

**TECHNOLOGY AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:  
A NARRATIVE PASTORAL COUNSELLING APPROACH**

**by**

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## Declaration of Originality

I, Mamasila Grace Mohale, student number 1835 1264, hereby declare that this dissertation, "Technology and family relationships: A narrative pastoral counselling approach," is my original work that has never been submitted to another university before, and that it is being submitted in compliance with the requirements for the MTh (practical theology) degree at the University of Pretoria. This research paper includes a complete list of references for each source that is cited or quoted.



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Mohale M.G

04-July-2023

## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my dear sweet daughter in the Lord Pebetse Raesibe Leshilo. I will never forget you...Not even for a moment! In my heart is where your story lives. Born 16-Janury-2004, Passed on 06-November-2021, Burial 13-November-2021. Still loved, missed, and adored. May her spirit *rest* in peace eternal and that it *rise* in glory eternal. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may *rest* from their labours, and their works do follow them (Revelation 14:13). For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will *rise* first (1Thessalonians 4:16). Good people pass away; the godly often die before their time. But no one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come. For those who follow godly paths will *rest* in peace when they die (Isaih 57:1-2).

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the use of technology in families. The research question pertains to how the frequent use of technology affects family relationships. The study aims to come to a deeper understanding of how the use of technology affects the way in which family units interact and what the consequences are for their relationships. These insights are utilised to develop guidelines for pastoral care with families.

The study explores various theories on media and communication and utilises the Multi-Theoretical Model. Insights with regard to concepts such as family, information communication technologies and the internet that are gleaned from various disciplines are brought into discussion with what a narrative pastoral counselling approach would entail in the context of families and the use of technology.

The narrative approach to pastoral counselling focuses on stories that are told and social discourses that are investigated to ascertain their effect on the thinking and practices of people. The narrative approach is nonjudgmental. This focuses on meaning, interpretation and linguistics in order to gain a deeper comprehension of individuals and how they deal with their challenges. The paradigm is postmodern and epistemology social constructionist. In pastoral narrative counselling, the spiritual aspect of being human and individuals perceptions of and relationship with God play a central role. The aim of pastoral care and counselling is to provide holistic care that takes all aspects of personhood into account.

The study illustrates the impact of technological use on families. Family relationships are often affected negatively by the overuse of technology by family members. On the other hand, technology can also serve to maintain close contact and good relationships over great distances in a mobile era where family members often find themselves in different countries and continents. In a work environment the positive side of technology

is that it provides instant contact. On the other hand this can cause work to intrude in the family environment to the extent that it affects family interactions negatively.

From a pastoral care and counselling perspective, the study contributes insight into the situation of families and technology and provides guidelines for mitigating the negative effects on families and households. Internet access should be regulated in such a way that communication in the family can be improved. This would require a disciplined lifestyle for the good of all within the household. Technology should be used in moderation.

The findings of the study highlight the significance of technology and how technology influences the family system. Therefore, appropriate strategies to promote healthy family relationships should be implemented in the home and encouraged and guided by pastoral care and narrative pastoral counselling. Such strategies include that family rules are put into place, family time is prioritized, and family cohesion is strengthened.

### **Key terms**

- Technology
- Family relationships
- Internet
- Information communication technologies
- Narrative approach
- Pastoral care and counselling

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Technology is ever-changing. Advancements in television, the internet, computer technology, cellular telephones, and music devices are made at a rapid pace. Changes regarding technology have an impact on individuals and families (Lanigan 2009). It is estimated that young people in the age range of 8 to 18 watch television or use devices for seven hours a day, seven days a week. Everyone interacts with media on a constant basis, regardless of age (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010:1).

Information and communication technologies (ICT's), which include computers and cell phones, have seen some of the biggest technological breakthroughs in recent decades (Lanigan 2009). Some of the most significant changes have been to once-single-purpose items, like cell phones, which can now access the internet and are multipurpose tools. Technology is increasingly becoming the center of human lives. This has an impact on how the family unit functions. Families and family life are altered by technology in both positive and negative ways (Van Hook et al 2018: v).

### 1.2 Research problem

Technology has revolutionized the world. These days, it is essential to people's everyday existence. Technological devices and information and communication technology (ICT) have become prevalent in churches, families, business, and society (see Castells 2000; Magezi 2015:1), through the use of technology families can stay connected, especially over distances.

The dynamics and makeup of the family can be significantly impacted by the way parents use technology. Furthermore, it may have an impact on the interactions with the children (Jordan 2006:20). This study intends to investigate how people use technology within families and the problems associated with it. Technological advances such as



information communication technologies are creating disruptions in the family system, family structures and changes in the quality of family relationships. Parents' roles have shifted in certain respects because children and adolescents are often more competent at using communication tools than adults. Parents who are above children in the family hierarchical are in a position to monitor the activities of the children. From their position they often find it difficult to fulfill this function adequately when the children are more technologically literate than they themselves are. Youth with a high level of digital literacy can from their side also be unwilling to relinquish their position as the person in the family with the superior know-how when it comes to technology. These dynamics can lead to conflict in the household.

The research problem to be investigated in this study pertains to how the frequent use of technology affects family relationships. The question is how parents can be empowered and how greater synergy regarding the utilization of technological tools can be created in the daily lives and relationships of families. The context of this investigation is specifically Polokwane in Limpopo province. The study investigates how the use of technology affects how family units interact and what the consequences are for their relationships.

### **1.3 Literature overview and research gap**

The environment of the adolescents today is a complicated media which is inundated via printed media, iPods, computers, digital video recorders, television, and the internet. The daily lives of the adolescents are inextricably linked to the media (Cloete 2012:1). Although some people in today's world attempt to avoid media to a certain extent, it is rather difficult because media come in various forms and are present all around (Hoover 2006:142). Technology is typically a consequence of aging that does not correspond with the society of origin for older people. But today's youth culture is fundamentally shaped by technological advancements. In today's world, media play a significant role in allowing people to participate in culture and society. Traditional symbols, ideas, and values are disseminated through media platforms, which serve as sources and contexts (Hoover 2006:205).

Media is available to children from an early age, most notably television. As they get older the wider the range of material to which they have access. Between the years 2000 and 2008 internet usage in South Africa increased by 93.3%. An approximate 6.8 million internet users. The country currently ranks fourth among the top 10 internet-using countries in Africa (Internet World Statistics 2011). For users, having access to the internet opens up a whole new world of information, but along with it comes the responsibility to avoid harmful content. Something like pornography, for instance, is fairly easily accessible via the internet. The question is whether people's faith and pastoral engagement in any way have the power to counteract the negative effects of media engagement. Cooksey and Dooms (2010:110) point out that in "the abundance of articles written on adolescent sexual behavior in recent decades, relatively little research addresses the role that religion plays in affecting adolescent's sexual attitudes and behaviour."

Faith communities are often reticent to speak on sexual matters as this is a complex issue. The discrepancy between the religious teaching of clergy and their sexual practices often confuses young people and discredits religious institutions in the larger society (Nelson 1992:17-18). Because of the diverse and complex nature of issues of sexuality, the response from the side of religious institutions and leaders is often to shy away from the questions to which there are no direct and conclusive answers. Because of churches' silence, the media, for example, has an opportunity to lead the conversation and provide "education" on sexual subjects.

Over the last several decades, there has been a significant, change in the nature of communication. The internet and information communication technologies currently serve as an integral component of modern family life (Zhong 2013). Recent polls from the United Kingdom have indicated the following:

- 91% of households in the UK have a mobile phone (Dutton and Blank 2013)
- 83% of adults in the UK use the internet (Ofcom 2016); and
- 73% of the adults in the UK use the internet on a daily basis (Office of National Statistics 2013).

The rapid incorporation of information communication technologies into families has created new modes of interaction and has contributed to a rearrangement of relational patterns in families (Zhong 2013). The purpose of this study is to investigate how families communicate in light of technology. Bringing ICT's into the family is a complicated process. When it comes to making these technologies familiar and acceptable, the user is actively involved. This process is called "domestication" (Silverstone and Haddon 1996:60). Domestication of ICT's, according to Silverstone and Haddon (1996:60), is the process by which new and unfamiliar technologies are introduced in the home and come under users' control. This is often experienced as exciting but can also pose a threat on various levels.

One of the consequences of the increased use of ICT's is that workers are increasingly working from home. This leads to a blurring of the line between the workplace and family space (Silverstone and Haddon 1996). Whereas family members then spend more time in the same space, there is a risk that the work activities at home will have a detrimental effect on the quality of that time together. Chesley's (2005) study discovered a link between higher levels of discomfort and lower levels of family happiness when unpleasant work-related difficulties are brought into the house through the use of technology. The study of Wajcman, Bittman and Brown (2008) found that the perception is that through the use of cellular telephones family matters spill over into work time, but not that work-related matters spill over into family time in the same way.

However, according to another study, using technology can offer flexibility in terms of working schedules, which lessens marital tension (Valcour and Hunter 2005). According to Campbell and Ling's (2009) study, using a mobile phone frequently fosters intimacy in relationships and increases the amount of sharing that partners and family members can do. It's believed that doing this strengthens the bonds between families and couples. Therefore, research to date indicates that the use of mobile phones can both strengthen ties between families and couples and contribute to a blurring of boundaries within relationships.

The relationship between family time and internet use has also been studied (Daly 1996). Research has indicated that recreational time spent together as a family

improves family cohesion (Orthner and Mancini 1991). Because they foster an environment that is favorable to connection, communication, and the creation of memories, shared activities improve, enrich, and strengthen family bonds. This may influence how someone perceives their family's identity and distinctiveness (Hofferth and Sandberg 2001; Zabrieskie and McCormick 2001). Internet use is negatively correlated with home and family time, according to a study based on family time diaries. Compared to television watchers, internet users spend less time with their family (Nie et al 2002). With regard to the perception that the time spent using the internet can affect family time negatively, both parents and adolescents express this sentiment, though not in the same measure. Only 16% of adolescents agreed with 29% of parents in a study involving children and parents in the United States that internet use interfered with family time (see Rosen et al 2008). The general consensus among adolescents in a study involving a sizable sample was that using the internet did not improve their relationship with their parents and actually reduced the amount of time they spent with them (Lenhart et al 2001). Studies such as these indicate a relationship between using the internet and the decline in of family time. However, in these studies the internet is treated as a unified technology. A later study on the relationship between various forms of internet usage by young people and the influence on family time indicate that Internet use reduces the amount of time young people spend with their families. However, with internet use also comes with a variety of benefits (Lee and Chae 2007):

- Communicating with friends via the internet resulted in a smaller loss of family time.
- Making use of the internet for learning, such as searching for information for assignments and homework, had no negative impact on family time.

In general, the findings of research like this fall on both extremes. A 2003 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation revealed that using the internet has started to become a family activity in some households. Other studies show that adolescents' regular internet use has an impact on the state of their friendships and parent-child relationships. There is a general correlation between less internet use and better friendships and parent-child relationships, according to Mesch (2001; see Sanders et al

2000). Empirical research on the relationship between internet use and family time indicates that there is a decline in the amount of time parents and youth spend together (Lenhart et al 2001; Mesch 2006; Rosen et al 2008).

Studies have demonstrated that youth internet use for social and recreational purposes has a higher impact than youth use for information searches (Lee and Chae 2007). The idea that time spent on one task cannot be spent on another gave rise to the phrase "time displacement" (Nie et al 2002). Using the internet takes up time. Families that have access to the internet at home typically use it extensively, which can negatively impact family time and exacerbate conflict. Online communication replaces time spent with parents, but not with friends, according to another study (Lee 2009). Low family time is frequently linked to higher conflict levels, according to cross-sectional and longitudinal research (see Dubas and Gerris 2002). According to Jackson et al (2003) and Turow and Nir (2000), there is proof to support that parents and adolescents share varying degrees of concern regarding the potential harm that internet use may cause to family communication and bonding.

According to studies on family media interaction, parents require of their children to self-regulate use of the internet and to set time limits for computer-related activities. The parents are adamant that internet use should not interfere with children's academic work or social activities (Livingstone and Bovil 2001; see Pasquier 2001). When children reach adolescence, the expectations of children and parents often change. If their expectations differ, this can lead to intergenerational conflict. Parents could interpret the frequent internet use of children as going against their expectations of what families should do together (Steinberg and Silk 2002). Families that spend time doing things together tend to have better communication and better relationships. They are more able to discuss disagreements openly before these escalate to open conflict. Studies show that parents are generally optimistic about the potential benefits of the new learning resources that the internet offers to their children. They are worried about the authenticity of online content, though, and the weakening of standards, such as reading only short articles rather than books (Subrahmanyam et al 2001). They are concerned that the internet could divert children's attention away from more meaningful pursuits.

Research indicates that while parents say they keep an eye on the websites their children visit, children often say their parents don't monitor what they do online (Lenhart et al 2001; also Livingstone and Bovil, 2001). Since adolescents tend to be the technology innovators and experts in the family, adolescents frequently seize control of the device and limit other family members' access to the computer (Watt and White 1994; Kiesler et al 2000). According to Horst (2008), parents who possess inadequate computer skills and knowledge are more prone to believe that the internet separates them from their children. The time parents spend with adolescents on media largely depends on the parents' education and computing skills.

Several studies have explored online relationship formation. According to a US research, 14% of American adolescents make close internet friendships (Wolak et al 2003). According to a UK survey (Livingstone and Bovil 2001), 11% of adolescents report having met new internet friends. According to a research conducted in Israel, 12% of respondents said they had at least one intimate relationship that started online (Mesch and Talmud 2010).

Adolescent computer users likely to be heavier than non-users, according to studies on the relationship between the internet and activity displacement (Attewell and Battle 1999; Hugh and Hans 2001; Attewell et al 2003). According to a research conducted in Israel, compared to non-users, adolescent internet users are more likely to engage in social events that take place in public (Mesch and Talmud 2010).

That the internet influences the family system is indisputable. Though the results of recent studies are not always consistent, some trends can be identified in the existing research. The objective of this research is to contribute to the body of knowledge on how technology affects family relationships and how this matter can be addressed effectively by means of pastoral care and counselling with families.

## **1.4 Clarification of terms**

*Technology* is the use of scientific knowledge to solve problems and provide answers to queries. It is the practical application of science and scientific knowledge. Devices,

systems, and procedures are all part of technology (Puk 1996:10–11). In this study, “technology” is an umbrella term for how scientific knowledge is used for practical purposes. The focus of the study is on how family members utilize technology such as, for instance, cellular telephones, the internet, Facebook, social media and computers. Both the information and knowledge received in this way, and the style and frequency of the use of these devices can have an impact on family relationships. Technology has the function to improve how human beings do things. It has become part of contemporary life. The question is to what extent it helps and to what extent it hinders. That is this study's main objective.

A family is an individual group that may consist of spouses, children, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. A nuclear family, which comprises of parents and their offspring, is one example. In addition, a family may be defined as a close-knit community of persons who depend on one another, have shared resources and objectives, and live together for at least a portion of their lives (Wayne et al 2001:248). For the purposes of this study, “family” is regarded as a group of individuals, such as parents and children, who share a dwelling place, have common goals, a common culture, and share love and faith.

From a theological perspective, the ideal for the *family relationship* is that it is a covenantal commitment built on unconditional love. This would create a safe space in which attitudes of love and grace can develop and family members would be free to strengthen each other in a safe atmosphere where attitudes of grace and love could grow would result from this. Family members may become more intimate when they are empowered. Then, intimacy returns to a more profound degree of covenantal dedication. The term "family relationship" in this study refers to a link or relatedness by marriage, adoption, or blood (Balswick and Balswick 2007:21).

*Narrative counselling* is a form of counselling where the emphasis is on how individuals themselves give meaning to their life experiences by narrating their own stories. A narrative consists of events that are connected in chronological order and are joined by a plot (see Morgan 2000:12; De La Porte and Herbst 2003:6). For the objective of this

research the emphasis in the story telling will be on people's daily experiences regarding the use of ICT's.

## **1.5 The approach to the investigation**

### **1.5.1 Paradigm**

*The postmodern paradigm* places great emphasis on language and how it is used to express not only a person's understanding of a matter but also their feelings about it. This paradigm is useful in this study because it sheds light on how language shapes people's reality and structures information in the human brain. Through language, people can communicate their understanding and the meanings they attach to it with others, who interpret that communication and converse back also through language. Communication facilitates the interconnection between people, places and cultures (Taragona 2000).

A postmodern perspective on research emphasises the numerous, dynamic, complex, and interacting aspects of human life (Payne 2006:32). Aspects that are relevant to such an investigation include discourse, meaning, language and interpretation because they all shape an individual's story. In a postmodern paradigm, reality is seen as shifting, constantly changing and deeply personal. In this paradigm, there is no objective truth. "Truth" is different for different people and is influenced by social norms and ideas. Reality is socially constructed, there is no universally accepted reality or story (Payne 2006:24; Becvar and Becvar 2003). Postmodern thought is skeptical of grand narratives and the idea of "neutral language" and "universal truth". The main idea of narrative counselling is to understand individuals within their context and to guide them to create their own truth that helps them to construct a reality that serves themselves and others (Becvar and Becvar 2003). Through language, people's reality is shaped. Through language, they express their reality. In narrative counselling meanings are conveyed and interpreted through dialogue (Teragona, 2000; Becvar and Becvar, 2003).



## 1.5.2 Epistemology

*Social constructionism* is an appropriate epistemological point of departure for this study on narrative pastoral counselling (see Gerkin 1984:137-149; Müller 2000:56).

Knowledge is seen as socially constructed rather than “objective absolute truth”. The “lenses” that people use to understand the world are created by their societies. In other words, “These realities provide the beliefs, practices, and experiences which make up lives,” according to Freedman and Combs (1996:22, 31; see Müller 2000:56 ). This theory is helpful for examining how individuals interpret the good and bad parts of their family ties and how they create their reality around the usage of technology. People’s experiences are influenced by the social environment they live in and the interpretations they make of it through social interactions (Gergen 1984).

A social constructionist epistemology creates the space for multiple realities and personal stories (Payne 2006:21). Social Constructionism is a theoretical approach that offers several philosophical presumptions about the creation of knowledge and reality. It is focused on the historical context of knowledge and how it is ingrained in cultural norms and values. This method holds that individuals coordinate their numerous encounters to create meanings, which is why the social construction of reality is always a fluid and dynamic process at its core (Gergen and Gergen, 2012; see Galbin, 2014:89). Language is an essential component of the process of producing knowledge since it is a means of creating the world as well as a means of describing and representing it. Words are an instrument for social change. The context in which language is used gives it meaning (Burr, 2003; see Gergen, 1994; Mc Namee, 2004). This process of creating realities through language is continuous (Galbin, 2014:90).

Social constructionist theory states that social and interpersonal factors have a major role in explaining why human existence is the way it is (Gergen 1984:265). Social factors have an effect on both individual and community life. Individual learning occurs within interaction in a group. People’s ideas, interactions, and identities are influenced and activated by social and cultural norms and influences (Payne 2006:31). The most

potent impact on behaviour and cognition is sociocultural (Payne, 2006:32). A worldview is created by social and cultural processes. Actions and relationships are subsequently influenced by these viewpoints (Payne, 2006:31). Unquestioned sociocultural norms come to be seen as "truth status" for individuals, divisions, and communities, as explained by social constructionist theory (Payne, 2006:31). One's identity is shaped by society. Identity is socially constructed (Gergen and Davis 1985; Anderson 1997; Gergen 1992, 1999; see Payne 2006:33).

From such a postmodernism and social constructionist perspective narrative pastoral counselling therefore focuses on the following (Müller 2000:56; Gerkin 1997:137-149):

- **Realities are socially constructed**

The constructed social realities can be identified through the prevalent "discourses". A discourse is a set of ideas, a system of statements, convictions, and principles that are taken as true, or considered commonplace understandings (Morgan 2000). People's beliefs about God, the world, other people, and themselves are discussed in discourses. Interactions and dialogues with others have an impact on how people experience reality. Deconstruction is the process of understanding, how this reality is socially constructed. The goal is to comprehend and take into account the ways that each person's social and interpersonal reality has been shaped by their ongoing interactions with other people, human institutions, and environmental factors (Freedman and Combs 1996:33). This provides a deeper comprehension of the impact of social realities on the meanings people allocate to their lives and experiences. Discourses are identified by asking questions about the development, background and assumptions of the story (Freedman and Combs 1996:29).

- **Realities are constructed and conversed in through *language***

The same experiences may be interpreted differently by people who speak various languages (Freedman and Combs 1996:28).

- **Through *narrative*, realities are arranged and preserved.**

One way to make meaning of experiences is through stories and narratives.

- **There are no essential truths**

A person's truth might not apply to another person or even to the same situation at a different moment.

McLeod (1997; see Galbin 2014:83) identifies the following features of social constructionist theory:

- It rejects the conventional positivistic methods of knowledge acquisition that lack reflexivity.
- It challenges established presumptions about society that serve to advance the agendas of powerful social groupings.
- Past exchanges and agreements between different social groups have shaped people's perceptions of the world.
- The purpose of study and scholarship is to open possibilities rather than to provide knowledge that is fixed and generally applicable.

This method can be useful in narrative counselling because it allows psychological concepts such as the "mind," "self," and "emotion" to be redefined. These characteristics are not thought to be innate to the person but rather are the result of social discourse and are thus malleable if they are understood as socially constructed processes. These constructs can be altered through intentional reflexivity (Galbin 2014:83; see Gergen and Davis 1985; McNamee and Gergen 1992).

According to Galbin (2014:84-85; see Gergen and Gergen 1991), language serves as more than merely a means of communication. This is because social constructionist theory views language as such. People use words to "exist." As a result, the emphasis is regarding how language is used in social interactions in which language is created, maintained, or abandoned rather than the individual. Individuals use language to convey mutually understood meaning in order to create their social reality (see Speed 1991:400). According to social constructionist theory, there are no objectively

measurable "real" outside things that can be precisely located or identified. People can therefore never really see themselves as the "knowers" of indisputable "facts" (see Anderson and Goolishian 1988). Such "facts" are social constructs. Ideas and assumptions are created by means of speech and through social interaction. Not everything that is created in this way has value (Gergen 1984). Communities of common intelligibility are essentially dependent on knowledge and systems, and vice versa. They are ruled over by historical and cultural normative rules. Social constructionists therefore make no claims regarding the provision of "the truth". Culture, history, and social context frequently dictate the standards for classifying actions, occasions, and things (see Gergen 1999). Consequently, according to Dickerson and Zimmerman (1996:80; see Galbin 2014:85), a social constructionist viewpoint "locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context." Hart (1995:184) explains that people "live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and understand themselves and each other through changing stories and self-descriptions". Narratives that dictate single accounts of reality are suspect. They can lead to problems such as using knowledge as a means of exerting power and believing that "cultural specifications" should dictate people's lives (Dickerson and Zimmerman 1996:80). Even when a social constructionist viewpoint admits the existence of several realities or accounts of realities, not all stories are deemed equally valid. Stories based on people's lived experiences are seen as more valuable than so-called "expert knowledge". The multifaceted, dynamic, complicated, and interacting human existence should always be taken into account (Payne 2006:32). The social nature of human life is acknowledged and individuals are encouraged to tell their own stories.

### **1.5.3 Narrative approach**

Human beings operate by means of language and meaning-based systems. This necessitates that the language be grasped from the inside out. The interpretation of the meanings that are communicated should be recognized. This co-understanding of meaning and interpretation among individuals is developed in everyday life. According

to Anderson and Goolishian (1999), “communication and discourse define social organization”.

Narrative counsellors utilise language to excavate the meanings embedded in a counselee’s narrative. The counsellor approaches the story from a “not-knowing” position rather than the position of an “expert”. The counsellor remains non-judgmental and non-biased. The aim is to facilitate the person to comprehend the movement of their story. Understanding is about interpretation. There is no privileged standpoint for understanding (Anderson and Goolishian 1999). Meaning and understanding of life and life events are socially constructed by people in conversation with one another who use the same language basis. An individual can then act in accordance with the reality of their understanding that has been created through dialogue (Ganzevoort 2011). These understandings become the building blocks of understanding and problem-solving in an individual’s frame of thought.

To have a deeper comprehension of an issue, narrative counsellors ask questions to first elicit the initial understanding by the counselee of their story and experiences. Then follow questions that focus on points of significance in the counselee’s story. The counsellor can divert and redirect the individual into a new social construct that is not advisory or all-knowing but emphasizes constructive points made by the counselee. The problem narrative is deconstructed and a preferred narrative is re-established.

## **1.6 Research methodology**

### **1.6.1 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework for this qualitative literature study will now be explained briefly. *Narrative Therapy*, as developed in the field of the Humanities, views people as the authors of their own narratives. The attitude is nonjudgmental and courteous. The person and problem are separated: not the person, but the problem itself is the

issue. The narrative approach focuses on personal stories and social discourses (Morgan 2000). People become author of the story of their own life.

*Domestication Theory* (Haddon 2006) addresses the importance of technology in everyday family life. It explains people's adoption, rejection, and usage of technology, as well as the processes that influence these choices (Carvalho et al 2015:101). This theory is useful for the goal of the study, which is to come to an understanding of why and how people adopt and integrate technology into their daily family life.

The *Uses and Gratifications Theory* is about ways in which people utilize the media. According to this theory, people choose specific media in order to fulfill their needs and feel satisfied (Asamen et al 2008:198). This theory is utilised in the study to understand why and how people deliberately choose particular media to meet particular needs and to understand the motivations behind individual behaviour regarding media.

*Cultivation Theory* explains how and why the messages on television are likely to have an impact on viewers. The use of television has created and is continuing to create a homogenised culture (Asamen et al 2008:193). This theory can shed light on how television affects viewers' perceptions over time.

*Social Cognitive Theory* clarifies how people are motivated to learn a particular behaviour by observing others who serve as a role model whom they can imitate (Asamen et al 2008:195). This theory sheds light on understanding how new behaviour is learned by observing others through the media.

The *Displacement Hypothesis* assumes that the use of a time-consuming medium like the internet. This is time that is taken from other potential activities that are important to adolescents' social and cognitive development (Mesch and Talmud 2010:47-48). This hypothesis is useful for understanding the consequences of the time people spend using the internet for family interaction and relationships.

*Social Learning Theory* describes how people develop new skills and habits by observing others. This theory is utilised to explain how children increasingly play the role of a broker between new technical information and the older members of their family (Van Hook et al 2018:185).

According to *Social Domain Theory* children actively construct ways of understanding their world. Young people tend to consider the internet to be a private space. This provides them with the chance to create guidelines of communication at their own discretion (Van Hook et al 2018:28, 181). This theory emphasizes the significance of creating boundaries that are impermeable yet nevertheless obvious, taking contextual and developmental aspects into consideration in the use of technology.

*Social Identity Theory* explains how a person's in-group influences their self-concept to some extent. Presence in the media indicates a group's social standing and relative strength from the standpoint of social identity. This theory sheds light on how social identities affect people's attitudes and behaviour towards their in-group and the outgroup (Asamen et al 2008:196).

*Socialisation Theory* explains how children absorb the standards and guidelines set by their parents, siblings, other family members, instructors, and the media. This theory is useful for explaining how children socialize with their parents when using media (Van Hook et al 2018:29).

*Child Effect Theory* explains the effects of youth on the larger family structure and how that influences parenting. This theory highlights the role young people play in the way in which the family uses technology and how it might help strengthen bonds within families (Van Hook et al 2018:31).

*Diffusion of Innovation Theory* describes how innovations and new technologies are absorbed by societies and cultures (Van Hook et al 2018:30) and is therefore useful to this study.

*Drench Hypothesis* purports that certain media messages can have a dramatic and immediate impact on the perceptions of viewers. This theory aids in the understanding of how, under certain conditions, exposure to even a single character can have a powerful and instant effect on viewers (Asamen et al 2008:194-195).

*Developmental-ecological Theory* explains how technology is a primary driver of change, the family is viewed as a permeable social system. Human development occurs within the context of relationships (Mesch and Talmud 2010:24). This theory sheds light

on how exposure to online information during childhood and adolescence may impact family boundaries.

The Multi-Theoretical Model introduces *The Couple Family Technology Framework* (CFT), a specific thinking of how technology affects relationships. It explains how technology affects the initiation, maintenance and termination of relationships (Hertlein et al 2012:375). This framework is useful for understanding the the manner in which family life and couples are impacted by technology.

### **1.6.2 Empirical investigation**

This is a qualitative and narrative study with a phenomenological design. This approach is appropriate to the aim of coming to a more profound understanding of the impact of technology on family relationships. A qualitative methodology produces descriptive data (Brynard and Hanekom 1997:29). A phenomenological approach allows for an intensive investigation of, for instance, a small locality or community. In this study families in the Polokwane area in the Limpopo Province will be the focus. In a qualitative investigation specifics about people's experiences, opinions, viewpoints, and circumstances contribute to the richness of the data.

This qualitative investigation aims to explore a wider set of the social realm by observing people's day-to-day activities. It makes it possible to comprehend the perspectives of people who take part in the research (Mason 2002). The in-depth information gained in this way will make it easier to comprehend the impact of technology on family relationships. Qualitative research approaches focus on the specifics of what occurred, how it occurred, where it occurred, and when it occurred (Berg 2007). This study explores how the use of technology affects family relationships and enquires as to their experiences and perspectives on the matter of technology.

The study focuses on the Polokwane area in the Limpopo Province. Polokwane is the capital of the Limpopo Province of South Africa with a total population of 130 028 million people and 43 846 million households (Statistics South Africa, Census 2011, SIS Section, Polokwane).



The population of the study will be families from Polokwane who are using communication technologies in their homes daily. The families will be selected through purposive sampling (see Babbie 2010). The strategy of purposeful sampling is suited for this investigation because it will enable a focused selection of families who have been using communication technologies in their homes daily. Seven families will be selected to participate in the study.

Triangulation is the process of gathering data from several sources in order to verify the facts (Bless 2006:86). Multiple data gathering methods will be used to accomplish triangulation. Other than interviews, also existing literature, reports, statistics and observation will be sources for the collection of data on the topic under discussion.

The interviews will be semi-structured to gain information on the experience and use of technology in the family. Participants can freely respond to open-ended questions with their own experience (see Mathers, Fox and Hunn 2002:2). Through this kind of interview in-depth detail on the experiences of communication technology usage in families can be acquired. The data gathered in this fashion will then facilitate a deeper understanding of communication technology usage in the families (Boeije 2010). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to further elaborate on the responses and to follow up on the cues given by the participants. In this way, further details about their experiences can be procured (see Mathers et al 2002; Adams 2018). One-on-one interviews will be conducted at a location and time that is convenient to the interviewees. The interviews will be conducted in a language with which the interviewees are comfortable. Interviews will be transcribed verbatim to facilitate the accurate processing of the data.

Data analysis has the aim to organize the data and allocate meaning to it. Through this process consistent themes are identified (see Burns and Groove 1997:43). The major reasons given by the respondents are assessed and the consistency of their responses evaluated. Conclusions can then be drawn and findings presented. For the processing of data, a narrative approach to data analysis will be utilised. The reasons for and meanings attached to their experiences are clarified (Gilbert 2008). Narrative data analysis allows for the documentation of experiences of participants as seen from their

perspective. This implies that technology and family relationships will be understood from the perspectives of the respondents. These perspectives will be brought into discussion with the theoretical framework of the study.

Reflexivity is key to social research. Researchers should be constantly self-aware and admit that they are a part of the social environment they are investigating (Lambert, Jomeen and McSherry 2010). Investigators cannot isolate themselves from the research they are doing and be completely “objective” (Ackerly and True 2010). Another caveat is bias. An effect that results in mistake or distortion is referred to as bias and can have an impact on the caliber of the evidence. Previous observations can influence how the investigator understands and interprets the data (see Hesse-Biber 2007). Being aware of this will contribute to a cautious mindset in order to avoid bias. To avoid bias, it is necessary to continuously reflect on how these dynamics will play out in the study. Throughout the process, notes will be kept in order to provide an audit trail and to support the standard of the study and its degree of credibility (Carcary 2009).

Credibility, according to Halloway and Wheeler (2002) and Macnee and McCabe (2008), is the level of reliability that can be attached to the "truth" of the findings of the study. Credibility, as defined by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), is about whether the findings of the study fairly represent the participants' initial viewpoints and provide reliable information based on their original data.

According to Baxter and Eyles (1997), confirmability is the extent to which the results of an investigation can be corroborated or supported by additional researchers. According to Tobin and Begley (2004:392), confirmability is "concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are derived from the data". Triangulation, an audit trail, and a reflective diary are ways to ensure the confirmability of qualitative inquiry (see Browen 2009; Koch 2006; Lincoln and Guba 1985). In order to ensure reliability, participants must assess the interpretation, findings and recommendations of the study to ensure that they are all supported by the information gathered from the participants (Cohen et al 2011; Tobin and Begley, 2004).

In this study, confidentiality will be ensured. Information of participants will not be disclosed. Their identities will be kept confidential (see Van der Walt et al 2011). The use of pseudonyms will guarantee anonymity.

### **1.6.3 Ethical considerations**

The primary premise of the research is that participants should not suffer any harm as a result of taking part in the study. The researcher bears the responsibility of ensuring that the study is carried out in an ethical manner (Bless 2006:140). In this study, participants' right to self-determination will be ensured. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants. The investigator will ensure that the respondent is thoroughly informed in advance about the possible implications of the inquiry. The researcher will approach the participants with the utmost respect and will not violate their human rights. Participants will be informed of their rights, including the freedom to discontinue involvement in the research at any moment without prejudice (see to Neuman 2014).

The identities of participants will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for reporting the data (see Berg 2009). Transcripts and recordings of interviews will be kept at the University of Pretoria according to the prevailing data storage system. Ethical clearance was given by the Department of Theology's Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria before the data collection process began.

## **1.7 Chapter outline**

Chapter 2 explores the matter of the usage of technology. The advantages and disadvantages of social media and the effects of technology on families with adolescents are discussed. The chapter explains of how technology affects the human brain and child cognitive development. The integration of information and communication technologies within the home is examined.

In Chapter 3 the concept "family" is unpacked utilizing insights from various disciplines. Family is viewed as a unit, a primary agent of socialization and communication, and a space where understanding is facilitated. The impact of technology on families is

examined, with particular attention to how the internet is being adopted by families with children and youth. The influence of technology on family dynamics and discourses is explained. The chapter explores the predominant relevant media and communication theories and models. Theories and models about how media exposure affects people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours explain how media content becomes incorporated into an individual's cognition and family relationships and shape perceptions about these relationships. This theoretical lens will be used to explore the effects of media exposure on families.

Chapter 4 reports on the empirical part of the study. The methodology of the empirical part of the investigation, the techniques of data collection, processing, and interpretation, are explained and substantiated. The results of the interviews are presented, analyzed and interpreted.

Chapter 5 motivates why a narrative approach to family pastoral counselling is selected. Narrative practices and principles are explained and applied to pastoral care and counselling with families with young people.

Chapter 6 presents the findings and recommendations of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMMUNICATION, MEDIA, AND TECHNOLOGY

#### 2.1 Introduction

In the fast-evolving landscape of communication, media, and technology, this chapter delves into this intricate web and its impact on family dynamics. The chapter focuses on technology and investigates the potential effects of communication and information technologies on family relationships. The advantages and disadvantages of social media platforms are explored.

The chapter is divided into three sections: communication, media, and the effects of technology on family life. Each section explores the multifaceted aspects, advantages, and challenges that arise from the integration of technology into people's daily lives.

##### 2.1.1 Communication

Communication is the technique of passing information from one individual to another with the aim to come to a mutual understanding. The common medium of communication is face-to-face interaction. Personal interaction tends to be richer than written communication because cues other than words are available. Voice inflection, body motions and nonverbal signals provide immediate feedback. Bi-directional communication is immediately possible (Lunenburg 2010:1; see Mesch and Talmud 2010:83). Utilising technology for communication has grown to be part of people's lives. They communicate through email, mobile telephones, social media platforms, texting services, video chat rooms, and video conferencing. Today, the internet is a creative medium for communication with others, which differs from the telephone and television. The new media have been described as a "substitute for face-to-face interaction" (Mesch and Talmud 2010:78). However, MIT scholar Sherry Turkle (2011:1) cautions that leaning too heavily on virtual messaging is destroying genuine personal interaction.

People tend to text rather than converse in person. The attention is largely focused on concerns and the opportunity to see expressions on faces and through body language expressions is limited. Turkle makes the observation that relationships made online are not lifelong ones, but in everyday life they do take up time. People text while driving, jogging, having family dinners, and pushing their children on park swings. By not wanting to intrude in others' lives in person or by speaking on the telephone, they constantly intrude through this medium, though not in "real-time." When they misplace their devices, they become what Turkle (2011:280) calls "anxious-impossible".

Even people who live together can form what is called "post-familial families". Though they are in the same house, the members use a mobile device or a networked computer while isolated in their rooms. They often invest more energy in technology than in one another. They justify this kind of connectivity as "being close", even as they escape one another (Turkle 2011:281). In a study with students, they were instructed to cut off all communication by sitting alone and without phones for fifteen minutes, cutting off the flow of continuous communication. Many of them "opted for mild electric shock rather than meditation in solitude" (Turkle 2011:34). According to Elsdoerfer and Ito (2016:34), civil society is not about verbalization in online texts; it is about the quality of human relationships. Social isolation has been exacerbated by texting, instant messaging, email, online gaming, and cell phones. People look away from their loved ones in order to concentrate on their screens. Individuals do not interact with one another in person or join groups. In Japan, the human interaction that the network has eliminated is now facilitated by robots. Turkle (2011:146) describes it as follows: "Technology has corrupted us; robots will heal our wounds."

Individuals communicate through various channels by means of which they broaden their communication, social support, and information sources. Through information and communication technologies they are able to gain access to opportunities, knowledge, and resources. An essential component of youth culture today is online communication. The phenomenon known as the "network effect" describes how a service gains popularity as more users utilize it, resulting in an ever-growing number of "adopters" (Mesch and Talmud 2010:88). Some young people utilise the available technology out

of the motivation to “just have some fun”. Others use instant and text messaging out of a need to belong. Online communication makes it easy to stay connected. Young people establish and preserve relationships using these methods (Kendall 2007:3). Young people's experiences with relationships are shaped by conversations that begin as basic words on a screen (Kendal 2007:46). They can use the words on the screen to make their computer or mobile device feel like the actual world. An examination of virtual hangouts should start with online text-based communication platforms such as instant messaging (Kendall 2007:4). In terms of communication and relationships, the accelerated nature of internet communication can add to the complexity of dating relationships. Because of this, virtual emotional connection with someone of the other sex can quickly develop into sexual intimacy and exploration (Kendall 2007:46). Communication over the internet can be intimate, impersonal, or both (Mesch and Talmud 2010:80).

## **2.2 Media**

In the lives of children and young adults, the media is a major influence. This affects family life. The media have become a necessity in the culture of today. The youth are the consumers of television programs, video games, the internet, and other media. How much time adults and children spend using media devices is a good measure of how important media is in people's lives in general and in family life (Villegas 2013:3). Media have the capacity to influence the attitudes, behaviour, beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge of young persons. Through these means they are exposed to diversity (Asamen et al 2008:89).

These days, young people increasingly use tablets and smartphones in addition to televisions and video games for media consumption. Young people of all ages are increasingly using media in private, and children can use it in a variety of non-domestic settings. Ofcom (2016) notes that even though children use tablets these days, they still watch television. Young people begin using media for social purposes, such as staying in touch with friends and peers, as they get closer to adolescence. Parents should then discover a means of achieving equilibrium between adolescents' increasing

independence and the need to establish boundaries regarding media (Van Hook et al 2018:12, 23). Personal agency and self-expression are characteristic of media spaces including bulletin boards, blogs, and chat rooms. The privacy of a computer-mediated environment provides the opportunity for young people to discuss typical adolescent worries with peers. Such concerns can include sexual orientation, and how to deal with parents (Subrahmanyam and Smahel 2011).

For younger children, the use of media typically includes television. Educational programs provide them with educational information in an entertaining way to capture attention and show the parents that the children are learning. The usage of technology in the home is growing. The 2012 study of Huisman et al. indicated that 32% of children watch videos or DVD's for about an hour and twenty minutes on average, and 75% of children watch television on a daily basis. Younger children were also being reached by the new media. The study showed that 27% of children aged 5 to 6 years spent an average of 50 minutes using a computer every day. With regard to the usage of social networks by adolescents and younger children, parents must then decide when and to what their children should have access.

### **2.2.1 Social media: The advantages**

Social media have broken down the existing boundaries of communication and have developed decentralized communication channels. This has enabled individuals to have a voice and contribute to the social discourse. Social media can be used by people for a variety of things: to interact, relate to one another, exchange ideas, mobilize for a cause, seek counsel and help. These media sources allow for an extensive range of unplanned, official, casual, academic, interactions and the flow of information. They enable groups with students who share common interests can collaborate on group projects outside of the classroom. On topics like relationships, education, the economy, politics, race, and health, for instance, they encourage cooperation and creativity among a diverse group of commentators (Amedie 2015:3). Social media provide youth with the following opportunities (Wray-Lake et al 2010):



- They possess total authority over the way they portray themselves in social interaction.
- They have more social media information available.
- They form part of large networks in order to get input and validate oneself.
- They become independent and their social relationships increase.

The aim of social media platforms is to establish connections between people. Some studies emphasise that social media can provide people with emotional support. Social media possess the ability to reduce the symptoms of illnesses like anxiety and depression. Using Facebook, for instance, to keep up previously formed student relationships later in life can benefit people, especially those who tend to suffer from a lack of self-worth or feel isolated and dissatisfied with their lives (Ellison et al 2014). Social media also enables the establishment of new relationships. People can use social media to interact with those with similar interests (Ellison et al 2006; see Ellison et al 2007). Individuals with many media ties report having more communal capital. This is connected to a lower risk of depression (Ellison et al 2011; see Ellison et al 2014; Steinfield et al 2008; Van Hook et al 2018:156). The reason for this can be that people with greater access to social capital can draw upon a wide range of resources. They can, for instance, obtain relevant information, establish new personal contacts, and find work opportunities (Granovetter 1973; see Paxton 1999). In some studies higher degrees of life contentment, perceived social support and subjective well-being have both been linked to higher Facebook audiences (Kim and Lee 2011; see Manago et al 2012; Van Hook et al 2018:156). Amedie (2015:5) reported in 2015 that Facebook at the time had 1.4 billion users worldwide, which amounted to a fifth of the world's population. This way of understanding, learning, and sharing information confirms the idea of a global village.

Twitter has been acknowledged as a major force behind the world's transformation (BBC 2015; see Van den Berg 2017:1). Twitter provides a big audience in a conveniently located location. The assumption on social media is that real people exist as distinct individuals with personal histories. Twitter, in particular, creates new public spheres and new dimensions of normativity and authority within social media. When a

tweet is retweeted it gives another level to what was initially expressed on Twitter. It gives authority to those initial words. Twitter addresses current issues and therefore need prompt action. Social media discussions can take off and fade just as quickly as they originate. Hashtag usage is an additional intriguing marker, which emphasize a few important discussion points. When key phrases are expressed well, they frequently highlight fundamental truths and present them in novel ways to a broad audience. South African practical theologian, Jan-Albert van den Berg (2017:1, 6), traces the sacred in these contours touching on, among others, identity, authority, respect, guilt, shame, and humor.

### **2.2.2 Social media: The disadvantages**

With all the positive aspects of social media, others are potentially harmful. The use of social media can increase pressure on young people to perform to become socially desirable self. Inflated profiles are deemed more valuable than the real lives of real people (Amedie 2015:9). This has the capability to exacerbate ailments such as depression, anxiety, criminal activities, and cyberbullying.

- **Depression**

The American Academy of Pediatrics discovered a brand-new condition known as "Facebook depression" (see Jelenchick et al 2013:128-130). Facebook depression is a term that describes not just Facebook depression but also the psychological issues caused by other social networking sites. The idea that social media causes depression has gained name recognition because Facebook is currently the most well-liked and extensively utilized social media network (Amedie 2015:6).

Research has indicated that adolescent and adult depression may increase with increased social media use (see Lou et al 2012; Kross et al. 2013; Lin et al 2016; McDougall et al 2016; Shensa et al 2016). Some people who use social media platforms such as Facebook excessively develop depression. A vital component of social life is interacting with peers and seeking acceptance. However, some people may

experience depression as a result of the intense nature of the online world, which demands constant engagement (Amedie 2015:6).

Social media also makes social comparison easier. People then often find that others are better, more successful, and more sincere in their engagement than they are (Acar 2008; see Chou and Edge 2012; Lup et al 2015). High social media usage is usually linked to multitasking, either on social media sites or juggling social media with other tasks. In turn, emotional states such as depression and social anxiety, as well as a decline in academic performance, have been connected to this kind of activity (Becker et al 2013; see Cain et al 2016; Xu et al 2016; Van Hook et al 2018:156). Individuals who suffer from Facebook depression are as likely to become socially isolated as those who experience "offline depression". According to Jacobs and Tom (2014), this can result in dangerous sexual behaviours, substance use disorder, aggressive and self-destructive behaviour, and risky online behaviour.

- **Anxiety**

Stress can be a result of the use of social media. According to the study by O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) which involved 7,000 mothers, 42% of those who used the photo-sharing website Pinterest occasionally experienced "Pinterest stress". Anxiety and depression can arise from ongoing stress. The limbic system's fight-or-flight response is triggered when one is continuously on the lookout for fresh social media messages. It resembles extreme alertness where the stress hormone cortisol is released (Jacobs and Tom 2014).

The stress that results from continuously attempting to project an impossible and unrealistic view of perfection in one's social network is the second cause of depression and anxiety. The attempt to constantly project a perfect appearance, perfect career, perfect marriage, and the like, is linked to social anxiety of stress. According to Jacobs and Tom (2014), this results in the continuous release of the stress hormone cortisol, which can lead to anxiety and depression. Over time, damage to the gastrointestinal tract from due to the excess of cortisol can result in an immune-inflammatory response

in the body and brain. Anxiety and depression may also result from this (Amedie 2015:8-9).

- **Criminal activities and cyberbullying**

Social media can facilitate criminal activity. Predators can come into contact with younger users (Huisman et al 2012:46). As social media use rises, predators, nefarious individuals, and careless people take advantage of the platforms to attack, deceive, lie, and injure others in a variety of ways. Social media anonymity can be used to conceal their identities and enable them to carry out illegal activities such as drug dealing, human trafficking, cyberterrorism, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking (Amedie 2015:12).

Bullying by means of electronic devices is known as cyberbullying. Electronic technology includes gadgets and apparatus such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets in addition to communication instruments like websites, chat rooms, text messaging, and social media accounts. Bullying is defined as an aggressive behaviour committed over time and repeatedly by a group or an individual against a helpless victim (Huddleston 2016:141). Cyberbullying includes stalking and harassment. The consequences can be dire. Several cases of adolescent suicide in recent years can be traced back to cyberbullying (Huisman et al 2012:47). Cyberbullying has become a major issue among the youth (Huddleston 2016:141). Perpetrators use social media as a platform to humiliate their peers. Peer victimization encompasses more than just online harassment. It can also involve fights, sexual harassment, and violence in dating relationships. Numerous youths encounter varying degrees of harassment in both online and offline environments (Van Hook et al 2018:45).

Cyberbullies can use a false identity to terrorize their victim (Amedie 2015:12). Being a victim of bullying is currently linked to increased likelihood of mental health problems and suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Amedie 2015:12). Victims of bullying are prone to post-traumatic stress syndrome and changes that take place in the brain. When danger is present, the hormone adrenaline is released. Brain scans of the victims of bullying have shown a notable reduction in the size of the corpus callosum, the area of the brain that links the left and right hemispheres. Because of this, victims find it difficult to

comprehend what is going on around them and to react appropriately. Cyberbullying is also a reason for victims' decline in academic performance (Huddleston 2016:149-150).

## **2.3 The effects of technology**

### **2.3.1 Technology and the home**

There is much debate as to whether the use of computers is appropriate for children and, if so, from what age. Other questions include which technology can be used and how often should it be used. This study focuses specifically on how the impact of the use and overuse of technology on families. Technologies in the home were first aimed at making life easier. Later, technologies were developed for entertainment. This includes television and gaming. Families can now access information and communicate with relatives who live far away as a result of household internet usage. The flexibility that comes with using technology at home and at work environment has been made possible by the internet. Many studies identify the positive uses of technology, whereas others focus on the negative aspects (Huisman et al 2012:45).

Turkle (2011, 2015), a prominent critic of the internet, contends that people no longer possess the ability to listen well in person because of modern technologies. Cellular telephones are constantly distracting people from those who are physically present (Van Hook et al 2018:104). Young people now tend to converse with their peers more often in their rooms than to participate in interaction with family members who are physically present in the home (Carvalho et al 2015:103). Though digital technology has the potential to connect young people all over the globe, it also tends to isolate them in their homes. Information overload is commonplace as children have instant 24-hour access to knowledge and breaking news (Asamen et al 2008:83).

### **2.3.2 Technology and the human brain**

Technology is revolutionizing human life. In some respects, however, it is also ravaging the human brain. A reasonable level of usage can be conducive to quality of life, but excessive usage has harmful effects (Huddleston 2016:51). The use of devices has an

impact on the human brain and therefore also on human behaviour (Elsdoerfer and Ito 2017:15). Receiving and answering a notification causes the secretion of dopamine, a chemical neurotransmitter linked to the brain's reward system and motivation. Additionally, dopamine is released in large amounts when drugs and alcohol are consumed or when people engage in pleasing sexual activity. Notifications from social media can work similarly (Huddleston 2016:35). That can set a person in a dopamine-induced loop. Dopamine begins the cycle of seeking. The person is rewarded for seeking, which leads to further seeking of that kind of satisfaction. It becomes increasingly more difficult to refrain from checking email or Facebook, to stop texting, and refrain from checking cell phone messages. Their brain has become wired for instant gratification (Huddleston 2016:170).

This has an impact on human relationships, development, and the functioning of the human brain. It also affects behaviour, resilience, and general well-being. Both the behavioural sciences and neurosciences validate the significance of a positive response relationships for “rewiring” the brain to develop relational intelligence and skills. The human brain develops and learns best in interaction with other brains. Behaviour is also a matter of human interaction (Elsdoerfer and Ito 2017:13). American adults spend some 33 hours a week on electronics. Known as “screenagers,” adolescents spend roughly 30% of their time on social media and nearly 50% of their time on other websites the time that they are awake (Elsdoerfer and Ito 2017:16). The effect of this is that the human sense of connection alters to something broad with a great many but superficial contacts. For instance, a person may have 3 000 Facebook friends but not be close to any of them. It is possible to compromise or avoid expressing emotion when using a device. As a result, empathy generally declines.

People tend to grow less able to tolerate loneliness or boredom. Instead of staying in a neutral environment where the brain can be creative, they are constantly looking for stimulation. Additionally, there is less time for learning and long-term memory consolidation of the data from the devices. In addition to the reward and pleasurable dopamine system, the brain's motivational system is also influenced by the hormones oxytocin, which is associated with safety and trust. Safety and trust are based on

attachment, bonding, and belonging, all of which are influenced by oxytocin. An even greater factor in resilience and overall wellbeing than dopamine is oxytocin.

Algorithms cannot replicate brain function. The human brain makes use of electrical and chemical signals to communicate. Physical proximity, eye contact, a pleasant feeling that both parties share, and reciprocal concern for the sake of the other's well-being provide the environment for human neurochemistry (Elsdoerfer and Ito 2016:16-17). Two powerful agents, namely, attunement and empathy, open the brain for learning and rewiring. Mindfulness focuses attention on the present moment and the experience of now, without judgment or resistance. Self-compassion helps to evoke a person's caregiving system in the brain. This brings about a shift out of automatic survival responses so that the brain can be effective in problem-solving (Elsdoerfer and Ito 2016:19).

### **2.3.3 Technology and child cognitive development**

According to Huddleston (2016: 102-104), the overuse of technology can negatively impact a child's mental development. Children are not ready for the effects of social media and cell phones at an early age because their minds cannot cope with the dopamine. Technology leaders limit their own children's media exposure and usage: Apple founder and CEO, Steve Jobs, limited how much technology his children use at home. He discusses books and history over dinner. The founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, only allowed his daughter 45 minutes of gaming screen time per day during the week and one hour on weekends.

The stage of a child's cognitive development determines the process of social learning. Younger children are unable to draw connections between the behaviour and beliefs of media models. This ability only develops later (Asamen et al 2008:195). Young children who watch a video do not make a coherent narrative out of the content they are watching. What keeps them engaged is rapidly changing scenes and heightened stimulation. Even educational videos do not help them to learn. They are entertained and, Huddleston (2016:105) warns, later there is a price to pay. Studies have shown

that children who watch television before the age of three are more likely to experience attention issues when they get older (Christakis et al 2004; see Small 2008; Huddleston 2016:105). For every hour children under the age of three watch television, their risk of incurring attention problems increases by 10%. On the other hand, the more cognitive stimulation children receive, the better their chances of not having attention problems later in life. Cognitive stimulation includes being read and sung to, and visits to museums (see Christakis et al 2004; Small 2008; Huddleston 2016:105).

An infant is born with approximately 2,500 synapses. Additionally, by the time they turn three, they have 15,000. The tiny opening at the end of a neuron in the brain that permits information to travel from one neuron to the next is called a synapse. The manner in which children receive stimuli during this crucial time of brain development will determine their brain health, which is connected to emotional, mental, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Studies have shown that too much screen time during this time of development is detrimental and contributes to impulsivity, a lack of ability to self-regulate, attention deficit, cognitive delay, learning impairment, and tantrums (Small and Pagani et al 2010; see Huddleston 2016:106).

Technology use, particularly internet use at home, can improve cognitive development with respect to communication skills. According to studies, if everyone in the family had equal access to the internet, socioeconomic status would have less of an effect on children's cognitive development (Johnson 2010). On tests of cognitive ability and self-worth, children who use computers at home typically perform better than children who don't. However, studies also showed that young children who played on computers for longer periods of time during the week played less actively and had larger body weights than those who played on computers for shorter periods of time (Attewell et al 2003).

Numerous researches have demonstrated that engaging in games can enhance children's cognitive abilities. It has been discovered that digital content, especially video games, improves visual-spatial abilities like mental rotation, visual tracking, and target localization (see Schmidt and Vandewater 2008:63). Playing video games can improve



one's ability to solve problems. Whether the game has a positive or negative effect on a person can depend on the caliber of the content. While extensive computer use for social networking can increase feelings of loneliness and depression, particularly in adolescent girls, moderate computer use has little effect on children. The absence of genuine connection in virtual relationships is harmful to young girls who are shaping their social identities. Aggressive and violent websites and video games have been related to violent behavior. Children may become less sensitive to other people's emotions as a result (Irwin and Gross, 1995). These findings indicate the need for the use of technology by children of all ages to be monitored. Specific age-appropriate rules should be made and adhered to (Huisman et al 2012:48).

The exploration of communication, media, and technology within family dynamics contributes to a better understanding of the evolving role of technology in modern family life. In light of the advantages and disadvantages of technology usage in families, the importance of promoting healthy habits with regard to technology use and of fostering meaningful connections is underscored. The mental health implications of technology emphasize the crucial role of familial relationships in navigating the challenges posed by digital technologies. Strategies for supporting family well-being in the digital age are needed. The following chapter explores the incorporation of information and communication technologies into the family system.

## CHAPTER 3

### FAMILY

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the contemporary world, the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT's) has become an integral part of various aspects of daily life. The family unit, as a fundamental social institution, is not immune to these changes. This chapter explores the intricate relationship between family dynamics and the application of ICT's. Understanding how technology affects familial bonds, particularly with adolescents, is crucial for insight into the nuanced challenges and opportunities this brings about for contemporary households.

The family as a social structure has undergone transformation because of technological advancements. This chapter explores the intersection of family life and information technology in order to shed light on the ways in which ICT's are incorporated into the family setting. It examines the impact of ICT's on the interpersonal relationships in the family unit. By focusing on the effects of the internet on families, particularly those with adolescents, this chapter aims to elucidate the evolving dynamics and challenges faced by families in the digital age.

The chapter utilises relevant theories to explain the intricate relationship between technology and family dynamics. These theories provide a framework for analyzing the multifaceted influences of ICT's on family life and provide valuable insight into the mechanisms at play.

##### 3.1.1 Family as a unit

This chapter briefly explores the concept of family as well as the application of information technology (ICT's) in a family system, including how ICT's are integrated into the family setting and how they affect family dynamics. The effects of the internet on families with adolescents are the main topic of discussion. Pertinent theories that can be utilised to explain these phenomena are presented and applied.

“Family” is a topic of investigation in disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics, law, and theology. Family as a social institution can be found in all cultures (Cloete 2016:2). Traditional definitions define a family as two or more people who live together, form a cohesive economic unit, and have children. They may also be related by blood, marriage, or adoption (Benokraitis 2005:5). Sociologists define a family as a close-knit community of two or more individuals who share close emotional ties and functions, live together in a committed relationship, and view their identity as critically linked to the group (Benokraitis 2005:5). The family, from a theological standpoint, is the main context in which children are taught about God, the world, and themselves. Humans can develop a sense of self, mature personally, and acquire moral values through such mutual existence. Additionally, it can support spiritual development. A family is more than just a system. Identity, character, and spiritual development can all occur during this process (Cloete 2013:5).

The family serves a special hermeneutic purpose in the Bible. For children to get to know God and understand the past of their ethnic group, adults have to provide the information. The family is the space where this knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next (Nel 2000:19-20). In a faith community, parents or guardians serve as the main Christian educators. Children and youth develop their faith in their families, where it is also passed down from one generation to the next (Nel 2018:82). The family is a hermeneutic space that promotes knowledge of God, the world, other people, and oneself. God is active in relational life. The congregation functions as an extended family (Nel 2000:20, 21). Family ministry is the deliberate and continuous synchronization of a church's message and activities to acknowledge, assist, and hold parents responsible for being the primary teachers and role models in their children's lives (Nel 2018:85).

A family is defined as a close-knit unit of communicating, resource-sharing, and interdependent people who, at least for a portion of their lives, share a dwelling (Hill et al 2001:252). Family is a child's first socialization agent and the main factor influencing their personality development and growth (Villegas 2013:2). Families teach their children the customs and values of their society. Children are raised by their families

with the morals, abilities, and information needed to function in the community. The family is the most important socialization factor in an adolescent's early years.

With regard to the importance of education, parents and adolescents usually have similar beliefs and attitudes (Asamen et al 2008:148). Family is the structure of relationships that people build over time and in different contexts in an effort to meet their needs for attachment and belonging as well as to share resources, assistance, and life goals (Nel 2018:83).

### **3.2 Youth and identity formation**

Youth is often described in terms of a specific age groups such as for example 12 to 18 years. Theories explain people's life stages and the qualities of those stages in terms of an order that is almost predictable. A more complex and nuanced conceptualization of "youth" would be to describe it as a way of life shaped by social structures like the family, the workplace, educational institutions, and other cultural contexts (Miles 2000; see Cloete 2012:2). There is more to youth than just fitting into a developmental theory and a defined age range. It can be viewed as a pre-industrial cultural construct that emerged during the industrial revolution. It was primarily produced by industrialization. It was institutionalized through schools (Cloete 2016:1). "Youth" refers to both children and adolescents (Nel 2000:8).

Youth and identity formation go together. Adolescence is a developmental stage that is characterised by identity formation. It describes a stage of development where young people have to discover "who they are" amid multiple changes in biology, psychology, and society. These identity pillars are connected (Davies and Eynon 2013:60). Young people look for answers to existential questions during the process of forming their identities. They can come into contact with misleading information or information that contradicts their family's values. During the adolescent years young persons expand their peer group. This process is distinguished by a high level of social interaction. This can expose young people to risks such as cyberbullying and harassment (Mesch and Talmud 2010:26-27).

Theologically, the phase of adolescence involves wrestling with their ideology. Young people attempt to arrange their beliefs into a cohesive and consistent whole. The pursuit of identity often also involves their spirituality. Learning how to be an adult and acquire life skills are only two aspects of identity formation. It concerns existential and basic questions about life and what it means to live. Identity formation is an essential part of discovering who God is. Many young people do not achieve an integrated and Christ-centered view of themselves because of the absence of chances and the absence of a nurturing environment. The processes of faith formation and identity formation are connected through which persons should become “who they already are in Christ”. Identity formation and spiritual formation are interrelated and complementary (Cloete 2013:74). In terms of youth ministry, becoming the person God created would be the definition of one's identity: to become a person who is in Christ (Nel 2018:247).

Studies indicate that, despite the media's considerable impact on today's youth, family life continues to have a greater influence on children's and adolescents' lives (Cloete 2012:5). The procedure by which an identity is formed in youth and the change from childhood to adulthood are affected by the social media of the digital age. Young people are increasingly able to produce material and communicate experiences that are meaningful to them, because of social media and mobile technologies. This affects their sense of identity and well-being. They experience a sense of belonging. The emotional processes through which individuals form a bond with a particular virtual community and exchange norms and group identities via media are referred to as the construction of a sense of identity and belonging (Lim 2013: 322, 328).

Identity formation also takes place in online spaces where one can view media that has been produced commercially and personalized. Social networking sites are used by young people to create public profiles, share content with their social network, and access media content worldwide. A new social media environment is represented by social networking sites. According to Davis (2012), self-disclosure and belonging are "important peer processes that support identity development".

According to Social Cognitive Learning Theory, young people are media agents in socialization. They give the symbols their own active interpretation and learn

appropriate behaviour. People learn new attitudes and behaviours by observing others (Asamen et al 2008:195). According to the Uses and Gratification Theory, adolescents' identity issues and personal interests are reflected in their preferences and actions (Asamen et al 2008:198). They appropriate, reformulate, and embody entertainment media in a selective manner to reflect and validate who they are, their likes and ideals, their beliefs, and their values. Media and peer socialization are merging. Youth culture is influenced by the media in order to jointly develop ideas with regard to what is to be considered valued and good. The identity of adolescents forms as they adapt to peer culture through social processes (Arnett et al 1995).

Though identity formation is a developmental task of adolescence, the process already begins much earlier. Through the socio-emotional developmental process, it is through these social contexts that children learn to comprehend the complexity of their own lives. A child's self-concept is developed as part of their sense of self. Their qualities, advantages, and disadvantages are perceived and believed to be part of this. Children's assessments of their own worth and value are referred to as self-esteem. At an early age, children are aware of and can acknowledge the physical differences among people (Asamen et al 2008:84).

The identities that one has offline and online are not the same. *Online identity* portrays the image people want others to see. It is not authentic. It is what they choose to represent them rather than a reflection of who they are. *Offline identity* is who they are. It is authentic. Internet users can mask their identities. They can choose not to reveal or actively change information regarding their ethnicity, age, or gender (Mesh and Talmud 2010:123). According to Van Hook et al (2018), young people have embraced digital media devices quickly and integrated them into their daily routines. Because online behavior mimics offline behavior, it allows young people to positively experiment with boundary-setting, social mores, identity development, and appropriate emotional regulation techniques (Van Hook et al 2018:98). Adolescents can use technology to help them solve problems. It can boost their confidence in their social and intellectual abilities. It may facilitate the growth of coping mechanisms (Fitton et al 2013).

### 3.3 Internet in the home and at school

The majority of homes make extensive use of technology (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008). According to Baille and Benyon (2008), it facilitates communication between extended families and provides access to information. Several areas of family functioning are impacted by internet access being made available in homes. The functioning of a family depends on its members interacting with one another to establish guidelines, make decisions, meet basic needs, and set goals (Carvalho et al 2014:103). The consumer is actively involved in the complicated process of integrating communication technologies into the home. The use of technology has "domesticated." The process of bringing contemporary services and technologies into the home and having domestic users use them is known as "domestication". According to Mesh and Talmud (2010:24), family interaction patterns are impacted by technologies, and the family must adapt to them. This procedure is two-way. The family is exposed to much information, both positive and negative. New acquaintances are made available to young people, and parental supervision of their social interactions is eroding. Despite the dangers, there is much pressure on parents to make computers available to their children, for the purpose to support more profoundly because there is felt to be an underlying imperative to do so (Davies and Eynon 2012:41).

Students can investigate and integrate a wide range of diverse and international sources of information by searching for information on the internet. Adolescents pick up computer skills quickly, and schools take advantage of this multi-media aptitude to foster creativity. Collaboratively, students create projects that incorporate text, color, music, images, and video clips. School achievement can be enhanced by modern information technologies (Mesch and Talmud 2010:105).

## **3.4. The effect of technology on youth and families**

### **3.4.1 The family system and information communication technology**

Family is a social system defined by a structure of authority (Mesch and Talmud 2010:32). This hierarchy could be altered by information and communication technologies (ICT's). Adolescents who use technology frequently become the family's expert. They provide technical advice and guidance to other family members. Young people have more skills than their parents (Mesch and Talmud 2010:32). In this sense, family relationships' structure is impacted by technology (Van Hook et al 2018:90). When young people are more tech-savvy than parents are, it can be challenging for parents, who should have the hierarchical authority to monitor their children, to do so in reality (Van Hook et al 2018:90). Adolescents rapidly adopt modern technologies as they emerge. They are the technology innovators in families. They are the ones who teach parents and introduce modern technology devices to them (Van Hook et al 2018:24). The children consequently gain some authority within the system. Adolescents are more proficient than adults at using communication technologies, so in some ways, the role of parents has decreased (Van Hook et al 2018:90). Research has indicated that adolescents frequently seize control of electronics and limit other family members' access to computers (Watt and White 1994; Kiesler et al 2000).

People utilize mobile phones and computers to communicate with friends, loved ones, and family. Many working parents can now dedicate more time to their families because they can conduct business online rather than in person because they have access to the internet (Moore 2006:11; see Huisman et al 2012:46). Because of technology, families can maintain their connections even after adult children move out. Family members can share their everyday experiences with one another through email, social media platforms and instant messaging (Mesch and Talmud 2010:24). Many families can stay in touch even when they are physically apart due to communication technology (Malaterre et al 2019:4).



### 3.4.2 Information technology and boundaries

The introduction of information communication technologies can create tensions regarding boundaries, both external and internal (Mesch and Talmud 2010:26). Working, learning and shopping need not longer require of persons to leave their home. Such activities can increasingly be done in the home (Tapscott 1998:251). More people are now working from home. There is a compromised line between work and family (see Silverstone and Haddon 1996; Valcour and Hunter 2005). Even though the family will have more time to spend together, there's a chance that work-related obligations will interfere (Chesley 2005). Mobile phones and the internet allow for constant communication with the workplace while a person is at home and with family. The shifting of boundaries can strain family relationships (Mesch and Talmud 2010:26). An Australian study investigated the effect of ICT on the balance of work and family life. It found that the use of cellular phones was perceived to spill over not from business activities into family life, but rather from family life into work time (Wajcman et al 2008).

Advances in technology mean the increased accessibility of information. ICT's expose youth to more information, covering any topic, anytime, anywhere. They have instant access to information. They can connect and communicate with the world from their bedrooms (Carvalho et al 2015). The unsupervised exposure of adolescents to a wide range of content can create problems. Families attempt to adapt to the new challenges and moderate young persons' exposure to unwanted content. According to Mesch and Talmud (2010:26), information access is crucial for assisting with homework and schooling. However, the developmental stage of adolescence is particularly marked by identity formation. In this process young people search for answers to existential questions and can be exposed to material or information that contradicts the values of their family. The growth of the peer group grows and new social ties that are formed can expose young people to cyberbullying and harassment (Mesch and Talmud 2010:26, 27).

The use of ICT can expose adolescents to unwanted content such as pornography. Such content is easy to access and is abundantly available. The harmful effect of internet pornography on minors has been indicated in a variety of studies (Mesch and

Talmud 2010:27). The internet gives young persons a greater opportunity to access pornography than would be possible with other formats (Greenfield 2004). According to Malamuth and Impett (2001), pornography is defined as sexually explicit material that is primarily intended to stimulate the viewer's sexual urges. Negative consequences of regular and prolonged exposure to this kind of content consist of the following:

- the chance of having a sexual encounter for the first time at a young age is increased by more accepting sexual behaviours and the perception that peers engage in sexual activity (Flood 2007);
- intimacy as well as a desire for sexual activity that is emotionally detached (Byrne and Osland 2000);
- views that promote the "rape myth", namely that the female victim is to blame for sexual assault (Seto et al 2001; Flood 2007).

The studies of Fields (2004) and Livingstone and Bober (2004) investigated the degree to which young people were exposed to unwanted internet pornographic material. This constitutes when pornographic material appears on email or when a person is searching for study material. This causes the unintentional exposure of young persons to this type of content (Greenfield 2004). The studies found that such exposure by chance occurs frequently. Between 10% and 30% of young people have experienced this (Wolack et al 2003). Adolescents can also be exposed to hateful content found online that provokes people to commit acts of violence against, distance themselves from, insult, or keep a grudge toward people based on their gender, sexual orientation, race, or religion. Hate messages can appear in the form of cartoons, jokes and even pseudo-educational narratives. According to Mesh and Talmud (2010:27), a regular exposure to hate content can result in stereotyping and unfavorable attitudes toward people who are perceived as "the other".

Parents are concerned that through the use of the internet by youth marketers can use the web to gather information about themselves and their families, allowing them to develop a complete profile of a family way of life (Turow and Nir 2000). This can

influence how marketers approach and communicate with family members (Mesch and Talmud 2010:28).

As people interact through various avenues for communication and anticipate a reorganization of their own or their family's social network, the internet creates "increasingly blurred boundaries between offline and online social relationships" (Mesch and Talmud 2007:585). Young people who possess the ability to access a broad variety of information, regardless of its suitability, start to blur boundaries. A few can, for instance, be sexual, violent, and have hate content (Hertlein 2012:378-379). The relative anonymity of the internet can create the space for activities in which people would not engage when they form portion of a community. Group members frequently adjust their behaviour to fit the cultural norms (Pardum et al 2005).

### **3.4.3 Internet and family time**

Relationships have been altered by laptops, cellphones, and smartwatches (Derks and Bakker 2014; Feaster and Ramirez 2011). Technology has made it possible for people to perform duties outside of the office, which has put pressure on people's ability to maintain a work-life balance (Duxbury, Higgins, Smart, and Stevenson 2014). The temptation is to value work more than home life. Because technological devices are always turned on, people often respond to work-related matters instantly. This has an impact on relationships and the individual's overall wellbeing (Derks and Bakker 2014). Parents who use the internet for work at home, report that they have less time for the family and that technology is the reason (Williams and Merten 2011).

Family time is a sensitive matter and often elicits conflict (Mesch and Talmud 2010:32). Higher levels of conflict are associated with less family time, according to cross-sectional and longitudinal research (Fallon and Bowles 1997; Dubas and Gerris 2002). Family time is about how the family arranges their schedule and the things that they do together (Van Hook et al 2018:96). A Korean study (Lee and Chae 2007) investigated whether children's internet use contributed to a decline in conversation and family time. There was less time for the family due to how much time is spent on the internet, but the findings did not indicate communication problems because of that. Using technology in

particular cellular telephones, has increased the typical workday beyond the customary 09h00 to 17h00 (see Chesley 2005). Employees can stay connected and work all hours. The company provides them with mobile phones, laptops, and other communication devices. A long work week can generate stress since it detracts from family time and contact and people do not get sufficient rest (Huisman et al 2012:46).

Emotional ties between family members are what make a family cohesive (Olson et al 1983:60). According to Mesh and Talmud (2010):29, family cohesion develops through family time. Due to communication technologies, family members who live far away can now communicate frequently (Malaterre et al 2019:14). In terms of their relationships, education, and general wellbeing, the new media environments offer opportunities for parents and young children (Fitton et al 201; Van Hook et al 2018:17, 98). These days, children can use video chat to maintain contact with their distant family members. As they get older, they have the opportunity to make use of smartphones to communicate with parents more often (Van Hook et al 2018:17). Regarding connections, education, and overall wellbeing, the new media environment offers opportunities for parents and young children (Fitton et al 201; Van Hook et al 2018:17, 98). Adults use technology not only for professional and personal communication and interaction, but also to maintain relationships with friends and extended family. Though technological advancements afford people with the opportunity to connect with family members, they still find that the communication with family members is not sufficient. They are also concerned with respecting the privacy of others (Huisman et al 2012: 47). The affordability and accessibility of communication technology makes it ubiquitous in the contemporary world (Van Hook et al 2018:93).

Families are at a crossroads as a result of the growth of technology at home. On the one hand they have a greater opportunity to share things with one another. On the other hand they can become distracted and disappear into the isolating technological world that requires all of their focus. According to studies, family cohesion benefits from the time spent recreationally as a family (Orthner and Mancini 1991; Mesch and Talmud 2010:29-30).

#### **3.4.4 Roles, rules, and intergenerational conflict**

Technology alters responsibilities, necessitating the adoption of new rules. Regarding assignments and learning, technology can help accomplish specific goals. It also makes it possible for the group to engage in entertaining activities like games (Lanigan et al 2009). Children can play a different role in the family because they are often the first to adopt new technology (Fletcher and Blair 2014). The children then acquire a small role of authority. Prensky (2001) refers to children and adolescents as "digital natives". The study by Fletcher and Blair (2016:245) shows the following results: "Almost twice as many adolescents perceived themselves to be more proficient (at using technology) than both of their parents, as opposed to having at least one parent who was perceived as more proficient than they were."

Communication on the internet is ubiquitous (Wilkinson et al 2021:1). Therefore, it is important rules are set both for communication within the family and with people outside the family (Van Hook et al 2018:98). When young people first begin to use cellular telephones, ground rules should be set and the use of the device should be monitored by parents. They can control access to some sites while blocking others (Van Hook et al 2018:98).

Families must modify and adapt their bonds to the changing needs of the adolescent (Mesch and Talmud 2010:33). Control over the children's everyday life, social interactions, and private activities like using the phone and watching television performs a big function in the relationship that exists between parents and adolescents (Collins and Russell 1991). Research has indicated that as adolescent get older, they typically submit to parental authority less and demand more independence. They more readily disagree openly with parents (Fulgini 1998). The regulations laid down by parents are not always what occurs in practice (Horst 2008). A survey in Singapore with 1124 adolescents and their parents indicated inconsistencies between what parents and young persons reported. The frequency of their control and monitoring actions was overstated by parents (Liau et al 2008). The family's communication pattern can explain the differences in the perception of the rules (Mesch and Talmud 2010:33). Families with open, compassionate, supportive, and trustworthy communication were reported to

have consistent family media regulations by both parents and adolescents (Cottrell et al 2007).

Parental and adolescent conflict over authority and autonomy could arise from the introduction of communication technologies into the home. Adolescents who see internet use regulations from their parents as meddling in personal affairs may feel that they are being denied more freedom (Mesch and Talmud 2010:34). Adolescents and parents agreed, according to a study by Smetana and Asquith (1994), that parents had the right to control moral issues like morally dubious behavior like drinking and smoking or actions that could harm others or betray mutual trust. However, adolescents had a lower likelihood to tolerate parental intervention in behavioural personal matters like clothing choices, phone call and television time limits. Conflicts over personal matters turned out to be fairly common and intense.

Different expectations from parents and youth can also be a cause of contention (Mesch and Talmud 2010:34). Many parents regard computers as useful to support academic work, whereas young people use computers more for playing games and for entertainment (see Livingstone and Bovill 1999; Kerawalla and Crook 2002). These contradictory expectations aggravate conflict between adolescents and parents (Huisman et al 2012:46). Families that share activities and enjoy a higher quality of communication, deal more successfully with disagreements before these become open conflict (Mesch and Talmud 2010:32). During adolescence, expectations change, and this can cause family conflict (Mesch and Talmud 2010:34). An adolescent's self-regulation of conduct in order for social and recreational activities don't interfere with academic work is something that parents and young people can expect during adolescence (see Collins and Russel 1991; Livingstone and Bovil 2000; Pasquier 2001). Conflict between generations may arise when youth disobey parental expectations (Mesch and Talmud 2010:34). Parents know that using a computer can help their children perform better in school. While parents value the online resources for education, they are worried about standards being eroded, according to a study conducted in 2000 by Subrahmanyam et al.

An additional source of parent-children disagreement is the location of the computer. In many households, parental competition for the children's use of the single computer exists (Lenhart et al 2001; see Holloway and Valentine, 2003). The setting reflects the dynamics of the family and the kinds of relationships that exist there. The location reflects the family location structure and the type of relationships in the family. Issues related to the phase of adolescence that come into play, include (Mesh and Talmud 2010:35):

- as adolescence progresses, adolescents require greater *autonomy*;
- as adolescents are often the expert in internet use and help other family members the *power balance* in the family hierarchy shifts;
- the location of the computer it affects the access of adolescents to the computer and the types of content they access.

A number of theories from different academic fields have been developed to explain the relevant aspects related to families, young people and information communication technologies. Selected theories that can be utilised to understand and explain the effects of technology use on families will now be presented briefly.

### **3.5. Theoretical insights**

#### **3.5.1 Social Cognitive Theory**

According to the Social Cognitive Theory, people can learn through indirect experiences like media exposure (Bandura 2002:123). This vicarious capability allows human beings to acquire cognitive, affective, and behavioural information from behavioural situations that they might not otherwise experience themselves. Individuals can then enact the learned behaviour if presented with a similar situation. Televised models are of particular importance in the social cognitive theory because of the substantial number of consumers that are reached by these types of messages. One character on television can influence a large number of people both domestically and internationally because of how common it is (Asamen et al 2008:195).

The method of gaining knowledge through media is governed by four mechanisms (Bandura, 2002). The first involves *attention*. This entails the extent to which viewers address media messages, as influenced by a variety of content-based and consumer-based characteristics. The second process focuses on *the retention* of the observed event. Exposure to a message is meaningless if there is no feedback. This is known as the *production* process. The final process of *motivation* is about incentives to reproduce the learned behaviour (Brown and Bigler 2005; see Asamen et al 2008:195).

The level of the cognitive development of children affects each sub-process within this social learning model. For example, younger children can lack the ability to derive more sophisticated inferences from media content and can be unable to draw connections between the behaviour and beliefs of media models. This ability only develops around the age of six (Brown and Bigler 2005; Flavel 1992). Older children are more capable of appropriately and successfully emulating behaviour acquired from the media, as they possess the perspective taking ability required to understand how characters' behaviour relates to the rewards or punishments they attain. While there are many role models for children to follow in the media, children still learn more from some characters than from others through vicarious experience (Bandura 1977; see Asamen et al 2008:195).

Why television content can have such a strong effect on attitudes is explained by social cognition theories (Wyer and Srull). With regard to the formation of attitude, the most accessible and vivid information has the greatest effect (1975, Fishbein and Ajzen). The thoughts that have been viewed the most frequently and recently are remembered best. Television messages that promote consumption, youth autonomy, and family are especially influential in the shaping of the attitudes of young people (Schrum 2002). According to Nisbett and Ross (1980: 45), television visuals should be "emotionally interesting, concrete, and imagery provoking" (Bandura 1986; Schrum 2002). These kinds of images have the greatest effect.

Social learning is aided by television. Those who watch television can gain insight through other people's experiences. Television presenters and performers have the potential to transmit information, values, cognitive skills, and novel lifestyles and behaviors (Bandura 2002; see also Eyal and Rubin 2003). TV series can help explain



how a desired future can be reduced to a list of achievable objectives (Bandura 1986). The commercial focus of television can alter consumption patterns (Freedman 1979). The way that social roles, power dynamics, family relationships, and cultural norms are portrayed on television shapes public awareness (Gerbner et al 1989). According to Van Hook et al (2018), people's perceptions have a significant impact on how they construct reality, which makes these images potent.

### **3.5.2 The Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The Uses and Gratifications theory is concerned with how people use the media to meet particular needs. The Gratifications Framework is based on the idea that audiences vigorously look for media in a broad range of needs-based ways. That gives them the ability to satisfy a host of different needs (Katz et al 1974; Palmgreen et al 1985; Rubin 2002). The framework is centered on comprehending the motivations underlying people's media use. The Uses and Gratifications Framework initially centered on media gratification at an individual level (Rubin 1983). Recent applications have however addressed its role also regarding intergroup outcomes (see Yang et al 2004). Researchers found that the media aim to provide gratification in terms of acculturation: people attend to mass media to learn about the whole country (Yang et al 2004). Individuals seek media messages that provide social identity gratification (Harwood 1997, 1999). In this way, social identity is maintained and bolstered (Harwood 1997, 1999; see Asamen et al 2008:198).

### **3.5.3 Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation Theory explains how media exposure affects the long-term reality perceptions of consumers. It points out that a large portion of people's knowledge is derived from television (Gerbner et al 1980; Shanahan and Morgan 1999). Television serves as a socializer in this way. It gives viewers recurring, coherent messages that represent a standardized understanding of reality (Morgan and Signorielli 1990; Signorielli and Morgan 1996). As a result of repeated exposure over time, viewers

develop a worldview that incorporates thematic messages they see on television (Signorielli and Morgan 1990; Asamen et al 2008:193).

According to Cultivation Theory (Cohen and Weimann 2000; see also Hawkins and Pingree 1981; Potter and Chang 1990), the results of general exposure to the repetitive system of messages on television are highlighted. As theorizing in this field has advanced, more attention has been focused on differences in cultivation effects according to the quantity of exposure to various program types and genres that viewers choose to watch (Gerber et al 1980; Morgan and Signorielli 1990). According to the Cultivation Theory, watching television from an early age shapes the very preferences and predispositions that a child had previously learned from other primary sources. A culture that has been homogenized by television exists (Mastro et al 2007; Zuckerman et al 1980). According to the theory, people who regularly watch television have a higher chance of being impacted by the messages that are aired on international television. It implies that viewers' perceptions are progressively shaped by the media (Asamen et al 2008:193-194).

### **3.5.4 Social Domain Theory**

Youth perceive the online environment as their personal domain, where they can set their own rules for communication (Hessel et al 2017; Smetana et al 2005). This is consistent with Social Domain Theory. That would not be the case with online solicitation (Hessel et al 2017). It is up to adolescents to decide what constitutes appropriate technology use. For them, using social media and other online behaviors falls under the personal domain. This indicates that they are entitled to privacy in this area, and their parents have either no access at all or very limited access (Hessel et al 2017; Smetana et al 2005). In contrast, parents usually see their children's use of technology as a part of the traditional, shared domain in which they have the authority to manage (Hessel et al 2017; Smetana et al 2005). According to Van Hook et al (2018), Social Domain Theory highlights the importance of distinct but flexible boundaries that take contextual and developmental factors into consideration.

### **3.5.5 Child Effect Theory**

The Child Effect perspective (Bell, 1986) holds that youth significantly influence the structure of the family. The majority of parenting is a response to that impact (Van Hook et al 2018: 31), claim that media studies and social science literature have mostly ignored this point of view. However, this aspect is becoming more and more prominent considering the recent shifts in the media landscape, such as the arrival of tablets and smartphones (Van den Bulck et al 2016:31; Van den Bulck and Van den Bergh 2016). It goes beyond parents attempting to control communication to comprehend what the family uses technology for and to strengthen family bonds. Along with supporting family relationships, it also addresses the role that young people play in how technology is used in the home. According to Van Hook et al (2018), there exists an indirect correlation between the behaviour of parents and children. As per Correa (2014) and Van Hook et al (2018), children frequently act as technological bridges connecting parents and new media.

### **3.5.6 Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

There is a transfer of power regarding technology use in the context of the family whenever the children take the lead in innovation and the power dynamics within the family change. Van Hook (2018:30) describes this dynamic in terms of the Diffusion of Innovation (see Rogers and Schoemaker 1971; Rogers 1983). Diffusion studies investigate how ideas move among people in groups. A Diffusion approach analyzes the conditions that promote or diminish the possibility of a group adopting an innovation, new concept, or product. Individuals, or adopters, are influenced by the opinion leader in multi-step diffusion (see Van Hook et al 2018:30). Between the audience's decision-making process and the technology, there exist intermediaries. The change agent is one type of intermediary that can be used to influence a prominent figure's decision to accept or dismiss a new idea (Inflate et al 1997; see Van Hook et al 2018:30).

According to the Diffusion of Innovation approach, the young person would initially be regarded as the adopter. Then the young person becomes a change agent who encourages, supports, or teaches the parent. The goal is to persuade the parent to use

current technologies (Van Hook et al 2018:30). Most change agents' immediate objective is to put a plan into action. Personal relationships lead to adoption (Rogers 1983; see also Rogers and Schoemaker 1971; Van Hook et al 2018:30). Within a social system, innovations are not universally accepted by its members. They are applied one after the other. Depending on how much time it takes them to accept the innovation, people are categorized as adopters (Van Hook et al 2018:30). The short-term objective of change agents is to implement an idea. Adoption occurs as a result of personal relationships (Rogers 1983; see Rogers and Schoemaker 1971; Van Hook et al 2018:30). Social systems have individuals who accept innovations at different times. They are implemented sequentially. Individuals are classed as adopters depending on how much time it requires them to accept the innovation (Van Hook et al 2018:30). Every market is made up of groups that vary in readiness and desire to accept a new product, according to the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (see Van Hook et al 2018:30). Different groups are reached by innovation at different times (Van Hook et al 2018:30). Most populations exhibit the following adoption pattern (Rogers 1983; Van Hook et al 2018:30):

- innovators (2% of the population);
- early adopters (14%);
- early majority (34%);
- late majority (34%);
- laggards (16%).

In this case, parents would belong to one of the adoption categories and the innovators would be the youth. Parents may exhibit one of three behaviours: resistance (laggard), early adoption (quick learner), or somewhere in between (see Van Hook et al 2018:30). The child acts as a mediator or change agent, persuading parents to accept or reject a technological product or application, in accordance with the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. Frequently, a child's role could be to help an idea get adopted. After that, parents can adopt other people, teaching their peers or even their own parents about the innovation. For instance, adolescent can teach a parent how to use Facebook. The parent then gives the grandparents instructions on how to access their grandchildren's

posts. Since the child is in charge, he or she is inspired to use Facebook to maintain relationships with friends and family. The grandparent and the parent are both keen to adopt and learn (see Van Hook et al 2018:31).

### **3.5.7 Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) states the idea that a person's identity is partially shaped by the groups they belong to. People use group comparisons to gain a comparative advantage for their in-group because these categories are important for self-evaluation. Positive characteristics associated with the group will also be associated with the individual if the group is thought to have a privileged status. On the other hand, if the group is thought to be in a worse situation than the individual, then this is also thought to be the case (Abrams and Hogg 1990). People emphasize the distinctions between the in-group and the out-group when interpreting the identities of others, leading to stereotyped assessments of the out-group (Asamen et al 2008:196).

An individual's social identity is relevant outside of the real world as well. Intergroup interaction that is mediated may also be impacted. In particular, it has been discovered that viewers' social identities affect the messages they choose to consume and the way they assess those messages (Harwood 1997, 1999; Harwood and Roy 2005; Mastro 2003). Studies have indicated that individuals are drawn to media messages that fulfill their needs for positive social identities (Harwood 1997, 1999). For instance, media consumption can help people become more culturally socialized or feel more a part of their original culture (Greenberg and Atkin 1982; see also Stilling 1997; Asamen et al 2008:196).

### **3.5.8 Socialisation Theory**

Children pick up norms and regulations from their instructors, parents, siblings, other family members, the media, and other sources, according to the socialization theory (Van Hook et al 2018:29). It also suggests that children not only become engaged technology users but also bring new ideas and innovations into the home. They instruct parents on the proper use of contemporary technology. And so, socialization is a two-

way process that involves both parental socialization and active parental socialization on the part of the child. According to Nelissen and Van den Bulck (2018) and Van Hook et al. (2018), they play an equal part in the system in this regard.

This theory holds that children use media to socialize their parents. One common feature of adolescent development is the reciprocal nature of socialization. For instance, young people usually introduce fashion or music into the family unit (Van Hook et al 2018:29). Children are involved family members who have the potential to intentionally or indirectly affect parents (Crouter and Booth 2003; Kuczynski 2003). For instance, children teach and mentor their parents on how to use and engage with new digital media (Van Hook et al 2018:29), in addition to introducing them to digital media and influencing the family's decision to purchase new inventions (Gotze et al 2009).

Children and young people are crucial in getting their parents involved in the digital world, according to the Socialization Theory, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, and the Child Effect Theory (Correa et al 2015). The perspectives of child effects and diffusion of innovation work well together. When combined, they offer an overview that makes it easier to understand how complicated technology use is in family systems. They demonstrate how, when it comes to technology, family behavioural patterns adhere to less conventional and non-linear patterns (Van Hook et al 2018:33).

### **3.5.9 The Drench Hypothesis**

The Drench Hypothesis purports that certain media messages can have a dramatic, immediate impact on the perceptions of viewers. According to this hypothesis, exposure to even a single character can have a powerful and instant effect on viewers, under certain conditions. Strong and significant characters can be more salient and thus better remembered by viewers. As a result, these characters can have a greater influence on the subsequent attitudes of consumers. Research in this area indicates that exposure to such commanding characters is mediated by the perceived realism of the message, identification with the character, and viewers' involvement with the message (Asamen et al 2008:194-195).

If groups who have historically been underrepresented, are portrayed frequently and positively in the media, the Drench Hypothesis predicts that it can cause the opinions of viewers about the outgroup to shift. It can also lead to a more positive evaluation of themselves among the members of those groups (Asamen et al 2008:194).

### **3.5.10 Domestication Theory**

The goal of domestication theory is to integrate technology into daily life. Information and communication technology (ICT) "domestication" is the process of introducing new and unfamiliar technologies into the home and granting users control over them. It can cause anxiety as well as excitement (Blinn-Pike 2009; Haddon 2006; Mesch 2006a). The domestication theory discusses how technology's impact on families is cyclical. It explains how families accept and incorporate family processes (Blinn-Pike 2009:571; refer to Haddon 2006). According to Carvalho et al (2015), the theory addresses how people accept, use, and reject technology and includes analyses and descriptions of the processes that influence these decisions.

This theory takes two approaches. Using ICT's is one of them. As technology becomes more commonplace in household life, it gains acceptance. The ICT's are incorporated, for instance, into the family's daily routine. Conversion is the alternative. This is reflected in how people feel about using ICT. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the location of the computer in the house, which allows for usage monitoring (Haddon 2006; Carvalho et al 2015:101). Two separate levels of analysis are proposed by Livingstone (2006). The initial one is practical. An analysis is conducted of the home location and purchase options for ICT's. Symbolic is the other. Regarding the guidelines and expectations for using technology, this is relevant. When purchasing ICT's, people infuse the acquisition process with their own unique meanings and significance (Haddon 2006). These consist of their role in people's lives and their expectations of the environment at home. According to Carvalho et al (2015), these elements typically spark conversations regarding their purchase.

### 3.5.11 Social Learning Theory

According to the Social Learning Theory, individuals pick up new behaviours and attitudes by watching other people (Van Hook et al 2018:125). People are interrelated because they are entangled in social interactions throughout their lives. Children increasingly act as intermediaries between new technology information and their family (Van Hook et al 2018: 185).

### 3.5.12 The Displacement Hypothesis

According to the Displacement Hypothesis, adolescent social and cognitive development depends on other activities, which are prioritized less when using a new medium like the internet (Mesch and Talmud 2010:47). The Displacement Hypothesis states that adolescent's overuse of the internet will have an adverse effect on their wellbeing because it interferes with their social life and lowers the quality of those connections. They will have to give up other interests to ensure that there is adequate time for media consumption (Neuman 1991). Based on a variety of factors, the displacement hypothesis postulates that certain media and activities are more likely to be replaced. The principles of displacement are the following (Mesch and Talmud 2010:48-49):

- *Functional similarity*

Adolescents are more likely to give up on less efficient media that accomplishes the same goals as the internet. Compared to newspapers, radio, and television, using the internet is preferred.

- *Unstructured and casual activities*

It is more likely for informal activities to be replaced than formal, structured ones. Unstructured activities are vague in nature and do not have time restrictions. Internet use cuts down on time spent on planned activities such as extracurricular activities and sports.



- *Transformation*

Traditional media will be used in a more specialized manner. In an attempt to stay out of the competition, the established media adapts by changing its content whenever a new one enters the market. Television will give content that is not found on the internet or does not compete with it.

- *Geographic and sociological closeness*

Activities that take up physical space and aren't as enjoyable as the internet will be replaced. Although they take place in the same area as using the internet, household chores offer significantly less psychological satisfaction. Therefore they the internet will be preferred. In this way internet use reduces time spent on family activities.

The following table presents examples of displacement and substitution (Mesch and Talmud 2010:51).

The usage of the internet reduces the frequency with which people read newspapers and books.	People read books and newspapers online.
Regular in-person friend meetings are becoming less frequent because of using the internet.	Instant messaging and social networking sites are used to stay in contact with friends after school hours.
Playing games with friends becomes less frequent when one uses the internet.	Online video games are frequently played with friends.
The utilization of the internet for schoolwork diminishes the use of encyclopedias and books.	Schoolwork is completed by conducting an online search for school-related materials.

### 3.5.13 Multi-theoretical Model

The *Multi-theoretical Model* introduces *The Couple Family Technology Framework* (CFT), a particular interpretation of how relationships are impacted by technology. This framework provides a comprehensive and systematic view of the impact of technology (see Hertlein 2012; Hertlein and Blumer 2013; see Van Hook et al 2018:90). The CFT framework identifies seven factors with regard to technological and new media (mostly the internet) that have an impact on relationships within a couple and family. Three theories are integrated in the Multi-theoretical Model: the viewpoints of interaction-constructionists, structural-functionalists, and family ecology. According to Gradan et al (2003) and Hertlein (2012):375, the family ecology perspective is centered on how environmental factors impact families and couples. Policy, the economy, and community issues all have an impact on the family structure. According to the family ecology perspective, factors such as ecological impact, internet features, and interactive technologies drive changes in relationships. For example, accessibility which is an ecological factor, can have an effect on how families remain connected on a regular basis and even if they are separated physically (Wajcman et al 2008). Ecological effects alter connection in two ways. They bring about *structural alterations* and *process modifications* (see Figure 3.5.13.1).

The structural-functional approach describes how *structural change* comes about when families reorganize themselves to suit their requirements in terms of roles, limits, and rules (Johnson 1971). Rules are redefined. Rules include content, access, privacy, and enforcement strategies. Boundaries for couples includes technoference. Boundaries for families include a balance between work-life and time spent online. Roles for couples are about surveillance. Roles for families are about parents' role as monitors and youth's role as monitors (see Figure 3.5.13.2).

Process change derives from, the interaction-constructionist viewpoint, which clarifies how family members engage, form bonds with, and communicate with one another. This requires a redefinition of intimacy, the initiation of relationships, the process, and the

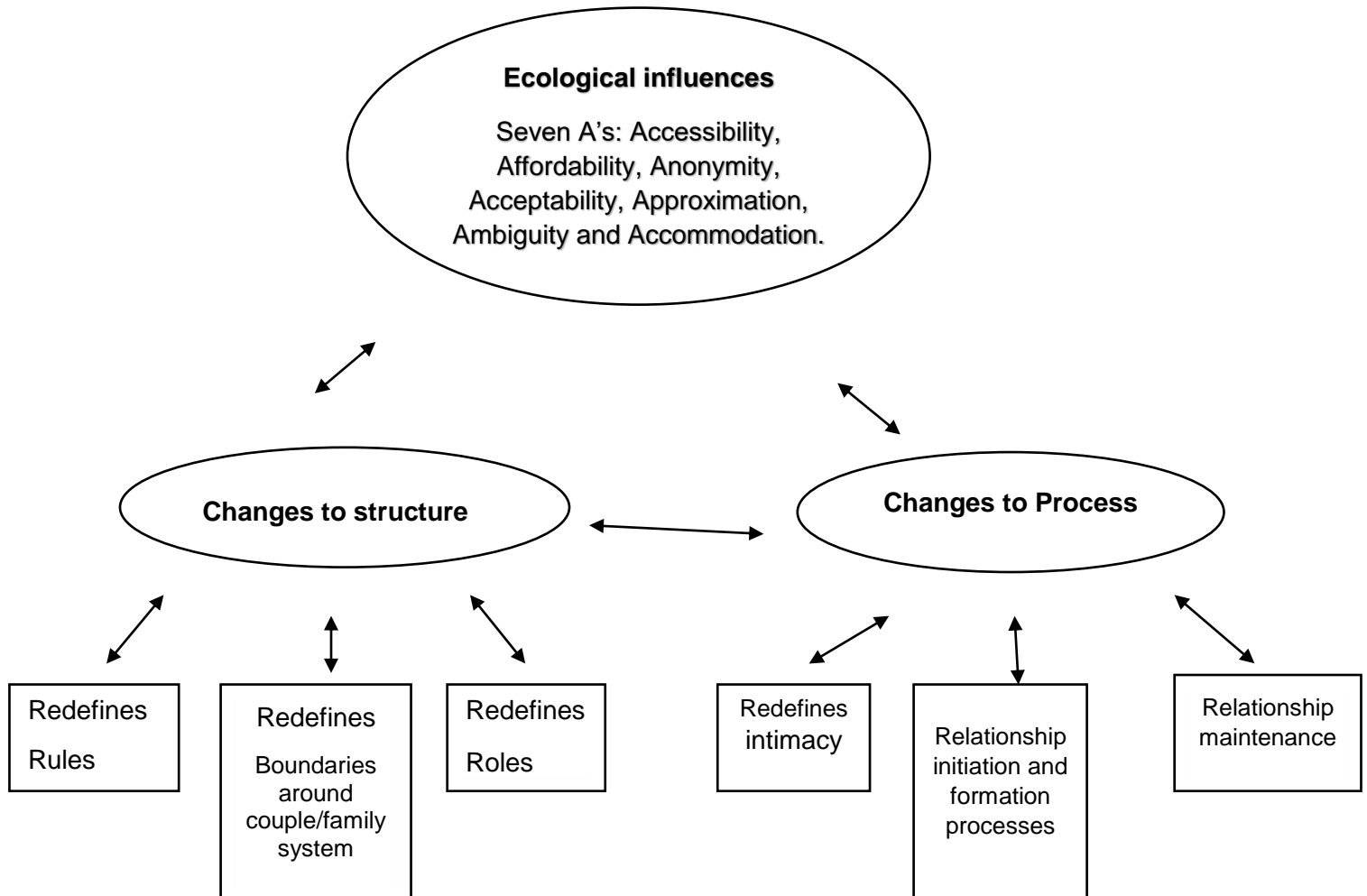
maintenance or termination of relationships (Berger and Kellner 1970; see Hertlein 2012:375) (see figure 3.5.13.1). Particular impacts on the family process consist of:

- a reinterpretation of intimacy in light of self-disclosure and the characteristics of online communication;
- a modification of processes of initiation and relationship formation (projection processes);
- changes in relationship maintenance regarding the interval or rhythm of the relationship, the level of dedication, interaction with other families, and recreational pursuits.

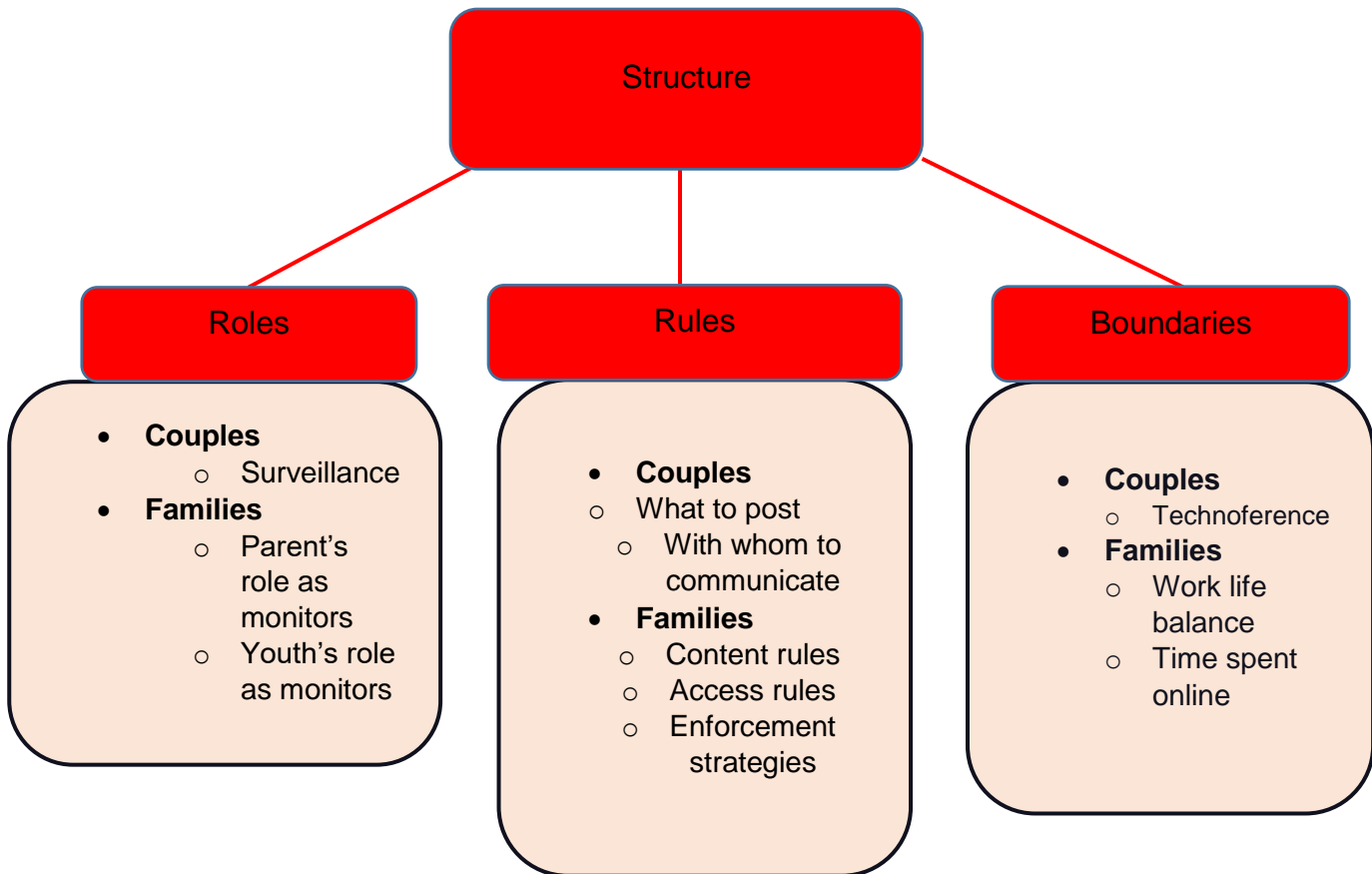
Relationship intimacy, maintenance or termination are all classified as relationship processes (see figure 3.5.13.1). The CFT framework looks into how these factors affect how family and couple relationships are set up and run in the internet and technology era. The framework draws from Haddon's (2006) and Lanigan's (2009) research. Future technological decisions and the manner that technology is integrated within the family are taken into account, along with the context in which individuals are embedded (Van Hook et al 2018:90). The seven factors (ecological impacts) of technology that are outlined in the CFT framework are accessibility, affordability, anonymity, acceptability, approximation, accommodation, and ambiguity (Hertlein 2012:375; Van Hook et al 2018:90). The model's three pillars relate to one another and connect.

Relationship structure is impacted by technology use in a variety of ways. Parenting within a family setting requires careful attention to detail and the ability to monitor and supervise others (Fox and Tokunaga 2015; Fox and Warber 2014; Hertlein et al 2017; Tokunaga 2015; Wang et al 2017; Van Hook et al 2018:90). The hierarchical role of parents as family monitors is being undermined by the increased use of technology (Fletcher and Blair, 2014). In a family hierarchy, children have a more important role as monitors (Fitton et al 2013). As a result, they operate within the family system at a higher authority level (Fletcher and Blair 2014; Livingstone 2003; Van Hook et al 2018:90).

**Figure 3.5.13.1** Multi-Theoretical Model (Hertlein 2012:375; Van Hook et al 2018:90-91).



**Figure 3.5.13.2** Roles, rules and boundary shifts with technology (Hertlein 2012:375; Van Hook et al 2018:90-91).



This chapter investigated the multifaceted realm of family dynamics in the context of information technology. The impact of ICT's on family relationships provides insight into the complexities of the contemporary family setting. The pertinent theories provide a variety of perspectives on the interplay between technology and familial bonds. The insights gained in this manner enable a more nuanced exploration of specific aspects and implications of technology on family dynamics in the empirical part of the study. The following chapter attends to the awareness and well-being of families with regard to the influence of the technologies of the digital age. In this respect, the usefulness of narrative pastoral counselling will be explored.

## CHAPTER 4

### A NARRATIVE PASTORAL COUNSELLING APPROACH

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a narrative approach to counselling and narrative practices will be explored in order to ascertain how such approach can be useful to pastoral counselling with young children's families and adolescents in this age of technology. Humans are "narrative creatures", according to Charles Gerkin (1986:22), who claims that narrative is how people access reality. Multiple stories can be used to describe any given situation. Stories are how people allocate meaning and purpose to life (De La Porte and Herbst 2003:6). The goal of the narrative approach to counselling is to facilitate people to tell their story, uncover its plot, identify unique outcomes, and author a new and preferred story of their life and relationships. The epistemology underlying this method is constructionist. Social processes are the means through which knowledge is created. People create their reality and their conception of life through these processes (Freedman and Combs 1996:23).

Through telling their stories in a narrative counselling setting, people can give their lives meaning and significance (Freedman and Combs 1996:29). A story is made up of events that are connected by plot and occur sequentially over time (De La Porte and Herbst 2003:6; Morgan 2003). The narrative counselling method separates the problem and the person. The issue does not define the individual. The issue is the issue. In order to deal effectively with the challenges they face, the method facilitates individuals to trust in their own abilities (Müller 2004:295). Stories from personal experiences become narratives from the heart, which help to shape a person's identity (White 1995a:13-14; see Payne 2006:20). It is a non-judgmental approach that gives meaning to the person's world through the stories they tell. The narrative approach to counselling allows individuals to express themselves in a safe environment.

## 4.2 The pastor and narrative approach

In an article on the hermeneutical approach to pastoral counselling, O'Connor (1999:17-18) traces the history of pastoral counselling back to a form of Christian ministry aimed at "saving souls". Under the influence of Freudian theory a shift took place and "individualised counselling" began to take shape (O'Connor 1999:18-19). Today pastoral counselling belongs both within the church and outside of it (O'Connor 1999:19-20). Various theories are incorporated, but the practice of pastoral counselling ultimately leads to God. From a hermeneutical perspective, the language and interpretation of the Bible are important in order to understand God's word and find meaning in it. Meaning and interpretation are important for gaining truthful understanding (O'Connor 1999:19-20). Kursusu et al (1990) point to the holistic aim of pastoral counselling – the whole person including the spiritual aspect of being human should be taken into account when exploring the meaning of life and life events. Narrative counselling theory and models are useful in a pastoral context due to its nonjudgmental and individual focus.

According to the narrative approach, counselees are seen as the expert on their own life. The counsellor is the attentive listener who does not claim to have the answers. It is not a form of therapy where established theoretical ideas are applied. Individuals are seen as unique persons with their own interpretation of the situations they encounter. Narrative pastoral counselling is therefore non-intrusive and non-directive. It allows for the flow of ideas at the counselee's pace. Sessions consist of calm dialogue and are discussion-based. These allow the person to articulate their own understanding of the problems they have encountered in life. Narrating and receiving stories has emerged as a significant pastoral tactic (O'Connor 1999:20-21; see Gerkin 1986:22). Jesus himself utilised stories in the form of parables (e.g. Mt 13:34, Mt 7:9-11, 24-27; Mt 11:16-19) to impart Biblical wisdom and to make sense of life and the world. Jesus used stories to teach, heal, correct and change people's mindset.

Though pastoral care, pastoral counselling and pastoral psychology differ in their methods, they have a similar point of departure and maintain the same viewpoints (O'Connor 1999:22-23).

According to Don Browning (1985; see O'Connor 1999:22-23), *pastoral care* has a christian-driven perspective, utilises insights from the social sciences, and is based on the Christian narrative. *Pastoral psychotherapy* focuses on the intrapsychic and interpersonal functioning of individuals (O'Connor 1999:23). This counselling does not usually form part of the church setting (O'Connor 1999:23). *Pastoral counselling* according to O'Connor (1999:23), is somewhere in between the two and can be located inside the church as well as beyond its walls. There is a variety of approaches to pastoral counselling. The narrative approach, which functions within a postmodern paradigm with its epistemology of social constructionism, is one of them.

Pastoral counsellors who opt for a narrative approach facilitate counselees to do the following (Müller 2000:72-103):

- share their narrative;
- learn the story's plot;
- recognize special results in their narrative;
- construct a fresh favorite narrative.

The three basic narrative tools are the following (Müller 2000:68):

- adopting a posture of "not-knowing";
- active listening that is participatory;
- engaging in question-based dialogue.

The narrative approach has four movements, namely (Müller 2000:17):

- problem saturated story;
- unpacking the story;
- an alternative story.
- the reimagined future story.



### 4.3 The narrative approach applied to pastoral care and counselling

The point of departure of narrative counselling is that every person is responsible for their own story and the meanings they allocate to experiences and events. Every person is the author of their own story (Morgan 2000). People are the expert of their own life. Narrative counselling aims to explore and maintain curiosity about the individual's life (Morgan 2000). Instead of passing judgment or bringing expert theories to the counselling process, the counselor begins the process with a state of "not-knowing" (Freedman and Combs 1996:40-41).

The narrative approach was developed by David Epston and Michael White (see White 1995; 2007). According to the theory, people's experiences, families, and cultures influence their knowledge and stories, or narratives. These give people a sense of identity and mold their lives (see White 1995a:13-14; White 2001; Payne 2006:20). According to several studies (Freedman and Combs 1996; Herbst and De la Porte 2006; Morgan 2000; Müller 1999; Payne 2006; White 1995; 2007), counselors and counsees are viewed as equals, each with their own expertise. Alternative stories that exist outside of the problem story are identified by the counsellor and the counsee together. They offer an alternative to the issue. They provide the opportunity to change the narrative and get in touch with the person's actual nature. By doing so, the problem story is replaced with a future story that highlights the counsee's abilities, knowledge, and strengths rather than their flaws and mistakes from the past. "Re-authoring" or "re-storying" puts a person's life narrative in a new light within this counselling framework (Müller 2003: 293).

The counselling process is facilitated through conversations and questions asked by the counsellor. The focus is on how individuals express their story, what meanings they give to their experiences, and how they act according to those meanings (White 2000). Meaning is not only an individual matter. It is influenced by external factors and other stories too. This allows for the expression and acts of interpretation to change (White 2000). The structure and meanings of an individual's narrative provide a framework for how they experience day-to-day life and how they would experience future events.

Linking one story to another creates present themes within an individual's perception of how a situation may end or begin. If themes are negative they can lead to habitual patterns of behaviour that are maladaptive to their personality and behavioural development (Ganzevoort 2011). Narrative counselling allows an individual to maintain the reality of their story, but also develop the ability and opportunity to "re-write" how they could respond to the situation. They can then devise how they can implement these changes in future.

Stories describe people, their experience, their reputation and communities. Storytelling happens daily. Through stories people and situations understood (Müller 2000:295). Stories give rise to ideas, both negative and positive, and create the foundation for friendships and relationships. Some events and situations call for specific stories, whereas others require silence. Some stories are based on a lie, others are exaggerated, and yet others are designed to cover up sin. Overall, life is maintained by stories. Not all are true but somehow all are relevant.

Narrative counselling does not intend to "solve" a counselee's problem but rather to redirect a problem through probing questions. It is used to guide the counselee to a solution-based story (Freedman and Combs 2012). The counselee would then be able to fill in the gaps in their story pointed out by the counsellor. Families and communities can define parts of individuals' stories. The individual then follows the trend for how to dress, behave, interact, and conduct their life (Freedman and Combs 2012). Such influences can also be exerted by media platforms and social groups. These "power" establishments then influence individual stories and how others fit into those stories. This could distort the reality of an individual human being (O' Connor 1999:21; see Gerkin 1986:22). Pastoral narrative counselling aims to redirect an individual's "power" influence back to themselves and God.

In narrative counselling problems are not regarded as based on the individual. People are not seen to be problematic or pathological. The problem is seen to be the problem (White and Epston 1990:40). The person has a specific relationship with the problem. That relationship is the cause of the issues the person is having. Counselling's initial goal is to separate the person and the problem (White and Epston 1990:40). In narrative

pastoral counselling the person is seen through the eyes of Jesus. Then, the true person behind the problem can be discovered and empowered.

Kelly (2002) identifies the following aspects of narrative theory:

- A narrative has an introduction, a middle section, and an end.
- The narrative is framed at a particular point in time by a temporal sequence.
- A discourse is expressed by language. This language is "performed language" or "personalized language". Language is dynamic, not static.
- The present moment is crucial.
- Events create fundamental units or a series of predictions.
- Storytelling exemplifies an anthropological mode of understanding and functioning.

Key aspects of narrative counselling have been worked out by various authors and entities (see Boje 1999; Dulwich Centre 2002; Kelley 1996; Kelly 2002; Morgan 2002; Van Niekerk 2003; White 1995; Payne 2006:7). These aspects include the following:

- A story serves as a meta-code for understanding.
- The social constructionist, postmodern paradigm serves as the foundation for narrative theory.
- Individuals are the experts in their own life.
- Narrative therapy is nonjudgmental and courteous. It is not persuasive, instructive, or corrective.
- Narrative therapy is thoughtful and artistic.
- People and problems are viewed as distinct entities. The starting point is that individuals possess the knowledge, abilities, convictions, values, skills, and commitments necessary to solve their problems

Self-awareness is an essential element of mastering one's own life. This awareness can empower people. People allocate meaning to their experiences through knowledge and

storytelling. People can be guided to question the systems in life that they experience as oppressive. They can re-author their life story by creating a preferred alternative story. A readiness to ask questions and a sense of curiosity are central to the narrative counselling process. Individuals tend to narrate a story that is centered on the present, but lives have multiple narratives and occur within a larger social framework. In counselling the aim is then to move from thin descriptions to rich and thick descriptions that contribute to the formation of an alternative story. Through narrative counselling, different accounts of experience can be brought together to create richer, more cohesive narratives.

The following table presents examples of narrative practices and principles in counselling.

<b>PRACTICE</b>	<b>PRINCIPLE</b>
Relationship building “Good day, my name is...I am from Unathi pastoral care and counselling. Is this a convenient time to talk	The narrative approach is a respectful and non-judgmental approach.
Entering in my companion’s world. “Please tell me about your time on online.”	Coming from a “not knowing” position. Retiring from the “expert position.”
Participative active listening. Getting to know the other’s story. “Let me see if I understand: Technology entered your life... It affected your life in the following ways... This caused you to feel ... You tried to deal with it in the following ways...”	People give meaning to the world through the stories they tell (Herbst and De la Porte 2006). A story consists of events, linked over time, according to a plot (Morgan 2000:12).
Deconstructive listening Understanding the plot of my companion’s story	Realities are socially constructed. This reality is built on “discourses”: What we believe about ourselves, others, the

<p>“It seems to me you believe that... You are... Other people are... The world/ life is... God is...and He acts...”</p>	<p>world, and God, Discourses about technology, the medical environment, treatment, and healing. Deconstruction is the process of understanding. How this reality is socially constructed. Realities are constructed through language. Realities are organized and maintained through narrative. There are no essential truths (Friedman and Coombs 1996:22)</p>
<p>Deconstructive questioning Finding and exploring unique outcomes “Even though you believe/even though your circumstances are... how it that you have is. Thought? Felt? Decided? Acted?”</p>	<p>My companion’s life is “multi-storied” (Morgan 2000:12). In every story, there are” unique outcomes” that do not fit with the “problem saturated story”</p>
<p>Re-authoring an alternative story Exploring alternative interpretations of the past and present. “Can it be that: You are... Other people are... The world/life is... God is...and He acts...”</p>	<p>Our life stories- past and present-can be “re-interpreted.” The outcome of the story can be changed.</p>
<p>Exploring an imagined future story Developing the alternative story How will this change your view of the past, present, and future? What are the implications for your relationship?</p>	<p>The "Gospel" is the "Good News," revealing God's kindness and the Holy Spirit's guidance for the future.  The clouded future can become an imagined and hopeful future.</p>

## **4.4 The four movements**

### **4.4.1 Telling the problem-saturated story**

The narrative approach begins with establishing a respectful and nonjudgmental relationship with the counselee. The story of the problem is told by the person. At this point, the person frequently begins to see the issue as a part of themselves, believing that they are the issue. The narrative is dominated by the issue (Payne 2006:10-11; Freedman and Combs 1996:121). Rather than listening as an "expert" who is prepared to diagnose and offer guidance, the counselor listens from a position of "not-knowing." According to Müller (2000:17), the counselee is regarded as the story's expert. In participative active listening, the counselor is present, focused, and a skilled listener to life stories (Müller 2000:35; Herbst and Reitsma 2016:189-190).

### **4.4.2 Unpacking the problem saturated story**

Counselor and counselee jointly examine the meanings that are made clear by the narrative's telling. The counselor helps the story's plot to emerge by asking probing questions and providing constructive feedback. It is an externalized problem. Herbst and Reitsma (2016:187; see Freedman and Combs 1996:47) contend that externalization is less of a technique and more of an attitude toward individuals and problems. Externalizing language personifies the issue and is a sign of an externalizing mindset (Payne 2006:12). By means of externalizing dialogues, the issue is recognized as such. The individual does not represent the issue (White and Epston 1990: 40). Then, starting with the problem as a distinct entity with its own identity, the person can start addressing it (White and Epston 1990:40; see Herbst and Reitsma 2016:188; Freedman and Combs 1996:49-50). Finding the problems is the first step in the externalization process (Freedman and Combs 2000:29). For instance, the issue may be called "worry", which along with its partner "anxiety", compromises the person's ability to be at peace (Freedman and Combs 1996:65; see Morgan 2000:17-18; Herbst and Reitsma 2016:189-190). Michael White (1989:97; see Payne 2006:1) explains that a person can objectify and personify that which is oppressive in their life by externalizing

the problem. The source of the person's problems was their relationship with the issue (Morgan 2000:17). The person can have a different relationship with the problem when it starts to exist as an independent entity outside of them. This allows internalized issues that were thought to be innate and fixed to release their grip on the person. The person in question is not pathological. According to Epston (1993:172; see also Freedman and Combs 1996:50), the issue is what it is and it is solvable.

Problems that people face are frequently not personal failings but rather the result of culture and history. These issues develop over time and are socially constructed (Freedman and Combs 2002:32). People can learn that they and the issue are not the same by externalizing (White 2005; see Herbst and Reitsma 2016: 187). The narrative approach to counselling attempts to enable people to break free from their perceived stuckness and create a preferred alternative life story by dismantling harmful discourses and externalizing what they perceived to be their personal problems.

#### **4.4.3 Discovering and developing an alternative story**

Positive outcomes in the landscape of action and identity are identified during the process of creating a preferred alternative story. These are what Morgan (2000) refers to as the story's "sparkling or shining moments." Thus, the process's initial step entails identifying, investigating, and creating new results (Müller 2000:55, 67). These are incidents that appear to defy the prevailing problem narrative or to exist independently of it (Morgan 2000:51). An alternate story can be rewritten as the present and the past are reinterpreted by investigating different interpretations of the past and present. The story's conclusion can be altered in this way. One could construct a new narrative for a preferred and optimistic story (Morgan 2000: 51, 57, 60-62, 69; Müller 2000:8-13, 55, 67; Freedman and Combs 1996:97, 98, 101-104, 125, 136-138, 203; Herbst and De la Porte 2006:10-13, 24-29, 69; Herbst and Reitsma 2016:189-190).

#### **4.4.4 Constructing and living an imagined future story**

The last movement focuses on creating a different story and investigating the potential of a future story that is imagined. When the counselor and the counselee jointly reinterpret the past, the desired future narrative begins to take shape. The unexpected happy endings from the problem story serve as the basis for the new narrative, which emphasizes personal autonomy and the use of that autonomy to reach choices that extend one's life. To develop a new plot, the alternate story is expanded upon and made thicker. Discourses that weaken people are dismantled. A person's journey toward growth-directed outcomes uncovers and strengthens solutions to mitigate the problem's devastating effects (Freedman and Combs 1996:197-283; Herbst and De la Porte 2006:77-99; Morgan 2000:69, 127; Herbst and Reitsma 2016:189-190).

#### **4.4.5 Narrative pastoral counselling with families**

This study has identified narrative pastoral counselling as a useful means to engage with families who struggle with the effects of the use of technology on their lives and relationships. As a result, the narrative approach will actually entail the following (O'Connor 1999:22; see O'Connor et al 1997):

- to hear each family member's story and interpretation;
- to dismantle the narratives that support the issue;
- to collaboratively create a fresh story that gives the family the confidence to reclaim their agency and identify solutions.

The underlying discourses of the prevailing problem narrative are recognized and dismantled (Müller 2000: 95-96; Herbst and De la Porte 2006:71). According to Morgan (2000:45), a discourse is the expression of a collection of concepts, assumptions, and precepts that are accepted as true or widely accepted. According to Kräuter and De la Porte (2006:19), dominant discourses consist of a collection of concepts and viewpoints about the individual, other people, the universe, and God. Following an understanding and deconstruction of the problem-saturated narrative, the plot of the story is outlined.



The narrative pastoral counselling approach therefore provides a useful framework for empowering individuals and families, facilitating them to rewrite their story, discover new perspectives, and build a more fulfilling future. The following chapter presents the empirical part of the study.

## CHAPTER 5

# EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter explains and executes the empirical part of the investigation. The methodology of the empirical part of the study is explained. The chapter presents the data and the analysis of the data. The interpretation of the data is done in conversation with the theoretical framework explained in the previous chapters. The empirical investigation explores the real-life experiences that families have with technology and its effects on their family system and family dynamics.

### 5.2 The methodology

The aim of the empirical part of the study is to explore the experience in families of how the use of technology affects their family system and family relationships. Fourteen participants from seven families were interviewed (see Bless et al 2006:116). The non-probability selection method of purposive sampling was used to select the families (see Babbie 2010). The interviews were semi-structured (see Mathers et al 2002:2). The processing of the data was done by means of narrative data analysis (see Gilbert 2008). The major themes from the interviews as identified, are presented and discussed in this chapter.

The first step, namely collection of data, was completed by means of semi-structured interviews with fourteen participants, two each from seven families. Getting the gathered data ready for analysis was the second step. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. Thirdly, transcribed interviews were read and re-read, in order to fully comprehend the subject matter. Fourthly, similar data from the various interviews were identified, labelled, coded and grouped under themes (see Burns and Groove 1997:43).

The major reasons given by the respondents were assessed, the consistency of their responses evaluated and conclusions were drawn. The results of the empirical part of the investigation are now brought into discussion with the theoretical framework of the study in order to explain and interpret the results (Gilbert 2008).

The inductive data analysis method was used. Transcribed verbatims were read and re-read and coded for emerging themes. The process moved from specific data to general codes and themes (Cohen et al 2007:184; see Creswell 2012:238). Every reading brought about a deeper and more thorough understanding of the data contributed by participants (see Creswell 2012:238). Through this process basic connections were explored (see Cohen et al 2007:184). The aim of the empirical part of the study was to examine the individual evaluation of the matter of technology in families and to bring this into conversation with the theoretical insights. In this way an overall view of what the data was illustrating could be presented (see Tesch 1992:141).

## 5.2.1 Presentation of the results

### 5.2.1.1 Participants' biographical details:

Participants	Gender	Age	Tittle	Ethnicity/Race	Occupation	Qualification
Participant 1	Male	75	Mr	South African	Pensioner	Pensioner
Participant 2	Female	56	Dr	South African	Contractor	PhD
Participant 3	Male	52	Mr	South African	Self-Employed	Diploma in Ministry
Participant 4	Female	20	Miss	South African	Student	Student
Participant 5	Female	34	Miss	South African	Manager	Diploma in Business Administration
Participant 6	Male	35	Mr	South African	Chef	Diploma

Participant 7	Female	65	Mrs	South African	Pensioner Typist	Diploma in Graphic design
Participant 8	Female	58	Dr	South African	Self- employed	PhD Business administration in entrepreneurship
Participant 9	Female	54	Mrs	South African	Self- employed	
Participant10	Male	80	Mr	South African	Pensioner	
Participant11	Female	38	Mrs	South African	Chef	
Participant12	Male	37	Mr	Zimbabwean	Waiter	
Participant13	Male	33	Mr	Zimbabwean	Waiter	
Participant 14	Male		Dr	South African	Professor	PhD

The following is a summary of interviews:

### *Participant 1*

For Participant 1, keeping in contact with loved ones is vital. Adequate access to technology such as the internet is hence significant. Utilising technology is mainly for the purpose of communication with family members through WhatsApp. This is because most of Participant 1's relatives live far from each other. Technology serves to close the distance gap.

### *Participant 2*

Participant 2 finds that technology and the internet can have both positive and negative impact on family interactions depending on how it is used. A positive impact would

include the possibility of instant communication, especially in cases of emergency. The internet can also be used positively for research or work purposes. Negatively, technology can affect the personal interaction among family members if some are constantly on the internet. It can lead to isolation and secrecy.

### *Participant 3*

Participant 3 finds that technology can be positive for families if its usage is regulated effectively by parents. It can however become a problem if children are using it freely and unsupervised. Technology should not usurp the role of parents. Children cannot be raised by the internet. Participant 3 is of the opinion that parents who are computer literate are best equipped to manage the part technology plays in the lives of their children. The use of technology should not replace human interaction but should improve upon it.

### *Participant 4*

Participant 4 finds that the use of technology in the family should be controlled. For this participant technology is not the primary method of communication. It is only a matter of convenience. Families should be disciplined in their use of technology and not allow it to interfere with the time they have for personal interaction.

### *Participant 5*

According to Participant 5 the internet is good for communication within the family dynamics. It becomes a problem though when technology begins to interfere with the quality time and communication of the family. There should be some control measures. An example is that mobile phones are not to be brought to the dinner table. Measures such as these can protect the precious personal time for interaction among family members.

### *Participant 6*

For Participant 6 Utilisation of technology and the internet was particularly useful during the lockdowns due to Covid-19, since people had to remain at home. The problem

begins when the interaction among family member becomes limited because they are constantly on their phones. This participant prefers face-to-face interaction because it is more personal. The participant does also appreciate the convenience of using technology to interact with people who are far away. It is much cheaper than traveling to go and visit.

### *Participant 7*

Participant 7 has family who live far away. Technology plays an important role for them to keep in touch. This participant has no objections to the use of technology since it is the only method to communicate with those family members. The participant would however prefer to communicate face-to-face if the option were available. Since this participant has no children, the impact of technology on family interaction is irrelevant.

### *Participant 8*

Participant 8 appreciates the opportunities technology affords to do research, marketing and communication. The problem arises when the communication is only done through technology, especially when people are in the same room or in the same house. This participant prefers in person interaction because it is more authentic. It is vital to see the emotions of the other in their face and body language. The participant finds that technology may not always be beneficial to family dynamics but feels powerless to mitigate this problem in their own family.

### *Participant 9*

Participant 9 appreciates the convenience of technology for research and work, but does not appreciate how it affects family dynamics. It makes communication difficult among people who are in the same house because everyone is always on their phones. This leads to isolation and sometimes deception or secrecy. This participant is also concerned with the negative effect of technology on some marriages. It can cause partners to drift apart. It also has a negative impact on the child-parent relationship if parents allow technology to take up their parental role.

### *Participant 10*

What Participant 10 finds positive about technology is how it enables people to stay in touch with distant family members. It also makes it possible to work from home. The negative side of technology is that it tends to diminish family interaction. The participant is of the opinion that there should be strict rules regarding how technology is used in the family. Internet access is restricted to the office in their house, whereas in-person communication is encouraged throughout the rest of the household.

### *Participant 11*

Participant 11 does not seem to have any negative feelings towards the use of technology. The participant spends much time on the internet watching and downloading TV shows. There is no indication of restrictions or regulation concerning the use of technology in that household. However, the participant is concerned that the internet and technology can promote mistrust. People can lie about where they are at any given point in time.

### *Participant 12*

Participant 12 finds that technology has a mostly negative impact on relationships. Its only advantage is easy access to information. It is the quickest way obtain information. This participant avoid wasting a lot of time online and uses technology to keep in touch with distant relatives.

### *Participant 13*

Participant 13 finds technology to be a useful tool because it allows family members to keep in touch. Problems in the household can be solved by reaching out to close relatives. The disadvantage is that in the evenings when the family is supposed to be having quality time together, everyone is on their phone. There is no communication. This participant prefers face-to-face interaction if the option is available. Communication through technology hinders people's ability to acquire social skills. The participant has begun to regulate ability to use the internet within the household in order to improve communication in the family

## *Participant 14*

Participant 14 finds technology to be a useful tool that enhances people's ability to accomplish many things. The participant uses the internet mostly for work and entertainment. Because most family members are far away, technology helps them to keep in touch. However, the participant does emphasize that technology should be used in moderation because too much of anything is detrimental. In the participant's household access to the internet is not limited because the children should have the sense to use technology moderately. That is how they have been raised.

### **5.2.1.2 Inductive and thematic data analysis**

Getting a "general sense" of the data and its overall meaning was the first step in the data analysis process (Creswell 2012:243). General ideas from the interviews were identified. The verbatim transcriptions were read and re-read. Specific themes were identified and noted in the margin of each transcript. Words and phrases pointing out the underlying thought or idea were highlighted.

Data were then coded thematically. Tesch's open coding data analysis method was used (Tesch 1992:141). The steps outlined in Creswell were followed (Creswell 2003:192). A list of themes that emerged was compiled in order to refine the process through inductive steps (Creswell 2012: 243). Key themes were identified, then reduced to a set of themes and categories. The highlighted words and phrases were coded numerically ranging from A1 to A40. An Excel spreadsheet was used to record the data. The second step included assigning a theme number (1 to 32). The third step included grouping themes into principal themes and sub-themes arranged chronologically to refine the number of themes. The procedure recurred several times. Lastly, headings were added to identify the various themes clearly. The main and sub themes will not be presented briefly.



## 5.3 Family time

### 5.3.1 Quality time

Technology can affect family functioning negatively, especially when it comes to the family spending quality time together. Where technology takes precedence, interacting and bonding as a family is no longer the main priority. Participants 2, 5 and 6 elaborate on their lack of quality time with children who do not like to be disturbed when they are on social media. Participant 5 puts it as follows: “Spending too much time on social media and TV reduces the quality time in families.” According to Participant 6, the use of technology interferes with quality time in the family. She appreciates the scheduled electricity power outages, because it is the only time when family members are away from their screens.

For Participant 13, family time involves screen time. She explains it as follows: “As long as there is a TV on somewhere, my four-year-old daughter will be on her tablet. So, family time involves her tablet, and her showing us what she has learnt on her tablet. Without that then there’s no way to keep her attention.” She also credits “load shedding” for compelling them to enjoy time together as a family. It benefits the family because without TV and Wi-Fi they can sit together and talk to one another.

### 5.3.2 Screen time management

With regard to screen time management, most participants emphasised that regulations should be implemented to enforce screen time management. Participant 2 stated that “people should set aside time from technology to connect with their loved ones without a distraction as a relationship could suffer the consequences”. Participants 3, 6 and 9 emphasize the importance of rules considering how technology is used and monitoring the children’s screen usage and what they watch.

Participant 5 speaks of her own childhood as follows: “When we got our first phone, the phones had no security, so parents could check regularly what you were doing. Misuse would lead to the loss of electronic privileges.” Participant 5 still abides by the rule and

implements it in their own family because they feel that “it brought us a lot closer as a family and we are more open with one another”. Participant 13 discovered applications that control all the electronics in their home. This allows them to manage screen time better. They can switch off the devices when they have had enough screen time for one day. Internet use can be regarded as a time consuming activity. It can interfere with a person’s career development. Participants 2 and 3 found that it can possess a detrimental impact on an individual's studies.

#### **5.4 Who is “tech-savvy”?**

Children today tend to be more advanced technologically than their parents, was the opinion of Participants 6 and 7. Parents with computer skills are able to monitor their children’s computer use. This is not the case with parents who do not have the necessary skills. The socio-economic situation of parents can also have an impact. Parents with a higher income tend to have more computer skills than parents from low-income groups. Participant 3 explains the consequences: “Children are spending more time on their computers and are not listening to their parents as much, which is causing family problems.” However, parents who are computer literate can provide a beneficial contribution to the education of the children. They can help the children to search for information for study purposes. Parents who lack computer skills will not be able to do so. Participant 6 is concerned that “you cannot regulate what your children view on the internet since it is too large”. With the phones and tablets it is more possible to control access because there are applications to facilitate parental control.

Children from rural areas often have restricted use of technology both in schools and in the community. Participant 3 put it as follows: “Even as we enter the fourth industrial revolution, according to which technology will have a greater impact on society, children in rural regions struggle to keep up with those in an urban environment. This can have a detrimental effect on their development.”

## 5.5 Family structure, roles and authority

Monitoring what their children are exposed to is becoming more and more difficult for parents. They are unable to control or supervise the content that their children engage with on the internet, television, or the violent games children can download onto their mobile devices. Children therefore learn other things than the morality, belief system, and values of their home. The pervasiveness of technology is reducing parents' role and custody.

Another matter brought up by Participants 8 and 9 is that overburdened “parents are using technology as a parenting tool, a ‘babysitter’”. They do not have the time to interact with their children or to discipline them. Participant 10 finds that parents should tell children to put away all mobile phones while eating or communicating, so that people can talk to one another.

Parents nowadays are confronted with modern battles, such as how to control media utilize both interior and exterior domestic. Participant's communicates concern around how to utilize technology successfully in arrange to control it instead of being controlled by it. Cleverly choice such as forbidding versatile gadgets amid family meals were suggested. Participant 5 exemplifies that “we do have rules when it's supper time. Such as there are no cell phones permitted. We must spend time with each other.”

Due to ICT's use parent's authority decreases produces blurred boundaries. Most parents cannot always understand the type of material their children are exposed to. They cannot control what their children always do. Parents cannot monitor or restrict what their children exposed to, whom they interact with, anonymity, etc. Parents have no control. Participant 2 affirms that “with technology it isn't simple to see anything your child is doing. They might either be working or playing diversions. We have realized that our child isn't wrapping up his assignments since he is dependent to technology”. Participant 3 deplors that “at the conclusion of the day you cannot control what your children see. They are open to all sorts of things on the web, and as a parent you cannot control what your children do on the web all the time”.

ICT's can provide positive results in terms of family cohesion. ICT's empowers families to remain associated, and as such create solid enthusiastic connection. This may lead to solid family connections. ICT's makes strides and increments family cohesion. Participant 14 specifies that "with the family that's far, it brings us closer since we stay in contact more frequently". However, technology also fosters a lack of cohesiveness within families. Due to the infiltration of technology in daily lives, families no longer pay visits to each other. As such there is decrease in family visits. Participants 2 and 6 make the statement "Hardly visits each other and no time for family members together".

## **5.6 Interpersonal relationships**

### **5.6.1 Technology as distraction**

The bond between parents and children can be negatively affected by technology usage in the family. This is not always because of how the children use technology. Parents who are constantly on their mobile phones are distracted and do not give children the necessary attention. Participant 8 observed that parents often purchase things for children to play with and keep them busy. Then the parents do not have to pay attention to them. Participant 14 found that often both parents are so immersed in the use of technology that they do not give children the necessary instruction, or provide them with a good example as to how to use technology in a way that is not harmful.

### **5.6.2 Technoference in adult relationships**

Couples often find that their relationships are disrupted because of the interference of technology. Relationships can suffer if partners are not transparent about with whom they communicate with on social media platforms. Most of the participants said that technology interferes with their relationships. Participant 2 related that her spouse is so fixated on technology that there is little interaction between them anymore. Participant 4 explained that "relationships have been broken or damaged since the coming of this new technology. Face-to-face confrontation is avoided. It causes all sorts of issues in

relationships.” Participant 9 found online pornography to be a problem in marriages. Participant 12 was of the opinion that technology use is devastating to relationships.

### **5.6.3 Alienation and conflict in parent-child relationships**

In a family setting a person who is constantly on their mobile phone is in effect absent during family time. This breeds isolation and leads to conflict. The overuse of technology has the harmful potential to isolate people. Progressive isolation from the other family members is often prevalent in households. When parents are preoccupied by their mobile phones in the presence of young children, it can cause tension, conflict and negative interaction with the children. Participant 2 points out that people then “barely see each other even though they are under the same roof and rather text one another than speak to someone in the same room”. The other participants voiced similar concerns with the increasing lack of direct communication in families due to the distraction and overuse of technologies.

### **5.6.4 Ambiguity**

Interpersonal communication is hampered by a lack of nonverbal communication. Written messages on technology devices are often rather brief and do not communicate clearly. They can easily be misinterpreted. The emotions that underlie a message become ambiguous when the message itself is unclear. Participants 6, 9, and 13 all find that technology has a detrimental effect on people’s social aptitude. They do not learn how to interact with others effectively on a personal level.

### **5.6.5 Sport, recreation and leisure**

A concern with regard to the overuse of technology is the lack of physical activity in people’s lives. Children are no longer playing outside or participating in sports and other physical leisure activities.

## **5.7 Behavioural problems**

### **5.7.1 Lack of discipline**

Behavioural problems associated with how technology is used include a lack of discipline and dishonesty. Parents who lose their authority are then unable to discipline children effectively. Technology provides much opportunity for creating a false persona. This insidious form of dishonesty can carry over to other spheres of life. Participants 2, 9 and 12 found that technology makes people apathetic.

### **5.7.2 Addiction**

Mobile phone and internet addiction is prevalent amongst technology users. Participants observed that some people are constantly on their devices and the internet. Participant 9 described it as follows: “People are not willing to put phones away. They do not leave their phones behind in the house. Minute after minute they check their phones.” Participants 2 and 14 also found this to be the case.

### **5.7.3 Health and education**

ICT’s contribute much to the health and education sectors. Participant 14 had a personal experience where technology in the health sector saved a loved-one’s life. Participants 2 and 14 agree that technology can assist with career development. Teachers and learners are empowered by technologies that are transforming the teaching and learning process. It is no longer teacher-dominated, but has become student-centered. This ultimately benefits students and learners in their development.

However, Participant 14 also pointed out that mobile device or computers should not be present in a bedroom since they can have a detrimental effect on the eyes and brain and can lead to sleep disturbances. Other medical problems that were mentioned in the interviews included depression, anxiety and suicide ideations.

#### **5.7.4 Safety and security**

Some of the issues mentioned in the interviews concern confidentiality and privacy. Technologies can be used in such a way that people's privacy is invaded and their human rights violated. When using technology or social media platforms, the youth tend to disclose information about their lives that should be kept confidential. Predators can then gain access to information and used it to cause harm. This can have an effect not only on the young person but on the entire family. A family can be made vulnerable to predators. Incidences such as housebreaking, hijacking, kidnapping, assault, harassment and human trafficking can result from a lack of privacy and confidentiality. Participant 3 was concerned with the prevalence of online harassment, victimization and cyberbullying. Participant 11 was concerned with content on the internet to which youngsters under the age of eighteen should not be exposed. Participant 13 found technology useful for the purposes of the surveillance of loved-ones.

### **5.8 The convenience and efficacy of technologies**

However, participants do find technology to be useful and effective. ICT's enables families to stay in touch in spite of physical distance. Most participants utilize ICT's to stay in contact with their loved ones, partners, and families every day. Most participants are grateful that ICT's makes contact possible all the time. Participant 10 articulated two positive uses for technology: "Now can effortlessly converse with someone at the other end of the world. That is an advantage of technology. You can also keep track of your where your children are. That is the positive side of technology. It is exceptionally useful to people".

While most participants valued the convenience and efficiency of technology in their families, because it makes communication easier, efficient, and accessible, they do acknowledge the loss of face-to-face communication. Most of the participants still prefer personal interaction to ICT's.

## 5.9 Discussion

The results of the empirical part of the investigation will now be brought into conversation with the relevant theories that were identified for the purposes of this investigation (see Gilbert 2008) and with the results of existing empirical studies.

The Displacement Hypothesis states that face-to-face communication has mostly been replaced by online communication (Kraut et al 1998). People rather use their devices to communicate than pay a visit or speak on the telephone. They rather text than talk. Participants 10 and 13 articulate how people do absolutely everything on their devices these days, including even watching the news and taking photographs. According to studies, spending time on the internet is essentially an asocial activity that frequently undermines rather than enhances in-person social interaction (Nie et al 2002). People lose touch, the more time they spend online, the less comfortable they are with their social surroundings and their devices (see Nie and Erbring 2002). People are less likely to visit friends and family when they use the internet excessively (Shklovski et al 2004). Online communication replaces time spent with parents, but not with friends, according to a study conducted among teenagers (Lee 2009).

Parents who use the internet much at home reported that technology was the reason for them having less time for the family (Williams and Merten 2011). Couples who spend less time together due to technology interference can lose a feeling of connection. This affects their relationship in areas like understanding one another, attending to each other's needs, and giving each other the space to share intimate details. All of these elements are essential to close relationships (Bodenmann et al 2007). Relationships are more impacted by gaming time than by game content (Coyne et al. 2012; Northrup and Smith, 2016). Internet access can be a good substitute for in-person time spent together when a couple is unable to maintain social and emotional support (Hertlein and Ancheta 2014; Murray and Campell 2011).

The main purpose of mobile phone technology was to enable remote communication. It seems unlikely that cell phones would affect how frequently people visit and interact with one another. While telephones facilitate social occasion planning, they also lessen



the necessity of in-person meetings. Technology facilitates the exchange of information (Van Hook et al 2018:145). Overuse of technology can cause alienation from the outside world, poor relationships, and isolation within families (Stoll 1995; Hughes and Hans 2001:777; see Villegas 2013:2). People may become socially isolated and find it difficult to build genuine relationships as a result of the Internet (Villegas 2013:10).

Children who use computers in moderation don't seem to be affected much. However, prolonged use of computers for social networking, particularly in adolescent girls, can result in depression and loneliness (Subrahmanyam et al 2000). Relationship conflict and relationship satisfaction are positively correlated with "technofence," or technology interference (McDaniel and Coyne 2016; see Morgan et al 2016). According to couples, spending too much time online can negatively impact their union (Morgan et al. 2016; see also Coyne et al 2012). Technofence also happens when media use interferes with parenting, family dynamics, and romantic relationships (McDaniel and Radesky 2017b; McDaniel and Coyne 2016a). Children may develop behavioural issues as a result (see McDaniel and Radesky 2017).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) believes that play is the best way for children to learn. According to Ginsberg (2006), play improves social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Adolescents who spend all of their time in a multimedia setting often stop participating in sports and other extracurricular activities. Additionally, they don't engage in peer gaming. Their social and physical development depends on these activities (Sanders et al 2000). According to some research, adolescents who use computers constantly have a higher tendency to be overweight than adolescents who use them occasionally or not at all (Attewell and Battle 1999; Hughes and Hans 2001; Attewel et al 2003). Through play, children acquire social skills, initiative, and self-regulation (Larson and Verma 1999; Mesch and Talmud 2010:52). Structured activities that support their formation and development include sports, youth groups, and youth organizations (Pellegrini and Smith 1998). If computer use is put first over family time, social, recreational, and athletic activities, the internet may have a negative impact on society and family life (Kayany and Yelsma 2000).

By means of Socialization Theory, a Child Effects Perspective, Social Learning Theory and Diffusion of Innovation the study has shown how and why adolescents are active users of technology. It has shown that children and youth are often the ones to introduce innovation and technology into the household. They instruct parents in the use of modern technology. Nowadays, children frequently have greater computer knowledge than adults do. Within the family hierarchy, adolescents with internet access tend to gain more authority and status. Conflict between generations may result from this circumstance (Kiesler et al 2000; Mesch 2003; Tapscott 1997). Adolescents not only use technology themselves, but introduce innovations and technologies to the family and teach parents about them (Van Hook et al 2018:33). From the perspective of the Socialization and Diffusion of Innovation theory, children would then have a role to play in engaging parents in the era of electronic devices (Correa et al 2015). Children and adolescents often excel and become experts in technology.

People's "digital coping skills," or their technical and cognitive capacity to select and configure online services, thus they are beneficial to them rather than disturbing, are positively correlated with their education level, according to a nationwide study on adult Swiss citizens (see Malaterre et al 2019:14; Buchi et al 2018). It is more difficult for parents who are less educated and computer literate to connect with their children when it comes to technology use (see Horst 2008).

Adolescents who belong to the high technology user category are less likely to have parents who are somewhat informed about what they do. Adolescents who are extremely active users tend to be more likely to have parents who are not very aware of what they do (see Van Hook et al 2018:28; Rudi and Dworkin 2014). Compared to younger children, parents were more likely to interact with older children and keep an eye on their mobile phones and activities (see Van Hook et al 2018:28; Devitt and Roker 2009). According to recent surveys, a lot of parents use technology to parent. Nonetheless, parents who earn more money tend to be more vigilant about their children's digital usage, even if it's just giving them advice on how to adjust privacy settings (see Malaterre et al 2019:14; Madden 2017). According to a study conducted in Hungary, parents who are more educated and don't face as many financial challenges

keep a closer eye on their children's technology use than other parents (see Malaterre et al 2019:14). Teachers in wealthy schools are more likely than those in low-income schools to believe that technology is causing a generation of distracted students (see Silicon Valley Community Foundation 2017). All socioeconomic groups' parents acknowledge that educational apps are a great way to improve the education of their children (see Van Hook et al 2018:15; McClure et al 2017). The study's participants discovered that "today's adolescents are smart." "You can try to use security measures with these children, but they are very clever," said Participant 3. They'll figure out a way around it.

Through the utilisation of insights from Social Domain Theory, Developmental-Ecological Theory, the Multi-Theoretical Model (Couple and Family Technology Framework) and Domestication Theory the study has shown the significance of putting in place precise yet pervasive limits that take cognitive and contextual factors into account. These theories throw light on how technology affects the family structure. Technologies serve to keep people in contact especially where loved-ones live far away. According to studies, having ICT's virtually present fosters closer ties between family members who live far away and offers an affordable, user-friendly communication environment (Bacigalupe and Lambe 2011). Computers and the internet can be strengthening family ties through activities such as working, learning and shopping. What previously had to take place outside the home can now be done together in the household (Tapscott 1997). Participants in this study reported that they can do business, marketing, research, education, make business transactions, do banking, and buy groceries online. Their purchases are delivered to their doorstep. They can participate in these activities without sacrificing the comforts of home and without leaving the family. These days, it's practical and convenient to work remotely due to advances in technology. However, the negative side is that it can also extend the workday indefinitely (Chesley 2005). The positives of technology can therefore be summarised as follows: computers and the internet have the power to foster better global understanding, increase communication and access to education, and improve the state of the world (Hughes and Hans 2001:776; Rheingold 1993; Villegas 2013:2).

By using electronic communication technologies, young people can transcend boundaries of local groups and geography, a power that traditional social authorities have less and less influence over (Wellman 2001). The informational space and group organization needed to establish social bonds are provided by the internet. The relationships that adolescents form online eventually seep into their social lives (Parks and Floyd 1996; McKenna et al 2002). Concerns about harassment, bullying, and victimization arising from indiscriminate exposure to people across age and gender lines have been voiced by parents and professionals (Mitchell et al 2003). Surfing the web exposes young people to commercial enterprises and can lead to them disclosing family information (Turow 2001; Turow and Nir 2000). Adolescents run the risk of being exposed to false information and offensive material (Livingstone and Helsper 2007). Addiction to aggressive and violent video games and websites has been linked to violent behaviour and can cause young people to lose empathy for other people (Irwin and Gross 1995).

As a result, families ought to make wise choices about how much technology is used at home (see Malaterre 2019: 14; Ward et al 2017). Establishing rules and allowing discussion about the boundaries they imposed were more common among parents who had strong expectations about moral behaviour, bullying, violence, and their own parental authority. This was discovered in an Australian study that focused on developing guidelines and strategies for technology use in the home. The study's parents found it exhausting to deal with every worry about technology use at home (Shepherd et al. 2006; see Huisman 2012:49). Children's technology usage guidelines should be reasonable and applied consistently (Shepherd et al 2006; Huisman 2012:57). For instance, parents can restrict their children's access to particular content by using filtering software (Livingstone and Helsper 2008).

Rules regarding both content and access are necessary to protect families and individuals. These include guidelines for what can be shared with others via text messages and mobile phones, what can be posted on social media platforms, and how to stay away from strangers and dangerous people online (Fletcher and Blair 2014; Vaterlaus et al 2014). Such guidelines are intended to discourage inappropriate

behaviour and to avoid infractions (Fletcher and Blair 2014). These steps can lessen the negative effects that technology has on youth (Fletcher and Blair 2016). Parents can require young people to “friend” them on Facebook in order that they can monitor the children’s activity (Fletcher and Blair 2016).

According to Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle (1983:60), "emotional bonding that the family members have toward one another" is a measure of family cohesion. Positively, research indicates that because there are fewer time and location restrictions, the internet can promote stronger social relationships (Katz and Aspen 1997; see Villegas 2013:11). Additionally, some research has demonstrated that there has been no alteration in the duration of time spent in-person with family members since they began using the internet (Katz and Aspden 1997; see Villegas 2013:11). Some people are finding that having conversations with family members via the internet makes sense (Katz and Aspden 1997; see Villegas 2013:11). According to some research, social bonds and sociability can be strengthened when people watch television together (Beniger 1987). On the other hand, some suggest that watching television diminishes social interaction (Brody 1990).

The Couple and Family Technology Framework outlines how family roles, rules, and relationships are impacted by the internet in both positive and negative ways (Van Hook et al 2018:98). The study has shown that the role of parents is in many instances diminishing due to technology. Social Domain Theory explains that when children grow older, they form opinions about the domains over which their parents have lawful responsibility, such as for example the domain of moral issues (Smetana et al 2005). Adolescents perceive media restrictions to be part of their “personal domain”, over which their parents have no lawful responsibility. As children grow older, parents may become less interested in their media consumption, which is explained by social domain theory (Van Hook et al 2018:9). For Participant 3 technology has a negative effect on the role of the parents because technology tends to usurp the role of the parent in a family. Because children have access to so much information they often find that they possess the necessary knowledge and do not have to listen to parents. This creates problems in the family.

Technology puts the family structure under strain. Adolescents who use technology frequently develop into the family's go-to person for guidance and technical advice (Kiesler et al 2000). Adolescents' role in the family changes (Fletcher and Blair 2014). Parental authority is transferred in part to the children (Prensky 2001). A study where parents and children in a restaurant were observed, found that parents were on their phones more than they interacted with the children (Radesky et al 2014). People who use ICT frequently describe themselves as being interested in virtual activities to the point of losing touch with their obligations in the real world, as well as in their offline social and physical surroundings (Kraut et al 1998; Nie et al 2002).

The participants found that the reason why parents and children spend less time together is because of internet use. They take part in communal activities less frequently. Children experience social isolation from adults as a result of this (Nie et al 2002). Technology has the potential to alienate people and this can lead to conflict in the family. Participants have found technology to be a distraction. However, empirical data from a few completed studies as well as the participant's testimony suggest that, rather than causing a rift between parents and children, using the internet can become a family activity (Kaiser Family Foundation 2003). Participant 10 gives an example of how it can be used as a shared activity: "They can use technology to advance the family unity, by doing Bible study on the internet. They can use E-sword, someone reads out of the Bible, another checks the word meaning on E-sword and can contribute positively towards family time."

Parents can actively participate in their children's technology use while simultaneously monitoring and limiting it through joint video game play (Jiow et al 2017). Another option is for a parent to keep an eye on their child's online activity. It's critical to have open lines of communication regarding children's internet usage and the guidelines for online behaviour (Livingstone and Helsper 2008). The main concern expressed was that using the internet would consume too much time, reduce opportunities for interpersonal communication, and have a social displacement effect (Kraut et al 1998).

The central role of technology often leads to a disengagement during in-person communication (Radesky et al 2014; Turkle 2011). A number of participants

emphasises that “people are always on their phones” which distract them from the social circumstance wherein they discover their own. The presence of the television in the background also interferes with parent-child communication (Kirkorian et al 2009). Research has indicated and named the “still face effect” on children (Kildare and Middlemiss 2017), which is detrimental to parent-child interaction (Kildare 2017). Other undesirable outcomes of the excessive use of technology include weaker performance of tasks and children who act out in order to get parents’ attention (Kildare and Middlemiss 2017). Parents’ availability, both physically and emotionally is crucial to parent-child relations (Warren 2003, 2005). With limited time in the busy lives of people today, parents have to select which family-friendly activities are most likely to be beneficial, and balance the advantages and disadvantages (Warren 2005).

Social Cognitive Theories, Cultivation Theory, Social Identity Theory, Social Learning Theory and Drench Hypothesis describe how media offers opportunities for social learning and why its content has such a significant impact on attitudes. The study has indicated how technology can provide a useful platform for learning. Participant 3 emphasised the convenience of being able to learn together at home: “Technology creates environment where people can learn new things without going out of the house.” New information technologies can improve school achievement. According to a Chinese study conducted in 2005, people with impairments experienced a significant decrease in social barriers due to the internet. Since learning software encourages personal learning, its use in classrooms is a significant educational advancement (Mesch and Talmud 2010:104).

There are certain unfavorable signs in relation to minority groups. According to a study conducted in the USA, minority adolescents are less likely to concentrate on developing the cognitive skills required for academic success and more likely to play computer games (Attewel et al 2003; Van Dijk 2005; see Mesch and Talmud 2010:105). There is some evidence that preventing students from using mobile devices, like cellphones, in the classroom can help high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who perform poorly (Beland and Murphy 2016). Teachers from schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are concerned about the reliance of technology for

schoolwork since children from poor household often do not have access to the technologies necessary to complete their educational tasks (see Van Hook et al 2018:15; Darling-Hammond et al 2014).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Domestication Theory explain how people use technology for gratification. Participants in the study pointed out how the need for instant gratification can be seen in the way in which people constantly check their devices. Turkle (2011) calls this being “alone together” and “presence in absence and absence in presence”. This “absence in presence” has an impact on relationships and quality time spent with people (Sharaievska and Stodolska 2017: 231-243). Parents are more likely than other adults to download apps and use social media extensively (Duggan et al 2015; see Lenhart 2012). Adults' dependence on mobile devices, especially smartphones, has grown; many say they carry their phones around constantly and find it impossible to imagine life without them (Rainy and Zickuhr 2015; Smith 2015).

Excessive computer use has been linked to internet addiction, weight gain and other health concerns (Subrahmanyaman et al 2000; Kautiainen et al 2005). Study participants also expressed concern about how the internet affects young people's social skill development (see Watkins 2009). Existing studies have indeed shown that the overuse of technology has a detrimental effect on people's social skills. Four participants commented on the growing lack of the skills needed to interact with people face-to-face and understand body language and the expression of emotions. This they attributed to the excessive use of technology. Participant 6 provided the example of friends who communicate easily on WhatsApp but are rather unresponsive in personal conversations. After their departure, they would leave long voice messages on the participant's mobile telephone, which the participant finds rather irritating.

Studies have shown that youth with a high usage of technology are often less able to read other people's body language and understand their emotions (Uhls et al 2014). Participants 9 and 10 feel strongly about the necessity of eye contact during personal interaction. Participant 9 explained it as follows: “People can't communicate normally anymore. For instance, if you are speaking to me and I am busy on the phone, I do not



bother to look on you in the eye. Eyes are windows of the soul. If you do not look into someone's eyes when they speak to you, you cannot see their emotions, how they are feeling." Participant 3 was concerned that people were not learning to work with people anymore.

The lack of "true connection" has also been found in studies to be a problem among young girls who are in the process of building their social persona (Parks and Roberts 1998). In contrast to face-to-face communication, computer-mediated communication, provides a restricted social presence. The lack of communication cues influences people's perceptions and the quality of their social connections (Sproull and Kiesler 1986). Not only verbal, but also nonverbal skills are necessary for a sender to be able to change the atmosphere of a communication, transmit a feeling of identity, or exert power or charisma. Text-only communication is sufficient for providing information about a task, but it is not sufficient for the communication of non-verbal information by means of body motion and tone of voice (Sproull and Kiesler 1996).

Some people are not able to establish and maintain face-to-face intimate relationships. This is due to certain personality traits that make it difficult for them to form emotional and social bonds, such as shyness or social anxiety (Mesch 2001; McKenna et al 2002). For this reason, people who are painfully introverted, feel insecure in social situations, suffer from social anxiety, and have a low self-esteem find it particularly appealing to use the internet for social purposes (Hamburger and Ben-Artzi 2000). Anxious and shy adolescents find anonymity to be a shield against the embarrassment they feel in personal and intimate contact with others (McKenna et al 2002). Early on in the online communication process, people can communicate without disclosing their physical characteristics due to the electronic platform. This creates a more secure environment for those who may feel less socially adept or physically attractive to interact with others and build relationships (McKenna et al 2002). The HomeNet study discovered an inverse relationship between extroversion and internet usage frequency. The likelihood of regular internet use is higher among introverted people (Kraut et al 1998). People who are more outgoing and who use the internet more often reported being happier and experiencing less loneliness. Conversely, introverted individuals who

used the internet frequently displayed a decrease in their level of wellbeing (Kraut et al 2002).

Participants were acutely aware of how technology impacts family dynamics and the need to find meaning in life and relationships. This study chooses a narrative approach to pastoral care and counselling with families in order to fulfil this need. Finding the meanings people ascribe to the experiences and events they relate to is the main focus of a narrative approach (Freedman and Combs 2002:191; see Müller 1999:1). By sharing their experiences, people can transform their relationships and lives (Freedman and Combs 2002:106). Externalizing dialogues establish that the issue is with the problem, not the individual. The focus is on distinctive results rather than an individual's shortcomings. These serve as the foundation for building the new, ideal life story (Gergen 2001:173; Morgan 2000:50).

In this chapter, the methodology of the empirical part of the investigation was explained. The selection of participants, the gathering of data, the processing and the interpretation of data was explained. Nine themes were identified, namely, family time, being “tech-savvy”, family structure, interpersonal relationships, sport, recreation and leisure, behavioural problems, convenience and efficiency, health and education, and safety and security. The results of the interviews were presented. These results were brought into discussion with insights from various theories and the findings of various existing empirical studies. The results indicate that technology has a definite impact on family relationships.

This chapter explained the methodology employed for the empirical section of the study. The selection of participants, data collection, processing, and interpretation were detailed. Through the lens of nine identified themes, ranging from family time to safety and security, the chapter gave a comprehensive overview of how technology influences various facets of their family life.

The results of the interviews, which provided a richness and narrative depth to the investigations, serve as the point of departure for the presentation of the findings of this study. By bringing these results into dialogue with insights from various theories and existing empirical studies, the study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of

the impact of technology on family relationships. The following chapter presents the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS

The chapter 6 presents the findings of the investigation, identifies the limitations of the study and suggests some recommendations. Suggestions for future research are also made. The findings underscore the significance of narrative pastoral counselling and point to the necessity of further research in a rapidly expanding and evolving field.

The media-saturated social world of today influences the dynamics in families. The goal of the study was to investigate the consequences of communication, the media and technology for family dynamics. As technology evolves and changes, the challenges it presents to family life also evolve. This can be a significant factor with regard to matters such as conflict and the power balance in families. Issues include, for example:

- what is suitable for a child's developmental stage;
- security issues pertaining to social media and internet use;
- balancing work and family time.

These matters play a role with regard to the well-being of individuals in the family and the family as a whole.

The study has shown that the media have an definite impact on how members of a family interact with one another. Their relationships often suffer as a result of the way in which communication technology is used. Over the distance, technology can help people strengthen their relationships and ties to their families without being constrained by time or location. On the negative side, the constant presence of technology can hinder social development and face-to-face interaction. The study demonstrated the variety of functions and influences the media have. These have both positive and negative aspects with regard to family life.

Technology has altered the power dynamics between parents and adolescents. Social media and technology are frequently introduced into families by young people. They are

innovators in technology. They offer parents tech-use guidance and instruction. By introducing new media provide, young people can become the authority on the use of technology. This can lead to role reversal in the family. Children become the ones who teach the parents. This challenges the power dynamics in the family hierarchy. Especially adolescents who are adept frequent users of technology then become the family experts. Others rely on them for technical advice and guidance.

There is a greater chance of unauthorised or unsupervised access when using mobile devices to access the internet. Material can now be sent across national borders and copied and circulated with ease due to digital technology. Currently, the internet is the pinnacle of decentralised media. Theoretically, anyone with access to technology can "publish" anything they want and make it accessible to others. It is becoming more and more of a commercial medium, though, and users must pay for material obtained through either direct or indirect advertisements. The widespread use of the internet to obtain information puts family boundaries under strain and exposes adolescents to a greater variety of unfiltered content, some of which may be extremely inappropriate.

Parents may find themselves in a difficult situation because new media can make it more challenging for them to keep an eye on what their children see. An increasing number of children, even at younger ages, possess media equipment available in their bedrooms for use. Internet filtering devices are not very efficient. It is often possible for young people to avoid them. Many parents are unaware of what their children are doing with these technologies because children and adolescents people are frequently far more adept at using them than their parents. Despite parental efforts to restrict their children's internet usage, children can still come across objectionable or dangerous content, frequently without the knowledge of the parents. Adolescents have the ability to expand their social circle beyond their neighbourhood and school. This increases the challenge for parents to regulate the associations their children make.

Because boundaries are blurred, the potential of the internet is to have an impact on the family both internally and externally. It has an internal impact on children's and parents' expectations. It has an impact on the hierarchy of power within the family. Adolescents are adept with technology and frequently decide when and where to use their

computers. Although parents can try to set rules about their children's media consumption, adolescents usually have no trouble breaking them. While parents anticipate that their children will use technology to help them do better in school, adolescents frequently use computers more for social and recreational activities. While adolescents want more freedom in how they use the internet, parents expect self-regulation from their children. Often these expectations clash. *External* boundaries are blurred when parental control is insufficient and external agencies gain access to private information. The lines separating work and family life are becoming less distinct is also a significant factor in families. Work can intrude in family life and disrupt activities such as communal meals, conversations, and activities. Young people can gain access to harmful content such as violent, hateful, and pornographic material.

The paradigm of this study is postmodern and the epistemology social constructionist. The point of departure is that knowledge is socially constructed and not “objective”. There is no “absolute truth”. Not all truths are equally valid or wholesome. People are social beings and knowledge is constructed also in and by families who make use of information communication technologies. The study proposed a narrative pastoral approach to counselling families who have to navigate the effects of technology on their own well-being and the dynamics within their family.

The study has shown that technology can have detrimental effect on family relationships. However, technology can also close the distance gap and help distant family members to keep in touch. Technology can be useful for work purposes. However, often this is detrimental to family interaction if the line between work and family time is crossed. Technology can be a platform for lies, mistrust, and a lack of honesty. That can cause conflict in the family. The overall results show that a high level of technology use and of “technoference” can lead to significantly less quality time to spend together as family. The study, therefore, recommends that the use of technology be regulated in households. Parents should take the lead in this. “Internet discipline” should be exercised within households and technology should be used in healthy moderation.

The study has indicated that technology has a definite influence on the family system and relationships. Therefore, appropriate strategies to promote healthy family relationships should be implemented. Using the pastoral care, direction, and counselling that the faith community can provide is a common strategy. Through narrative pastoral care and counselling harmful discourses in today's society also with regard to technology and the media can be deconstructed and people can be guided to find healthy ways of dealing with the social realities of the day.

Through narrative pastoral care and counselling matters such as troubled personal interaction within the family, conflict due to the utilization of technology, a power imbalance because of one-sided technological expertise, and unsolicited access to harmful content by minors, can be addressed. The aim is to facilitate practices that are conducive to the wellbeing of individuals and the family as a whole. This includes effective and constructive communication among family members and quality time to spend together in order to strengthen family cohesion.

The study provided insight into the intersection of media, technology, and family dynamics. It is, however, essential to acknowledge the limitations of the study. One notable constraint is the relatively small and localized sample for the empirical part of the study with which the study could not access the full diversity of family structures and technological experiences. The rapidly evolving nature of technology poses another challenge to research. The observations of a particular study can become outdated in the face of new technological advancements. The study did not have the scope to also explore cultural and socio-economic factors that could influence how families navigate the digital landscape. The recognition of these limitations aims to contribute to the transparency of the research and provides a nuanced understanding of its scope and applicability.

The findings of this study contribute to both academia and pastoral practice, shedding light on the intricate relationship between media, technology and family dynamics. The academic contribution is about expanding the understanding of how evolving technologies influence family structures and hierarchies. The results of the study

underscore the need for ongoing studies that keep pace with technological advancements in order to provide up-to-date insights into the challenges that families face. The suggestion of narrative pastoral counselling as a strategy for addressing the identified issues enriches the academic discourse by highlighting practical interventions informed by a social constructionist perspective.

With regard to pastoral practice, the study recommends the integration of narrative pastoral care and counselling to guide families through the complexities introduced by technology. By adopting this approach, faith communities can play a pivotal role in deconstructing harmful discourses and facilitating healthy ways of coping with the impact of media on family life. The emphasis on effective communication, quality time spent together, and the regulation of technology within households aligns with the values of pastoral care, emphasizing the holistic well-being of individuals and families.

When considering the evolving nature of media, it is imperative that future research delve deeper into specific aspects of family dynamics affected by technology. Exploring cultural variations and socio-economic factors that influence how families navigate the digital landscape could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Future research can also focus on evaluating the long-term effects of narrative pastoral counselling in diverse cultural contexts. This can contribute to the development of effective strategies tailored to specific communities.

The narrative pastoral counselling was shown to be effective in addressing the challenges identified by this study. By recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed, a narrative pastoral approach aims to deconstruct harmful discourses surrounding technology within families. This approach offers a platform for families to articulate their experiences, fostering effective communication and understanding. Through narrative pastoral counselling, families can collaboratively construct narratives that empower them to navigate the complexities of technology, fostering healthier relationships and stronger family bonds.

In conclusion, this study illuminated the multifaceted impact of media and technology on family dynamics, offering insights that contribute to both academia and pastoral



practice. Acknowledging its limitations, the research suggests narrative pastoral counselling as a constructive strategy to address the challenges posed by technology. By promoting effective communication, family time, and the regulation of technology, narrative pastoral care aligns with the goals of fostering family well-being in the digital age.

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## Appendix A



Faculty of Theology and Religion

Research Office  
Mrs Daleen Kotzé

**NAME:** Ms MG Mohale  
**STUDENT NUMBER:** 18351264  
**COURSE:** Masters  
**DATE:** 5 October 2021  
**APPLICATION NUMBER:** T038/21

This letter serves as confirmation that the research proposal of this student was evaluated by:

- 1) **The Research committee:** This applies to all research proposals
- 2) **The Research Ethics committee:** This applies only to research that includes people as sources of information

You are hereby notified that your research proposal (including ethical clearance where it is applicable) is approved.



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**Prof E van Eck**  
Chairperson: Research committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion



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**Dr T van Wyk**

**Chairperson: Research Ethics committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion.**

## **Appendix B**

### **INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE**

I hereby confirm that I have read an informed consent letter and I am fully aware of what participation in this study entails. I hereby give my consent to participate in Mamasila Grace Mohale's research study.

In addition,

I understand what participation in this study requires from me.

I understand my participation is voluntary, no remuneration attached.

I understand I have the right to withdraw at any time I may choose.

I understand that any information I share will be held in the strictest confidence by the researchers.

I understand I have access to the final copy of the research report and results.

By signing this form I am giving my word to participate.

Signed by \_\_\_\_\_ on (date) \_\_\_\_\_ at  
(Place) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant email address: (if you wish to receive a summary of the research):

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### INFORMED CONSENT TO BE INTERVIEWED

I have read the information sheet and I am aware that by giving consent to participate in this study I am required to be interviewed. I am fully aware what the interview will entail.

Additionally, I understand that:

I may refuse to answer any questions I am not comfortable with.

I may stop the interview process at any time.

I may withdraw at any time.

I will be required to verbally answer a number of questions.

This interview may take up to an hour.

I am free to say anything I so desire

The researcher may use direct quotes of my words spoken.

I will receive the research results.

By signing this form I am giving my consent to be interviewed by Mamasila Grace Mohale.

Signed by \_\_\_\_\_ on (date) \_\_\_\_\_ at (place)

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### INFORMED CONSENT TO BE AUDIOTAPED

I have read the information sheet and I am aware that by giving consent to participate in this study I am required to be interviewed, and that my words will be recorded with a handheld audio device.

Additionally, I understand that:

The tapes and transcripts will only be heard by the researcher and her research supervisor, and will only be processed by the researcher.

All tape recordings and transcripts will be kept in a password encrypted folder on the researcher's laptop, which only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to.

All recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.

No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

By signing this form I am giving my consent to have my words and interview audiotaped.

Signed by \_\_\_\_\_ on (date) \_\_\_\_\_ at (place)

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix E

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The research problem to be investigated in this study pertains to how the frequent use of technology affects family relationships. How the use of technology affects the way in which family units interact and what the consequences are for their relationships. Below are the interview questions:

1. How important is technology/internet to you and your family?
2. How often do you use the Internet?
3. On average, how many hours per day do you spend on the Internet?
4. What do you like doing most online?
5. How do you prefer communicating with your family, using technology or face to face? Please example your answer.
6. How does the use of technology affect family relationships and their interaction?
7. Does it reduce, deaden, or enhance your family time?
8. When you use Internet at home, what room do you use it in?
9. How do you think technology is affecting social skills?
10. How would you limit the impact of technology on your family time together?

## Appendix F

### AN INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

#### TECHNOLOGY AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: A NARRATIVE PASTORAL COUNSELLING APPROACH

Dear Sir/ Madam

This letter serves to invite you to participate in the above study. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of existing knowledge on how technology affects family relationships. The study aims to explore the specific impact of technology, both negative and positive on the way in which families interact.

I am hoping to get an in-depth idea of how technological advances such as information communication technologies are creating disruptions in family system, family structures, family boundaries and family quality time and changes the quality of family relationships, and how this may have affected them. Hence this study seeks your view, and I would like to formally invite you to participate.

Participation in this study will entail being interviewed by myself, at a safe and a quiet time that is convenient for you. The interview will be about 20-45 minutes long. The interview will be conducted in a language which you will be comfortable. With your permission the interview will be transcribed verbatim to facilitate the accurate processing of the data. Data obtained can be accurately used for the final write up of the research.

Your participation is voluntary, without remuneration, no monetary gifts or in any kind and please remember that you can withdraw at any time even during the interview or after it is complete. Please take to consideration that there will be no penalty if you withdraw. Because I am interviewing you, I will know your identity. However, I can assure you that anything said in the interview will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms

will be used in place of your name in any sort of write-up. No information that could identify you will be included in either the interview transcripts or the research report.

The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person other than myself and my research supervisor. Audio recordings and transcripts will also be kept in a password-encrypted folder on my laptop, and then will be destroyed after a two year period. The findings of this study will be reported in a research report, which will then be made electronically available over the university's library database. The findings of this study may also be published in a research journal. A summary of the research findings will be available to you on request-please add your email address at the end of this letter if you would like a summary to be sent to you in approximately 6 months' time.

If you choose to participate in this study please endorse your signature on this letter and please complete the interview Consent Form, attached. I will contact you within two days in order to discuss your participation. Alternatively I can be contacted telephonically on 072 701 8581 or 083 988 3926 or via E-mail at [pastorgracem@gmail.com](mailto:pastorgracem@gmail.com)

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated.

_____	_____
Mamasila Grace Mohale	Date
Masters Student in Practical Theology	
Faculty of Theology and Religion	
University of Pretoria	

Your Signature _____	_____
Place _____	Date _____

## Appendix G

### Biographical information of participants:

Participants	Gender	Age	Title	Ethnicity/Race	Occupation	Qualification
Participant 1						
Participant 2						
Participant 3						
Participant 4						
Participant 5						
Participant 6						
Participant 7						
Participant 8						
Participant 9						
Participant10						
Participant 11						
Participant 12						
Participant 13						
Participant 14						
Total						

