll be on the phone or his iPad…Yeah, absolutely definitely, an increase [of smartphone and digital devices]." Similarly to some mothers' accounts before the pandemic, Participant 5 shared, "I want to say pre-pandemic. The boys had one phone that they would share [between] all of them …the amount of time that they spent on it [smartphone] was not as significant." She continued, "I don't believe that any device could replace a human being… nurturing. So then, what happens to a kid…getting that nurture from a technology. Then there's a lack, right?" suggesting that while digital devices may temporarily fulfill certain attachment-related

needs, they do not replace primary attachment figures Bowlby's (1988) theory identified are essential for healthy emotional development.

As Bowlby's theory suggested, adolescents became emotionally absorbed in their devices, reducing their proximity-seeking behavior toward their mothers, which is crucial for maintaining a secure attachment. Nevertheless, this shift to smartphones as attachment objects may have had emotional consequences for mothers, disrupting and complicating emotional bonding and security in attachments. Additionally, smartphones and digital devices may have served as attachment objects, offering temporary comfort and perceived security in the face of anxiety, loneliness, and the uncertainty caused by the pandemic (Lee & Hood; 2021; Li et al., 2021). According to Participant 8, this phenomenon was significant as she remarked, "But because you're [her son] so almost like obsessed with being on the device that it's almost like his reaction sometimes is like someone trying to take his most prized possession." Although some mothers expressed a significant increase in smartphone use after the pandemic, others shared minimal to no effect, citing factors such as children's ages, boundary setting and enforcing, parenting practices, and extracurricular activities.

Group Experiential Theme 4: Rationally Accepting and Emotionally Adjusting to the Generational and Cultural Shifts Caused by Adolescent Phubbing

Gradually, emotional strain of repeated disconnection appeared to shift how some mothers related to their adolescents. Initially, frustration and repeated attempts to engage were common; however, mothers eventually modified their emotional responses or behaviors as a form of emotional adjustment: an intentional reevaluation of expectations

and coping strategies they used to navigate challenges of their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Particpant 6 captured this shift, "It's almost like if you can't beat them, join them, you know, a little bit. So you know, I've kind of just adapted to..." The shift reflected an increasing recognition that fighting against digitalization was not sustainable; however, adapting allowed mothers to make conscious efforts to maintain composure and calmness in a technology dominated world.

As the emotional strain of these repeated emotional disconnections increased, many mothers observed a widening gap involving family dynamics. Participant 5 noted: "Once everyone had their individual phones, you could see the slow shift… the gap widening… in terms of engagement together." The shared routines that once secured connection such as family movie nights were increasingly diminished by adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Participant 1 explained, "Even just in the house trying to watch a movie… the phone seems to be more interesting than having conversations." These reflections highlighted deeper emotional disconnection, demonstrating how technology reshaped mother–adolescent interactions in ways that made traditional forms of engagement feel distant. In response, some mothers began interpreting their adolescents' phubbing behaviors within a broader generational context. Participant 1 observed, "I think it's a this-generation thing… how I grew up and how this generation is growing up is just different."

Nonetheless, this recognition did not fully mitigate the emotional strain. Some mothers articulated their rationalized acceptance more openly: "I'm like probably the last generation that remembers life before cell phones, and can remember, you know, the

evolvement of it to this. So I think I've kind of adapted a little bit" (Participant 6). This adjustment, that most likely resulted from frustration, was a way to maintain a secure mother–adolescent attachments in the face of a pervasive cultural shift. Although mothers adapted their approaches to communication, their emotional strain appeared to remain. These adaptations did not reflect mothers' abandonment of mother–adolescent attachments; rather they were reevaluations of their expectations and emotional bonds in a world in which digital technology is increasingly unavoidable.

Reflexivity

As I reflected on mothers' experiences, I found myself empathetic and aware of how their emotional complexities unfolded. The process of resignation seemed to stem from a rationalized acceptance of the technological shift in family life. Mothers reasoned that technology was intertwined with their adolescents' daily lives and, by extension, mother–adolescent attachments. Recognition emerged in their reflections regarding generational differences, with many acknowledging that their adolescents' attachment to their smartphones was a defining feature of their experience. Participant 2 explained, "They know nothing without the technology… It's an extension of who they are." The statement exemplified a rationalized shift in perspective: mothers recognized dominance of technology and adapted to its existence in their relationships with their adolescents.

Nonetheless, beneath the rationalized acceptance, emotional yearning for connection was evident. The tone of the mothers' voices often conveyed a longing, particularly when they reflected on past times when their adolescents initiated engagement before smartphones became prevalent in society and culture. Mothers'

recollections were more than memories; they seemed to represent an emotional need for continual connection and a desire to restore emotional bonding technology had diminished. For example, Participant 1 expressed frustration of having to ask for attention repeatedly: “I think my frustration is—I don’t want to have to ask you… Just frustration and maybe disappointment in terms of him not understanding where I’m coming from in terms of phone usage.” The mother’s statement emphasized emotional connection between the past: when the mother-child bond felt more immediate, attuned, and close and the present, when that bond is repeatedly sought; however, not fully reciprocated.

As I reflected on the emotional complexity, I became acutely aware of my position as a researcher, integrating the world of digital and traditional communication. As an individual who has experienced firsthand the rise of technology’s dominance, I related to mothers’ acknowledgment of technology’s persistence. On the other hand, I also interpreted emotional disconnection mothers expressed in yearning for their adolescents to ‘look up’ from their smartphones and give them the same undivided attention they once shared. This helped me remain attuned to the tension between emotional need and rationalized acceptance: a tension that seemed to be supported by many of the mothers’ narratives.

In interpreting these dynamics, I drew upon Bowlby’s (1988) attachment theory, which suggests that emotional bonds are essential to development and maintenance of mother-adolescent attachments, and may be disrupted by consistent emotional unavailability and disconnection. Mothers’ experience of resignation reflected a shift in their attachment behaviors, as they navigated the tension between their emotional needs

and their adolescents' increasingly digital world. Bowlby's theory highlights how, when emotional needs are not met over time, individuals may modify their attachment strategies to maintain emotional connection; however, these strategies may have led to emotional disconnection or fatigue rather than fulfillment.

Group Experiential Theme 5: Struggles and Desires to Maintain a Meaningful Connection and Fulfill Attachment Needs

Among frustration and emotional strain of repeated disconnection, many participants expressed a deep and constant yearning for emotional availability and connection with their adolescents. Despite phubbing, mothers yearning for emotional connection reflected a deep need for their adolescents to be emotionally present and physically present. The emotional strain regarding mothers being repeatedly disregarded and ignored resulted in a desire for reciprocity, which Bowlby (1988) described in secure attachment. For some mothers, this was a persistent yearning for emotional reciprocity, validation, and recognition. For example, Participant 1explained this feeling, expressing, "I'm asking you to give me this time, and you're more interested in whatever it is that you're looking at… everybody deserves at least five minutes of your time." The mother's statement highlighted an underlying emotional complexity: desire not to explicitly request attention; however, for her adolescent to willingly value and prioritize his mother, which revealed the challenges mothers faced in requesting emotional connection and attention repeatedly, and yet, they continued to hope for unprompted responses.

Another mother shared a similar feeling, expressing her frustration regarding digital dominance: "But my son is like head in phone just in his own world. It's like

we're interrupting him like we're bothering him" (Participant 8). The mother's statement captured the disheartening experience of feeling disregarded and invisible, particularly when a bond that once defined the mother–child attachment seemed dominated by external digital distractions. Despite this frustration, yearning for emotional connection remained a central theme for many mothers.

Notwithstanding growing influence of digital technology, mothers longed for emotional connection and bonding experiences that were increasingly impeded by pervasive presence of technology. Participant 6 expressed, "Just you know they're teenagers, so I know their time, you know, under my roof, you know, was winding down so you know, just missing some of those connections." Bowlby's attachment theory (1988) contextualized mother–adolescent attachment dynamics since mothers recognized their adolescents were transitioning toward greater autonomy; however, they still desired to maintain emotional availability, responsiveness, and reciprocity, which supported a secure mother–adolescent attachments.

Although mothers expressed disappointment regarding their adolescents' emotional unavailability, they did not fully withdraw or diminish their emotional connections, although it may have shifted. Many mothers continued searching for ways to re-engage or repair emotional disconnection and unavailability with their adolescents, despite their efforts being often met with partial, delayed, or no responses. Mothers' continued efforts for emotional connections aligns with Bowlby's attachment theory (1988) that attachment bonds can endure in the face of attachment-related disruptions.

Although resignation became a coping mechanism, underlying yearning for emotional connection and reciprocity remained, not fully diminishing when emotional bonding may have become temporarily weakened by adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Mothers' frustration was associated with being ignored and not having their emotional needs met. For many mothers, being ignored did not only reflect momentary frustration; however, it may have reflected an emotional loss in the mother–adolescent attachments by reducing emotional availability and disrupting reciprocity, leading to temporary emotional disconnection or unfulfilled attachment needs. Bowlby's attachment theory (1988) helps contextualize these dynamics by explaining that secure attachment requires emotional connection, availability, and responsiveness, aspects that were increasingly challenged by adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Nonetheless, many mothers continued to seek emotional connection, highlighting the nature of attachments and continual emotional bonding, despite their attachment needs remaining unmet.

Summary

Findings revealed five key group experiential themes: feelings of dismissal and emotional disconnection, as adolescent phubbing weakens recognition, respect, and feelings of being valued and loved; the use of emotion regulation, boundary-setting, and self-care as coping mechanisms to manage adolescent phubbing; frustration with communication barriers that weaken emotional bonding; rational acceptance and emotional adjustment to the generational and cultural shifts caused by adolescent phubbing; and the struggles and desires to maintain meaningful connections and fulfill attachment needs. The themes were derived from the participants' feedback and interview

questions. An in-depth analysis of participants' lived experiences revealed phubbing was often perceived by mothers as a breach of respect and emotional connection, diminishing their maternal identities and core attachment needs, particularly the need to be recognized, respected, valued, and loved.

Findings highlighted the ways in which mothers engaged in active emotional regulation strategies to manage their emotional responses, often having to navigate the tension between their emotional needs and their adolescents' increasingly digital world, balancing the desire for secure base with the need for attachment re-engagement or repair. Additionally, some mothers accepted diminished emotional connection, acknowledging generational differences and emotional strain that resulted from disconnection. Nonetheless, mothers expressed yearning for meaningful connection, emphasizing their attachment-related needs to be recognized, respected, and emotionally available, in addition to needs for reciprocal engagement within mother–adolescent attachments. Together, these themes highlight the significant emotional challenges faced by mothers in the digital age, providing a nuanced understanding of how they interpret, adapt to, and attempt to sustain attachment in the context of their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Chapter 5 will present the analysis of the findings, highlight the limitations of the study, and propose suggestions and implications for future research. Results were derived from participants' reflections on their lived experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing daily lives and emotional well-being of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. I used IPA to examine nuanced factors that shaped these experiences. Through a thorough analysis of participant interviews, I identified five key themes: feelings involving dismissal and emotional disconnection as adolescent phubbing weakens recognition, respect, and feelings of being valued and loved, use of emotion regulation, boundary-setting, and self-care as coping mechanisms, frustration with communication barriers that weaken emotional bonding, rational acceptance and emotional adjustment to generational and cultural shifts caused by adolescent phubbing, and struggles and desires to maintain meaningful connections and fulfill attachment needs.

Interpretation of the Findings

Findings of the Study Compared to the Literature

Phubbing adversely affects romantic relationships, friendships, employee-supervisor relationships, and parent–child attachments, often resulting in diminished emotional bonding, intensified feelings of neglect, and communication breakdowns. Parental phubbing may damage parent–child attachments and reduce emotional bonding, causing adolescents to feel neglected, unnoticed, or rejected (David & Roberts, 2017; Hong et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2019). There is a significant gap in research regarding lived experiences of mothers who are phubbed by their adolescent children. My research may have filled this gap by providing valuable insights regarding this topic.

This study included insights regarding lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, emphasizing their expectations and desires to feel recognized, respected, valued, and loved. Additionally, the study highlighted their frustration with communication barriers, coping mechanisms they employed, rationalized acceptance and emotional adjustments, and persistent struggles and desires to maintain meaningful connections and fulfill attachment needs. The following discussion situates these findings within broader literature, highlighting alignments and deviations.

Desires to be Recognized, Respected, and Feel Valued and Loved

Adverse outcomes of phubbing include disruptions involving interpersonal relationships and communication barriers and emotional distance particularly in terms of romantic and parent–child attachments (Hong et al., 2019; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Niu et al., 2020). Participants reported various negative emotions such as feeling undervalued, emotionally disconnected, unrecognized, disappointed, and hurt. This aligns with existing research that associated phubbing with negative emotions such as feeling loneliness, rejection, and emotional neglect. Participant 1, Participant 5, and Participant 8 explained how they desired to spend time with their children; however, their adolescents favored their smartphones over face-to-face interactions with them, which resulted in feeling hurt, disappointed, undervalued, and emotionally disconnected. Key insights from my study were respect which was complexly connected with emotional availability, and mothers viewed adolescent phubbing as a breach of respect. Additionally, emotional disconnections experienced by mothers were not only a temporary frustration and may threaten the stability of mother–adolescent attachments.

Regulating Emotions, Setting and Enforcing Boundaries, and Self-Care

Literature highlighted the importance of setting and enforcing boundaries for smartphone use. Participant 6 and Participant 7 explained setting and enforcing boundaries during dinner time by implementing a rule that prohibited devices helped to create a more controlled environment and minimize conflicts related to digital device use. Findings aligned with literature on parental controls and mediation. Establishing explicit limits on device usage provided mothers with a direct approach to addressing phubbing, thus helping them manage their frustration and concerns regarding excessive technology use. For Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4, when this rule was disobeyed, boundary enforcement occurred, and smartphones were confiscated, which was sometimes met with conflict.

Additionally, participants employed emotional regulation and self-care to manage adolescent phubbing. Although literature highlighted the importance of coping strategies in terms of addressing excessive smartphone use, my study added nuance by exploring how mothers employed emotional regulation strategies. Rather than responding emotionally when phubbed by their adolescents, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 7 regained their composure before they engaged with their children, which helped reduce conflicts. Mothers adopted perspective shifts to avoid taking adolescent phubbing personally by attributing behaviors to the developmental stage. Additionally, participants used self-care strategies to manage frustrations that arose from adolescent phubbing. Participant 1, Participant 5, and Participant 8 engaged in activities that did not involve their adolescents such as walking, watching movies, and relaxation

treatments such as massages. In managing their adolescents' phubbing, participants employed strategies such as emotional regulation, setting and enforcing boundaries, and prioritizing self-care to maintain emotional wellbeing and preserve mother–adolescent attachments.

Frustration With Communication Barriers that Weaken Emotional Bonding

Communication barriers such as insufficient face-to-face interactions and reduced quality time due to phubbing may increase conflicts involving technology use and weaken emotional bonding (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; Dwyer et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022). Participant 3, Participant 5, Participant 6, and Participant 8 explained how they became frustrated when their adolescents were emotionally unavailable: they competed for attention and repeated themselves, which disrupted emotional bonding during shared experiences and face-to-face interactions. Quality of interactions is negatively impacted by increased phubbing, and individuals who are phubbed feel their expectations for interactions have been breached, which leads feelings of exclusion or rejection during those interactions (Shen & Xie, 2024; Stockdale et al., 2018; Vanden Abeele et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023). When Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4 attempted to engage in face-to-face interactions with their adolescents, although their children were physically present, they were prioritizing their smartphones, which resulted in participants becoming frustrated and feeling unrecognized, invisible, or unacknowledged.

Rational Acceptance and Emotional Adjustments to Generational and Cultural Shifts

Phubbing has increasingly become a normative behavior among younger demographics (Garrido et al., 2021; Vanden Abeele et al., 2019). Findings in my study supported the literature and found that mothers recognized the dominance of technology and their adolescents' immersion with it as part of their identity (Participant 2, Participant 4, Participant 6, Participant 8). Consequently, mothers viewed their adolescents' favoring smartphones as an inherent part of their social interactions, including interactions with them. Moreover, parental smartphone use may influence adolescent behaviors (Niu et al., 2020; Tong et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2019). In my study, findings revealed that adolescents' phubbing influenced mothers' smartphone use, particularly in terms of adapting to cultural shifts and discovering new ways to connect with their children through their smartphones (Participant 1, Participant 4, and Participant 6). In addition to cultural shifts, mothers made adaptations in response to generational shifts. As Participant 1 expressed, "I think it's a this-generation thing… how I grew up and how this generation is growing up is just different." Her statement reflected the consensus of many of the mothers and their recognition that fighting against digitalization was not sustainable. Participants' responses to cultural and generational shifts contributed to key insights in my study. Although mothers recognized both shifts and adapted their approaches to communication with their adolescents, their emotional strain remained. Emotional adjustments most likely resulted from frustration was an approach to maintain secure mother–adolescent attachments in the face of pervasive cultural shifts driven by technology.

Struggles and Desires to Maintain Meaningful Connections

Whether in romantic relationships or parent–child interactions phubbing fosters emotional distance, which diminishes the quality of relationships and leads to emotional distress, emotional neglect, loneliness, and dissatisfaction (Bae & Nam, 2023; Kushlev & Dunn, 2019; Roberts & David, 2016; Zhan et al., 2022). Although many mothers in my study felt emotional disconnection due to their adolescents' phubbing, they continued yearning for emotional availability and connection despite the increasing digital barrier. Participant 1, Participant 3, Participant 5, and Participant 8 explained the challenges mothers faced in requesting emotional connection and attention repeatedly, and yet, they continued to hope for unprompted responses. A key finding in my study was mothers recognized that their adolescents were transitioning toward greater autonomy; however, they still desired to maintain emotional availability, responsiveness, and reciprocity and that bond may continue as the adolescent moved toward full independence.

Findings of the Study Compared to the Theoretical Framework

The study explored how mothers interpreted and emotionally responded to being phubbed by their adolescent. Using IPA, five group experiential themes were identified, including experiences of emotional hurt, unmet expectations, efforts to re-engage or repair bonding, and emotional regulation. Although behavioral responses such as boundary setting were commonly reported, deeper emotional meanings emerged, particularly regarding perceived emotional disconnection, unavailability, and yearning for emotional connection. Findings from this study about the lived experiences of mothers

who were phubbed by their adolescents were analyzed through the lens of John Bowlby's attachment theory.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, with its focus on the importance of secure emotional bonds and caregivers' roles in providing secure bases, provided a particularly valuable framework for exploring emotional challenges faced by mothers as they were intentional about securing mother–adolescent attachments while they navigated their adolescents' phubbing. Attachment theory underscores the critical role of bonds between primary caregivers and children, suggesting presence of secure attachments contribute to development of emotional security. Findings of the study aligned with attachment theory by demonstrating how mothers felt being disregarded, dismissed, deprioritized or unrecognized, rejected, ignored, and disrespected (Theme 1). Negative feelings mothers experienced most likely disrupted or threated emotional bonds and attachment-related expectations they desired to have with their adolescents, which led to feelings of frustration and disappointment. Bowlby (1979) stated the universal human longing for love and care is an innate desire that continues throughout adulthood, beyond earlier developmental stages. Consequently, demonstration of these needs is a normative feature of adult behavior. In the context of attachment theory, although mothers are caregivers and authority figures, they also possess a deep and intrinsic need to be recognized, valued, and loved. Needs for recognition and emotional connections were essential to their maternal identities and vital for maintaining a secure mother-adolescent attachments.

Mothers described a range of emotional responses such as disappointment, frustration, anger, and perceived disrespect. These reactions were often indicators of a deeper emotional hurt or pain: mothers' unmet attachment needs: yearnings to be recognized, desires for reciprocal emotional availability, and to feel valued and loved within the mother-adolescent attachments. Findings that emerged from participants' narratives were maternal responses often driven by longings for emotional availability and desires to feel respected, valued, and loved in mother-adolescent attachments (Theme 1). Although mothers' desires were not always explicitly expressed, they were embedded in their emotional tones of sadness and disappointment that accompanied conversations about missed moments of emotional connection (Theme 1, Theme 2, Theme 5) Furthermore, emotional availability and need to be loved were intertwined: emotional availability was the behavior mothers hope to receive, and core driver of the behavior was a need to be loved (Bowlby, 1979; Bowlby, 1988). With insufficient emotional availability, mothers felt emotionally disconnected, undervalued, or rejected by their adolescents' phubbing, although they may not consciously recognize it as such.

The study's findings may have contributed to the growing body of literature that frames mother-adolescent interactions involving phubbing within the context of attachment theory. Emotional responses described by mothers, such as frustration, disappointment, hurt, frustration, and anger, may be interpreted as demonstrations of fundamental attachment-related needs. Although emotions were often expressed in response to observable behaviors, such as adolescents'phubbing behaviors, the deeper

meaning that mothers attributed to these moments suggested disruptions in emotional connections (Theme 3, Theme 4, Theme 5).

According to Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979; Bowlby, 1988), secure attachments are fostered through emotional availability, responsiveness, and proximity. Although literature emphasizes the child's need for attachment, caregivers also have attachment-related needs. When these needs are unfulfilled, caregivers may experience emotional distress. In this study, many mothers implicitly assumed that their adolescents would offer attention, respect, and emotional availability, particularly during key bonding moments such as car rides, meals, or shared unstructured time (Theme 2, Theme 3). When these expectations were disrupted by their adolescents' phubbing, mothers often exhibited emotional distress due to insufficient emotional availability, connection, and responsiveness.

Emotional availability is a central construct in understanding maternal hurt in the context of adolescents' phubbing. Mothers' emotional logic often followed a pattern such as: if you cared about me or loved me, you would choose to be present with me. This reasoning reflected not only behavioral expectations, but attachment-related needs to feel recognized, valued, and loved. When adolescents appeared to favor their smartphones instead of their emotional connection with their mothers, it may have threatened mothers' emotional importance in mother–adolescent attachments, prompting disappointment, frustration, or anger.

For many mothers in this study, adolescents' phubbing was interpreted through a lens of connection rather than disobedience or distraction (Theme 3). Frequent phubbing

may have led mothers to perceive emotional neglect, particularly if the behavior signaled insufficient emotional availability and responsiveness from their adolescents. According to Bowlby's attachment theory (1979) this disruption may foster insecure attachment dynamics, in which mothers felt unrecognized, which led to frustration and insecurity (Theme 3)

Mothers were not only reacting to behavioral disruptions but to what they perceived as emotional dismissal, loss, or diminishing emotional availability. Phubbing during conversations or shared time was often perceived as disrespect or rejection of the mothers' emotional availability. Although some mothers framed their adolescents' phubbing behaviors as normal or characteristic of the generation, their deeper emotional narratives revealed desires to be valued, respected, and emotionally connected. Unmet expectations seemed to challenge mothers' roles as secure bases for attachment, which resulted in emotional hurt, frustration, and efforts at emotional regulation (Theme 1, Theme 4, Theme 5).

Limitations of the Study

Based on potential limitations outlined in Chapter 1, no significant issues occurred during the study. Mothers were willing to participate, and while the demands of motherhood such as busy work schedules, required thoughtful, efficient, and adaptable scheduling, this did not present a major challenge. Mothers generally provided detailed and candid responses, sharing their experiences openly, including emotions such as frustration, anger, or vulnerability regarding their adolescents' phubbing behaviors. Additionally, mothers did not express concerns about confidentiality and privacy, as I

ensured their privacy was protected prior to and during the interview process. Regarding social desirability bias, most mothers were candid, though a few seemed hesitant in their responses, perhaps concerned about how they would be perceived. Althoughmothers did not seem to have difficulty recalling past experiences, the self-reported nature of the accounts introduced some subjectivity. Although the study may have provided valuable depth, this subjectivity may impact the accuracy and richness of the data, potentially influencing the findings of the study.

Although IPA reflects an interpretive process influenced by the researcher's lens, reflexivity was practiced to minimize bias. As I do not share the same life experiences of being phubbed by an adolescent, my personal experiences with adolescent phubbing and technology use did not significantly impact the data collection, analysis, or interpretation. I ensured that my interpretations were grounded in the participants' narratives rather than my personal views on technology use and attachment dynamics.

Although this study employed a homogeneous convenience sample of mothers, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of their unique experiences, the homogeneity consisting of mothers aged 18 and older who shared experiences of being phubbed by their adolescents, may have reduced the diversity of perspectives. Finally, the study involved only mothers, who, although they provided rich, context-specific data, may not have represented experiences of all mothers, especially those from different cultures. This limitation may reduce the transferability of the study's findings to other contexts and restrict the broader applicability of results beyond the group studied.

Recommendations

Expanding on the findings of the study, several detailed recommendations for future research emerge. Considering emotional responses and attachment-related needs revealed in this study, future research may further explore how adolescent phubbing impacts mother–adolescent attachments across developmental stages and cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies may investigate how patterns of disappointment and frustration, boundary-setting and enforcement, and reengagement or repair of bonding evolve across developmental transitions, such as early to late adolescence.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies may explore how patterns of emotional hurt, disappointment, frustration, perceived disrespect and emotional availability progress over time in relation to adolescents' increasing digital autonomy. For example, researchers may ~~f~~follow a cohort of parent–adolescent dyads over an extended period, ranging from several months to 2-3 years. The study would monitor changes in the emotional dynamics of parent–adolescent attachments as adolescents gradually gain autonomy and become increasingly immersed in digital technology. Key variables to measure would include emotional hurt or disappointment, emotional availability, and digital autonomy. The study would employ a mixed-methods approach to capture a comprehensive view of the changes, combining quantitative standardized questionnaires to measure emotional hurt, disappointment, and emotional availability. Surveys may be administered to adolescents and parents during multiple time points throughout the study, such as every 3 to 6 months, and qualitative interviews conducted biannually to explore the nuances of parental experiences and coping strategies. This approach may provide a comprehensive

understanding of how the emotional dynamics between parents and adolescents develop as digital technology become increasingly prominent aspects of the adolescents' lives. Additionally, although mothers reported using emotional regulation, researchers may examine whether unresolved emotional hurt, or feelings of being unrecognized or unloved often masked by disappointment, frustration, or resignation have long-term effects on maternal well-being and quality of mother–adolescent attachments as adolescents gain increasing digital autonomy.

Additionally, researchers may conduct observational or experimental studies about how mother-adolescent interactions are influenced by disruptions from smartphones or digital devices, potentially identifying key moments when mothers are most vulnerable to emotional hurt or pain. Furthermore, observational or experimental studies may examine how adolescents' phubbing in real time affects emotional responsiveness and reciprocity. Similarly to how children form attachments to blankets or teddy bears as attachment objects, (Bowlby, 1969; Lee & Hood, 2021), they may also develop an attachment to smartphones or digital devices for comfort, security, and proximity in the absence of the mother's emotional sensitivity and availability. Consequently, this connection may extend beyond functionality, becoming an emotional attachment object. Considering that smartphones may function as attachment objects, researchers may investigate whether smartphones have become attachment objects for adolescents since the pandemic, potentially weakening or substituting the attachment needs typically met by their parents.

Implications

Positive Social Change

This study may contribute to positive social change by providing valuable insights into the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. By exploring how these experiences affected emotional bonding, emotional well-being, and mother–adolescent attachments, the study offers mothers opportunities to reflect on the influence of adolescents' phubbing on their emotional well-being and bonding experiences with their adolescents. A deeper understanding of how phubbing impacts emotional connection may empower mothers to foster more meaningful and supportive relationships with their adolescents. Additionally, process of meaning-making and reflection may empower mothers to better navigate the ways in which technology affects their attachment dynamics and emotional well-being.

The study's findings may have significant implications for developing interventions and resources aimed at strengthening mother–adolescent attachments and supporting emotional bonding in the digital age. These insights may inform policy and practice, guiding creation of educational initiatives focused on managing technology use at home. These programs may help mothers establish healthier digital boundaries, promoting more authentic, face-to-face interactions with their adolescents and supporting mothers' emotional well-being. Furthermore, incorporating parental control features in digital devices may offer mothers tools to mitigate emotional disconnection associated with adolescents' phubbing behaviors, fostering stronger, more supportive family connections. This study was significant for its contribution to understanding the

influence of phubbing on mother–adolescent attachments, and its potential to inform strategies that promote healthier emotional bonds and strengthen attachments between mothers and adolescents in an increasingly digital world.

Theoretical Implications

Bowlby (1979) stated that the universal human longing for love and care is an innate desire that continues throughout adulthood, beyond earlier developmental stages. Consequently, demonstration of these needs is a normative feature of adult behavior. Bowlby (1969) argued that attachment behaviors are evolutionarily programmed, with humans having an innate tendency to form these bonds for survival. Strong attachments to caregivers ensure children's safety, care, and security; however, need for emotional connections continue beyond childhood; parents also require their attachment needs to be met by their adolescents, particularly regarding emotional availability, responsiveness, and reciprocity.

Bowlby's theory (1979) suggested that the need to be cared for, valued, and loved, and is not limited to childhood; however, continues throughout an individual's life. Although his work initially centered on parent-child attachment, this study reinforced Bowlby's attachment theory, which recognized that mothers continued to have attachment needs throughout their lives, and extends the theory by highlighting how mothers' attachment needs may be unmet in the context of adolescent phubbing. In this context, when adolescents phub their mothers, the behavior may go beyond disappointment and frustration; adolescent's phubbing behaviors may disrupt mothers' emotional connection. Theses experiences may be perceived forms of attachment

disconnections, with mothers feeling disregarded, dismissed, unrecognized, or undervalued. Applying Bowlby's framework demonstrates how technological behaviors, such as adolescents' phubbing, may impact lifelong attachment needs for reciprocity and emotional availability.

In the context of adolescent phubbing, the emotional availability mothers yearn is often weakened, and they feel emotionally disconnected and undervalued, whether they identify their feelings in this way. In essence, mothers' desire for reciprocity and emotional connection from their adolescents originate from the same fundamental attachment needs that Bowlby described. According to Bowlby (1979), secure attachment, is characterized by consistent emotional availability, responsiveness, and proximity. These dynamics evolve as individuals navigate different life stages, and mothers continue to seek emotional connection from their children, including adolescence. Adolescents' phubbing can be viewed as an attachment-relevant behavior, which diminishes maternal security and emotional well-being. When viewed through this framework, frustration and disappointment mothers feel are not solely reactions to perceived rudeness or disobedience; rather result from emotional hurt and insufficient emotional reciprocity needed to feel valued and loved within mother–adolescent attachments.

Conclusion

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents, identifying five key group experiential themes: feelings of dismissal and emotional disconnection, as adolescent phubbing weakens recognition,

respect, and feelings of being valued and loved, use of emotion regulation, boundary-setting, and self-care as coping mechanisms to manage adolescent phubbing, frustration with communication barriers that weaken emotional bonding, rational acceptance and emotional adjustment to generational and cultural shifts caused by adolescent phubbing, and struggles and desires to maintain meaningful connections and fulfill attachment needs. The study may have addressed a significant gap in the literature by focusing on the unique effects of adolescents' phubbing regarding mothers and their emotional well-being. This research contributes new insights regarding how being phubbed influenced mothers' emotional experiences and mother-adolescent attachment dynamics, as no previous research has solely focused on the lived experiences of mothers who were phubbed by their adolescents. By revealing emotional stress and strain mothers experienced in navigating adolescents' phubbing in a technology dominant world, this study may have provided a deeper understanding of the behavioral and emotional responses of mothers. The study highlighted challenges mothers faced in maintaining emotional connections and fulfilling their attachment needs in the face of technological disruptions, providing a valuable contribution to the literature on mother–adolescent attachments in the digital age.

References

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Erlbaum.

American Psychological Association. (2017). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct.* http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.html

Amran, M. S., & Jamaluddin, K. A. (2022). Adolescent screen time associated with risk factor of fear of missing out during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *25*(6), 398–403. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2021.0308

Bae, E. J., & Nam, S. H. (2023). How mothers' problematic smartphone use affects adolescents' problematic smartphone use: Mediating roles of time mothers spend with adolescents and adolescents' self-esteem. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, *16*, 885–892. https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S401515

Bai, Q., Lei, L., Hsueh, F., Yu, X., Hu, H., Wang, X., & Wang, P. (2020). Parent-adolescent congruence in phubbing and adolescents' depressive symptoms: A moderated polynomial regression with response surface analyses. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *275*, 127–135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.03.156

Bajwa, R. S., Abdullah, H., Zaremohzzabieh, Z., Jaafar, W. M. W., & Samah, A. A. (2023). Smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior among university students: A moderated mediation model by fear of missing out, social comparison, and loneliness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1072551

Barbed-Castrejón, N., Navaridas-Nalda, F., Mason, O., & Ortuño-Sierra, J. (2024). Prevalence of phubbing behavior in school and university students in Spain. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *15*, Article 1396863. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1396863

Błachnio, A., Przepiórka, A., Gorbaniuk, O., McNeill, M., Bendayan, R., Durak, M., Senol-Durak, E., Ben-Ezra, M., Benvenuti, M., Angeluci, A., Abreu, A. M., Makita, M., Blanca, M. J., Brkljacic, T., Babič, N., Gorbaniuk, J., Holdoš, J., Ivanova, A., Malik, S., Milanovic, A. … Mazzoni, E. (2021). Country indicators moderating the relationship between phubbing and psychological distress: A study in 20 countries. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, Article 588174. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.588174

Bloemen, N., & De Coninck, D. (2020). Social media and fear of missing out in adolescents: The role of family characteristics. *Social Media + Society*, *6*(4), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120965517

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, Vol. I: Attachment*. Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss, Vol. II: Separation anxiety and anger*. Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1979). *The making and breaking of affectional bonds*. Routledge.

Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss, Vol. III: Loss sadness and depression*. Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base.* Basic Books.

Bozzola, E., Spina, G., Agostiniani, R., Barni, S., Russo, R., Scarpato, E., Di Mauro, A., Di Stefano, A. V., Caruso, C., Corsello, G., & Staiano, A. (2022). The use of social media in children and adolescents: Scoping review on the potential risks. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(16). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19169960

Braune-Krickau, K., Schneebeli, L., Pehlke-Milde, J., Gemperle, M., Koch, R., & Von Wyl, A. (2021). Smartphones in the nursery: Parental smartphone use and parental sensitivity and responsiveness within parent–child interaction in early childhood (0–5 years): A scoping review. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *42*(2), 161–175. https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21908

Butler C. R., O'Hare, A. M., Kestenbaum B. R., Sayre G. G., & Wong S. P. Y. (2021). An introduction to qualitative inquiry. *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*, *32*(6), 1275–1278. https://doi.org/10.1681/ASN.2021040473

Butler-Kisber, L. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Chen, S., Qiu, D., Li, X., & Zhao, Q. (2023). Discrepancies in adolescent–parent perceptions of parental phubbing and their relevance to adolescent smartphone dependence: The mediating role of parent-child relationship. *Behavioral Sciences*, *13*(11), 888. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13110888

Chotpitayasunondh, V., & Douglas, K. M. (2016). How "phubbing" becomes the norm: The antecedents and consequences of snubbing via smartphone. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 9–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.018

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*

traditions. SAGE Publications, Inc.

David, M. E., & Roberts, J. A. (2017). Phubbed and alone: Phone snubbing, social exclusion, and attachment to social media. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, *2*(2), 155–163. https://doi.org/10.1086/690940

David, M. E., & Roberts, J. A. (2021). Investigating the impact of partner phubbing on romantic jealousy and relationship satisfaction: The moderating role of attachment anxiety. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *38*(12), 3590-3609. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407521996454

Dhakal, K. (2022). NVivo. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, *110*(2), 270-272. https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2022.1271

De Figueiredo, C. S., Sandre, P. C., Portugal, L. C. L., Mázala-de-Oliveira, T., da Silva Chagas, L., Raony, Í., Ferreira, E. S., Giestal-de-Araujo, E., Dos Santos, A. A., & Bomfim, P. O. (2021). COVID-19 pandemic impact on children and adolescents' mental health: Biological, environmental, and social factors. *Progress in Neuropsychopharmacology & Biological Psychiatry, 106*, 110171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pnpbp.2020.110171

Dwyer, R. J., Kushlev, K., & Dunn, E. W. (2017). Smartphone use undermines enjoyment of face-to-face social interactions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *78*, 233–239. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.10.007

Gayatri, M., & Puspitasari, M. D. (2022). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on family well-being: A literature review. *The Family Journal, 31*(4), 606–613. https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807221131006

Gao, B., Shen, Q., Luo, G., & Xu, Y. (2023). Why mobile social media-related fear of missing out promotes depressive symptoms? The roles of phubbing and social exclusion. *BioMed Central Psychology, 11*(1), 189. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01231-1

Garrido, E. C., Issa, T., Gutiérrez Esteban, P., & Cubo Delgado, S. (2021). A descriptive literature review of phubbing behaviors. *Heliyon*, *7*(5), e07037. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07037

Garrido, E. C., Delgado, S. C., & Esteban, P. G. (2024). Phubbing and its impact on the individual's psychological well-being. *Acta Psychologica*, *248*, 104388. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104388

Geng, J., Lei, L., Ouyang, M., Nie, J., & Wang, P. (2021). The influence of perceived parental phubbing on adolescents' problematic smartphone use: A two-wave multiple mediation model. *Addictive Behaviors*, *121*, 106995. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.106995

Gergen, K. J. (2002). The challenge of absent presence. In J. E. Katz & M. Aakhus (Eds.), *Perpetual contact: Mobile communication, private talk, public performance* (pp. 227–241). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511489471.018

Geurts, S. M., Koning, I. M., Vossen, H. G. M., & van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M. (2022). Rules, role models, or overall climate at home? Relative associations of different family aspects with adolescents' problematic social media use. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, *116*, 152318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsych.2022.152318

Gong, J., Zhou, Y., Wang, Y., Liang, Z., Hao, J., Su, L., Wang, T., Du, X., Zhou, Y., & Wang, Y. (2022). How parental smartphone addiction affects adolescent smartphone addiction: The effect of the parent-child relationship and parental bonding. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *307*, 271–277. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.04.014

Han, J. H., Park, S., & Kim, Y. (2022). Phubbing as a millennials' new addiction and relating factors among nursing students. *Psychiatry Investigation*, *19*(2), 135–145. https://doi.org/10.30773/pi.2021.0163

Hikmah, B. P., Rahaju, S., & Yunanto, T. A. R. (2023). Phubbing in millennial generation: Influence of fear of missing out and self-control. *Journal of Educational, Health and Community Psychology*, *1*(1), 220–235. https://doi.org/10.12928/jehcp.v1i1.25001

Hong, W., Liu, R., Ding, Y., Oei, T. P., Zhen, R., & Jiang, S. (2019). Parents' phubbing and problematic mobile phone use: The roles of the parent–child relationship and children's self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Networking*, *22*(12), 779–786. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2019.0179

Jager, J., Putnick, D. L., & Bornstein, M. H. (2017). More than just convenient: The scientific merits of homogeneous convenience samples. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, *82*(2), 13–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/mono.12296

Kerr, S., Penner, F., Ilagan, G., Choi-Kain, L., & Sharp, C. (2022). Maternal interpersonal problems and attachment security in adolescent offspring.

Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotional Dysregulation, 9(1), 18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40479-022-00188-8

Kildare, C. A., & Middlemiss, W. (2017). Impact of parents' mobile device use on parent-child interaction: A literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *75*, 579–593. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.06.003

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2017). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 120–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kushlev, K., & Dunn, E. W. (2019). Smartphones distract parents from cultivating feelings of connection when spending time with their children. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *36*(6), 1619-1639. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407518769387

Langlais, M., & Welch, E. (2025). Supervisor phubbing in part-time jobs: Examining its relationship with supervisor–employee rapport. *Social Sciences*, *14*(5), 276. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14050276

Lebrow, J. L. (2020). Family in the age of COVID-19. *Family Process*, *50*(2), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12543

Lee, A., & Hood, B. (2020). The origins and development of attachment object behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *39*, 72–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.07.023

Li, J., Zhan, D., Zhou, Y., & Gao, X. (2021). Loneliness and problematic mobile phone use among adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic: The roles of escape

motivation and self-control. *Addictive Behaviors*, *118*, 106857. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.106857

Li, M., Gong, H., Zhang, H., Chen, Y., & Zhang, C. (2023). Maternal adult attachment and mother-adolescent attachment: The chain mediating role of marital satisfaction and harsh parenting. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 14*, Article 1170137. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1170137

Li, X., Fu, Y., Weng, W., Liu, M., & Li, Y. (2024). Maternal phubbing and problematic media use in preschoolers: The independent and interactive moderating role of children's negative affectivity and effortful control. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, *17*, 3083–3100. https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s471208

Liang, Z., Delvecchio, E., Cheng, Y., & Mazzeschi, C. (2021). Parent and child's negative emotions during COVID-19: The moderating role of parental attachment style. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 567483. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.567483

Liu, R. D., Wang, J., Gu, D., Ding, Y., Oei, T. P., Hong, W., & Li, Y. M. (2019). The effect of parental phubbing on teenager's mobile phone dependency behaviors: The mediation role of subjective norm and dependency intention. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management, 12*, 1059–1069. https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s224133

Liu, J., Xie, T., & Mao, Y. (2024). Parental phubbing behavior and adolescents' online gaming time: The mediating role of electronic health literacy. *Behavioral Sciences*, *14*(10), 925. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14100925

Liu, S., Wu, P., Han, X., Wang, M., Kan, Y., Qin, K., & Lan, J. (2024). Mom, dad, put down your phone and talk to me: how parental phubbing influences problematic internet use among adolescents. *BioMed Central Psychology*, *12*(1), 125. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01620-0

Lowe, A., Norris, A. C., Farris, A. J., & Babbage, D. R. (2018). Quantifying Thematic Saturation in Qualitative Data Analysis. *Field Methods*, *30*(3), 191-207. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X17749386

Lumivero. (n.d.). *NVivo*. https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/

Lv, H., Ye, W., Chen, S., Zhang, H., & Wang, R. (2022). The effect of mother phubbing on young children's emotional and behavioral problems: A moderated mediation model of mother–child attachment and parenting stress. *International Journal of Environmental. Research, and Public Health, 19*, 16911. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416911

Marino, C., Canale, N., Melodia, F., Spada, M. M., & Vieno, A. (2021). The overlap between problematic smartphone use and problematic social media use: A systematic review. *Current Addiction Reports, 8*(4), 469-480. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-021-00398-0

Mason, M. (2010). Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *11*(3). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-11.3.1428

McDaniel, B. T., & Coyne, S. M. (2016). "Technoference": The interference of technology in couple relationships and implications for women's personal and

relational well-being. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 5*(1), 85–98. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000065

McDaniel, B. T., & Radesky, J. S. (2017). Technoference: Parent distraction with technology and associations with child behavior problems. *Child Development*, *89*(1), 100–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12822

McDaniel, B. T., & Drouin, M. (2019). Daily technology interruptions and emotional and relational well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *99*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.04.027

McDaniel, B. T., Pater, J., Cornet, V., Mughal, S., Reining, L., Schaller, A., Radesky, J., & Drouin, M. (2023). Parents' desire to change phone use: Associations with objective smartphone use and feelings about problematic use and distraction. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *148*, 107907. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107907

Mi, Z., Cao, W., Diao, W., Wu, M., & Fang, X. (2023). The relationship between parental phubbing and mobile phone addiction in junior high school students: A moderated mediation model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*. 1117221. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1117221

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Muppalla, S. K., Vuppalapati, S., Pulliahgaru, A. R., & Sreenivasulu, H. (2023). Effects of Excessive screen time on Child Development: An Updated review and Strategies for Management. *Cureus*, *15*(6), e40608. https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.40608

Nielsen, P., Favez, N., & Rigter, H. (2020). Parental and family factors associated with problematic gaming and problematic internet use in adolescents: A systematic literature review. *Current Addiction Reports*, *7*(3), 365–386. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-020-00320-0

Niu, G., Yao, L., Wu, L., Tian, Y., Xu, L., & Sun, X. (2020). Parental phubbing and adolescent problematic mobile phone use: The role of parent-child relationship and self-control. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *116*, 105247. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105247

Pancani, L., Gerosa, T., Gui, M., & Riva, P. (2021). "Mom, dad, look at me": The development of the Parental Phubbing Scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *38*(2), 435-458. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520964866

Parent, N., Dadgar, K., Xiao, B., Hesse, C., & Shapka, J. D. (2021). Social disconnection during COVID-19: The role of attachment, fear of missing out, and smartphone use. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 31*(3), 748–763. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12658

Pathak, S. (2013). McCann Melbourne made up a word to sell a print dictionary: New campaign for Macquarie birthed 'phubbing ' http://adage.com/article/news/mccann-melbourne-made-a-word-sell-a-dictionary/244595/

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Pivetta, E., Marino, C., Bottesi, G., Pastore, M., Vieno, A., & Canale, N. (2024). The influence of maternal and paternal phubbing on adolescents' problematic gaming:

A two-wave mediation model. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *152*, Article 108058. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.108058

Qiao, L., & Liu, Q. (2020). The effect of technoference in parent-child relationships on adolescent smartphone addiction: The role of cognitive factors. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *118*, Article 105340. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105340

Ravitch S. M. & Carl N. M. (2019). *Qualitative research; Bridging the conceptual theoretical and methodological.* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Roberts, J. A., & David, M. E. (2016). My life has become a major distraction from my cell phone: Partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction among romantic partners. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *54*, 134–141. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.07.058

Roberts, J. A., & David, M. E. (2017). Put down your phone and listen to me: How boss phubbing undermines the psychological conditions necessary for employee engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *75*, 206–217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.05.021

Rosen, L. D., Carrier, L. M., & Cheever, N. A. (2013). Facebook and texting made me do it: Media-induced task-switching and academic performance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29(*3), 945-948. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.001

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity, 52*(4), 1893-1907.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Sbarra, D. A., Briskin, J. L., & Slatcher, R. B. (2019). Smartphones and close relationships: The case for an evolutionary mismatch. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *14*(4), 596-618. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619826535

Schmeer, K. K., Singletary, B., Purtell, K. M., & Justice, L. M. (2023). Family disruption and parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Family Issues, 44*(1), 112–138. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211042852

Shen, X., & Xie, X. (2024). How parental phubbing decreases adolescent core self-evaluation through basic psychological need satisfaction: Evidence from longitudinal mediation analysis and longitudinal network analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *41*(10), 3031-3060. https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075241262536

Shutzman, B., & Gershy, N. (2022). Children's excessive digital media use, mental health problems and the protective role of parenting during COVID-19. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *139*, 107559. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107559

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research. SAGE Publications.

Smith, J. A., & Fieldsend, M. (2021). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In P. M. Camic (Ed.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (2nd ed., pp. 147–166). American Psychological

Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000252-008

Smith, J. A., & Nizza, I. E. (2022). What is interpretative phenomenological analysis? In J. A. Smith & I. E. Nizza, *Essentials of interpretative phenomenological analysis* (pp. 3–10). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000259-001

Steinsbekk, S., Wichstrøm, L., Stenseng, F., Nesi, J., Hygen, B. W., & Skalická, V. (2020). The impact of social media use on appearance self-esteem from childhood to adolescence – A 3-wave community study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *114*, 106528. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106528

Stevic, A., & Matthes, J. (2023). Co-present smartphone use, friendship satisfaction, and social isolation: The role of coping strategies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *149*, 107960. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107960

Stockdale, L. A., Coyne, S. M., & Padilla-Walker, L. M. (2018). Parent and Child Technoference and socioemotional behavioral outcomes: A nationally representative study of 10- to 20-year-Old adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *88*, 219–226. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.06.034

Sun, J., & Miller, C. H. (2023). Insecure attachment styles and phubbing: The mediating role of problematic smartphone use. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *2023*, 4331787. https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/4331787

Sun, J., & Samp, J. A. (2021). 'Phubbing is happening to you': examining predictors and effects of phubbing behavior in friendships. *Behavior and Information Technology*, *41*(12), 2691–2704. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929x.2021.1943711

SurveyMonkey. (n.d.). SurveyMonkey Features. https://www.surveymonkey.com/product/features/

Tandon, A., Dhir, A., Talwar, S., Kaur, P., & Mäntymäki, M. (2021). Social media induced fear of missing out (FOMO) and phubbing: Behavioral, relational and psychological outcomes. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *174*, 121149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121149

Taquette, S. R., & Borges da Matta Souza, L. M. (2022). Ethical Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: A critical literature review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *21*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221078731

Tariq, A., Muñoz Sáez, D., & Khan, S. R. (2022). Social media use and family connectedness: A systematic review of quantitative literature. *New Media & Society*, *24*(3), 815-832. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211016885

Tong, W., Jia, J., Wang, P., & He, W. (2023). The associations between parental phubbing, Adolescent Phubbing, and adolescents' adjustments: A cross-lagged panel network analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *53(*7), 1529–1541. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01909-0

Tufan, C., Köksal, K., Griffiths, M. D., Erturgut, R., & Mert, İ. S. (2024). Effects of fear of missing out, smartphone addiction, phubbing, and being phubbed on friendship satisfaction. *Behavior and Information Technology*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929x.2024.2434893

Vanden Abeele, M. M., Hendrickson, A. T., Pollmann, M. M., & Ling, R. (2019). Phubbing behavior in conversations and its relation to perceived conversation

intimacy and distraction: An exploratory observation study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *100*, 35–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.06.004

Vossen, H.G.M., van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M., & Visser, I. (2024). Parenting and problematic social media use: A systematic review. *Current Addiction Reports 11*, 511–527. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-024-00559-x

Wang, M., Ning, H., Quan, X., Yunfan, Y., Meng, L., & Jiahao, L. (2022). Childhood emotional neglect and problematic social media use among Chinese adolescents: A moderated mediation model. *Addictive Behaviors*, *131*, 107309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2022.107309

Wang, P., Ouyang, M., Yin, Y., & Li, B. (2023). Mother phubbing and adolescents' problematic SNS use: The mediating role of perceived burdensomeness and the moderating role of need to belong. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*, 1098707. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1098707

Wang, Y., Li, T., Peng, C., & Wu, H. (2024). Parental attachment and fear of missing out among Chinese adolescents: A moderated mediation model. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *33*(7), 2324–2336. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02778-8

World Health Organization. (n.d.) *Adolescent Health*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/adolescent-health#tab=tab_1

Xie, X., Chen, W., Zhu, X., & He, D. (2019). Parents' phubbing increases adolescents' mobile phone addiction: Roles of parent-child attachment, deviant peers, and gender. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *105*, 104426. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104426

Xu, T., Wang, T., & Duan, J. (2022). Leader phubbing and employee job performance: the effect of need for social approval. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, *2022*, 2303–2314. https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s370409

Yan, H. X., Sayer, L. C., Negraia, D. V., Rinderknecht, R. G., Doan, L., Drotning, K. J., Fish, J. N., & Buck, C. (2022). Mothering and stress during COVID-19: Exploring the moderating effects of employment. *Socius*, *8*, 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221103056

Yasin, R. M., Bashir, S., Abeele, M. V., & Bartels, J. (2023). Supervisor phubbing phenomenon in organizations: Determinants and impacts. *International Journal of Business Communication*, *60*(1), 150-172. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488420907120

Yue, H., Gao, S., Feng, F., Wu, F., Bao, H., & Zhang, X. (2024). Linking adolescents' phubbing to depression: the serial mediating effects of peer relationship quality and psychological need frustration. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *12*, 1420151. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1420151

Zelčāne, E., & Pipere, A. (2023). Finding a path in a methodological jungle: A qualitative research of resilience. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, *18*(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2023.2164948

Zhan, S., Shrestha, S., & Zhong, N. (2022). Romantic relationship satisfaction and phubbing: The role of loneliness and empathy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, Article 967339. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.967339

Zhang, H., Hu, Q., & Mao, Y. (2024). Parental burnout and adolescents' phubbing:

Understanding the role of parental phubbing and adolescents' psychological distress. *School Psychology International*, *45*(2), 172–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/01430343231201863

Zhang, J., Dong, C., Jiang, Y., Zhang, Q., Li, H., & Li, Y. (2023). Parental phubbing and child social-emotional adjustment: A meta-analysis of studies conducted in China. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, *2023*, 4267-4285. https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S417718

Zhang, J., Liu, M., Zhang, Q., & Li, Y. (2024). Mother phubbing and child problematic media use: The role of mother-child relationship and paternal coparenting. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management, 17*, 3327–3339. https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S431065

Zhang, J., Madigan, S., & Browne, D. (2022). Caregivers' psychological distress, technology use, and parenting: The importance of a multidimensional perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *134*, Article 107324. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107324

Zhang, P., & Wang, X. (2025). The impact of parental phubbing on social withdrawal in preschool children: The serial mediating roles of parent-child conflict and negative emotions. *BioMed Central Psychology, 13*, 36. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02363-2

Zhao, J., Ye, B., Luo, L., & Yu, L. (2022). The effect of parent phubbing on Chinese adolescents' smartphone addiction during COVID-19 pandemic: Testing a moderated mediation model. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*,

15, 569–579. https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s349105

Appendix A: Social Media Post

Interview study seeks moms: Are you being ignored by your teen? Let's talk!

Caption: There is a new study about the experiences of mothers who feel phone-snubbed (ignored in favor of smartphones or digital device) by their teenagers that could provide valuable insights into the emotional and social dynamics between mothers and teens in the digital age. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences of daily life with your teen, particularly if you feel they tend to favor their smartphone over spending time with you.

About this Study:

- One 45–60-minute Zoom interview (audio recorded)

- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Mothers aged 18 or older
- Mothers who have experienced being phone-snubbed (ignored in favor of smartphones or digital device) by their teenagers (ages 14-18).

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Mye Alexis, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during June. If you meet the requirements stated above and are interested, please use the following link to complete the survey (Google Form).

Appendix B: Qualifying Participant Questionnaire

The first page is the consent form; participants will not be able to move forward without the study without providing consent. Then, the inclusion questions will be presented; if participants do not meet the inclusion criteria, they will be automatically directed to the end of the survey with a message saying that they do not qualify for the study, and thanking them for their time.

Inclusion criteria

Question 1: Are you a mother of a teenager aged 14 to 18?

Yes

No

Question 2: Are you aged 18 years or older?

Yes

No

Question 3: Have you experienced being phone-snubbed (ignored in favor of a smartphone or digital device) by your teenager aged 14–18?

Yes

No

If anyone says no, they do not meet the inclusion criteria

Demographic questions

Question 4: On average, how many minutes per day does your teenager spend on a smartphone or other digital devices (e.g., tablet)? [Open-ended]

Question 5: What is your age? [open-ended]

Question 6: What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

Prefer not to answer

Question 7: What is your race/ethnicity? [open-ended]

Question 8: How many children do you have? [open-ended]

Please provide your email address if you are selected to participate in the study.

Appendix C: Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of mothers who have been phone-snubbed (ignored in favor of smartphones or digital device) by their teenagers. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study seeks 8-12 volunteers who are

- Mothers aged 18 or older
- Mothers who have experienced being phone-snubbed (ignored in favor of smartphones or digital device) by their teenagers (ages 14-18).

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Mye Alexis who is a Doctoral Candidate at Walden University.

Study Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of mothers who have been phone-snubbed (ignored in favor of smartphones or digital device) by their teenagers (ages 14-18) children.

Procedures:

The study will involve the following:

- Completing a brief demographic online survey, taking approximately 5 minutes to complete
- A 45–60-minute interview on Zoom, which will be audio-recorded

- You will also be sent a copy of your interview transcript within one week of your interview so that you can correct or edit any information for clarity.
- It will take approximately 20 minutes to review your transcript.
- You will have one week to provide feedback on your transcript.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So, everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing. If you experience any distress as a result of participating in this study, you can contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) for free mental health support at 1-800-950-6264 or text "helpline" to 62640.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. This study aims to benefit society by informing the development of strategies that strengthen the emotional bonds between moms and their teenagers. By exploring how teenagers' phone-snubbing affects mothers' emotional well-being and their connection with their teenagers, the research hopes to encourage more supportive, meaningful relationships between mothers and their teenagers in today's digital age. Results of this study will be automatically published

online in Scholarworks (a publication of Walden University doctoral research) which can be viewed free of charge.

Payment:

There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Privacy:

The researcher is required to protect the privacy of every participant. Your identity will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. The researcher will not use any personal information for any purposes outside of this research study. Also, the researcher will not use your name or any identifying information in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would have no identifiers; therefore, there would not be a new round of informed consent. Data will be kept secure by password protection and use of code in place of names. Data will be kept for at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You can contact the researcher by email at mye.alexis@waldenu.edu if you have any questions. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, please call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-05-25-1179552. It expires on June 4, 2026.

You might wish to save this consent for your records. You may as the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact information provided above.

Obtaining Your Consent:

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by selecting “I agree” below. If you do not wish to participate, please exit this online survey.

“I agree”

Appendix D: Interview Guide

About this study

Hello, and thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this research study. Before we begin, I'd like to take a moment to provide you with some important information about the study and your role in it. The purpose of this interview is to understand the lived experiences of mothers whose adolescents have engaged in phone-snubbing, where your child may prioritize their smartphone or digital device over spending time with you. This is an opportunity for you to share your unique perspective and the emotions associated with these experiences. I want to assure you that there are no right or wrong answers—what matters most is your individual experience. Your responses are incredibly valuable, and they will help me gain deeper insight into how this behavior affects mothers like yourself.

This interview will be recorded to help me accurately capture and analyze the information you provide. As we go through the interview, I will also be taking notes to ensure I don't miss anything important. The goal is to create a judgment-free space where you can speak freely and share how you've been impacted by your teenager's behavior, and how it may affect your emotional well-being and your connection with your teenager. I want you to know that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, and that will not affect your participation in any other way. After completing the research and analysis, I will share the main themes that emerge from your responses with you to ensure everything is accurate. I will be following a semi-structured interview guide, which means I will ask you specific questions, but you are encouraged to elaborate on

any points that feel important to you. Before we begin, is there anything you'd like to ask or clarify?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about different times you felt phone-snubbed by your teenager? What was that experience like for you?
2. How do you typically react when you feel your teenager is not paying attention to you due to their smartphone or other digital media?
3. What emotions do you experience when you feel ignored or disconnected from your child during these moments?
4. How would you describe your emotional connection to your teenager before and after these interactions?
5. How do you think your teenager's phubbing affects your emotional well-being?
6. How do you interpret or make sense of your teenager's behavior when they seem preoccupied with their phone although you're trying to interact?
7. What do you think your teenager's behavior (phubbing) says about your relationship or connection?
    a) How does it impact the way you see your relationship?
8. Do you feel that these moments of phubbing challenge or reinforce your sense of closeness and trust with your teenager?
9. Do you think these experiences influence your perception of your teenager's connection to you? In what ways?

10. What, if anything, do you do to cope with the feelings or frustration that arise when your teenager is phubbing you?
11. Have you tried to address or communicate with your teenager about their smartphone use? How did that go?"
12. What strategies do you use to cope when your teenager phubs you?
13. How do you think your teenager's use of technology impacts their ability to connect emotionally with others, including yourself?
14. How do you feel the presence of smartphones has affected the emotional connection and interaction between you and your teenager, particularly during the pandemic? a) Has the use of the smartphone become more prominent in your relationship over the past few years?
15. Do you notice any changes in your teenager's behavior or emotional responses when you address issues related to technology use and your relationship?
16. How has the experience of being phubbed influenced your sense of attachment or connection to your teenager? Does it change how you view the bond you share?
17. Do you think your attachment or connection to your teenager has been strengthened, weakened, or altered in any way because of the experiences you've had with digital media?

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences today. I want to acknowledge the emotional depth of your responses and thank you for your openness in discussing your experiences as a mother. Your insights are incredibly valuable to this study, and

they will help to shed light on how phubbing affects emotional bonding and attachment between mothers and their adolescents.

If at any point you felt uncomfortable or would like to discuss any aspects of the interview further, please don't hesitate to reach out. I understand that these topics can bring up strong feelings, and your well-being is important. Once the analysis is complete, I will share the main themes and findings with you to ensure that your experiences have been accurately represented. Your feedback is important, and you are welcome to clarify or elaborate on any part of the study before it is finalized. If you have any further questions or concerns, or if there's anything you'd like to discuss about the study or the interview process, I'm happy to address those now or at any time in the future.

Appendix E: Codes

Table 1

Codes, Descriptions, and Inclusion Criteria

Code	Description	Inclusion Criteria	Experiential Statements
Frustration	Emotional response to unmet expectations and needs.	Expressions of irritation, annoyance, anger	”I think that’s frustrating to me the most because it goes back to what I said about giving me my 5 min.” (P1) “I feel frustrated” (P8) “it can be frustrating” (P4)
Connection	Longing for emotional closeness and face-to-face interactions	Expressions of longing for attention or closeness. Seeking engagement through direct interaction.	“…not really engaging” (P3) “they don’t want to spend time with me” (P5) “Give me…just a few minutes” (P7)
Undervaluation	Mother feels unrecognized or disregarded because of adolescent’s phone prioritization	Language conveying being ignored, disregarded, disrespected	“You’re more interested in whatever it is that you’re looking at” (P1) “engage in this conversation” (P6) “nice to be able to give that respect back” (P7)
Perceived Disrespect	Feeling dismissed, undervalued, or ignored due adolescent’s phone use.	Statements indicating disrespect or being treated as unrecognized during attempts to engage.	“Why is it so easy for them to not respect me?” (P3). “I mean, it’s… it’s about respect” (P4) “…is seen as a sign of disrespect” (P7)
Generational Differences	Perceived gap between parent and adolescent behaviors and values	Comparison between mother’s childhood and adolescent’s present communication or engagement styles.	“How I grew up and how this generation is growing up is just different” (P1) “They were raised in this generation” (P2) “I’m like probably the last generation that remembers life before cell phones” (P6)

Appendix F: Personal Experiential Themes

Table F1

Personal Experiential Themes and Experiential Statements of Participant 3

Personal Experiential Theme		Experiential Statements
Emotional disconnection and hurt due to adolescent's favoring smartphone over face-to-face interactions	emotional disconnection, feeling ignored, feeling undervalued, perceived disrespect, emotional unavailability, rejection	"He's on his phone the entire time…can you just put down your phone…while we're in the car…Let's just have a conversation…we don't really get to talk." "Why is it so easy for them to not respect me?" "Just looking down at your phone not engaging." "I feel like the bond and the connection could be deeper without him having that other avenue—or putting someone [else] as a priority."
Unmet attachment needs and yearning for engagement, responsiveness, and emotional availability	desire for closeness, longing for connection, desire for face-to-face interaction, desire for open communication, desire for mutual emotional availability, desire for undivided attention, mother–adolescent attachment	"I feel like the bond and the connection could be deeper." "I would like I would like our connection to be more than what it is." "The attachment or the connection could be deeper" Yeah, I think…it could be better…there could be a deeper bond" "Just wanting…to feel like I'm more involved in what he's thinking and feeling. Having that, you know the one-on-one engagement with my teen just connecting with him."

Frustration and repeated efforts due to adolescent's lack of engagement and communication	Persistent efforts to connect met with indifference or resistance, leading to anger, irritation, neglect	"It's a lot of one-word answers...not really engaging." "I'm having to tell you two and three times. So that's…why I get angry and frustrated." "More so him not wanting to put the phone down" "I just noticed a difference when you know he was younger...the wanting to…have more conversation as opposed to now him being a teen, it's like his interest is just, not the same." I think that it's on his end. [it] comes across as him frustrated or even angry that…I keep bringing it [phubbing] up Like to him, it's not a big deal, or it's not an issue.

Appendix G: Group Experiential Themes

Table G1

Group Experiential Themes and Personal Experiential Themes Answering the Research Question

Group Experiential Themes	Personal Experiential Themes	Experiential Statements
1. Feeling dismissed and emotionally disconnected as adolescent phubbing weakens recognition, respect, and feelings of being valued and loved	Feeling undervalued and ignored, Emotional disconnection and neglect, Maternal disappointment and unmet expectations, Perceived disrespect as violation	"Like, if they're talking… you can't ignore people. Like, that's not what you do" (P4) "This is what love does. This is what respect looks like" (P5) "Why are you not responding? You know that's feeling disrespectful" (P7)
2. Regulating emotions, setting and enforcing boundaries, and self-care, as coping mechanisms to manage adolescent phubbing	Boundary setting and enforcement, Intentional smartphone disconnection, rationalizing adolescent behavior by generational differences, Seeking alternative activities during adolescent's smartphone use	"I'm not irritated as much" (P4) "I remind myself that they are kids… he's a child" (P3) And being mindful that I was once a teenager… I was preoccupied with something else" (P2) "It's dinner time, no phones at the dinner table (P7) "Get my nails done, go for massages" (P8)

3. Frustration with communication barriers that weaken emotional bonding	Frustration with repeated requests and lack of adolescent engagement, Adolescent's one-word answers and surface-level communication, Maternal challenges balancing authority	"I'm asking you to give me this time, and you're more interested in whatever it is that you're looking at" (P1)"I'm having to tell you two and three times" (P3) "…his answers are like one word" (P4) "Just missing some of those connections…like some frustration that you know you can't put this [smartphone] down for a few minutes…to engage in this conversation? (P6)

4. Rationally accepting and emotionally adjusting to the generational and cultural shifts caused by adolescent phubbing	Maternal resignation to phubbing as normative, Rationalized acceptance, Reflection on generational and cultural shifts, Nostalgia for earlier closeness with adolescent	"Once everyone had their individual phones, you could see the slow shift… the gap widening… in terms of engagement together" (P5) "It's almost like if you can't beat them, join them, you know, a little bit. So you know, I've kind of just adapted to" (P6) I think it's a this-generation thing… how I grew up and how this generation is growing up is just different" (P1)
5. Struggles and desires to maintain a meaningful connection and fulfill attachment needs	Longing for face-to-face interaction, Desire for adolescent to share emotions and thoughts, Hope for emotional availability and responsiveness	"I'm asking you to give me this time, and you're more interested in whatever it is that you're looking at… everybody deserves at least five minutes of your time" (P1) "I feel like the bond and the connection could be deeper without him having that other avenue—or putting someone [else] as a priority" (P3) "But my son is like head in phone just in his own world. It's like we're interrupting him like we're bothering him" (P8).