

**TOGETHER ALONE: THE EFFECTS OF PHUBBING
IN A ROMANTIC PARTNERSHIP**

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication and the Arts

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Graduation Year 2023

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Abstract

Partner phubbing has been defined as an individual distracted by their phone or someone who would rather be on their phone than interact with the people in front of them. In most romantic partnerships, phubbing is directly connected to relationship satisfaction and can be linked to how frequently phubbing occurs in the union. Several research studies provide qualitative data on how phubbing negatively influences romantic relationships. 97% of the population admit that phubbing has lowered the connection quality with their partner. Phubbing can lead to jealousy, declining mental health, partner surveillance, conflict, separation, reciprocal phubbing, and adaptation. This research aims to discover how phubbing affects relationship satisfaction, whether the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed, and how the interaction adaption contributes to or affects relationship satisfaction.

Keywords: phubbing, relationship satisfaction, interpersonal communication, expectancy violation theory, cell phone, smartphone, interaction adaption theory

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, who passed away in June of 2014, my son, sister, nieces and nephews, and family. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, love, and support during this process and in all other areas of my life.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| AAT | Action Assembly Theory |
| AAML | American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers |
| AT | Attachment Theory |
| CNM | Consensual Non-Monogamous |
| CMC | Computer-Mediated Communication |
| EVT | Expectancy Violation Theory |
| FAD | Facebook Addiction Disorder |
| FOMO | Fear of Missing Out |
| FTF | Face to Face |
| IAT | Interaction Adaption Theory |
| IPC | Interpersonal Communication |
| ORC | Online Relationship Visibility |
| PES | Partner Electronic Surveillance |
| PSMU | Problematic Social Media Use |
| SNS | Social Networking Sites |
| SCT | Social Comparison Theory |
| SAT | Speech Act Theory |
| TTOL | Triangular Theory of Love |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Modern-day technology significantly influences many of our everyday lives; with constant change and improving technology, many problems have formed due to its overuse. Despite the range, access, and positive outcomes technology and devices bring to the lives of everyday people, there are several reasons not to overindulge in said technology and gadgets. Knowing such consequences, people still engage in activities, knowing the potential adverse outcomes of overindulging in anything, especially technology. Today the cell phone is one of the most famous pieces of technology. Over 97% of the world's population has a cell phone and partake in daily interactions on social media and social networking sites (SNS) (Vogels & Anderson, 2020).

For many, cell phones, SNS, and social media apps are used daily and in different capacities and serve many purposes. However, most would believe that casual use causes little to no harm; the overuse of cell phones and social apps and the possibility of addiction to said apps and cell phones have become a worldwide issue, especially for those that engage in interpersonal connections and romantic partnerships (Karadag et al., 2015). People in a partnership with an individual who cannot look away from their cell phones would strongly disagree that ignoring others for their cell phones is causing little to no harm. According to Vogels & Anderson (2020), 51% of people within a partnership have admitted to being ignored by their partner for their cell phone. This phenomenon of being ignored for one's cell phone is now known as "Phubbing." (Aagaard, 2020, p. 238).

According to Bouffard et al. (2021), social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter negatively impact relationship dynamics because cell phones and social media activities

diminish the time spent and attention given to partners. The increased use of cell phones and possibly social media apps and SNS can lower the relationship quality and trigger phubbing, jealousy, mental health issues, electronic partner surveillance (EPS), conflicts, separation, or divorce (Karadag et al., 2015). With said knowledge, couples continue to use social media excessively or take the necessary precautions to ensure that all parties use the apps and technology to strengthen their relationship, not harm it. In addition to social media, the technology of text messages has become the most accessible and effective communication between everyone; however, for those in relationships, text messages and direct messages (DM's) can provide a continuous connection between partners (Bird,2014).

Nevertheless, those same connections that are instant and constant can quickly derail and have an adverse effect (Bird, 2014). When a partner sends messages and receives a response quickly, the individuals involved feel meaningful and happy, showing consistency in the connection and strengthening the communication between the two (Bouffard et al., 2021). The interaction is an instant and constant connection; couples rely heavily on cell phones for their relationships and socializing, to feel connected to others and their partners, and sometimes to assert autonomy (Bird, 2014). With the advancement of technology, cell phone text messaging has drastically replaced phone call conversations. Savvy cell phone users can utilize emojis, pictures, and videos, allowing individuals to say what they choose without speaking to or texting their partner (David & Roberts, 2021). With a ray of mediums to deliver and receive messages, couples can stay connected and prioritize their relationships, satisfying all involved.

However, with the constant use of the cell phone and connection seeming to be a positive gesture in a romantic partnership, the open use and endless possibility of communication could

be unnerving because one could use that device to scout other potential partners. The idea that one could use the same technology to show love and consistency could also use these same devices and mediums of texting and social apps to scout other potential partners, rekindle old relationships, escape reality, or fight boredom. The cell phone can harm any romantic connection (David & Roberts, 2021). According to Roberts & David (2016), the continued use of the cell phone and social media combo increases one's potential to fall victim to social media addiction and cell phone addiction. Karadag et al. (2015) conclude that overusing technology to escape reality and phub partners leaving them to feel neglected is a sure way to tarnish the connection and spark conflict.

Background

In addition to the possibility of developing a cell phone addiction and phubbing one's partner, Karadag et al. (2015) state that people often use cell phones and social sites as a coping mechanism as they have lost faith in their shared connection with their significant other. When people within a partnership want to escape, they often turn to the Internet and their cell phones. Having a convenient handheld device such as a cell phone, the Internet, and social apps has made it convenient to escape and engage in behaviors that can dismantle a relationship, making cheating or replacing a partner easier (Bird, 2014). According to Aagaard (2020), not every couple exposed to social media will end with scandal and cheating, yet phubbing has ended some troubled relationships. Phubbing, or being phubbed, has caused irritation and conflict among 62% of couples in 2021 (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Social Media Addiction

According to Kashian (2019), social media plays a role in most modern marriages even though there is a negative relationship between social networking site (SNS) usage, marriage, and well-being. This negative relationship between the two can be explained from both perspectives; SNS weakens marriage and causes divorce, and people in strained relationships use SNS more frequently (Valenzuela et al., 2014). The adverse effects of SNS on relationships and how they can lead to divorce were first noticed in 2009 by an executive of the UK's Divorce Online. There were 500 divorce petitions, mentioning Facebook 989 times throughout the documents (Keenan, 2009). The year 2010 was similar; the AAML (American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers) found that four out of five lawyers reported an increase in divorce cases and had Facebook as evidence (AAML, 2010). However, Facebook or SNS may not be the only reason for conflict, separations, breakups, or divorce. People blamed Facebook for partner phubbing because their partners prolonged their cell phone use because of Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD) (Facebook et al.).

In 2010 American psychologists introduced (FAD) because individuals using SNS excessively displayed addictive behaviors such as mental preoccupation, escapism, neglect of personal life, tolerance, and concealing such behavior (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). According to law firms and popular media, it is suggested that Facebook may be responsible for one out of five divorces in the United States (Gardner, 2013).

Facebook maintains that its mission is to connect people; instead, it has been accused of damaging the relationships of 1000 couples. The individuals in these relationships are accountable for the parts they play in the demise of their relationship. However, using SNS

makes it easy to engage others and invite conflict into a relationship, increasing detachments and phubbing from a significant other. People who detached from their significant other could have done so for various reasons; suspicious cell phone activities or phubbing (Douglas,2018).

In 2012 the Macquarie Dictionary coined and presented the term “phubbing” (Douglas,2018, p. 304). Its original function was to present a term for the alarming number of problems the smartphone causes when it is misused in social situations. According to Douglas (2018), the Macquarie Dictionary term “Phubbing” can be defined as the act of snubbing or ignoring a person or persons for their phone instead of communicating and interacting with the individual or individuals presently and currently in front of the user (Douglas,2018, p. 304). Although social media is a famous mention in developing cell phone addiction, it must be noted that social media and SNS are not just for social interactions, posting pictures, and liking comments. Social apps can be used to exchange career development and entrepreneurship information (Fukubavashi et al., 2021).

There are sites for individuals seeking careers; they discuss available jobs, allow individuals to network, and find the career of their dreams. Another aspect of SNS influence is using social media for career advancement. Using SNS for a career change can improve an individual’s emotional well-being because a new career can improve mood and relationships (Fukubavashi et al., 2021). An unfavorable outcome of SNS and career is excessively admiring others with their dream job or trade; this could increase cell phone and social media activities, triggering anxiety and increasing partner phubbing and cell phone addiction (Fukubavashi et al., 2021).

Many social sites have also made it easier to meet and communicate with others. However, cell phones and social media have hurt romantic relationship dynamics due to the need for more attention and reduced time given to a partner (Bouffard et al., 2010). In 2010 Bouffard et al. (2010) questioned partnerships, how social media leads to negative consequences within the union, and how excessive use of social media and SNS negatively triggers cell phone, social media addiction, and partner phubbing (Karadag et al., 2015). Karadag et al. (2015) state that cell phone addiction and social media activities often cause partner phubbing. Romantic partners usually recognize the adverse effects of phubbing their partner and how it affects others is a significant reason for a partner to question and examine what is happening on their partner's cell phone that keeps them so preoccupied and neglecting their partnership, knowing that such an act could be detrimental to their relationship.

With such nonchalant regard to phubbing partners, it should be noted that cell phone access in America begins at the average age of ten (NW et al., 2010). Therefore, in modern times young people start using cell phones and social media when they discover themselves, as this is the time for them to form new relationships and interpersonal skills. However, according to (Rast et al., 2021), many form attachments to their cell phones because of their fear of missing out or FOMO. This phenomenon causes one to have their phone handy to check and scroll each social app for any information or notification on their phone at any time (Rast et al., 2021). FOMO; gives way to embracing social platforms that feature sound notifications, view counts, and staying current on world news and gossip (Rast et al., 2021).

Engaging in social media sites with the FOMO can cause people to lose track of time and not realize how much of an impact it has on their lives (Rast et al., 2021). Social media addiction

triggered by (FOMO) mirrors other obsessions regarding brain changes, resulting in an urgency to use social media and check one's cell phone. Individuals tend to crave to be on social media to receive instant gratification. FOMO and social media have given way to outcomes of diminished work-life performance, poor interpersonal communication skills, and lack of sleep (Rast et al., 2021). Cell phones create poor sleep habits and, as a result, increase anxiety, causing people to engage in social media activities even more (Rast et al., 2021). Increased social media use can result in later bedtimes and fewer intimate moments with a partner due to the impact on melatonin production (Woods & Scott, 2016).

The idea that using one's cell phone to browse social sites before bed will relax the individual becomes an obstacle because FOMO takes over, and the individual has allowed time to tick away. The desire to stay connected leads to 86% of adults sleeping with their devices near them or even having a phone under their pillow (Woods & Scott, 2016). Late nights of scrolling lead to difficulty in rising times, resulting in tiredness during the day. The increased usage and lack of sleep can lead to mood swings, reduced health, and even more phubbing, which leads to guilt and anxiety (Truel et al., 2018). The cycle becomes routine lack of sleep, partner phubbing and mentally connecting, and identifying the neglect of essential things unrelated to social media and the urge to scroll again weighs heavy (Rast et al., 2021).

Over the past decade, social media has grown expeditiously, which has examined the influence of social media on the individuals that use it (Mackson et al., 2019). According to Lin & Utz (2015), social media has positive consequences; however, most research shines a light on the adverse effects on its users, such as addiction, phubbing, jealousy, envy, anxiety, depression, and decreased life and relationship satisfaction (Lin & Utz, 2015). In addition, frequent users are

more likely to report psychological distress (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017), such as depression and anxiety. However, one should note that cell phone addiction, social media addiction, and partner phubbing will continue to increase along with heavy cellphone use because of people's (FOMO) fear of missing out (Rast et al., 2021).

According to Aagaard (2020), phubbing can be defined as ignoring conversational partners in favor of one's phone. This behavior is associated with negative interpersonal consequences and has adverse effects, yet people continue to engage in this behavior. Partners tend to have a discrepancy in their relationship with phubbing, and they express that this is disrespectful and annoying. Still, they hesitate to admit that they also participate in phubbing their partner (Roberts & David, 2016). They have moral convictions that this is wrong, but it does not stop them from going against those convictions. This discrepancy is an unintentional inclination to divert attentional engagement (Aagaard, 2020).

During the COVID-19 lockdown of 2019-2020, social media apps saw an increase in use among couples by 80%, and 47% of couples complained of a decrease in partner connection, intimacy, and relationship quality, due to phubbing during the lockdown (Lisitsa et al., 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 lockdown saw an increase of users between the ages of 17-52 across multiple social media apps by 90%. According to Valdez et al. (2020), the most popular apps were Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Instagram is a free social app for those 13 and older (Instagram, n.d.). Users can share videos, content, and pictures on the site and get feedback and "likes." In addition, individuals use this platform to share images typically filtered or edited to produce their best photos. In June 2018, Instagram had one billion monthly users, and 64% of said users were young adults between 18 to 32. Clement (2019) emphasized that both men and

women use this site respectfully, but women use social media at a much higher rate in intensity and frequency.

However, in 2021 a mixed-method research study was conducted to determine the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on couples. The study focused on couples not directly impacted by the virus but those that cohabitated during the lockdown of 2020. According to Weber et al. (2021), individuals within the partnership suffered from depression, anxiety, and difficulties in psychological growth. The research focused solely on coupled individuals because the individual's well-being is related to the overall functioning of a harmonious relationship (Pieh et al., 2020). According to Valdez et al. (2020), the COVID-19 lockdown increased social media and cellphone use among single individuals between the ages of 18-34 by 95%, and with an increase in usage, mental and physiological health increased by 35-70% among all individuals, both in relationships and those who were single (Pieh et al., 2020). However, the impact of those in relationships saw increased conflict and separation due to phubbing and substance abuse during the COVID-19 lockdown (Twenge & Joiner, 2020).

Reflexivity Statement. When dealing with relationship problems, people often believe they are the only person on earth dealing with them. However, when discussing with others or researching, one would learn that they are not alone and their situation is familiar. For example, being ignored while a partner is on their cell phone can seem normal, and for others, being ignored by a cell phone is not considered normal behavior. With such differences and ideas and relationship dynamics of what a romantic relationship should be, only those involved can determine what is expected. Personally, as the researcher and writer of this dissertation, the idea of being ignored for a phone was not believed to be the norm.

Therefore, sparking the idea of using the phenomenon as a research topic, and two days into the research, the term “Phubbing and Phubbed” were discovered, a term to define the behavior of ignoring others for the preference of one’s phone as the researcher and an individual that had been phubbed daily by a partner. The thought was, I wonder if anyone else is being ignored by their partner because they are on their cell phone and feel the way I do about it. Being phubbed by a romantic partner feels horrible, and feelings of anger and neglect come to mind.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, I was being phubbed daily, which created arguments, resentment, and reciprocal phubbing. There were several outbursts of anger from trying to gain my partner's attention. He was determined to be on his cell phone rather than be present in our conversations. The idea of this research was to ask others if they had experienced being phubbed, how it made them feel, and what and if they had failed expectations of communication in their relationship and if those failed expectations had lowered their relational satisfaction or dismantled their relationship altogether, as it did mine. The idea of not having interpersonal communication with a partner caused such irritation during moments and events of importance, and the most infuriating part was that he did not feel that his behavior had any effect on me and that I was overreacting. However, I begged to differ because I believed my response of anger, yelling, and profanity was justified.

Having a partner that chose a phone rather than communicate dismantled my communication expectations that I believed necessary for the relationship to remain solid and for me to be happy and satisfied within the union. Therefore, as the researcher and a person who has been phubbed, the study method is carefully constructed to minimize biases, thoughts, and feelings from the process and outcomes. In addition, the data collection process was added to minimize biases, which removed my ability to talk with the participants as they answered each

question. As the interviewer and researcher, I was only allowed to ask the questions, repeat if necessary and ask if they were done answering. Removing the ability to add to the conversation or engage increased the credibility and removed any possibility of influence over the participant's responses.

Problem Statement

How technology and social media impact romantic relationships is a growing phenomenon and topic. Modern-day technology and social media can be a way for people to connect in diverse ways, but for some, in a romantic relationship, it can create problems. Over 51% of the coupled population admit to being ignored because of their partners' excessive cell phone use (Vogels & Anderson, 2020). According to Gogos (2022), depression and insecurity in couples stem from being ignored by a partner on their cell phone in addition to inappropriate “liked” images or comments on social media.

This behavior of partner phubbing led to lower relationship satisfaction, insecurities, conflict, and, in some cases, separation. The phenomenon of being phubbed has yet to be well understood in its correlation to an individual's inner and outer conflict and a couple's relational satisfaction. Being phubbed by a romantic partnership is a distraction and interruption to the communication expectancies within a romantic partnership. During the COVID-19 lockdown of 2019-2020, social media apps saw an increase in use among couples by 80%, and 47% of couples complained of a decrease in partner connection, intimacy, and relationship quality, due to phubbing during the lockdown (Lisitsa et al., 2020).

Understanding the potential harm in one's increased mobile phone use and noting that social media activities could be the cause, leading to phubbing, can trigger negative emotions in

one's partner and harm the relationship. Cell phone use in romantic relationships has become a social norm, and asking couples to avoid cell phones and social media altogether is not an option (Balzarini et al., 2019). Many consider the cell phone and social media to be an added pressure to maintain a romantic connection, as phubbing leads to conflict and the dissolution of relationships (Balzarini et al. (2019). How couples and the general population communicate with technology and cell phones has changed. With these continuous changes, everyone should understand the effects of technology at their fingertips, how it may lead to phubbing and being phubbed, and the consequences of said behavior for an individual's well-being and partnership.

Purpose of Study

This qualitative case study aims to determine how being phubbed affects individuals within a romantic relationship and, in turn, affects relational satisfaction within a romantic relationship. Understanding the connection between being phubbed and relationship satisfaction is essential within a romantic relationship because it can lead to internal and external conflicts. Internal conflicts such as jealousy, anxiety, depression, external; electronic partner surveillance, verbal altercation, reciprocal phubbing, and separation can directly impact relationship satisfaction (Kashian, 2021). In addition, being phubbed for any amount of time, during any occasion or event, can increase negative emotions and feelings of isolation and neglect (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). According to Kashian (2021), phubbing harms romantic relationships because it can be viewed as a direct violation or intrusion into the nonverbal norms within a couple's interpersonal relations.

Being phubbed interferes with the perceived expectations of face-to-face communication etiquette between a romantic couple (Burgin,2018). According to Parks (2017), dating and

married couples in modern times have a greater chance of experiencing conflict in their relationship because of mobile devices and technology because mobile devices provide access to the Internet, text, phone calls, video calls, and social networking sites (SNSs). With such advancements, the mobile phone could present new ways for couples to distract themselves from their relationships or show little respect for the relationship, triggering adverse effects and conflicts (Parks, 2017). In addition, couples understand that life can get in the way of any relationship, stress from work or work-life balance; with the added phenomenon of partner phubbing, a romantic relationship can fall apart (Bolger et al., 1989).

Psycho-Social Perspective

This case study takes a psycho-social perspective on the phenomenon of being phubbed by a romantic partner and its connection to relationship satisfaction. Psycho-social is often described as a way in which people interrelate with each other, in other words, how people connect and influence one another through their interactions (Lu et al., 2019). A psycho-social perspective is examined because people often enter romantic relationships with interrelation expectations. However, over time these expectations may or may not change. These expectations may disappear as individuals adapt to the behaviors and interactions and lower or remove all behavioral expectations placed upon their partner. This adaptation is necessary for some to avoid conflict and maintain or achieve harmony to obtain a high-quality relationship (Collibee & Furman, 2015).

According to Collibee & Furman (2015), relationship quality is essential in achieving a harmonious, successful relationship. A higher-quality relationship influences mood, motivation, coping skills, and overall health. The quality of any relationship is directly associated with the

relationship's satisfaction (Collibee & Furman, 2015). A quality relationship is subjective and relies heavily on the individual's perception of the union. Individuals within a romantic relationship evaluate their union and will decide if they are satisfied, with the relationship, by their own set of expectations and accepted behaviors and how they may or may not adapt to failed expectations when being phubbed.

Individuals may begin to accept and adapt to the behaviors of their failed expectations and experience internal and external conflict, reciprocate the phubbing, accept a low-quality relationship, or choose to end the relationship. Littlejohn et al. (2016) state that fighting adaptation may be challenging because people begin mirroring or converging behaviors over time. Couples eventually begin behaving reciprocally, influencing each other. At some point, both individuals may begin to adapt to the behaviors of being phubbed by reciprocating the phubbing until they both eventually end up on their cell phones.

Significance of Study

The significance of this qualitative study is to show how being phubbed affects a romantic partner and lowers relationship satisfaction. Phubbing violates the typical social construct of being present in the company of others. People are so attached to their phones that they do not recognize the adverse effects of being in the presence of others while giving their attention to their phones. Individuals in a romantic relationship for any length of time will encounter some areas of conflict, and in most relationships, the conflict can be addressed and overcome. However, when an everyday device interferes with face-to-face interaction, the outcome can harm the person and the relationship. In the United States, couple satisfaction has

been declining, divorce rates have been increasing, and social networking sites have been one of the leading factors (Valenzuela et al.,2014).

This research will advance the knowledge and literature on the social phenomenon of partner phubbing and explain how phubbing impacts individuals within a romantic relationship and affects romantic relational satisfaction. The findings from this study will expand on phubbing, being phubbed, and its negative impact on relationship satisfaction, and how people may or may not adapt to being phubbed, even if they are bothered and have lowered their relationship expectations. Past studies provide insight into the phenomenon through the theoretical framework of interference of technology. Taking it a step further and understanding how being phubbed makes people feel and connecting the act of phubbing and relationship satisfaction to the connection of its disruption to the social constructs of communication etiquette between romantic partners through the expectancy violation theory theoretical framework. The (EVT) approach can focus on what causes adverse feelings to those on the receiving end and why it contributes to internal and external conflict and the loss of relational satisfaction within a romantic partnership.

Research Question(s)

This qualitative correlation study aims to determine if and to what extent being phubbed affects individuals and relational satisfaction within a romantic relationship. Relationship satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of experiences and opinions of one's relationship. According to Sobral et al. (2015), satisfaction relies heavily on one's fear of intimacy or losing a partner. Being phubbed is being ignored for one's phone; feeling ignored and neglected could lead to internal and external conflict and lowers relational satisfaction.

Research Question One

How does phubbing affect relationship satisfaction?

Research Question Two

How do the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed?

Research Question Three. How does interaction adaption affect relationship satisfaction?

Summary

Over the past decade, cell phones have increased technological advancements and users. These advancements include social media and other features to make life convenient. With said advancements, individual users can create their reality. With such advancement and convenience, people are paying more attention to their devices than those around them. Cell phone users are choosing to ignore those in their presence, for the interactions of virtual socializing and trying to engage in a face-to-face conversation is nearly impossible. Getting a cell phone user to be attentive in conversation can be difficult because users find it hard to detach from their cell phones even when people are present and conversations are happening. Such advancement in technology was designed to improve communication, and it has, however, for those in a romantic relationship, this phenomenon is disrupting communication and violating social norms (Bolger et al., 1989).

Definitions

Attachment Theory A psychological developmental and etiological theory of human relationships.

Expectancy Violation Theory An interpersonal communication theory that analyses how individuals respond to unanticipated violations of how one should respond when communicating.

Interaction Adaption Theory People adapt and mimic verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors with those they continuously interact with.

Interpersonal Communication Human one-on-one communication involves verbal and nonverbal communication, body language, tone, and facial expressions.

Nomiphobia Fear of being detached from one's phone.

Phubbed The act of being ignored in a face-to-face encounter, as the other person pays attention to the content on their smart or mobile phone.

Phubbing Ignoring others face-to-face, focusing on the content of mobile or smartphone.

Technoference The interruption of quality time, conversation, and activities with a romantic partner.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the late 1950s, Leon Festinger conceptualized interpersonal communication theory (IPC). He presented a theory of how individuals converse and interact verbally and nonverbally with others and proposed his idea in the 1970s (Burgin, 2018). One of the many questions about interpersonal communication is how one defines it. According to Burgin (2018), interpersonal communication can be limited to how two people in a relationship converse with one another. However, because of the theory's broad spectrum, four different scopes are defined to narrow the understanding of how two people build and sustain relationships. The first are theories on the meaning of relationships, ideas about the motives in relationships, views on the messages in relationships, and approaches to movement in a relationship (Burgin, 2018). This thesis focuses on the verbal and nonverbal messages sent and received in romantic relationships as there is no absence of communication because when one chooses not to communicate verbally, they will still send a message of communication.

When individuals converse and exchange messages to gain understanding or remain connected, they send verbal and nonverbal messages. The message should explain why individuals choose specific wording, say what they are saying, choose a particular tone or nonverbal cue to interact, and, most importantly, how the message is received and processed (Burgin, 2018). The action assembly theory and speech act theory are under the umbrella of the theories of sending messages in relationships. The action assembly theory (AAT) describes how individuals explain their thoughts, where they come from, and how they deliver them through verbal and nonverbal interactions and communication (Greene, 1984). The speech act theory

(SAT) can be defined as how one chooses words to convey or trigger an action (Provenzano, 2021).

According to Givertz et al. (2013), direct and indirect communication is the most critical element in any successful romantic relationship. Interpersonal communication helps couples minimize misunderstandings, strengthen bonds, and allows the other partner to reciprocate and show and tell their partner how they feel. In addition, interpersonal communication creates a meaningful connection that can be sustained by sharing one's feelings, views, and interpretations of events (Bylund et al., 2012). In 2022, research was conducted to determine if interpersonal communication was still obtainable through technology. The conclusion was that it is possible to maintain a positive romantic relationship with social media networking and technology (Lapierre & Custer, 2021).

McDaniel et al. (2016) presented a study that showed the opposite (Lapierre & Custer, 2021). The research found that social media networking hurt romantic couples; some of the areas in question were the quality of the relationship and the comparison of other relationships on both Facebook and Instagram networking apps. One of the significant effects that contributed to the adverse effects of the association is comparison, envy, jealousy from other app users, and time away from significant others (Gerber et al., 2018). Tandon et al. (2021) conducted similar research to determine the underlying issues, outcomes, and behaviors of why people compare themselves to others and its connection to the influence of social media. The study found that social media significantly impacts all human-to-human contact and interactions despite the advanced mediums and sparking jealousy and stalking behaviors.

Tandon et al. (2021) concluded that the new mediums hurt interpersonal communication because of the lost personal connection that face-to-face interactions create. The primary reason for the adverse outcome was the distraction influenced by cellphone use, social media, and social mediums used to connect in relationships. According to Arikewuyo et al. (2022), social media was an added distraction to couples, regardless of the time each couple had been together, how often they used their cell phones and partook in social sites. The distraction still creates distance, jealousy, and conflict between couples (Tandon et al., 2021). Therefore, cell phone use and social media addiction are direct interruptions of interpersonal communication and can be projected as expectancy violation that directly causes such adverse effects in relationships (Arikewuyo et al., 2022).

Romantic Relationships & Intimacy

According to Ippolito (2020), no romantic relationship functions the same. There is no universal law that will keep and maintain all relationships because what works well and sustains one relationship may not work within others. However, one area of potentially succeeding in a successful relationship is universal: the ability to communicate openly and often (Ippolito, 2020). Couples that openly share, send clear messages, listen attentively, comprehend said messages, and respond honestly have a greater chance of having a successful relationship that meets both people's needs and sustains relational satisfaction (Ippolito, 2020). In modern times, the ability to keep continuous communication and connections has been improved, or has it? Add social media, technology, mobile devices, cell phones, and free will; individuals and couples can send and receive messages in real-time and share pictures for as long and often as their heart desires.

Nevertheless, such additions to communication can be detrimental to couples, their intimacy, and overall relationship satisfaction, especially those in committed relationships

(Gogos, 2022). According to Gogos (2022), social media can be the source of many romantic relationship problems because successful relationships are often rooted in relationship satisfaction, attachment styles, quality time spent together, and individual self-esteem. Individuals within a partnership or romantic relationship frequently use their cell phones, ignoring others or their partner for the preference of their phone (Bhopal: Phubbing is killing marriages., 2018). Being phubbed or ignored by a partner for their phone often creates an emotional war within, starting with social comparison leading to low self-esteem, jealousy, and envy, magnified through the regular act of being phubbed (Bhopal: Phubbing is killing marriages., 2018).

According to Sun & Samp (2021), communication technologies and smartphones are now indispensable and used daily in our lives, and 46% of American adults admit that they cannot live without their smartphones. The beginning of 2019 brought 3.5 billion people over 13 onto social networking sites (SNS), which is 58% of the world's population. These numbers reflect a doubling of numbers from 2014 to 2019, revealing the demand for virtual contact (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). In 2020 when the world shut down due to Covid-19, the demand for virtual contact skyrocketed (Pieh et al., 2020). In addition to the increase in users, 90% of Americans admitted to using the internet from their cell phones during the COVID-19 lockdown (Pew, 2022).

However, individuals in relationships or even friendships admit to phubbing in their relationships during the lockdown because phubbing encourages social displacement, causing face-to-face interactions to become meaningless and, in return, lowering one's conversation quality and relationship satisfaction (Frackowiak et al., 2022). Sun & Samp (2021) states that social apps are where people display relationships, career paths, and even daily outfits in hopes

that they get a “like” from their “friends” or “followers.” Vogels & Anderson (2020) mention that 51% of couples in the United States deal with their partner being distracted by their cell phone. The outcome means that 51% of Americans in a romantic relationship have been phubbed by their partner (Vogels & Anderson, 2020),

Relationship Expectations

According to Burgoon (1995), couples in committed relationships enter their union with preconceived expectations. Konstam et al. (2019) describe expectations as patterns of anticipated behavior, and these expectations change based on the relationship one has with others. For example, the anticipated patterns or expectations of a family member and an associate would differ because the interactions and level of personal connections are different. In romantic relationships, couples are held to a different standard of commitment.

Therefore, the expectations of a committed relationship should differ. Konstam et al. (2019) conducted a study to determine what couples expect in a romantic relationship; the results were emotional support, loyalty, fidelity, help around the house, and commitment. In addition to these expectations, the day-to-day functions and interactions of the relationship were extracted to provide the daily relational expectations. Communication, being physically present, working as a unit, trust, honesty, and respect were chosen by participants (Konstam et al., 2019). In addition, 51.14% of the participants believed that monogamy was necessary, 61.90% thought that working as a team was essential, and 100% agreed that communication, trust, and being present are commonly desired expectations of being in a romantic relationship (Konstam et al. (2019).

In 2012 a study was conducted to determine the number one factor and expectation in a romantic relationship. Much like Konstam et al. (2019) study, it was no surprise that

interpersonal communication was the number one factor in the efficiency of a harmonious relationship. According to Johnson et al. (2021), a couple's communication quality often predicts the relationship's satisfaction over time. A relationship with open communication where both individuals are comfortable sharing their thoughts, ideas, and needs and are being heard yields a higher level of relationship satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2021). Therefore, it is safe to say that couples would show signs of low relational satisfaction without communication and, more specifically, effective interpersonal communication.

The study discovered a link between positive mental health and interpersonal communication because humans need social interaction and connections to thrive. According to Johnson et al. (2021), how a couple communicates will often show the correlation between depression, relationship distress, and conflict through the quality of their interpersonal communication. One of the ways a couple shows signs of distress is through disengagement (Nichols et al., 2015). According to Nichols et al. (2015), when romantic partners show signs of distress and conflict, they often use disengagement tactics; this could include negative nonverbal communicative cues and external conflict. A disengagement tactic that one could be using is phubbing. Phubbing and being phubbed could be a subtle nonverbal communicative gesture to disengage from a romantic partner (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

In 2015, Miller-Ott & Kelly (2015) researched the correlation between cell phones and their ability to help maintain healthy ties in a romantic partnership. The study aimed to determine what expectations they put on their partner's cell phone usage in the presence of each other, such as times of intimacy or what they deemed crucial moments and events (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). The researcher focused on the expectancy violation theory (EVT) and how participants adapted or managed their expectations not being met when the cell phone was present. Fifty-one

participants agreed that cell phones are a positive addition to their daily communication because they provide continuous connection when the couple is apart. However, they did not feel the same when their partner used their cell phone when their undivided attention was needed (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

The participants then deemed moments like spending intimate time together and “hanging out” or having a meal together as times of violation. Miller-Ott & Kelly (2015) qualitative study concluded that people in romantic relationships anticipate behavior from their partners when a cell phone is present. They either anticipate that their partner will be attentive; or not. The behavior pattern of being phubbed determines how the partner would adapt to or manage the violation (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). The study also revealed that expectations for a partner's undivided attention in formal and intimate moments were when individuals expected their partner's attention. When those expectations were violated, they did nothing; participants were unwilling to set boundaries to address the violation. Instead, they accepted the phubbing if the phone use was essential or quick, yet still expressed displeasure about the violation during formal and intimate moments (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

Digital Akrasia & Phubbing. Digital Akrasia is an individual who tends to be wrapped up in their digital devices despite having better intentions or others to engage with (Aagaard, 2020). Before phubbing and Digital Akrasia, McDaniel and Coyne (2016) presented technofence, which describes how technology interrupts quality time, conversation, and activities with a romantic partner. According to Aagaard (2020), Digital Akrasia, technofence, and phubbing describe ignoring others for one's technological devices or cell phone and are often associated with negative interpersonal consequences.

Phubbing is inevitable, and those that have been phubbed have phubbed another. Robert & David (2016) state that most individuals have phubbed their romantic partner on several occasions and events. Research has shown that the more an individual is phubbed, the more they are inclined to believe that phubbing is acceptable (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). Several studies have addressed phubbing to determine its primary source or why people are inclined to partake in this behavior. One source believes phubbing can manifest through social media addiction or a non-satisfactory union (Douglas, 2018).

Phubbing has become a fundamental problem in modern-day relationships because the act interrupts one's ability to be present and alert to engage and exchange proper interpersonal communication between two people (Douglas, 2018). Phubbing adversely impacts romantic relationships, marriages, and interpersonal communication because phubbing decreases relationship satisfaction and takes the individual's focus time and attention away from their partner (Douglas, 2018). This nonattentive nonverbal action could give the illusion of not being interested in one's partner while giving more attention to the cell phone and SNS apps.

Aagaard (2020) questioned the connection between phubbing and perception; he believed being phubbed was perception and wanted to discover how one can perceive themselves as phubbed. According to Bröning & Wartberg (2022), the perception of being phubbed and to what extent is in the eyes of the phubber's company. Bröning & Wartberg (2022) proposed a partner phubbing rating scale to understand how often a partner perceives being phubbed. Robert & David (2016) used the scale amongst couples to measure their perception of being phubbed.

The nine-item partner phubbing scale summarizes how individuals use cell phones with their partners present and how it impacts their partner, relationship satisfaction, and their

partner's well-being (Roberts & David, 2016). According to Monash (2020), the adverse outcomes of being phubbed by a partner in a romantic partnership can create a feeling of loss or a decline in relationship satisfaction, displaying reactions such as separation, avoidance, revengeful behaviors, and conflict. In addition to conflict caused by perceived phubbing, Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas (2018) researched whether gender plays a role in the perception of being phubbed.

The researcher concludes that phubbing can happen to both partners at some point in any romantic relationship, male or female; the outcomes of gender differences see little to no influence on the outcome of phubbing. All parties perceive phubbing as rude and disrespectful, and being ignored by one's cell phone lowers the quality of the moment (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018).

In 2018 an adolescent gender study was conducted to determine if Internet addiction was a gender factor. The study discovered that adolescent boys between 11-16 scored higher in internet and mobile phone addiction than girls. The use of the studies' conclusion is significant to this study because it is essential to understand if phubbing is a gender issue or a similar issue among people. This study's outcome aligns with the Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell (2019) study because its data concluded that the root of phubbing was cellphone-internet addiction and attachment styles, not a gender issue.

In 2016 Roberts & David (2016) created a nine-item partner phubbing scale to determine how a partner could be impacted by being phubbed. The scale was given to 145 individuals over 18; 55% were female. The outcome determined that phubbing impacts relationship satisfaction and well-being (Roberts & David, 2016). Roberts & David (2016) also determined that the

interruptions and distractions caused by a partner's phubbing increased conflict, decreasing the quality and partner satisfaction of the relationship.

Phubbing. Although social relationships are essential to one's well-being and longevity, the quality of those relationships is just as important as the connection (Holt-Lundstad et al., 2010). With the addition of the mobile phone and the internet, the quality of relations in romantic relationships has decreased (Holt-Lundstad et al., 2010). This disconnection is linked to fewer face-to-face interactions and more time spent online and on mobile phones. More online cell phone use means less time and attention to one's partner (Yam & Ilhan, 2020). Yam & Ilhan (2020) believes that it is essential for relationship satisfaction that one gives their full attention to their significant other when fostering social bonds. However, introducing phubbing has become an issue (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016).

According to David & Roberts (2017), individuals being phubbed turn to their phones to avoid appearing alone and create a sense of inclusion to avoid awkward face-to-face interaction (David & Roberts, 2017). Bhopal: Phubbing is killing marriages (2018) study confirms that phubbing has begun to undermine relationship connections; the cell phone's presence when interacting with others can lead to lower connections, closeness, or conversation quality. (Frackowiak et al., 2022). The study concluded that when the cell phone was absent, there was increased empathy and conversation quality (Misra et al., 2016). Misra et al. (2016) study presents the question of relationships being affected when phubbing is involved; the compromise of interpersonal interactions, social occasions, and romantic relationships demonstrates that no arena is safe from phubbing.

The outcome is unfortunate for those involved because studies have shown that these behaviors can be perceived as a lower communication quality and relationship satisfaction. However, phubbing affects over 51% of relationships (Vogels & Anderson, 2020). Phubbing and social media use or addiction can quickly come to fruition due to the fear of missing out or FOMO (Rast et al., 2021). In the U.K., “Divorce-Online” found that in divorce issues, Phubbing or its description and Facebook were listed in over 900 divorce petitions (Keenan, 2009, p.16).

In furthering the connection between the psychological effects of phubbing and social media, a study was conducted asking users to restrict their social media use for 24 hours; after doing so, their experiences were documented (Rast et al., 2021). The researcher noted that after 24 hours of non-usage, users were stressed. Participants were still allowed to have their phones to receive notifications from their SNSs. However, the stress increased when announcements were made, and they needed help checking their phones (Turel & Cavagnaro, 2019). It was concluded that the reason for stress was their FOMO. The desire to stay up on current trends and news or to know what their friends are doing and posting on each site was too compelling (Turel & Cavagnaro, 2019).

This phenomenon of FOMO could be directly linked to a partner’s urge and desire to be phubbed. Phubbing can also affect casual social relationships, harming daily human-to-human engagement (Roberts & David, 2017). Phubbing situations such as lack of eye contact, motionless body, or mechanical intonations combined can discourage further conversations and a lack of apathy. It is said that Phubbees tend to cope with this marginalized and passive condition and fight fire with the fire type by reciprocating the same behavior (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). In other words, phubbing tends to be a vicious cycle of self-reinforcement.

Unfortunately, phubbing has become the norm, and although people complain and become irritated with others who practice phubbing, they often phub others in return. According to Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas (2016), phubbing has contributed to declining relationships and the quality of relationships.

Phubbing & Scales. In 2018 Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018) developed and used a three-factor, 22-item generic scale to determine when and why individuals choose to phub their significant other. The individual's perception or experience of being phubbed is the driving factor in deciding if being phubbed is taking place or if one partner is taking a phone call at an awkward time. The perception of being phubbed is subjective and is a significant area that should be measured when addressing being phubbed by a partner (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). The three factors, PN = (Perceived Norms), FI = (Feeling Ignored) IC = (Interpersonal Conflict), are used to assign feelings to action. Perceived norms are the social ideas that can be subjective to one's everyday behavior, such as self and others (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018).

If a person is being phubbed and feels ignored, the individual's feelings at that very moment are the deciding factors because the feeling of being ignored can be subjective; however, it can be defined as feelings of self-doubt or not worthy of attention and not being heard or seen (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Interpersonal conflict is another factor associated with phubbing and being phubbed; this can be defined as a conflict between two or more people. Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas (2018) used each factor to develop the perception scale of being phubbed, and answering each question within the scale could help understand what it looks and feels like to be phubbed.

The results suggest four essential factors of phubbing, nomophobia, fear of being detached from one's phone, interpersonal conflict, self-isolation, and acknowledging the problem. In addition, another scale was created to question what would be needed to understand what couples expect and what they are receiving that could show why said satisfaction is low, starting to decline, or completely nonexistent. A 1- 5 range satisfied to dissatisfied scale was created to question intimacy, trust, shared goals, and overall togetherness. Cepukiene (2019) discovered a correlation between the idea that one cannot provide such needs while ignoring phubbing; however, one could determine that being phubbed could interrupt or dismantle what one believes is needed to be satisfied in a romantic partnership (Cepukiene, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Expectancy Violation Theory

In the late 1970s, Burgoon developed and presented the expectancy violation theory (EVT). The essential idea of the theory was to determine how people react to their personal space being violated; however, over time, the theory expanded to how individuals behave when the typical social exchange is interrupted once it has already been established. According to Gregory (2013), communication expectancies can be considered a guide of behaviors significantly impacting interactions with others. The EVT explains the effects of nonverbal behavior violations on interpersonal communication outcomes for harmonious interactions between two or more people (Gregory, 2013). This qualitative study will build on the expectancy violation theory (EVT) framework and its relationship to interpersonal communication and partner phubbing.

The expectations in communication with others are highly determined by the relationship or connection with the communicating partner (Gregory, 2013). In elaborating further, expectancies can be a feeling of excitement or disappointment depending on the communicator and the norm of expected behavior between two people (Gregory, 2013). An example is two people in a romantic relationship who typically interact with eye contact, appropriate responses, and response times during face-to-face communication. The connection between (EVT) and nonverbal communication could be directly connected to the social-psychological tradition of how people interact with nonverbal messages, their interpretation of said behaviors, and their norms and expectations (Lv et al., 2022). When two people in a romantic relationship hold certain expectations within their nonverbal communication, their interactions can be viewed as positive or negative.

When one-half of the romantic partnership views the situation as a violation of their expectation and unacceptable behavior, their cognitive, physical, or physiological arousal can be triggered (Mendes et al., 2007). Cognitive arousal could show up as a mental response, anxiety, depression, and physical arousal can show up as fight or flight or jealousy; psychological arousal could show up as an emotional or cognitive response such as fear and disappointment (Mendes et al., 2007). In a romantic partnership, the expectancy violation theory sends a nonverbal message of rejection in interpersonal communication between partners where phubbing is present (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). According to Wang et al. (2019), people within a romantic partnership can experience anger, depression, and jealousy when feeling rejected. Kadylak (2020) states that phubbing is a nonverbal behavior of looking at or preferring one's mobile phone over a person or partner when a face-to-face (FTF) interaction occurs in real time.

Whereby the mobile telephone receives attention rather than the present person. This behavior breaks the perceived expectations of communication etiquette. In interpersonal communication, individuals choose to converse and exchange messages to connect and gain understanding from others. When conversing with a partner, there is a social construct to how the exchange should occur (Burgin,2018). The social construct of sending and receiving messages is interrupted because one of the two communicators has chosen to interact on their cellphone, sending a nonverbal message of uninterest and rejection (Mendes et al., 2007).

According to Kadylak et al. (2018), using or checking one's phone during a face-to-face interaction can be perceived as violating the expectations of face-to-face communication etiquette. Phubbing goes against the norm of being attentive or giving the proper nonverbal and verbal cues presented to show that one is interested and present to participate in the social exchange (Bouffard et al., 2021). Phubbing or ignoring a person or partner to pay more attention to their mobile device removes one's ability to listen and respond to their partner, thus removing any possibility of effectively communicating (Bouffard et al., 2021). The non-contractual interaction between two people is compromised, as they continue to ignore their partner for their cell phone. Relationship social norms are constructed over time through patterns and expectations; when these patterns and expectations are not met, individuals will feel the social contract was broken and violated by their partners, causing damage to the relationship (Kelly et al., 2017).

Cell phones and social media can cause disruptions and distractions in romantic relationships (Kelly et al., 2017). Couple norms or transgressions are often perceived and interpreted by the social and relationship standards that the couple has established. According to

Miller-Ott & Kelly (2015), individuals in a romantic relationship expect their partners to be actively involved when directly communicating. Individuals rely on their partners to be present, show interest, provide feedback, and actively listen, sending nonverbal and verbal cues (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

In 2015 Miller-Ott & Kelly (2015) conducted a research study to determine the expectations that romantic partners have of cellphone use during times of togetherness and how the couple reacts and manages the rejection that occurs with being phubbed by their partner. To participate in the Miller-Ott & Kelly (2015) study, the individual had to be 18 and over, be in a romantic relationship, currently or in the past, and own a cellphone. The study consisted of 10 focus groups, with 36 women and 15 men, ages 18-30, with an average age of 20.14. Seven individuals were in a casual dating relationship, 14 were in an exclusive relationship, 14 were in a monogamous relationship, and one was engaged.

The participants answered the questionnaire rating many experiences from 1 to 5, from unimportant to most significant (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). The outcome showed that all participants rated communication as the most important. The survey determined that each partner expected to receive their partner's undivided attention. However, when their partner was present with their phone in hand, the communication was interrupted, and the phubbed partner felt unseen and unheard (Mendes et al., 2007). The study also noted how long the couple had been together, and the outcome remained the same. The expectations were that the person was attentive and present even when their cell phones were near.

Miller-Ott & Kelly (2015) noted that the communication expectations of a romantic couple became more intense the longer the couple had been together. For example, for a couple

in an exclusive long-term relationship, their expectations of their partner did not differ. The expectations of constant attention were high across all ten focus groups (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). In addition, the survey responses yielded repetitive words used to describe how each partner felt when being phubbed. The descriptive words were rude, annoying, hurtful, and rejected (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

In conclusion, Miller-Ott & Kelly's (2015) study showed that when a partner is phubbed, the social norms of eye contact, responses, response times, and nonverbal cues are nonexistent. As a result, phubbed partners feel rejected and ignored. When partners feel neglected and ignored, the outcome can be anger, anxiety, depression, conflict, jealousy, electronic partner surveillance, low relationship satisfaction, or an end to the relationship.

Interpersonal Communication Theory

In the late 1950s, Leon Festinger conceptualized interpersonal communication theory (IPC). He presented his understanding of how individuals converse and interact verbally and nonverbally with others and proposed his idea in the 1970s (Burgin, 2018). One of the many questions about interpersonal communication is how one defines it. According to Burgin (2018), interpersonal communication can be limited to how two people in a relationship converse with one another. However, because of the theory's broad spectrum, four different scopes are defined to narrow the understanding of how two people build and sustain relationships.

The first are theories on the meaning of relationships, ideas about the motives in relationships, views on the messages in relationships, and approaches to movement in a relationship (Burgin, 2018). The case study focuses focus and nonverbal messages sent and received in romantic relationships as there is no absence of communication because when one

chooses not to communicate verbally, he or she will still send a message of communication. When individuals choose to converse and or exchange messages to gain understanding or remain connected, the idea of the theories in messages in relationships provide an understanding and or explanation of why individuals choose specific wording, why they say what there are saying, or why they choose a particular tone, or nonverbal cue to interact, and most importantly how the message is received and processed (Burgin, 2018).

Interaction Adaption Theory. In 1995, Burgoon presented the interaction adaptation theory (IAT). IAT is an interpersonal exchange when one's behavior adjusts and adapts to changes over time, often in the place of failed expectations (Le et al., 1999). The interpersonal communication theory has many other ideas that acknowledge the patterns and nonverbal interactions of sent and received messages between people (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). According to Johnson et al. (2021), a couple's behaviors change and are set into place as they adjust their daily interactions based on their needs, failed expectations, and desired outcomes. In turn, functionality forms a predominant pattern or interaction that reciprocates or manages another individual's behavior.

These patterns happen continuously and subconsciously because people expect how others should behave (Le et al., Cording to Le Poire & Yoshimura (1999), IAT can be presented as predictable behavior because humans interact daily and share the same spaces. Over time people will eventually mimic, adjust, or manage their partner's nonverbal behaviors. IAT can balance many couple relationships because it could strengthen the conversation, relatability, relationship quality, and overall connection (Nichols et al., 2015). However, such adaptations have the potential to create an adverse outcome because choosing to adapt to a negative behavior will eventually cause conflict (Nichols et al., 2015). Couples enter romantic relationships with

expectations, requirements, boundaries, and goals of how they want to be treated and heard in their relationships (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

People in romantic relationships expect their significant other to be attentive during conversations, provide nonverbal reassurance that suggests they are paying attention, and provide face-to-face communication expectancies during conversational interactions (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). When a person does not give the expected attentiveness or nonverbal communication expectancies during an exchange, a partner must decide to adapt to the behavior, accept the behavior, or take action to end the behavior (Miller-Ott et al., 2012).

According to Miller-Ott et al. (2012), when a partner is being phubbed, they either adjust to being ignored, internalize their partner's behavior, or set boundaries. Based on how often a partner is being phubbed and the violation is being accepted, mimicked, or adjusted to could eventually alter the interaction between them. When negative communication between a couple occurs from both partners, that is a significant indicator that disengagement and internal and external conflict are occurring, and their relationship satisfaction is low or lower (Nichols et al., 2015). Over time, one's ability to adapt interactions with their partner because of failed expectations could face the ultimate test when a partner is being phubbed. Being phubbed is a nonverbal gesture that violates interpersonal communication expectations between couples (Miller-Ott et al., 2012). However, only a couple can determine if the violation is unacceptable, a slight inconvenience, and sees no concern or retaliate for being phubbed by phubbing.

Related Literature

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship or couple satisfaction can be defined as a subjective evaluation of experiences and opinions of one's relationship, and according to Sobral et al. (2015), the level of satisfaction relies heavily on one's fear of intimacy or fear of losing a partner (Sobral et al., 2015). Sobral et al. (2015) also describe relationship satisfaction as the degree to which a partner satisfies the other partner's wants and needs through communication, intimacy, and quality time together. Relationship satisfaction is essential in the discussion of partner phubbing, as partner phubbing is the perception of being sidelined by a partner's smartphone, in turn, the loss of intimacy and the anxiety of losing a partner from the speculated actions that one could partake in with said smartphone (Sobral et al., 2015). An individual with the fear or lack of intimacy and anxiety of losing a partner is the many reasons the divorce rate is 40-50% in 3-6 countries Sobral et al., (2015).

Although the level of satisfaction in marriage and romantic coupling can be challenging, a reliable and valid measure of relationship quality is essential when trying to understand what a quality relationship should feel like between two people. However, before understanding what makes a quality relationship, it is essential to try and conclude what each person needs to feel satisfied.

Nevertheless, understanding that men and women experience intimacy differently creates a challenge in finding the right questions to create a survey and data to conclude the intimacy levels needed in a partnership for satisfaction (Sobral et al., 2015). In 2015, Sobral et al.

conducted a study to determine the level of intimacy necessary for both a man and woman in heterosexual partnering to feel satisfied within the relationship. An email survey was delivered to couples to gather the required data and returned with anonymous replies from 276 heterosexual couples from 18-55.

The average relationship length was 10.74 years. Of those relationships, 49.4% were married, 41.3% were dating, and 10.9% were cohabitating. The results showed very little difference between men's and women's views and approach to what would make a good relationship (Sobral et al., 2015). Per the relationship satisfaction scale, women scored 6.26%, and men scored a 6.32 %. The findings indicate that both men and women believe that intimacy is an essential part of a relationship worth being in. This finding dramatically aligns with the adverse effects of phubbing on any romantic relationship (McDaniel & Wesselmann, 2021). Losing intimacy with a smartphone can leave one partner feeling left out and abandoned, triggering negative emotions to spill over into conflicts (David & Roberts, 2021). Nevertheless, measuring satisfaction within a relationship is needed to determine how partner phubbing hurts romantic relationships. The relationship satisfaction scale puts these measures into perspective.

Adverse Effects of Phubbing a Romantic Partner

According to David & Roberts (2021), partner phubbing is often distinguished by the person being phubbed, the Phubbees and the person doing the phubbing being labeled the phubber. Although in many relationships, individuals would like to refer to themselves as the Phubbees, many are also phubbers because it is known that those who are phubbed turn into phubbers (Attridge, 2013). Both individuals within the relationship become Phubbees because of the lack of relationship satisfaction caused by phubbing between the two (Attridge, 2013).

Knowing who the phubbed and the phubber are essential for perception purposes, yet, not in the bigger picture because the act alone is counterproductive in any relationship. The negative impact of partner phubbing on a relationship has long-term and short-term effects (Attridge, 2013).

For example, thumbing through social media in an intimate dinner setting as your partner sits directly across is a sure way to make them feel ignored and insignificant. The quality of the conversation at that same dinner table can adversely affect the relationship. Losing a quality conversation on the phone lowers relationship satisfaction (David & Roberts, 2021). According to David & Roberts (2021), being face to face and not present in conversation sends a message of one not being mentally present. Having face-to-face conversations with one person absent-present or alone together lowers the quality of the interaction and undermines the relationship quality and connection; according to (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016), couples that find themselves on their phones during intimate times are less likely to recover the time lost, have low relational satisfaction, and are more likely to show signs of conflict both internally and externally.

Jealousy. Romantic jealousy can be defined as one's reaction to the threat of losing a valued relationship, perceived or imagined (Attridge, 2013). However, when addressing the phubbing phenomenon, the actions and feelings one may display when there is a perceived or imagined threat to their relationship suit best. According to Attridge (2013), individuals who spend excessive time on their mobile devices are more than likely browsing social media apps. Therefore, one could reasonably argue or conclude that the more a partner is phubbing, they may browse social media. For many, the idea of a partner phubbing for social media could spark

romantic jealousy as the partner may feel that their partner prefers a smartphone, person, or image rather than them, possibly posing a perceived threat to the relationship.

Nevertheless, attachment styles are mentioned and explored when discussing romantic jealousy, yet with phubbing, the attachment style matters most to those that phub (Attridge, 2013). In 2019 a study was conducted to understand the reason behind phubbing and its connection with jealousy and attachment styles. The study found that phubbing had more to do with smartphone addiction, social media addiction, narcissism, and being phubbed rather than attachment style (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019). According to Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell (2019), people phub those close to them the most; this conclusion would explain why romantic partners feel most neglected and triggered by jealousy because they are being phubbed more than strangers, not their attachment style (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019).

Attachment styles do not lead to romantic jealousy when associated with phubbing. Still, rather than social media addiction, smartphone addiction, narcissism, or being phubbed, David & Roberts's (2021) research method involved a controlled environment and two open-end questions to 191 adults over 18. 50% male, 50% female ranging from ages 19-71. 83% of participants were in a romantic relationship, and the remaining subjects had to think of their most recent romantic relationship to answer one of the two questions (David & Roberts, 2021). Ninety-four individuals were asked to describe their last phubbing encounter when spending quality time with their significant other and how it made them feel. Ninety-seven individuals were then asked to describe what was happening and how they felt while running errands, watching a movie, having dinner, Etc., with their significant other while being phubbed (David & Roberts, 2021).

The results showed jealousy was sparked by controlled conditions such as the event, watching movies, running errands, or quality time (David & Roberts, 2021). The study's outcome presents a case where jealousy was most present when individuals believed that the moment or event was compromised because of their partner's phubbing them, not an attachment style. According to David & Roberts (2021), individuals that experienced phubbing in a controlled setting or special event designed to be a romantic or quality time moment had higher anxiety about their partner's actions and being phubbed. The study also presented data on individual phubbing; the outcome showed they presented signs of insecurities of an anxious attachment style (David & Roberts, 2021).

Therefore, the presented data concludes that not all romantic jealousy is triggered by one's attachment styles but by partner phubbing. The phubber's attachment style is more on display within a romantic relationship where phubbing is taking place.

Mental Health. According to Ergün et al. (2020), mental health is a direct adverse effect of being phubbed; being phubbed negatively affects one's life and psychological well-being. It can also lead to anxiety, jealousy, and what feels like justified phubbing. In addition, individuals being phubbed by others are at higher risk for depression and other related mental health problems, excessive loneliness, and lack of relationship satisfaction (Ergün et al.,2020). However, several factors lead one to phubbing mobile phone addiction, social media addiction, mobile game addiction, depression, nomophobia, fear of being without one phone, low agreeableness, or difficulty getting along with others (Ergün et al.,2020).

The phenomenon of being phubbed, the excessive use of cell phones, and its direct connection to mental health have become a topic of interest and growth in the past decade.

Ivanova et al. (2020) state that mental health and excessive phone use have been studied and connected to the user. However, the user that phubs their partner for their phone shows the exact outcome of declining mental health (Ivanova et al., 2020). Ivanova et al. (2020) mention that depressive disorders can be associated with sadness and emptiness, and loneliness; the connection between being phubbed with depression triggered by loneliness can be an adverse effect of being ignored by one's partner for their phone excessively or in a moment when one's partner is most needed, Not being able to receive a partner's attention when the communication is most needed can be triggering to one's mental health, therefore connecting the decline of mental health to one being phubbed.

Partner Responsiveness & Surveillance. According to Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), low-quality and high-phubbing relationships have a greater risk and rate of electronic partner surveillance (EPS). EPS is surveilling a partner's smartphone and social media activity (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022). EPS is often at its peak when a partner is being phubbed, shows little to no interest in face-to-face interaction with their partner, and becomes highly protective of their smartphone or other electronic devices (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022).

Partner phubbing during conversations or romantic moments can often leave a partner feeling anxious, and the inadequate preserved response from phubbing decreases relationship satisfaction. The verbiage of perceived partner response is essential to the outcomes of phubbing because one must perceive that they are being phubbed before determining their feelings towards their partners, broken contract of nonverbal interaction of face-to-face interactions, causing expectancy violation.

In 2020 research was conducted to determine what factors lead to dissatisfaction in a relationship caused by phubbing. According to Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), a negative outcome of phubbing was EPS; a partner who feels they are being phubbed had increased anxiety and speculations of their partner's infidelity. To determine how phubbing increases EPS among those in a romantic relationship, a data collected survey concluded that 75% of women with an age average of 40.5 that their relationship was given in taking of phubbing and EPS (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022).

Another adverse effect of phubbing is partner responsiveness; according to (Forest et al. (2014), partner responsiveness can be described as the thought that one's relationship is or is not satisfying in connection with how their partner responds to their feelings with care, understanding, and validation. Phubbing and partner responsiveness directly connect to relationship satisfaction because when a partner is phubbed, they believe they are not being heard, triggering anxiety, insecurity, and partner surveillance. To further expand and show data on how phubbing and partner responsiveness create an adverse effect in romantic relationships by lowering the satisfaction of the relationship and increasing insecurities, a research study was conducted, one that stretched over seven days. The researcher created and presented a responsiveness scale that allowed the participants to rate their feelings, such as how their partner made them feel when they expressed their feelings, such as their partner was understanding, provided validation, and the comfort and feeling of being heard (Frackowiak et al., 2022).

Over seven days, Frackowiak et al. (2022) asked participants to log their experiences. The average age of women participants was 31.7, and males average was 33.1. The longest female relationship was 10.3 years, and the most extended relationships among the males were

8.8 (Frackowiak et al., 2022). 60% of women identified as heterosexual, nine female participants identified as bisexual, and one male participant identified as bisexual. However, the participants reported that the more they were phubbed, the less their partner displayed positive responsiveness. They gave their partners a negative evaluation of low responsiveness, concluding that the more a partner is phubbed, their partners feel the adverse effects. The participants gave their phubbing partners a lower responsiveness rating, concluding that with increased phubbing, they noted that their partners displayed increased negative behaviors and found their partners less responsive (Frackowiak et al., 2022).

Lower partner responsiveness, or lack thereof, can increase anxiety and insecurities within a partnership (Frackowiak et al., 2022). One of the many outcomes of such feelings is Electronic Partner Surveillance (EPS), or checking a partner's electronic and digital activity. Shafer et al. (2022) describe this term as a partner's desire to control their romantic partner by removing all external or perceived threats to their relationship. According to Ruggieri et al. (2021), a partner's electronic device's EPS could be anything from their mobile phones, social media apps, emails, and internet browser history. Any form of EPS is considered an act of jealousy (Ruggieri et al., 2021). When discussing jealousy and EPS, one should consider the triggers of jealousy when phubbing is involved. Partners being phubbed receive little to no attention from their partner when their smartphone is present, triggering jealousy (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019).

According to Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), EPS directly connects to phubbing because phubbing is known to lower partner responsiveness, leading to low-quality romantic relationships. When a partner perceives their partner's responsiveness to decline or is

nonexistent, anxiety and jealousy can often be the outcome (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022). In 2022, Schokkenbroek et al. surveyed 346 participants average age of 40.5, and 75.7% were women. The overall outcome was that 92.2% of those surveyed admitted to being phubbed; 93.1% were women, 89.3 % were men, and in response, 34.1% responded with EPS (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022). 38.2% of women and 21.4% of men partook in EPS because of being phubbed by their partners (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022).

Summary

In 2021, there were 5.3 billion mobile phone users, many of whom spent an average of 7 hours a day on their devices or the internet because of COVID-19 (Valdez et al., (2020)). The increased use of social media and smartphone devices negatively impacted interpersonal communications, triggering the expectancy violation theory because mobile phones use and phubbing remove interpersonal norms of face-to-face interactions (Wang & Zhao, 2022). In addition, phubbing creates many adverse effects between partners, leading to conflict because partner cheating suspicions arise, resulting in breakups, separation, or divorce (Wang & Zhao, 2022). Some of the adverse effects of phubbing are not limited to lower relationship quality, mental health, anxiety, depression, jealousy, EPS, social media addiction, and smartphone addiction.

To directly connect an increase in conflict between romantic partners and phubbing. Wang & Zhao (2022) presented a study to address such adverse behaviors in partner phubbing to address previous literature on increased partner phubbing and lowered relationship satisfaction and phubbing connection to reducing a couple's marital quality. In this Wang & Zhao (2022) study, couples were asked to watch 3-minute scenario videos and place themselves in a scenario

where phubbing occurred in three different areas and events. They were then asked to describe how they would feel if their partner had phubbed them as the scenario actors had in the videos. Couples mentioned a perceived lack of partner responsiveness and a loss or lower intimacy (Wang & Zhao, 2022). During the data collection, the researchers used the participant's initial responses about what they would do in the scenario. Some responses were confrontation, retaliation, revenge, and electronic partner surveillance (EPS), while some had conflicted outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative case study approach to discover how being phubbed by a romantic partner could affect relationship satisfaction. A qualitative case study approach was decided after reviewing the literature on phubbing and being phubbed and low relational satisfaction. Past studies have connected the advancement of technology, cell phone addiction, attachment styles, and digital akrasia to low relational satisfaction. This study aims to provide data to show that being phubbed by a romantic partner causes the individual to react immediately internally or externally because of the failed communication expectations between the two. In interviewing individuals within romantic relationships to understand their experiences and immediate reactions to being phubbed by a romantic partner, one could provide the data needed to determine how phubbing a romantic partner affects individuals and, in turn, relational satisfaction.

In addition, being phubbed violates the expectations of communication between romantic partners and could cause adverse outcomes and lower relationship satisfaction for failed expectations (Wang et al., 2019). However, in response to how being phubbed by a romantic partner, one could adapt to the experience and or experience internal and external conflicts, such as increasing emotions and feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and frustration leading to external events, such as IAT, electronic partner surveillance, reciprocal phubbing, breakups, separations, or divorce (Wang et al., 2019).

Research Design

A qualitative explanatory case study approach is most appropriate for this research because there appears to be an association between being phubbed by a romantic partner and relationship satisfaction. Interview-style questions will be asked via Zoom. The questions and answers will be recorded and then transcribed. The results are generalized and thematically analyzed in six categories of interest. The six interest categories are (a) conflict, (b) reciprocal phubbing, (c) break up or divorce, (d) relationship expectations, (e) adaptation and/or acceptance of expectations, and (f) unbothered by failed expectations.

Phubbing and being phubbed and its impact on romantic relationships will be addressed in the connection between expectations, outcome, and relational satisfaction categories of internal conflicts, such as jealousy, depression, anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and frustration. Other possible outcomes include external conflicts such as verbal confrontation, separation, electronic partner surveillance, reciprocal phubbing, and interaction adaptation. The explanatory case study design is most effective in generating an answer for each research question because the outcomes of the interview questions will aim to determine if, why, how, and to what extent being phubbed in a romantic partnership lowers its quality.

Research Question(s)

This qualitative explanatory case study aims to determine if and to what extent being phubbed impacts individuals and relational satisfaction within a romantic relationship. Relationship satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of experiences and opinions of one's relationship because satisfaction relies heavily on one's fear of intimacy and lost connections (Sobral et al.,2015).

RQ1: How does phubbing affect relationship satisfaction?

RQ2. How do the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed?

RQ3. How does interaction adaption affect relationship satisfaction?

Recruitment Sample Selection. The samples for this case study will be ten men and ten women in a romantic relationship. The participants have been recruited via the business networking site LinkedIn. A research recruitment announcement advertisement was placed on the site. In addition, a link and an email address were provided for those interested in participating. The prequalifying questions were available to ensure that all participants met the criteria before volunteering. Participants are 20 male-female romantic partners that may or may not be a couple, ages 18-65; ten men and ten women were chosen. Participants must be in a romantic relationship and own a cell phone. This study will not address cohabitation, sexuality, ethnicity, or occupation. Excluded participants were individuals that did not have a cell phone, were under 18, were over 65, and had not been with their romantic partner for more than 30 days.

Procedures. After receiving permission to begin recruiting, the researcher created and posted an advertisement announcement via the business networking site LinkedIn. The researcher randomly chose volunteers. The advertisement announcement for the case study provided the volunteers with the research, its purpose, and the eligibility criteria to be part of the study. Participants answered pre-qualifying questions. Participants ages 18 - 65 that responded yes to the pre-questionnaire were asked to click the link for more information. The link led each person to the consent form, interviewing process, and ethical procedures for confidentiality. The

participants were given a list of dates and times to choose from to join the interviewing process via Zoom.

Agreeing individuals continuing with the study were provided a consent letter for ethical considerations and the right to privacy and be recorded via Zoom. The consent form includes the purpose of the study, the participant's role, the researcher's role, how their information will be used, and their right to access the study when it is complete. The consent form must be signed and dated before the interview begins. Participants who disagreed with the consent were removed and replaced with a new candidate. Their names, phone numbers, and emails are collected and seen by the researcher for research purposes only and will be shredded or deleted after the study is complete.

Participants' first and last names are used during the interview; they are assigned a number based on the order in which they are interviewed and identified as that number for the interview analysis throughout the case study. A Zoom call link is provided for the participants via email or phone to answer interview questions. Each participant's interview answers are recorded and then transcribed. The transcript was then emailed to the participant for member check to ensure accuracy and validations. Approved and validated transcripts were reviewed by the researcher and then sorted for a thematic analysis of six areas of interest to establish patterns. The six areas of interest are being phubbed, length of the relationship, internal and external conflicts, break ups and divorce, relationship expectations, adaptation or acceptance of failed expectations, or unbothered by failed expectations.

Ethical Considerations

For this research, ethical consideration permissions were obtained to proceed. The researcher presented all participants with consent forms preceding each interview to ensure they understood their rights to privacy and the finished discretion. The data context did not include names, personal emails, and phone numbers from the case study to protect their privacy, information, and identity. Instead, numbers were assigned to each participant based on the order in which they were interviewed to ensure confidentiality. The interview data will be stored electronically; the data will be stored on a locked computer and in a locked file, only accessible to the researcher.

The researcher will be the only person accessing the Zoom interview data. The Zoom recordings are transcribed and seen by the researcher only. A password-protected electronic file, identified with a number, on the researcher's home computer, will protect the linking name to the code list. The researcher will not discuss the interview process with anyone until all personal information is removed and the transcribed interview is complete using assigned numbers only. The transcript is emailed to the interviewee for member check to ensure accuracy and validation. In addition, all confidential documents, such as names, personal emails, and phone numbers, will be permanently deleted and shredded at the end of the case study.

Data Collection & Analysis

To collect data each participant was interviewed via Zoom call. With consent, each interview was recorded and later transcribed. A structured interview guide with a logical flow was used to provide each participant with the same questions in the same order. No additional questions were included in the interview or adlibbed. Participants could answer each question in

as much detail as they believed needed to answer all questions thoroughly. The researcher did not guide the answers and remained silent until the participants signaled that they had completed their response by saying, “End of the answer.” A time limit of 60 minutes is proposed as the start-to-finish time of each interview.

Each participant was assigned a number 1-20, based on the order in which they were interviewed, to ensure their names were excluded from the case study. In analyzing the data, a thematic approach was most appropriate. The data will be sorted and grouped by themes and patterns and six categories of interest, fully noting that each data set can fulfill various categories. The data will be generalized; for example, women experienced inner conflicts of jealousy from being phubbed by their partners more than men; men expressed having lower expectations of face-to-face conversational norms than women; and men and women expressed that being phubbed made them angry.

Themes of Interest

1. Men and women that have been phubbed.
2. Length of relationship.
3. Conflict, internal and/or external break up, or divorce.
4. Relationship expectations.
5. Interaction adaptation and/or acceptance of behavior or reciprocal phubbing.
6. Relational satisfaction.

Role of Researcher. In this qualitative case study, the researcher serves as the population recruiter and interviewer, generalizing the collected data and the context of the data. The researcher creates and distributes Zoom links to each qualified participant and provides and

receives each consent form. In addition, the researcher recorded, reviewed, and transcribed each interview via Zoom. Finally, the researcher provides each participant with their transcribed interview to member-check for accuracy and their initials for approval and validation. The researcher examined each transcript and thematically analyzed the interviews, generalizing information and providing the outcome in context and figures. The researcher will provide participants with a copy of the completed study at their request and shred and delete any personal information from each participant as agreed in consent. The researcher will keep emails to revisit the study in five years.

Strategies to Validate Findings & Expected Outcome. A member-checking strategy is applied to validate the findings. Participants will receive their transcribed interview via email and are given two business days to review it to reject or confirm that their accounts and experiences are accurately written by dating and initialing on the consent form. Rejected transcribed experiences are rewritten and presented to the participant until approval is obtained. Approved transcripts are accepted and obtained, and used for context data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Zoom-call interviews were conducted to retrieve context data. Each interview was conducted with only the interviewer; no one else was present on the interviewer's end to hear or see the participants. However, participants could have had someone present who may have overheard their answers. A structured interview guide with a logical flow was used to provide each participant with the same questions in the same order. No additional questions were included in the interviews. Participants answered each question with as much detail as needed to provide a thorough answer.

The interviewer did not guide the answers and remained silent until the participants signaled that they had completed their response by saying, "End of the answer." Alternatively, the interviewer asked, "Is your answer complete?" None of the interviews exceeded 30 minutes from start to finish. Each participant was assigned a number, 1-20, based on the order in which they were interviewed. This numbering system was developed to ensure each participant's identity was excluded from the case study. The interview was then transcribed and labeled accordingly; for example, the first male interviewee was written as Participant M1; and the first woman as Participant W1.

A thematic approach was most appropriate to analyze the data because they were retrieved across several relational communication, which was most beneficial to determine the research answer. Accordingly, the participant's responses were generalized and divided into six categories. Each interview question was developed to address the themes and patterns noted in the six categories. Additionally, each data set may have covered other areas of interest. For example, women experienced inner conflicts of jealousy after being phubbed by their partners more often than men; men expressed lower expectations of face-to-face conversational norms

than women, and both men and women expressed that being phubbed made them adjust when and where they chose to communicate with their partners.

Twenty participants were interviewed to retrieve the contextual data, ten men and ten women. Each of their answers was collected and generalized into six themes of interest. (a). Men and women. (b). Length of relationship. (c). Conflict, internal and/or external break up, or divorce. (d). Relationship expectations. (e). Interaction adaptation and/or acceptance of behavior or reciprocal phubbing. (f). Relational satisfaction. Theme 1 will address men and women who have been phubbed, their opinions of cell phones and their effect on relationship communication, and participants' reactions and feelings to being phubbed by their romantic partner. Theme 2 comprised the length of the relationship and the communicative expectations from the beginning of the relationship until the present.

Theme 3 encompassed participants' discussions of conflict and their relationship expectations. Theme 4 addressed participants' relational communication expectations from their partners. Theme 5 regarded IA, which provided contextual data to illustrate whether participants remained true to their original relational expectations or adapted to their partner's behaviors over time. Theme 6 covers relational satisfaction, which was addressed using a satisfaction scale to determine each participant's level of satisfaction with their current relationship.

The interview answers contributed to addressing the research questions. The first theme revealed that men and women are frequently phubbed in romantic relationships. However, women displayed external conflict showing their anger and discomfort of being phubbed with physical reactions. Participants were then asked to address their cell phone habits and how the cell phone impacted their relationships, and their answers varied. For some, the cell phone was an addition to the foundation of expectations set at the beginning of the union.

For participants who were together before the cell phone, the expectations were dinner dates, mandatory face-to-face conversations, phone calls from landline phones, and handwritten letters both then and now. Additionally, a few daily texts and face times were expected within these unions, regardless of whether the relationships were established during or after cell phones became available. Societal changes and the couples' adaptations to the use of cell phones were evident throughout the data because many of the participant's needs, wants, and expectations were similar after cell phones became available.

Communication Expectations and Adaptations

Participants establish communication expectations at the beginning of each romantic relationship. Consequently, couples develop patterns that align with their partner's communication habits, such as the time between responses, the level of eye contact offered when communicating, the level at which their partner listens to understand, or the expectations regarding interruptions. Individuals note whether their partner responds quickly or slowly via text or mobile phone. They also begin to notice whether their partner listens to understand or respond. Couples quickly discover whether they are in a union with a partner who validates their feelings and has difficult conversations when necessary.

Participants in this study determined how often they wanted to receive text messages throughout the day. They expressed the need for attentive communication and face-to-face conversation to remain satisfied in their relationship. The generalized outcome is that even with the advancement of technology, most participants and couples choose to revert to face-to-face conversation to share essential or exclusive communication. All participants deemed communication to be the main factor in their relationship satisfaction both currently and at the

beginning of the relationship; accordingly, expectations of communication were common among the participants.

As participants described how they established communication patterns, they expressed that those expectations were no longer being met, explaining that phubbing was now a part of their expected communication and that being phubbed made them feel rejected and neglected, causing anger, hurt, and annoyance. Participants expect their partners to be as attentive when conversing as they had been at the beginning of the union. This expectation violation triggered the feelings and reactions of being phubbed during communication. The concept behind this violation is conceptualized in the expectancy violation theory (EVT) framework.

The EVT framework explains the effects of nonverbal behavioral offenses on interpersonal communication outcomes between two or more people (Gregory, 2013). Those being phubbed mentioned their feelings of being annoyed, angry, and hurt by the lack of attentiveness during a time of communicative exchange, which was captured in each participant's response to being phubbed and indicates that expectancy violations (EVs) could be the root cause of conflict among those in romantic relationships in which phubbing is present. Although communication expectations were a top priority for all participants, the findings suggest that participants significantly adapted to the cell phone and its technology in their communication efforts and routines. Some participants noted that they displayed interaction adaptation theory (IAT) behavior.

The IAT refers to an acceptance of behavior and could be the inner cause of reciprocal phubbing or an acceptance of the behavior. Johnson et al. (2021) state that a couple's behaviors change and adapt; couples adjust their daily interactions based on their needs, unmet expectations, and desired outcomes (Le et al., 1999).

As mentioned, when half of the romantic partnership views the situation as a violation of expectations, that partner's cognitive, physical, or physiological arousal can be provoked (Mendes et al., 2007). As participants expressed their desire for face-to-face communication, some chose to compromise and settle for texting. However, some participants did not adapt when they wanted to be heard by their partners. Many expressed that cell phones positively and negatively impacted their relationship satisfaction and communication level. Four of the ten male participants stated that the amount of time their partner spent on the phone was an adverse effect of having their cell phone presence.

One participant mentioned that text messaging caused continuous arguments because the messages were often read out of context, and the partner's attention appeared to be elsewhere, which caused additional adverse outcomes. Participants who spoke of the cell phone's positive impact on their relationships noted their ability to instantly and frequently communicate with their partners. Writing is beneficial when people cannot express themselves verbally; furthermore, they can choose words carefully when texting to avoid or solve a conflict.

Findings

Men and Women

When generalizing the contextual data, it became evident that none of the participants enjoyed being phubbed by their partners. Furthermore, when conducting the interviews, I noted substantial differences between men's and women's responses to being phubbed; the deviations in their feelings and responses varied. The categorical data illustrate that phubbing interrupts communication creates adverse feelings, increases conflict, and could impact a person's overall

relationship satisfaction. All participants were asked the following three questions to gather said data:

1. Question 7: How do you think phones affect your relationship's communication in your relationship?
2. Question 9: When you perceived yourself as being phubbed, what event, moment, or time did it occur, and how did you respond?
3. Question 10: Describe your worse reaction to being phubbed, explain why you responded that way, and how it made you feel.

Men

All three questions were designed to determine how participants believed the cell phone affected their relationship communication in their relationship, how they responded to being phubbed, and how each participant felt when being phubbed. For example, when asked Question 7, all male participants offered positive and negative connotations to owning a cell phone. Participants then provided positive and negative examples of how the phone affected communication in their relationship.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the contextual data from male participants' positive and negative connotations of cell phone use in their relationships.

Figure 1

The Adverse Effects of Cell Phones on Relationship Communication in Men

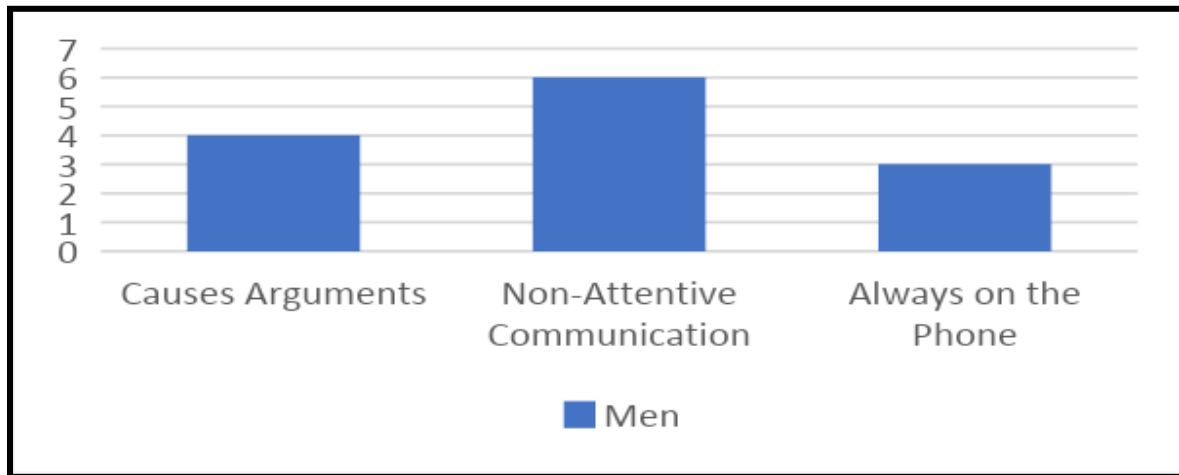
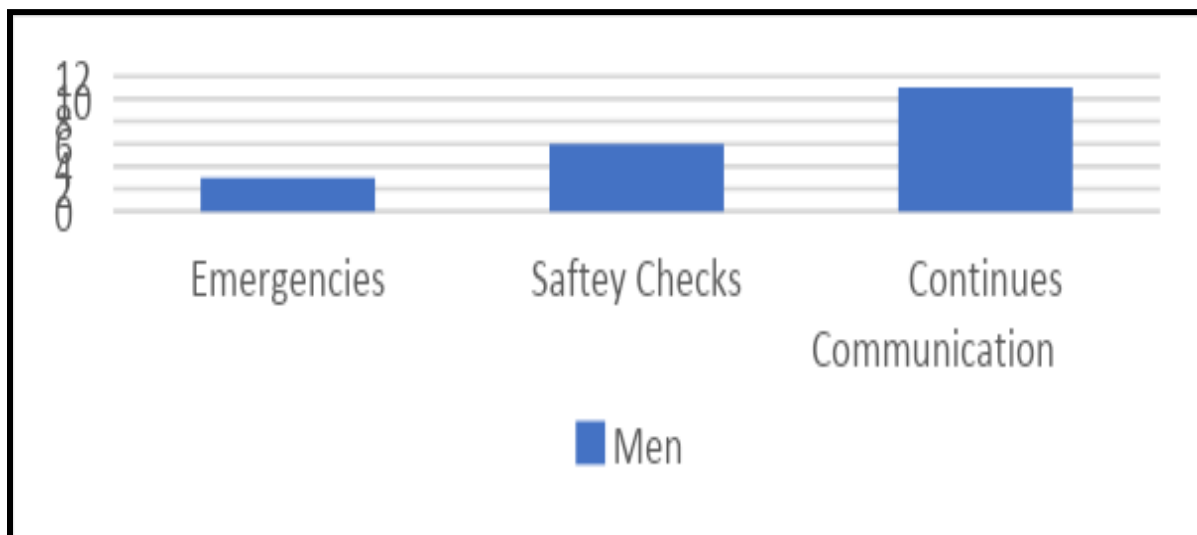


Figure 2

The Positive Effects of Cell Phones on Relationship Communication in Men



Participant Interviews: One

The following are some of the interview answers from the male participants.

Participant M3

“It is negative and positive ‘cause I get to talk or text with her throughout the day, so it’s kinda like, I can do everything on my phone, and we [are], like, talking and texting all day, like, if I miss her.”

The participant clarified that he enjoyed communicating with his partner throughout the day and appreciated the continuous connection that the phone provides. However, he often missed his partner throughout the day, especially on long days, because he worked long hours. Other male participants also mentioned that the phone provided safety within the relationship because they could contact and communicate with their partners during emergencies. They further reported that cell phones allowed them to check on their partner’s safety.

For example, Participant M5 mentioned that he worked late nights and early mornings, so the cell phone enabled him to check on his wife at any time throughout the day.

Participant M5

“For the most part, I work long days and am sometimes gone, so they help us stay in touch and check on each other in case, like, in an emergency or something like that, so yeah, they help us communicate.”

Participant M4. Participant M4 moved from Chicago to San Antonio. He and his partner were each working two jobs until they could find positions similar to those they had in Chicago.

Therefore, their phones were needed and were an excellent addition to communication in their relationship.

“They help sometimes; we both work two jobs so that we can check on each other throughout the day.”

Additionally, participants provided examples of how cell phones negatively affected their relationship communication. For example, Participant M7 was a college student. He and his partner expected to graduate next year. He expressed that the phone was an essential staple in their relationship because they were both in school, and their days consisted of classes, hobbies, and friends. Consequently, they decided to use their phones to schedule times to see each other around campus. However, he expressed that the phone was often a problem when they were together for serious conversations.

***Participant M7.** “Umm, I would say it has a negative effect, like, when like, more so when it’s a genuine conversation or asking how our days went, and if we go out for dinner, that’s when it seems like it affects our communication, and when we do, we say, like, hey, this is an important conversation, so we gotta put the phones down.”*

Participant M2. Participant M2 stated that he only saw his partner 4 days per week. He mentioned that the phone negatively impacted communication because she was continuously on her phone, scrolling through social media when they were together. He believed that it interrupted their communication because her focus was on her phone, not the conversation or him.

“They do sometimes get in the way when we are not engaged in the conversation, we just talk about something, and then her phone notification starts going off, and now she’s on social media, saying, huh! Huh! ‘Cause she’s not paying attention to anything that I say.”

Participant M3. Participant M3 expressed that cell phones negatively affected his relationship communication because they caused arguments. His partner examined his phone and social media, looking at the women who followed him. He told her that many of the women following him were his younger clients' mothers. Participant M3 believed that his partner assumed that he was communicating with other women whenever he was on the phone, and the conversations quickly became arguments.

“Like, it’s kind of negative too, ‘cause every time I am on my phone, she thinks I’m sending and messaging other women. But I’m a barber, and my social media is how I advertise my business, and so when I’m answering people asking questions, she starts a fight, and now I have to argue with her because I cannot just not answer people. I gotta keep getting new clients, so, yeah, it’s crazy.”

Other participants who mentioned the arguments that cell phones created also mentioned trust issues. For example, Participant M6 believed that the cell phone was harmful because his partner accessed his phone on several occasions, and after doing so, arguments began. He recalled one argument that began because he followed a girl wearing short shorts and a small shirt on Instagram.

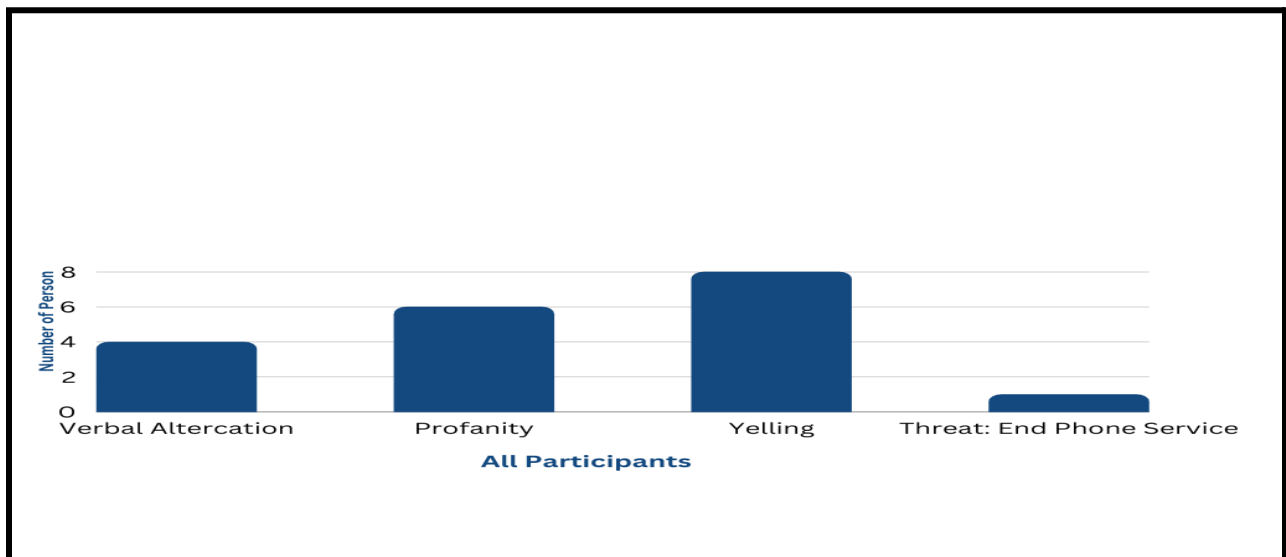
Participant M6. *“Even though it’s some positive stuff, it[’s] also some negative stuff too because they cause arguments; my girlfriend goes through my phone all the time; she gets mad because of who I follow or pictures that I like. Like, one time, I followed a girl with short shorts*

on, and she had large breasts in a small top. She went crazy! We argued [and] I tried to tell her I didn't know her in real life, but she was pissed, so I unfollowed, ha-ha!"

In addition to examining the impact of cell phones on relationship communication, I aimed in this case study to better understand how participants responded and felt about being phubbed. Consequently, they were each asked to recall a time they perceived themselves as being phubbed. Participants were then asked to mention the event, moment, or time in which it occurred, how they responded, and how they felt. Figure 3 portrays the male participants' reactions to being phubbed. Some participants offered more than one response.

Figure 3

Responses to Being Phubbed



The generalized data indicated that many participants had the same response to being phubbed. As seen in Figure 3, those responses included yelling at their partner, verbally altercating, using profanity, and one unique response: verbally threatening to end the partner's

phone service because the participant paid for the service and phone. Participant M7's response to Question 9 contained a verbal altercation, yelling, and profanity. His explanation of the moment that he perceived that he was being phubbed follows.

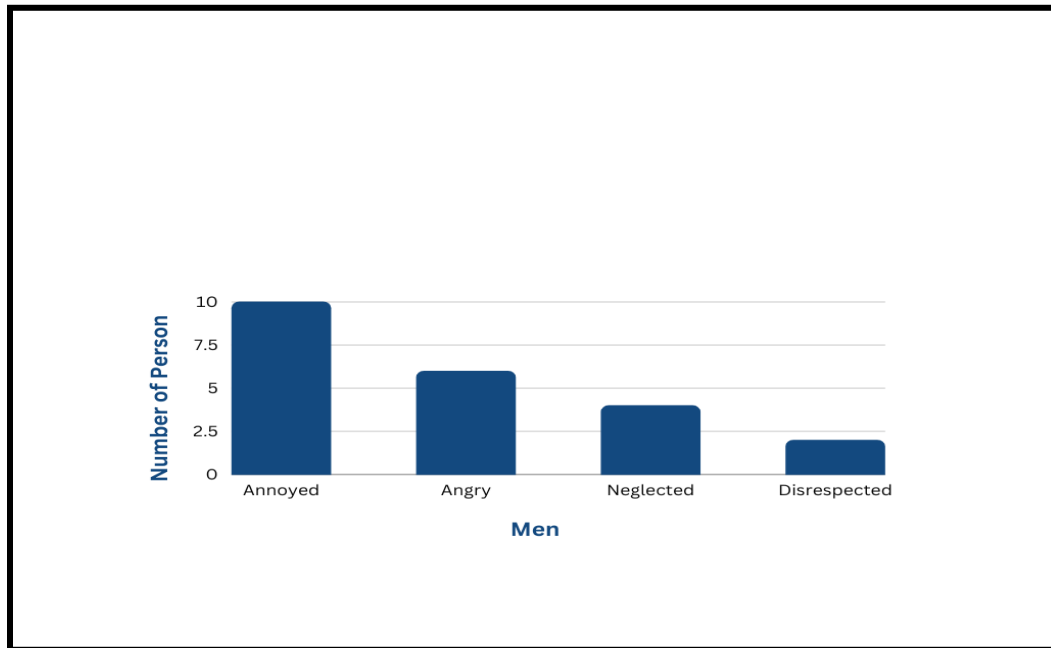
Participant M7. *"We were at home; I asked her something about the kids, and she didn't answer; and when she did, she yelled at me for interrupting her. I yelled right back at her with profanity and said, 'I've been trying to talk to you and ask you about the kids. Get your ass off the phone!' I kept yelling words I won't repeat here; I told her, 'I'm sick of this, this,' Ha-ha; she started yelling, 'What?' Now I'm even madder 'cause she knows why. Now we're yelling back and forth at the top of our lungs."*

Participant M4. *"Perceived, ha-ha! I was calling her name because I was cooking and could not find something. I cannot remember exactly what it was, but I kept calling her name repeatedly to ask her, and I was so mad because she was right in front of me! So, I yelled, 'What the [expletive]?' and then she finally looked up."*

Participant M3. *"I came in from picking up a few groceries from the store, and when I walked in, she saw that I had bags. She said, 'Oh! You stopped at the store.' So, I said, 'Yeah, could you help me bring them in?' And so, I put the bags on the table, went out to get more bags, and then sat those on the table. So again, I called out to her and asked if she could help me get the groceries in. She didn't look up or say anything; I went out a third time, came back in, and placed those on the table. Finally, I yelled, 'Hey! Help me with the [expletive] bags. I'll turn all that shit off; I'll turn it off! Consider it canceled 'cause I know you [expletive] see me!' It was silent; we brought the rest of the bags in the house in silence."*

Figure 4

Men's Feelings About Being Phubbed



Emotions about being phubbed are general feelings, as seen in Figure 4, which illustrates that male participants felt angry and annoyed when being phubbed by their partners. The one male participant who was not annoyed was Participant M7, who explained that understanding his partner's heavy phone use was the reason for his anger but lack of annoyance at being phubbed. Participants were also asked to describe their worst reaction to being phubbed and explain why they responded that way and how being phubbed made them feel.

Participant M7 "Never had a worse [reaction] because I'm on my phone more than her. So, when it happens, I feel angry because it's like talking to yourself, like a whole conversation, only to realize she never heard a word I said."

Participant M1. *“I think, umm, I’ll say it was the time in line at the park at Universal Studios. We went down to Florida for our anniversary, and she looked at her phone in every line; those lines are long. I called her name, like, 100 times. The park was already loud, and her focus was on the phone, and I yelled to her to get off the damn phone; she heard me [and] then looked up. I was angry because it was our time; we could be talking and enjoying each other’s company, and she was on the phone, so imagine being in line with no one to talk to ‘cause she’s on her phone. So annoying, yeah.”*

Participant M4. *“I would say it happened during dinner; I wanted her to be attentive, but she wasn’t, so I yelled and told her, ‘Hey, I’m trying to talk to you, and you are on the freakin’ phone. What up with that?’ I was angry, angry ‘cause if I did that, it would be hell to pay. It’s like talking to yourself, so freaking annoying, and when I do it to her, she wants to go through my phone and triple-text me as she sits in front of me; that pisses me off—like she can do it, but if I do it. . . .”*

Women

Female participants were asked the same three questions to further determine how cell phones affected relationship communication and how being phubbed by their partner made them react and feel.

1. Question 7: How do you think phones affect communication in your relationship?
2. Question 9: When you perceived that you were being phubbed, what event, moment, or time did it occur, and how did you respond?
3. Question 10: Describe your worst reaction to being phubbed and explain why you responded that way, as well as how the phubbing made you feel.

Figure 5

The Negative Effects of Cell Phones on Relationship Communication in Women

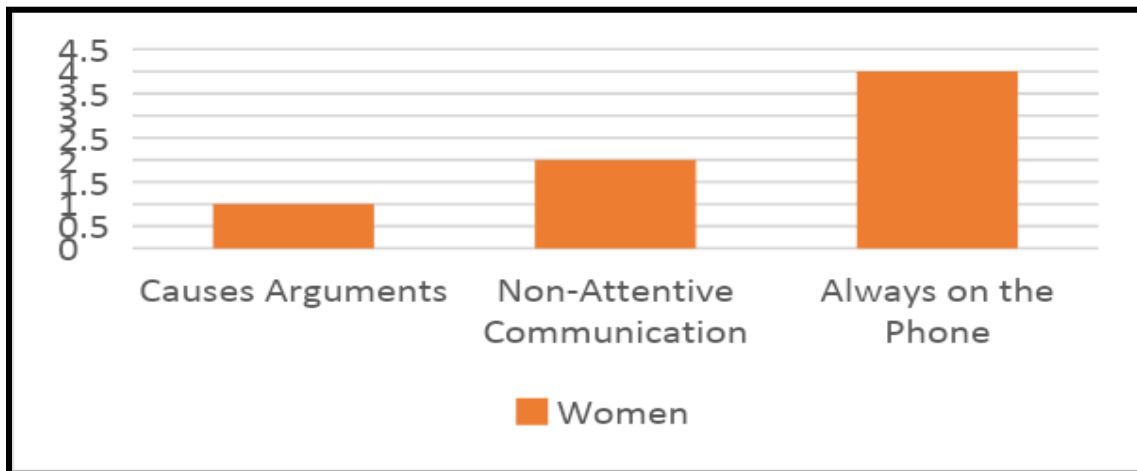
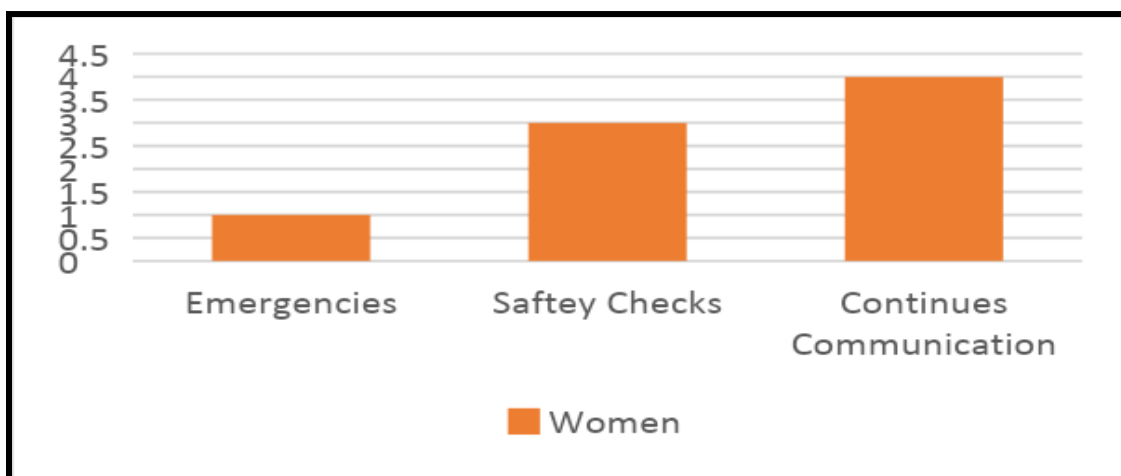


Figure 6

The Positive Effects of Cell Phones on Relationship Communication in Women



Female participants were asked how they thought phones affected communication in their relationships. Unlike the male participants, seven female participants mentioned no negative scenarios when asked how the phone affected their relationship communication. Conversely, only four mentioned the negative connotations of cell phones and their communication. **Figure 5** presents the adverse effects, and **Figure 6** illustrates the positive impacts of cell phones on women's relational communication compared to men.

***Participant W1.** "It helps because we are in class most days, and we get to send each other messages to say hi and just see how each other's day is going and that we are ok. So, it helps us."*

***Participant W4.** "I think it makes it better because I communicate better in writing than talking. I feel like I just communicate better, and if we are mad at each other, I can get my feelings out better. But for him, he likes face-to-face, but I like to send a text, and I can get my feelings across better, and he responds faster. When I need him to do something, like, if I ask in person, he'll be like I don't know, but in the text, he responds yes or no right away, so I like that, but there is some negative stuff that happens."*

***Participant W5.** "It doesn't affect it either way; I feel like it sometimes helps because I can text him to bring milk or pick up dinner, and we can say hi and check in on each other throughout the day. Of course, I'm on my phone more than him, but I know when to put it down, especially when he initiates a conversation."*

Participants W1, W4, and W7 discussed how cell phones negatively impacted relationships and communication.

Participant W1. “It creates an invisible shield when we’re together, it always feels like, but something is like, like, in the middle or between us.”

Participant W4. “But some negative stuff happens that makes it difficult. So, it is sometimes negative and positive when it’s a distraction.”

Participant W7. “It affects it a lot because he is on his phone most of the time when we’re together—about 85% of the time, he is on the phone when we’re together. It is like we’re apart in the same room or place.”

Figure 7

Men Versus Women’s Negative Effects of Cell Phones

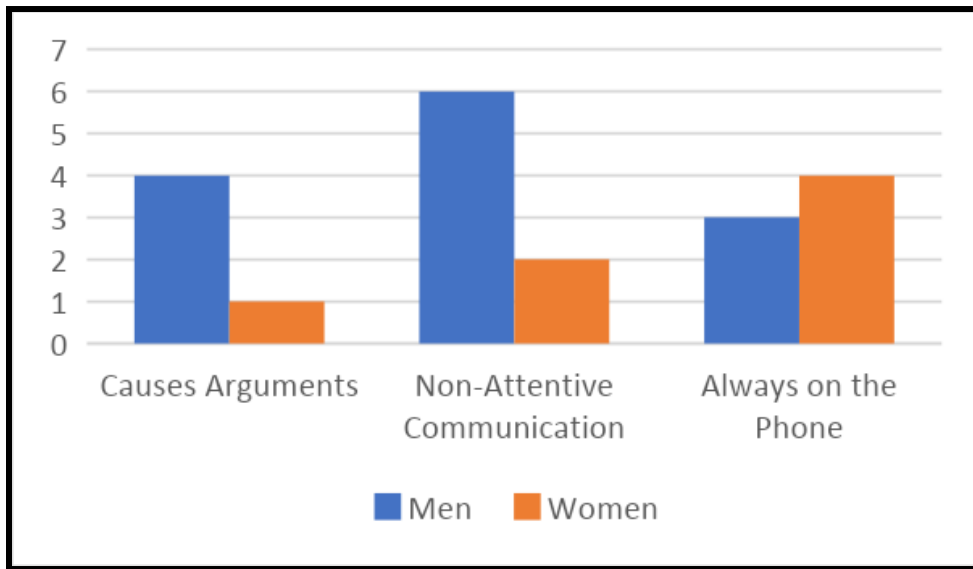
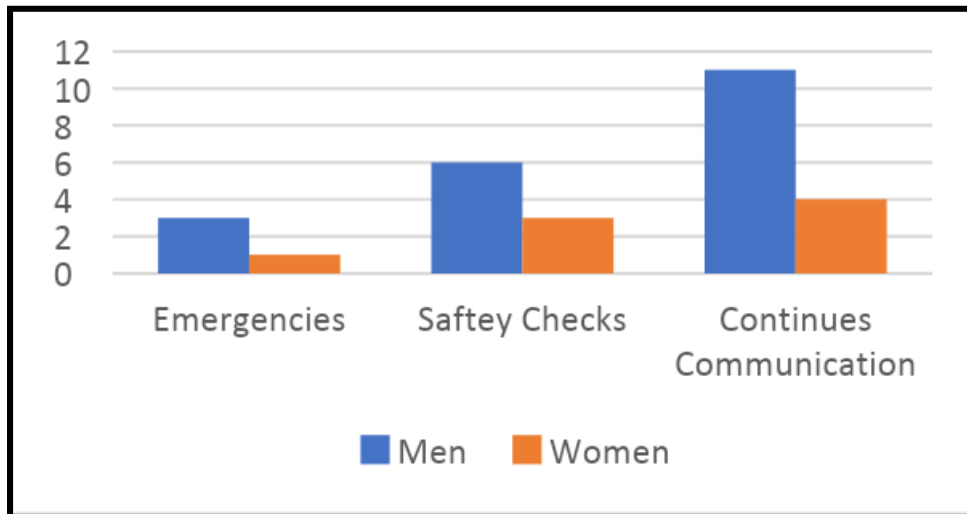
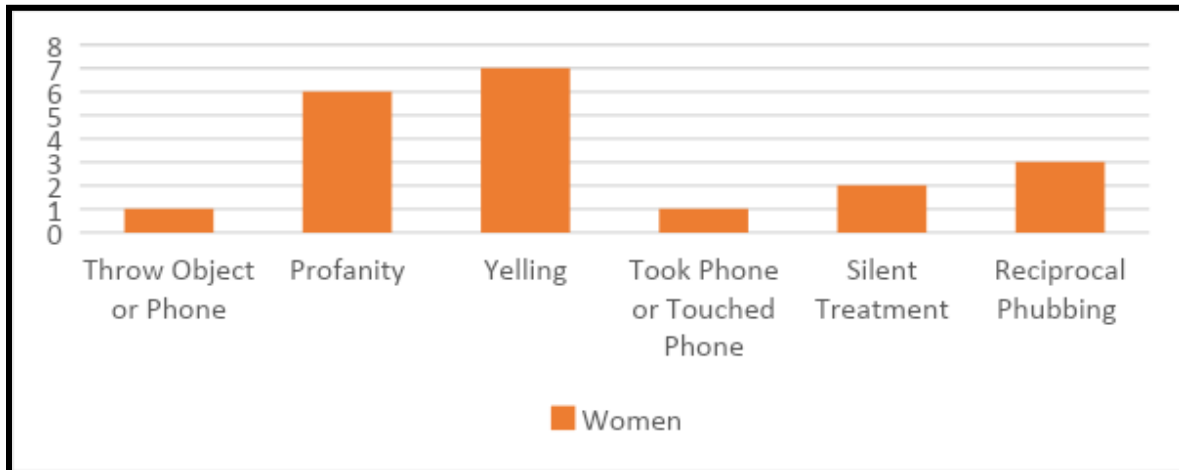


Figure 8

Men Versus Women's Positive Effects of Cell Phones



To further the study, women were asked Questions 9 and 10 to determine how they reacted to being phubbed and how they felt about it. When asked to describe their worst reaction to being phubbed, the women responded with one or more of the following: throwing an object or the phone, yelling, using profanity, and reciprocal phubbing. Then, when asked how they felt about being phubbed, the women mentioned annoyance, hurt, and neglect, unlike the men, who noted only anger and irritation.

Figure 9*Women's Responses to Being Phubbed*

Participant W1. Participant W1 chose to yell and rub her hand across her partner's cell phone in a public setting.

"We were at the hibachi restaurant, and he was on his phone, and I kept talking to him, but he would just give short answers, and even when the fire started, he never looked up. I then waved my hand across his screen, yelling, 'Hello! Hello!' and said, 'Could you get off the phone?' He got off but had some attitude for a few minutes."

Participant W2. Participant W2 chose silence as a reaction to being phubbed.

"During dinner, I stopped talking and finished my meal, leaving the subject alone."

Participant W4.

"I explained that she did not often feel phubbed because she is always on her phone; therefore, she does not respond verbally to being phubbed."

Participant W5. *“Most of the time, my reaction is the silent treatment, or I’ll get petty, ignore him, and phubb him back.”*

Participant W4. *“Ha-Ha, we were supposed to be watching a movie, and he was on his phone. I was asking him a question about what just happened, and he never looked up from his phone. He just said, ‘What?’ I asked again, and his head never came up to answer. I was so angry because I repeated myself, like, 100 times, and he never heard me any of those times. I threw a pillow at him, which scared him; he finally looked up and said, ‘What?’”*

Participant Interviews: Two

Participant W7

Participant W7 explained being phubbed in a public setting.

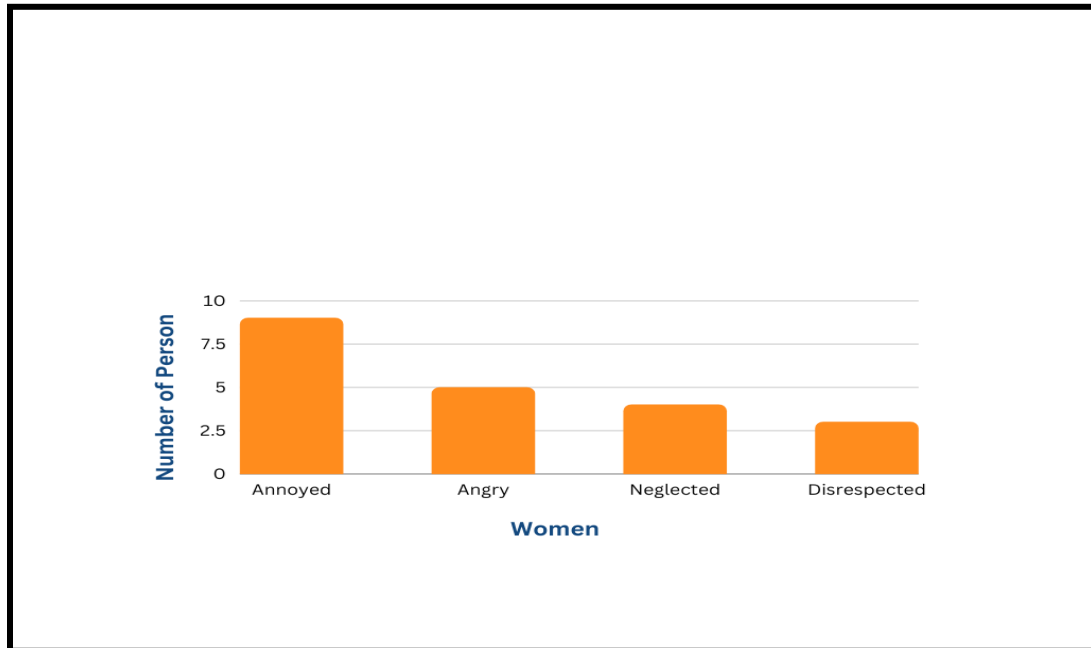
“I yelled loudly in the restaurant, started cursing, and threatened to leave. I was so heated; it was like I was the third wheel on a date with him and his phone. I cursed so loud that everyone turned, and I’m sure he was embarrassed, but I do not care. I bet he’ll think twice about picking his phone up in public places with me again.”

Participant W10

“When I threw the shoe, it wasn’t to hit him. It was to get his attention. It worked. I felt hurt and ignored because he never does that. He usually says, ‘Hold on; I am texting my mom. But this time, he didn’t look up or stop until I threw the shoe.”

Figure 10

Women's Feelings About Being Phubbed



Participants' feelings about being phubbed were consistent with their responses. **Figure 10** portrays participants' feelings when being phubbed by their partners. Below are some interview answers that better describe the reactions to being phubbed and explain why female participants responded in such a way as well as their feelings.

***Participant W3.** "Which one? [Laughs]. We were watching a Netflix series, and he wouldn't pay attention but kept asking me questions because he was missing everything. I yelled, 'Put the [expletive] phone down!' I grabbed it and threw it over to the other couch. He laughed because he knew it was annoying and that I was so [expletive] annoyed."*

Participant W6. *“I took the phone and threw it, and it broke . . . I felt dismissed and disrespected because he was on his phone instead of listening to what I had to say[. I was] like, ‘What are you doing?’”*

Participant W9. Participant W9 recalled being phubbed at a wedding with her partner. The two were not married at the time. The participant understood the phubbing as a nonverbal cue that her partner did not want to marry. Therefore, as the participant described, the response to being phubbed was inevitable.

“I yelled and used profanity at him after the wedding at the reception because I thought his ignoring me meant he did not want to marry me, and he was just saying, ‘I didn’t hear you.’ I guess I didn’t realize I was being phubbed because we do it to each other so much, but with that, it hurt my feelings, and I was devastated just by his silence.”

Figure 11

Men Versus Women’s Responses to Being Phubbed

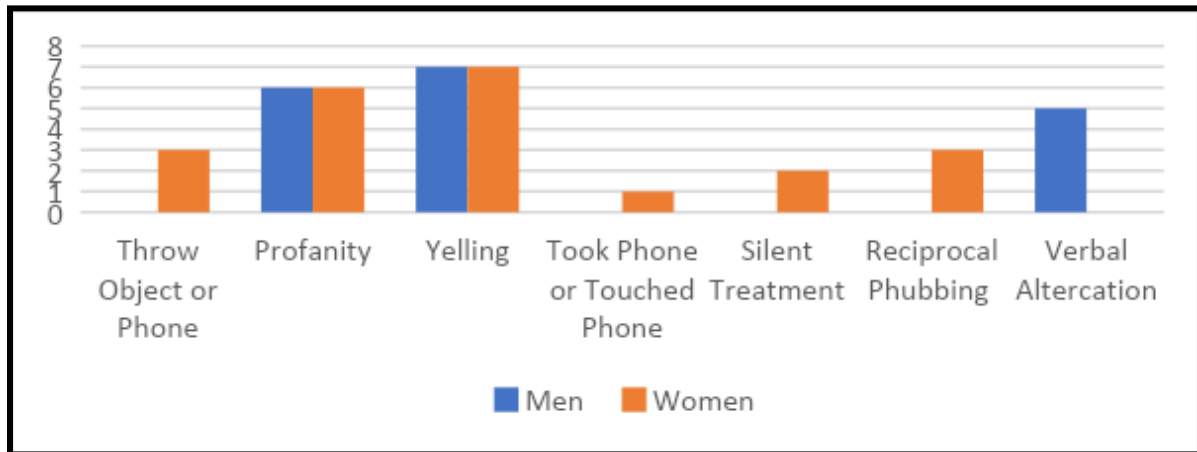
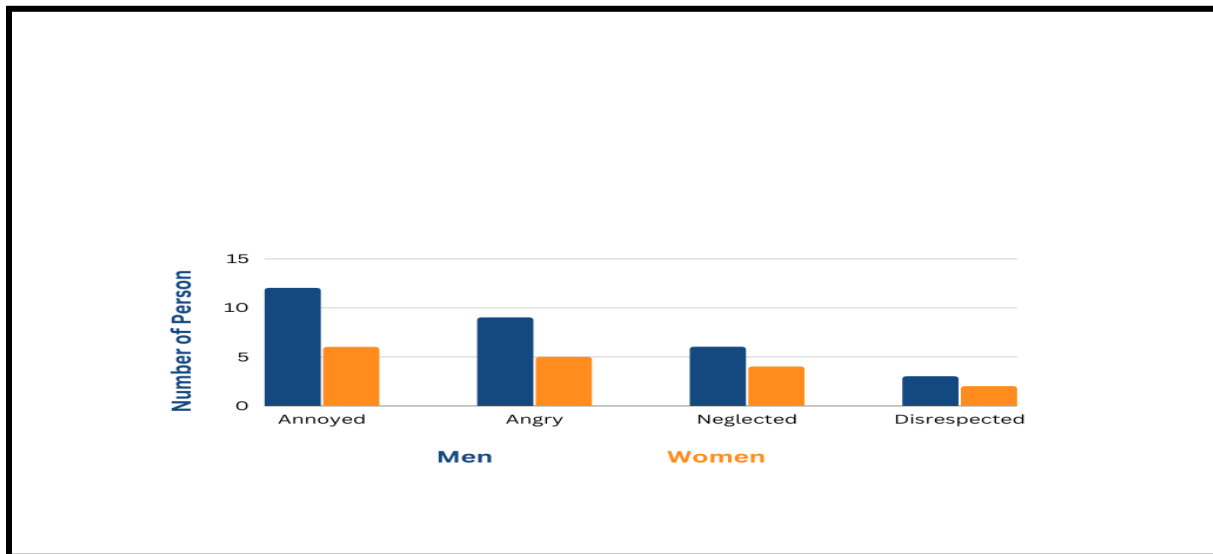


Figure 12*Men Versus Women's Feelings About Being Phubbed*

Men and Women's Concluding Data. The contextual data revealed that women physically responded to being phubbed and expressed more feelings of neglect and hurt than male participants. Furthermore, both men and women believed that the phone was both a positive and negative addition to communication in their relationship because it offered continuous connection and safety checks but also caused arguments and was a distraction between the participants and their partners. Although male participants did not feel less annoyed or angered, they did not respond to phubbing with physical conflict or reciprocal phubbing. The data also exhibited that participants were equally angry about being phubbed, deeming it annoying, but female participants additionally felt neglected. In response to being phubbed, 90% of men and women yelled and used profanity; additionally, one phone was taken, three were thrown, one

participant threatened to end their partner’s phone service, and three retaliated with reciprocal phubbing.

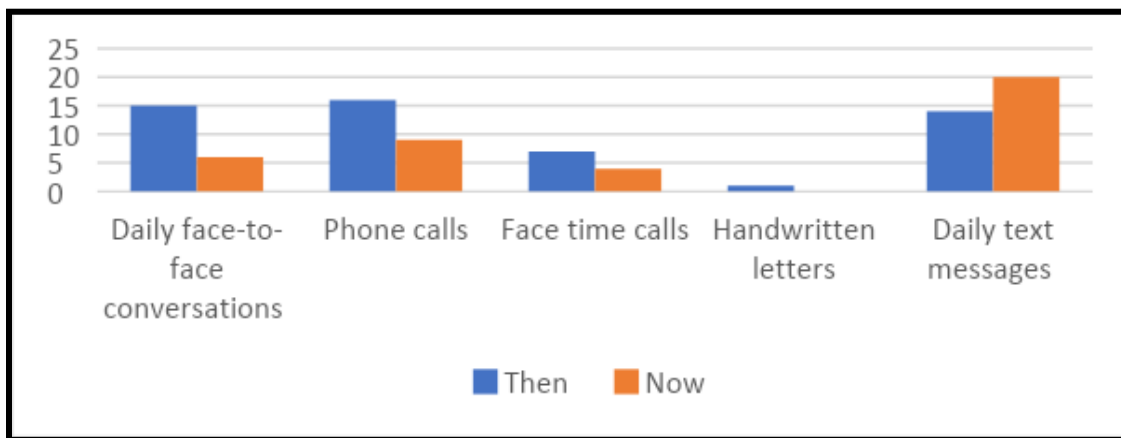
Length of Relationship. Theme 2’s purpose was to determine whether the length of a relationship affected one’s communication expectations currently or at the beginning of the relationship. Each participant was asked the following questions to collect contextual data:

1. Question 8: What were your communicative and face-to-face connection expectations for your relationship when it began versus now?
2. Question 11: Is this how you expected the communication to be? If yes, why? If not, why?

Question 8 was designed to establish a timeline of relational communication expectations and to determine how participants utilized their cell phones within the relationship over time.

Figure 13

Communication Expectations from the Beginning of the Relationship Until Now



As the interviews continued, the data began to reveal that being phubbed daily was common among participants, and the length of time a couple had been together did not appear to

matter. As seen in Figure 13, the expectations of cell phone use within the relationships varied based on the available technology when the couple began their relationship. The data suggested that each couple had established communication expectations, regardless of the presence of cell phones and technology. Six participants expected their partner's cell phone habits and communication to remain unchanged. The remaining 14 participants, who were not accustomed to using cell phones at the beginning of their union, had different expectations of communication from their partners. The expectations in relationships that began when cell phone technology was already available included active listening and daily face-to-face conversations. Those 14 participants who were in unions before cell phones were available stated that they expected communication to change within their relationship for various reasons once the technology was introduced. Many noted having to adjust to fewer daily face-to-face conversations.

Conversely, participants whose relationships were established during active cell phone use expected their relationship communication to be as it was at the time of the interview because the technology was a significant part of their daily communication, and nothing had changed. Although participants in a longer union saw the changes occur, they adapted to cell phones and infused them into their daily communication expectations and routines. Generally, all participants used cell phones daily to communicate with their partners.

Adverse Effects of Phubbing a Romantic Partner

The purpose of the third theme was to determine how and why phubbing a romantic partner causes internal or external conflict, which could contribute to low relational satisfaction. According to Ergun et al. (2020), mental health issues can be a direct adverse effect of phubbing, negatively affecting one's life and psychological well-being. Phubbing can also lead to anxiety,

jealousy, loneliness, feelings of neglect, and anger, thus lowering relational satisfaction (Ergün et al., 2020). Early in the research questioning, interviewees' responses quickly established that all participants deemed communication the priority in their relationship and stated that it added to their past and current satisfaction in the relationship.

However, the internal and external conflicts discussed by the participants did not match their reality, as their expectations of communication being a top priority were exhibited differently in their responses to being phubbed by their partners. Unlike the women, no male participants physically responded to being phubbed, as seen in **Figure 14**. Instead, male participants employed verbal confrontation, whereas women engaged in a range of verbal and nonverbal responses to being phubbed. The internal and external displays of conflict were determined from the data retrieved from answers to Questions 9 and 10.

1. Question 9: When you perceived that you were being phubbed, what event, moment, or time did it occur, and how did you respond?
2. Question 10: Describe your worst reaction to being phubbed and explain why you responded that way and how the phubbing made you feel.

Figure 14

Participants' Responses to Being Phubbed

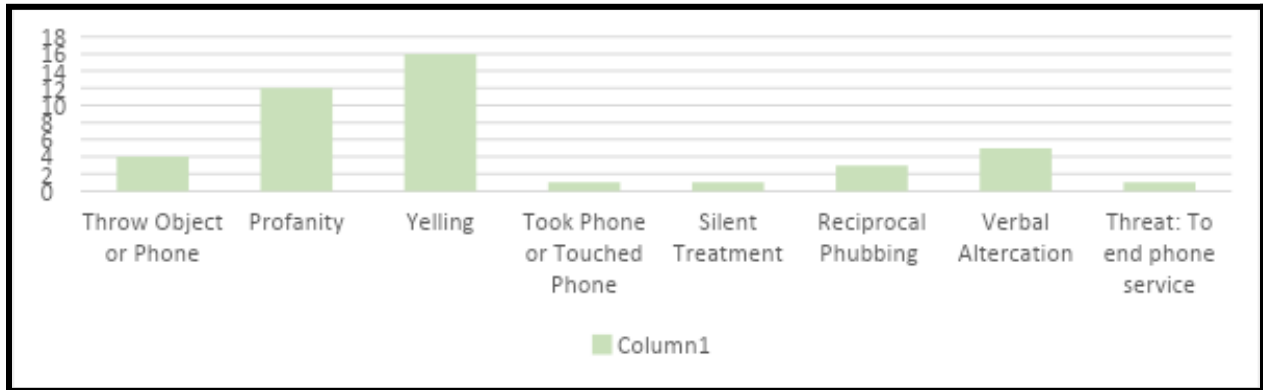
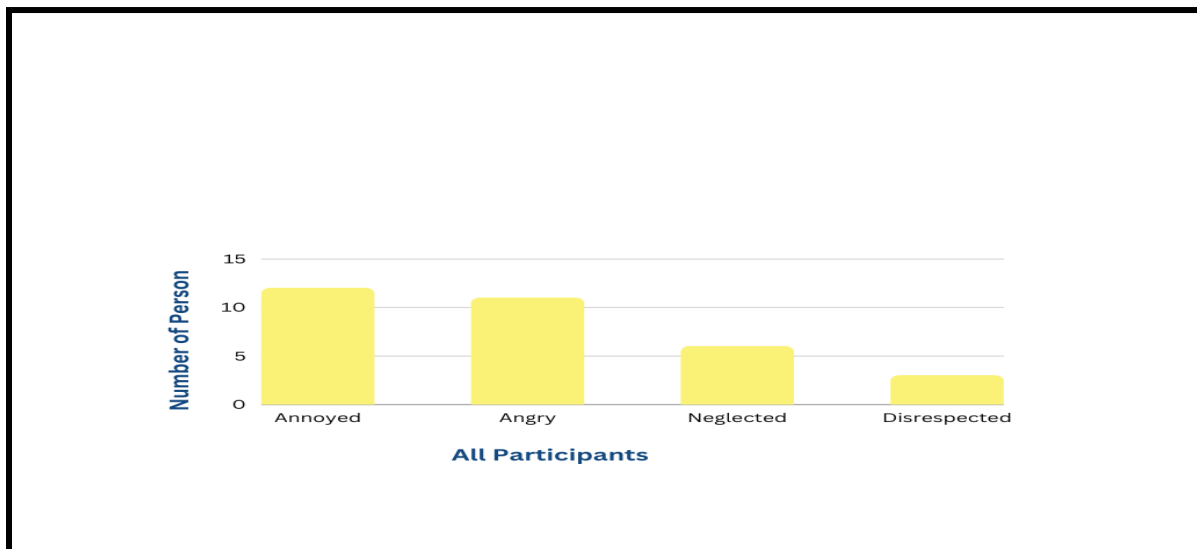


Figure 15

Participants' Feelings About Being Phubbed



In an effort to establish proper verbiage to describe internal and external conflicts, I intentionally designed Question 10 with the word *describe* so that participants would explain in detail how they felt and responded to being phubbed. With Questions 9 and 10, I hoped to establish a clear understanding of the internal and external conflicts each participant may have experienced. Ergün et al. (2020) posit that being phubbed causes or sparks mental health issues, and internal conflict can often create a foundation for mental health. Based on data obtained in response to Question 10, **Figure 15** illustrates that the internal conflicts participants experienced were anger, jealousy, annoyance, feelings of neglect, and disrespect.

Participant W7

“I felt dismissed, angry, helpless, ignored, and neglected.”

Participant W6

“When I am driving[, it] seems like he does it the most because there’s nothing I can do. I felt helpless and neglected because I was driving and, too, realized that I’d been talking to myself for the past 10 minutes.”

Participant M4. *“So, how do I feel about that? I would say when I’m trying to say something, and she is on her phone, I feel annoyed and left out.”*

Participant W6. *“When I am driving[, it] seems like he does it the most because there’s nothing I can do. I felt helpless and neglected because I was driving and, too, realized that I’d been talking to myself for the past 10 minutes.”*

Participant M4. *“So, how do I feel about that? I would say when I’m trying to say something, and she is on her phone, I feel annoyed and left out.”*

Relationship Satisfaction and Phubbing

According to Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), relationships in which phubbing occurs have low quality and are at greater risk for external conflicts, such as electronic partner surveillance (EPS) and violent retaliations. One attempted EPS to no avail and, because of the inability to retrieve information, was contemplating ending the relationship at the time of the interview.

Participant W3

“We were having a moment or conversation when it was supposed to be no phones, and it was our time to communicate with no phones or interruptions. I noticed that he was giving very little eye contact, so I just took his phone and threw it on the couch. I didn’t try to break it; I just wanted to prove a point by taking it. I was angry because I felt invisible and unimportant, like what was going on on that phone that says I am nobody right now.”

Participant W8

“I feel angry because I know some of the things I’ve seen him ‘like,’ and I get jealous and a little insecure because, like, why are you ‘liking’ those girls’ pics? It’s crazy, but yeah. I’ve tried going through his phone [(laughs)] using his Gmail account but could not. I am always skeptical of what he is doing on his phone.”

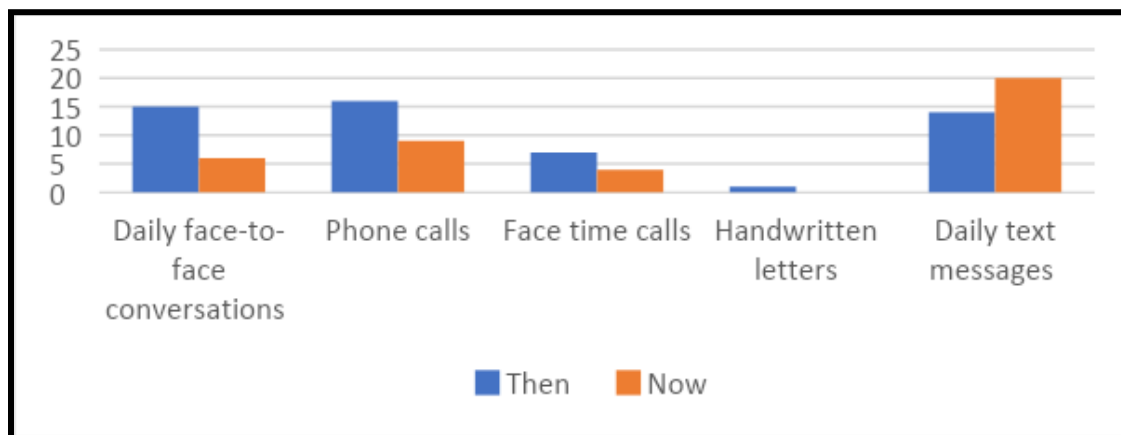
Summary. In conclusion, most participants expressed their anger verbally or internalized their feelings. Additionally, some recalled external conflicts; however, no divorces or separations occurred due to the conflicts discussed during the interviews.

Findings Regarding Communication Expectations

The fourth category, **Figure 16**, shows the relationship expectations, which revealed whether unsatisfied expectations from being phubbed interfered with communication, which may have contributed to lower relational satisfaction. All participants were asked to answer Questions 8 and 11 to gather data. The contextual data obtained via Question 8 provided the foundation for participants' communication expectations from their partners when they began their relationship versus now; a variety of responses were received. The advancement of technology and cell phones influenced the participants' initial communication expectations.

Figure 16

Communication Expectations Then and Now



Participant M1

“Mmm. When we got together, well, we’ve been together since high school, and cell phones weren’t a thing, so I just knew when I wanted to talk to her, I just did. We wrote letters, and I went to her house, but now we understand that we both work and that

sometimes our phones get in the way, but when I want to be heard, I never feel like she's not listening because things or what I ask or say to her gets done."

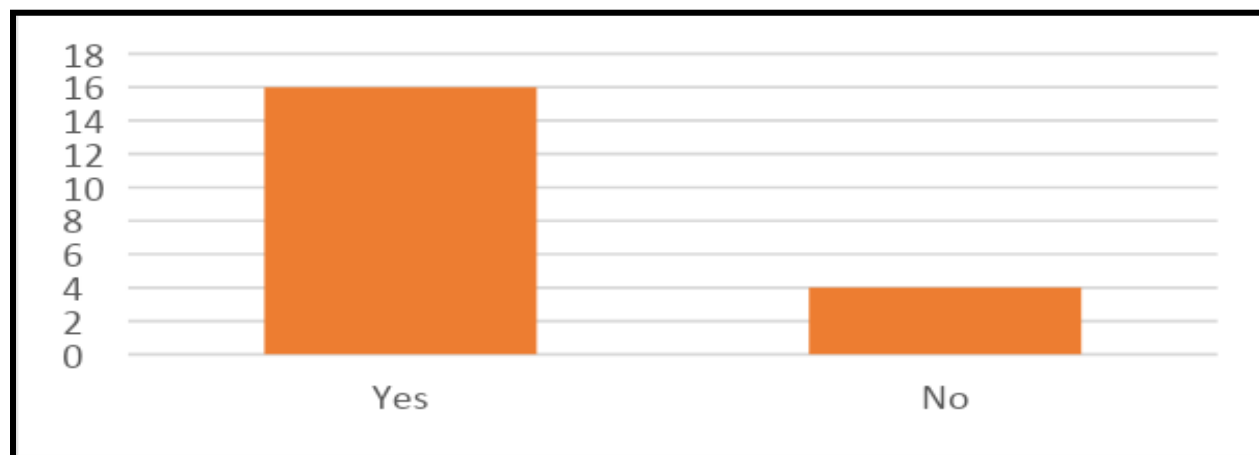
Participant W1

"When we got together, I expected us to talk and have a conversation about everything as we, like, we always do. We talked about everything. We share so much in common, and now we still talk and stuff, but it's like we are listening in and talking on our phones, so sometimes we just send our messages through our cell phones, like text or something."

Participant M3. *"When we first got together, cell phones and texting wasn't a big thing. We met at work at Best Buy, so that was early 2000, so [texting] was just getting started. So, then I expected to get together and talk on the weekends when we went on dates or at work if we had the same shift. And now I expect text throughout the day. If I don't get it, I think she's mad or something."*

Participant M4. *"In the beginning, it was direct; it was hand touching and not really on the phone, but now it's less face-to-face and more on-the-phone conversations, text, FaceTime, stuff like that."*

Figure 17 results revealed that participants had communication expectations for their relationship, and the cell phone either influenced the beginning or the later expectations for their communication. Finally, Question 11 data were used to determine whether participants expected and accepted the changes they encountered. The data indicate that participants expected that their relationship communication would be as it was at the time of the interview. The following excerpts illustrate why the changes were expected.

Figure 17*Expected Communication Habits*

Participant M4. *“Umm, I would say yes because we are in a generation where we all use our phones sometimes all day, so I’m not surprised because everyone in my generation seems to always be on their phones. So yeah, I wasn’t surprised; I expected it.”*

Participant M6. *“Yeah, because phones are what people do now. I didn’t think we would be different. We’re just not as bad as the young folks.”*

Participant M5. *“Yes, because we still communicate, and there are no real problems of being phubbed. When it happens, we both express that we are feeling it, and we act accordingly.”*

Some participants, however, stated that they did not expect communication changes from their partners over the years. These interview excerpts explain why they expected communication to stay the same.

Participant W3. *“In the beginning, yes, but not after we discussed how important communication is to me and how important it is for both of us to feel heard and seen. Because we talked about it, so, no, I didn’t expect it to change from then ‘til now.”*

Participant M3. *“No, because I didn’t expect it to be like this; this is good because, in my past relationships, the communication was not good. So, I expected the same communication to be like text, call, [or] FaceTime. That’s how it was initially, and we still have that. It’s great communication. Even though it’s more texting throughout the day, it’s still open, often, and quick text responses.”*

Participant M4. *“No, because ignoring each other for our phones doesn’t happen all the time, and I never expected it to, but I still never thought the phone would cause any problems with us because they help us so much when I’m away.”*

Participant W4. *“No, because we both, I think, when we’re both phubbing each other, I never expected that to be our way of communicating. I would never think that I should, or we should be doing that to each other. And being ok with it. We should be like no, we need to talk and not phubb each other, but the expectations that we built are now what I expect.”*

Participant M1. *“Mumm. When we got together, well, we’ve been together since high school, and cell phones weren’t a thing, so I just knew when I wanted to talk to her, I just did. We wrote letters, and I went to her house, but now we understand that we both work and that sometimes our phones get in the way, but when I want to be heard, I never feel like she’s not because things or what I ask or say to her gets done.”*

Participant W1. *“When we got together, I expected us to talk and have a conversation about everything as we like we always do. We talked about everything. We share so much in*

common. And now we still talk and stuff, but it's like we are listening in and talking on our phones, so sometimes we just send our messages through our cell phones, like text or something."

Participant M3. *"When we first got together, cell phones and texting wasn't a big thing, we met at work at Best Buy, so that was early 2000, so it was just getting started. So, then I expected to get together and talk on the weekends when we went on dates or at work if we had the same shift. And now I expect text throughout the day. If I don't get it, I think she's mad or something."*

Participant M4. *"In the beginning, it was direct; it was hand touching and not really on the phone, but now it's less face-to-face and more on-the-phone conversations, text face time stuff like that."*

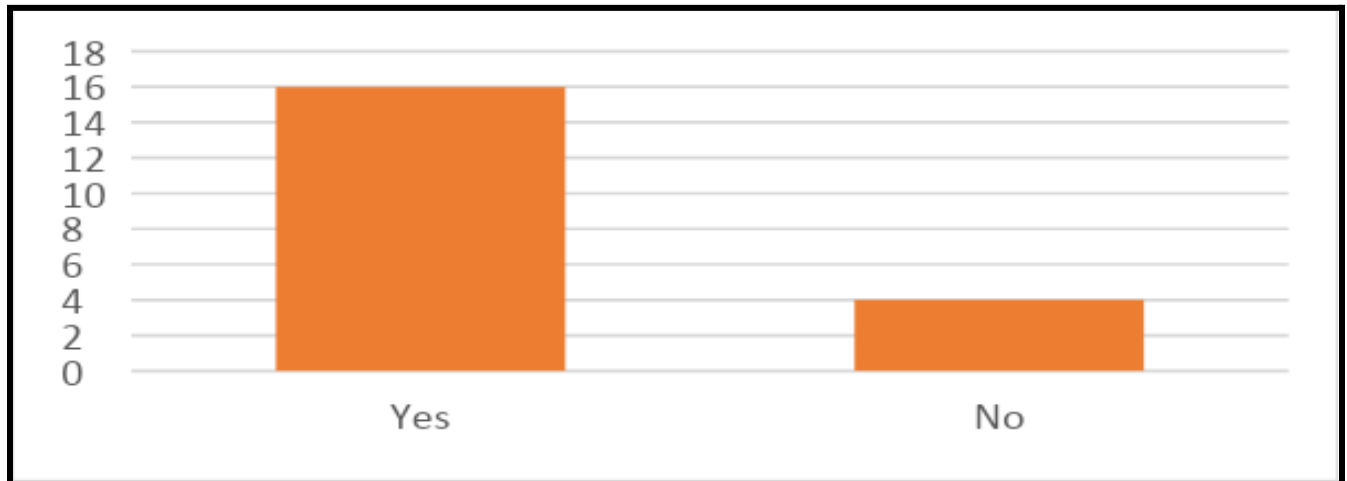
The results show that participants had communication expectations for their relationship, and the cell phone either influenced the beginning or the later expectations of their relationship communication. A second question was asked to understand further if and why the communication expectations changed. Finally, question 11 data was used to determine if participants expected the changes they now encounter and accept.

1. Question 11: Is this how you expected the communication to be? If yes, why? If not, why?

Figure 18 data shows that participants expected the current state of their relationship communication to be as it is currently. Here are a few interviews to show why the changes are to be expected and a few to show why the shift in communication was not expected.

Figure 18

Expected current communication habits.



Participant M4. *“Umm! I would say yes because we are in a generation where we all use our phones sometimes all day, so I’m not surprised because everyone in my generation sales to always be on their phones, so yeah, I wasn’t surprised I expected it.”*

Participant M6. *“Yeah, because phones are what people do now, I didn’t think we would be different. We’re just not as bad as the young folks.”*

Participant M5. *“Yes, because we still communicate, and there are no real problems of being phubbed. When it happens, we both express that we are feeling it, and we act accordingly.”*

Participants said they did not expect communication changes from their partners over the years.

Here are a few interview answers explaining why they expected everything to stay the same.

Participant W3. *“In the beginning, yes, but not after we discussed how important communication is to me and how important it is for both of us to feel heard and seen. Because we talked about it.” So, no, I didn’t expect it to change from then till now.*

Participant M3. *“No, because I didn’t expect it to be like this; this is good because, in my past relationships, the communication was not good. So, I expected the same communication to be like text, call face time. That’s how it was initially, and we still have that. It’s great communication. Even though it’s more texting throughout the day, it’s still open, often, and quick text responses.”*

Participant M4. *“No, because ignoring each other for our phones doesn’t happen all the time, and I never expected it to, but I still never thought the phone would cause any problems with us because they help us so much when I’m away.”*

Participant W4. *“No, because we both, I think, when we both phubbing each other, I never expected that to be our way of communicating. I would never think that I should, or we should be doing that to each other. And being ok with it. We should be like no, we need to talk and not phub each other, but the expectations that we built are now what I expect.”*

Findings Regarding Interaction Adaptation

Individuals who counter their partners’ phubbing by reciprocating or ignoring the phubbing could naturally adapt to their environment or seamlessly transition to IA; hence, Theme 5 was intended to determine whether individuals adjusted to their environment and were unfazed by phubbing—in other words, the phubbing did not affect participants, partners, or relational satisfaction. Question 12 was designed to retrieve data that would explain IA as it connects to communication and relational satisfaction. This referred to the changes in communication from the beginning of their relationship until the time of the interview. Question 12 was a follow-up question.

1. Question 12: How have you handled the success or failure of these expectations?

According to Johnson et al. (2021), a couple's behaviors change and are reestablished as they adjust their daily interactions based on their needs, failed expectations, and desired outcomes (Le et al., 1999). Therefore, the purpose of IA is to form a predominant pattern of interactions that reciprocate or manage another individual's behavior. This happens continuously and subconsciously because people have expectations regarding how others should behave (Le et al., 1999). Below are excerpts from interviews with participants describing how they addressed failures or expectations and, ultimately, their adoption of or adaptation to the new style.

The contextual data indicated that participants' relational communication expectations were influenced by the cell phone and their partner's use of the cell phone. Participants who expected their relationship communication to consist of daily face-to-face conversation were influenced by their partner's cell phone use, causing them to add the cell phone to their daily routines for texting and phone calls. Participants who were determined to meet their communication expectations used the cell phone to add to their thriving communication. Those with unmet expectations of relational communication did not use the phone to alleviate their failed expectations. Therefore, the data suggested that participants who had solid relationship communication were not adversely influenced by their partner's cell phone use.

Participant M1

“Just fine; I adjusted to her hand gestures when she's on the phone, and I know that at some point during our being in the same room, she will eventually be or get on her phone, and I usually just get on mine, and stroll through TikTok or something.”

Participant W1

“I just get on my phone or speak up and tell him to get off the phone.”

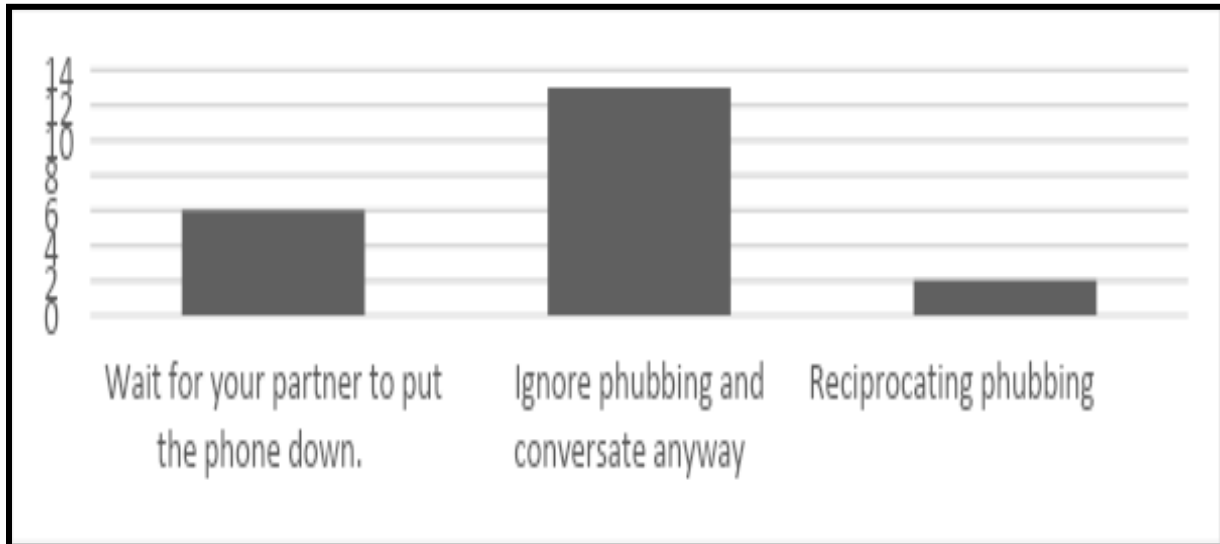
Participant M3. *“[Laughs] A phub for a phub, and just making sure I let it be known that the conversation is important and that phones should not be present, so I just stick with nighttime for really important conversations.”*

Participant M4. *“Um, I would say successfully that we handled it by having a day that we agree not to use our phones, on Wednesdays or Thursdays when we have no phones present, and we usually go out somewhere during the day to disconnect from the phones.”*

Participant W7. *“I just take it as it comes, the failures and the success, because ultimately, I guess it’s just what it is, so I don’t expect anything different now. I just wait for him to put it down, or I let it be known that I need to talk to him, or just talk at him in hopes that he hears me.”*

Participant M10. *“There’s no failure. It doesn’t happen much, but the success is that she just doesn’t be on it because we are older. The young kids be on their phones; we just talk.”*

Answers to Question 12 and **Figure 19** provides data to determine which participants adapted their relationship communication expectations or experienced the fulfillment of their relationship communication expectations. Question 12 data also contributed to answering the research question of how IA affected relationship satisfaction. The contextual data illustrated that four participants adapted to match their partner’s use and reciprocated phubbing.

Figure 19*Ways of Adapting to Being Phubbed*

Relational Satisfaction Results

Theme 6 of the study aimed to answer the research question of how phubbing affected relational satisfaction. The contextual data collected from participants' answers to Questions 1, 2, 4, and 7 enabled a conclusion regarding whether phubbing a romantic partner had adverse effects that lowered relational satisfaction. Responses to Question 1 provided the data to determine participants' beliefs regarding contributing factors to their current and past relational satisfaction. In contrast, answers to Question 2 furnished the data to establish participants' satisfaction with their relationships overall.

1. Question 1: With your communicative needs and relationship expectations in mind, what would you say contributes to your current and past satisfaction with your relationship?

Participant W1

“Contributes? Um, the time we spend together and how we like the same things.”

Participant W2

“The mutual understanding that we need to communicate in order to meet each other’s needs.”

Participant W3. *“Mm, um, well, I’m big on communication, so my past satisfaction was not there because of the lack of consideration or because they could not communicate effectively. So now there is more face-to-face conversations, and we check in because I like communication.”*

Participant M3. *My expectations for the relationship when it comes to communication is that I wanted open and honest conversation, and we did that in the past, so it contributed to the satisfaction a whole lot, and going places with just the two of us helped. So, yeah, communication helped the satisfaction then and now.”*

Participant W9. *“It makes it better; without communication, it’s not good. So, it’s important to me.”*

Participant W10. *“It’s the most important, and I expect communication to stay strong, so it contributes to satisfaction.”*

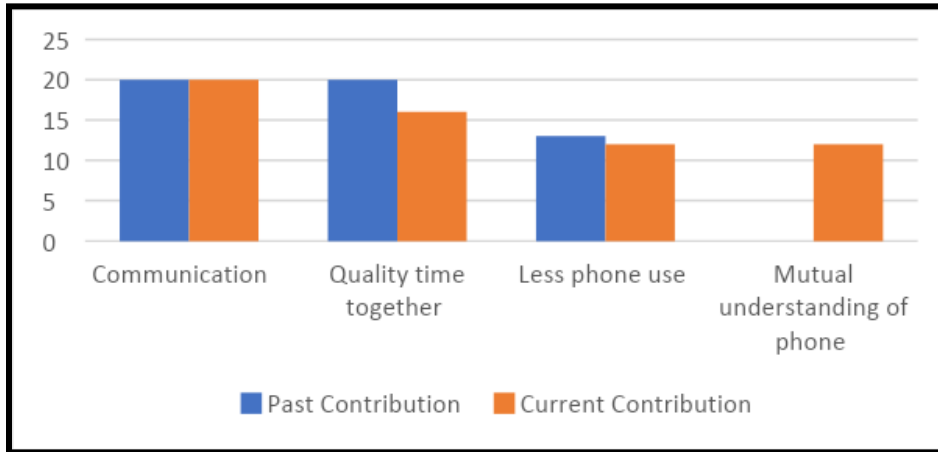
Figure 20 shows the data of participants' past and current contributions to relational satisfaction. The answers to question 2 were used to create the data. Question 2: How would you describe your overall satisfaction with your relationship?

Participant M4. *“Um, overall, I would say very satisfied.”*

Participant W1. “Overall, we’re good. I feel loved, heard, and appreciated, and all those things, so I’m satisfied; it wasn’t always that way.”

Figure 20

Past Versus Current Contributions to Relational Satisfaction



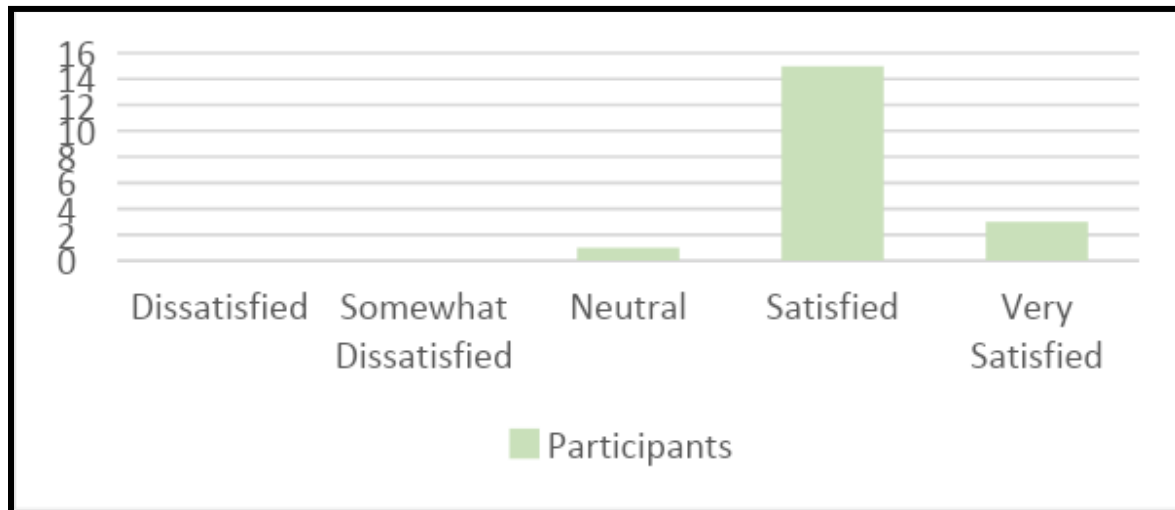
Relationship Satisfaction Findings

The study results suggest that all 20 participants deemed communication the top priority in their relationship and the leading factor in their overall satisfaction as well as a direct influence on participants’ expectations at the beginning of their relationship. All participants discussed their established expectations, which they hoped would endure. However, for some, their actions did not match their words. Eight participants admitted to excessively phubbing each other, creating tension and conflict within the union. Four of the 20 participants explained that they had reciprocated by phubbing their partner in retaliation. In summarizing the contextual data, phubbing a romantic partner influences low relational satisfaction because it adversely affects the individual and, in turn, the relationship.

Individuals within a romantic partnership affect relational satisfaction, and the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed within that partnership. Individuals know how they want to communicate and be heard, which typically does not include feeling neglected, hurt, or annoyed. The contextual data also portray that phubbing could influence IA and affect relationship satisfaction. Phubbing hurts romantic partners, causing individuals to feel neglected and separated from their partner, with the feeling of being alone while they are together.

In current studies, there is a narrow range of literature on the phenomenon of phubbing and being phubbed. The associations with relationship satisfaction, cell phone use, expectations, and communication are connected to the quality of relationships. For this study outcome and past study outcomes, the expectation of the encounter is the factor that contributed to how one's partner viewed being phubbed. The quality of relationships can be driven by expectations and the social construct of what it means to be in a committed romantic relationship. Although the cell phone has created some areas of improvement in couples' communication, the overall understanding is that the timing and the amount of time people spend on their cell phones can be problematic.

In **Figure 21**, 75% of the participants answered "Satisfied," while 15% responded with "Very satisfied," and 10% answered "Neutral." Participants who answered "Good" did not specify why they chose to respond with "Neutral." However, those who answered "Very Satisfied" expressed that they enjoyed conversations with their partner and were "getting along" and communicating well. The general data indicated that this was due to spending time together even if their partner was on the phone.

Figure 21 *Overall Satisfaction. with Relationship*

Summary

The findings demonstrate that phubbing does not affect relational satisfaction, as Ergun et al. (2020) state in their study, in which they conclude that phubbing a romantic partner contributes to lower relationship satisfaction, insecurities, conflict, and, in some cases, separation. The results of this study indicate that being phubbed by a partner does not appear to affect the satisfaction of the relationship. However, it affects the connection because of the unsatisfied expectations of interpersonal communication that people place on their romantic partners. With the disappointment of unmet expectations, participants began to adapt or succumb to adaptations by adjusting their expectations, communicative norms, and behaviors to match or accommodate their partner's behaviors (Nichols et al., 2015).

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this qualitative case study is to determine how being phubbed affects individuals within a romantic relationship and, in turn, how being phubbed affects relational satisfaction. Being phubbed or ignored by one's romantic partner in favor of the cell phone may seem like an innocent act, yet excessively phubbing a partner could have serious relationship consequences. Phubbing or being phubbed could be a fault of modern-day technology and social media, as they allow couples to connect continuously. However, for some in a romantic relationship, the action can create problems. Over 51% of the coupled population admit to being phubbed by their partner's excessive cell phone use (Vogels & Anderson, 2020). This number led me to question whether being phubbed affects relational satisfaction, how expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed, and whether a partner's ability to adapt to their partner's phubbing contributes to relational satisfaction.

Discussion

The findings of this study can be generalized to say that cell phone usage impedes being heard and acknowledged by a romantic partner. For some, communication expectations with their partners are unsatisfied because of cell phone overuse. Some people believe that cell phones do not hamper their relationships because their expectations differ from those of others and even their partners. Some individuals have chosen to adapt and accept the changes that come with having cell phones and being phubbed. Overall, the idea of being phubbed and the outcome are centered around expectations; some have learned or chosen to adapt.

The findings in each theme provided a clear understanding of the cell phone's role in a couple's relational communication, the communication expectations participants placed upon

their partner, and whether those expectations were fulfilled. Theme 1 was designed to reveal how men and women viewed the cell phone and its role in their communication, how they differed in their responses to being phubbed, how they felt about being phubbed, and how phubbing contributed to relational satisfaction. The data portrayed that participants, both male, and female, viewed the device as a way of providing continuous communication. Cell phones allowed them to check in and contact each other in emergencies. However, the data exhibited that men and women had differing views of the cell phone and its role in their relationship, although they agreed that life without it was not an option. Male participants viewed the device as a distraction that caused relationship problems. Female participants admittedly used the device more than their partners and were the most explosive when they were being phubbed by their partners.

Male participants did not consider the cell phone and its addition to their relationship to be crucial, meaning that they were not bothered by their partner's use of the cell phone because they had adjusted to their partner's use. They only showed signs of anger when they needed their partner's attention and their partner was on the phone.

Female participants, however, demonstrated signs of anger and, in some cases, rage and jealousy when their partner was on the phone. The findings suggested that male and female participants were angered when phubbed, but phubbing did not lower or affect their relational satisfaction. The results displayed that 16 participants were still satisfied in their relationships; one was neutral, and three were very satisfied regardless of the phubbing. Hence, phubbing had no actual effect on their relational satisfaction; if anything, the action was an irritation to which they adjusted.

Theme 2 was the length of the relationship. This theme was designed to determine the relational communication expectations each participant placed on their partners when they began

their relationship versus their current expectations. This question related directly to the second research question: How do the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed? The data illustrated that participants expected open and frequent communication and some anticipated daily face-to-face conversations. However, the findings portrayed that those expectations changed and differed for each participant over time. Participants who preferred everyday face-to-face conversations adjusted their expectations and now favored the daily or occasional text throughout the day.

One may think that these substantial changes—from talking face-to-face and being present with each other daily to communicating via text messages—would lower participants' satisfaction with the relationship. However, the data demonstrated that participants did not have low relational satisfaction and that those who attempted to maintain to their expectations knew that their desires would eventually change. Furthermore, participants were asked whether they believed their relational communication would change over time; 17 of the 20 answered affirmatively and admitted to adapting and adjusting to their partner's cell phone habits. Participants conceded that their relational communication expectations were not as high as they had been in the beginning, although they did not agree that the lowered expectations affected their relational satisfaction; however, the revised relational beliefs contributed to the adverse effects of being phubbed, such as the negative feelings and responses to being phubbed, which included anger, annoyance, object throwing, and reciprocal phubbing.

Theme 3 concerned the conflict that participants either endured or intensified. This theme aimed to determine whether internal or external conflict due to a romantic partner's phubbing contributed to lower relational satisfaction. Internal conflicts such as neglect, jealousy, mental health problems, or depression resulted from being phubbed. The study's findings suggested that

there were no causalities in relational satisfaction due to phubbing, meaning none of the participants had separated or divorced due to being phubbed by their partners. However, one participant considered EPS but was unsuccessful. Female participants threw objects and their partner's phones, and one participant threatened to end phone service; these examples were considered external conflicts. While participants endured inner conflict, including feelings of jealousy, anger, neglect, and disrespect, none mentioned any bouts of mental health issues or depression. Hence, phubbing adversely affected romantic partnerships and experiences of both internal and external conflict but was insufficient to cause a relationship to end.

The purpose of the fourth theme was to address the expectations of relational communication that participants placed on their partners and themselves. Similar to Theme 2, its purpose was to discover the expectations from the beginning of the relationship versus current expectations.

Additionally, Theme 4 addressed those expectations to answer Research Question 2: How do the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed?

The results indicated that all participants had higher communication expectations for their relationship, such as daily face-to-face talks and attentive communication from their partner. However, the findings revealed that, despite expectations, what participants received was different: all had been phubbed and described the event, their response, their feelings, and the reasons for each. Although participants anticipated such communication, they were not disappointed to the point of ending the relationship because relational satisfaction was not lowered by phubbing. However, their expectations of communication in the relationship were reduced. Being phubbed may have caused conflict internally and externally because of their

unfulfilled expectations. Participants repeatedly mentioned feeling annoyed and angered when they had something to say or needed their partner to act; this led to the conclusion that their expectations for relational communication were not being met.

The attentive communication they expected could have been present, which led me to believe that the answer to Research Question 2 is that the expectations of interpersonal communication could contribute to the effects of being phubbed due to unsatisfied communication expectations. Theme 5 was IA; it intended to address Research Question 3: How does IA affect relational satisfaction? This factor was important because participants openly discussed adapting to their partner's phone and relational communication habits.

Question 12 asked participants how they addressed the achievement or lack thereof regarding these expectations, and here, participants addressed their adaptations, such as waiting for their partner to put down their phone, ignoring the phubbing, continuing the conversation while their partner was on the phone, or reciprocating the phubbing. Although participants adapted and were unhappy with being phubbed, none admitted to having low relational satisfaction, which suggested that IA may be the reason that participants did not have low relational satisfaction because they adapted to their partners' cell phone behaviors. Some also adopted these habits in addition to reciprocal phubbing.

Theme 6 covered relational satisfaction to conclusively answer the first research question: How does phubbing affect relational satisfaction? Participants were asked to describe their overall relationship satisfaction and were offered a scale to rate their satisfaction; all participants used the scale but did not appear to read the questions in Figure 20. Participants determined whether they were dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied, with results indicating that, overall, participants were satisfied with their relationships.

Throughout the interviews, participants were asked how they responded to and felt about being phubbed by their romantic partners, their expectations of relational communication, their IA, and their overall satisfaction with their relationship. The findings demonstrated that participants were in satisfying and neutral relationships. If one provides how participants responded to and felt about being phubbed, one may conclude that participants were not in satisfying relationships.

However, those responses could have resulted from unmet expectations of interpersonal communication between the partners rather than from the actual act of being phubbed. Therefore, one could conclude that although adverse effects were present when being phubbed, participants could have adjusted and adapted to their partner's cell phone habits. Despite these adverse effects, participants were still generally satisfied with their relationships. Finally, this could mean that the lowered or changed expectations were no longer a hindrance or a problem in their relational communication and expectations because the problems were no longer present. Nevertheless, all participants adapted to their partner's cell phone behaviors.

Direct Analysis of Research Questions

RQ1 How does phubbing affect relationship satisfaction?

Modern-day technology and social media have become the social norm, it is a way for people to connect or reconnect in diverse ways, but for some, in a romantic relationship, the cell phone and its technology can create potential problems. During the COVID-19 lockdown of 2019-2020, social media apps saw an increase in use among couples by 80%, and 47% of couples complained of a decrease in partner connection, intimacy, and relationship quality, due to phubbing during the lockdown (Lisitsa et al., 2020). Over 51% of the coupled population admit

to being phubbed with their partner's excessive cell phone use (Vogels & Anderson, 2020). This behavior of partner phubbing led to lower relationship satisfaction, insecurities, conflict, and, in some cases, separation. The phenomenon of being phubbed has yet to be well understood in its correlation to an individual's inner and outer conflict and a couple's relational satisfaction.

This research study aimed to determine how phubbing affects relational satisfaction. The outcome concludes that phubbing does not affect relational satisfaction in any way. However, phubbing did contribute to adverse outcomes for individuals within the union. Although phubbing did not contribute to relational satisfaction for this sample, it did create adverse effects for the individuals within the union. Participants were interviewed and asked a series of questions. The questions provided insight and data into each participant's relationship communication expectations and the phubbing habits of their partners. The data in **Figure 13** shows what participants expected at the beginning of their union versus current communication. The outcome provides communication expectations that individuals placed on their partner's cell phone habits and how they dealt with any failures of their communication expectations within their union.

Past studies have concluded that phubbing a romantic partner contributes to lower relationship satisfaction, insecurities, conflict, and, in some cases, separation (Ergun et al., 2020). This study did not collude that phubbing a partner lowers or affects relational satisfaction, causes any relationship separations, or affects relationship satisfaction. However, the study did conclude that phubbing a romantic partner causes insecurities, electronic partner surveillance, feelings of neglect, anger, loneliness, jealousy, and conflict, and according to Ergun et al. (2020), mental health can be a direct adverse effect of phubbing. Therefore, it can negatively affect one's life

and psychological well-being. This study did confirm the Ergun et al. (2020) study but could not prove or provide the data to show that phubbing a romantic partner affects relationship satisfaction.

RQ1. How does phubbing affect relationship satisfaction?

Modern-day technology and social media have become the norm, allowing people to connect or reconnect in diverse ways. However, for some in a romantic relationship, the cell phone and its technology create potential problems. During the COVID-19 lockdown of 2019–2020, social media application use among couples increased by 80%, and 47% of couples complained of a decrease in partner connection, intimacy, and relationship quality due to phubbing during the lockdown (Lisitsa et al., 2020). Over 51% of the coupled population admit to being phubbed by their partner's excessive cell phone use (Vogels & Anderson, 2020), which leads to lower relationship satisfaction, increased insecurities and conflict, and, in some cases, separation. The phenomenon of being phubbed has yet to be well understood as it correlates to an individual's inner and outer conflict and a couple's relational satisfaction.

This research study is aimed to determine how phubbing affects relational satisfaction. The results indicate that phubbing does not affect relational satisfaction. However, phubbing does contribute to adverse outcomes for individuals within the union. Participants were asked a series of questions, the answers to which provided insight and data into participants' relationship communication expectations and their partners' phubbing habits. **Figure 13** illustrates participants' expectations at the beginning of their union versus their current communication desires, revealing communication expectations that individuals placed on their partner regarding

cell phone habits and how they addressed any unfulfilled communication expectations within their union.

The findings in this study do not indicate that phubbing lowers or affects relational satisfaction or causes relationship separations. However, the findings suggest that phubbing a romantic partner causes insecurities; EPS; and feelings of neglect, anger, loneliness, jealousy, and conflict. Furthermore, Ergun et al. (2020) posit that mental health issues can be a direct adverse effect of phubbing, negatively affecting one's life and psychological well-being. This study confirms Ergun et al.'s (2020) findings but does not prove or provide the data to demonstrate that phubbing a romantic partner affects relationship satisfaction.

RQ2. How do the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed?

Another purpose of this study is to discover whether the expectations regarding interpersonal communication contributed to the adverse effects of phubbing a romantic partner. The findings illustrate that interpersonal communication expectations contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed. Participants expected a particular mode of communication with their partners and quickly discovered that they were encountering different interpersonal expectations within the union. For example, participants mentioned receiving daily texts and handwritten notes as well as enjoying face-to-face conversations with active listening and attentive discussions that built the relationship and increased intimacy at the beginning of their union. Fast-forward to now, and participants realized that they still needed to receive the desired interpersonal communication from their partner. **Figure 16** portrays participants' expectations at the beginning of their union versus now.

Unmet communication expectations are directly connected to the EVT framework, which explains that nonverbal behavior violations affect interpersonal communication outcomes and harmonious interactions between two or more people (Gregory, 2013). This qualitative study presents clear signs that the EVT framework and its relationship to interpersonal communication as well as partner phubbing, are directly correlated with participants' behaviors. When violations of interpersonal communication accrued, participants used adverse behaviors and outbursts while acting on emotions and internal feelings associated with being phubbed.

RQ3. How does interaction adaption affect relationship satisfaction?

The IAT explains why participants did not feel or admit that phubbing affected their relationship satisfaction, although many admitted to the unsatisfied expectations of interpersonal communication within their unions. The study's outcome proves that this happens. Participants wanted to engage with their partners when their behavior was predictable but, in some cases, still did not receive attentive communication. The outcome also suggests that IA influenced the sample's relational satisfaction.

Figure 18 illustrates participants' adaptations to their partner's behaviors to ease the loss of expectations, further proving that IA affects relationship satisfaction. This case study outcome provides further evidence for Nichols et al.'s (2015) study. However, this study does not prove that phubbing affects relationship satisfaction. Nichols et al.'s (2015) findings state that people eventually mimic, adjust, or manage their partner's nonverbal behaviors. They can balance relationships because it could strengthen the conversation, relatability, relationship quality, and overall connection.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study do not provide a clear answer to whether being phubbed by a romantic partner lowers relational satisfaction because one could infer that each relationship is founded and functions differently. However, being phubbed by a romantic partner causes adverse effects on individuals, such as feelings of anger and neglect. Within the sample, participants were prompted to react confrontationally when being ignored by their partners. The contextual data do not provide a solid conclusion regarding whether phubbing lowers relational satisfaction, although it can be understood that unmet communication expectations adversely impact individuals within a romantic partnership.

Every relationship has a unique foundation; its origin and the partners' interactions are often unique patterns formed by the union of the parties involved. Within the relationship dynamics of participants in this study, it was evident that their relationship expectations included interpersonal communication and that they expressed their displeasure when that expectation was unfulfilled. Their responses were similar to mine: yelling profanities, reciprocating phubbing, and throwing objects, which in some instances, were cell phones. One could believe that these outbursts were due to one party violating the expected social exchange that the couple established at the beginning of their union.

Implications for Interpersonal Communication

In interpersonal communication, individuals converse and exchange messages to connect with and gain understanding from others. When conversing with a partner, there is a social construct for how the exchange should occur (Burgin, 2018). as one of the two communicators has chosen to. These findings also provide a connection between the participants' need to

converse with their partners, the EV that occurs when being phubbed, and the nonverbal behavior of phubbing as a direct violation of communication etiquette that triggers participants to feel neglected and ignored. That outcome led participants to express anger, initiate conflict, yell profanities, throw objects, and feel jealous, which leads to the conclusion that phubbing violates the social construct of face-to-face interactions between two people. When a partner is phubbed, the social norms of eye contact, response times, and nonverbal cues are nonexistent. Consequently, phubbed partners feel rejected and ignored.

Implications for Expectancy Violation Theory

According to Gregory (2013), communication expectations are a guide to behaviors that significantly impact interactions with others. Interpersonal communication a form of nonverbal social exchange that couples abide by when communicating that includes eye contact, verbal or nonverbal responses, and body language that indicates attentive listening. The nonverbal cues can be noted in body placement when partners face each other during conversations or look in their partner's direction. For example, two people in a romantic relationship typically interact with eye contact, appropriate responses, and satisfactory response times during face-to-face communication. The connection between EVT and nonverbal communication could be the psychosocial tradition of how people interact with nonverbal messages, their interpretation of said behaviors, and their norms and expectations (Lv et al., 2022).

The dynamics in this example were mentioned repeatedly in interviews, as participants described why they were angry with their partner when they were phubbed. Participants frequently stated that their partner never looked up from the phone. As the study progressed, participants shared their stories of and feelings about being phubbed, which enabled my

understanding that unmet expectations between a romantic couple cause cognitively or psychologically aroused mental responses, such as anxiety, anger that triggered the fight-or-flight reaction, jealousy, and emotional or cognitive responses such as fear and disappointment (Mendes et al., 2007).

Participants who threw objects explained that they were met with a response that implied they were overreacting. This response is subjective, and as participants noted, being ignored only caused them to yell louder and become angrier; they stated that they—one-half of the romantic partnership—viewed the situation as a violation of their expectations and phubbing as negative behavior that provoked their cognitive, physical, or physiological arousal (Mendes et al., 2007). Each participant experienced the nonverbal message of rejection in interpersonal communication when being phubbed because such behavior during a face-to-face interaction was perceived as a violation of the expectations of face-to-face communication etiquette, causing a reaction to the unfulfilled expectation.

Participants explained the events and triggers of their worst reactions to being phubbed, indicating that their partner's behavior was contrary to their norm of being attentive or offering the proper nonverbal and verbal cues when conversing or enjoying a social exchange. Additionally, a couple's communication expectations varied among participants based on the length of their relationship. The implications of the time a couple spent together were noted as participants described their communication expectations both at the beginning of their relationship and now. Participants spoke of communication early in their relationship, communication changes, whether they expected those changes, and how they adapted to or addressed the changes.

Implications for Interaction Adaptation. IA is an interpersonal exchange in which one's behavior adjusts and adapts to changes over time, often to overcome unfulfilled expectations. The implications of adapting behavior can be noted and generalized, as participants were asked how they handled the unsatisfied communication expectations within their union. Participants expressed that they had noticed the changes in their communication over time and had begun to reciprocate the phubbing as a form of mimicking and adjusting one's behavior. Alternatively, they ignored the behavior and waited for their partner to put their phone down or make eye contact. Other adaptation implications included participants managing their partner's phubbing by waiting or reciprocating the behavior to balance their reality to adapt to their partner's behavior and meet their need to feel connected. The IAT acknowledges the patterns and nonverbal interactions of sent and received messages between people.

For example, participants being phubbed did not receive a reaction from their partner when they repeatedly called their partner's name; conversely, if they garnered their partner's attention, then they did not receive their undivided attention. Participants expressed anger as their partner half-listened or refused to listen. To adjust to this disappointment, participants overcame the lack of attentive communication and chose to adapt by talking regardless of eye contact, attentive responses, or listening; however, once they truly needed or wanted to be heard, they expressed themselves through outbursts of anger. The functionality of IAT is to form a predominant pattern of interactions that reciprocate or manage another individual's behavior. Another example of IA is that participants predicted their partner's behavior patterns to adapt to known unmet communication expectations when being phubbed. However, as irritated as participants were, only they could determine whether their partner's action was a violation and whether the violation was unacceptable, a slight inconvenience, of no concern, or a cause of low relational

satisfaction. As participants expressed their anger at being phubbed—and some expressed that phubbing caused them to experience feelings of neglect—they still did not deem their relationship undesirable. Therefore, I conclude that the chosen participants had already adapted and adjusted to being phubbed, or they did not believe that phubbing comprised an unfulfilled expectation and chose to adapt to the behavior by ignoring, waiting, or reciprocating and remaining satisfied in their relationship.

People in interpersonal relationships have expectations of what they intend to receive or require from a partner. Afifi and Metts (1998) define an EV as a behavior that is notably different than what people expect; essentially, it is a behavior that is out of range of the typical behavior of said individuals, leading people to believe that their partner has become unpredictable (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Eventually, predictable or inconsistent behaviors become the norm within a partnership because people begin to rely heavily on the predictability of their partner. However, phubbing a person who wants to be heard when the typical behavior involves responding appropriately is deemed hurtful and is considered EV behavior, leading to a threshold of emotional sensitivity response because now there are moments of uncertainty when people cannot predict their partner's behavior. According to Afifi and Metts (1998), romantic partners or spouses develop shared ideas over time, such as the nature of the relationship, shared values, and morals.

Communication was the top priority for each participant, and expectations were shared with their partners. The more an individual loses the ability to predict the behavior of a partner, the more violations increase relational uncertainty (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). When participants expressed their worst outburst about being phubbed, they explained that they were

accustomed to being phubbed, but at that moment, they needed to be heard, causing an EV that quickly angered them. According to Bachman and Guerrero (2006), violations of expectations are highly likely to increase moments of uncertainty, thus accelerating the likelihood of possible displays of adverse behaviors (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). If uncertainty is at the forefront of relationships, then one could believe that being phubbed could increase this feeling of uncertainty because of the EVs presented by phubbing.

Participants expressed their feelings about and responses to being phubbed, which were all negative, yet all concluded that their relationship satisfaction was in proper standing. Bachman and Guerrero (2006) state that people who adapt continuously feel satisfied even when a violation of expectations has disrupted the union because of the nature of adaptation. People need to continue to develop the ability to predict their partner's behavior, and this need to predict behavior could keep participants standing firm on their relational satisfaction even when they discuss what fits anger or hurts them, such as the desire to be heard, needing to relay or receive information, or needing help. Participants responded with outbursts, yelling, cursing, and throwing objects. Bachman and Guerrero (2006) describe these moments as hurtful events that violate expectations, and those who perceive that their partner is phubbing them intentionally are more likely to report or use a destructive communicative response.

Findings Regarding the Adverse Effects of Phubbing a Romantic Partner

Phubbing a romantic partner has negative consequences, and one of those many adverse effects is losing relationship quality, which means conversations are less likely to be intimate (David & Roberts, 2021). However, relationship satisfaction remained relatively high for the participants in this research. The participants did not admit to having lower relational satisfaction

due to phubbing; in fact, 90% of the participants measured their relational satisfaction as satisfying. The findings indicate that some participants were accustomed to being phubbed and believed there was no real reason not to be satisfied in their relationship because the behavior had become normalized. Some had even adopted the behavior themselves by reciprocating the phubbing.

Participant W5

“Yes, I expected the communication to be this way when the phones became computers with all this stuff on them, but back then, I expected conversations to be face-to-face, not texting in the middle of the day and calling when you want. But I did [expect this] when the phones became mini-computers, but before then, I only expected face-to-face conversation, which we still do when important conversations come up, but I expected this.”

According to David and Roberts (2021), being face-to-face but not actively participating in the conversation sends the message that one is not mentally present. Having face-to-face conversations with the effectiveness of the interaction. It undermines the relationship quality and connection, as the data reveal that the effects of phubbing can and did have adverse effects on individuals within a romantic partnership. Regardless of whether participants admitted that being phubbed affected their relational satisfaction, the findings clearly demonstrate that phubbing affects the union and interferes with intimacy. However, it did not affect participants’ satisfaction with the relationship.

Participant W3

“I just took his phone and threw it on the couch. I did not try to break it; I just wanted to prove a point by taking it. I was angry because I felt invisible and unimportant, like what was going on on that phone that says I am nobody right now.”

Findings Regarding Jealousy. Many participants agreed that feeling alone while together could be better, although they stated that this factor did not lower relational satisfaction. It caused problems, but these issues were insufficient for participants to admit that relationship satisfaction needed to be higher. For one participant, jealousy was a significant factor in her realization that her relational satisfaction was neutral.

According to Attridge (2013), Romantic jealousy can be defined as a reaction to the perceived or imagined threat of losing one's relationship. However, the relational quality is lower when a perceived or imagined threat exists in one's relationship. The interview findings reveal that none of the participants used the word *jealousy*. However, one could infer that jealousy is an effect of phubbing, as four of the ten female participants made comments that questioned their partner's cell phone behavior, such as wondering what her partner was doing on his phone that was so vital that he did not want to put it down.

Participant M5. *"I do not think it undermines the relationship; it does cause some issues of insecurity on her end, like if I like someone's picture or something."*

Participant W3. *"I just took his phone and threw it on the couch. I did not try to break it; I just wanted to prove a point by taking it. I was angry because I felt invisible and unimportant, like what was going on. On that phone, that says I am nobody right now."*

Findings Regarding Mental Health. There are no significant findings or connections between phubbing and severe mental health issues. However, I believe it is worth mentioning, as previous phubbing studies list mental health issues as an adverse effect. According to Ivanova et al. (2020), depression disorders can be associated with sadness, emptiness, and loneliness. Negative mental health findings among this study's participants were uncommon; participants

did not mention depression other than mentioning that they felt neglected, which is associated with depression (Ivanova et al., 2020).

Participant W7. “Communication, in general, has changed because, in the beginning, we were engaged in each other's conversations. But now there is a distraction within the communication because of his cell phone, so I am irritated and feel neglected because communication was good in the past, but not right now. It could be better.”

The connection between being phubbed and depression generated by loneliness can be an adverse effect of being ignored by one's partner in favor of their phone.

According to Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), partner phubbing during conversations or romantic moments can often leave a partner feeling anxious, and the inadequately preserved response from phubbing decreases relationship satisfaction. However, participants did not directly mention that they were depressed or anxious. The findings reveal that participants felt alone when phubbed but did not cause severe mental health concerns. The results also indicate that 90% of participants felt alone with their partners but did not experience low relational satisfaction.

Findings Regarding Electronic Partner Surveillance. Throughout the interviews, all participants had the opportunity to answer each question to the best of their ability and to the extent that they deemed sufficient. In using open-ended questions, participants, without hesitation, offered more information than asked. The detail in their accounts enabled me to associate some of their feelings and reactions with the previous studies noted in the literature findings. One of those literature findings regards EPS. According to Shafer et al. (2022), EPS occurs when people consistently check their partner's electronic and digital activity as a way to control their partner by removing all external or perceived threats to their relationship. The

literature presents EPS as a negative outcome of phubbing because partners who feel ignored in favor of a cell phone demonstrate signs of increased anxiety due to infidelity speculations (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022).

The results in this study support Schokkenbroek et al.'s (2022) findings. One of the 20 participants in this case study admitted to EPS, volunteering her strategies to access her partner's electronic devices. However, she was not successful because he used high-security measures to keep his phone activity private. This failure led this participant to mention that she was often suspicious of his activity because he frequently phubbed her. This admission aligns with Schokkenbroek et al.'s (2022) findings that people in low-quality, high-phubbing relationships have a greater risk and rate of EPS. Participant W8 rated her relational satisfaction as neutral because of her partner's excessive phubbing.

***Participant W8.** “There is no success right now and no real communication or success in this relationship right now and failures of my expectations. I guess I just get on my phone and ignore it, or eventually, I’ll just end the relationship because I thought I meant more to him than the phone, but [I guess] not.”*

Findings Regarding Partner Responsiveness Partner responsiveness is necessary for romantic relationships because it builds connections and intimacy. According to Forest et al. (2014), partner responsiveness can be described as the thought that one’s relationship is not satisfying in connection with how their partner responds to or validates their feelings. Partner responsiveness is also connected to Research Question 2: How do the expectations of interpersonal communication contribute to the adverse effects of being phubbed? The findings indicate that phubbing is a barrier to partner connection. Participants admitted that their partner's

nonresponses to their needs were a threshold that caused them to react negatively and feel neglected. Although the findings do not suggest that phubbing lowers relational satisfaction, there were signs and clues in participants' words, such as *neglect* and *ignored*.

Low or absent partner responsiveness can increase partnership anxiety and insecurities. Participants discussed their partner's cell phone habits; consequently, I conclude that the participants had adapted to being phubbed, although they were upset and annoyed when their partner did not respond to their needs. A partner's excessive cell phone use negatively impacts interpersonal communications, triggering violation behavior because phubbing violates the norms of face-to-face interactions between two people. The study interviews also clarify that although participants hated being ignored by their partner, they were disappointed and annoyed that their partner did not respond when they expressed their belief that their needs were unmet. Participants who wanted to be heard or needed help were the most explosive in their responsive behaviors because their partners did not respond in a timely manner or when the participants believed that they should.

Findings Regarding Participants' Tolerance Thresholds. As participants spoke of their most explosive response to being phubbed by their partner, one could infer some IA or behavior acceptance until participants could no longer ignore their partner's actions. Some participants expected to be phubbed, and they had become accustomed to the cell phone being the third member of their relationship, which was acceptable until they wanted to be heard, desired to offer or receive important information, or needed help. These moments were the breaking point for participants.

According to Alberts et al. (2011), these common areas cause couples to quarrel. The distribution of unpaid domestic labor produces arguments among couples; household responsibilities being somehow unevenly distributed may have been why needing help was a threshold moment for participants who were phubbed.

Although participants each offered a different story of their most explosive response to being phubbed, their outbursts varied. The breaking point occurred when participants did not receive the attention that they believed to be essential. Participants who demonstrated anger by throwing objects did so when they needed important information and wanted to be heard. Participants who responded with profanity needed help or wanted to receive critical information. The moment when participants felt that they had adapted for long enough to their partner's behavior could be understood through their casual mentions of how often their partner phubbed them.

Participants unanimously mentioned how annoyed and aggravated they were at being phubbed but did not respond to the behavior. After explaining that they had reached their breaking point, their demeanor appeared casual, and their outburst was minimized. It appeared that each participant had accepted the phubbing. They had quickly forgotten their outburst and deemed it casual behavior because they continued with the relationship despite their unmet communication expectations. I believe that the participants considered this behavior casual or normal because they had adapted to the phubbing and seemed to have expected it.

Participant M6

“Well, she was on her phone in the front room, and I was standing in the kitchen with the fridge open, and I was asking her what we would put on the grill later. I closed the fridge. ‘What

are we going to put on the grill?’ She still didn't look up. I was over it, so I looked in her direction, fuming, and she never looked up. So I said it again, louder, a second time. I walked over to the TV, stood in front of it, and yelled, ‘WHAT THE EXPLETIVE are we putting on the grill?’ She finally looked up and said, ‘Oh, I was texting my sister without my glasses on.’ I laughed, but I was pissed.”

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this qualitative case study recognized that partnerships are subjective and that participants could provide irrelevant information when answering each question. As the researcher and interviewer, I found it necessary to note that people see their unions differently because the union may appear problematic from the outside, although those within the relationship may view it otherwise. When creating scales to measure people's satisfaction, I could not attain the depth or the details to allow every couple or person to measure their satisfaction. The evidence of this factor is this: participants were asked to provide details about being phubbed, how they felt, and how they chose to respond. The outcomes were similar, yet 19 participants remained firm that they were satisfied with their relationship despite being phubbed regularly and having feelings of neglect and anger.

According to Bokek-Cohen (2011), emotions and possible power dynamics in an intimate relationship are often viewed subjectively. They are necessary because people may respond to what they believe to be happening rather than what is actually happening. Bokek-Cohen (2011) also mentions that power is essential to note in relationships when addressing satisfaction because the person with the most satisfaction is often the one with the most power, and the person who is least satisfied has the least power. Therefore, the participants' subjective views

could be based on the power dynamics of their relationship, causing them to view their relationship as satisfactory based on whether they hold most of the power within the union. Consequently, it remains important to note that the study's outcome delineates the effects of phubbing but does not allow a conclusion regarding whether being phubbed by a romantic partner lowers satisfaction because of the participants' subjective views.

Furthermore, creating boundaries to maintain the study's scope after participants provided off-topic answers was another challenge because this study could have taken many directions. My goal was to expose how phubbing a romantic partner creates adverse effects and lowers relationship satisfaction. Hence, the boundaries had to be straightforward to allow me to generalize the outcome. The questioning had to be direct so that the participants would want to share their stories with honesty and detail. Therefore, I asked participants how phubbing affected them as well as their worst reaction to being phubbed and provided research on how the behavior affects individuals and appears externally.

Delimitations of the Study

With subjective limitations or outcomes, one must consider that emotions and feelings are based on people's experiences within their union. However, I chose structured interviews with a small, diverse sample to ensure accuracy and validity throughout the study. I chose not to interact in the conversations during each interview. Asking open-ended questions with no additional questions or discussions with the participants eliminated any biases that could occur within the interviewing process. Consequently, my biases and self-reflection were not presented to any participants, and my experiences and opinions were not expressed. By not adding additional conversation, I allowed participants to answer each question freely, openly, and to any extent they desired.

To remain within the scope of the study, I engaged 20 participants, ten men, and ten women, and used six categories to keep the findings within the scope of the research question. The categories were as follows: (a) men and women; (b) length of relationship; (c) conflict, internal or external breakup, or divorce; (d) relationship expectations; (e) IA, acceptance of behavior, or reciprocal phubbing; and (f) relational satisfaction. The research allowed me to establish a pattern of behaviors and remove any biases by using a structured interview process, which maintained the validity of the study's outcome.

The 12 questions each related to one or two of the categories. I asked questions that would garner information on how participants felt when being phubbed, how they responded to being phubbed, their communication expectations, and how they addressed unmet expectations—by adapting, standing firm to keep the communication as it was at the beginning of their union, or reacting at the moment their response expectations were not met. They reached the threshold of reacting when adjusting no longer served them, whereas being phubbed by their romantic partner either lowered their relational satisfaction or had no effect because their partners either ignored the behavior or responded with negative behavior.

Recommendations for Future Research

A suggestion for future researchers regarding partner phubbing is to examine the phenomenon using age grouping and generational differences in communication and phone etiquette expectations. For example, participants in this study were required to be 18 years of age or older and 65 or younger. However, as the research progressed, I noted that the ages and generational differences seemed to factor into participants' expectations, how they handled being phubbed, and their overall satisfaction in their relationship. Additionally, relational expectations appeared to impact how each participant responded to being phubbed, their willingness to adapt,

their communication and satisfaction in the relationship, and why they reached their threshold and could no longer endure the phubbing.

The age groupings that I recommend are as follows: start with the baby boomers and then work through generation X, millennials, and generation Z. The future researcher should compare the findings and present the differences in how participants respond to the EV behavior of phubbing and how they adapt. The study could further explain how participants obtained these habits, which would establish the adaptation theory, and whether they want or need to adapt to their partner. As noted in this study, the younger college student and his partner were accustomed to using the phone within their relationship. Therefore, they did not see a problem with communicating via phone 80% of the time.

Future studies should also address relationships that may have ended for any reason and address participants who left relationships for phubbing or infidelity. The final recommendation is to have the participants log their days for two weeks, addressing when they texted their partners and had face-to-face conversations. They should also log when they began phubbing or being phubbed, what they did while being phubbed, and how they felt at that moment.

Summary

The implications of this case study could provide future researchers with a foundational understanding that unmet relational communication expectations may be the underlying cause of the adverse effects of being phubbed by a romantic partner. This behavior constitutes a direct failure to meet communication expectations within a relationship. Participants wanted and expected specific relational communication with their partners. When those expectations were unfulfilled, participants reacted to their emotions when being phubbed by yelling, cursing, and

throwing objects. When those outbursts or their partner's phone use became the norm, some participants began to adapt to their partner's behavior by waiting for them to put down their phone or reciprocating the phubbing because low or absent partner responsiveness can increase partnership anxiety and insecurities. These emotions triggered individuals to respond when they reached the threshold of needing and wanting to be heard, to acquire what they perceived as crucial information, or to be helped by their partner. When participants no longer wanted to adapt, their feelings and reactions were brought to the forefront of their relationships.

Projected Relationship Survival

In continuation of the recommendations in this study, I believe I should repeat the study with the same participants in the same order. Additionally, I should apply participants' predictions that may still be true. The study should be revisited in 5 years to determine whether anything has changed between participants and their significant others. At that time, I predict that three of the 20 participants will have continued their relationships, and the other 17 will have ended their unions. Several factors enable individuals to remain satisfied within a relationship; however, what is essential is that adaptation occurs.

As Coutinho et al. (2019) mention, a couple's ability to adapt to each other to regulate any negative or unmet expectations is a telling sign of their long-term success. The participants who established firm communication boundaries will sustain them over time. In contrast, those who had wavering communication expectations and long-term IA will fall short of a sustained relationship. Those who can adapt and set boundaries will probably have difficult times but could remain with their partner. Therefore, I anticipate that Participants M8, M10, and W4 will still be in their union when this research is revisited, and all others will not.

Participant M10

“There is no failure; it doesn’t happen much, but the success is that she just does not be on it ‘cause we are older. The young kids be on their phones; we just talk.”

Conclusion

Andre Gide, a French writer, once said, *“It is better to be loved than hated; it is also far better to be hated than ignored”* (Bevilacqua, 2020, p. 409). Similar to the participants, I agree that it is far more difficult to be ignored than hated, although I would rather argue with a partner than be ignored. The idea that being on a cell phone is more interesting than talking to a partner is something that my participants and I can not understand. When each participant described their moment of outburst after being phubbed, I could relate, even if I did not respond in the same way.

In concluding this study, one thing is certain: being phubbed is annoying and contributes to unmet expectations in a romantic partnership. Individuals in this study recalled when they released bouts of rage and anger triggered by their partner’s phubbing. During the interviews, participants expressed how important communication was to them in their relationship. Many expressed the openness and constancy of communication at the beginning of their relationship; however, when the cell phone suddenly became the third party, it created an invisible wall between participants and their partner, leading me to believe that the unfulfilled communication expectations were the inciting cause of anger and outburst when participants were phubbed by their romantic partners. Although the relationship did not end as an effect of phubbing, the behavior created an adverse effect and a barrier for participants who wanted to achieve their goal of interpersonal communication with their partners.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

ATTENTION: LinkedIn Friends

As a graduate student at Liberty University School of Strategic Communication, I am conducting a research case study titled.

TOGETHER ALONE: THE EFFECTS OF PHUBBING IN A ROMANTIC PARTNERSHIP.

The purpose of my research is to determine how being phubbed affects individuals within a romantic relationship and, in turn, affects relational satisfaction within a romantic relationship. Participants must be ages 18-65, male or female, in a romantic relationship for at least 30 days, own a cell phone, and have been phubbed by their romantic partner. Phubbed is defined as being snubbed or ignored for your partner's phone; they pay more attention to the phone than you.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to partake in a one-on-one, Zoom audio- and video-recorded interview. The interview should take approximately 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Participants will have an opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click on this screening survey link to confirm your eligibility.

A consent document or link to an electronic consent form will be emailed to you if you are found to be eligible. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to type your name and date on the form and submit it, or physically sign in and return it to me via text/scan prior to the interview.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ligon-Tucker

sligontucker@liberty.edu

Appendix B: Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire

1. Are you between the ages of 18-65? Yes, or No
2. Relationship status
 - a. Single
 - b. Romantic relationship
 - c. Married
3. Have you been with your partner for at least 30 days? Yes, or No.
4. Do you have a cell phone? Yes, or No.
5. Have you ever been phubbed by your significant other? Yes, or No

Definition of Phubbing: Being snubbed or ignored by your partner's phone. They pay more attention to the phone than you.

7. Please enter your name and email address. _____

Appendix C: Consent Letter

Title: Together Alone: The Effects of Phubbing in a Romantic Partnership

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Ligon-Tucker, Doctoral Candidate, School of Communication & Arts

Role: Researcher and Interviewer **Affiliation:** Liberty University, School of Communication & Arts

Invitation to be part of a research study

You are invited to participate in a research study on people's interpersonal communication experiences in romantic relationships. To participate, you must

1. Be in a romantic relationship for 30 days or longer.
2. Be between the ages of 18-65
3. Own a cellphone.
4. Been phubbed by a partner. "Phubbed" is defined as being snubbed or ignored for your partner's phone; they pay more attention to the phone than you.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

This study aims to show how ignoring or snubbing a partner for their cell phone, known as phubbing, may or may not interrupt connections and lower relational satisfaction within the union.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an audio and video-recorded interview via Zoom (30-60 minutes).
2. Read over and initial your transcribed interview transcripts to ensure validity.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include improving relationship satisfaction and relationship connections.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Only the researcher will view the interview or have access to any of your personal information, i.e., emails and or phone numbers. Your responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with codes. Example (Male3)
- The interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer; any papers will be in a drawer/file-locked cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- The interview recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted/erased them. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee/the study team, etc., will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is **Stephanie Ligon-Tucker**. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact **Stephanie Ligon-Tucker**.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study

after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. Therefore, I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Date: _____

Member Check: I have read the transcript of my interview given on _____, and I agree that the transcript is accurate. *Initials* _____

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. With your communicative needs and relationship expectations in mind, what would you say contributes to your relationship's current and past satisfaction?
2. How would you describe your relationship's overall satisfaction?
3. What role does your cell phone play in your downtime?
4. Describe your partner's cell phone habits when you are "hanging out" or on a date—for example, watching movies at home, out at a restaurant, being intimate, etc.
5. When is the best time during the week for you and your romantic partner to talk?
6. Could you describe the setting for that conversation; are your phones present, are either of you on your phones, and if so, how does that make you feel?
7. How do you think phones affect your relationship's communication?
8. What were your communicative and or face-to-face connection expectations for your relationship when you first got together versus now?
9. When you perceived yourself as being phubbed, what event, moment, or time did it occur, and how did you respond?
10. Describe your worse reaction to being phubbed, explain why you responded that way, and how it made you feel.
11. Is this how you expected the communication to be? If yes, why? If not, why?
12. How have you handled the success or failures of these expectations?

Appendix E: Relationship Satisfaction Scale

Below is a satisfaction scale with questions to be answered on a scale of 1–5.

1. Dissatisfied, 2. Somewhat Dissatisfied, 3. Neutral, 4. Satisfied, 5. Very Satisfied

1. General satisfaction with the relationship
2. Emotional intimacy with a partner
3. Mutual attachment within the relationship
4. Intimacy and closeness
5. Sexual intimacy
6. Mutual trust
7. Shared future goals
8. Resolution of disagreements or conflicts
9. Household management
10. Shared future goals