

TECHNOLOGY AS THE THIRD SPOUSE - THE IMPACT OF SMARTPHONES ON
NEWLYWED COUPLES

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Donna, a spirited little girl who was full of wonderment and never stopped asking questions. It is also for all individuals who are curious, think outside the box, and dream of one day making a difference. Donna learned not to let anyone discourage her from becoming what she was born to be. Regardless of her age, she pursued her dream. To all like her, have compassion for yourself as you lead with your heart. Do your best to feel empathy for those who try to crush your imagination, as they are fearful and most likely they never received the support or love that they needed.

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ABSTRACT

TECHNOLOGY AS THE THIRD SPOUSE - THE IMPACT OF SMARTPHONES ON NEWLYWED COUPLES

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Recent research has explored the impact of technology and smartphone use on relationships. This is the first study to address smartphone use in the newlywed stage of marriage. The newlywed time period is the foundational phase of a marital relationship. Technological changes have become part of our culture and smartphone technology has become central to individuals' lives. The accessibility and size of the smartphone, along with the features it provides, is different from all other devices, thus creating a more intimate and dependent relationship with it.

The aim of this study was to expand upon the existing research related to smartphone technology by addressing the gap in the literature on smartphone use during the newlywed time period. This qualitative study explored the experiences of smartphone use in newlywed couples when in each other's presence and how smartphones were part of a newlywed couple's interaction. Twenty newlywed couples, married between one and four years were interviewed separately, totaling a sample of 40 participants. Data were collected from June 2020 through July 2020 until saturation was met.

The five themes that were illuminated in this study were, Vehicle, Mindset, Phone Rules, Interface, and Circular Use. The themes were developed based on the appreciation of the common experience of all the participants within their newlywed marriage in

relation to their smartphone use (n=40). The results indicated that the smartphone is a neutral reflection of its user and is a vehicle that can be used to either magnify or minimize the value of the couple's interaction when together. The user's needs and mindset drive the use of the smartphone. Depending on the spouse's mindset, the smartphone was used to either enhance bonding or to create a momentary outlet within the relationship. The unexpected finding that a person's mindset effected their smartphone use informed the reason why individuals used their smartphone object in the moment when with their spouse.

These findings support that when the newlywed couple either employed rules or made quality time a priority by putting the brakes on their smartphone consumption, smartphone use did not have a negative effect on their feelings of attachment to each other. This study suggests the importance of understanding a spouse's mindset as a motivating factor for smartphone use during shared interactions in order for the couple to better acknowledge each other's needs and support their developing marital bond. This research has provided information that stresses the importance of helping couples exchange their seeking of connection to their devices in exchange for live and conscious connection to their partner.

Keywords: smartphone use, newlywed marriage, relationships, couples, technology, mindset

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This paper will explore what effect the use of the smartphone has on newlywed couples when in each other's presence and to understand how smartphones are part of a newlywed couple's interaction. The development of dating apps and social media provided a tool in helping single individuals connect, meet, and begin dating relationships. "5% of Americans who are currently married or in a long-term partnership met their partner somewhere online. Among those who have been together for ten years or less, 11% met online" (Smith & Duggan, 2013). On the other hand, there is evidence that technology can interfere with marital closeness. Today, couples are spending more time on technology and in front of the screen in general. "25% of cell phone owners in a marriage or partnership have felt their spouse or partner was distracted by their cell phone when together" Lenhart & Duggan (2014 p. 2). Attention once focused on engaging with each other competes for attention with technology. Linguistics has caught up to this phenomenon in the development of a new term. "The term phubbing has been derived from blending together the words 'phone' and 'snubbing'" (Roberts & David, 2016). According to Roberts & David (2016) "thus, to be phubbed is to be snubbed by someone using their cell phone when in your company, instead of communicating with you" (p.134).

The newlywed period of marriage will be the focus of this dissertation because, according to the literature, it is an important, foundational phase of marriage. "The

interpersonal problems that emerge in the early years of marriage are particularly important” (Tallman & Hsiao, 2004, p. 173). According to Kreider & Ellis (2011) the cohort of early marriages are at increased risk of separation and divorce. Kurdek (1998) learned that for both newlywed spouses that marital quality decreased equally over time within the first four years of marriage. Verhoff, Douvan, and Hatchett (1995) established that the newlywed stage is unique, as it coincides with spouses managing pressures from external stressors as they learn to respond to each other’s needs and gain validation as their own social unit while building marital stability. Robinson and Blanton (1993) found in their qualitative study that the strengths that contributed to enduring marriages were a couple’s commitment to work through their marital issues using positive communication and maintaining intimacy through a mutually supportive connection with each other. According to McCarthy, Ginsberg, & Cintron (2008) the important tasks of the newlywed phase are to foster an intimate and secure marital bond that provides for a reciprocal and functional marital style. Spouses who perceived receiving emotional support within their newlywed marriage reported positive relationship satisfaction (Lorenzo, Barry, & Khalifian, 2018). The maintenance of positive exchanges between spouses help to build safety and intimacy in a marriage, while the inability to manage disagreements impact relational success (Roberts & Greenberg, 2002). Lavner, Bradbury, and Karney (2012) concluded in their longitudinal study of newlyweds over the first 4 years of marriage that divorce rates were three to four times higher in spouses in the low-satisfaction groups than spouses in the moderate and high satisfaction groups across multiple domains of their relationship.

A particular challenge for couples during the newlywed phase of marriage include managing the amount of negative communication exchanges between them (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). Huston, et al. (2001) determined that couples who divorced while still in the newlywed period of their marriage exhibited a decrease in positive regard, along with waning affection and doubt in their commitment to their marital bond. The newlywed phase is a susceptible time period for marital dissolution, with 10% of first marriages ending after 5 years (Kreider & Ellis, 2009). It is important in the first few years of marriage for a couple to develop the skills to navigate the common challenges that can arise during this fundamental period of a spousal relationship.

The literature that supports that technology is having an impact on relationships is just beginning to be explored. “Both marital instability and conflict are positively associated with entertainment media use, individuals should consider the meaning of involvement in entertainment media personally as well as relationally” (Dew & Tulane, 2015). Lapierre and Lewis (2018) found that a partner’s smartphone dependency and having to share a romantic partner’s attention with a smartphone device was linked to less satisfaction and greater frustration within the relationship. The study by Roberts and David (2016) found that the use of a cell phone in the presence of a partner created conflict, as the partner experienced being “phubbed” which negatively impacted the partner’s relationship satisfaction and ultimately their personal well-being.

Robinson and Blanton (1993) found that “communication was important in helping couples maintain or enhance their connectedness.” (p.44).

Within the couple's dyad, focused attention through daily interactions with each other is the foundation for relational well-being and the ability to maintain connection. McDaniel and Coyne (2016) have coined the concept of intrusion by technology on relationships as technoference. McDaniel and Coyne (2016) found that "the majority (62%) of participants in their study reported that technology interfered in their couple leisure time... their conversations (35%) and at mealtime (33%) at least once a day" (p. 93). Lavner, Karney, Williamson, and Bradbury (2017) found in their study on newlyweds and marital problems over the first 4 years of marriage that "the interplay between global judgments about relationship satisfaction and ongoing specific relationship difficulties highlights the value of examining bidirectional effects to better understand marital functioning over time." (p. 869). Smartphone technology provides a bidirectional effect as couples can communicate with each other when apart under circumstances when they previously would not have been able to and it can interrupt them when they are together. Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, and Grant (2011) found that couples when apart who texted to express positive communication and affection experienced it as a connective act, though any negative communication was viewed as having a hurtful impact on their relationship. Technology in its passive function is an object which can interrupt with alerts, rings and tones from an email or text. As an active function, technology may give partners the opportunity to reinforce their connection by sharing information, entertainment, and integrating it into their lives, or may create a route of exit from their spouse by focusing their energy toward the outside world.

In a qualitative study by Morgan et al. (2016) the theme, “distraction from the moment,” emphasized that participants experienced their partners being distracted when using technology in their presence and viewed this negatively (p.690). The development of healthy patterns of interaction within the couple’s dyad is reciprocal, as both people are responsible for creating and renegotiating these patterns. It is important for both partners to mutually maintain this reciprocation by attuning to each other. According to Kucharski (2017), “attunement is the ability for individuals in any form of relationship to be connected to and harmonious with one another” (p. 122). “The regular enactment of behavioral exchanges that lead to experiences of relational intimacy will serve to maintain the climate of security, trust, and acceptance that characterize well-functioning relations” (Roberts & Greenberg, 2002, pp. 120-121). “Attunement is focused attention, it is important that an individual minimize and disengage from distractions to in order to attune properly” (Cobb, 2009, p. 124). Bernecker, Ghassemi, & Brandstätter (2018) found in their study on newlywed couples that, “the more individuals approached relationship goals, the more positive involvement and the less avoidant withdrawal they showed nonverbally when interacting with their partner” (p. 631). Clearly technology use is not going away. This dissertation will explore the compelling and ubiquitous variable of the smartphone and its potential impact on a couple’s relational bond in the formative years of their marriage when in each other’s company. More rudimentary forms of technology have been available for decades, but the smartphone is a device that is an internet communicator and entertainer all in one, all the time - available right in our pocket.

This technological object can connect people through texts, apps, games, email, voice calls, sharing music, and getting information no matter where you are or who you are with. This instant accessibility, along with the features it provides, and the ability to carry smartphones on our person is different from access to all other media like television, desktop computers, laptops, tablets, thus creating a more intimate and dependent relationship with it. The smartphone offers an opportunity to tune out and tech in. “Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other” (Turkle, 2011, p. 1). Smartphones are impacting the relational connection that “in essence, partners may be in physical proximity to each other, but are not fully present for each other” (Robert, 2017, p.72).

The newlywed couple not only needs to learn to connect within their own couple’s milieu but to manage external challenges and intrusions, like technology, that can influence how they perceive and relate to one another. It is therefore important to address the effect and management of the smartphone on the nuances of the newlywed marriage.

Whereas the literature has raised concerns regarding the impact of technology on relationships, its association has primarily focused on internet use and social media (e.g. McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Morgan et al., 2017; Dew & Tulane, 2015; Vaterlaus & Tulane, 2019; Leggett & Rossouw, 2014; Coyne et al., 2001). Studies that have defined their research on smartphones have included participants that were college students in relationships, (e.g. Lapierre, 2019; Lapierre & Lewis, 2018) and randomly assigned adults, (e.g. Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; Misra, Cheng, Genevie, & Yuan, 2016). Only

one study has examined newlywed couples and technology, and that research focused on internet use (Kerkhof, Finkenauer, & Muusses, 2011). There is nothing specific in the literature to date regarding the impact of smartphone use on the developing relationship in the newlywed phase of marriage. Therefore, this dissertation will investigate the impact of smartphone use among newlywed couples and its impact on establishing a secure bond and a stable pattern communication and attuning to shared experiences.

CHAPTER 2

Smartphone Prevalence and Use

According to Pew Research (2018), 96% of Americans own a cellphone, and of that percentage 81% are smartphones, and a third of these households have three or more smartphones. Cell phones have become a portal for an ever-growing list of activities. According to the Nielsen company (2018) “In fact, American adults spend over 11 hours per day listening to, watching, reading, or generally interacting to media.” A 2015 Gallup panel survey reflected that 52% of smartphone owners check their device frequently throughout an hour, with Americans, ages 18-29 (51%) and ages 30-49 (47%) having the highest rate of phone checking behavior, compared to users ages 50-64 (33%) and ages 65 plus (18%). The same Gallup report also revealed that 81% of Americans surveyed keep their smartphone with them during waking hours and 63% keep their devices with them at night while sleeping. The use of social media is prevalent; it is gripping and neurobiologically compelling for many. Panova & Carbonell (2018) did not find sufficient support to call the excessive use of smartphone behavior an addiction, “but could be better labeled as problematic or maladaptive” (p.256). However, Van Deursen, Bolle, Hegner, & Kommers (2015) found that the “smartphone offers several pleasurable experiences that potentially function as rewards and increase the chance that process orientated use develops into habitual use” (p.417). The Neilson Company (2016) reported that “overall smartphone penetration continues to rise rapidly, growing about eight percentage points year-over-year from 80% in third-quarter 2015 to 88% in third-quarter 2016.” The same Neilson report (2016) showed that by age, “Millennials (aged 18-24)

have the highest rate at 98% of smartphone ownership, followed by Millennials (aged 25-34) at 97% and Gen Xers (aged 35-44) at 96%, making smartphones nearly ubiquitous among these generational segments.” Today’s digital landscape is very much app focused. In fact, according to Score’s Mobile Hierarchy Report (Jan. 2017) apps make up 87% of total mobile minutes. Pew Research states that, “some 46% of smartphone owners said their smartphone is something “they couldn’t live without” (Perrin, 2017). The mechanisms for understanding the impact of smartphones on human beings is still being explored. “With a smartphone, nearly all notifications that the user encounters elicit a social value and thus activate the dopaminergic reward circuit, leading the user to anticipate and seek these rewarding notifications” (Veissiere & Stendel, 2018, p.4). Oulasvirta, et al. (2012) concluded that “smartphone notifications are cues that eventually become checking behaviors and lead to habit-formation which is an opportunity for making smartphones more personal and pervasive increasing usage overall” (p. 112). There are varying reports on time spent on mobile phone use. According to comScore’s (2017) report, the average American adult spends 2 hours, 51 minutes on their smartphone every day. eMarketer (2016) released a study that shows total time spent by mobile users as 4 hours, 5 minutes per day. In a small-scale study data obtained by Andrews, Ellis, Shaw, and Piwek (2015) obtained data that the participants used their phone more than they assumed, spending 5.05 hours per day on their smartphone. The seminal study by Rothberg, Arora, Hermann, Kleppel, Marie, & Visintainer (2010) addressed phantom vibration syndrome and learned that close to 70% of the staff that had been surveyed experienced phantom vibrations from their electronic devices which was correlated with frequency of use. Phantom vibrations are felt sensations that the brain

perceives from a device, like a beeper or smartphone, that are not actually present (Rothberg et al.). The phenomenon of PVS was again investigated by Sauer, Eimler, Maafi, Pietrek, and, Krämer (2015) and indicated that 83.5% of participants experienced phantom phone sensations and that the factors that contributed to the phenomenon were excessive cell phone use and age, especially young adults ($M = 26.22$ years) (p. 300). Hadar, Hadas, Lazarovits, Alyagon, Eliraz, and Zangen (2017) found that smartphone use increases negative social cognitions and that heavy users showed an increase in impulsivity and their ability to sustain attention was impaired. In quantifying the smartphone as a personal device, the literature is demonstrating an association with both benefits and consequences of its function, as the smartphone is always present even when not in use.

CHAPTER 3

Newlywed Tasks

The literature indicates that the newlywed period is a distinct phase of adjustment for a newly married couple within the one to four-year lifecycle. “The newlywed period is a seminal period of time for relational adjustment, requiring the development of an intimate foundation for the couple’s future” (Cobb, 2009, p. 2). According to the United States Census Bureau (2020) the median age at first marriage for women was 28.1 years and the median age at first marriage for men was 30.5 years. These data estimates include both heterosexual and same sex marriages (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Understanding the relationship maintenance process in this early period of a couple’s legal and emotional commitment can provide strategies that the couple can use to build and maintain a strong connection. “Individuals who put ‘we before me’ ought to benefit in the long term, assuming a balance of maintenance efforts across partners” (Ogolsky, Monk, Rice, Theisen, & Maniotes, 2017, p. 293). Studies further indicate that during this phase of marriage, the tasks of a healthy relational bond include maintaining attachment through positive communication patterns, emotional attunement, and forming their own dyadic system of supportive connection with each other. As the couple’s relationship is one of the main foci of this dissertation, the use of attachment theory as guiding framework will be addressed. Attachment theory is a model that addresses a socio-emotional developmental approach in that human beings have a proclivity towards creating strong affectional bonds to emotionally specific individuals. Attachment behaviors refers to any behavior that an individual uses to maintain proximity to their

caregiver as a source of security and survival. This framework applies not only to the caregiver/offspring relationship but to other affectional bonding relationships, including adult pair bonds. The marital bond is a reciprocal attachment relationship.

A feature of attachment theory is the concept of Internal Working Models (IWM) (Bowlby, 1988) IWM's facilitate the development and organization of mental representations of the self and of the individuals with whom they have an enduring attachment bond. In Bowlby's model, a responsive and attuned caregiver provides a secure base. This attuned attachment results in an emotional connectedness and a feeling of safety so that an individual can engage in exploratory behavior while maintaining a sense of accessibility and a mental representation to their primary caregiver.

Ainsworth and Bell (1970) added to Bowlby's work on attachment and provided further evidence of the importance of the infant-caregiver relationship on the development of patterns of attachment behavior. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) observed in the *Strange Situation* experiment three classifications of attachment styles: secure, anxious/resistant, and anxious/avoidant. These classifications were developed while watching a child's exploration during brief separations from their caregiver, their introduction to a stranger and their reactions when reunited with their parent. Hall and Adams (2011) reported essential themes found in their study for newlywed couples including managing "competing loyalties" among relationships with others outside their marriage and to establish boundaries to cope with "unanticipated adjustments" in their new marriage (p. 383). It is necessary for the couple to develop a working model for managing expectations of needs and issues that arise in order to build an alliance with one another. "Communication was important in helping couples maintain or enhance

their connectedness” (Robinson & Blanton, 1993 p. 42). Emotional responsiveness includes being available to your partner with both time and attention. In a study by Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) the positive affect model was found to significantly relate to marital happiness and stability in newlywed marriages. The positive affect model posits that when an individual exhibits traits that are affirmative to their partner, this can provide an interaction that is experienced as a satisfying interaction. This model of positive affect was also concluded in a study by Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, and Ruckstuhl (2000) in which, “the perceptions newlywed spouses have about their partner and their marriage predict the stability of the marriage with 87% accuracy at the 4-6-year point ...lending support to the theory that the ways that spouses selectively attend to positive or negative aspects of the marriage and their partner shape the future marital path” (p. 52). Positive communication patterns appear to provide a way for couples to maintain a healthy connection and enable them to manage issues and solve problems as a team.

Main and Weston’s (1981) research added to Ainsworth and Bell’s qualitative *Strange Situation* study of organized attachment classifications by adding a fourth disorganized version. This fourth category addressed the unclassified features that infants with insecure attachment exhibited but with a disorganized style of behavior that included conflict and low relatedness in response to their caregivers. Main and Weston’s research was the first study to consider the attachment relationship to the child’s mother and father. Mary Main continued her contribution to attachment theory with the development of the Adult Attachment Interview -AAI (Main, Goldwyn, & Hesse, 1998). The AAI is an empirically validated research tool that uses a questionnaire to evaluate the inner

representations of childhood attachments and attachment narratives of the adult being interviewed. The interview represents the relationship between language usage and the mental and emotional representations of the individual's attachment behavior toward their childhood caregiver.

Driver and Gottman's (2004) study provided "preliminary support for the hypothesis that the couple's everyday moments contribute to positive affect during conflict" (p. 311). A study by Lorenzo et al. (2018) on newlywed married couples in their first marriage found that, "receiving more emotional support from one's partner was associated with greater relationship satisfaction, and the effect of received emotional support on relationship satisfaction was stronger for wives compared with husbands" (p. 869). Sullivan et al. (2010) in their study on newlywed marriage found that "spouses who create a warm, supportive, relationship with their partner may be more accepting of relationship problems and in turn experience more satisfying and enduring relationships" (p.641). Graber, Laurenceau, Miga, Chango, & Coan (2011) demonstrated that when newlywed partners engage in positive behaviors with each other, they are significantly more satisfied with their relationship and additionally that contempt emerged as a predictor of divorce. Tallman and Hsiao (2004) provided support that "couple cooperation is a useful strategy in resolving interpersonal problems and that marital satisfaction and mutual trust are antecedent conditions for fostering cooperative behaviors" (p. 185). "The construct of emotional attunement encompasses more than positive effect: in addition, emotionally attuned couples showed awareness of each other's perspective, listen and respond to each other's needs, and talk about the future as couples" (Curran, Hazen, Jacobvitz & Sasaki 2006, p.477).

This dissertation will apply the following themes based on attachment theory to the study of newlywed couples including: First, the importance of newlywed couples to develop the foundation of a mutual and secure relational bond during the early stages of marriage. "... the groundwork is laid for the pair to develop a much more complex relationship with each other, one that I term a partnership" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 268). "One of the most important differences is that romantic love is usually a two-way street; both partners are sometimes anxious and security-seeking and at other times able providers of security and care" (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, p. 522). Second, to organize an attachment system which enables the newlywed relationship to endure. "Ethological theory regards the propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals as a basic component of human nature, already present in germinal form in the neonate and continuing through adult life into old age." (Bowlby, 1988, p. 162). Velotti, Balzarotti, Tagliabue, English, Zavattini, and Gross (2016) discovered in their investigation of newlywed couples that chronic emotional suppression and attachment avoidance negatively impacted marital quality. As the literature has shown, the newlywed period of marriage is a time of significant development in modeling patterns for establishing a stable marital bond and in particular is an important period for providing a foundation for the couple's functioning (Ruvolo, 1998). Third, to develop a reciprocal and stable pattern of interaction and communication through attunement and a sharing of experiences. "For a relationship between two individuals to proceed harmoniously each must be aware of the other's point of view, his goals, feelings, and intentions, and must so adjust his own behavior that some alignment of goals is negotiated" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 131). The newlywed couple's affectional bond and patterns of interaction requires certain

components, as highlighted in the literature, for a healthy relationship to evolve. Additionally, these patterns are needed for the management of stressors that can impact their developing marriage. “Attuned communication is when two systems are allowed to become a part of one resonating whole” (Siegel, 2009, p. 138). Bonding behavior is vital to a healthy marriage, as partners look to each other for emotional responses and validation of shared experiences. The patterns of interaction and problem solving are established early on in a marriage and can become habitual. Schoebi and Randall (2015) support that, “daily exchanges between intimate partners help to promote and maintain closeness and intimacy by responding to emotional disclosure” (p. 344). The significance of adult attachment bonds and the ability to co-construct emotional responses appear to provide a foundation on which to build a secure relationship in the early stage of marriage. Attachment theory provides a frame of reference for understanding the important period of a newlywed couple’s developing bond, their relational adjustment, the ability to reflect on shared experiences, and the relational consequences of each partner’s behaviors within the relationship.

CHAPTER 4

Marriage and Technology

Some research suggests that the smartphone may negatively impact the couple during the important developmental periods of a new marriage, affecting patterns of interaction and feelings of closeness and connection. Wang (2017) in his study of married Chinese adults found that, “partner phubbing is an important factor that can undermine relationship satisfaction and increase the risk of depression via relationship satisfaction” (p. 15). For some individuals their partner’s smartphone use in their presence may produce anxiety around the other’s perceived unavailability and absence due to time spent on electronic devices. Roberts and David (2016) found that partner phubbing increased conflict with individuals with both secure and insecure attachments. “Because attunement is focused attention, it is important that an individual minimize and disengage from distractions in order to attune properly” (Carlson & Dermer, 2016, p. 3). It can be hard to fight the urge and technology provides a compelling platform. “Cell phone distractions are especially common among younger couples – some 42% of 18-29-year olds in marriages or serious relationships have experienced this issue” (Lenhart and Duggan, 2014, p. 16). Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma, and Raita (2012) found their results drew a distinction between smartphones and laptops: “in comparing laptops and smartphones, their availability as a physical cue is significantly different – smartphones are available and used more often throughout the day and are used more in terms of total usage time” (p. 113). Lack of intimate communication can lead to misunderstanding and a marked decreased in the ability to problem solve together. “Individuals are potentially

more likely to miss subtle cues, facial expressions, and changes in the tone of their conversation partner's voice and have less eye contact when their thoughts are directed to other concerns in the presence of a mobile device" (Misra et al., 2016, p. 291). McDaniel and Coyne (2014) found that even small amounts of perceived technoferece affected women's relational and personal well-being within their marriages. During the foundational phase of the newlywed marriage, it is important for a couple to develop an interplay of behaviors which help them attune to each other, understand each other's needs, and develop skills to manage external factors that may influence their relationship.

Utilizing central concepts of the British school of object relations will provide a framework to address the newlywed couples' relationship and to identify the experiences that couples subscribe to technology in the formative years of their marriage. D. W. Winnicott informed his theory through his clinical work and understood that healthy development was based on the child's relationship with their mother/caregiver and the type of environment that she provided. "A complex interchange between what is inside and what is outside begins, and continues throughout the individual's life, and constitutes the main relationship of the individual to the world" (Winnicott, 1990, p. 72). "Overall the British school of object relations developed the idea that people have a primary need to be connected meaningfully to others, that the object organize experience and that psychic structure evolved from the individual's relations with other people" (Spaulding, 1997, p. 139). Driver and Gottman (2004) in their study of newlywed couples found data to provide preliminary support for the theory that couples "build intimacy through hundreds of very ordinary, mundane moments in which they attempt to make emotional connections" (p. 312). Given that the smartphone is an object, it is important to

appreciate how a couple manages their attachment to their smartphone and how the use of their device relates to their intimate connection during time spent together.

These studies highlight the importance of maintaining mutually responsive, attuned, and positive patterns of communication during this developmental period of a new marriage. As with attachment theory, object relations emphasized the importance of the infant's early relationship experiences with their caregivers and the positive and caring interaction of the child within this environment. This dissertation will apply the following themes based on object relations theory including: First, transitional objects and its application to the smartphone and how each partner defines its function and its influence on the couple's developing bond. Second, the holding environment concept and the newlywed couple's ability to create a contextual supportive environment during the newlywed phase of marriage as they relate to each other and to build a secure environment for their future. In the newlywed phase, the couple is learning to develop a bond to their spouse (we) while maintaining their individuality (I). The couple represents a framework from multiple perspectives. There is the unit of the marriage and the experiences of the independent two. The couple is its own environment and thus inextricably influence one another. The newlywed couple not only relates to each other within their own milieu but balances interactions and socialization outside their couple's space. "The loving space helps create the central relatedness that is enveloped by a mutual holding capacity" (Spaulding, 1997, p. 140). A partner represents an extension of the other within the intimate relationship. The individual in a relationship provides the function of the transitional object for their partner as they share experiences and are able to meet each other's needs. Tangible objects can become transitional objects which

represent the feelings and experiences an individual comes to associate with their significant other. “When symbolism is employed the infant is already clearly distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external object between primary creativity and perception” (Winnicott, 1953, p. 92). Winnicott’s clinical observation was developed from his work with children and described the transitional object as a symbol to represent the first relationship (the caregiver). In the marital relationship, the partnership is to provide the ideal object, if not a transitional object may be sought to represent the feeling of emotional connection to their spouse. Technological changes have become part of our culture and smartphone technology has become central to individuals’ lives enabling an access to spontaneous connection and interaction. Butler and Randall (2013) indicated that a partners’ level of positive and negative affect covaried, above and beyond the influence of their shared daily interactions. This effect was greater on days when couples spent more time together, suggesting the partner’s presence is an important part of coregulation. As Sbarra and Hazan (2008) describe, attunement can be thought of “as the reciprocal maintenance of psychophysiological homeostasis within a relationship” Schoebi and Randall (2015) in their review of emotional dynamics in relationships support that “regular contact and proximity with a close partner will increase the availability of the social provisions and can act as a buffer against the perturbations of major and minor daily stressors, dampening the dynamics of stress-related emotions” (p. 344). Lavner & Bradbury (2012) discovered that even low distress newlywed couples “who displayed negative communication, emotion, and social support with each other was a significant risk factor” in their eventual marital disunion (p.8).

Bonding behavior is vital to a healthy marriage, as partners look to each other for emotional responses and are dependent on this for validation of the meaning that they have to each other. Misra et al. (2016) found that both participants experienced diminished quality of their conversation and less empathy in their face to face conversations with a mobile device present in their field of vision. “Fully 25% of cell phone owners in a committed relationship have felt that their spouse or partner was distracted by their cell phone when spending time together” (Lenhart & Duggan, 2014, p. 2). Polezoes (2017) found a significant negative association between smartphone interference and relationship satisfaction. Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002) found that “both negative interaction and overall positivity indicated that relationships characterized by the presence of significant withdrawal by either men or women are likely to be of poorer quality...” (p. 671). Tallman & Hsiao (2004) found that couples whose marriage ended during the course of their study exhibited “significantly lower cooperation scores than those marriages that remained intact” (p. 184). According to the literature above, attunement within the marital relationship helps the couple manage their emotions and cope with negative feelings that may come up within the relationship. Sbarra and Hazan (2008) found that, “coregulation represents the physiological instantiation of felt security, which is a critical element of normative attachment” (p. 161). Technology may help couples feel connected when apart, but focused and attuned responsiveness is also important task when together. Patterns of interaction and problem solving are established early on in a marriage and can become habitual. In this qualitative research project, this investigation will explore how married individuals, during the

newlywed stage of marriage (one through four years) perceive the effects of smart phone use on their marital satisfaction when in each other's presence.

CHAPTER 5

Methods

Brief Overview

Technological developments continue to advance and have become a ubiquitous part of our culture. The intent of this study was to develop an appreciation of the influence that smartphone use has on newlywed couples when in each other's presence and how it mediates their developing relationship. Smartphone is defined by Merriam-Webster (2020) as a cell phone that includes additional software functions (such as e-mail or an Internet browser). This inquiry sought to understand the essence of experience relating to this phenomenon and develop a context which gathers information on each partner's use of the smartphone during this important developmental period of a new marriage. This study is a qualitative exploratory phenomenology study seeking to describe the ways in which newlywed couples perceive their smartphone use and the impact of the smartphone on their relational adjustment which includes: the development of their intimate marital bond, their shared experiences, communication patterns, a system of socialization and supportive connection.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of the newlywed time period is the first four years of marriage. Cobb (2019) suggested that "Newlyweds are recently married couples, and newlywed research generally focuses on the first 2 to 4 years of marriage" (p. 2). The literature varies among studies in defining the time frames to describe the newlywed phase and have included: a period of one year, (e.g. Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001; Lorenzo, Barry, & Khalifian, 2018; Luo &

Snider, 2009; Ruvolo, 1998; Tan, & South, 2017), a period of two years, (e.g. McCarthy, Ginsberg, & Cintron, 2008; Tallman & Hsiao, 2004;), and the majority of studies regarded this phase as up to four years, (e.g., Lavner, 2017; Lavner, Karney, Williamson, & Bradbury, 2017; Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2014; Lavner & Bradbury, 2012; Sullivan, et al., 2010; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010, Kurdek, 1998). As most studies focus on defining the newlywed stage in their methodology within the first four years of marriage, that was the chosen definition for this study.

Study Design

This study is based on phenomenological qualitative research as the primary purpose was to conduct an exploratory inquiry. Specifically a heuristic phenomenological approach was used to help provide insight into the existence of the smartphone and how newlywed couples experience it's use within their marriage when in each other's presence. "The heuristic researcher is seeking to understand the wholeness and the unique patterns of experiences in a scientifically organized and disciplined way" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16). The phenomenon of the smartphone and its impact on pair bond relationships is an under-researched subject. At the time that the researcher initiated this study there was no research on the topic of the smartphone and its impact on newlywed relationships. The aim of this study was to expand upon the limited existing research related to smartphone technology and the gap in the literature on smartphones use during the phase of newlywed marriage. Additionally, it was to gain an understanding of the subjective experience of the informants within the newlywed population and explore their perspective of smartphone use in their marriage. Data included both partners in the marriage. "Phenomenological findings explore not only what participants experience but

also the situations and conditions surrounding those experiences” (Padgett, 2017, p. 41). This investigator was responsible for recruitment of the sample along with the initial screening evaluation via phone to determine eligibility for participation in the study.

Interview Guide

This researcher administered a self-designed, semi-structured interview. For the complete interview guide please see appendix A. The interview guide was the standard for all informants in this study. The questions developed for the participant interviews were based on concepts from attachment theory, British object relations, as well as literature outlined in this study. The questions were presented with a clear and organized approach.

The first set of questions focused on the topics of marital expectations, emotional intimacy, shared experiences, and how the participants viewed quality time spent together. The second group of questions explored communication, marital strengths, marital stress, external factors, and socialization in the newlywed marriage. The third and final series of questions focused on smartphone use in marriage, rules for technology use, communicating needs, time spent utilizing the smartphone, perceived sense of connection, and circular use relating to the smartphone. The questions in the interview guide addressed how the participants experienced smartphone use when each other’s presence.

Sampling and Recruitment

After receiving IRB approval, interested participants were screened by phone based on inclusion/exclusion criteria. The cohort for this study included both heterosexual and same sex married newlyweds. In June 2015 same sex marriage became legalized in the United States (U.S. Congressional Documents Library, 2015). According to the United States Census Bureau, there are 61.4 million opposite-sex married couples and there are 543,000 same-sex married couple households. (Barrett, 2019).

Purposive sampling was used to represent the newlywed population that was studied, as it helped to illustrate the characteristics of the phenomenon being experienced by this particular group. The type of purposive sampling used was criterion sampling which helped to identify cases relevant to this study.

Criteria

The inclusion criteria that was met for this study included:

1. First civil marriage for each spouse between one to four years in length.
2. Heterosexual or same sex legal marriage.
3. 18 years of age or older.
4. Each partner must own their own smartphone.
5. Able to speak English.
6. Willing to participate voluntarily in study.

The exclusion criteria for this study included:

1. Partners have attended couples counseling.
2. One or both partners has been in counseling for a technology-based issue or addiction.

Couples for this study were recruited through flyers, which after receiving permission at each location were posted at Overlook Medical Center in Summit, NJ and

in various established business in my local area in Union County, NJ. Additionally recruitment letters were emailed to colleagues. Furthermore, the clergy at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun synagogue in Short Hills, NJ posted recruitment information. As participant couples were recruited, snowball sampling further aided in recruiting additional informants. The snowball sample is a strategy that begins with a sample of a few respondents that have been identified for the study and then increases through referrals (Rubin, & Babbie, 2016). The recruitment period ran from June 17, 2020 through July 15, 2020. The data was collected until saturation was met. Ending data collection is based on "... when the data show redundancy and reveal no new information" (Padgett, 2016, p. 134).

This investigator screened 44 participants, 22 newlywed couples married between one and four years. After screening, four interested participants were disqualified from entering the study as they did not meet the inclusion criteria or met the exclusion criteria. One informant had been previously married and another couple were actively attending couple's counseling. Forty semi-structured interviews were completed between June 2020 and July 2020. The sample size for the study was 40 participants total, 20 newlywed couples married between one and four years. This included 18 heterosexual couples and two same sex married newlyweds couples, providing for a total of 20 female and 20 male informants. Demographics were as follows: 35 participants identified as heterosexual, two as gay, two as lesbian, and one as bisexual. One participant identified as African American, two as Asian, 29 as Caucasian, five as Hispanic, one as More Than One Race, and two as Other Race. Thirty-three participants were employed full-time, two part-time, four were not employed, and one identified as a student. Level of education included 29

participants who were college graduates, 16 who had graduate degrees, and four who were High School graduates. Combined income for all participant couples totaled more than \$50,000 per year. Thirteen informants were 25-29 years old, 16 ranged from 30-34 years old, nine were 35-39 years old, two were 63-67 years old. In number of years married, 14 participants were married for one year, 14 were married for two years, six for three years and six for four years. Thirty-four participants owned one smartphone, five owned two smartphones, and one owned three smartphones. Please see table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics (n=40)

Gender	
Female	20
Male	20
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	35
Gay	2
Lesbian	2
Bisexual	1
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	1
Asian	2
Caucasian	29
Hispanic	5
MTOR	1
Other Race	2
Employment Status	
Full-Time	33
Part-Time	2
Unemployed	4
Student	1
Level of Education	
High School	4
College	20
Graduate School	16
Combined Income	
> 50K	40
Years Married	
One	14
Two	14
Three	6
Four	6
Smartphones Owned	
One	34
Two	5
Three	1
Age in Years	
25-29 y/o	13
30-34 y/o	16
35-39 y/o	9
60-67 y/o	2

Note: MTOR = More Than One Race

Setting

A letter of introduction describing this study was made available to each of the participants. Participants were provided a consent form that informed them about this study. This researcher answered any questions that the participants may have had. Each individual participant agreed to the guidelines of the interview and completed and signed the Informed Consent form approved by the IRB before they participated in the study. The researcher conducted all of the interviews using a semi-structured interview guide when meeting with the participants. Each spouse in the couple was interviewed separately and when alone using the same interview guide. In this study, both partners in the couple were interviewed separately as to not minimize the uniqueness of each individual's perspective and experience. Documenting each partner's experience helped to gain a more accurate picture of what feelings and concerns existed and allowed for individual reflection of smartphone use in their relationship. Exploring the meaning that each individual partner conveyed helped to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of the smartphone and how it exists among the developing patterns of interaction and bonding in the newlywed couple. Each newlywed partner was interviewed utilizing Zoom technology and the interviews were recorded. Interviewing each partner separately provided for and supported the informants' ability to discuss sensitive topics that they may have felt uncomfortable to talk about in front of their partner. This approach also removed the opportunity for any one spouse to control or guide the interview to their singular points of view. Both the researcher and the participant were in a private and secure space to insure confidentiality. No couple interview was conducted. Participants were interviewed separately at a time and place that was convenient for their schedules.

The interviews began with a detailed review of the informed consent and by answering any questions the informants had about the consent form or the study. The participants were asked questions regarding demographics including age, gender, sexual orientation, race, education level, employment, income, number of years married, and number of smartphones owned. Prior to beginning the interview, each participant chose a pseudonym other than their real name to provide additional privacy. The researcher administered a self-designed, semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Notes were taken during each interview, reflecting the researchers' preliminary thoughts relevant to the phenomenon being studied. At the end of the interview a debriefing took place to provide for a sense of closure and to allow for feedback on the interview process. Information on appropriate referrals for counseling were made available at the time of the closing of the interview as needed and all the participants declined the need for such a referral. During the interviews both the researcher and the participant were required to be in a private and secure space to insure confidentiality. The same interview guide was used with all informants. All interviews were recorded using audio and video via the Zoom platform.

After the Zoom interviews were finished, the recordings were immediately downloaded to a password protected computer. Zoom software automatically provided a video and a text transcription of each interview that this researcher downloaded from the cloud and immediately deidentified. The researcher reviewed each recording along with each transcript to insure clarity to the dictation and to ensure accuracy of the participants' spoken words. Using inductive coding, the researcher coded each interview, line by line, while searching for key words. Utilizing the field notes and reviewing the self-reflective

writing that was noted after each interview helped to gain a comprehensive appreciation of this analysis by illuminating similarities and differences. These preliminary codes were further developed and were grouped into broad categories using "Delve" (a password protected qualitative software). Patterns developed as the similarities and the frequency of the participants' response to the research questions began to emerge. The researcher then reviewed the transcripts again line by line along with the initial broader categories developed in the Delve software to analyze and review the data and to continue identifying key concepts and meaning units. This researcher then took these categories and organized them into central themes and subthemes. After the themes were defined, quotes were then organized as they corresponded to the themes and the subthemes that were developed. This contributed to the researcher's understanding of the common experiences of the participants relating to this phenomenon being studied.

Participant Compensation

Compensation of \$25 cash for each informant was offered at completion of the interview via Zelle or Venmo. All of the participants accepted the compensation of \$25.00.

Data Management

Consent forms and all demographic information were kept in a secure and locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. At the completion of this study all securely held files related to each informant including interview recordings and transcripts were securely erased and deleted.

Institutional Review Board

The safety and protection of all participants were a requirement for this study. An application was submitted to the Internal Review Board of the University of Pennsylvania and upon IRB approval on June 17, 2020, confirmation # dbgggbbj, the researcher began recruitment of participants for this study.

Risk and Benefit Assessment

This researcher respected the privacy, rights, needs of the participants involved in the study. Participation in this study was voluntary and the informants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any point during the study. Participants were required to agree to guidelines in this study and signed the Informed Consent form before participating. The informed consent included information pertaining to the potential risks and benefits of participation in this study. Only identifying demographic information that was essential to this study was collected as to minimize the risk associated with breach of confidentiality of the participants. Anonymity was protected by the use of a pseudonym chosen by the participants and all identifying information was concealed in a locked file to which only the researcher had access. There was minimal risk to participate in this study. Participants were informed that they could end their participation in the study at any time without risk of negative consequences. Information on appropriate referrals for counseling was made available to each participant at time of the closing of the interview.

Human Subjects

Approval was obtained from the University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board prior to beginning this study. Participants were provided a consent form

that informed them of the risk and benefits of this study. At each interview, the investigator reassured each participant that their personal information would be kept confidential and was informed that all material resulting from the study would be de-identified. Participation was voluntary and informants were informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any given time.

Methods to Enhance Rigor and Trustworthiness

This study addressed a clear and central phenomenon, the smartphone, which is an under-researched subject relating to its use by couples during the newlywed stage of marriage. To enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of this study, data triangulation (Padgett, 2016) was used and included a detailed review of the in-depth interviews, transcripts, field notes, and self-reflective writing which help to illuminate the complementary aspects of the phenomenon being studied. To further enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of this study theory triangulation was utilized. Theory triangulation is defined as, “the use of multiple theories or perspectives to interpret a single set of data” (Padgett, 2016, p. 215). Attachment theory and the School of British Object relations were used when reviewing the data from the interviews to provide for an organizing concept in the development of the analysis. To further application of rigor to this study, this researcher adopted an audit trail process (Padgett, 2016) and documented detailed notes that mapped the progress and the explication of the data through which the final codebook was written. This researcher shared her codebook with her dissertation chairman.

Reflexivity Statement

This researcher engaged in an exercise of reflexivity by exploring her subjectivity in preparation for this study. The researcher identifies as a clinical social worker, certified Imago couple's therapist, doctoral student, spouse for 27 years, and a mother of two sons. This researcher has both an understanding and familiarity with the many facets of being in a marriage and the emotional connection and commitment in relating to a spouse. This researcher owns two smartphones and her spouse owns one. As the researcher developed this dissertation problem statement this researcher identified a couple areas of potential biases from her own experiences both clinically and personally. "In self-dialogue, one faces oneself and must be honest with oneself and one's experience relevant to the question or problem" (Moustakas, 190). These issues included occurrences of both positive and negative encounters with the researcher's husband's smartphone use and in client's expressions of the impacts of smartphone and technology use in their partnerships. As an experienced clinical social worker, who has worked in outpatient mental health settings, hospital settings, and currently in a private practice, this researcher is familiar with maintaining boundaries according to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics and the core values. With no experience as a researcher, it is important that the researcher acknowledge and examine her preconceptions, thoughts, and feelings on this topic of study. This is not to eliminate bias but to be mindful and monitor herself at all times during this exploration and investigation. This researcher made an honest effort to contain any bias or preconceptions before entering into interviews with participants and to interrogate her own subjectivity and experiences at all stages of the study. Moustakas (1990) addresses the

concept of self-reduction and that the process of self-dialogue is a tool that enables scientific inquiry to be guided by human experience and this can be explained and discovered through one's own self-inquiry. To enhance the trustworthiness of this researcher's engagement in this investigation and to capture the participant's experiences, feelings, and beliefs from the informant's point of view, this researcher used bracketing to mitigate any preconceptions that could have tainted the knowledge encountered.

CHAPTER 6

Findings

The following themes were developed based on the appreciation of the common experience of all forty participants within their newlywed marriage and the essence of this experience in relation to the phenomenon of smartphone use. When this researcher explored the meaning that each of the forty participants conveyed regarding smartphone use in their marriage when in each other's presence, those descriptions and narratives contributed to the developing patterns that emerged and defined themselves into codes and themes and an understanding of the universal lived experiences within this study.

The five themes that emerged are as follows: Vehicle, Mindset, Phone Rules, Interface, and Circular Use. The theme vehicle summarized the participants' relationship with their smartphone and how it related to their interactions when with their marital partner. The smartphone was experienced as a vehicle which could transport the participants to a specific mindset and as an instrument through which something was communicated, expressed, or facilitated between the couple when together. The theme mindset informed this researcher and provided clarity on why individuals used their smartphone object in the moment when with their spouse. It was elucidated that the participants' mindsets are the motivation for their smartphone use and their mindset drives the attachment towards or the disconnection from the relationship. The theme phone rules developed when some of the participants shared that they created guidelines with their spouse to define the use of the smartphone in their marriage. The theme interface was illuminated as many of the participants shared that they use their

smartphone to convey their mindset with their spouse. Depending on each participant's need, the smartphone could be used as a mediator to avoid verbal expression of feelings, to connect when apart, and by its removal, to manage the amount of quality time between the couple. The last theme, circular use arose as some of the informants related that their spouse's smartphone use influenced them to engage with their own smartphone device when together. Although, a smaller sampling did not feel that this had an effect on whether or not they used their smartphones. These themes emerged from the interviews and the perspective expressed regarding smartphone use and how it relates to a newlywed's interaction in establishing a secure bond, a stable pattern of communication, and their attuning to shared experiences.

The Smartphone as a Vehicle

The predominant theme that was identified in this study is *Vehicle* (n = 40) (100%). Collectively the participants shared that it was not the amount of time that their spouse spent on their phone but their need in the moment that created the phone being a distraction, an outlet, or an object to share. Spending time together, balancing needs, creating quality time, being realistic about their own and their partner's smartphone use and minding the gap that devej;

loped when smartphone use created a disconnect between the couple allowed them to acknowledge and work on prioritizing their time spent together focusing on the relationship and not on their technology. As the participants continued to share their examples, the smartphone was experienced as an instrument through which something was being communicated, expressed, or facilitated between the couple when together.

Therefore, the smartphone could be used to either magnify value or minimize value by each partner within the couple's interaction. This external object is an everyday part of the newlywed couple's existence, a third spouse or as noted by participant 3B:

Maybe in the future that will not be seen as such a negative thing but smartphones will be seen less like a third wheel, but more is just add something that could really enhance the relationship or make something work.

Overwhelmingly, the response from the informants who were interviewed for this study about their smartphone use and their newlywed relationship found that it was an object of their attention for a multitude of reasons and that their smartphone was present and with them often when together. Informant 12A expressed:

I use it a lot. I mean, it's basically a computer. So whenever I have like, Oh, I wonder what this is. I pull out my phone and type it into Google or, you know, even just communicating with friends. I always have my phone on me.

Informant 7B echoed this sentiment:

I think smartphones are the greatest, worst invention in the world. Greatest invention because you have everything at the click of a finger. Worst invention because when you actually do have time. You kind of spend 50% of that time anyways on your smartphone, even though you've had it all day. You still use it all the time and it kind of breaks the unity. It's kind of weird when you're both sitting on the couch together. It's a long day and you're looking at Instagram scrolling through pictures or people's post and that's more entertaining than the conversation that you guys can have for the day.

The awareness of the convenience of the smartphone together with the participants' entire lives easily accessed by one touch of a screen is expressed by Participant 17A: *"I personally think that I'm too attached to my phone sometimes. So as things have gotten faster and easier, just everything's at your fingertips. So it's like just too easy."*

Although the participants expressed that they used their smartphones for many reasons, the vehicle must be driven by the driver as articulated by participant 13B: *"I don't blame the smartphone."* The vehicle theme establishes the understanding that with the function and the ubiquity of the smartphone, as with any external object, it is the intention of its user and the user's awareness that can make the difference. Informant 2A shared their point of view, *"When I think about it, I think I'm on my phone too much. Like, oh wait, let me put this down. You just have to make that like conscious effort."* A similar perspective on not blaming the smartphone vehicle was reported by respondent 15A:

He made me aware that he wasn't happy with the amount of time I spend on the phone. It's not gonna help me, it's gonna distract our marriage. So we just said okay, when we go to their bedroom, we're not going to use our phones.

The importance of being aware of smartphone use as a variable in a couple's interaction was conveyed by participant 14A:

We definitely are both on our phones, a good bit in my opinion, and not necessarily where it's harming our marriage or anything, but I would say we could spend less time on our phones. We're definitely on them. We're on them in

the evening. I mean, they're always there. So we don't necessarily call it the problem, but I think they could still be less.

Informant 5A shared that being conscious of smartphone use when together with their spouse was important:

The only times when we don't use our phones is when we remind ourselves to be intentional and say let's not look at our phones. It's not the smartphone. Oh no, I don't think so. I don't think the phone in itself.

In the theme Vehicle there are four primary ways in which the smartphone impacted the participants during their shared experiences with their spouse and the behaviors that developed in response to managing their needs and their developing bond as a newlywed couple. Four subthemes were identified under the theme Vehicle. The first three describe the different types of bonding behavior facilitated via the presence of the smartphone. The fourth describes the retreat from bonding that the participants experience by using their smartphone to reduce or avoid involvement in the relationship. Dependent on the informant's mindset, the smartphone was found be used to transport the spouse to a specific cognitive and emotional state in order to manage their need in the moment. Please see Table 2.

Table 2. Excerpt from codebook, vehicle theme and four subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example
Vehicle		The smartphone is a vehicle which can transport the spouse to a specific mindset and is a neutral reflection of its user. The smartphone is an instrument through which something is communicated, expressed, or facilitated between the couple when together.	15B: Yeah, I will say that smartphone has played a good and bad in my relationship. I think all the time that we spend on the phone, could have been spent together doing something beneficial. I believe that when it is being taken out or being reduced especially when I'm with her it will enhance my relationship with her more than anything.
	Side by Side Play	Awareness of partner's smartphone use as a means of winding down, relaxing, and hanging out. Spending time in physical proximity to each other and mutually using the smartphone.	18A: I think that we're on the phone a lot. When we're together, the quiet time at night, even if we're sitting on the couch, we may be together reading it, but we're sitting there kind of doing it together.
	Bonding Play	The exchange of information from the smartphone as a shared experience. The function is to promote relational connection through this shared experience.	5B: So if we're doing something together like there's an activity on the phone that we're looking at, like, a place to go on vacation together. I think that's good, sharing recipes, that kind of stuff is good.
	Outlet from Play	Using the smartphone to avoid involvement in your relationship. The smartphone is used to convey from one spouse to the other that they have disconnected and left relationship for a period of time. There are intentional and non-intentional outlets.	(Intentional) 9A: If there's a fight and somebody is stonewalling the other person, the phone is there as a source of destruction. Just another world to hop into to not be there presently. Too heavy for sure. I'm quick to refer to it in an uncomfortable situation. (Non-Intentional) 15B: Because when she's out there with her phone and I'm here with my phone we don't really spend any time together. And it makes me not pay attention to her needs and sometimes she doesn't even pay attention to what I need in a particular point in time.
	Putting the Brakes On	Sharing quality time with your spouse by putting the brakes on smartphone use. Mutually not using the smartphone via rules or asking your spouse to put it away to provide for emotional connection.	17A: If were going out or doing something that's our time. That's when the phone needs to go away because that's time that we want to just really spend with each other.

The first subtheme is *Side by Side Play* (n = 31) (78%). Side by Side Play expressed itself frequently during the interviews as the passive bonding experience that the couple encounters when they are each using their own individual smartphones when spending time in physical proximity to each other and are aware of each other's smartphone use. The couple is together but separate when on their smartphones, in the same room, and have an awareness of each partner's phone use as a means of winding down, relaxing together, hanging out, and destressing after work. These participants found that they used their own smartphones simultaneously most commonly while sitting on their couch, watching TV, or winding down in bed. The participants did not consider this quality or focused time with each other. It was often expressed in the interviews that intimate time was different from hanging out time. As informant 1B conveyed: "*If we're just hanging on the couch I'll go on my phone. If we're actually playing a game, like cards or something or watching a movie I'll stay off of it.*" Participant 18A shared their thoughts on using their smartphone when with their spouse: "*I think that we're on the phone a lot. When we're together, the quiet time at night, even if we're sitting on the couch, we may be together reading it, but we're sitting there kind of doing it together.*" When occupied in side by side play, the couple is physically together yet not mentally engaged. A similar experience with side by side play was shared by participant 14B: "*If it's when we're winding down at night, definitely on the phones, a good bit usually in our living room.*" A related viewpoint is described by informant 2B:

So it's not like we completely ignore each other the whole time we're both pretty much just winding down because when we're sitting together and we're on our

phones. I think it's usually mutual where we both unwind and then we both realize it's time to put the phone down.

Participant 16A described their experience of sharing solitary scrolling on their smartphone when with their spouse: *“If we're watching a movie together one of us is probably like scrolling through their phones.”* Participant 3B commented on the presence of the smartphone: *“If were hanging out at night, or whatever, watching TV, both on our phones will usually be around for both of us.”* Even while not at home but still with their spouse, informant 8B reported: *“I mean if we are on the subway together and were not talking, I'll go through my emails and start deleting.”*

Participant 5B explained that side by side play is not considered quality time with their spouse:

When we're strictly looking at our own phones independently it doesn't really make the time too quality or too valuable to spend with each other even if we're in the same room because you check out and you're looking at whatever on the phone.

The second subtheme in vehicle is *Bonding Play* (n =12) (30%). The smartphone was found by the participants to function as an active enhancer, facilitating moments with the couple as a way to share, connect, and promote feelings of attachment. Bonding Play expressed itself as the exchange of information while the couples used the smartphone as a shared experience. The smartphone's function is to promote connection through this shared experience as informant 20a shared: *“Now if she uses it, she'll like take a picture or something or she'll look up a song, so we can put it on to play.”* The participants

reported that when they used their smartphone to share something with their spouse, it magnified the value of these shared occurrences between the couple and enhanced feelings of closeness. Informant 8B acknowledged the experience shared with their spouse:

Probably several times an hour, looking at our phone, even when we are just the two of us together and whether we are sending a text or emailing or going on the Internet. But frequently that will involve whatever is going on the phone showing the other person or talking to the other person about what that is.

A similar viewpoint is shared by informant 7A: “*So we're both on it quite a bit. Aside from work, we're always on it for social media or even just taking pictures of the baby, just sharing little things*”. Participant 15B explained that they preferred to use their smartphone to share their interests with their spouse: “*When I'm with her, it is either I'm on Facebook trying to show her something but most of the time when I'm with her I try to put my phone away.*”

The third subtheme in vehicle is *Putting the Brakes On* (n=34) (85%) and involves the action of putting aside the smartphone to enhance bonding. Putting the Brakes On is defined as awareness of the phone’s negative impact on the relational connection by putting the brakes on its use. The participants expressed the need for quality time and the motivation to remove the distraction of their smartphone and focus solely on their relationship.

The informants related that this was accomplished by not using the phone via the rules that they developed or by addressing their individual need and directly asking their

spouse to put their smartphone away. Informant 1A expressed their view of quality time: *“If it's just us, intimate time, there's no phone use.”* Participants indicated that focused time and attention, sans their smartphones, was important for maintaining their emotional connection to each other and putting a limit on their smartphone usage. The participants related that quality time equals mutually shared time together as a couple. Some participants developed rules for managing smartphone use when together, as they recognized that they needed to remove the smartphone as distraction to their time spent connecting with each other and put the “brakes on the vehicle.” Informant 17A shared what putting the brakes on means to them: *“If we're going out or doing something, that's our time. That's when the phone needs to go away because that's time that we want to just really spend with each other.”* Participant 7A explained why it was important to limit smartphone use when seeking emotional connection with their spouse:

I think honestly, the biggest issue with like smartphones is that it really it creates a barrier between you and your spouse. It doesn't allow you to really focus solely on that person, which I fundamentally think is one of the more important things that you need to do to sustain a relationship.

A related perspective is shared by respondent 20a: *“But other than that if it's quality time with us we're not on our phones, were hanging out together.”* Participant 3A reported the understanding they have with their spouse: *“I think as sort of as an unspoken agreement when we have made time to be together, we are really not really on our phones.”*

In addressing shared time spent focusing on connecting with their spouse participant 7A explained:

Quality time, it's just being around each other, just doing little activities just touching base with each other, being in the same room with each other. Definitely less technology, less laptop time, less phone time, less answering work calls and things of that nature.

The fourth subtheme in Vehicle is *Outlet from Play* (n=18) (45%). Some of the participants shared that they used the smartphone as an outlet from intimacy when trying to avoid conflict or were frustrated with their spouse. Other participants related that they used the smartphone when feeling distracted or needing time to relax and would scroll through social media or play a game. The smartphone was used to convey from one spouse to the other that they had disconnected and left the relationship for a period of time. Informants revealed that they would utilize the smartphone as a retreat from engaging with their partner and prefer to disconnect for brief periods of time. As participant 4B shared: *"I would say it's not like having the smartphone around sort of impedes your ability to communicate by itself, it's only when I'm using it often to ignore her in that type of sense."* The smartphone became the participant's object of focus, as a solitary escape engaged by the user. The smartphone provided a way for many of the participants to manage their feelings and display moments of avoidance, disconnection, preoccupation, and distraction, with attention focused away from their partner.

There are two types of outlets from play. The first outlet is intentional use of the smartphone by a participant as a means of acting out and expressing negative emotions toward their partner. The smartphone is used to convey a non-verbal message from one spouse to the other that they have disconnected and left the relationship for a period of time. The participant uses the smartphone to minimize the value of the interaction with

their spouse by reducing involvement in the couple's relationship. Participant 9A reported the use of their smartphone as an outlet: *"If we're fighting however, it is a tool for escape, so I get defensive."* This action is considered a *textit*. The term *textit* was developed by this researcher to describe an intentional outlet from intimacy via the use of the smartphone vehicle transporting the spouse to a disconnected emotional state. A *textit* (technology-exit) is defined as the action of an individual using their smartphone to avoid engaging with their spouse. Respondent 4B shared how the smartphone was experienced as a disrupter to connection: *"Since obviously if you're not on your phone a lot when you're talking, but then you are, it is specific case. It's often a pretty clear message that she's upset and trying to ignore me."* Participant 10A shared a similar point of view: *"Yeah, like a few times when we've been in arguments if one of us picks up the phone to me it's disrespectful and it shows that you're not focused."*

The second outlet is non-intentional use of the smartphone and reflects a participant's mindset of distraction, preoccupation, or needing to de-stress from their day. This action is considered a *phoneruption* (phone-disruption). The term *phoneruption* was developed by this researcher to describe a non-intentional outlet from play between the couple. *Phoneruptions* are brief moments when the spouse is distracted by their smartphone impacting their ability to be present and attentive to the relationship. Participant 2B explained:

I know she's not ignoring and same the other way, I'm not ignoring her. It's just you get so focused on your phone that you forget where you even are so if the other person is off of their phone, you don't even realize that. So you just keep on staying in your bubble until somebody tells you get out of it.

Phoneruptions temporarily focus attention outside the relationship as conveyed by participant 5B:

If she's sitting there on her phone and I'm sitting there not on my phone but watching her on her phone naturally I'll understand that we're not bonding at that time, and I'll look for my own escape, which may or may not be on my smartphone, but it kind of tells me it's okay. We're not really engaged right now, so feel free to look for your own stimuli to occupy your brain as well.

Informant 20a imparted the importance of awareness to manage outlets from play within her newlywed marriage:

Moments in your marriage, where you can either turn in or turn away and I felt like our phones were moments where we were turning away. It's like we're having these conversations and we're both like in front of a screen. We're not even looking at each other when we're talking, we're not paying attention.

Participant 15B related a similar viewpoint:

Because when she's out there with her phone and I'm here with my phone we don't really spend any time together. And it makes me not pay attention to her needs and sometimes she doesn't even pay attention to what I need in a particular point in time.

The difference between an intentional and non-intentional outlet was explained by informant 9B: *“It can be intentional disrespect. If we are not fighting and it’s just casual use, then I would say that it just means boredom.”* When together, outlets from play do

not enhance or build the connection for the couple. Outlets may be experienced as a momentary barrier to the relationship, whether intentional or non-intentional.

Mindset

The second theme *Mindset* (n=40) (100%) is defined as the state of being (involving the cognitive and emotional process) that occurs when a participant is using the smartphone while in the presence of their spouse. The participant's shared that in balancing the many moving parts in the midst of their busy lives, that their attitudes and needs were often the motivation for using their smartphone. The mindset of the participant modulates the smartphone as a vehicle, which was found to alter the experience of the couple. Thus the use of their smartphone informed the other of their availability and presence during interactions or lack thereof when together with their spouses. Participant 7B shared how their mindset impacts the use of their smartphone:

At times I do because I feel like we need the connection time or just to get away from the social media fact. And at times I don't because If I had a stressful day of work or just not in the mood to talk or to interact with her. It's just easier to be together both of us, but to be in a separate world kind of, her on her phone and me on mine.

Thus the mindset regulates the attachment towards or the disconnection (outlet from play) between the spouses. Please see table 3.

Table 3. Excerpt from codebook, mindset theme and ten subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example
Mindset		The participant's state of being (thoughts/emotions) when using the smartphone while in the presence of their spouse. The participant's mindset is the motivation for their smartphone use. The mindset drives the attachment towards or the disconnection from the relationship.	13B: I don't blame the smart phone. I probably usually blame it more on she's distracted or something like that. Generally if one or the other really wants to talk about something then we know to put our phones down.
	Boredom	Using your smartphone because you feel you have nothing to do. In a state without focused attention or action to something specific. This is a non-intentional outlet.	17B: I mean, there are times for sure where I'm just bored and I'll be like, all right, let me just hop on.
	Distraction	An alert, call, or buzz from the smartphone draws your attention away from spouse momentarily. This a non-intentional outlet.	3A: It's always like an external thing that one of us is putting their attention towards. Yeah, I think it's a distraction
	Detox Bubble	The participant uses their smartphone to unwind from the stress of their day as a mindless activity. Seeking alone time to relax. This is a non-intentional outlet.	5B: Occasionally, just browse on my Facebook.com, which is really to kind of escape.
	Work-Related	The participant uses their smartphone to attend to unfinished business from their professional day, checking work emails, managing work phone calls and being on call for their job. This is a non-intentional outlet.	17A: I use my cell phone for work all the time. So I am on it a lot for that, but it's more just answering phone calls and texts and things like that from work.
	Disconnection	The participant uses the smartphone as an escape from connection to their spouse. This is an intentional outlet.	16A: If we're fighting however, it is a tool for escape, so I get defensive.
	Nudging	The participant is seeking connection to their spouse who is instead preoccupied with their smartphone. The participant asks their partner to put it away. This encourages attachment towards the relationship and bonding play.	18A: So it probably has a lot to do with what I'm needing at that moment. and that's when I'll tell him to put the phone away, or he'll tell me to put the phone away.
	Attentive	Participants are mutually seeking time to focus on each other and consciously seeking connection. Not using their smartphones via formal rules, informal rules, or asking to put away their devices. This encourages attachment towards the relationship and bonding play.	19A: I guess it's the difference of like being together or that quality time together. They'll be a conscious conversation of let's put our phones away.
	Social Connections	Participants use the smartphone to help continue their own individual interests, friendships, and familial relationships. Two individuals within the couple's relationship using the smartphone to maintain their relationships external to the marriage. This is a non-intentional outlet.	14B: Both of us have close friends. I think we've both communicate by speaking with them on the phone or texting back and forth, sending stuff on Instagram and stuff like that.
	Technology Monogamy	Participant trusts their spouse and allows them to use their smartphone freely. Neither spouse feels compelled to hide information from their spouse. This encourages attachment towards the relationship and bonding play.	7A: Trust, I'm like, there's no hidden secrets. If we bring it back to the phone like we both have each other's passwords.
	Sharing Information	The participant is using the smartphone to exchange information and look up activities to share with their spouse. This encourages attachment towards the relationship and bonding play.	20a: Now if she uses it, she'll like take a picture or something or she'll look up a song, so we can put it on to play.

There are ten subthemes in the mindset theme: Boredom, Distraction, Detox Bubble, Work-Related, Disconnection, Nudging, Attentive, Social Connections, Technology Monogamy, and Sharing Information.

The first subtheme *Boredom* is defined as a participant who is using their smartphone because they feel that they have nothing else to do thus is in a mindset without focused attention or action to something specific. Many participants utilized their smartphone in order to fill their time when their spouse was not available or were involved in something that they were not interested in. As one informant shared, *like there's nothing else to do*. This is a non-intentional outlet from play or phoneruption for the participant. Participant 17B conveyed their understanding of their smartphone use: *“I mean, there are times for sure where I'm just bored and I'll be like, all right, let me just hop on.”* Respondent 6B offered an explanation of their mindset: *“I do scroll through Instagram, even while I'm sitting with her. Sometimes it's just kind of like a bored habit.”* Relating to that point on boredom, participant 1B explained: *“If I'm bored, I'll sit on my phone, look something up or play a game.”* This thought was echoed by participant 7B: *“I'll go on my phone probably just to fill the time. I think it's just become a habit at this point. Oh, we have a void in life, oh I'm a little bored.”*

The second subtheme *Distraction* is defined as an alert, call, or buzz from the smartphone that draws the participant's attention away from their spouse briefly. As informant 2A explained: *“And he was talking, he was like saying something to me, but I wasn't even paying attention. The phone for me provides a very big distraction.”* The participants experienced the distraction mindset as a momentary outlet when preoccupied by their phone and as a non-intentional outlet from play or phoneruption.

Participant 3A described the experience of a non-intentional outlet from play when with their spouse:

It's always like an external thing that one of us is putting their attention towards. Yeah, I think it's a distraction. I guess that it's not always negative, it's just means we are elsewhere at times when it can be with each other. Which I guess is the same thing about it being a distraction, it just means that you're here, but you're not here.

Informant 4B explained how smartphone use as an outlet from play impacted their relationship: *“Because I know that for me it feels like you know smartphones and usage is mostly negative and that detracts from like the time that we seem to spend together.”*

Respondent 7A conveyed a similar perspective: *“So I think it impacts my ability to communicate with him because I'm distracted most of the time, but it also just keeps me distracted in general, so I'm not really able to be present at the moment.”* Participant 13B expressed their understanding of their spouse's distracted mindset: *“I don't blame the smart phone. I probably usually blame it more on she's distracted or something like that. Generally if one or the other really wants to talk about something then we know to put our phones down.”* Respondent 5B related the experience of their spouse's phoneruption: *“It's kind of she's not present if she's on her phone and I'm the same, it's just a consequence of it.”*

Informant 15B shared how a non-intentional outlet interrupts their plans with their spouse: *But sometimes, it becomes a setback in terms of we have to do something together. We end up getting on our phones, getting distracted.”* Participant 19A related how distraction can interrupt communication with their spouse: *“I think, if anything, it*

would just be the fact of me trying to have a conversation and there being that distraction.”

The third subtheme *Detox Bubble* is defined as a mindset that a participant is in when they use their smartphone in order to take a break from the present moment and unwind. Participant 17A expressed their thoughts: *“Sometimes I play a game that literally is also useless, just because it's my way of detoxing from the day.”* Many of the participants shared that they used their smartphones as a mindless activity to decompress as momentary outlet. Overall the smartphone helped the informants take a few minutes to release the pressures that they felt from work, family, and other external factors. This enables them to transition and be better prepared to focus on their spouse. Detox bubble is a non-intentional outlet from play or phoneruption for the participant. Respondent 16A shared the way in which they use their smartphone: *“I guess if we're just doing like a mindless activity, we're on our phones. But other than that, I would say, we're pretty present.”* Participant 2B acknowledged their mindset: *“I think the biggest thing with the smartphone when we're together is, I'll be watching one of my videos and she's talking to her sister, so we're both kind of in our own little world.”* Respondent 5B shared how they use their smartphone to momentarily disconnect: *“Occasionally, just browse on my Facebook.com, which is really to kind of escape.”*

Participant 18A disclosed their motivation for using their smartphone:

It's a break. I'm always worrying about dinner, is this done, is that clean, do the kids have that? And so for me, if I could just have five minutes to scroll something, it is a complete mindless activity. I don't have to think of anything at all.

Adding to their similar viewpoint informant 13A imparted: *“I find it easy to get lost scrolling through the news or something like that.”* Informant 20a related: *“Like after work I feel like I use it to deescalate from the day and to relax.”*

The fourth subtheme *Work-Related* is defined as the mindset the participant is in when using their smartphone to attend to unfinished business from their professional day by checking work emails, managing work phone calls, and being on call for their job. The work-related mindset is a non-intentional outlet from play or phoneruption for the participant and is a temporary preoccupation relating to professional responsibilities. As participant 19A shared her experience: *“My husband is always on his phone. It is personal but it's also his profession, he's a lawyer and so he is always on call.”*

Informant 19B conveyed how they manage their smartphone use related to work and marriage: *“If an email comes in from work, I feel like I have to take it immediately, otherwise, I'll forget. And I try not to work on Saturdays and try not to use my phone as much as possible.”*

Participant 7A explained that they were on their smartphone primarily for their job:

I do feel like it's a lot. I wish it could be less, but unfortunately my job is very dependent on me being at everyone's beck and call. I'll be on Instagram and I'll be on social media platforms, but mostly I'm on my phone for work.

A related perspective is shared by respondent 5B: *“So mostly emails or calls or texts about work, which is kind of annoying, but that's probably the primary function for it.”*

Respondent 17A explained why their smartphone is an outlet: *“I use my cell phone for work all the time. So I am on it a lot for that, but it's more just answering phone calls and*

texts and things like that from work.” Informant 10A stated a similar mindset: *“I feel like I’m on it for work, to be honest. So I think I kind of associate it with work.”*

The fifth subtheme *Disconnection* is defined as the mindset in which the participant uses the smartphone as an escape from connection to their spouse. Participants employed it as a means to seek distance and avoid directly addressing their negative feelings to their spouse, as participant 16A acknowledged: *“If we’re fighting however, it is a tool for escape, so I get defensive.”* Disconnection is an intentional outlet from play or text for the participant. Informant 9A confirmed that they used their smartphone intentionally when upset with their spouse: *“If there’s a fight and somebody is stonewalling the other person, the phone is there as a source of destruction. Just another world to hop into to not be there presently.”* Respondent 4A related a similar viewpoint: *“I would say, if we’re having a conversation neither of us are on the phone unless were like intentionally trying to ignore the other person.”*

Participant 20a explained their mindset:

A lot of my work is listening and talking so I’m a little bit drained at the end of the day. And sometimes I really just want quiet for a little bit. So I think that’s where it can be a disconnect sometimes and she’ll want to talk and I’m like okay, I need a minute.

Informant 5A revealed their awareness of using their smartphone as a text: *“So even when he’s with me and sometimes he’s calling me, I don’t listen until he taps me. I’m just like, oh, you’re talking to me, it’s bad.”*

The sixth subtheme *Nudging* is defined as the mindset of the participant when they are seeking connection to their spouse who is instead preoccupied with their smartphone. Many participants expressed that they would have to ask their partner to put down their smartphone and pay attention to them as informant 18A shared: *“So it probably has a lot to do with what I’m needing at that moment. and that’s when I’ll tell him to put the phone away, or he’ll tell me to put the phone away.”* The use of the smartphone is regulated by one of the spouses asking the other to put it away. Participants related several ways that they nudge their spouse by waving their hands in front of them as respondent 20A conveyed: *“But there are times sometimes and I do it, and I feel like I am a little impatient, because I’ll be talking to my partner and she may be looking down on her phone. And I’m like, hello.”* Nudging is an example of putting the brakes on their partner’s smartphone use and to actively promote connection within their relationship. Informant 16A related their interaction with their spouse: *“Yes, if we are watching a movie and I’m on my phone, and he’s trying to talk to me about it, he’ll asked me to put my phone away and be present.”*

Participant 9A shared that when using their smartphone that they routinely respond to their spouse’s needs:

An intellectual conversation and emotional conversation. discussing life, discussing family, discussing politics, anything that is more connection based. If he calls me out for it typically, I will just say sorry and put it down, realizing that I am actually not paying attention.

Participant 10A related her mindset when their spouse was utilizing their device:

If I do feel he's paying more attention or more engaged in that, I'll say something and he'll put it away. I don't ever think it's really an intentional thing, I think he just kind of goes down the rabbit hole.

Respondent 2A related their experience with nudging: *"We do go on our phones when we're in each other's presence. Sometimes we have to tell each other to put the phone down."*

The seventh subtheme *Attentive* is defined as the mindset that the participant enters into when seeking quality time. Being present and sharing quality time with their partner was a common talking point that was expressed by the majority of the participants. This mutually shared time that focused on maintaining the relational bond contributed to many of the couples developing rules for smartphones use as participant 3A stated: *"I think as sort of as an unspoken agreement when we have made time to be together, we are not really on our phones."* The participants shared that they made a point of consciously creating time to be connected with their spouse and focus on being present when sharing activities, spending time, and communicating without the distraction of their smartphone. The attentive mindset is when both of the spouses are putting the brakes on their smartphone use. Respondent 19A shared the reason the smartphone is removed during interactions with their spouse: *"I guess it's the difference of like being together or that quality time together. They'll be a conscious conversation of let's put our phones away."*

Participant 20a: shared the reason for an attentive mindset:

20a: It's like, you can just lock down an entire person because you're so involved in this screen and it definitely impacted our marriage. I think we've been better about it because we're conscious of it, but if you're not you can kind of turn into yourself and just be in your own world.

Participant 7A revealed about this awareness about their spouse: *“He is the better one out of the two of us. He will personally take that time to put his phone down and be more present in the moment.”* Informant 5A expressed a similar perspective: *“The interaction in the relationship is very important. So the talking, the sharing is very important and that’s how I perceive quality time. So quality time is actually being present.”*

Informant 2B conveyed the importance of being attentive to their spouse’s needs:

I think the smartphones are a great thing. But I think that there is definitely times where they can have a negative impact on a relationship. But you just have to always be aware that you're with somebody else and you can't just be on your phone the entire time.

Respondent 6B explained the importance of quality time in a relationship: *“It’s just the two of us and you’re having a conversation with the person you’re sitting across the table from, don’t be distracted by what’s going on your phone.”*

The eight subtheme *Social Connections* is defined as the mindset of the participant when using the smartphone to maintain their relationships external to the marriage. Many participants shared that using their smartphone was important to help maintain their own interests, friendships, and familial relationships. Informant 9B reported: *“I mean, it is a connection to the outside world.”* Many of the participants used

their smartphones to connect with their individual social support systems and considered this to be a healthy activity to maintain their own individuality within the couple's relationship. Informant 10B conveyed how they manage social connections within their marriage:

I think we do we optimize the time we have together. But just being mindful to know that we're so lucky that we have so many good family members and friends that were close to. I think that helps a marriage honestly that the people they lean back on and shared relationships. But I also think you got to prioritize one on one time.

Participants shared that as they developed their system of support as a couple, using their smartphone to stay in contact with family and friends helped them to balance their distinct personal needs. Social Connections is a non-intentional outlet from play or phoneruption.

Participant 3B shared the way they used their smartphone to keep in touch with interpersonal relationships: *"Like our family and friends and stuff. There's a couple of text chains."* Informant 16A conveyed the importance of using their smartphone to keep up with others: *"So I definitely am like addicted to Instagram. I check it every day, multiple times a day and it's like all silly stuff. It's like my girlfriends or cooking."*

A related perspective is shared by respondent 15A:

Well, reading things, seeing old friends, sometimes you just miss them and the only way to connect with them is through social media. So you just go on social

media. Just read what's happening just to know what's happening, this friend has done this and it's fun.

Participant 14B shared how he and his spouse have utilized the smartphone to maintain friendships outside their marriage:

Both of us have close friends. Some of them are the same, some of them are different. I think we've both communicate by speaking with them on the phone or texting back and forth, sending stuff on Instagram and stuff like that.

Respondent 20a explains their mindset regarding social connections and smartphone use:

"I'm very close to my family, usually I talk to my parents and my mom like all the time. But I do have like a few close friends I still talk to all the time."

The ninth subtheme *Technology Monogamy* expressed itself as the mindset in which the participants shared that they maintain trust in their spouse and allowed them to use their smartphone freely. In the examples used by the participants, this trust showed up as both implicit and explicit. This can include sharing passwords, apps, and emails. In communicating this information during the interviews, the participants expressed trusting their spouses with their sharing their smartphones and did not feel a need to hide any information on their devices from their spouse. Participant 7A acknowledged: *"Trust, I'm like, there's no hidden secrets. If we bring it back to the phone like we both have each other's passwords. There's really no locking of anything."* Technology monogamy is considered bonding play by promoting mutual connection and sharing their smartphones within the marital relationship. Informant 1A explained her mindset of technology monogamy when with their spouse:

We don't go through each other's phones like this is my space and that's his space. And if he ever says, oh, hey, can I borrow your phone for something I've never like say no. So clearly, we have an open line of trust.

A similar perspective is shared by respondent 5A:

We give each other a lot of freedom because we trust each other. Like I never go into my husband's phone and he never goes into mind, even though I have his password. You know, so when he says he's going to go somewhere, I trust that exactly where he's going to be or even if he doesn't tell me where he is. I don't worry that he's going to be doing something that he shouldn't be doing. You know, so that's really, really good.

Participant 10B conveyed their thoughts on smartphone use in their marriage: “*Yeah, I mean I think the strengths are like fundamentals like transparency and trust are just not even something I even worry about.*” Informant 5B related that: “*Sure, I think that the trust is big, because we kind of implicitly trust each other, you know, not kind of spying on each other for lack of a better word.*”

The tenth subtheme *Sharing Information* is defined as the mindset that the participant has when seeking moments of connection with their spouse and is intentionally using their smartphone to share information, collaborate, and create experiences that promote an alliance and connection with their partner. Examples of these experiences for the participants included, looking up information on their smartphone to share in the moment like recipes, music, videos, posts, and taking pictures. It also included making plans with their spouse by searching for vacation spots, movies, and

restaurants. As informant 5B explained: *“So if we're doing something together like there's an activity on the phone that we're looking at, like, a place to go on vacation together. I think that's good, sharing recipes, that kind of stuff is good.”* Sharing information is considered bonding play and is a connective experience for the couple, as participant 9A related: *“Capturing important moments with the camera, that's a big one for us.”* Respondent 20A shared their mindset: *“We definitely have found ourselves, sometimes sitting next to each other, scrolling through our phone, and actually even sending a video when we're right next to each other.”* Participant 6B related a similar experience during interactions with their spouse: *“I think the only time one of us will pick up our phones is if we want to like show each other an article or something, you know, look up something that we're debating about or something.”*

Phone Rules

The third theme *Phone Rules* (n=40) (100%) developed from the participants' responses to the question, “Do you have rules for technology use when together?” Some of the participants shared that they initiated explicit rules to manage their smartphone use when in each other's presence and this was often implemented at mealtimes or when in bed.

Other participants expressed that they have implicit rules and simply understood when they should put their phone away when with their partner. The participants who had either formal or informal rules totaled (n=26) (65%). Some of these rules were negotiated and others were developed as they grew up in their families of origin and became adopted

as the couple was forming their relationship during courtship. Informant 1A explained how rules for smartphone use developed in their marital relationship:

It was always a rule from my parents, no phones at the dinner table, and when we went out there was no phones at the restaurant table. So when my husband started coming over and we started dating. It was just like an unwritten written rule.

For the remaining participants rules did not exist between the couple (n=14) (35%) but some thought it might be a good idea to develop them with their spouse. As respondent 13B simply stated: “*No, there are no rules.*” Using phone rules is a form of bonding play, a bilateral collaboration between the spouses to problem solve and put the brakes on the smartphone vehicle. This relates to the mindset of attentive. It illustrates the participants’ motivation for being more conscience of how their smartphone use is impacting quality time with their spouse. The three subthemes in phone rules are Formal Rules, Informal Rules, and No Rules. Please see table 4.

Table 4. Excerpt from codebook, phone rules theme and three subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example
Phone Rules		A guideline that some of the participants created with their spouse to define the use of the smartphone in their marriage. These rules are explicit, implicit, or do not exist between the couple. This is seen as bonding play and a bilateral collaboration to problem solve and put the brakes on the smartphone vehicle.	7B: We use it a lot. Once we go to bed, that's kind of when it's shut off time but during the rest of the time that we're together we do consistently use our cell phones.
	Formal Rules	Rules that have been discussed by both spouses and are explicitly agreed upon and instituted during specific activities. The guidelines help the couple to provide for quality time that is focused on bonding with each other.	15B: To a point where we decided to put our phones down whenever we are in the bedroom. This is the first rule that we set for ourselves that we will try as much as possible to put the phones away and to put them on silent. So that if we have to have a conversation, we have all the time in a consistent and conducive environment to have a conversation.
	Informal Rules	Boundaries and habits for the couple based on values and respect for quality time without the distraction of their smartphones. An unspoken understanding between the couple.	4B: No, I mean not rules that we've spoken about. I think both of us know that when we're eating dinner we're off of our phones. Knowing the time and place to actually be able to login is important to both of us.
	No Rules	No rules or guidelines formally or informally developed. Some participants recognized that developing some parameters would be helpful in managing smartphone use when together. Nudging to seek bonding play.	6A: No, but I think we probably should. I think it would be very helpful for us to set some ground rules on cell phone usage.

The first subtheme *Formal Rules* (n=10) (25%) is defined as explicit rules that have been discussed and developed by both spouses jointly relating to their smartphone use during time spent together. Although each spouse was interviewed separately, n=10 is equivalent to five couples, i.e., all ten were paired with their partner. These rules are verbally agreed upon and instituted during specific activities as outlined by the couple. For example, participant 15B expressed:

To a point where we decided to put our phones down whenever we are in the bedroom. This is the first rule that we set for ourselves that we will try as much as possible to put the phones away and to put them on silent. So that if we have to have a conversation, we have all the time in a consistent and conducive environment to have a conversation.

Many participants shared that they developed these rules to manage their mutual smartphone use and to help to create quality time in order to focus on each other.

Respondent 20a shared their smartphone rule: *“I mean in the house, it’s just kind of a natural thing. But when we’re out to dinner it is a rule.”* Informant 17A explained why rules were initiated in their marriage: *“If we’re going out or doing something that’s our time. That’s when the phone needs to go away because that’s time that we want to just really spend with each other.”*

Participant 19B related his experience of negotiating rules with his spouse:

Yes. I am not allowed to play games past 12 midnight. If I’m going to be playing, I should be playing in bed next to her after she goes to sleep. She posed a much

more conservative rule and I negotiated. That's the rule that we both came to agree on that.

Participant 12A stated that their smartphone rules were important when spending quality time together: *"When we go out to dinner it is no phones, while we are out eating on a date."*

The second subtheme *Informal Rules* (n=16) (40%) was understood to be the boundaries and habits that have been created implicitly by the couple based on their personal values, respect for time spent with each other, and the intention to focus on each other without distraction. Although each spouse was interviewed separately, n=16 is equivalent to eight couples, i.e., all sixteen were paired with their partner. Informant 4B conveyed the understanding shared with their spouse:

No, I mean not rules that we've spoken about. I think both of us know that when we're eating dinner we're off of our phones. Knowing the time and place to actually be able to login is important to both of us.

This emerged for the participants as an unspoken understanding to manage smartphone use when together. Respondent 5B reported how smartphone use is managed in their relationship: *"We'll kind of try to make an effort to do less like if we're eating together and grabbing lunch, for example, we'll try our best to not be on our phones, but I wouldn't call it an official rule."*

A related perspective is shared by respondent 3B:

I don't think it would be something that either one of us would feel good about so it's an unwritten rule. I think just based on our shared instincts, I guess. So far, if

we've been out and saw a couple on their phones at dinner, it was something that would neither of us would find attractive or interesting.

Participant 16A revealed the implicit awareness shared in her marriage: *“I wouldn't say rules. I think it's kind of understood that we're not using our phones while we're having any meals or doing any sort of like quality time activities together.”*

The third subtheme *No Rules* (n=14) (35%) included the participants in the study who did not develop guidelines for their smartphone use. Similar to formal rules, although each spouse was interviewed separately, n=14 is equivalent to seven couples, i.e., all fourteen were paired with their partner. They conveyed that even though they did not have rules, some had an awareness of when smartphones should be out or put away. Participant 11A explained: *“No, just a few times and I said stuff at restaurants, but it wasn't even like a big deal.”*

Informant 18B related his experience when spending time together with their spouse:

No, we don't have any official rules, but we do bring up the specific facts. Hey, let's watch an episode of Game of Thrones and not go on our phones or even if we do, then it's in a non-aggressive way. Hey, put your phone away, you know, something like that. But we don't have specific rules about times when we don't use our phone or anything like that.

Some participants who did not have rules felt that they should consider developing them when we discussed this topic during the study as informant 6A shared: *“No, but I think we probably should. I think it would be very helpful for us to set some ground rules on*

cell phone usage.” A similar viewpoint was also described by respondent 7A: “*Not really, we never really put forth those boundaries. I really think there probably should be some ground rules on when we should have our phones together.*” These participants have not developed boundaries or habits to regulate smartphone use within their marriage but instead when seeking quality time, ask their spouse to put their smartphone away.

Interface

The fourth theme *Interface* became obvious while interviewing respondents as they expressed the different ways in which they communicate with each other and how the smartphone is actually involved in this connection. When quantified, the total sum for each subtheme equaled more than (n >40) (>100%) because participants used their smartphone multiple ways to communicate and to put the brakes on their smartphone use. All the participants shared this after being asked, “Is there a way in which smartphone use has impacted communicating your needs to your partner?” During the interviews, participants described different communication styles. These styles broke down into two distinct behaviors that described the way that they used their smartphone, that is whether they communicated directly or indirectly to their spouse. Depending on the participants’ mindset or specific need, they shared that they used the smartphone to deflect how they express feelings, manage challenges and conflicts or to avoid directly communicating topics that could lead to an argument. Other respondents used the smartphone to connect and keep in touch with their spouse during the day when apart.

Although when seeking quality time, all of the informants shared that whether via their formal or informal rules as well as when asking for a face-to-face conversation, they

put away their smartphones to honor their spouse's request. The smartphone was employed as a facilitator in the relationship to either manage the participants' feelings, to convey uncomfortable viewpoints, or to communicate and feel connected when apart. Participant 16B reflected on the impact of smartphone use when trying to correspond with their spouse:

Verbally, so I say the biggest communication discrepancy is I hate text messaging and my wife can have a full conversation via text and I prefer not to have that. I'd rather have it in person. Whether it's positive or negative. I would rather have an in-person conversation.

Many participant's conveyed that when they needed quality time and to dialogue with their spouse, they would put their smartphones away and connect with each, as informant 17A related: *"We don't communicate over the phone or anything like that about our feelings or anything like that, we try to do that verbally."* There are three subthemes in interface, Mediator, Synchronous Communication, and Asynchronous Communication. Please see table 5.

Table 5. Excerpt from codebook, interface theme and three subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example
Interface		The participant uses the smartphone to convey their mindset with their spouse. Depending on each participant's need, the smartphone is used as a mediator to avoid verbal expression of feelings, to connect when apart, and by its removal, to manage the amount of quality time between the couple.	5B: We do communicate via texting and calling each other when we're not physically together but as far as communicating needs unrelated to that I would imagine that it kind of prohibits us from doing that as productively as we should. 10A: If we're talking, then we're talking and I'm not my phone and I expect him do the same, which he does, for the most part.
	Mediator	The participant retreats from direct communication of their feelings and uses the smartphone as mediator to manage their frustration and avoid verbal confrontation. This is an intentional outlet.	7B: I would definitely say that sometimes using the cell phone is just easier somehow to communicate with my wife when you don't want to say something to her face that might not come up the right way, so you kind of just text it to her. But yeah, I think cell phones in general have impacted and kind of come into conflict with the socialization of marriages.
	Synchronous Communication	The participant is looking for connection with their spouse and their communication is based on face-to-face conversation. The spouses are not using their smartphones in order to engage without distraction and to focus on quality time with each other. This encourages attachment towards the relationship and bonding play.	19B: Depends on the need. I mean, basic need, a text message or phone call. When it comes to something that's a much more deeper need, I have a face-to-face conversation with her.
	Asynchronous Communication	The participant is utilizing their smartphone to connect and check-in with their spouse via text or phone call when physically apart to share updates and communicate. This encourages attachment towards the relationship and bonding play.	8b: Text really does keep us more connected when we're not together.

The first subtheme *Mediator* (n=7) (18%) is defined as when the participant retreats from direct expression of needs and instead uses the smartphone as a mediator to manage their discomfort by using it to text their feelings or relational issues that they fear may result in a verbal argument with their spouse. Participant 7B reported their experience in using their smartphone as a mediator with their spouse:

I guess because there's no interruptions. So I guess you can just kind of say everything that you want, at one time and not be interrupted by somebody, or you don't have to see the emotional look on their face when you say something. So I guess it's easier just to text it and hey, this is what it is.

The respondents shared that they intentionally utilized the phone to deflect or avoid conversations that they would rather not have in person or express that they are not in the mood to talk. Participant 19B conveyed his use of deflection:

I think as far as communicating my needs to my partner. When I get upset or depressed or whatever, I'm a huge gamer, so that's what I do. And so, communicating that I'm upset, it actually does a very good job communicating that I'm upset to her.

When used as a mediator, the smartphone is a vehicle that facilitates avoidance of quality communication and thus interrupts an opportunity for a quality connection. This is an intentional outlet from play or text and describes a participant's mindset as disconnection. Informant 6B explained how they have used their smartphone to avoid possible face-to-face arguments:

Actually, I think it probably has, just because texting can be used if you don't want the verbal confrontation. If you want to text to try to brush it under the rug, a little bit. You can text an issue, instead of addressing it when you got home later or something.

A related perspective is shared by respondent 3A: *“It's a way to like to deflect from doing that, you know, when there might be a source of conflict or disagreement, rather than addressing it. You can just sort of give yourself a timeout.”*

The second subtheme in the interface theme is *Synchronous Communication* (n=40) (100%). The participants' shared that synchronous communication occurs when seeking face to face communication with their spouse by putting the brakes on their smartphones use. The participant's related that when seeking quality time with their partners that they were cognizant of putting their smartphones away in order to have intimate conversations that were focused on meeting their emotional needs without distraction. Informant 16A shared their feelings:

I'm a big texter so unless it's something really important then I'll wait to chat about it. I have no problem saying, hey, can you put your phone down and let's chat and he is fine with that. I never feel that his smartphone is a priority over me.

The participants explained that they were looking to engage with their spouse, focus on communication that helped meet intimate needs and maintain their intimate connection. This is bonding play and an active reciprocal shared attachment experience between the couple. The mindset for the participants is in the category of attentive. Respondent 10A conveyed an example of an interaction with their spouse: *“If we're talking, then we're*

talking and I'm not my phone and I expect him do the same, which he does, for the most part." Informant 20a simply expressed: *"I always think face to face is much better.*

Participant 19B revealed when they look for synchronous communication within their marriage: *"Depends on the need. I mean, basic need, a text message or phone call."*

When it comes to something that's a much more deeper need, I have a face-to-face conversation with her." Respondent 14A expressed a similar viewpoint: *"I think that our time together definitely helps us grow each day in our relationship. Interactions would include talking on the couch together, definitely times we are not on our phones."*

Participant 13A related: *"For me quality time is mainly just feeling like I'm being listened to that we can have a meaningful conversation."*

The third subtheme in the Interface theme is *Asynchronous Communication* (n=24) (60%). The participants' conveyed that when physically apart they utilize the smartphone to check-in and connect with each other via text or phone call. Although this study focused on smartphone use when in each other's presence, the participants added this information in response to the breadth of their smartphone use regarding the topic of communication and it was important for it to be included. Respondent 8b explained why they use asynchronous communication with their spouse: *"Text really does keep us more connected when we're not together."* Using the smartphone in this manner enabled the participants' to share updates, communicate household, personal, and family needs. This is bonding play and is an active use of the smartphone by the participants' to magnify its object value and seek connection with their spouse when separate. The participant's mindset is in the category of sharing information. Respondent 5B expressed how asynchronous connection is different from quality time:

We do communicate via texting and calling each other when we're not physically together but as far as communicating needs unrelated to that I would imagine that it kind of prohibits us from doing that as productively as we should.

Informant 7A related the importance of asynchronous communication in their newlywed relationship:

It also can be a huge asset and a keystone in maintaining that connection to that person if scheduling is an issue. It has its good points and bad points. Especially just touching base with each other, as I mentioned we are on completely opposite schedules, so just like, hey, how you doing, how's everything and like sharing pictures of our little one, it's just really our way of, I guess, bonding for a lack of time and us trying to make up the interpersonal connection that we have the phone gets to really substitute that.

Participant 16A stated how using their smartphone when apart helps to feel connected to their spouse during the day:

Yes, I would say that I like constantly texting my husband about different things I need or want or that we have to get done or plans. It's something we're always doing, like we're tagging each other in really funny little memes on Instagram making each other smile.

Circular Use

The fifth theme *Circular Use* (n=40) (100%) was appreciated as the participants responded to the question, “Is your response to your partner’s smartphone use circular?”

Informants shared whether or not their spouse's smartphone use influenced them to use their device when in each other's presence. Some of the participants realized that they got interested in looking at their smartphone when their spouse's attention was directed toward their device instead of towards them. Many viewed it as an incentive to use their own smartphone. When their partner was engaged with their device, they felt at liberty to be distracted like their spouse with an activity/entertainment, an instinct/curiosity to see what is going on in the world, or as their own escape. Other participants did not feel that this had an effect on whether or not they used their smartphones. These respondents were comfortable with being focused on a different activity. Still others were not impacted because their spouses didn't use their phones as much, so it did not have a significant effect on their decision to use their smartphones. Participant 8b shared their experience of circular smartphone use: *"If he pulls out his phone, I do feel it does give me more permission to pull out my phone. That doesn't happen a lot but I have noticed that actually."* Individual smartphone use was either dependent or independent of their partner's use. There are two subthemes in circular use, Mirroring and Self-Governing. Please see table 6.

Table 6. Excerpt from codebook, circular use theme and two subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example
Circular Use		The participant's smartphone use is related to their spouse's smartphone use and whether or not it influences them to engage with their own smartphone device when together. This is considered side by side play	8b: If he pulls out his phone, I do feel it does give me more permission to pull out my phone. That doesn't happen a lot but I have noticed that actually.
	Mirroring	The participant's use of the smartphone is dependent on their spouse's smartphone use when together. Their spouse's smartphone use acts as an influencer to use their device. This is considered side by side play.	14B: Yes, I think when one of us on the phone, it definitely makes the other person pick up their phone. I think it's just a good time that I know, she's on her phone, I know I can be on my phone without causing any conflict. I think it's also just when she gets on hers. I say, okay, its time check in on things on the phone, like email and social media.
	Self-Governing	The participant's smartphone use is independent from their partner's use when together. This is a non-intentional outlet.	18A: No, I use it if I want to use it. I don't think it's dependent upon him.

The first subtheme, *Mirroring* is the participant's dependent response to their spouse's smartphone use when together (n=33) (83%). Mirroring are moments when use of the smartphone reflects their partner's use and influences a shift in the participant's mindset to begin using their smartphone when they had no prior inclination. Informant 6B reported their mindset: *"Yes, I think when I see her on hers it definitely incentivizes me to use mine. If she's distracted, then I can be distracted too."* This interaction between spouses is considered side by side play through mirroring behavior and can relate to the mindset of boredom in response to their partner's smartphone use. Participant 14B revealed why their smartphone use is dependent on their spouse's use:

Yes, I think when one of us on the phone, it definitely makes the other person pick up their phone. I think it's just a good time that I know, she's on her phone, I know I can be on my phone without causing any conflict. I think it's also just when she gets on hers. I say, okay, its time check in on things on the phone, like email and social media.

Respondent 5A shared their thoughts: *"If I don't have anything else to do, like, I'm gonna take my phone out too."* Participant 3B related their experience of mirroring their spouse's smartphone use:

Some of its just like human mirroring of each other. I'm not sure what to do with my body or myself for a minute. She's looking at news and I'll open my phone and look at news because it's like you just do what the other person is doing, you know, I mean, you don't know what to do with yourself right there, sometimes you just mimic each other.

Participant 1A conveyed how side by side play is mirrored in their marriage: *“I’d say that he plays games on his phone and when he plays games, I’m on Facebook or talking on it or texting.”*

The second subtheme in circular use is *Self-Governing* (n=7) (17%) and is defined as the participant’s use of their smartphone independent from their spouse’s use when together. Participant 13B conveyed: *“No. It’s asynchronous, it’s driven by my own personal needs at that time.”* Self-governing is considered a non-intentional outlet from play or phoneruption. The mindset of the participant may be detox bubble, work-related, distraction, disconnection, or socialization. Participant 12B reported on the independent use of their smartphone when with their spouse:

No, not at all. Usually if I’m on my phone it’s for a point or a reason. But if she’s on the phone and she’s watching her show sometimes I do find it intriguing, so I even put down my phone. It doesn’t affect me in any way if she’s on her phone or not.

Informant 18B explained his mindset: *“I personally am trying to not use the smartphone as much, so even if I see her using it that doesn’t interfere with me still trying to not be on my phone so much.”* A similar viewpoint on self-governed smartphone use is shared by respondent 7A: *“No, I wouldn’t say it circular. I think it’s really self-reliant on whatever we personally have to get done.”* This group of participants related that the use of their smartphone was self-governed and independent from their partner’s use when in each other’s presence.

Chapter Summary

To summarize, the findings in this study indicate that the smartphone can be used to either magnify or minimize the value of the couple's interaction when together. The five themes that were illuminated in this analysis were, Vehicle, Mindset, Phone Rules, Interface, and Circular Use. The themes were developed based on the appreciation of the common experience of all the participants within their newlywed marriage in relation to their smartphone use (n=40). The results indicated that the smartphone is a vehicle which can be used to transport the participants to a specific mindset. Depending on the mindset, the smartphone can be experienced as an object of connection and shared experiences or as a distraction and an outlet that creates episodes of disconnection. It was understood that the participants experienced the smartphone as an instrument through which something could be communicated, expressed, shared, or facilitated between the couple when together. These interactions were conveyed in the theme vehicle which were expressed in the four subthemes, side by side play, bonding play, outlet from play, and putting the brakes on. Bonding play is active bonding; side by side play is passive bonding; outlets from play can be either intentional and non-intentional disrupters to bonding. When seeking quality time with each other, the couple mutually agree to put the brakes on the use of their smartphone and put their devices away.

The participants used their smartphone object in reflection of their mindset. The theme mindset was identified, along with ten subthemes. Depending on their needs, the spouses' smartphone was utilized to express their emotional and cognitive state, which then informed the type of interaction that they created with their partner. There are six

mindsets that influences the spouse's use of their smartphone as an outlet from play and the other five mindsets encourage bonding play and connection between the couple.

Many of the participants were consciously motivated to manage the use of their devices and plan for a break from smartphone interference in their marriage. It was found that 65% of the informants created rules in order to manage the negative impact of their devices in order to provide for quality time focused on each other. The theme phone rules had three subthemes which included, formal rules, informal rules, and no rules. The remaining 35% of informants who did not develop formal or informal rules requested that their spouse put their phone away when they sought emotional connection and quality time.

The theme interface described the different communication styles of the respondents and included the two subthemes, mediator, synchronous communication, and asynchronous communication. The smartphone was found to impact communication when used as a non-verbal mediator to deflect expressing their needs or to indicate the desire to disconnect from their spouse. The findings also revealed that the participants used their phones asynchronously to connect when apart. Conversely, when seeking quality time and synchronous attention, the couple removed the smartphone from their shared interaction.

Additionally the theme circular use was appreciated when the informants shared the effect of the smartphone as a motivating factor in the decision to use their device. Circular use had two subthemes, mirroring and self-governing. Some participants were found to mirror their spouse's smartphone use by engaging in dependent side by side

play, while others used their devices independently and self-governed their use determined only by their individual needs.

The participants found that it was not the amount of time that their spouse spent on their phone but their need in the moment that created the phone being a distraction or an object to share. Spending time together, balancing needs, creating quality time, being realistic about their own and their partner's smartphone use and minding the gap that developed when smartphone use created a disconnect between the couple allowed them to acknowledge and work on prioritizing their time spent together focusing on the relationship and not on their technology.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

This study set out to explore the experience of smartphone use on newlywed couples when in each other's presence and to understand how smartphones are part of the newlywed couple's interaction. Additionally, this study set out to investigate the smartphone's effect on patterns of communication, the couple's ability to attune to shared experiences, meet each other's needs, and maintain their developing marital bond. The newlywed time period is an important, foundational phase of marriage and technological changes have become part of our culture. Smartphone technology has become ubiquitous to individuals' lives, enabling instant and spontaneous access to the world. According to Pew Research (2018), 96% of Americans own a cellphone, and of that percentage 81% are smartphones. The newlywed period was the focus of this study because according to the literature, it is an important foundational phase of marriage. "The interpersonal problems that emerge in the early years of marriage are particularly important" (Tallman & Hsiao, 2004, p. 173). The phenomenon of the smartphone and its impact on a newlywed couples' relationships is an under-researched subject. Smartphones are impacting the relational connection that "in essence, partners may be in physical proximity to each other, but are not fully present for each other" (Robert, 2017, p.72). The newlywed couple not only needs to learn to connect within their own couple's milieu but to manage external challenges and intrusions, like technology, that can influence how they perceive and relate to one another.

Studies that have defined their research on smartphones have included participants that were college students in relationships, (e.g. Lapierre, 2019; Lapierre & Lewis, 2018) and randomly assigned adults, (e.g. Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; Misra, Cheng, Genevie, & Yuan, 2016). Only one study has examined newlywed couples and technology, and that research focused on internet use (Kerkhof, Finkenauer, & Muusses, 2011). There is nothing specific in the literature to date regarding the impact of smartphone use on the developing relationship in the newlywed phase of marriage.

This study contributes to the previous research that has provided an understanding of technology use within intimate relationships. This present investigation found that the smartphone plays a major role in the patterns of interaction and shared experiences of the newlywed couple. Additionally, the smartphone is an object that is ever present, as though a third spouse. However, the smartphone cannot function without its user. The results clearly indicate that the smartphone is a vehicle that can either facilitate this developing bond or accelerate distance and act as a temporary outlet from intimacy. Furthermore, each individual within the relationship is the driver of the smartphone vehicle and thus the smartphone is often a functioning part of a newlywed couple's interaction. The user's needs and mindset drive the use of the smartphone. The results indicated that the smartphone functioned as a neutral reflection of its user by transporting the individual to a specific mindset or as a means of expression to communicate their emotional state to their spouse.

It became evident from the data that there are three basic ways that the smartphone was found to impact a couple's interaction during their shared experiences. The first and the second are enhancers of bonding and the third, to the contrary acts as an

outlet from intimacy. The smartphone acts as a facilitator when associated with time spent together (side by side play) or used to share and connect with their spouse (bonding play). The analysis revealed that this bonding was expressed both passively and actively. The passive action of the couple's side by side play and solitary yet mutual scrolling on their smartphones contributed to them spending time together in the same room. These findings are directly in line with a qualitative study by Miller-Ott & Kelly (2015), who found that when couples were spending unstructured time together, participants expected cell phone use would occur especially in more established relationships, i.e., beyond dating, though none of their sample were married. Although they were not fully engaged, it was a positive experience for the couples, yet not considered quality or focused time with each other.

The second type of enhancer is an active and reciprocally shared bonding experience. In this instance, the couple utilizes the smartphone to interact, share, and plan activities together. It was found that using the smartphone this way magnifies the value of these shared occurrences between the couple and enhances feelings of closeness and connection. Similarly Roberts and Greenberg (2002) found in their study of couple's interactions that, "the regular enactment of behavioral exchanges that lead to experiences of relational intimacy will serve to maintain the climate of security, trust, and acceptance that characterize well-functioning relations" (pp. 120-121).

Additionally, it was found that the smartphone can be used as an outlet. The smartphone was experienced as a momentary barrier to the relationship, whether intentional or non-intentional. The study by Roberts and David (2016) found that the use of a cell phone in the presence of a partner created conflict, as the partner experienced

being “phubbed” which negatively impacted the partner’s relationship satisfaction and ultimately their personal well-being. Although spouses experienced moments of tension or frustration when their spouse was occupied with their smartphone, contrary to the findings of Roberts and David (2016), none of the participants expressed being dissatisfied with their relationship or feeling emotionally deprived by their spouse’s smartphone use. Outlets do not enhance or build the connection when the couple is together and therefore, this study has demonstrated that when a partner uses their smartphone intentionally, it is a means of acting out and expressing negative emotions toward their partner. As an outlet, the smartphone can be used as a non-verbal signal to indicate to their spouse the need to disconnect. A textit (technology-exit) is defined as the action of an individual using their smartphone to avoid engaging with their spouse. Non-intentional use of the smartphone reflects a mindset of distraction, preoccupation, or needing to unwind. Phoneruptions (phone-disruption) are brief moments when the spouse is distracted by their smartphone impacting their ability to be present and attentive to the relationship. In a related paper, Lenhart & Duggan (2014) demonstrated that, “25% of cell phone owners in a marriage or partnership have felt their spouse or partner was distracted by their cell phone when together” (p. 2). Interestingly, this author’s study revealed that the amount of time spent by a partner on their smartphone was not viewed by their spouse as an outlet from connection but rather it was when the smartphone was used.

A similar conclusion was reached by Lapierre & Lewis (2018) “... the actual time spent with smartphones does not directly affect relationships; rather, it the psychological sense of needing the device that is negatively linked to relationships attitudes and

satisfaction” (p. 393). That is, if a spouse needed their partner and their partner was unavailable because they were focused on their smartphone, it was seen as a disconnecter. Therefore, when used as an outlet, this resulted in the inability of the spouse to get their needs met, resulting in frustration and disappointment. This current study showed that the smartphone does not make a partner want to escape but is convenient and makes it easier for them to do it. A similar pattern of results was obtained by Turkle (2011) who noted that, “Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other” (p. 1). Furthermore, the smartphone as the third spouse can be used to create an imbalance in the momentary connection between spouses, when one partner chooses to disconnect. Ultimately, the smartphone can be used an entrance and facilitator to connection, but also an outlet or distraction, taking attention away from their interaction with each other.

Two concepts of the British school of Object Relations were used to outline the findings of the newlywed couples’ experiences of smartphone use in their marriage. “A complex interchange between what is inside and what is outside begins, and continues throughout the individual’s life, and constitutes the main relationship of the individual to the world” (Winnicott, 1990, p. 72). Object Relations theory explores the process of how people experience themselves as separate and independent from others while at the same time needing significant attachment to others. Thus, managing these opposite needs can cause internal conflict. This study’s results demonstrated that depending on the individual’s mindset, a spouse may use the smartphone to momentarily mitigate their needs in relation to the other and therefore, the smartphone can facilitate side by side play, as they are together, yet separate or by disconnecting and utilizing their devices as

an outlet. “Play provides an organization for the initiation of emotional relationships... Play can easily be seen to link to the individuals relation to inner reality with the same individuals relation to external or shared reality” (Winnicott, 1964, p. 145). The individuals within the partnership use the smartphone as an extension of the internal self and to share something that is meaningful with their partner, who is outside and separate. This occurs when the couple is engaged in bonding play by sharing information on their smartphone with each other. The spouse’s mindset influences their use of their smartphone and can be a motivating factor that drives the individual to either bond or disconnect. In line with the ideas of British Object Relations, it can be concluded that the research findings in this study strongly support that the smartphone is an object that can help a spouse manage their emotional discomfort in the relationship or be used to create a shared experience between the couple. There are six mindsets that influences the spouse’s use of their smartphone as an outlet from play and are as follows: boredom, distraction, detox-bubble, work-related, disconnection, and social connections. The other five mindsets encourage bonding play and connection and are the following: nudging, attentive, technology- monogamy, and sharing-information.

The results clearly indicated that quality time was a collective priority for all the couples in the study. It was recognized that putting the brakes on their smartphone use allowed the couple to spend time together, share connective experiences, focus on each other without distraction, and additionally helped to maintain their emotional bond. Many couples developed rules for managing smartphone use when together, as they recognized the need to remove the smartphone as a distraction from their time spent connecting to each other. They put the brakes on the smartphone vehicle. This study found that in

seeking quality time together, in learning to meet each other's needs and in order to manage feelings of disconnection, many couples developed rules for handling smartphone use when together. Seeking quality time was intentional and conscious as they cooperatively negotiated explicit and implicit rules. As Tallman and Hsiao (2004) found, "couple cooperation is a useful strategy in resolving interpersonal problems and that marital satisfaction and mutual trust are antecedent conditions for fostering cooperative behaviors" (p. 185). Some couples did not have any rules but were respectful when their spouse asked them to put their smartphone away and prioritize time with them. When this subject was explored in this study, it had an impact on the couples who had no rules as they expressed that they would consider developing some guidelines when wanting to be engaged and focused only on each other. As the newlywed relationship was one of the main foci of this study, attachment theory was used as a guiding framework when analyzing the data. Attachment theory posits that human beings have a proclivity towards creating strong affectional bonds to emotionally specific individuals. "For a relationship between two individuals to proceed harmoniously each must be aware of the other's point of view, his goals, feelings, and intentions, and must so adjust his own behavior that some alignment of goals is negotiated" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 131). The marital bond is a reciprocal attachment relationship. Ainsworth (1989) stated, "In enduring marriages, shared experiences are pleasant to talk about and connote a basis of mutual understanding that, in turn, contributes to security and mutual trust." Based on Attachment theory, this study illustrated how the newlywed couple can develop strategies to get their needs met during shared experiences while managing their smartphone use to build and maintain a strong relational connection.

These findings revealed that when using the smartphone, the couples had different communication styles. These patterns broke down into two distinct behaviors that described whether they communicated directly or indirectly with their spouse. This study further revealed that depending on their mindset or specific need, a spouse used the smartphone to deflect expressing feelings and managed conflicts via text as a way to avoid verbally addressing an issue with their partner. Lavner and Bradbury (2012) found that a particular challenge for couples during the newlywed phase of marriage includes managing the amount of negative communication exchanges between them. There were similar findings in my study in that some of the newlyweds focused their attention on their smartphone, using it as a mediator to forestall communicating and taking a time out from issues that could lead to an argument. This author's study revealed that the participants used their phones asynchronously to connect with each other when apart and share updates about their day. This finding is in line with the previous study by Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, and Grant (2011) who found that couples when apart and who texted to express positive communication and affection experienced it as a connective act, although any negative communication was viewed as having a hurtful impact on their relationship. Despite the fact that this current study was not meant to address use of the smartphone when the newlyweds were remote from each other, it was so clear that it played a large role in that aspect of their marriage that it simply emphasized its importance when they were together.

This study found evidence for circular use of the smartphone as a pattern of interaction with the couples. This suggests that an individual's smartphone use was either dependent or independent of their partner's use. When a spouse was busy on their

smartphone, a majority of individuals found that they would mirror them and use their device as well. In this dependent reaction, they felt justified to use their device as if it granted them permission because their spouse was preoccupied and not communicating with them in that moment. It is interesting to note that mirroring is another example of side by side play between the couple. However, analysis of the data also revealed that only a small minority felt that their smartphone use was independent from that of their spouse's. The use of their smartphone was a choice that was self-governed and driven by their personal needs at that time. Additionally, the spouse's independent use of their smartphone can be characterized as an outlet from play from their partner. Although Wang (2017) in his study of married Chinese adults found that partner phubbing was a factor that negatively impacted relationship satisfaction, this study did not reach a similar conclusion.

Unexpected Findings

Interestingly, this researcher was surprised at how well the newlywed couples managed their smartphone use given that the literature implied the negative impact on relational and personal well-being. The primary interest for undertaking this study was based on the experiences shared by couples in this investigator's clinical practice. The general shared experience of these clients was that smartphone use had an impact on contentment within their relationships, though it is important to note that this is a cohort that presents with marriages in crisis and long-term unresolved issues. Overall the majority of the previous literature came to the conclusion that technology and smartphone use negatively impacted relationship satisfaction. Most unexpectedly, this study did not confirm those findings. This study sought to identify the experiences that newlywed

couples subscribe to smartphone use in their marriages. Most of the participants in this study grew up with the smartphone and thus had experienced other relationships (friendships and dating) while using their devices prior to their marriage. Therefore, informants came in with their own thoughts, beliefs, and experiences regarding how they perceived smartphone technology in their life from their past interactions and how they behaved with that technology. Sixty-five percent of the participant's interviewed for this study either negotiated rules with their spouse for smartphone use or came in with some boundaries for technology use based on experiences with their families of origin or on their beliefs and value systems. Taking into account the concept of phone rules may account for the findings that support that when the newlywed couple either employed rules or made quality time a priority by putting the brakes on their smartphone consumption, smartphone use did not have a negative effect on their feelings of attachment to each other.

Despite the fact that it was not the aim of this research to explore a spouse's attitude, the significant finding that a person's mindset effected their smartphone use illuminated the reason why individuals use their smartphone object in the moment when with their spouse. The smartphone in its basic function is a phone and internet communicator all in one, yet it is also an object which can be shared as an activity together or be put aside when the couple want to focus on quality time shared without distraction. The knowledge that a spouse's state of mind can either lead to connection or disconnection via the use of their smartphone, may help to provide for a richer understanding of what can influence both positive and negative interactions within a relationship. Newlywed couples have to manage adjustments to sharing a life together

and the mindset is an important concept to consider during this stage of their marriage in negotiating the ubiquity provided by the smartphone. This study suggests the importance of understanding a spouse's mindset as a motivating factor for smartphone use during shared interactions in order for the couple to better acknowledge each other's needs and support their developing marital bond.

Although types of attachment were not measured in this study, the overall response by the participants was that their partner's smartphone use when together did not have an impact on their sense of connection. Only one participant reported that they felt a momentary sense of disconnection from their spouse and once the smartphone was removed from their interaction, the feeling of disengagement was resolved and the bonding maintenance was immediately reestablished.

When examining demographic profiles, there were no differences found based on gender within the couple or whether or not the marriage was same sex or heterosexual in this study's findings. The smartphone is an object that is gender neutral but is also an external component to the couple's relational interactions. Each individual within the relationship is the driver of the smartphone vehicle and as the results indicated, the user's needs and mindset drive the use of the smartphone. Although, there may be many characterizations relating to the smartphone and the meaning an individual gives to it, the couple's experience is shaped by each individual and the preferences that they give to their use of technology within the relationship.

Strengths and Limitations

This research used a large qualitative sample and a wide range with regard to the newlywed time period of one to four years of marriage. Both members of each couple were interviewed, allowing for the individual accounting of both spouses in this sample. Despite this strength, limitations need to be addressed. With regard to the sample, the majority (95%) of the informants were under the age of forty; therefore, these individuals have had a familiarity with both the cellphone and the smartphone. Moreover, they were used to contending with technology in their daily lives prior to marriage. These findings may not be generalizable to all newlywed couples. Additionally, couples who are past the newlywed stage, may have a marriage that preexisted the smartphone and thus developed their smartphones habits within the framework of those conditions. Another limitation may involve the lack of diversity with regard to the socio-economic status of the participants, as 100% of the participants had a total combined income that was greater than \$50,000 per year. Thus they had the financial ability to own a smartphone and contribute their experiences to this study. The author considered the possibility of selection bias as participants volunteered to do this study and that may indicate that they were comfortable talking about their marriage because it was a healthy relationship. Further evidence of this selection bias may be that it excluded couples who were in marital counseling.

Social Work and Practice Implications

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the findings that couples can use their smartphone as a tool to either enhance bonding or to create a momentary imbalance in their connection as an outlet. As discussed, this is due to the fact that the

smartphone is a vehicle that is influenced by the individual's mindset. These findings also support that when the couple either employ rules or learn to manage their smartphone use by having respect for their spouse and making quality time a priority in their relationship, smartphone use does not have a negative effect on their connection.

The social worker can help couples learn to negotiate technology as one of many distractions in their life and relationship. The topic of smartphone use and the role it plays in the couple's relationship should be a part of the discussion and processing during counseling. As this study described, if the couple works in tandem on the relationship, they can manage disruptors and learn to negotiate goals and get their needs met as they maintain their bond. In a qualitative study by Morgan et al. (2016) the theme, "distraction from the moment," emphasized that participants experienced their partner as being distracted when using technology in their presence and viewed this negatively (p.690). Additionally, social workers can expand their assessment and evaluation of their client systems (both couples and individuals) by including how smartphone technology relates to maintaining their social networks and support systems. Social workers can begin a dialogue with their clients and assist them in addressing how to use technology. Ultimately, the challenge is to help the couple figure out how to use smartphone technology to enhance their relationships and not degrade their time spent together.

Developing an understanding of the smartphone's impact on each client system is vital, as technology is a part of our daily lives. Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma, and Raita (2012) found their results drew a distinction between smartphones and laptops, "In comparing laptops and smartphones, their availability as a physical cue is significantly different – smartphones are available and used more often throughout the day and are

used more in terms of total usage time” (p. 113). The accessibility and size of the smartphone, along with the features it provides, is different from all other devices, thus creating a more intimate and dependent relationship with it. It is important for social workers to understand each client’s relationship with technology and how it relates to their mindset. During assessment and intervention, the social worker must consider the impact that its use may have on their relationships. In addressing issues of disconnection and communication, clinicians can help each partner to better understand their thoughts and feelings based on their smartphone use as an outlet in the marriage in order to reduce its inhibition of attunement, communication, and connection.

In preparation for marriage, including the topic of smartphone use would assist couples in identifying their expectations regarding technology use and communication styles. Additionally, smartphone use should be strongly considered in programs for couples who engage in pre-marital counseling whether through a religious affiliation, such as Pre-Cana, a pre-marital seminar, relationship workshop, or pre-marital counseling with a psychotherapist. Additionally, it would be a beneficial topic for family therapists to explore the overall implication of the role that smartphone use plays in parent-child relationships and to address guidelines about using the smartphone within the family system.

Social worker clinicians can act as effective partners when working with couples as well as individual clients by using treatment that is effective and empirically supported. Therefore, addressing the role that the smartphone plays in a client’s life and their relationships can help to provide them with agency and recognize the importance and centrality of human relationships (NASW, 2017).

Future Research

The strengths and limitations described above lead to considerations regarding future research. Further studies could benefit from exploring the use of the smartphone at different stages of a couple's relationship, particularly marriages that predated the release of the smartphone. It would be useful to explore the experiences of a mature marriage and smartphone use with regard to their interpersonal styles of communication and learn if there is an impact that is in contrast to their newlywed counterparts. If the selection bias with regard to exclusion criteria is significant in this study, it would be enlightening to investigate newlyweds that are in couple's counseling to see if there are any differences compared with those that have not sought relationship therapy. This could lead to therapeutic interventions based on the habits developed by those couples that are doing well. In other words, one could utilize the information derived in the current study and see if it can be employed to help less well adapted couples use their smartphones when they are together along with preventative interventions in programs such as Pre-Cana and pre-marital counseling. Another study could investigate the association of an individual's mindset and the evolution of the habits that form when using their smartphone that are developed prior to the formation of an intimate relationship and how it impacts their marital interactions. It is important to be cognizant of the fact that the smartphone is here to stay and studying how it can improve relationships is paramount.

Conclusion

This study offers support in recognizing that the smartphone is a neutral reflection of its user and depending on the individual's mindset is a vehicle that facilitates bonding or accelerates outlets within the newlywed marriage. As the results indicated, the user's

needs and mindset drive the use of the smartphone. The unexpected finding that smartphone use is related to an individual's mindset provides important knowledge regarding attunement and closeness in relational interactions. When in each other's presence, understanding when a partner should tune in or text out can offer spouses opportunities that foster attunement to each other and help to support their relational attachment. The couple's shared experience is shaped by each individual and the preference that they give to their use of technology within the relationship. Each individual within the relationship is the driver of the smartphone vehicle and thus the smartphone is often a functioning part of a newlywed couple's interaction.

This finding can encourage spouses to be more aware and understand their mindset, which can help to manage expectations in their marital relationship and enhance quality time when together.

These results clearly demonstrate significant evidence for newlyweds to recognize their individual and relational needs in order to manage their smartphone use so that it does not interfere with the shared experiences that contribute to their developing bond. This research has provided information that stresses the importance of helping couples exchange their seeking of connection to their devices in exchange for live and conscious connection to their partner.

From understanding their collective experiences, the participants viewed the smartphone as an object of their attention and that their smartphone was present and with them often when together with their spouses. As we currently live in the information age, anticipating new and transformative changes must be recognized as smartphone technology has profoundly impacted the method and meaning of communication within

relationships. Recognizing that focused attention can help partners be cognizant of each other's needs when moments arise between them is paramount. Therefore, managing smartphone use may provide experiences that promote mutual reciprocity when together, and thus build a secure foundation in their marital relationship.

This paper has demonstrated that the smartphone can in fact be used to facilitate bonding yet also allow for a momentary outlet between the couple when that is the mindset of its user.

Findings from this study conceptualize that the smartphone could act as a potential uniter between the couple when the couple use their smartphone in moments of shared exchanges of play together. Keeping this in mind, it is important that the smartphone does not become a point of contention within the newlywed marriage as the addition of phone rules was found to help manage this issue for some participants.

Ultimately this research provides information which can help couples to seek balance within their relationships regarding smartphone technology's impact. Additionally it may help couples to gain a broader and open-minded view around technology. Certainly, the newlywed years are a time of significant development in establishing patterns of communication while maintaining the couple's emotional attachment and the smartphone must be considered during that evolution.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A Interview Guide

My name is Sarah Mandel and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the meaning that smartphone use has in your marital relationship. As an in-person interview I will review the consent form and have you voluntarily sign it. (Interviews done remotely via the Zoom platform, the consent form will be sent and signed prior to the session).

The format that will be used in this interview will be semi-structured and will last approximately 60-90 minutes. As stated in the consent forms, your participation is voluntary and the information that you share is completely confidential. I will be taking some notes and the interview will be recorded by a digital recorder or audio and video if via the Zoom platform so that I can make sure to capture your thoughts, reflections, and experiences as we move through this interview process. Your identity will not be linked to the comments used in this research study. Can you please share the pseudonym that you will use for this study.

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for agreeing to participate and take part in this interview.

Questions

The questions seek to identify the ways in which newlywed couples perceive smartphone use on their relational adjustment when together including: how they perceive the development of their intimate marital bond, their emotional attunement, communication patterns and system of supportive connection.

Experience of Newlywed Marriage

1. How long have you been married to your spouse?
 - a. What expectations do you have about your marital relationship?
Probe: Can you share how an example of how you define that?
 - b. How do you maintain emotional intimacy?
 - c. How do you view time quality spent together?
Probe: What factors could enhance your quality time?
 - d. Can you share what interactions and experiences impact your emotional connection to your spouse?

e. How do these shared experiences and interactions impact how you feel about your relationship?

Probe: Are you satisfied with the amount of time you are receiving from your spouse when together?

f. Can you describe how you share your intentions and meet goals together?

Probe: Can you share how an example of that?

Communication and Stress in Newlywed Marriage

2. How do you communicate and share your needs with your spouse?

a. How do you acknowledge the thoughts and feelings of your spouse's when they share their needs?

b. How would you describe the strengths of your marital relationship?

c. Can you describe how you experience stress within your relationship?

Probe: When experiencing this, how do you share this challenge with your spouse?

d. What factors contribute to conflict in your relationship?

e. How do you and your spouse manage conflict within your marriage?

Probe: How do you negotiate these goals with your partner?

f. Can you describe any external factors that have an impact on your marriage?

g. How do you manage your socialization and social networks outside your marriage?

Smartphone Use and Marriage

3. How do you experience smartphone use in your marriage when in each other's presence?

a. How do you perceive your own use of the smartphone within your marriage?

b. Can you share how you experience your partner's smartphone use when spending time together?

c. How much time do you spend using your smartphone when together?

d. Is there a way in which smartphone use has impacted communicating your needs to your partner?

e. Probe: Can you share how an example of that?

f. Do you have rules for technology use when together?

Probe: Tell me more about how you developed these rules.

4. What meaning do you give to your partner's smartphone use when attention is not focused on you?

a. When together how do you ask for your partner's attention when they are using their smartphone?

b. Does your spouse ever ask you to stop using your smartphone when together?

- c. When together, how do you experience the amount of time your partner spends on their smartphone use?
- d. Do you ever feel that your partner spends too much time on their device when together?
- e. How do you ask for your partner's attention when they are using a device?
- f. Does the amount of time your partner spends with their smartphone have an effect on your perceived sense of connection to them?

Probe: If, yes in what way do you address this issue with your spouse?

- g. What do you use your smartphone for when you are with your spouse?
- h. Is your response to your partner's smartphone use circular – do you experience using your smartphone more when they are utilizing theirs?

Would you like to add anything else or have any feedback about the interview process you would like to share?

Closing

Thank you for participating in this study. Your feedback is valuable and I appreciate you allowing me to interview you and learn about your experiences.

Appendix B Participant Screening Form

1. Is this your first civil marriage?
 Yes or No
2. How long have you been married? _____
3. Do you own a smartphone?
 Yes or No
4. Does your spouse own a smartphone?
 Yes or No
5. Have you and your spouse ever attended couples counseling?
 Yes or No
6. Have you or your spouse ever been in counseling for a technology-based issue or addiction?
 Yes or No
7. Are you willing to participate voluntarily in this study?
 Yes or No

Appendix C Demographic Data

Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender:

Male Female Trans/Other

Sexual Orientation/Gender Expression

Heterosexual Gay Lesbian

Employment Status:

Full-time Part-time Not Employed Student

Race or Ethnicity:

African American Asian Hispanic Native American Navajo
 Pacific Islander Caucasian Other

Number of Years Married:

One Two Three Four

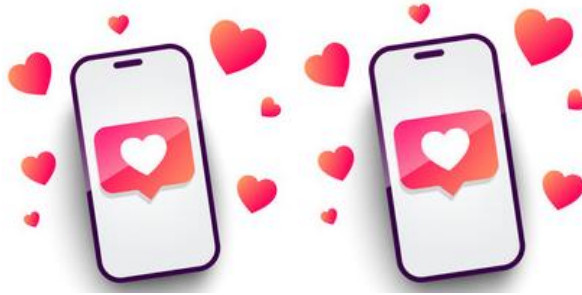
Number of Smartphones Owned:

One Two

Appendix D Recruitment Flier

University of Pennsylvania Doctoral Research Study

PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES!



PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF SMARTPHONES ON NEWLYWED COUPLES' BOND

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study on

Newlywed Couples and Smartphone Use

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to *share your experiences in interview form.*

Each partner's participation will include one session, which will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

In appreciation for your time, each of you will receive \$25 cash for each interview.

Flexible scheduling available in person or via an on-line platform.

You may participate if:

- You are currently in your first marriage between one to four years.
- Each partner must own their own smartphone.
- Heterosexual or Same Sex marriage.
- Willing to participate voluntarily in this study.

For more information about this study or to volunteer to participate in this study, please contact: Sarah Mandel, RN, LCSW at 908-477-8557 (feel free to text or call)

