HOMESCHOOLERS AND TEXTING: A CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF TEXT LANGUAGE ON SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

by

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(Under the Direction of Jennifer M. Graff)

ABSTRACT

There is disagreement in the literature on the influence of texting and text language on adolescents’ literacies. Some research has indicated that familiarity with text language will negatively influence social and academic writing both in process and in product. Other research has indicated that there is no influence on accomplished writers and that texting could potentially positively influence children in learning to spell because they are using three components of literacy, as defined by the National Reading Panel, when they text. This paper addresses these very divergent studies and examines the adolescent homeschoolers’ use of text language in their social and academic lives. A constructionism epistemology was used for this research study. The main theories for analysis were social constructionism and sociocultural learning. The findings suggest that while more research is needed, homeschooled adolescents are modifying language to fit their perceived audience and situational communications.
INDEX WORDS: Homeschool, adolescent, social media, text language, academic discourse, affinity group, discourse community, social discourse, constructionism epistemology, sociocultural learning, social constructionism
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my incredible husband, Jim. Thank you for the unwavering support and words of encouragement. You stood beside me, behind me, and in for me more times than I can imagine these last two years. You have always believed in me and I thank God for you. You are my lobster.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Identifying the Case

I initially became interested in the potential differences in interactions between homeschoolers and formally educated students within peer social groups after my adolescent daughter attended summer camp with our church. When she returned home after a week away, she was full of stories. What I came to notice was that most of the tales contained two groups of campers – those educated at home and everyone else. Not long after that, my daughter, a frequent texter, commented to me that her friend had shared some “cool” text language with her that she was sharing with the other friends in her school peer group. Together, these two circumstances of the possible differences between social group interactions based on how they received their education and the sharing of “new” language made me wonder if homeschoolers participate in the same social media group practices as formally educated students and if those practices are influencing their academic lives. This led me to research homeschoolers and the influence of texting on their social and academic interactions. Even though there is existing research on the influence of texting and the use of text language on adolescents educated in a traditional setting, there appears to be a void in information concerning homeschoolers, social media, and the potential influence of text language on homeschoolers’ social and academic communications.
Exploring Homeschoolers and Texting

In 2007, the number of children being educated at home was approximately 1.5 million, which represents “3% of the K-12 population” in the United States, increasing from approximately 800,000 in 1999 (Cogan, 2010, p. 19). Parents are either withdrawing their children from public or private school systems, or not placing them there from the beginning, for the express purposes of providing what they consider to be the best possible academic education. Homeschooled students outscore traditionally educated students on standardized tests (Cloud et al., 2001; Cogan, 2010; Kleiner & Lord, 2000; Ray, 2004, 2010). Research on this topic has addressed testing scores for those educated at home, but has neglected study on the language used in academic and social situations. The void of information is perhaps due to the freedom from strict government regulations for homeschooling families. Except in a few states (e.g. Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and North Dakota), parents are not required to register curriculum used in homeschooling or in some cases even the days of instruction (Farris, 2011; Lloyd, 2011). Also, in an effort to protect from potentially negative influences, many homeschooling families insulate their children from the secular world (Gaither, 2008; Gathercole, 2007). Taken together, these two reasons, a lack of curriculum and teaching regulations, and a desire for group insulation, could address the missing research on homeschoolers’ language use. Specific studies on homeschoolers’ use of technology and social media are also noticeably absent from the literature.

Technology, and in particular, the use of text language, is transforming the ways in which people communicate. There is increasing evidence of the proliferation of social
media and technology, especially text messaging, among adolescents (Jago, 2009). Text language is being increasingly utilized by adolescent students in their written assignments within the confines of the formal school classroom (Barker, 2007; as cited in Drouin & Davis, 2009). Some researchers, such as Snowden (2006), see the use of text language as a positive step toward a new kind of communication (as cited in Kavoori & Arceneaux, 2006). Plester, Wood and Bell (2008) hypothesize that the texting and the use of text language could potentially increase students’ knowledge of different language registers that are in use around them. These researchers also believe it is reasonable to expect that a possible positive association could exist between texting and phonological development, phonemic awareness, and reading development. However, other researchers, such as Jago (2009), Horowitz (2008), Skaar (2009), and Bauerlein (2010), view the use of text language as negative. They believe text language is infiltrating adolescent literacy and is doing irreparable harm to their ability to form thoughtful responses to new information using carefully crafted language (Jago, 2009). Jago writes, “I worry that students will become better and better at being quick off the mark and less and less able to marshal evidence needed to construct a logical argument” (p.5).

Studies concentrated on adolescent students and their involvement with texting have focused on public or private school students. Researchers have found that many adolescents are prolific social media and text language users (Alvermann, 2008) whose literacy skills are ever-evolving (Carrington, 2004). Although the use of text language could positively influence literacy skills (Bloom, 2010; Durkin, Conti-Ramsden, & Walker, 2011; Kemp & Bushnell, 2011; Plester, et al., 2008; Plester, Wood, & Joshi, 2009), students must realize the need to differentiate language use based on perceived
audience (Barker, 2007; O'Connor, 2005) so that when text language shows up in school work, it is deliberate and serves a specific literary purpose (Barker, 2007; Turner, 2009). However, those who are homeschooled are not included in this research.

Due to the absence of information relating to social media and adolescent homeschoolers’ academic literacy, the purpose of my research is to discover the ways in which adolescents educated in the home use texting and how their academic writing may be informed by text language. Given the increasing number of homeschooled students (Cogan, 2010; Isenberg, 2007; Ray, 2011), as well as the prevalence of texting among adolescents (Brody, 2006; Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010; "Texting and students' well-being," 2009), it is important to investigate the ways in which their social and academic writing practices possibly converge and diverge as a means of inquiry into the potential influences of social language on homeschoolers’ written and spoken literacies. Using social constructionist and sociocultural learning as theoretical frames, in this study I examine the ways in which texting and text language are a part of adolescent homeschoolers’ lives and how text language informs their homeschool-based writing.

Because literacy now includes not only reading from traditionally printed literature and writing with pen and paper, but also familiarity and competency with digital technology and social media, educators are faced with the task of including all of these literacies in the academic curriculum (Gee & Levine, 2009; Kandell, 1998; Lewin, 2008). Using this information, educators can scaffold from the homeschoolers’ previous learning in order to fully engage multiliteracy potentials in this ever-changing digital age.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Within this literature review, there are two primary topics of interest: homeschooling and social media in the form of texting. The review that addresses homeschooling will look more specifically at the reasons behind the decisions to homeschool, the demographics of those families who choose this form of education, and the influence of social media on the academic outcomes for homeschooled students. The literature review concerned with the social media in the form of texting will examine this method of communication’s influences on adolescent peer groups, and the subsequent reflections in spoken and written literacy. Then, peer group influences on social communications and academic achievement will be mentioned. Finally, the literature review will conclude by addressing the gap in research of homeschoolers, literacy and text language.

Homeschoolers

In the most basic terms possible, a homeschooler is someone who is educated at home with a parent as the educator instead of a traditional, institutional setting (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007; Cogan, 2010). When children reach the middle and high school levels, parents will often either hire tutors to instruct in the higher level courses or enroll their adolescents in a homeschool co-op which may be taught by a certified teacher or by other parents in order to give teens instructional variety (Basham, et al., 2007; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; St. John & St. John, 2010). Whatever the method of
instruction, the differentiating factor between traditional schooling and homeschooling is that parents are involved in all aspects of their children’s education and in most instances, personally guide the learning process.

**Homeschooling Demographics**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in the 1970’s there were approximately 13,000 K-12 students homeschooled (Lines, P.M., 1991; as cited in Cogan, 2010). But by 2008-2009, estimates grew exponentially and were at 1.5-2 million students that are being home educated (Cogan, 2010; Ray, 2010, 2011), which is equal to or greater than the total number of children enrolled in charter schools or school voucher programs (Bauman, 2001; Isenberg, 2007; Princotta & Bielick, 2006). While the racial make-up is 75-90% Caucasian (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001; Collom, 2005; Collom & Mitchell, 2005; Ray, 2004; Rudner, 1999), the homeschooling movement is gaining new membership with non-mainstream populations. A recent study (Ray, 2010) estimated that 15% of children educated at home are non-whites/non-Hispanics. Although homeschooling parents on average attained a higher level of educational achievement than the parents of traditionally schooled children (Ray, 2004, 2005; Wagenaar, 1997), there was very little difference in socioeconomic status when comparisons were made between both homeschooled families and traditionally schooled families with single incomes (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, et al., 2001; Ray, 2005; Rudner, 1999). Education attainment beyond high school could potentially inform parental lifestyle choices, but it seems not to have influenced monetary gain or the choice to homeschool children.
Homeschoolers are not institutionally educated and, as such, there are no official records on their academic achievements, no required curriculum or mandatory high-stakes testing (Gaither, 2008; Isenberg, 2007; West, 2009). The students who are home educated more often hail from environments in which education is a priority and parents are involved in the learning process. Educational excellence is expected and evidenced in a continuing phenomenon – that of the homeschooler outscoring traditionally educated peers on standardized tests such as the ACT and SAT (Cloud, et al., 2001; Cogan, 2010; Collom, 2005; Collom & Mitchell, 2005; DiStefano, Rudenstam, & Silverman, 2004; Kleiner & Lord, 2000; Ray, 2004). According to Ray (2010), on standardized tests, homeschoolers usually outscore publicly educated students by 15-30 percentile points. In an earlier study, Rudner (1999) recorded the gap between homeschoolers and institutionally educated youths as being smaller. She had the group of formally educated adolescents scoring between the 60th-70th percentiles and homeschoolers scoring between the 70th-80th percentiles, a potential difference of 10-20 percentile points. Based on these outcomes, it could be said that parents are creating a “successful academic environment” (Rudner, 1999, p. 28). Parents are teaching and their children are learning, oftentimes better than those in formal settings.

According to Collom and Mitchell (2005), home educators typically identify themselves as having strong religious values and as being conservative both socially and politically. In over 95% of the families, the couples are married with 90% of the academic instruction provided by mothers who do not work outside the home (see also Bauman, 2001; Bielick, et al., 2001). Fathers do instruct in some instances, but most are prevented from full participation because they work in professional or technical
occupations or are self-employed. In non-white/non-Hispanic homeschool families, however, fathers may take on a slightly different instructional role. “Fathers assume responsibility for teaching their children…in a particular area, or for reinforcement” (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009, p. 374). A recent study on adolescents educated in traditional settings found that even though adolescents are caught between childhood and adulthood, they feel pushed into behaving in constrained and subdued ways more indicative of adulthood than their age would suggest due to their educational environments (Eckert, 2004). However, for homeschoolers, the insular unit of parent(s) and child(ren) form both a familial and social bond that allows the children to enjoy being children and avoid regulated social behaviors, while at the same time achieving academic success (Gaither, 2008; Gathercole, 2007).

Families choosing to educate at home, usually do not do so in isolation. They often create a community along with other like-minded families that puts the emphasis on the children, not the yearly progress attained (Collom & Mitchell, 2005), which they believe is the focus of traditional schools. The underlying difference between children who are homeschooled and those who are institutionally educated is that children educated at home coexist with their families on a continuous basis. Their entire lives are structured around the familial unit and the ways in which their group interacts with similar peer groups. Children are given not only academic instruction, but also taught social graces. Gathercole (2007) writes, “In fact, the prerequisites for healthy social growth – love, security, compassion, discipline…are found primarily in the family” (p.38). Parents are teaching their children to socially interact with their peer groups and because they have more time during the day than they would have with conventional
school, homeschoolers say they not only “have more time with friends, but also [have] closer friends…” (p.53). Homeschooled children are given the gift of time – time spent with family, homeschooled friends and learning about their world.

**Resurgent Population**

Until compulsory attendance laws were established in the 19th and early 20th centuries, almost all students were educated by their parents at home since only the monetarily elite could afford an educational tutor (Basham, et al., 2007; Cloud, et al., 2001; DiStefano, et al., 2004; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). However, due to the changing social and political climate of the 1960’s and 1970’s, there began to be a resurgence of interest in homeschooling, especially among those who were growing ever more dissatisfied with the available formal educational opportunities (Cogan, 2010; Collom, 2005; Collom & Mitchell, 2005; Gaither, 2008).

During this cultural revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s, those parents choosing to educate at home saw non-mainstream academic instruction as a way to forego “conformist” institutional education (Cloud, et al., 2001) and to avoid the inflexible structure and conservatism of traditional schools (Gaither, 2008; Kleiner & Lord, 2000; Morrison, 2007). Parents were seeing the effects of living the “American Dream”, where one’s life was better and full of more opportunities because of hard work and abilities, and believed they could educate their own children at least as well, if not better, than the teachers in the traditional schools (Gaither, 2008; Kleiner & Lord, 2000; Van Galen, 1988). They now had the physical space because they lived in a large house in the suburbs, the time since one spouse was the wage-earner and one took care of the home, the academic knowledge due to their own post-secondary schooling, and the confidence
in their own abilities to educate their children (Gaither, 2008; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Schenwar, 2008). Parents wanted to expose their children to more than the conservative school curriculum, and at the same time, provide them the best educational opportunities. Homeschooling was the perfect solution.

There were some parents in the 1970’s that believed regular homeschooling, where the parent chose the curriculum, and instructed and assessed the children, was too prohibitive and restrictive. They wanted an environment of child-centered learning where the youth had the freedom to explore the world (M. Davis, 2006), deciding what, when, how, and if they would study (Cloud, et al., 2001; M. Davis, 2006; Morrison, 2007; Schenwar, 2008) based on their interests and abilities with their parents as guides, not educators (Kleiner & Lord, 2000; Wheatley, 2009). The parents believed children should choose their own paths of education and focus there for as long as they were interested, which is the very essence of individualized learning (Wheatley, 2009). These parents, known as “unschoolers,” believed that children wanted to learn because they were born curious, and it was only after being forced to adhere to inane rules in an institutional setting that they lost their love of learning (Morrison, 2007). Wheatley (2009) wrote, “The assumption that learning always requires formal instruction, an assumption that is central to most schooling, communicates profoundly low expectations to students about their capacity as learners” (p.28). He and other unschooling proponents believed that learning could happen anywhere and at any time (Holt, 1989; Schenwar, 2008), it was not necessary to have textbooks, a planned lesson, or grades to assess progress. For the families who desired educational freedom for their children, the choice was to abstain from the traditional rules of instruction used in formal educational settings.
In the 1980’s, the previously silent conservative Christian population began to homeschool in greater numbers due to the secularism of the traditional school system (Cloud, et al., 2001; Collom, 2005; Kleiner & Lord, 2000). This small non-mainstream movement became very powerful and banded together to prevent unwanted government regulations against state mandated school attendance laws and data reporting (Gaither, 2008; Isenberg, 2007). Conservative Christians successfully lobbied for legal status and few regulations for homeschooling families, and the lobbyists convinced congress not to hold them accountable for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards (Isenberg, 2007). Although fewer regulations allows for more creative, flexible teaching and learning interactions, it also introduces the possibility of irresponsible homeschooling practices that could harm, rather than enhance, student academics (West, 2009). Together, these very different movements, the countercultural pedagogues of the 1960-1970’s and the conservative ideologues of the 1980’s, seemed to desire the same outcome: freedom from the tyranny of institutionalized education (Isenberg, 2007).

**Reasons for Homeschooling**

The decision to homeschool is highly personal and the reasons behind the decision are unique to each family (Gathercole, 2007), the rationales can be divided into two broad categories, according to Van Galen (1988, 1991) and Madden (1991):

1. **Ideologues** – concerned about the perceived lack of morals and values in the traditional educational system

2. **Pedagogues** – concerned about the perceived lack of quality academic instruction

These categories can be further subdivided. Under the heading of “ideologues” are the parents that homeschool due to either religious reasons or those dissatisfied with the
public/private schools. Under the heading of “pedagogues” are the parents that homeschool because of academic concerns or children needing additional attention, such as gifted or special needs (Collom, 2005; Schenwar, 2008). Based on the most current figures available, since 2002, the number of homeschooled children has grown an estimated 7-8% each year ("The condition of education (NCES 2005-094)," 2005; Ray, 2004, 2010). Parent-educators are deciding in larger numbers each year to either withdraw their children from public or private schools, or to simply never enroll them at all (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Gaither, 2008), due to the increasing perception that public education is not truly educating.

The most prevalent reasons to homeschool, religious beliefs often combined with the desire to prevent peer contact with the secular world, is the driving force behind many parents’ decision to teach their children at home (Collom & Mitchell, 2005; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Kleiner & Lord, 2000). Homeschooling avoids the negative secular influences of public schools, such as exposure to offensive course materials and interactions with children from differing family structures (Gaither, 2008; Van Galen, 1988, 1991), while simultaneously maintaining familial bonds due to constant companionship and dynamic learning opportunities (Collom, 2005; Gathercole, 2007). Learning at home provides more occasions for families to spend not only copious amounts of time together, but to also share in educational experiences (Gathercole, 2007), that expand the academic horizons of all members.

For the parents choosing to homeschool for academic reasons, they believe they are quite capable of instructing their children and of having a higher success rate than formal education teachers. They simply believe they can ‘do school better’. These
parents are not satisfied with the quality of the academic instruction in traditional schools (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Isenberg, 2006, 2007), and therefore want to invest themselves in their children’s education so that they can influence the learning process and help them academically succeed (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). Home educators are able to focus specifically on one child or on a few and can give differentiated curriculum that fits the needs of the student. Researchers believe that the parent-educators must have a working knowledge of the material to be taught, as well as the instructional methods and skills necessary to make the educational experience a success (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; West, 2009). For the children as well as the parent-educators, when academic concerns are the basis for choosing to homeschool, then academic success is the goal for learning.

For other parents, there is a strong push to overcome the destructive stereotypes and monocultural curriculum (Collom, 2005; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009) prevalently taught in many traditional school settings. There are growing numbers of non-white parents choosing to home educate due to the consistent and ever-worsening “achievement gap” between students of color and white students (Gaither, 2008, p. 219). These homeschooling parents are dissatisfied with the formal school systems and are motivated to educate their children in their home. Due to concerns for the racial inaccuracy of educational materials which did not positively reflect African-Americans or allow for differentiated learning styles, African-American parents lobbied for changes in the curriculum to reflect historical contributions by their ancestors and different learning styles (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Kleiner & Lord, 2000), but have been unsuccessful so far. According to Fields-Smith and Williams (2009), the non-white
parents choosing to homeschool “represent a new category of home educator, which we call Ethnological, because they are concerned with negative stereotypes and labels within schools that are used to identify Black children” (p. 385). They educate at home because they perceive that the traditional school atmosphere continues to favor those of privilege over their children (Collom, 2005; Collom & Mitchell, 2005). Learning is a personal matter, and one many parents are choosing to invest their time and energy in so that their children will have the best educational chance for success, no matter the societal circumstances.

The last reason behind parents’ decisions to homeschool is family lifestyle situations. There are a small number of adolescents in the entertainment industry, in amateur or professional sports, or who are chronically ill or have special needs, that are homeschooled (Schenwar, 2008; Van Galen, 1991). According to West (2009), these students can be educated best by the people closest to them. Perhaps with their parents as educational advocates, the curriculum and peers to which these children are exposed will positively influence the acquisition of academic knowledge.

The push behind the decision to homeschool a child can come from a myriad of directions and for a number of reasons. These reasons are as varied as the family lifestyle, dissatisfaction – or even disenchantment – with the typical formal educational systems, a desire for greater academic instruction and the most prevalent one, religious and/or moral reasons. But whatever the motivation, the end results are children being segregated from their non-homeschooled peer group age-mates due to parental choices.
Social Engagement for Homeschoolers

According to Cogan (2010) and Basham, Merrifield and Hepburn (2007), there is a belief that homeschoolers suffer from a lack of social stimulation and engagement with their age-mates. There are concerns that when youth educated in the home complete the high school curriculum and embark on additional schooling or enter the workforce, they could encounter socialization problems due to the potential isolation of the homeschooled experience (Cogan, 2010; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; Thurlow, 2006; West, 2009). Those who are unfamiliar with homeschooling as a concept and are not acquainted with any families that choose to homeschool – could conceivably believe that parent-educators and their children self-segregate from the outside world solely to prevent contact with potentially harmful influences or to maintain academic focus. While it is true that homeschool families are protective and do focus on academics, except for extreme circumstances, it is not true that they refuse to engage with the world at-large.

Research has shown that not only are homeschoolers socially well-adjusted (Gathercole, 2007; Van Galen, 1991), but they are also involved in numerous community and extracurricular activities (Stevens, 2001). In Basham, et al’s, 2007 study comparing Canadian and American homeschooled children to traditionally schooled ones, it was discovered that the youth educated at home spent less time watching television, had fewer social interactional dysfunctions with peers, and were involved in numerous non-academic activities outside the home (see also Stevens, 2001). According to Ray (2004, 2005) homeschoolers are motivated and disciplined in their academic work, which could translate into college and/or career success. In another study, it was found that homeschooled children regularly interact not only with their intimate family, but also
with adults outside the family, traditionally schooled peers, and people from various socio-economic backgrounds (Medlin, 2000). Homeschoolers routinely interact with their social peers and many other individuals as they engage in learning. The difference between their interactions and traditionally schooled youth interactions is that they have more time to delve deeper into relationships and the flexibility to develop unconventional friendships due to the nature of their educational experience and its lack of inherent constraints on their time. Homeschoolers are socially engaging with their peers and their families face-to-face and by using the tools of their society – social media.

**Social Media**

For the purposes of this study, social media is defined as interactive online tools that allow social communications (Blankenship, 2011; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011), such as cell phones used for texting, Facebook, email, instant messaging (IM) – also called chat, and blogging. Specifically, Facebook, MySpace and other sites like these are further identified as social media networks or social networking sites. In this paper, “social media”, unless otherwise indicated, will reference the above-mentioned tools of communication.

On December 3, 1992, using a computer keyboard, Neil Papworth sent the first text message “Merry Christmas” to Richard Jarvis’s cell phone (Mohan, 2008; Shannon, 2007; Snowden, 2006). Since then, there has been an explosion in technology, especially in the realm of social media. For 21st century adolescents who have grown up with computers, digital recorders, and cell phones, the lack of privacy in the world today is a matter of consequence – it is something to be expected, and it comes with the privileges, or burdens, of owning this technology (Berson & Berson, 2003; A. P. Davis & McGrail,
2009; Larson, 1995; van Manen, 2010). Katz and Aakhus (2002) argue that “technology is the primary influencer of human life” (as cited in Campbell, 2006, p. 143). According to the latest data available from the Pew Internet & American Life Project, in 2009, 75% of American youth owned a highly-functioning cell phone and many had the capability to communicate not only in sound, but also in text (Lenhart, et al., 2010). This communication is in the form of text language and is known by several names: squeeze text, text speak, or textisms (Carrington, 2004; Drouin & Davis, 2009; Plester, et al., 2008). Users send communications to each other, called text messages or texts, via cell phones or other digital devices in order to participate in a form of social engagement known as “texting” or “text messaging.” The language used in these messages can be typed in a formal language register, a text language register, or a combination of both registers. Written communications in social media outlets in the form of text language can appear to be a code, but is truly a shortened form of writing.

**Texting: What is it?**

One of the first modern-day uses of shortened code writing for communication to the masses was during the 1980's. Prince, a musician and recording artist, used “abbreviations in song titles and lyrics that can now be commonly seen in…texting” (Snowden, 2006, p. 117). These abbreviations, seen in the title ‘I Would Die 4 U’ (Prince, 1984), were codes that were interesting and unusual for that time and generation. Now, almost three decades later, Gordon (2006) states that the “text message has become a coded language in its own right. A complex subculture of codes and subtle meanings has developed by using a combination of abbreviations and phonetics” (p.51). Carrington
(2004) gives this language a new name—“squeeze text” and lists the following examples (p.217):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WRU</td>
<td>where are you?</td>
<td>T2UL</td>
<td>talk to you later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-X</td>
<td>kiss</td>
<td>:-X me</td>
<td>kiss me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XLNT</td>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>:-)BDAY</td>
<td>happy birthday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNT</td>
<td>don’t</td>
<td>BCNU</td>
<td>be seeing you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B L8</td>
<td>be late</td>
<td>RUOK</td>
<td>are you okay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RU</td>
<td>are you</td>
<td>2DAY</td>
<td>today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THX</td>
<td>thanks</td>
<td>GR8</td>
<td>great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYI</td>
<td>for your information</td>
<td>WBU</td>
<td>what about you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(for a more detailed listing, please see Appendix A)

In squeeze text, syllables are shortened because vowels are removed, articles and conjunctions are deleted, acronyms are substituted for common phrases, numbers take the place of common grapheme units, and capitalizations are used or omitted according to personal preference. The idea is to send the written communication as quickly and succinctly as possible, thereby allowing for rapid transmission of thoughts slowed only by the speed at which one can type and hit the “send” button.

The shortened terms could be called “textisms” (Plester, et al., 2008). These researchers argue that “the use of text abbreviations…is dependent upon a certain level of phonological awareness…the most commonly used text abbreviations…are phonologically based, as in…”C U L8R”” (p.138). Drouin and Davis (2009) have coined the term “text speak” to refer to the language of texting. They write that text speak is “characterized by acronyms, emoticons [:-) for winking], and the deletion of unnecessary words, vowels, punctuation and capitalization” (p.50). Although it is at the discretion of the sender as to the text abbreviations he or she chooses to use, because texting is so widespread, especially among adolescents, the abbreviations are becoming somewhat standardized (Plester, et al., 2008).
The official name for language in a “text-based format” is Short Messaging Service (SMS) (Ling, 2005; Shannon, 2007), and it is characterized by many forms of communication that aid in creating, maintaining and broadening social networks (Snowden, 2006). Texting is seen as a fun and creative method of communication (Plester, et al., 2009; Snowden, 2006; Thurlow & Brown, 2003) that enhances social interactions (Crystal, 2008; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Whatever the name given to the new language created by texting, it is fast and functional – two very important features for adolescent communication.

**Texting among Adolescents**

Adolescents share information and learn from each other (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996; Purcell-Gates, 2002); therefore, it is also logical that they would begin to pass along text language and then use it with others. As more and more information becomes available digitally, youth are learning to multitask in order to attempt completion of the most tasks in as little time as possible (Gross, 2004; PBS, 2010, February 2). There is the idea that in learning to digitally multitask, a person’s way of thinking is changed (Chandler-Olcott & Lewis, 2010; Rich, 2008). “Increased availability of hypermediated digital text is having profound effects on how young people process information” (Alvermann, 2008, p. 16). The ways in which adolescents process the large amounts of information they receive influences how they use and produce this information.

Adolescents are producing more language than ever before, by way of text language (Bauerlein, 2010; Jago, 2009). Their language is growing and changing rapidly and they are becoming experts at writing in an informal register (Jago, 2009). For some,
texting has given them a confidence about writing that they have not ever had (Miners, 2008; O'Connor, 2005). For others, ‘code-switching’ between formal language and text language has become commonplace and they consider themselves better able to do this now after practicing texting (Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier, & Cheever, 2010). It is possible that familiarity with texting “may…raise awareness of the variety of language registers” and indicate “metalinguistic awareness to slip between one register of language and another” (Plester, et al., 2008, p. 143). Adolescents are texting and using text language in a myriad of ways, which will be evidenced in their communications as “textisms” become less of a novelty and more of a standard form of writing.

**How Does it Influence Literacy?**

Literacy was once thought of as the ability to read and write. Until the late 20th Century, speaking face-to-face and writing with a writing implement on a piece of paper continued to be the preferred modes of communication for societies that considered themselves to be comprised of literate, educate populations (Alvermann, 2008). But in this new technology-driven age, it is so much more and it has changed the manner in which people communicate (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Mayne, 2007). In the mid 1990’s, a group of educators, called the New London Group, conferenced on literature education in the 20th century (Mayne, 2007; Mills, 2009). According to Mills (2009), it was at this conference that the term “multiliteracies” was coined, which meant the definition of literacy was expanded to include “mass media, multimedia and the internet” (p. 104) and an increased awareness of the changing global market (see also Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). In the 21st century, adolescent literacy is no longer simply reading and writing printed text, it is intertwined with the social discourses and digital media in
multimodal communications (Alvermann, 2008; Gordin & Pea, 1995; McLean, 2010; Salzman, Dede, Loftin, & Chen, 1999). Multimodality includes single modes such as oral and written language, visual images, and “meaning-making” systems (e.g., facial expressions, body language and actions) in combinations (Carrington, 2004; Jewitt, Kress, Ogborn, & Tsatsarelis, 2001; Kress, 2000). In multimodality, the different modes are connected and working together to revolutionize communication, which is in turn changing the very structure of language (Kress, 2000; Matthewman, Blight, & Davies, 2004; Mills, 2009). Adolescents have been on the forefront of the movement almost since its inception and continue to be the demographic most likely to influence and be influenced by changes in language and technology (Gee, 2008). They are no longer separating their oral, written, and visual literacies from digital technology (Alvermann, 2008). Social media includes a combination of all of these literacies and it is the very multimodality of digital technology that makes it attractive to today’s youth.

Texting, a social media outlet commonly used for communications, has caused mixed reactions from literacy researchers who have studied the used of textisms in student literacy. According to Snowden (2006), some “have embraced its use as yet another positive sign of a ‘revolution’ in communication…[and some] regard it as another step toward the destruction of human civilization, beginning with written language” (p.114). There are those who see text speak as simply a play on language similar to word puzzles or poetry. Poems like “Grasshopper”, by E.E. Cummings, are said to be a “cultural precursor to…text use” (Snowden, 2006, p. 116). In his poetry, Cummings’ unique word placements, omissions of letters, and changes in standard language rules of case and punctuation could be considered a play of language, which is
how Snowden (2006) refers to SMS messages, “…deliberate and playful manipulation of the text” (p.116).

According to Mills (2009), the written language of social media, especially with regard to text language, differs from traditional formal language in a number of ways. Social media language is more:

- Abbreviated
- Spontaneous
- Interactive
- Informal
- Like spoken language
- Quickly transmitted (p.107)

These characteristics work together to create a unique linguistic entity embodied in the shortened codes and emoticons of text language. Oates (2004) reported that some researchers dismissed social media language outright, saying that textisms are slang and that they will go in and out of fashion. But, as the number of youth receiving cell phones grows each year and the age for receiving them continues to get younger (Lenhart, et al., 2010; Wood, Jackson, Hart, Plester, & Wilde, 2011), text messaging is exponentially increasing. A recent Pew Internet Study determined that 30% of teens send more than 100 texts a day, which is equal to at least 3000 a month (Lenhart, et al., 2010, p. 2). Youth are using text messaging to communicate and they are doing it in a manner heretofore unseen.

Children and adolescents today are prolific social communicators, they are very familiar with digital language (Prensky, 2001), and their outreach seems to be growing. Adolescents see themselves as part of a global community facilitated by online communications (Chandler-Olcott & Lewis, 2010; Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma,
Robison, & Weigel, 2009; Shaffer, 2007) and resulting in shortened forms of words in languages worldwide (Shannon, 2007). Those unfamiliar with a received text message can readily access online text language dictionaries, such as:


(For a more complete listing of textisms, please see Appendix A.) This would seem to indicate that textisms are more than a passing trend and will continue to have a place in our communicative languages.

Some researchers view the use of text language in communication as an aid to reading comprehension because it could reasonably be expected to increase phonological development, phonemic awareness and reading development, three of the components of literacy according to the National Reading Panel (2000), due to the notion that most textisms are using phonics as a basis for language building (Plester, Lerkkanen, Linjama, Rasku-Puttonen, & Littleton, 2011; Plester, et al., 2008; Plester, et al., 2009; Wood, et al., 2011). Texters may use text language in social media interactions because they have phonological awareness and can build on the phonics and spellings skills they already have in order to create textisms (Plester, et al., 2009) for unfamiliar words. The language choices a text messager makes could be informed by his/her literacy skills, which could then influence the recipient’s language choices.

In a recent study, Kemp (2011) found that when texters are making language choices in their digital messages, good readers are more likely to use textisms than poor readers. This potentially supports the previous assertions that text language could be aiding in the increase in youth literacy, as defined by the National Reading Panel. However, it could also support the idea that good readers are able to differentiate between
language registers more easily than poor readers and are thus able to appropriately use
textisms but maintain reading skills. As for writing skills, researchers believe the use of
text language encourages creativity which can inform both formal and informal writing
(Crystal, 2008; Plester, et al., 2008). However, the analysis of data from another study
suggested the use of text language had a negative influence on students’ formal writing,
but a positive influence on their informal writing (Rosen, et al., 2010). The casualness of
informal writing was enhanced by their familiarity with texting, according to these
researchers.

There are also those who believe text language is infiltrating adolescent literacy
and is doing irreparable harm (Jacobs, 2008; Oates, 2004; Powell & Dixon, 2011).
According to Jago (2009), good, skillful composition takes time and writing fast does not
produce excellent results. Students could be less skilled at composing complex,
thoughtful writings because they have become accustomed to fast written responses.

Bauerlein (2010) declares:

Today, students write more words than ever before. They write them faster, too.
What happens, though, when teenagers write fast? They select the first words
than come to mind, words that they hear and read and speak all the time. They
have an idea, a thought to express, and the vocabulary and sentence patterns they
are most accustomed to spring to mind; with the keyboard at hand, phrases go
right up on the screen, and the next thought proceeds. In other words, the
common language of their experience ends up on the page, yielding a flat blank,
conventional idiom of social exchange…because writing is a deep habit, when
students sit down and compose on a keyboard, they slide into the mode of writing they do most of the time on a keyboard – texting… (p.25).

Engagement with the digital world promotes instant gratification, but it keeps youth from developing patience in long-range plans (Brody, 2006). It takes experience and patience to develop the ability to write well, and neither of these is encouraged in the fast-paced world of social media.

Horowitz (2008) writes that there is concern that time with technology is time NOT spent on more academic activities such as sustained reading, building comprehension and higher order thinking. The sheer amount of time spent texting is infringing on students’ acquisition of academic knowledge, they are not being properly prepared for the reading comprehension skills needed for adulthood. Their out-of-school practices are influencing their in-school performances (Gutierrez & Beavis, 2010; Horowitz, 2008; Turner, 2009). According to Skaar (2009), even though traditional composition of lengthy formal papers is more difficult than interacting with digital technology, it should be the most important form of written expression over all social media communications. Students are saturated with technology, but the above-mentioned researchers hold to the belief that academic writing must be nurtured to flourish and it is in this manner that higher order thinking skills are developed.

Just as experience and mentors help students become apprenticed in academic writing, so too are these two factors critical in adolescents’ adeptness in texting. However, an unfortunate aspect of the prolific and enthusiastic use of technology is that not all adolescents are able to participate in the changing landscape of technology-influenced language. There are sometimes factors beyond a student’s control which
make participation in various forms of social media either unlikely or impossible. They must then depend on their more “tech-savvy” friends to share the community knowledge with them (Alvermann, 2008). Gee (2008) writes, “Component skills of…literacy [in this case, text language] must be practiced, and one cannot practice a skill one has not been exposed to, cannot engage in a social practice one has not been socialized into” (p.88). Students who are unable to practice text language until it becomes commonplace to them and must depend on their friends to lend them equipment to practice on and relay the text codes, would not be as familiar or as comfortable with the shortened codes as someone who uses them repeatedly every day. This lack of familiarity with text language could influence these students’ social and academic literacies. In today’s digital society, in order to gain acceptance and maintain membership in peer groups where they socially construct their language and learning, it is important that adolescents participate in social media.

**Peer Social and Academic Influences**

Adolescents are influenced by their peers. As a result, the choice of who they spend time with could be one of the most important factors in their development (Burns & Darling, 2002; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Young people create social groups in which there are expectations for entrance into the group and maintenance of membership. One of these expectations is based on discourse guidelines established by the peer group. If adolescents desire to become a part of the group and remain members, they must adhere to the established language rules (Borg, 2003; Little, Jordens, & Sayers, 2003). Because adolescents are typically socially and emotionally insecure, they are influenced by the ways in which they believe the members of their social group
potentially will react to a given situation (Burns & Darling, 2002; Rubin, et al., 1998). They do not yet have the maturity to navigate daily life with self-confidence, but being a part of the group helps instill the confidence that they lack as they make their way through their teen years (Burns & Darling, 2002; Frantz, 1970). Adolescents are interacting with their peers and shaping their social exchanges based on the desire to maintain membership in their peer groups and to engage with each other.

The fact that peers influence each other is not new information – but the ways in which peer influence affects academic achievement could be. During adolescence, many young people are thinking more about their future education because they are metacognitively aware that education is interwoven with potential career choice (Eccles, Vida, & Barber, 2004; Nurmi, 1991). Adolescents discuss future academic goals and plans with each (Malmberg, 1996), and there has been a positive relationship shown between improved academics and social interaction (Cullingford & Morrison, 1997; Kiuru, Aunola, Vuori, & Nurmi, 2007; Rubin, et al., 1998). In fact, according to Kiuru, et al., (2007), traditionally schooled young people believe they do not differ from their social group in expectations and motivations about, and success with their education (see also Chen, Chang, & Yunfeng, 2003; Plester, et al., 2011; Ryan, 2001). Peers communicate with each other and seek out each other’s opinions continuously. As a result, peers are influential both in and out of the classroom in social and academic situations (Cullingford & Morrison, 1997). It is possible that within the social realm of the adolescent world, the language they create among themselves can be found in their spoken, written and digital communications.
Missing Connections between Homeschoolers and Social Media Literacy

Ernie Smith (2002), an African-American linguist, writes, “Acquiring an additional code comes from identifying with the people who speak it, from connecting the language form with all that is self-affirming and esteem-building, inviting and fun” (p.39). Now more than ever, language is becoming less and less about just oral and written words and more and more about electronic ones, especially among adolescents. In my own literary lifetime, I have progressed from handwriting my academic assignments, to typing them on a typewriter, to inputting the information into a word processor, to finally typing my work on a laptop into a word processing program, from various locations. For many adolescents, the progression goes even further into using social media as a writing outlet. However, missing from the research is a connection between adolescent homeschoolers and social media literacy. Digital learning is becoming a part of the curriculum for traditional schools; however, youth educated in the home have an unknown background in this area since no official data exists concerning their prior instruction. Research needs to be undertaken to identify where adolescent homeschoolers are in their acquisition of digital media technology and communications, so that future instructors, either in a secondary or college classroom, or a workplace environment, can scaffold from their previous learning. Research into this area can also help educators and literacy researchers better understand what social media literacy means for the growing population of homeschooled adolescents and incorporate this information into the curriculum for inclusive teaching of previously homeschooled students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Lenses

As they socially interact with the people and the world around them, adolescents
learn from their peers as well as their educators. They are metacognitively aware of the
influences of their own group interactions and continually redefine their perceptions
about their environment in response to these social contacts (Youniss, 1983). Just as I
believe adolescents socially construct their identities, so too is meaning constructed;
therefore my epistemology for this particular study is rooted in Constructionism.
According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), a constructionist epistemology is based on
the idea that knowledge is constructed by social group interactions, not by isolated
individuals, and this knowledge is influenced by the context in which it is used. These
researchers write that they see the very framework of societal interactions as both integral
and necessary to an individual’s existence.

In this study, the concept of social interactions was manifested in the ways in
which the participants used texting. Who the adolescent homeschoolers texted as well as
the frequency with which they did so – influenced their social communications and
interactions. My focus on how adolescent homeschoolers use texting as written
communication situates literacy as social practice and reflects aspects of social
constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bruner, 2001). Additionally, sociocultural
theory, wherein culture mediates a person’s social experiences (Cole, 1990; Cole &
Wertsch, 1996) and higher mental functions, such as reading and the creation of language, are social in origin (Au, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978), informs my study.

The theory of social constructionism represented in Berger and Luckmann’s pivotal 1966 work, The Social Construction of Reality, includes a belief that man and his social sphere were mutually intertwined. Guided by this belief, I sought a better understanding of the ways in which texting with their peers has influenced homeschoolers’ social and academic writing and how these participants then influence each other in their language use. As adolescents communicate, they tailor their interactions to meet the expectations of their peers (Burns & Darling, 2002). My focus was on how adolescent homeschoolers similarly used text language in their lives and how they made meaning of this language, so that this new information could add to the existing literature on the factors which influence the differentiation of language registers used in formal and informal writing situations. In addition, the knowledge of these adolescents’ use of texting and text language within their social groups could increase the understanding of the influence of social media on adolescents as a whole.

Vygotsky is often said to be the preeminent scholar on the theory of sociocultural learning. In his 1978 work, Mind in Society, he wrote, “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p.90). Vygotsky believed that more complex ideas and learning stemmed as a direct result from interactions with one’s social environment. He also believed that children learned about cultural priorities when they made use of the tools of society and by inclusion in activities with others who shared a cultural background (Vygotsky, 1978). These tools can be
symbolic or physical and they differ with the prioritized skills and abilities of the group. In the westernized world, the societal tools of the adolescent culture most often involve technology in the form of cell phones or computers (Lantolf, 2000). Therefore, as adolescents are interacting with their peers and using the tools of their society, they are learning. In this study of homeschoolers’ interactions via social tools such as texting, instant messaging (IM), social networking sites, and email, Vygotsky’s approach to the sociocultural theory of learning enabled me to better understand the ways in which the participants’ use of text language was involved in their written and spoken communications, creation of peer language, and daily lives.

Case Study Methodology

I conducted my research using the case study method because I wanted to focus on one particular group, homeschoolers who use texting on a regular basis, and come to a better understanding of one aspect of their social language and literacy practices: how the language of texting could be influencing their academic writing (Yin, 2004). A benefit to using the case study method is that one type of phenomena can be studied in depth by taking a holistic approach, using multiple data sources and member checking. I chose to view the participants as a socially constructed group constituting one case for this study. Using Dyson and Genishi’s (2005) explanation of qualitative case studies, I focused on the meaning made in the particular context of these homeschooled participants in their everyday lives interacting with text language in social and academic discourses. The collection of data for this research involved interviews, observations, and writing samples. The participants were asked to review the analysis of the collected data as a form of member checking.
One consistent criticism of the case study method is that the results of the research are typically not able to be duplicated because the participants and the situation are unique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although a single case study’s results are not generalizable to other studies, the findings of the study can reify particular theoretical stances about literacy learning such as Social Constructionism and Sociocultural Learning Theory. The findings could also fuel additional studies involving different student populations such as single gendered adolescent homeschooler social media users as well as those homeschoolers who are partially isolated from the usual societal interactions with peers and must use social media to establish and/or maintain peer connection. Subsequent studies could focus on the construction of social identities and the influence of the newly developing language of texting. For this research study on homeschoolers, texting, and literacy, my proposed questions of inquiry were:

1. In what ways are texting and text language a part of adolescent homeschoolers’ lives?
2. In what ways do their text language and academic discourses inform their homeschool-based writing?

In order to facilitate understanding, I have provided definitions below of common phrases used throughout this research study.

- **Adolescent homeschooler** – a person aged 13-17 who receives his or her education in a home setting taught by a parent/educator.

- **Text Language** – language derived from the “use of acronyms, emoticons [: -) for winking], and the deletion of unnecessary words, vowels, punctuation and capitalization” (Drouin & Davis, 2009, p. 50), usually for fast and functional
electronic communication. Other names for text language include textisms and squeeze text.

- **Academic Discourse** – manner of communication usually required and used in an educational or scholarly setting.

- **Social Media** - interactive online tools that allow social communications (Blankenship, 2011; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011), such as cell phones used for texting, Facebook, email, instant messaging (IM) – also called chat, and blogging.

**Participants**

While I do not homeschool my own children, I was welcomed into the homeschooling community because I am acquainted with several families who support home education through my church. One adult member of this community had an adolescent daughter who fit the criteria for my study. I briefly spoke with the adult about the broad parameters of my research. She offered her daughter as my first participant. During the initial telephone screening of possible study participants, the daughter agreed to participate. For my subsequent participants, I used snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2011) wherein my first participant recommended other possible participants, making use of “natural social networks” (Noy, 2008). That person then suggested other possible participants. This technique generated ten possible participants, four males and six females, and their respective parent-educators. During my initial telephone contact with each possible adolescent participant, I asked questions based on my eligibility criteria, all of which they had to meet, but two of the possible participants were not in the age range. The criteria were:
1. they must be between the ages of 13-17
2. not educated in a formal setting
3. have used the social media of texting, so that they are familiar with and know how to apply the ever-evolving language of texting.

For each adolescent represented, a parent-educator also participated in the study. In order to prevent recognition of and to provide anonymity for my eight participants and their parent-educators, I used pseudonyms for all individuals included in the study. This was done to protect the privacy of the participants and to ensure no one is harmed as a result of this research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Eight homeschooled adolescents, five females and three males, between the ages of fourteen and seventeen participated in this study. The adolescent participants’ experience with texting on electronic devices varied from a few months to several years, but all of them claimed to have had prior knowledge of text language before they began texting due to their participation in some form of social media such as social networking sites, instant messaging (IM), or online chatting. Social media prevalently showcases text language and all of the participants engage in the use of text language on them. However, one participant, Thad, does not have a Facebook account and does not email his friends, so his use of text language is restricted to texting and some online chatting.

Six of the eight participants attend a weekly homeschool co-op held at a local church. The remaining two participants, Anna and Claudia, are educated in the home by their mothers, with Anna receiving additional writing instruction from a tutor in her home.
For the remainder of this section, I will discuss each participant individually and his or her family. Due to the number of participants involved in the study, I have provided a table at the end of this section to illustrate the ways in which the adolescents are connected to texting, to each other and to me.

Leslie

Leslie is a 16-year-old female and has been texting for about three years. She describes herself as someone who frequently texts because she needs to know one quick thing and does not want to become involved in a long phone conversation (personal communication, February 25, 2011). Leslie was a bit reserved at first, but then loosened up and spoke more freely as the conversation lengthened. She is an avid runner and swimmer, and an excellent student. She is currently employed at a local retail shop and babysits when time permits. Leslie attends a homeschool co-op at a local Protestant church once a week, another group for math instruction and a third for chemistry. In each of these homeschooling groups, her instructors create the assignments and she has until the next class meeting to complete them.

Leslie’s three younger brothers, Harry, Mitchell and Rodney, are also home-educated. Harry attends the same homeschool co-op as Leslie. Mitchell and Rodney are exclusively homeschooled by their mother. Leslie’s mother, Kelly, did not enter intentionally into home education. Leslie was enrolled for a Catholic Parochial Kindergarten, but was wait-listed because the family was not Catholic. On advice from the school administration, Kelly decided to homeschool Leslie until a spot opened up in a class, but it never did. The family moved to a different district and Leslie then attended public school for first, second and half of third grade. Harry began Kindergarten, but
attended only half of the year. At this time, Leslie’s parents were becoming more and more concerned about the lack of personal relationships that the children seemed to have with their teachers and the lack of attention they were receiving in their respective classrooms. Then, because Kelly had had the experience homeschooling during Leslie’s Kindergarten year, she felt confident that she could undertake the task. Both parents feel that homeschooling has given them more quality time as a family and allowed the adults to shield the children from perceived harmful societal influences.

Kelly is a homemaker and a parent-educator with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. Leslie’s father, Braxton, is an independent businessman and also has a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration.

Claudia

Claudia is a 16-year-old female and has been texting for approximately 5 months. She describes herself as someone who texts to see how her friends are doing, but probably emails more than she texts (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Claudia was soft-spoken, but impeccably polite and gracious during our visits. Although she is surrounded by siblings, she often feels socially isolated from her peers due to lack of face-to-face contact. Claudia virtually connects with her friends and family using social media, but finds that she rarely has opportunities to “hang out” due to familial and academic responsibilities. Claudia has recently gotten her driver’s license, but because her father must use one car for work and there is only one other vehicle for family transportation, she does not have the freedom to leave home to meet with her friends. She does, however, sometimes teach music lessons to children from her church to earn money, but always under her mother’s supervision.
Claudia has been exclusively homeschooled by her mother, Camille, for her entire academic career, and is a high achiever. There are seven additional younger siblings in the home, ranging in age from 3 to 14, and one is on the way. Two of the siblings are females and five are males. According to both parents, homeschooling was the best option for the academic instruction of their children. Education within the home allows for protection from potentially harmful societal influence, while at the same time affording the children the flexibility of academic study designed around each one’s individual needs.

Claudia’s mother, Camille was a high school Chemistry and Biology teacher and a high school volleyball coach prior to becoming a mother. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Secondary Science Education. Camille currently runs an in-home business and is a parent-educator. Her father, Blake, has a Bachelor’s degree in Accounting, and works outside the home full-time.

Chad

Chad is a 17-year-old male and has been texting for approximately 4 years. He describes himself as someone who likes to text because it’s convenient (personal communication, February, 15, 2011). Chad was polite, but a bit reserved during our visits. He is an avid soccer player and currently has three part-time jobs in addition to his academic responsibilities. He is often the event organizer, a natural leader for his peer group, and a good student. Chad has experienced receiving his education from several different sources. He began his academic career in the home environment, but then transitioned to attending private Christian school. But two years ago when private school was no longer an option due to financial constraints, Chad’s parents chose the
homeschool co-op for his educational needs because they felt the curriculum was more challenging than the local public schools. He attends once a week and is given his assignments that he must complete before the next class meeting. He is also tutored in math twice a week and science once a week in separate homeschooling groups.

Both Chad’s older sister, Catherine, and younger brother, Jesse, attend the same homeschool co-op. However, his younger sister, Jackie, is enrolled in the local public elementary school because she has developmental difficulties that are best met with resources available in this setting. Chad’s mother, Dena, works outside the home on a part-time basis and is also a parent-educator with a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism. His father, Grant, works on a full-time basis outside the home and has a Bachelor’s degree in English.

**Chelsea**

Chelsea is a 15-year-old female and has been texting for around 9 months. She describes herself as a prolific texter and will “text about anything” (personal communication, February 24, 2011). Chelsea is bright, articulate and funny. She plays soccer and often helps Chad organize social events for the peer group. Because she worries that people unfamiliar with homeschooling will think the entire concept is strange or unusual and ask a lot of questions, Chelsea tells those who ask that she attends a private school. She is gregarious and eager to engage with others, whether they are educated in the home or are traditionally educated. She babysits frequently, but is not regularly employed. Chelsea currently attends a homeschool co-op once a week at a local Protestant church, where she has all of her classes except for math and science and is an excellent student. Two days a week she is tutored in math from a separate
homeschool group and one day a week she is tutored in chemistry with a third
homeschool group. In sum, Chelsea regularly attends three different homeschool groups
four days a week. In each one, she is given her assignments and is expected to complete
them before the next scheduled meeting of the class.

Chelsea and her younger sister, Evangeline, attend the same homeschool co-op
once a week. The rest of the week, Evangeline is taught at home by their mother,
Meredith. Her younger brother, Larry, is exclusively homeschooled at present. Chelsea
began her schooling by attending a private Christian school, but Meredith had mixed
emotions due to her absence within the family dynamics each school day. At this time,
she was not familiar with homeschooling and did not feel it was an option for her family.
However, due to financial constraints of sending two children to private school, when it
was time for Evangeline to begin her schooling, Meredith actively began to research the
concept of home education. At first, Chelsea’s father, Wyatt, was not completely
convinced that home-education was a viable option. But through his own research, he
warmed to the idea. Both parents now feel that homeschooling is a ministry and the
sacrifices everyone makes are well worth the benefits afforded their family in the way of
stronger familial bonds. Since making this decision, the children have been educated by
their mother through 5th grade and then they enroll in the local homeschool co-op.

Meredith is a homemaker and a parent-educator with a Bachelor’s degree in
Psychology and a Master’s degree in Counseling. Wyatt is an independent businessman
and has a Bachelor’s degree in Graphic Design. The family is active in the local
Protestant church that houses the homeschool co-op. Both parents volunteer their time to
mentor members through established church programs. In addition, Meredith disciples
adolescents and Wyatt disciples young boys in the church through the Youth Bible Fellowship program (Sunday School).

**Thad**

Thad is a 14-year-old male and has been texting for approximately a year. Thad describes himself as someone who texts because his friends do (personal communication, March 3, 2011). Thad was polite, if a bit distracted during our time together. He plays soccer with a rec league team and enjoys being with his friends. This is his first year to attend a homeschool co-op, where he receives his assignments and must complete them before the next class meeting. His mother, Jacqueline, teaches math to Thad and her other children. By all accounts, he is a good student.

Thad’s three younger brothers, Gavin, Hank, and Frederick, are all educated exclusively in the home environment. Thad’s mother, Jacquelyn, is a homemaker and parent-educator with a Bachelor’s degree in Interior Design. His father, Luke, is an independent businessman and holds a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration.

Thad began his academic career in a private school because his parents wanted him to have a biblical view of learning. However, when Frederick was in Mother’s Morning Out once a week for half a day at the same location, Jacquelyn would check on Thad and she believed instruction was being overlooked for the ease of entertaining with a movie. She would take him home with her so that she did not have to return to the school for pick up and the teacher would instruct her to go over his math that they were going to do later that day with him. Then, Jacquelyn decided it was not a far leap from instructing math once a week to full instruction daily for the children. The added bonus
was that they would no longer pay tuition. Luke was not convinced at first, but after he did some research, he changed his mind and became an advocate.

Anna

Anna is a 15-year-old female who has been texting for approximately one year. She describes herself as someone who likes to text because she can do it in a hurry and check in on her friends (personal communication, February 21, 2011). Anna is talkative and interested in social engagement. She enjoys church youth group activities and finds herself a part of several different peer groups because she can adapt socially to various situations and circumstances. Anna does not enjoy school and said that she would much rather socialize than study. She is currently homeschooled by her mother, Stephanie, for all academic subjects except writing. For this, she is tutored once a week in her home by an undergraduate English major, Matthew, who attends a local four-year public university. Anna, who had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, attended public elementary school. Anna’s increasing difficulty with social and academic engagement in public school and her parents’ rising dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of academic rigor required in the public schools, ultimately led to their decision to homeschool Anna, and subsequently her other siblings. Stephanie became the primary teacher for all of her children following Anna’s 5th grade school year.

Anna’s younger brother, Steven, continues to be homeschooled with her, while her older brother, Timothy, began attending the local public high school last school year. Anna’s mother, Stephanie, is currently a homemaker and a parent-educator with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. Her father, Clint, was a high school teacher, but is now a professor at a local four-year public university. The family
regularly attends a local Protestant church where they are active members and play vital roles in the church organization. Both parents mentor adolescents in a religious setting. In addition, Stephanie disciples college-age women in the church, while Clint mentors college students as a part of his professional responsibilities in his classes on campus.

Kayla

Kayla is a 16 year-old female and has been texting for around two years. She describes herself as someone who is not excited about texting, but does it because her friends do (personal communication, February 13, 2011). Kayla is open and engaging and enjoys speaking with others face-to-face. She is an academic high achiever and diligently works toward perfection with each assignment. Kayla is currently employed at a local retail shop and babysits when time permits. She attends a homeschool co-op held at a local Protestant church where the family has their membership. However, for Math and Science, the classes not taught at the co-op, she is homeschooled by her mother, Sharon. Kayla began her academic career in a private preschool, which both she and her parents loved for the first year. The second year was a completely different experience and academics did not hold her interest. It was at this time that both parents made the decision to begin home education.

Kayla’s younger sister, Emma, began private school this current school year due to the desire for more varied social interactions. Her youngest sister, Maria, and two younger brothers, Charlie and Adam, are all home-educated. Kayla’s mother, Sharon, is a homemaker and parent-educator with a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education and a Master’s degree in Educational Psychology. Her father, Chester, is a criminal
investigator with the local police force. He has a Bachelor’s degree in Law Enforcement Criminal Justice and a Master’s degree in Public Administration.

The family is active in the local Protestant church where the local homeschool co-op is located. Sharon and Chester both volunteer their time to mentor members through established church programs. In addition, Sharon disciples college-age youth and Chester teaches classes at a local junior college for those wanting to join the police force.

**Chuck**

Chuck is a 14-year-old male who has been texting for about a year. He describes himself as someone who likes to text because he can get and share information quickly (personal communication, February 28, 2011). Chuck was quiet and reserved. He plays soccer with others from his homeschool co-op and studies in his off-time. Chuck had been educated in the home exclusively by his mother, Shannon, until the past two years. He now attends a homeschool co-op one day a week held at the local Protestant church where the family has their membership. The remaining days of the week, he independently works on the assignments given to him by the co-op teacher and Shannon teaches the subjects not covered at the co-op.

Chuck has two older sisters and one younger sister, all of whom have been homeschooled. The two older sisters, Kacie and Martha, were educated in the home through the 10th grade. The oldest then went on to attend a university and the other finished out her high school years at the local public school. Chuck’s youngest sister is Becky and she is fully home-educated.

The family is actively involved in the local Protestant church where the homeschool co-op is housed. Both Chuck’s mother, Shannon, and his father, Peter,
mentor members through participation in various programs run by the church. Shannon is a homemaker and a parent-educator. She has a Bachelor’s degree in English and a Master’s degree in Business Administration. Peter is a respected local businessman with a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism. They initially began homeschooling their children due to their perceived lack of academic rigor in traditional schools. However, as time passed, they saw the time spent with their children as opportunities to disciple them and to “best equip them according to their God-given gifts and abilities to serve Him and His people” (Shannon, email message, February 16, 2011).

Although Chuck was interviewed twice for the study, he was reluctant to answer the questions or elaborate on his answers. He fit the criteria for the study, but in analyzing the data gathered from my time with him, his reticent behavior in the interview resulted in my inability to include him in this study.

In order to illuminate the connections among the participants, texting, and myself, I have included the following table listed in order of my connection to the participants. With the exception of Claudia, all of the participants are socially connected to at least two other adolescents in the study. All of them have been texting between 5 months and 4 years, and each one has at least a tenuous connection to me.

**List of Participants - Table 1** - (arranged in order of my connection; non-church, church, church plus)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Length of Time Texting</th>
<th>Friends in Participant Group</th>
<th>My Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Kayla, Chad, Chelsea</td>
<td>My children are on the same swim team as the younger children in this family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td></td>
<td>My husband and I taught two of her younger brothers in a religious training class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Friendship Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Kayla, Chelsea, Leslie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>Kayla, Chad, Leslie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Anna, Chuck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Thad, Chuck, Kayla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Anna, Chad, Chelsea, Leslie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck (not included in analysis)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Thad, Anna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Researcher’s Role**

I was a participant observer for the data collection part of the study. A participant observer “collects data by participating in the daily life of those he or she is studying” (Mac an Ghaill (1994), as cited in M. K. Smith, "What is Participant Observation?", 1997, para. 4). My social constructionism theoretical frame supports my position as a participant-observer. Through my interactions with all of the participants and through our social positions as adolescents, students, parent-educators, researcher, friends and acquaintances, the data was socially constructed. While I interviewed the adolescents and their parent-educators, I was a participant in the sessions because although the session began with several preplanned questions, the participants, by their responses to the questions, and I, by my follow-up responses and/or questions, constructed the flow of discourse together. I also participated in these interviews by taking notes.

**Methods**

It is imperative to gather more than one kind of data for a case study. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), “Many sources of data . . .[are] better in a study than a single
source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding…” (p.115). Being able to effectively use multiple sources of data prevents reliance on any one, shallow basis of information, resulting in less chance of either researcher or participant bias (Yin, 2004). Although researcher perception and participation were both integral to the qualitative process, it was imperative that the data was collected with sensitivity for the participants’ viewpoints and insights. Thus, I collected three types of data over the course of four months: interviews, writing samples and field notes. More information about each type of data will be discussed in subsequent sections.

The data was collected in two stages. The first stage involved initial interviews with all eight participants and their parent-educators, for a first stage total of sixteen interviews. Each interview of the adolescent and the parent-educator was separately digitally recorded, field notes were taken, and written and digital artifacts were collected from the adolescent participants during February and the beginning of March, 2011. All digital artifacts were printed for easier coding. Each interview was transcribed and analysis began.

The second stage of data collection involved re-interviewing five of the eight adolescent participants, one parent-educator and member checking. Two of the adolescent interviews and the parent-educator second interview were conducted in February and the remaining three adolescent second interviews were in May, 2011, for a total of 6 second stage interviews. All of these interviews were digitally recorded, field notes were taken, and written artifacts were collected from the May participants. Each interview was transcribed and analysis continued.
Data collection took place within the participants’ homes for seven of the eight initial interviews and at the church for one initial interview. Home and church are comfortable settings for the homeschoolers as they are educated either academically or religiously within these settings. For the second interviews, four of the five took place in the adolescents’ homes and one occurred at church. My analysis of these three main sources of data enabled me to discuss both how homeschoolers were influenced and how they believed they were influenced by using text language in their everyday lives.

**Data Sources**

**Data Collection - Table 2:** The table below visually represents which data was collected from whom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Member Checking</th>
<th>Digital Recording</th>
<th>Observations/Field Notes</th>
<th>Self-Selected School-Based Writings</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Emails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>7 of 8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Educator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>7 of 8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

Although sets of questions were planned for each group, the design was to simply begin the discussion of the homeschoolers’ and their parent-educators’ perceptions of their text language usage, since “the researcher must always be prepared to let go of the plan and jump on the opportunities the interview situation presents” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 106). The interviews were semi-structured in that there were pre-planned questions to begin the discussion (See Appendices B and C), but the path of the ensuing discourse was constructed by either the participants’ or the parents’ responses to my
questions and my replies, then subsequent questions. I began with open-ended questions, allowed the participant to answer, and then probed for deeper understanding. I used the topics of text language and writing to guide the interviews as we interacted. In this way, in the context of our time spent together, the participants and I were constructing our conversation and making meaning of our exchanges together (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

I initially interviewed both the adolescent homeschoolers and the parent-educators one time each. I then followed-up with second interviews for five of the eight participants and one parent-educator, for a total of twenty-two interviews. Three of the participants were not re-interviewed due to scheduling conflicts or time constraints. For all of the interviews, I attempted to speak with the participants and their parent-educators separately so that each interviewee felt comfortable and able to speak freely. I was successful for all but one adolescent. This participant’s mother had not met me prior to our interview and was uncomfortable leaving her child alone with me for the initial interview. However, for the second interview, the mother allowed me to speak with the participant privately. Member checking was met with approval from the participants and parent-educators; therefore, my contact with them was complete. Initial interviews lasted no longer than 90 minutes for each participant and 60 minutes for each parent-educator. Four of the five second participant interviews lasted no more than 30 minutes. One second participant interview lasted 60 minutes. The second parent-educator interview lasted no longer than 30 minutes.

For each homeschooled participant, I began with the participant interview. I then collected both the written and the digital samples. For the samples, the youth had been
asked during the initial telephone screening to ready any social exchanges and academic writings they would like to share. The request was made to include all drafts of formal papers along with teacher comments. An additional request was made to provide digital samples, in the form of text messages and emails, where possible. The participants self-selected these samples from assignments and interactions within that and the previous semester. I ended the session with the parent-educator interview and a request to contact me if he/she wanted to share any more information or data with me. For the second interviews with the adolescents, I began with follow-up questions from the first interview. I then discussed the previously collected written and digital samples with the participant and took notes on the responses. I ended each one with a reminder to contact me with any further information that he/she would like to share. Two parent-educators also contacted me following initial interviews in order to provide additional information they had forgotten to share.

For the homeschoolers’ interviews, I began with a set of questions (see Appendix B) developed to better understand the ways in which homeschoolers use text language, their familiarity with this ever-evolving language, and if they believe texting is changing how they communicate in writing. The questions were open-ended and after the participant responded, I then asked more questions to probe for a greater understanding of the answer that had been given. My role with the adolescents was adult researcher to whom they could impart their digital knowledge and with whom they could construct the meaning behind social interactions and language use. For the parent-educator interviews, I also began with a set of questions (see Appendix C). These questions are similar in form to the adolescent interviews, but my goal with the parent-educator sessions was to
probe for their observations on their child’s use of texting and text language in both their social and academic communications. Again, the questions were open-ended and I probed for a deeper understanding of the answers given to me. My role with the parent-educators was that of a colleague/friend/confidante with whom they could share their thoughts and attempt to construct the meaning behind digital communications for their children.

Following the initial interview sessions, I contacted five of the eight participants and one parent-educator for follow-up interviews. I met with seven of the eight participants and parent-educators to review the gathered data and analysis for member checking. When I attempted contact for the remaining participant, the parent-educator indicated that they would be unable to schedule time for data review, but that she was confident in my analysis. When I met with them, each participant reviewed the data that was relevant to him/her. The parent/educators reviewed the data pertaining to their specific interviews.

I digitally recorded all interview sessions. I hand wrote field notes as I interviewed so that I would have a running record of the actual occurrences, my thoughts and ideas, and the participants’ actions. I transcribed each of the interviews in full using the software program “Express Scribe” on my computer, in order to realize the intricacies of language use between the participants and the researcher, and to fully capture the participants’ views on the topic of text language usage and its influence on written communication. The adolescents and the parent-educators that participated in member checking confirmed my analysis of their spoken communications.
Writing Samples

Several self-selected writing samples were collected from each adolescent participant. Allowing the participants to choose which samples to share inherently biased the research process. They were free to choose samples that showcased their language skills to the best of their abilities in both formal and informal registers. However, the alternative lens with which to view this limitation was that having control over the samples chosen encouraged an environment in which the adolescents were more likely to freely converse because they were not uncomfortable that their private, embarrassing information was being shared.

Writing samples were collected in the form of self-selected homeschool-based writing, texts, chats, and emails that were produced the semester of and the semester prior to the onset of this study. These samples were collected in order to discover the usage of text language in the adolescents’ writing prior to participating in this study, yet within a time frame that showcased their most current methods and language choices and where they could recollect the contexts in which the text were written. I requested from the participants 2-3 self-selected homeschool-writings that they would like to share. I asked that these writings include as many drafts as possible as well as the final copy. In all writing samples, I looked for uses of text language. I also requested self-selected texts, chats, and emails from the participants that they would like to share. I wanted to see the ways in which the participants potentially used text language in multiple formats and for different purposes. In addition, I asked the homeschoolers to please contact me in the future if they had additional writing they would like to share. This was a chance for the participants to elaborate on their previous thoughts expressed in the interviews by
sending other samples for inclusion in the study. Three participants contacted me to send additional text messages as material for inclusion in the study. Two contacted me by email and one by text message.

The adolescents were asked and all agreed to participate in the interviews, digital recording of the interviews, self-selected school-based writings, texts, and emails. All adolescents were asked to participate in member checking, however, one participant’s parent elected for them to refrain from member checking. The parent-educators were asked and agreed to participate in the interviews and member checking, and digital recording of the interviews. One parent-educator did not participate in member checking due to a scheduling conflict.

In order to detail the data collected as well as the involvement of each participant, I have included the following table (Table 3) listed by participant pseudonyms. With the exception of Thad, who did not provide a formal academic paper but did provide examples of class assignments, all of the participants shared both formal academic papers and digital samples with me for writing analysis. Each adolescent provided a social, or informal, writing sample and many engaged in other forms of social media in addition to texting.

**Participant Involvement - Table 3** – The table below gives a visual representation of the participants, data collected, and number of interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Academic Classwork Papers</th>
<th>Academic Formal Papers</th>
<th>Social Writings</th>
<th>Text Samples</th>
<th>Chat (IM) Samples</th>
<th>Emails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 with drafts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 total – 1 with drafts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 total - 1 w/drafts; 1 without</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 total - 1 w/drafts; 1 without</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 with drafts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 total - 1 w/drafts; 1 without</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 with drafts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 with drafts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

I used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis Method to analyze the collected data. Thematic Analysis is a “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A theme is a recurring idea found in the data that symbolizes a pattern of meaning and there were several that emerged as the data was studied and evaluated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using themes to analyze data is especially good for “investigating an under-researched area”, which would include adolescent homeschoolers’ literacy. Analysis using this method is flexible due to the researcher’s evaluation of patterned discourses in data. It worked for this study because during my interviews of the participants and their parent-educators, we constructed the dialogue together. Thematic Analysis allowed me to evaluate the information that was constructed from data collection and to categorize it according to repeated ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006),
“Thematic analysis can be…a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (p.81). I analyzed my data to identify patterns of text language in adolescent homeschoolers’ literacy as influenced by their peers through texting.

I first become familiar with the data by transcribing, rereading, taking notes, etc. I spent several hours on each transcript to ensure full recordings of the interviewees’ words. I then reread each one, taking notes on ideas that were important in each transcript. It was at this point that I realized I needed to re-interview the first two participants and one parent-educator due to lack of researcher follow-up on questions during the initial interviews. I completed this step by transferring the transcribed interviews onto individual conversation grids and boldfacing each interviewee’s words so that they stood out from my words as the researcher.

The second step was to begin initial coding of all documents. I again read through each transcript and wrote key words or phrases next to each substantive line of participant data within the interview transcripts for all participants and parent-educators. I repeated this process with all field notes, written artifacts and digitally printed artifacts. I completed this step with another reading of all collected data and transcripts to ascertain initial codes were in place.

The third step was to find themes within the initial codes, to sort data according to themes, and to collate the themes. This is similar to Corbin & Strauss’s (2008) axial coding method, where one makes connections between the codes and organizes the data according to the new connections. I went through the conversation grids and through the computer program “Microsoft Excel”, I was able to sort and collate the data by initial
themes. I completed this step by combining the data from the conversation grids and the written and digitally printed artifacts into like themes.

The fourth step was to review the themes and then create thematic maps. I came up with two overarching themes, which reflected my two research questions, and then six subthemes. When I generated the thematic maps, I combined two of the subthemes, deciding on a total of five subthemes. I completed this step with a review of the data to confirm all information was included, coded, and themed.

The fifth step was to define and name the themes, refining the overall story each one tells, generating definitions and detailing specifics. I began with the thematic maps which detailed all five subthemes and wrote a short synopsis of each one, discussing the information to be contained within each part. I then sorted the data that could support the information into sections under each synopsis. I defined the specific terms that could be unclear in the final paper. It was at this point in the analysis that I decided I needed to re-interview in order to delve deeper into the subject matter three of the remaining six adolescent participants who had not had a second interview. It was also during this step that I came to the conclusion I could not use one of my participants. Although I had interviewed him twice, he was reluctant to engage either time and did not provide information that enabled me to gain his perspective and insights into my research questions. I then excluded him. I engaged in member checking with seven of the eight participants and their parent-educators. The remaining parent-educator refrained from participation for both herself and her child due to scheduling conflicts. I completed this step with a review of the data and rearrangement of some information.
For the last step, I checked my data analysis to ensure equal representation for the participants and that the data truly expressed, unless otherwise stated, the beliefs of the majority of the adolescent homeschoolers as a single “case”. This allowed me to revisit data that appeared to represent ideas not included in my research questions to ensure I had not overlooked important information. Some of the data also provided additional context to the data which enabled me to better answer my research questions. I selected supporting quotations and data that related to research questions. I then searched through the themed, coded conversation grids and other collected data to find suitable quotations and documentation.

**Limitations**

In attempting to discover the ways in which adolescent homeschoolers were using text language and how that language and their academic discourses are potentially coming together in their homeschool-based writings, I was limited first by the dual role I played as a researcher and as an acquaintance to many of the participants and as a friend to many of the parent-educators. My closeness to participants could have potentially helped or hindered the interview process. Because most of them were familiar with me and felt comfortable conversing, this probably enabled them to open up to me. However, this familiarity could also have limited their conversations if they were fearful that sensitive information would be repeated to their parents. In an effort to be as impartial as possible in this study, I distanced myself from the participants and their parents from the onset of research, which has been socially and emotionally difficult due to the nature of our relationships.
I was also limited not only by my focus on this particular group of homeschooled adolescents, due to the homogeneous religious nature of the group, but also by the degree of control they had in choosing which writing samples to share. While I cannot offer assurances that this population of homeschoolers is representative of all homeschooled adolescents, the findings from this study are similar to findings from other adolescent studies. The participants’ self-selection of writing samples in the form of texts, chats, emails and homeschool-based writings influenced and directed my understanding of their use of text language because they chose which examples to provide and thus, how their academic and social personas would be reflected in their writings. Given the pressure to and desire for “proper” language use, and the potential sensitivity of topics in some text messages, emails or other written artifacts, the writing samples volunteered cannot provide a holistic view of their compositions. While their academic writing samples, final or draft copies, did not contain text language, the informal writing and digital communications did feature this social discourse register. The limitation of the participants’ choice in writing samples is offset by their desire to share aspects of their lives that may not have otherwise been shared.

At the onset of this study, I was not a texter. Texting and text language was a novelty and a young person’s domain in which I had no desire or reason to participate, I believed. But the more I researched and the more I talked with the adolescent homeschoolers, the more fascinated I became in this social media tool. I embarked on the texting journey in March, 2011, and have yet to become proficient. Being able to communicate with other texters via this medium has given me an appreciation for the
nuances of the languages used in conversations. I would say that my lack of knowledge about the texting world was a limitation to this study.

In closing, this case study on homeschooled adolescents and the influence of texting on their social and academic discourses has not drawn definitive conclusions for the homeschooled population at large due to the homogeneous population and small sample size of this study. However, it does begin to ponder the questions about social and academic literacy for this understudied group of adolescents and is a starting point for subsequent research. The ideas that language is ever-evolving and adolescents are the pioneers of change were the springboards for the research questions that led to this case study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION ONE – HOW IS TEXTING INFLUENCING HOMESCHOOLERS’ LIVES?

The findings presented in this section address my first research question, “In what ways are texting and text language part of adolescent homeschoolers’ lives?” I explored this question in an effort to better understand my findings for my second research question which focused on their texting and academic writing. My analysis of the data regarding the ways in which texting and text language are part of the homeschoolers’ lives resulted in three core themes: a) Employing Text Language in Social Discourse, b) Texting to Communicate in Social Media, and c) Making Language Choices in Texting.

Within the first theme, Employing Text Language in Social Discourse, I discuss affinity groups and their significance to homeschoolers, especially as enacted through their use of text language in Facebook, email, online chat (IM), and handwritten informal written notes. I then discuss how the homeschoolers’ text language has also become part of their oral vernacular. The second theme, Texting to Communicate in Social Media, encompasses the ways in which texting is integral to homeschoolers’ social relationships and self-efficacy. My discussion focuses on the homeschoolers’ perceived necessity of connecting quickly and corresponding frequently with others as a way of confirming and sustaining their social and emotional well-being. Such connections sustain relationships in physical and virtual worlds. I then conclude with a listing and discussion about the common texting topics in these homeschoolers’ world.
Within the third theme, Making Language Choices in Texting, I discuss the ways in which the participants differentiate between language registers and the fact that researchers are skeptical of the ability to differentiate. Within this discussion I speak explicitly to the ways in which the homeschoolers’ have created a “text language grammar” which they use to form particular affinity groups. The homeschoolers modify and create new language to use among themselves, that both serves as a means of signaling their membership within the group and flagging a non-member for misuse. For them, adherence to the peer group language standards is a necessity for membership.

Through the course of the chapter, there will be some overlap of discussion related to social media outlets (e.g., chats or messaging in Facebook) and the representation of text language as indicative of informal, oral communication. These two topics were well represented within data which fit within multiple themes. For these instances, I discuss the data in-depth within the most representative theme and then refer back to those discussions in the affiliated themes. For example, when the homeschoolers were asked about the use of text language in alternate social media besides texting, many declared that they used it on Facebook. However, on this social networking site, a user can send messages, chat, and update statuses, all which potentially call for separate language registers. Therefore, the data was included under the broad topic of Facebook with references to using Facebook when discussing the homeschoolers’ types of text exchanges and use of different linguistic registers.

**Employing Text Language in Social Discourse**

Text messaging is a form of communication that incorporates written language. People who text often use shortened forms of words, abbreviations, changed sentence
structures, etc., (called textisms or text language, see pg. 18 of this document and Appendix A for examples) in order to hasten their queries and replies, to be part of a group, to fit the message into the 160 character limit, and to be creative with language (Kemp, 2011; Kemp & Bushnell, 2011; Rosen, et al., 2010). As adolescents use more text language and it becomes more familiar, textisms begin to emerge in other social media outlets. The adolescent homeschooled participants in this study intentionally and unintentionally used text language in their social discourses as an integral component of their everyday lives.

Affinity groups were integral to the homeschoolers’ uses and contexts of texting. Gee (2009) has advocated for adolescent affinity groups, or informal learning cultures, as important for social identity and development. The essential characteristics of an affinity group are:

1. The group is organized around a common interest in which there are no strict dividing lines between members (e.g. gender, age, etc.)
2. No one person is the boss - one may assume leadership responsibilities for a time, but then relinquish to another with more expertise or information
3. All members know the unwritten and unspoken guidelines for group membership and the ideas behind which the group has been established
4. Only group information that has previously been agreed-upon may be publicly shared (Gee, 2007, pp. 192-193)

The adolescent homeschoolers in this study each belonged to a minimum of two affinity groups. For six of the eight participants, one of their affinity groups was comprised of peers who attended the same homeschool co-op as they did. The group was
organized around how their attained their education: no one person was the indefinite
leader, and the guidelines concerning communication and behavior were known to the
group, but were tacit. For the two homeschoolers who did not attend the co-op, their
academic affinity group was based on the people with whom they interacted concerning
education. For Anna, it was her homeschooled cousins and her traditionally-schooled
friends. For Claudia, it was her siblings and her cousins. The second affinity group to
which every homeschooler belonged was based on their peer group. The groups were
different for many of the participants, but the characteristics were the same. Each one
was organized around peers they communicated with, there was no defined leader, and
though the guidelines were a bit more relaxed for the peer affinity groups, they remained
in place, unwritten and unspoken.

For some participants, their affinity groups overlapped in that some of the same
people were in both groups for them. For instance, an adolescent could attend the
homeschool co-op, have friends and attend church with peers from the co-op and
traditional school, and then work with peers that are not associated with any of the above-
mentioned groups. In that case, the academic, peer, and church affinity groups would
potentially overlap with some of the same members, but the work group would not. The
guidelines for each group are based on whatever the group decides is important for
maintenance of membership.

An important point to be made about affinity groups is that the members of the
group can instinctively recognize when someone else is a member of the same group. If
the person is a member, he or she will share the similar language and behaviors as the rest
of the group because according to researchers, adolescents tailor their language
interactions to meet the expectations of their peers (Burns & Darling, 2002). The
members of the group learn from each other and socially construct their peer language
use. If the person is not a member of the group and does not use the same language
construction, the other members will know and will often shun that person (Gee, 2007,
2009). Throughout my discussion of how the adolescent homeschoolers employed text
language in their social discourses, I will refer to affinity groups and to the standards of
membership. It is the affinity groups’ guidelines for communications that the
homeschoolers used most often for social and academic communications and text
language.

**Written Text Language**

While there are occasions of spoken text language between the homeschoolers in
this study, the adolescent homeschoolers and their parents stated that the textisms that
appeared in the homeschoolers’ language are mostly in written form. In addition to text
messaging, the participants used text language in a variety of social media
communications, such as email, Facebook, online chat (or IM-instant messaging), Skype,
as well as informal written notes. Social media sites, such as Facebook, allow users to
engage with others who share the same interests (Ito et al., 2008), while honing their
social skills (Ito, et al., 2008; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011), and learning as they
interact (Gee, 1999; Lantolf, 2000). According to Roberts, Foehr and Rideout (2005),
parental rules about media (including social media) affect the ways in which youth are
exposed to and experience digital technology. For the youth in this study, the research is
especially significant. One of the benefits of homeschooling is time spent together for
parents and their children. All of the homeschoolers’ parents stated at some point in their
interviews that they set limits for usage, knew how, when, and with whom their adolescents used social media, and oftentimes read the written exchanges. The parents are setting and enforcing rules for the use of social media and their rules influence the homeschoolers’ peer social media interactions, of which texting is a large part. Below are the most common social media outlets the homeschoolers discussed with regards to how texting and text language is a part of their lives: Facebook, email, instant messaging (IM) – also called chat or chatting, and informal written notes.

**Facebook**

With the exception of Thad, the participants all used Facebook to digitally interact on a social basis with their peer affinity group using text language. Facebook allowed for peer-to-peer engagement without the strict discourse boundaries typically seen in use by this affinity group. The homeschoolers conversed with each other and with other users of Facebook in a discourse manner comfortable for the group, even though it was not a strictly formal use of language. Thad did not use text language on Facebook because his parents prohibited him from having a Facebook account. His mother, Jacquelyn, felt that social media sites are an invasion of privacy and that children should have real friends. She said, “We grew up with a group of friends and those were your friends and that’s why they were friends ’cuz you could talk to them. Not just post it for the world” (personal communication, March 3, 2011). Jacquelyn saw Facebook friends as not being real friends because digital messaging is not really talking. For her, talking involved a face-to-face meeting with oral conversation, not words on a screen passed through cyberspace at a lightning-fast speed. Thus, Thad does not use text language on Facebook because he does not interact on this or any other similar social networking site.
During our first interview, Kayla said, “I might use it [text language] on Facebook. Maybe sometimes... like if I'm chatting with someone on Facebook…” (personal communication, February 13, 2011). Kayla was a reluctant texter, and did not frequently interact via text messaging as the other participants did. As such, she was not as comfortable with text language as the other homeschoolers were. For her, chatting on Facebook was at such a quick pace that she did not have time to write everything out if she wanted to reply before her communication partner sent another inquiry, thus putting her even farther behind and causing the partner to stop chatting. Just as in her text messaging, which is discussed in a later section, Kayla reluctantly used some abbreviations and familiar acronyms, left off commas and capitals, and generally misspelled easy words in order to maintain her membership in this affinity group.

Chelsea agreed with Kayla about her own text language usage and added that she also used textisms on, “Facebook statuses, chats on Facebook... Facebook messages between people...like a group message or whatever” (personal communication, February 24, 2011). Chelsea did not limit her use of text language to Facebook status changes and chats. She also included group messaging, which was used to gather members of their peer group together for social events. According to Chelsea, Chad was usually the instigator of the idea because he was good at organizing and planning, but she usually put together the message for the group since she was good with language and was more comfortable socially contacting people. Chelsea said if she and Chad were planning something, she would probably use “Facebook messages, Facebook event invitations, writing out what the event is...if you're just wanting to send out a message to 10 of your closest friends, ‘Hey come over Fri nite 4 a movie and pizza’, something like that”
 Chelsea and Chad often worked together, each playing to their strengths, in order to organize and host social gatherings, using language common to their peer affinity group which included textisms, emoticons, and added letters for emphasis.

Chad had a differing opinion about Facebook status updates. During the interview with his mother, Dena turned to Chad and commented, “I rarely see text language used in his Facebook status posts, that kind of thing. You write short sentences sometimes in your statuses, but I don't think you abbreviate or use text language” (personal communication, February 15, 2011). Chad quickly retorted, “That's what status is...short sentences. I don’t abbreviate status” (personal communication, February 15, 2011). His tone of voice and his words quickly identified his disdain for the practice of abbreviating status updates on Facebook posts. A status update, or called simply a “status” is a short message telling how a person is feeling, what they are doing, where they are going, etc. Chad is of the opinion that the purpose of the Facebook status medium is a quick update; therefore the communication output should be only a few words – no need for an abbreviation. He does not use text language in status updates, only in chat or messages.

**Email**

Thad, Anna, Claudia, and Leslie all included text language on occasion in their emails to peers and family. For Thad, text language is used in emails with friends or with his cousin who is on mission overseas. Thad said that he does email his study group leader from the homeschool co-op, but he would not use text language in those interactions because they would be academic in nature, not social. Leslie said that while she mainly texts, “[On] the rare occasions that I do have an email conversation with a
friend, I would [use text language]” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). Leslie attempted to homogenize all of her peer communications – her texts, emails, chats, etc., should all look the same and use the same kind of language. Although Thad, Anna, Claudia and Leslie do not use email frequently to communicate, it is a social media outlet where they feel comfortable engaging with their peers and family in an informal language that sometimes involves the use of textisms.

Connecting socially with their peers is a strong motivator for adolescents in the use of text messaging (Brown, 1990, 2004; Conti-Ramsden, Durkin, & Simkin, 2010; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). Two of the benefits to all interactive social media parties is stronger peer relations and more of a feeling of belonging to the group (Corey, 2001; Katz & Aspden, 1997; Lin, Sun, Lee, & Wu, 2007). Adolescents feel they are not alone in their joys or their sorrows and whatever the circumstance, they feel comforted when they share with a peer. In an email conversation with a younger friend, Anna comforted Mallory concerning a scheduled event.

Line 1: Anna: Heyy!

Line 2: Mallory: What r u doing I am sad!

Line 3: Anna: Watching tv! Wbu? Aw why are you sad?

Line 4: Mallory: Because my parents are going on a 4 day trip yeah I know that it’s only 4 days but I Am still going to miss them ALOT!! I DONT WANT MY PARENTS 2 LEAVE! They are going to sandigo!! Yeah they r really lucky! I am going to miss my parents alot!!! Well my grandparents are really nice and fun yeah fun like kinda!! But I am still going to miss them alot I already miss them and they haven’t even left yet!!! They r leaving in the
morning but not really early!! I know I have said this alot but this is my last time I miss my pArents!!!

Line 5: Anna: Oh ): I’m sorry ): that’s not fun!! ): when I was your age my parents went on a 2 week trip to Alaska © (email communication, January 25, 2011).

In the above email exchange, Anna was able to comfort Mallory because she understood how stressful physical separation could be. At the elementary level before she was homeschooled, Anna was diagnosed with a social anxiety disorder which made it difficult for her to adapt socially in groups and have a difficult time with separation from her parents. As she has matured, she has learned to control much of her anxiety and is able to offer words of wisdom to others who might have similar feelings. In line 3, Anna uses a familiar textism “wbu”, which means “what about you” to engage with Mallory and ask about her emotional state of sadness. Then after Mallory details why she’s sad in line 4, Anna uses emoticons and lots of exclamation marks to show she understands and that she feels badly for Mallory. Anna reached beyond her own intimate world using text language in social media to make a connection with Mallory about her personal life and to strengthen the bonds of their friendship with a shared understanding of difficult experiences.

**Instant messaging**

Online chatting, or Instant Messaging (IM), is also a popular place to find text language (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008; Roberts, et al., 2005). The social discourse in this digital medium is the same as that used in text messaging and the homeschoolers discussed, as researchers before them had discovered, that texting and
chatting are similar to oral conversations (Durkin, et al., 2011; Gross, Juvonen, & Gable, 2002; Jacobs, 2008; Plester, et al., 2008) rather than written ones. Chad, Leslie, and Anna used text language in online chatting with friends and Thad used it in Skyping with his cousin who is on mission in Asia. Leslie commented during her interview that she would use it in “…Facebook chat, or Gmail chat” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). Chad said he would use it in “chat…” (personal communication, February 15, 2011) and Anna agreed when she said that she uses textisms in, “Chatting, like IM chatting…” (personal communication, February 3, 2011) was another place she used text language. The homeschoolers see chatting as talking, but through a digital device. Therefore, they are more apt to be creative with their use of language because they are attempting to manipulate the words so that they read the way that they sound.

In an IM example from Leslie, she and Chelsea are chatting about a recent negative texting experience Chelsea had with a fellow member of their homeschool co-op. Phil had romantic feelings for Chelsea, but was reluctant to express them. Instead, he disguised his emotions and overstepped his boundaries, which only served to confuse Chelsea. In attempting to garner Chelsea’s attention for himself, he told her that it was in her best interest to cease contact with her two best friends because he felt they were not a good academic influence on her. When Chelsea questioned him and his motives, he retorted that he knew best and that she should do what he said because he “was older and smarter” than her. When she refused, Phil was embarrassed. He then resisted no opportunity to speak to people about Chelsea’s certain academic demise due to the negative influence of her friends. Chelsea was confused and hurt by these events and she shares her feelings with Leslie in the following IM exchanges:
Line 1: Chelsea: my song for phil….. hahaha SOOOO TRUEEEE. “mean” by T Swift…..go look up the lyrics. Haha

Line 2: Leslie: OH MY GOSH YES! all you are is mean, and a liar, and pathetic, and alone in life and MEAN and MEAN and MEAN hahahaha

Line 3: Chelsea: with your words like knives and swords and weapons that you use against me… you….picking on the weaker man…

Line 4: you pointed out my flaws again as if i dont ALREADY SEE them…. 

Line 5: i can see you years from now in a bar….talking OVER a football game (cause he wont be watching) with that same BIG LOUD OPINION…but NOBODYs listening!!

Line 6: Leslie: hahahahaha YES! he’ll be talking about the economy and obama and healthcare and who knows what…. and all the drunk football fans will get mad and beat him up.

Line 7: ………wow, that was mean. dont quote me on that. lol

Line 8: Chelsea: haha yeahhh….and i wont. haha i just thought the song was rather perfect. lol

Line 9: Leslie: hahaha yupppp absolutely perfect. is it bad that i think about mrs. p everytime i hear it….?

Line 10: Chelsea: hahaha yahhhh thts probably not so good……hahaha (IM communication, February 7, 2011)
The two girls socially bonded via online chatting over a particular negative experience with this male member of their class. Leslie knew Phil and could contribute to the conversation, but she was not personally involved in the digital altercation. As will be discussed in later sections, the intimate friends used a form of text language unique to their specific peer group, as seen by the addition of extra letters in words and all caps for words of extreme emotion. They also indicated they were aware of different language registers when they did not abbreviate the song lyrics or convert them to textisms. Overall, the adolescents felt that the language used in chatting was similar to having a face-to-face conversation in which they strengthened their friendship bonds and, as shown in the above example, they communicated via text language with that intention.

**Informal written notes**

For a few of the female participants, text language could be found in informal social communications. Claudia said she uses textisms “…sometimes on cards or notes”, but “never on thank you notes” (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Based on my conversations with Claudia and my analysis of her text artifacts, it appears as though she considers cards and notes, except for thank you notes, as opportunities for playful and creative expressions with language. Text language exemplified such playfulness and creativity when she used emoticons, shortened words, and added extra punctuation for emphasis.

The following example of a note exchanged between Chelsea and Liza during their homeschool co-op meeting, speaks to the prevalence of textisms in their lives.
Line 1: Liza: last night I was chatting 2 him on fb & he was like I wish I could talk to u right now b/c I miss not seeing u b/c I havent seen him in like 3 weeks b/c youth is over till jan.

Line 2: Chelsea: oh

Line 3: Liza: does michael txt u a lot?

Line 4: Chelsea: yeah 😊 he’s called me once though 😊

Line 5: Liza: yeah same here (written communication, December 7, 2010)

It is interesting that the two girls are discussing online chatting and text messaging in a note using texting discourse. They have shared their lives and loves with each other by way of informal social communication using the language of their peer group. Even though there are several abbreviations, as in lines 1 and 3, and a lack of punctuation and capitalization in all the lines, some rules of grammar have been maintained. In line 1, all of the “I” pronouns are capitalized and even though January is abbreviated and not capitalized, there is a period at the end. In line 3, there is a question mark at the end of the sentence and in line 4, an apostrophe is used to show possession. There is only one line where emoticons are used and that is line 4. This is used to show emotion, and in this case, happiness that she has received one phone call from her romantic interest.

Although it will be discussed in depth in a later section, it is worth mentioning that text messaging is the preferred method of communication among peers and in the above example, the girls mention that their guy friends have texted them numerous times, but each one has only received one phone call.

Liza and Chelsea are comfortable with each other and use familiar language to communicate their meanings. Their handwritten note is similar to a series of text
messages in that the paper was passed back and forth, the girls wrote something and had to wait for the other to respond, and text language was used throughout. The communication reads very much like an oral communication with the very long initial message and insertion of “like” two different times in line 1. When read aloud, it sounds as if a person is speaking quickly to someone familiar to them. Also, in lines 4 and 5, both responses begin with “yeah”, which is often a remark made to a friend in agreement. Liza and Chelsea are not confused by the changes to formal language and have put a combination of codes together to form the message that they both understand. They are using text language to communicate in the form of social messages.

When the adolescent homeschoolers are socially interacting, there are two dominant factors that determine the discourse used in their communications. The first is the audience’s perceived level of understanding for the interaction. When the topic of telephone messages was addressed, Kayla said, “If I’m on the phone with someone and they tell me to write down a quick note for Mom, then I probably would [use text language]. If they said, ‘Just tell her I’ll talk to her later’, I might just put ‘ttyl’, you know, real quick just to get it down” (personal communication, February 13, 2011). Kayla’s mother, Sharon, frequently texts with college students and is subsequently very familiar with textisms. In fact, both Sharon and Kayla individually suggested that Sharon possibly texted more and understood and used more text language than Kayla did on a regular basis. Kayla admitted using text language infrequently, but thought that in the instance of a phone message, she would sacrifice correct grammar for expedient message-taking. Kayla perceived that her mother understood basic text language, therefore, using this language register in her social communication was acceptable.
The second factor that determines discourse for the homeschoolers is their perceived audience. If they believe the recipient of their message would be accepting of text language in their social communications, then they are more likely to use this language register. In Claudia’s interview, she said she would not use text language in an informal phone message to her mom because “I’d want to make sure that she got the right information. My mom and dad want us to be pretty careful” (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Claudia’s mother, Camille, discourages the use of text language in written communications and would not approve of their use in messages meant for her or any adult. Also, both Claudia and her parents are aware that an abbreviated word could be misunderstood and confusion is not permissible when it comes to writing down phone messages for her mother’s in-home business. Claudia perceived that her mother would not permit text language in phone messages; therefore using this language register was not acceptable. Choice of register was determined by level of understanding and audience in each of these examples.

**Spoken Text Language**

For at least half of the homeschoolers, text language is becoming increasingly part of their oral vernacular. In her first interview, Anna said, “When I talk, sometimes I’ll say ‘jk’ or ‘lol’” (personal communication, February 3, 2011). She indicated that she used these acronyms to lighten the topic about whatever she and her peers were speaking because sometimes people could take conversations too seriously. This is very similar to the way in which emoticons are used in a text message – to show sarcasm or to lighten the message if it could be taken in a way that is too serious. For Anna, the use of text
language in texting has become so commonplace that she is now voicing the former exclusively written language.

According to Claudia, one particular word that she used in texting is now being spoken. Giving the example, she said, “Like the word, ‘sweet’. Usually I’ll text ‘sweet’ and I’ll end up saying it. Whereas, I probably wouldn’t if I didn’t text it” (personal communication, February 23, 2011). The more Claudia has used this word in written social discourse, the more familiar it has become and the more it has emerged into her spoken social discourse. Like Anna, Claudia is voicing what was once exclusively written in digital format.

Chad also mentioned that he used one text phrase in spoken discourse. The phrase, “totes adorbs” is a common one among the homeschool co-op adolescents. It means “totally adorable” and is often used in social media messages as a commentary on the world-at-large. Chad said that he used the phrase because he thinks it’s “funny” (personal communication, May 30, 2011). Although most times this particular phrase is used in texting or online chats, Chad is choosing to orally incorporate it in his social language register.

Thad, however, did not believe texting had influenced his spoken discourse in any form. He believed he knew the difference between formal language and text language and that he spoke without using text language. His mother, Jacquelyn, disagreed and commented during her interview that even though he did not think text language was entering into his spoken literacy, she was hearing it. She said, “Maybe he's just not realizing it...'cuz I can hear him. He has things to say that sound like little catchy phrases that come from texting” (personal communication, March 3, 2011). For Thad, textisms
had potentially entered into his social discourse through text messaging and had become so familiar that he did not recognize when he used them in oration. Like Anna and Claudia, Thad could possibly be speaking text language aloud (according to his mother), and it appears it could be unbeknownst to him.

The homeschooled adolescents’ discussions about how typed texted messages have begun to inform spoken language illustrate how a language register frequently used in one mode of communication will become familiar and begin to influence other forms of communication (Baron, 2009; Rosen, et al., 2010). The influence of a person’s social interactions, including language, as they communicate with the world around them, is the very essence of sociocultural theory of learning (Au, 1997; Cole, 1990; Cole & Wertsch, 1996). Some of the adolescent homeschoolers use text language in both written and spoken registers because this is the language with which they feel most comfortable around their peers. Chelsea believes text language, or “youth code” (Plester, et al., 2009) infiltrates adolescent spoken language because academic discourse is not usually spoken discourse. She said in our first interview, “I mean, you use it when you’re talking to your friends in person. You don’t usually use Standard English when you’re talking to your buddies” (personal communication, February 24, 2011). Chelsea has thought through the patterns of communication and come to the same conclusion renowned linguists the world over have discovered: although no one speaks their language in its formal discourse form perfectly all the time (Kretzschmar, 2005, 2008), adolescents in general are the least likely to do so (Eckert, 2004). The homeschooled adolescents in this study were no different. They conformed to the language standards of their affinity group, but
they did not adhere to formal language standards when they were communicating with their peers, as seen by the use of text language throughout their interactions.

Whether in written or spoken form, the adolescent homeschoolers’ conversations contained textisms. Text language was found in all manner of social media used by the homeschoolers, in their informal written notes such as those passed in school, and those taken as phone messages. The homeschoolers use variations of text language as a signal that they belong to a particular affinity group and in order to maintain that membership, some adolescents reluctantly or even unknowingly bring out the occasional textism. Familiarity with this social language register has influenced all facets of these adolescents’ peer communications.

**Texting to Communicate in Social Media**

According to a recent Pew Internet Study, social media is becoming essential to American adolescents’ lives (Lenhart, et al., 2008). As they are interacting with their peers and social media, they are increasing their literacy (Vygotsky, 1978). The new language created by texting is informing social relationships (Carrington, 2004) as adolescents’ online behavior mirrors that of their offline lives (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). As indicated in the previous theme, the offline and online behaviors of the adolescent homeschoolers in this study are collectively similar, but their online communications appear to be a bit bolder than their face-to-face conversations. This boldness translates to text messaging with newly acquired friends, displaying feelings onscreen via emoticons and excited punctuation. Texting was a necessary and expeditious endeavor for all of the participants.
Texting as a Social Necessity

As with adolescents who participate in traditional schools, the adolescent homeschoolers overwhelmingly chose to use text messaging to connect with those most important to them at any time and over long distances (Kemp, 2011; Kemp & Bushnell, 2011; Lenhart, et al., 2010). They show care and concern for others when they check in on their family or friends and when they follow up after being together. In his first interview, when asked why he texted, Chad said:

I text because it's a form of communication and sometimes you can't just call people. It's easier to do...you can whip out your phone and send a text message, then put it away. It's easy and to the point, I guess (personal communication, February 15, 2011).

Anna, Claudia and Leslie all concurred and deemed communicating and connecting with friends as their main motivation for sending text messages. Additionally, Chad and Chelsea believed it was important to have text messaging available as a communication tool since some people will respond to texts but will not answer a phone call. However, Kayla was a somewhat reluctant texter. She preferred to call people on the telephone, but realized that more of her peers prefer to converse via text. She said in our initial interview, “I'm not excited about texting…so it’s only when I have to use it that I text” (personal communication, February 13, 2011). She felt that technology was moving ahead of her and in order to keep up with her peers and maintain her membership in the affinity group, she must text as all the others do, even if it is not her preferred mode of communication. During the interview with Kayla’s mom, she confirmed Kayla’s reluctance and added:
I don't think she likes to text, as much as it's become the only way to communicate with people. She will call and call people because she'll go, "It would be so much easier if I could just get them on the phone and ask them this so we can clarify instead of texting back and forth and not understanding what we're really trying to say." But the same person that's texting will not pick up the phone and answer. So, I think it's become a necessity that she text to even coordinate (personal communication, February 13, 2011).

Kayla much preferred oral communications, but in order to fit in with her peers and to be considered a member of this affinity group, she felt she had to adhere to the digital communication guidelines the others in the group employed. For her, texting is not so much a fun activity as it is a necessary conversational tool.

Even though Thad’s mother, Jacquelyn, does not equate digital communication with real conversations with friends, she and Thad’s father, Luke, are the ones that suggested texting as a method of social communication for him. Jacquelyn said:

We originally offered it a year ago when we were changing churches and we knew it was going to be a new school thing for him with the homeschool co-op. So, we just thought a connection with some old friends and keeping up with new friends, it was the thing to do (personal communication, March 3, 2011).

They felt they were assisting Thad in his social adjustment to his new surroundings by giving him digital communication possibilities. They believed they were helping him adjust to the new surroundings in both his religious and academic lives, while at the same time maintaining contact with peers from the previous life. When Thad was asked why he texted, he commented:
I would call them (friends), but that usually wouldn't work too well...mainly because they'd be like, ‘Just text me. I'm in a place where it's loud.’ Or they couldn't really talk all the time. But, then they'd just be like, ‘You can text me.’ It kind of died out (phone calls with friends). I text because my friends do, I guess. That's probably just the main reason (personal communication, March 3, 2011).

Thad, like Kayla, would prefer to have an oral conversation, but has found that his peer group’s preference for digital communication is one of the guiding factors for his membership in the group. Even though he would prefer face-to-face communications, in order to maintain his place in the affinity group, he reluctantly adheres to the conversational guidelines established by his peers: text messaging.

**Connecting Quickly**

All of the homeschoolers felt that text messaging was used to share information quicker, but with the exceptions of Anna and Chad, the participants thought texting was mainly for answers to simple questions and about less important topics than an oral conversation. Leslie summed up the sentiments of the group best when she stated:

I think most [of the] time for me, I text if it’s just like one quick thing that I need to know, and I don't really want to get in a phone conversation. Or...I'll talk to someone on the phone if it’s like...a big issue that I want to talk about, for a long time. You know, something I want to tell them about, say more than I would in a text. But like, text... I think I text less important things... If it's something I just need to know right now and I don't really care about it, I'll just text you, but, if...I want to tell you a story or just, to have time to talk, that's when I would call (personal communication, February 25, 2011).
Although texting was important as a means of social discourse for Leslie, she was metacognitively aware that this medium may not be the best manner in which to transfer important information. Recent research in digital communication provides additional support for Leslie’s rationale. Baron (2009), Madell and Muncer (2007), and Geser (2004) found that deciding who to text or call is all about control, that youth text to have short conversations instead of long phone calls, and they tend to save phone calls for long conversations or serious events, rather than texting the information. Leslie intuitively understands that text messaging is a social media tool to be used for information gathering, fun conversations, and quick inquiry. It is not a medium fit for deep, thoughtful, insightful communications that run the risk of misunderstandings.

Like Leslie, several of the participants related that if the conversation was serious or lengthy, they would rather place a telephone call than attempt communication on a digital device that did not allow for hearing tone of voice. The difficulty of communicating emotions through digital devices has been discussed by Max van Manen (2010). When studying the ways in which the idea of privacy is changing because of social media, he stated, “It is well-nigh impossible to text message online through phatic intimacies (words that convey emotions) such as glances and gestures, tone of voice and physiognomic expressions, attentiveness and corporeal subtleties” (p.1025). The lack of social cues (e.g., facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, etc.) available through texting can change or even negate the meaning of the message, which can then lead to misunderstanding in the online communication world. Both Thad and Leslie indicated that they would rather engage in a higher-stakes conversation in a manner in which there is less chance of misunderstandings due to an absence of social cues.
Thad’s criteria for opting for an oral instead of a texted conversation further echoes van Manen’s beliefs about texting-based communications: “You call them [fellow homeschoolers] if you have a serious question about school, to make sure you got something right, make sure you’re ready for your test” (personal communication, March 3, 2011). Thad was concerned that a text message could be construed in a more casual manner than a question about school-based assignments required. Therefore, he opted to place a phone call so that he could participate in the serious academic conversations when necessary. Leslie agrees with Thad and states, “If it’s something important I'll call” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). For her, text messaging is reserved for communications of a less-important nature; however, serious topics are orally discussed on the telephone in order to delve more deeply into the conversation and avoid miscommunications. Unfortunately, misunderstandings are common in the world of social media and users attempt to avoid instances of the greatest possibility of occurrence by reserving text messaging for simple conversations, not in-depth, serious ones (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Weigel & Gardner, 2009). For these adolescents, important topics are better suited for oral interactions rather than digital ones.

Chad works three jobs and is a prolific texter, who, according to his estimations, texts on two separate devices a combination of 200-300 messages a day. He admitted that he rarely, if ever used his phone to call anyone, which is similar to findings from other studies involving adolescents (Conti-Ramsden, et al., 2010; Durkin, Whitehouse, Jaquet, Ziatas, & Walker, 2010). Chad texts because, “It's easier to do. It's not only easier, it's faster. And that's one of the main things that comes with texting…it's quicker than calling them on the phone, so why not make a fast thing even faster?” (personal
communication, February 15, 2011). Texting allowed Chad to attend to several activities and several communications virtually simultaneously and in his opinion, hugely benefitted his active lifestyle. In his adolescent world of social, educational, recreational, and work demands, Chad felt he simply did not have time to orally communicate with people concerning information that he could type onto a screen, touch “send”, and move on.

The idea that texting allows for multi-tasking is supported by current adolescent research (Madell & Muncer, 2007; "Texting and students' well-being," 2009) that says youth prefer texting over notes and phone calls as their mode of communication because it allows them to attend to several task at the same time. In this hyperactive, overstimulated, technologically-connected world that adolescents live in, multitasking seems to be a preferred mode of operations. However, attending to several tasks at once does not guarantee that those tasks are performed well. Recent research supports the idea that adolescents believe they are accomplishing more and doing the tasks better; but, the indications are that they are really only paying surface attention to each task and not performing well at any of them (PBS, 2010, February 2; Wallis, 2006). Time needs to be taken to attend to each task individually so that they are given the depth and breadth of necessary attention, according to the above-mentioned research. Chad believed texting helped him accomplish many things faster, but as research suggests, not necessarily better.

**Corresponding Frequently**

Each homeschooler communicated via texting multiple times each day with someone in their family, whether it was siblings, grandparents, or parents, and with their
peers. Although most used digital communication to reach out to those they frequently see face-to-face, each homeschooler connected with someone they did not often visit, such as a family member or a friend who moved away. Kayla and Leslie have recently gotten their driver’s licenses and as a safety precaution, they both must text their parents when they reach and leave each destination. Kayla mentioned in our first interview, “When I'm driving, I have to text her (Mom) when I get to the place...[and] when I'm leaving...I have to text her in between sometimes” (personal communication, February 13, 2011). For Kayla, texting is not a pleasurable activity, and texting on her arrival and departure to and from locations only adds to her displeasure. Leslie concurred with, “I would have to text [my mom] everywhere I go and everywhere that I'm leaving” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). Leslie enjoys texting, but not with her mom about driving. She views this text activity as an annoying requirement rather than a pleasant pastime. Both girls felt constrained by the requirement, but knew that this was a condition of the privilege of driving – so they acquiesced. Texting parents upon arrival at a driving destination is the 21st century version of adolescents placing a phone call to parents upon arrival at the agreed-upon destination using a land line telephone. The requirement has not changed; it is simply the message and the delivery method that has evolved.

During our initial visit, Leslie elaborated a bit on the roster of people she texts. She mentioned several peers, her mom, and some family, and then she said:

I talk to friends a lot through text. 'Cuz you can do it whenever. I also think more people who wouldn't...how do I say this...people text more than they would actually be your friend in person. Someone who would never actually call me
will text me. I may not... before I had a phone, I may not be friends with that person, but... I guess I have more conversations with text than would ever happen in real life. That person may not have gone through the effort of email or having a conversation in person, but they will text (personal conversation, February 25, 2011).

Leslie identified a growing trend in digital technology – that of the virtual relationship. It is possible to engage 24 hours a day (Berson & Berson, 2003; Hsieh, 2008; Weigel & Gardner, 2009) and to be physically distant, but to feel closely engaged due to the intimate possibilities of social media communications (Kandell, 1998; van Manen, 2010). Users will reach out to interact with other users in a digital world even though they would normally not engage with that same person in the face-to-face world. Digital technology is opening up the possibilities of more social interactions and communications than would happen in real life situations due to the perceived safety and anonymity of cyberspace. The ability to “hide” behind the texting “wall” encourages some users to become bolder in their interactions and engage with those they might not otherwise text.

Chelsea made a similar comment in her initial interview. She said, “Texting is cooler to my generation. I'll call Kayla, my best friend, but a complete stranger... somebody I've met at church Wednesday...I wouldn't call them on the phone. I'd text them because that's just cooler” (personal communication, February 24, 2011). Chelsea felt she needed to maintain her social status as one of the “cool” kids, and maintain her own standing in the peer affinity group, by being selective on who she chose to call on the phone allowed her to maintain that status. However, there is also a sense of safety with texting. It is easier for an adolescent to maintain his or her “cool” status when time

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is available to plan and revise communications, as is possible with text messaging. There is the idea that text communications are able to be manipulated, therefore, they are able to be controlled (Plester, et al., 2008) and do not threaten the social standings of the senders. Users of text messaging, like users of online media technology, are encountering conversational opportunities that might not otherwise occur (Alvermann, 2008), because they feel safer expressing their thoughts and feelings (Elias & Lemish, 2009; Graham, 2011) due to the perceived anonymity of digital media (McKenna & Bargh, 1998, 2000). Adolescent texters are forming virtual relationships with other texters in lieu of actual personal relationships, in some instances, and redefining the ways in which they make friends. They are using text messaging and text language to socially construct a new kind of relationship, one in which both parties willingly, virtually participate. They interact for the excitement of social engagement, but do not have the obligations of maintaining face-to-face friendships.

Later in our interview, Leslie commented, “I can see where text conversations sometimes take the place of real conversations...but, there are also additional text conversations that wouldn't happen” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). She acknowledged that there are more and more text conversations taking place, but they are doing so at the expense of “real” social interactions. This idea is supported by research into the phases of friendships. According to Hays (1985), two of the ways casual friends will grow closer is if they increase their levels of communication and time spent together, (as cited in Aboud & Mendelson, 1996). However, with a virtual relationship in which the only time spent together is via text messaging, they are getting to know each other.
through language, not personal interactions. This idea was further supported during my interview with Sharon, Kayla’s mother. She said:

In this generation, I said, "Are you going to know what each other sounds like?" It worries me that you don't really know the other person at all. Because you don't know who is sitting there helping them text. And it does give them time to think something cute...where when they're really interfacing, you don't have that time to go, "Wait a minute, let me go find a cute response to that."...clever...or let me ask somebody, "What would you say to that?" And so I'm like, you're not getting the real person. And so that worries me. It does, it really bothers me. (personal communication, February 13, 2011).

Sharon believed that virtual relationships were not equal to face-to-face relationships in which people hear each other’s voice, see each other in real time, and interact on a personal, intimate level. Text users are interacting via social media with others that they might not have a personal relationship with, if it were not for text messaging.

**Texting Topics**

For the homeschoolers, the substance of the text messages varied but the general topics were usually – making plans, ensuring safety, inquiring about academics, or conversing socially. The participants who attended the homeschool co-op, Kayla, Chad, Chelsea, Leslie and Thad, often texted their fellow attendants about academic concerns, which will be discussed in a later section. Although Anna does not attend the co-op, she did text about school with her cousins who are homeschooled and other friends that attend traditional schools. Even though none of the adolescent participants are educated in a traditional setting, academics maintain a position of importance in all of their lives.
Each adolescent used text messaging to make plans or coordinate activities. Claudia said, “We text about planning” (personal communication, February 23, 2011) and Leslie concurred and said that when she texts, “…sometimes it’s for planning” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). Chad remarked, “I make plans and such with friends, trying to get coordinated” (personal communication, February 15, 2011). Thad commented that he would text a friend to “see if he wants to go play soccer or go hang out somewhere” (personal communication, March 3, 2011). Anna said that she would text her mom, Stephanie, to plan “…if a friend can come over” (personal communication, February 3, 2011). In each of these recorded instances, texting was used to facilitate communication and coordination of social activities. Both Chelsea and Thad texted their parents for pick up times from school. Because neither one is a licensed driver, they must depend on someone else for transportation. Anna is also not licensed, but because she is exclusively homeschooled, she does not contend with the same transportation issue as Chelsea and Thad.

Planning social events and connecting with their peers is a large part of adolescent communications (Conti-Ramsden, et al., 2010; Durkin, et al., 2011; Ling, 2005). As young people mature, their social connections with their peers take on a more important role in their communications. Recent research has shown that youth need to feel constantly connected to their peers (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2007; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000) and will seek engagement through social media when face-to-face interactions are not feasible or are restricted (Katz & Aspden, 1997; Lin, et al., 2007). For Claudia, face-to-face contact with her peers is often not feasible due to the location of her home and her family responsibilities. Her reason for texting is
usually “to see how my friends are doing. Sometimes it occupies time when I'm bored or something” (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Claudia desires to socially connect with her peers and texting is the means by which she is able to do so. In general, the adolescent participants connected with their peers for both scheduling and social purposes using texting as their means of communication. They made full use of the digital technology at their disposal and participated in social media conversations in order to pose academic questions or to ease the burden of event planning.

Making Language Choices in Texting

According to Krandell (1998), the manner in which the world at large communicates evolves with every new technological development, and texting is no exception. Texters have learned a new method of communication and those that use textisms in their messages, such as the adolescent homeschoolers in this study, also acquired a new language register. Being able to differentiate between social and academic language registers is a necessity in these participants’ worlds. The adolescent homeschoolers construct their language to meet the expectations of their peer affinity groups (Burns & Darling, 2002; Gross, 2004). They navigate their way through the adolescent years, maintaining their affinity group memberships and communicating with their social media partners all through the use of text messaging.

Language Registers

Leslie, Chelsea and Claudia all texted their employers to plan babysitting jobs, check on scheduled shifts, or even ask for time off. They were careful to use more formal language, unlike their texts with their peers because they were addressing adults who were their employers. Leslie said, “I'll definitely capitalize, punctuate, not [add]
extra letters with my parents who I babysit for... I'll just be completely straightforward, [text] exactly what I mean” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). She believed she needed to change language registers with the changing of the recipient because in having a conversation, even a digital one, with an adult employer required a level of respect and formality not used with peers. These same participants believed text messages should be conversational, which aligns with research in children and adolescents’ use of text language (Madell & Muncer, 2007; Plester, et al., 2011; Plester, et al., 2009). The studies mentioned found that adolescents are constructing language in oral form when they text modeled on English language phonetics rather than as a traditional written language.

In the following example, Leslie and a mother for whom she babysits, discuss schedules and the children. The text conversation is respectful and at the same time, familiar and comfortable:

Line 1: Mrs. Loran: Hey Leslie, wondering if you have anytime Friday to babysit both Amy and Seth. Amy doesn’t have school Friday
Line 2: Leslie: Friday I have class until 3 and leave for a church retreat at 5. Sorry! 😞 but next Wednesday I can come anytime before 4 if that works!
Line 3: Mrs. Loran: How about Wed at 1:30? What time do u need to leave?
Line 4: Leslie: That sounds great! I would need to leave by 3:45ish if that’s ok😊
Line 5: Mrs. Loran: That’s great. Thank u
Line 6: Leslie: Thank you! See you then! I’ve missed those kiddos! 😊
Line 7: Mrs. Loran: They and I have missed you! (text conversation, February 23, 2011)
As they are attempting to schedule babysitting, the text conversation reads like an oral interaction rather than a written one. At the beginning of the exchange, Mrs. Loran skipped the “I was” before the word “wondering” in Line 1 as one would if in an oral conversation. In Line 2, Leslie skips a preposition before the word “Friday” as one would in an oral conversation where the second speaker picks up the first speaker’s words. Also, Leslie inserted several emoticons and exclamation marks in all of her lines to indicate the levels of her emotions during the exchange. Although Leslie did not use the same language she would have used in school-based writing, she did follow grammar rules and did not get creative with her words. She is adhering to the guidelines of a more formal affinity group, while at the same time allowing her enthusiasm and personality to show through with her use of emoticons and exclamation marks.

Claudia also believed she must differentiate her language registers according to the message recipient and in the following example of a text sent to a family for whom she babysat, she was careful to use formal language, but included emoticons for fun. She wrote:

Hey, Mrs. Martin! I’m not going to be able to make it today. 😷 I have a bad head cold and wouldn’t want to give you guys anything! Tell Princess Gweny “Happy Birthday” for me! I hope you are doing well. Also, Mom said to tell you she’ll drop your shaklee off tomorrow. Take care. ;-) (text conversation, February 23, 2011)

Claudia recognized the need for differentiating her social discourse registers and chose a more formal one for use with her employer. The language was familiar, as with beginning the text “Hey”, using emoticons, and addressing the young girl as “Princess
Gweny”, but was still respectful to the recipient’s position as Claudia’s employer and as an adult, in that there are no misspellings, missing punctuations or capitalizations. There is the idea among researchers that adolescents are learning the differences between language registers (Barker, 2007) and text messaging is helping with the process (Plester, et al., 2008). The more they switch between formal and informal registers, the more skilled at changing they become (Rosen, et al., 2010). Baron (2009) stated, “Technology enhances our ability to manipulate our communication with others” (p.45). The homeschoolers were metacognitively aware of their social discourse choices and having the digital technology available to communicate with various affinity groups allows them the opportunities to change registers at will in order to adhere to language guidelines for interactions.

In the following example about texting with her grandparents, Claudia speaks about making language choices based on her audience’s level of understanding of language as well as the inherent sense of respect that would be shown in a message to family elders. Her discussion echoes her previous recognition of the need to be aware of her audience when she took informal phone messages for her mother (see pg. 74 of this document).

I guess it's the cool thing to do to abbreviate with your friends...and it's a lot faster to text. But I don't do that as much with my grandparents 'cuz they…don't get all the abbreviations and stuff, so...I try to keep it simple (personal communication, February 23, 2011).

Claudia and her grandparents are from different generations, locations, and affinity groups, therefore the language they use in communication will vary. She chose which
register to use according to her audience as well as the social discourse necessary so that misunderstandings were avoided and adhered to the language guidelines of her family affinity group. Claudia’s language choices are supported by a recent news article that revealed for any social media to be successful, it has to be understood by its users (Shannon, 2007). Simple digital language circumvents ambiguity and functions most adequately in situations where the persons communicating are not of the same affinity group. As Claudia said, “Keep it simple.”

Plester, et al, (2011), in a recent study on pre-teen text messaging, determined that language is ever-evolving within the social discourse communities. Therefore, as these adolescent homeschoolers texted using “youth code”, they were influencing each other’s digital language choices and were developing texting habits that mirrored their communication partners. Anna said in her first interview, “Well, if you text a person enough, sooner or later, you’re going to get in the habit of texting like them.” She believed that familiarity with a person’s discourse would inform her language choices and she would then begin to text in a fashion similar to her communication partner. This is the manner in which new abbreviations, shortened codes, and symbols used in place of words get passed among group members. Leslie and the other homeschoolers suit the wording of the text, formal or informal, to whoever is receiving it. When Chelsea was asked why she changed her language with the person receiving the text, she uttered the definitive statement, “Different people, different lingo” (personal communication, February 24, 2011).

An example of this is the phrase used by the homeschooled participants, “totes adorbs”, which means “totally adorable,” and as previously discussed (see pg.75 of this
document), has become part of their oral and written discourse. This term is used as a commentary on a person, an action, or an object. Chelsea commented, “My friends and I all say, "totes adorbs" instead of "totally adorable". You abbreviate it” (personal communication, February 24, 2011). In a chat conversation between Leslie and her friend, Catherine, they mentioned the same phrase.

Catherine: he says “totes adorbs” even before I started saying that.

The first time I said it, he was like ‘uh, soul mate much?’ dawwwww 😊

Leslie: hahaha ohhhhh goshh, totttallllyyy PERF!!!

Catherine and Leslie are discussing Catherine’s new love interest and marveling over the idea that he uses the same phrase they use. This new boy is homeschooled, but does not attend the same homeschool co-op as Catherine and Leslie. Then, Chad mentioned this same phrase in his second interview. “The phrase ‘totes adorbs’…we use it. I don't use it in texting. I'll use it out loud because I think it's funny. I don't think there are any phrases that are mine alone that no one else knows about” (personal communication, May 30, 2011). In each of the above-mentioned incidences, the homeschoolers used the phrase “totes adorbs” spelled the same way, used in the same way, to mean the same thing, and stretched across digital mediums. Chelsea used it in texting, Leslie used it in chatting, and Chad used it in spoken discourse. This is a phrase they are all familiar with and they have shared the meaning among their affinity group. Regardless of gender, this phrase is used fluidly in all kinds of peer conversations, and according to Chad, it is not his alone.

One participant, Leslie, spoke specifically to language modeling. She said, “A lot of times, I base [my text] on how the other person talks” (personal communication,
For her, text messaging with a partner becomes an exchange dependent on the discourse from the other person. If the person texts in a very formal manner with no text language used, Leslie does the same. If abbreviations and emoticons are used, then Leslie does the same. She differentiates her language in response to what she reads on her screen so that she can mirror her partner’s discourse. Although Leslie mentioned modeling her text language after the ones she receives, she was the sole participant to do so. Additional research could be undertaken in order to study the possibility of other adolescents’ digital language modeling and the influences this could have on their language use.

Researchers investigating the ways in which technology is connected to adolescent lives recently found that social groups learn from each other (Luke, 2003) using the tools of technology for their socialization (Conti-Ramsden, et al., 2010; Gee, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978); which for these homeschoolers, is a cell phone that is used for texting. All of the participants, with the exception of Thad, commented that text messagers, themselves included, began to reflect their peers in their social discourse choices. As previously mentioned, the more familiar adolescents become with text language, the more they use it. The same can be said for social discourse choices. As with adolescents in general, the more these homeschoolers make certain discourse choices in their social media communications, the more familiar those choices become and the more apt they are to choose them – especially when conversing with another adolescent who also makes the same discourse choices.
Language Modifications

Differentiating between language registers differs from modifying existing language. For language register choices, the adolescents knew the registers and they chose which one or parts of one to use with each situation depending on perceived audience and level of understanding. For modifications, the adolescents change existing language registers to fit their communication needs at that specific moment in time. During his interview, Thad spoke about modifying his text language so that it would maintain its phonological acceptability and still be recognized as English by the recipient. This idea is supported by research that found sometimes in the digital world, formal language is not acceptable (Jacobs, 2008; Turner, 2009). Thad said, “When you text, sometimes you might write a word...you'll write it completely different, but it'll sound the same. Or, 'cuz it might be easier or faster to type up.” He continued on to speak about his cousin and sending email messages, “He's on a mission and I messed with the word "praying" because you're not really supposed to say that. But, it was okay because I really messed that word” (personal communication, March 3, 2011). Thad then wrote the example of how he might text this forbidden word to his cousin in Asia. He said he could type it as “pRyn”, which is an abbreviated code for the word and it would not flag the censors. Out of necessity, he created his own text language word and showed how he could use it to potentially communicate with a loved one living far away.

Thad was speaking about this skill of word handling that many adolescents use, yet do not realize it requires an intricate knowledge of the English language in order to alter text language in this manner (Bloom, 2010; Plester, et al., 2009; Powell & Dixon, 2011). Several recent studies support Thad’s assertion of modifying text language as
being a creative and nuanced use of English (Plester, et al., 2011; Plester, et al., 2009; Powell & Dixon, 2011). He changed the spelling of English words in order to align them with oral interpretations of the sounds of the words. He and his peers employed this technique often in their texts to each other as an “insider’s” text language.

Leslie did much the same in her text messages, as mentioned in previous sections. For these adolescents, it was important that their social media communications, when read aloud, sounded as if someone were actually speaking the words. They chose to add extra letters to words, write in all caps, use emoticons, and extra punctuation in a creative effort to convey emotions and minimize text message confusion, as previously discussed (see pg. 81 of this document). Their social discourse was conversational and casual, which was represented by the text language they chose to use. Leslie commented during her interview that her texting habits make her messages more like oral communications that written ones. Recent research confirms that text language has some features making it more like spoken than written language (Durkin, et al., 2011; Ling, 2005; Plester, et al., 2008; Plester, et al., 2009). Leslie said:

With friends, we'll text song lyrics, inside jokes, stuff like that...other people wouldn't understand …I guess with friends I'll add extra letters and so it doesn't make perfect sense...I feel like I, a lot of times, will do things...I would say, talking, you know what I mean? Like, "Uhhh" or "Hmm"...I do like random letters in a row, when I'm mad or confused. Where, you know, I'll make it longer, funnier...like more of what I'd actually say...than just trying to get it out (personal communication, February 25, 2011). (see example in paragraph below)
Leslie modified her words in a way that is common for adolescents (Oates, 2004) because texting, especially among peers, is fun and encourages youth to play with language (Plester, et al., 2009). By taking digital language and deliberately misspelling words and phonetically spelling them, called “accent stylization” (Thurlow & Brown, 2003, Section 3.2, para. 1) or “youth code” (Plester, et al., 2009, p. 148), adolescents are making texting more conversational within their social groups. As an example, Leslie wrote in a text to her friend, Lona, a fellow homeschool co-op attender, “Yeah I wanted to cry and leave honestly… They were sooooo mean an arrogant and annoying!! Uggghhh” (text communication, February 24, 2011). Leslie placed an emphasis with the insertion of exclamation marks on how the unnamed interaction made her feel. She added extra letters in order to convey her emotions. The more extra letters added to the word, the stronger the emotion. These changes in English brought on by text language could be sign of a change in the meaning reader and writers are making of language, not necessarily a slip in standards, according to Barker (2007). As the homeschoolers modify their text language to illustrate their messages and emotions, they are introducing new wordings into text vocabulary that their affinity groups potentially will begin to also use, thus signaling changes in discourse and changes in literacy.

**Text Language Standards**

Because the homeschoolers frequently socially and digitally interacted, they were very much aware of the style of texting for members of the group. As introduced via the earlier discussion of a conscious attempt to create a “conversational tone” through syntax, semantics, and punctuation, the homeschoolers had created discourse standards for text messaging and they would sometime refuse to engage with a person who did not adhere
to the social texting standards of the group. At the conclusion of his mother’s interview, Chad approached and requested to add a comment. He said:

There’s certain people that come to mind, when I think of when I text them...how do they respond to me? It not the standards of how I communicate. It's just not. If they respond in few words or they respond in text language...if they don't punctuate, if they don't give me anything back...then I usually just don't respond (personal communication, February 15, 2011).

Chad outlined the social discourse guidelines for his peer affinity group and detailed the standards by which he communicated. In order to participate with him in a text conversation, people must follow these unwritten discourse rules, all of which were socially constructed by the members of Chad’s affinity group. Chad mentioned in his second interview that for someone new to the group, he would patiently attempt communication with them a few times, but after that, they must either figure out the youth code and how to “do it correctly” or he simply would not include them in the group. For Chad, it is important that the affinity group members adhere to the language standards in order to maintain their communication privileges.

Although the homeschooled adolescent participants typically texted using detailed, full sentences for clarity, there are some abbreviations that are standard among this peer group, which is supported by recent research (Mills, 2009). In her first interview, Kayla said, “…if I was texting…I might use "wuz" for was” (personal communication, February 13, 2011). Thad agreed with Kayla that he might use a standard abbreviation, but then he said, [I use] "txt" and then...I don't really use abbreviations…I just spell out a word” (personal communication, March 3, 2011). Even
though he admitted to using less punctuation than is usually standard, Chad said his text language was more formal than informal. However, “…there are certain words and certain phrases I won't say…such as ttly, talk to you later, and btw, by the way, or even ‘em for them in get ‘em…I'll just abbreviate… they [friends] know what I'm talking about” (personal communication, February 15 and May 30, 2011). He and his affinity group used a common language for texting and contained in that language are abbreviations that were standard to the group. Group membership is maintained, in part, by adhering to the language guidelines set down by the peers. It is important to respond to texts in a timely fashion, use common abbreviations, but not a lot of strange codes that no one understands, and above all else, continue differentiated texting based on affinity groups.

**Texting as Emotional Support**

For Leslie, Anna, and Claudia, texting was not only a means of communication, it was used to show and received care and concern. Through social media, all three girls sought a deeper level of friendship and connection with their peers. Leslie stated, “…if I know it's a mass text, I usually don't reply. Like, if they don't use my name or if it's not specifically to me…if I don't like the person, I don't reply. It's… [my response is] based on their text” (personal communication, February 25, 2011). For her, the level of personalization of the message, the content therein, and the sender were more important than the language choices. Leslie used texting to connect with her friends and other peers, but did not wish to be part of a faceless mass of responders. She was not engaged by mass texts because the sender did not personally seek her out in communication. She felt that being one of many meant the sender did not care whether or not she responded.
Leslie was able to decide with whom and how often she would communicate based on her criteria of discourse standards.

Unless the text is a quick reply to a previous question, Claudia and Anna felt that it was more meaningful to spell words out than to abbreviate. Anna said, “It [text message] sounds more… meaningful I guess, when you spell everything out” (personal communication, February 3, 2011). She acknowledged that although textisms could be fun and playful between peers, but that messages that show concern are ones that were written out. For Anna, a message that means something is one that someone took the time to carefully craft. Adherence to spelling and grammar rules takes special time and extra effort; therefore, text messages that were written out with no abbreviations or misspellings meant to Anna that the sender cared about his or her audience and wanted the message to be well-written so that it would be well-received.

Claudia agreed and expanded a bit on the idea, “I think if they actually took the time and wrote it out, it means more to me than some quick little thing. Because they actually take the time…they care about me…they want to talk to me” (personal communication, February 23, 2011). She expressed the idea that time equated to care. Claudia is exclusively homeschooled in an isolated environment. Digital media connects her with peers that she does not often see face-to-face and with the world away from her home. Adolescents expressed their feelings via text on a daily basis, but for Claudia, a message to her that was written in more formal language using recognized grammar standards translated to concern for her as a person because that meant the writer took the time necessary to create a message specifically chosen for her, not some meaningless string of quickly abbreviated words that could have been sent to anyone.
Conclusions for Research Question One

Texting played a variety of roles in these adolescent homeschoolers’ lives as they used text language in their oral communication and their written social media connections with their peer group, family, employers and even new acquaintances, all in an effort to strengthen bonds of friendship, share personal experiences, and relay information. As indicated by the overarching themes, Employing Text Language in Social Discourse, Texting to Communicate in Social Media, and Making Language Choices in Texting, the adolescents engaged in texting with people with whom they would not normally have had a face-to-face conversation, leading to virtual friendships initiated solely on social media conversations. They differentiated their language registers based on perceived audience and level of understanding as either informal for friends, immediate family members and other peers, or formal for extended family, educators, and employers. But no matter the register, the topics of social texting conversations were usually planning for social events, arranging work schedules, or organizing pick-up times.

Elements of both formal language and text language were used in text messaging in order to help circumvent misunderstandings due to the limitations of texting with regard to visual and auditory clues. The adolescents felt that text messaging was a good communication medium for quick conversation of a less serious nature in which to transfer less important information.

The adolescent homeschoolers used a social discourse among their peer group members in which they manipulated both formal language and text language to form new words based on phonetic spellings, which resulted in words that captured the spirit of oral conversations rather than written correspondences. As the participants texted, they
symbiotically influenced the manner in which language was learned and created because texting habits develop with familiarity. They socially constructed elements of a peer language within their affinity group and used this language to either accept or reject potential members depending on their adherence to these discourse standards. Therefore, if a message was received that did not adhere to the language standards of the group, the recipient would oftentimes reject or ignore the message due to the fact that they deduced that the sender was not a member of their affinity group. Oftentimes, they used texting to show concern, to develop and to strengthen their relationships.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS TWO – HOW IS TEXT LANGUAGE INFORMING HOMESCHOOLERS’ ACADEMIC WRITING?

The findings presented in this section address my second question, “In what ways do adolescent homeschoolers’ text language inform their homeschool-based writing?” My analysis of the data regarding the way text language is informing the participants’ homeschool-based writing resulted in two core themes: a) Differentiating Language for Academic Success and b) Texting Influences on Writing Process and Product.

Within the first theme, Differentiating Language for Academic Success, I discuss parental expectations for language and for academic success, and the homeschoolers’ considerations of “proper” language both in social media and in academic assignments. I then speak to the ways in which the participants used both text language and formal language in social media with each other to encourage, support and assist in their academic assignments.

In the second theme, Texting Influences on Writing Process and Product, I examine the homeschoolers’ use of language in their academic work and discuss the ways in which texting could be informing the participants’ academic writing, both in product and process. I conclude with the idea that these adolescents do not equate social media communications with academic writing; therefore, they do not misuse either register and have little difficulty differentiating between the two discourses.
Differentiating Language for Academic Success

The homeschoolers in this study expressed a desire to perform well on academic tasks, which they defined as school essays, research papers or assessments. Whether they were attempting to meet adult expectations, were socially influenced by their peers to achieve, or were self-motivated, the end results were the same – they wanted to produce at the highest levels academically. Their academic success was dependent on their knowledge and use of the appropriate writing discourse, which the participants demonstrated when they differentiated between formal and informal writing circumstances in their home-school based writing. In order to differentiate between discourses, the homeschoolers implemented their definitions of texting and writing.

Texting and Writing Defined

As I sought to better understand the potential influences of text language upon the adolescents’ homeschool-based writing, my conversations with them necessitated my comprehension of their definitions of writing itself. The homeschoolers made vivid distinctions between “writing” and “texting,” discussed nuances associated with the term “writing,” and expressed both a desire and need to keep them separate based on audience and purpose for the writing. Additionally, some of the homeschoolers elaborated on two distinct categories of writing: “writing” and “social writing,” with text language used in social writing. Thad considered writing to be an activity where formality was required and usually involved the production of homeschool-based or academic assignments, such as writing “…a paragraph or an essay or a book…or like a letter” (personal communication, March 3, 2011). Anna agreed with Thad and said that she thought writing was work completed for school. Additionally, Anna did not equate the physical
act of writing to typing a text message onto a screen and sending it to someone via an online connection. For her, they are completely separate endeavors. Anna is exclusively homeschooled and her writing assignments are hand-written. For her, writing stems from these assignments and the end products are papers created using formal academic language. The use of social media is not considered in Anna’s very definition of writing because of the lack of academic influence and the informality of the discourse used in social media.

Kayla believed writing involved following thoughts to completion. She did not consider that particles of scattered information or the use of singular words or brief phrases constituted the discourse of writing. Claudia agreed that words and phrases did not fully represent writing and added that it was sometimes difficult to understand text language due to the abbreviations, which was not the case with more formal writing. Similarly, Chad believed writing involved transferring his important thoughts from his head to paper, but for him, it was never through a computer. However, unlike Anna, he did not make the distinction between social media writing and school writing as processes. He differentiated between the kinds of writing based solely on the tools used. Chad distinguishes between text language and formal language, saying:

I try and keep the two as separate as possible…I guess that's something that writing before texting has helped…Texting isn't writing on paper. It's different to me. This is done electronically and it's just with two fingers (indicating his texting devices), but this is…a large, detailed process that has to go on (indicating his notebook of academic work). So, I guess that's why I keep them separate (personal communication, February 15, 2011).
Chad is positive that because he knows there is a difference between the two discourses, he is able to compartmentalize his language use. He does not automatically connect formality with school-based assignments or informality with social media. For him, the tool used for writing, as well as the energy required to perform the task, are the distinguishing factors between the languages. In order to be classified as “writing,” the undertaking must consist of a physical pen-and-paper setting, and the task must be time-consuming and detailed. Work that is informal and quickly written cannot be classified in the same category as formal writing.

For Chelsea, however, the medium of the message was not as important as the language, audience and content. She said, “[For] Facebook event invitations…if you're just wanting to [contact]…your closest friends… you would write a message. It wouldn't really classify as intellectual writing, but you are writing out something that you are sending to your friends, so it is a kind of writing. It's more like social writing” (personal communication, May 29, 2011). Chelsea believed the classification of the output was dependent on both the intended effects of the writing as well as the language used.

For the participants, the definitions of writing varied. Thad felt that writing was finite, with a definitive beginning and ending, and he and Anna both believed it required the degree of formality found in school-based academic assignments. Kayla and Claudia felt writing was comprised of complete thoughts. Claudia’s confusion with text language was often caused by the abbreviations used. Chad did not differentiate between social and academic writing processes, only on the techniques and tools necessary to perform the tasks. Chelsea looked to the intent and the recipient of the writing in order to distinguish discourse communities. Although the adolescent participants differed in their
opinions of what actually comprised a writing assignment and even the very definition of writing, they were united in their exclusion of social media, such as texting, IM or blogging, from this formal discourse.

The participants not only differentiated writing from texting but also differentiated formal language from text language. Formal language is generally considered to be the language used by educated speakers as a model for speech and writing (“The Free Dictionary,” 2009). For this group of adolescent homeschoolers, text language was “shorter,” “abbreviated,” had “incomplete sentences,” “no capitals,” or “punctuation.” Their text language descriptors closely align with Carrington’s (2004) definition of textisms: removal of vowels, dropped articles and conjunctions, acronyms, use of numbers in place of graphemic units, and inconsistent capitals and punctuations (p.218). These distinctions indicate their ability to easily differentiate between formal language and text language, and bolster their original disassociations between texting and writing. Recent research supports the idea that students believe texting is not “real” writing (Lenhart, et al., 2008; Lewin, 2008), and that adolescents have the ability and choose to differentiate between the two registers (Bloom, 2010; Plester, et al., 2008; Plester, et al., 2009). Adolescents fluidly move in and out of different language registers in order to express their social identities (Barker, 2007). The participants in this study consciously defined writing as school-based assignments, emails, Facebook messages, or social etiquette correspondence; completely omitting social communications such as texting, chatting (IM) or blogging from their definitions. They have a metalinguistic awareness of the appropriate discourses and instinctively know when to employ them.
“Proper” Language Use

Social constructionists often investigate the contexts which influence one’s thoughts and behaviors. So what contributes to this group of homeschoolers’ distinctions between writing and texting as well as between formal language and text language? Through my analysis of the homeschoolers’ interviews, parent-educator interviews, and the adolescents’ written and texted artifacts, it appears that the adolescents’ educational environments and the cultural and societal constructions of “proper” language use, are primary determinants of their discourse distinctions and subsequent inclusion or exclusion of text language in homeschool-based writing.

The homeschool environment creates an ongoing reminder of the high parental expectations due in part to the parents’ continual presence in the adolescents’ lives. The homeschoolers feel they must meet these high expectations for proper language use, officially defined as “marked by suitability or rightness” ("Merriam-Webster Dictionary," 1974, p. 557), as determined by the adolescent homeschoolers’ parents’ academic demands and assumptions of excellence (Collom, 2005). The first environment for instruction is the family (Hsieh, 2008), and because the parent-educators taught them that using formal language, as the proper language, is necessary for academic success, the homeschoolers stated that they must not disappoint their parents with non-standard language use in their school-based assignments or run the risk of academic failure.

I believe Claudia and Thad summed up the feelings of the group of participants most succinctly when they said that texting was “not proper.” They felt that the use of text language outside the confines of social communication was simply not to be done. For Leslie and Thad, proper writing did not include any manner of informal discourse.
They both stated there was a “correct” or “right” way to complete written homeschool-based assignments and they felt their academic work should be undertaken with serious intentions of excellence. There is a time and a place for specialized language registers. Using textisms en route to academic assignment completion was not seen by the homeschoolers as abiding by the discourse rules for homeschool-based coursework that were required by those in authority over them, such as parents, teachers, and tutors. Parental expectations were exceptionally high and the adolescents felt they must live up to them.

Claudia explained her conviction that texting was not proper in homeschool-based assignments by saying, “My mom wouldn't accept it” (personal communication, February 23, 2011). She understood her mother’s expectations for excellence in educational accomplishment and knew that anything less would not be tolerated. For Claudia, pleasing her mother was the pinnacle of achievement. Relatedly, Anna stated, “My parents don't appreciate that…my parents would be mad…They taught me how to write correctly...so I think I should when I'm doing my writing” (personal communication, February 3, 2011). She believed that choosing the more formal language register would be pleasing to her immediate authority figures, her parents, because they taught her the language and in the manner in which to use it. Anna is careful with her discourse since she does not want to run the risk of causing her parents displeasure due to failure to reach the expectations they have set for her. Both Claudia and Anna are taught in the home by their mothers who are the ultimate authority figures.

There was an overwhelming sense of a desire for correctness or the proper way when academic language was the subject of discussion. The homeschoolers could
identify their parents’ educational standards and understood that they were expected to meet or even exceed these standards. They also intuitively recognized that their academic discourse informed their school-based writing because the language used was formal in structure and did not allow for playful or creative informal uses of letters and/or sounds. Taken together, parental expectations and academic discourse allowed no content differentiation in the form of text language.

Sharon, Kayla’s mother, believes that Kayla is metalinguistically aware of her discourse options and that choosing proper language for academic assignments has become a habit. During our interview, Sharon said, “But she has been writing papers and all, and was under different expectations for so long that…she can definitely say, ‘I'm writing a paper and I have to write it this way’” (personal communication, February 13, 2011). Sharon believes that both her own and the homeschool co-op teachers’ language expectations for Kayla have been a part of her academic life for so long that she can easily differentiate between language registers and knows when to use formal or informal discourse effectively. But for Anna’s parent-educator, Stephanie, the process of writing is about motivation, while continuing to be concerned about language use. She commented that because Anna liked to write and she understood her parents’ language expectations, she was motivated to perform to the best of her ability in order to achieve success. Anna’s desire for success manifested itself in the form of voluntary multiple handwritten drafts of formal writing assignments in an effort to make her papers “perfect.” Sharon and Stephanie are confident that their daughters are aware of the different language registers and are capable of choosing the appropriate one for academic assignments. My analysis of the data, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter,
from both Kayla and Anna showed that while their papers were not grammatically perfect, they were on the low end of the range of usual mistakes made by adolescent writers.

While children are receiving their education exclusively within the home, they are subject only to their parents’ expectations for both language use and academic success. However, as they reach middle-school age, many homeschoolers are then placed in homeschool co-ops where certified teachers manage their instruction. The adolescents then must adhere to the teachers’ expectations of proper language use so they will not receive failing grades. This group of adolescent homeschoolers discovered that just as their parents prohibited text language in their home education academic assignments, so too do their teachers because it is not deemed culturally acceptable to use text language in the co-op academic setting.

For the homeschoolers, it is important to adhere to the language standards expected by those in authority so that academic success is realized. According to Little, Jordens and Sayers (2003), members of a group who share a common language and voluntarily conform to the group norms of that language in order to connect with fellow members as they construct their identities are called discourse communities, which Gee also identified as affinity groups (2000, 2008), mentioned in the previous chapter. As a part of their discourse community, the adolescents in this study used proper language, as defined by their parents and/or educators and society at large, in order to achieve the academic success they desired.
Academic Expectations

As the adolescent participants adhered to the expectations of their educational environment for proper language use in their homeschool-based writing, so too did they adhere to the expectations for academic achievement, which were reflected in the adolescents’ selective discourses and exclusion of text language from their formal assignments. The homeschoolers navigate through a rigorous curriculum with high expectations for success in order to attain an intensive education. In my analysis of my interview with the participants, their parents, and the collected artifacts, it seems that instruction for language, whether from the homeschool co-op instructors, the home-based tutor, or the parent-educator, is concentrated on formal language instruction as the adolescents write formal research papers or essays. The homeschoolers maintained English language standards, according to their instructors’ guidelines, with minimal mistakes, few of which could potentially be attributed to familiarity with texting. Errors in the papers were infrequent, but they did occur. According to Baron (2009), this could be a signal not of carelessness or disregard for English language standards, but perhaps an evolution of language itself in which some formal standards are relaxed with non-use.

The participants and the parents for this case study desired that the students should be viewed by the larger society as having successfully navigated a rigorous academic curriculum as a result of the parents’ participation and guidance. Claudia’s mom, Camille, who homeschools several children, emphatically stated, “I want them to look educated. I wanted [sic] them to seem educated… we don't have to stoop to this level [of using text language in school work]. We can still look like we know the English language” (personal communication, February 23, 2011). Camille also expressed her
intense disdain of the use of text language in social media and shared how she chastised her children for appearing uneducated and lacking decorum if they used text language in social media. She was concerned that because her children were not exposed to a typical institutional academic education, some people in the outside world might assume they were not highly capable if they did not use formal language. As reflected in the phrases, “to look educated”, “seem educated” and “look like we know the English language,” Camille shows how for her, language serves as the premier identifier of social status, intellectual capability and level of education (Kretzschmar, 2005; Peterson, 2004).

Already feeling societal pressure for “breaking societal rules” (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Gaither, 2008; Stevens, 2001) by homeschooling her children, Camille wished to dismiss any concern from the larger society as to her children’s linguistic and academic competence. Appearance, especially as expressed through language, are important and it must not seem that the home education she is providing is inferior to traditional schooling.

While she is not solely providing Chad’s education at this time, his mother, Dena, is still very much involved in Chad’s educational program and her expectations for his academic achievement have increased with his enrollment at the homeschool co-op. She believed the local co-op curriculum is based on “perfection”, or close to it, and that the lofty standards are to be expected, which far exceeded the “lowered expectations” of a public or private school curriculum. As expressed in our interview, she did not feel that Chad would use the more base language of texting in his academic work due to the high expectations of the co-op program.
Like Dena, Thad’s mother, Jacquelyn, was also confident that the homeschool co-op teachers were managing Thad’s academic instruction and tracking his language use. She believed he was writing better and completing more homeschool-based assignments than when he was exclusively homeschooled. For her, it was important that Thad present the image of a well-educated, well-spoken young man, but she did not believe text language would have a detrimental influence on his academic work because his teachers were exacting in their instructions, so there was no risk of improper language standards creeping into his academic discourse.

Based on my review of the writing samples, I found the co-op homeschoolers adhered to formal language construction for a majority of their academic writing. Because Claudia and Anna do not attend the homeschool co-op, they were not required to write formal research papers; however, they did engage in formal writing assignments. In Claudia’s 500-word essay, I found four mistakes, which equals less than 1% of the total. Two types of errors could potentially be attributed to familiarity with texting: use of contractions and missing comma. As this was a final draft of a typed essay, the expectation was that contractions would not be used; however, Claudia used “don’t” and “it’s” instead of “do not” and “it is”. Her missing comma occurred after an introductory phrase. In regards to the content of the essay, the topic, “Songs I Adore”, was superficially addressed and did not delve deeply into the meanings behind Claudia’s emotions or statements of fact. As each song was listed, reasons were given for its favored status. However, this essay served more as a list with explanations than a narrative piece of writing. For Anna, the essay was a bit shorter. It was a final draft of an 80-word essay and contained only one error, which is less than 1%. Anna’s mistake
could be attributed to either using the wrong pronoun or spelling error. She used “you” for “your”, which was the sole mistake made in the essay. Hers was an expository essay entitled, “How to Make Your Dog Sit,” in which she details the steps necessary for canine training. This essay satisfactorily written, but did not adhere to the typical form for expository writing.

For the participants that attended the homeschool co-op, they were required to write a formal research paper that went through several drafts before submission of the final copy. In Kayla’s approximately 1100-word research paper, there were 20 language/grammar errors, which equals just under 2% of the total. This percentage is at the low end of the range of the 2-4% average that has been found in formal student writing in traditional schools (Kemp & Bushnell, 2011). However, only seven of those errors, (e.g., missing punctuation and misplaced apostrophes) could potentially be linked to texting habits. For example, Kayla wrote, “In 1934 he created…” and the corrected sentence would read, “In 1934, he created....” She omitted the hyphen in “self-managed” and neglected to make “employees paychecks” possessive, as in “employees’ paychecks.” These findings line up with recent research that states that there is “…evidence that mediated language is changing traditional speech and writing. [There is] decreased certainty about when a string of words is a compound, a hyphenated word or one word, and diminished concern over spelling and punctuation” (Baron, 2009, p. 43). In her paper, “Social Security,” Kayla addressed the historic and economic significance of this government program. This non-fiction essay was thoughtfully and provocatively written. While she did address the history of the program, Kayla spent most of the essay writing her opinions of and proposals for the future of social security.
When I spoke with Kayla about her paper, she felt that although she had written several drafts of this specific research paper, had turned in a rough draft to the instructor for correction prior to the final draft, and had proofed it before final submission, errors slipped through because she was not looking for them. Kayla believes, as stated in the previous chapter, that texting has not influenced her homeschool-based writing due to the fact that she reluctantly texts only when absolutely necessary. However, it is possible that even a small amount of exposure through the texts she has received has unknowingly influenced Kayla’s language and this influence has shown up in her formal writing.

In Leslie’s approximately 1700-word essay, there were fifteen errors, which equals less than 1%. Because this was a formal research paper, the expectations of the instructor were that there would be no abbreviations, punctuation errors, or grammar mistakes. There were four different types of errors, missing apostrophe, abbreviations, missing punctuation, and misplaced plural, but only three of the four could potentially be linked to text language familiarity. Leslie abbreviated “United States” as “U.S.” several times within the body of the paper. She missed the apostrophe in the date several times, such as “1900s” instead of “1900’s”. The last error that could potentially be attributed to texting was a missing comma before a quotation. In her paper, “Abandonment of the Gold Standard,” Leslie delved into the history of America’s system of money. She brought in global influences and her own recommendations for the future of our country. The essay was well-written and researched, but not inspired by thoughtful opinions.

Chad, like Leslie and Kayla, was required to write a formal research paper. In his approximately 1100-word essay, there were seven errors, which equals less than 1% of the total. Most of Chad’s errors were structural, such as misplaced modifiers, word
repetition, and lack of supporting information, and could not be attributed to texting. However, he did have one missing comma after an introductory phrase and missing punctuations are potentially linked to texting familiarity. In his paper, “The Effects of Government Guaranteed Loan on College Tuition,” Chad writes about the influence of government’s involvement in paying for high education. Although the paper is relatively grammar-error free, it is not an easy-to-read paper. The structural problems mentioned above cause some content confusion. When I spoke with Chad about his paper, he commented that he is not “good with spelling” (personal communication, May 30, 2011) and has not ever used punctuation effectively. But in his formal research paper, there were no spelling errors and only one punctuation mistake. Chad did not make the errors in his writing he believed he would make, which surprised me until I reexamined the interview with Chad’s mother, Dena. She had commented that she and her husband both proof-read all research papers before submission in an effort to catch Chad’s errors and prevent questionable scores. Therefore, my analysis of the situation indicated that family is potentially attending to grammatical language choices, but not to structural ones. Thad declined to share a formal research paper for analysis.

In reviewing Chelsea’s approximately 1050-word research paper, I found fifteen language/grammar errors, which equals just over 1% of the total. Seven errors in Chelsea’s paper (e.g., missing punctuation, and abbreviations) could also be attributed to familiarity with texting. In her paper, for example, Chelsea wrote, “good hardworking…” but the corrected phrase should read “good, hardworking…” or even “good, hard-working….” She abbreviated the Federal Reserve as the “Fed” several times in the research paper. She also used a colon before a quote with quotation marks, “As
Samuelson says: ‘The basic idea…’, but it should have been written, “As Samuelson says, ‘The basic idea…’.” In her paper, “Inflation and the Carter Administration,” Chelsea writes about the United States’ economic inflation issues during the late 1970’s and the lingering effects. She attempts to give a broad overview of the problems, but succeeds only in shallow analysis. Her theories are vague and conclusions are relatively non-existent. When I questioned Chelsea about the errors, she said, “I think [they are] definitely a result of texting” (personal communication, May 29, 2011). Researchers are finding that although text language is showing up in school-based writing assignments (Barker, 2007; Baron, 2009; Lewin, 2008; Prensky, 2001), the changes in the language are more about structure than anything else (Baron, 2009; Thurlow, 2006). Text users are leaving out commas, apostrophes, hyphens, and other punctuations which essentially change the very foundation of language. Punctuation signals the flow of the written work and word meanings. When the punctuation is missing or incorrect, then the meaning changes as does the manner in which it is read. Changes to the foundation of language could potentially mean that as language evolves, so must the ways in which language is written.

In a recent study, it was found that the introduction of text language into print media is widespread and has caused a panic among researchers (Thurlow, 2006). Some academics believe literacy skills are declining as a direct result of text language (Jago, 2009; Sutherland, 2002; Thurlow, 2006) and this, in turn, is destroying the standards of the English language ("Is texting destroying kids' writing style?," 2008; Lewin, 2008). While others state that their data has shown no relationship between the use of text language and the decline in literacy (de Vries & van der Meij, 2003; Kemp, 2011; Kemp
& Bushnell, 2011; Plester, et al., 2009), but that texting could actually increase literacy because of the numerous reading and writing opportunities (Crystal, 2008; Plester, et al., 2009; Wood, Plester, & Bowyer, 2009). Despite the confusion in the academic world, linguists believe that far from destroying the language, text language is helping English evolve. Thurlow (2006) wrote, “There are always precedents for non-standard forms making their way into standard language use” (p.680). In analyzing the adolescent homeschoolers’ academic writing samples, I saw the beginnings of the evolution. While some of the errors could potentially be attributed to texting, they do not impinge on the content of the paper. Punctuations that were once mandatory are now optional, such as the comma immediately following the last item of a list or after a word that interrupts the flow of the sentence (e.g., My father, Henry, is here.). Apostrophes are almost non-existent and hyphens seem to be forgotten. There are a few abbreviations, but traditional spelling remains unchanged, as does most capitalization. The adolescent homeschoolers are not writing perfect papers, but neither are their papers full of errors that can be linked to text language. I believe the most that can be said is that there are errors that are potentially more frequent with the onslaught of texting and these errors are showing up in the participants’ writings as predicted in Baron’s (2009) and Thurlow’s (2006) previously mentioned research.

**Peer Language Use**

For the homeschoolers in this study, text language is a part of their everyday lives. They use texting in their social lives to connect with their friends and to communicate with their family, as discussed in the previous chapter, and in their academic lives to discuss homeschool-based assignments, as well as offer support and encouragement for
each other. In my analysis of the data, I found that the adolescent homeschoolers often
texted each other about homework, such as missing assignments, confusion about
directions, or even inquiries into the work itself. Also, due to the fact that they are in
class one day a week, the participants often use texting to support and encourage each
other about upcoming tests, formal papers, and difficult assignments. Text language was
found in the text messages, but many standards of the English language were used also.
The adolescent homeschoolers were respectful of the language standards expected for use
in academic inquiry, but also used the language of their affinity group when
communicating with their peers.

The homeschoolers in this study used texting to inquire about assignments, which
appears to be quite common among adolescents in general (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson,
2011). Kayla, Chelsea and Leslie all admitted to texting peers to ask “school
questions”, which for them meant to clarify assignments, find out about missed work, or
seek support for academic struggles. The following text message exchange about two
recent co-op assignments, exemplifies a typical text between the homeschoolers.

Chad: do we have grammar?

Chelsea: negative. She didnt give us the sheet to do it on.

Chad: thank God.

Chelsea: yeah, but weve got apologetics vocab thing though (text communication,
n.d.)

Chad used text messaging to ask “school questions” and Chelsea socially and
academically supported him with her replies. Their text discourse of this community
adhered to text language standards such as the absence of capitals and punctuation;
however, some semblance of formal language was also present via minimal abbreviations of standard words and no “textisms” (e.g. “do”, “didn’t”, “vocab”).

In another interaction, Leslie received a text message from her friend Allison (not a participant in the study), seeking clarification of an assignment. In this particular text, Allison used more text language than Leslie, but there were no misunderstandings between them, which is indicative of text language comprehension.

Allison: So. Those govt qs mr. Mineke didnt go over in class…do u think we have to study them?? I have that he skipped all the qs from articles 3, 4, and 5!! (in chapt 6) is that right???
Leslie: Hmmm we were talking about this last night and couldn’t decide!! Maybe you should email him…? Idk!! But I want to know!! Haha (text communication, February 23, 2011)

It is interesting that the adolescents will text each other about the assignment and seek assistance in completion directives all while using text language because they often use texting for quick exchanges of information, as discussed in chapter 5. The discourse used in the exchange is exemplary of the text interactions between Allison and Leslie. Sentence structure standards are upheld, as is beginning sentence and proper noun capitalization. There is missing punctuation in Allison’s line (e.g., govt, didnt) and added letters for visual effect, as discussed in chapter 5, in Leslie’s line. These two girls are effectively socially communicating with a mixture of formal and text language. They habitually abide also, to some extent, by the rules of formal language, in an effort to avoid misunderstandings in their conversation – such as, capitalizing the instructor’s name, remembering punctuation for emphasis, and using commas in a series so that they
both understood the correct chapters. Leslie and Allison are adhering to the language of their affinity group to communicate their academic inquiries.

Due to high expectations for academic success and the logistics of being in class together only once a week, the homeschoolers often used texting as a method of support and encouragement concerning school-based assignments. One such short text conversation between Chad and Leslie exemplifies such support:

Chad: How Goes your day??

Leslie: About to fail a test but other than that pretty good!! Haha Hbu?

Chad: Haha you’ll doo fine!!! Promise!! (text communication, February 25, 2011)

Chad and Leslie often emotionally support each other via texting prior to important academic events. During our interview, Leslie informed me that his confidence helped to calm her nerves before the test and she had, as Chad predicted, done well. He reassured her so that she could achieve at the highest level and realize academic success. The members of this affinity group rely on each other for assignment clarifications, academic support and encouragement – and they are using texting as social media to do it. Thus, while the adolescents are not using text language in their academic writing assignments, they are using it to support each other in academics. This seems crucial to their emotional well-being, and texting appears to supplement the absence of daily face-to-face interactions students experience in traditional school settings.

Texting Influences on Writing Process and Product

The homeschooled participants in this study used texting to communicate and connect with their peers about homeschool-based concerns. However, they were careful to maintain the distinctions between social and academic discourses in their writing.
When each of the participants was asked about the influence of texting on their homeschool-based writing, five of the eight said that they did not believe texting had influenced them at all in this regard. However, three of the participants, Chelsea, Kayla, and Anna, spoke of how texting and the use of text language potentially served both as a cognitive tool and deterrent in the development of their academic writing assignments. While the majority of the participants did not speak to this facet of texting, I believe the information gleaned from these three participants provides further support of current research about texting and academic writing. Additionally, these findings speak to a potential benefit of texting which has yet to be discussed in literacy research.

In her first interview, Chelsea said, “Thinking about what you're going to say in a text message...like what exactly your wording will be...how you'll say it. All those things go into writing about what you think about something so that’s the same thought process...” (personal communication, February 24, 2011). She believed that texting had helped her to decide on the wording for her writing assignments because she had to make word choice decisions for texting. She also had the idea that the use of texting had helped to stream-line her thought processes and solidify her point of view. Chelsea stated:

[If] it's writing from a point of view...like I was giving my personal opinion on something ...that's basically what texting is. I wouldn't write a paper the way I would text someone, but at the same time, I guess you could say it has kind of helped me with my thought process for those certain things (personal communication, February 24, 2011).
Although Chelsea conceded that she would not use the same language in school-based writing that she used in social media communications, she allowed that texting had influenced her structural writing choices. In her second interview, Chelsea elaborated more on the ways in which familiarity with text messaging had informed her academic writing:

When I sit down to write a topic without any kind of background...the teacher says, "Here, write this essay, right now, here you go", and I don't have any time to prepare, it helps to have already practiced thinking quickly about what I'm going to say, which is what texting is. I mean, you reply quickly and you know exactly what you want to say and the way you want to say it more clearly. So, I think when I said I have to write an essay and I don't have any background, it's helped to streamline my thought process more quickly...because it's like texting is practice for writing, I guess. I can think more quickly based on practice with texting (personal communication, May 29, 2011).

When the homeschool co-op instructor gave the assignment for a “quick-write”, [Here, write this essay, right now, here you go], he also provided the topic and the 250 word limit. Such word limits are similar to social media texts: 160 character limit for texts and 420 character limit for Facebook status updates. There is also a need to respond quickly in all the mentioned mediums of written communication. The process Chelsea used for deciding her quick write paragraphs and the one she used for deciding on a text were very similar in her opinion. She has a metacognitive awareness of her text writing process, which she then transfers to her essay writing process. Her awareness of her process is a picture of the ways in which familiarity with social media, especially texting, can be used
in a classroom setting as schema for journal writing, think writes, or even for short answer tests.

Chelsea’s consideration of the ways in which texting is akin to editing drafts of academic assignments in the example below provides us with a glimpse of how texting can serve as a cognitive scaffold for students as they delve into academic writing. Her comment reflects her metacognitive awareness of how texting appears to be assisting her through the composition process:

After I write my rough draft, I'll go through and put "finish intro", "reword this sentence"...all the different things I feel I need to correct. Sometimes I'll just cross out entire sentences and say I need to reword this. This relates to text messaging because that thought process when I'm typing a text message, I'll backspace the entire thing and restart because it didn't come out the way I wanted it worded. Or I had to rethink the process of how I was going to say after I reread it. The thinking process that I go through, "Oh, that doesn't sound right. I think I should reword it." After you reread it, the same thing with papers, helps you know you're writing better, and you know what you need to fix and how to make it sound better (personal communication, May 29, 2011).

As exemplified in her comments, Chelsea undertook the same steps in texting that she would in writing a paper: rough draft (message), reread, revise (if necessary), recopy and submit (send). For her, the differences were the communication tools and the language, not the thought processes. As she engaged in social media, Chelsea and her homeschool peers gained experience in written communication with an audience (Jenkins, et al.,
2009), which in turn seems to inform the choices she made when she wrote for academic purposes.

Conversely, Kayla believed texting might impede her growth/development in academic writing. She expressed concern that if she texted more, perhaps she would “probably use shorter sentences” (personal communication, February 13, 2011) in her writing. Recall, that as a reluctant texter, Kayla did not often engage in the language processes associated with texting. Additionally, she expressed a belief that familiarity and habits with texting would cause the change in her usual pattern of sentence structure. Because she engages in texting out of necessity instead of pleasure, she believes text language has not become a part of her linguistic repertoire for more formal writing occasions. Recent research supports Kayla’s beliefs that as text language becomes more familiar to a social media enthusiast, it is used more frequently (Barker, 2007; Plester, et al., 2009). However, for her, texting is a necessary tool for connecting with her friends, not a pleasurable activity; therefore she feels it does not influence her writing process, but it could be potentially influencing her written assignments.

Anna’s commentary on the ways in which text language has or has not become a part of her formal compositional process for school-related assignments is similar to Kayla’s hypothesis of texting frequency as a primary contributor to shorter sentences. Anna is exclusively homeschooled and thought she was reducing her sentence length due in part to the character limits associated with texting and the habit of truncating rather than elaborating on her thoughts. Anna’s school-based work consists of placing words in blanks to answer questions and writing essays when her tutor assigns them. She believed that her written papers were exhibiting shorter sentences than before she began texting,
but the work had maintained the same academic quality. For Anna, familiarity with texting will potentially influenced her cognitive processes so that elongated thoughts are shortened without a loss of meaning. Current research into the ways in which social media is influencing youth support Anna’s beliefs that the use and availability of digital media has changed how she and other adolescents process information (Alvermann, 2008; Carrington, 2004; Prensky, 2001). Anna was convinced that a correlation between text messaging and changed sentence structure existed and that the connection could be traced to the influence of written discourse combined with social media.

Chelsea, Kayla and Anna all agreed that the use of social media, specifically text messaging, has influenced, or for Kayla, would have if she texted more, the manner in which they cognitively constructed their writing assignments. For Chelsea, she believes texting has benefitted her writing process, but that it has also potentially influenced a change in her formal language use for academic essays. But for Kayla and Anna, texting seems to be potentially detrimental to their compositional processes. In spite of the multiple ways I approached this topic with the other homeschoolers, they either did not comment on or did not know if texting had influenced their cognitive processes in regards to academic writing. From the homeschoolers’ perspective, the act of social media communication is not writing. Because they do not equate texting with writing, it is possible that the adolescent participants are not aware of the potential influence texting and text language could be having on their process of writing and on the final products.

Some researchers are in agreement with the participants that the proliferation of language use in the social media context is encouraging quicker responses and changing sentence structures for school-based writing assignments (Bauerlein, 2010; Horowitz,
2008; Jago, 2009). These researchers feel that text language is changing student writing – and not for the better. However, based on analysis of the homeschoolers’ formal writings, I did not find this to be the case. Their academic essays were researched, cohesive, and well-written. There were grammar/language errors evident in each paper that could have been texting influenced, or could have simply been mistakes. However, because I do not have homeschool-based formal writing samples written prior to the onset of texting to compare to the newer samples collected during the study, the information is inconclusive at this time.

When thinking about the potential relationships between texting/text language and academic writing, the homeschoolers appear to provide alternative perspectives to those espoused by researchers such as Jago (2009), Horowitz (2008) and Bauerlein (2010). The homeschoolers are able to differentiate their language registers and choose which language to use in which situation, as previously discussed. They are articulate, intelligent, and metacognitively aware of their language choices and when to make them. These adolescents find the idea of using text language in homeschool-based writing to be completely against the teachings of their parents and/or their instructors, and indicators of a person who is uneducated or academically unsuccessful. Recent research (Barker, 2007; Bloom, 2010; Plester, et al., 2009) concerning traditionally educated students supports the idea that such students are also aware of the differences in language registers and do not believe text language should be used in formal academic assignments. Even though there are those who would decry texting as the ruination of the English language, these homeschooled adolescents appear to be able to separate their discourses and
properly apply the appropriate ones. Furthermore, the process of texting, as least for one homeschooler, appears to assist in the cognitive process of written composition.

**Conclusions for Research Question Two**

The adolescent homeschoolers that participated in this study communicated about academic concerns via texting. Some also found that texting and text language were potentially influencing both their writing process and the written assignment. The participants purposefully excluded text language from their academic assignments and one participant believed texting served as a cognitive tool to inform her school-based writing. In order to succeed at the highest academic levels possible, the homeschoolers differentiated between school writing and social writing and were able to compartmentalize the two, flexibly flowing between the registers as the situations arose. Parent expectations were high and the homeschoolers felt they must achieve due to parental and perceived societal standards, which required that they abstained from the usage of text language in their academic assignments.

The participants used texting to academically support and encourage each other. For those that could discuss their perceptions about the influence of texting and text language on their academic writing, some felt that familiarity with texting had helped them to clarify opinions and streamline thoughts due to the usual quick responses and text screen character limits. However, they also felt that while texting was not influencing their grammar or punctuation, it potentially facilitated shorter sentence writing. Unfortunately, an investigation into the quality of writing was not undertaken due to the time constraints of the research study. Because some of the homeschooled adolescents had been texting for several years, an examination of written artifacts prior to the onset of
texting to use for comparison with written artifacts collected after texting, would have encompassed data collection of materials no longer in existence.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to research the ways in which adolescent homeschoolers used texting and text language in their lives and to find the ways in which their academic writing practices were being influenced using a constructionism epistemology with theories reflective of social constructionism and sociocultural learning. This study was conducted through interviews with adolescent participants and their parent-educators, and through the collection of traditionally and digitally written artifacts. I began with eight participants, but due to one participant’s limited participation, data from only seven participants were included in the data analysis.

The thematic analysis of the data resulted in more realizations that adolescent homeschoolers are fully immersed in the digital world of social text messaging. Similar to other adolescents who are more likely to converse online with those people familiar to them, (Berg, 2011; Gross, et al., 2002; Ito, et al., 2008; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011), the homeschoolers in this study use social media to extend existing friendships and converse about current personal and public events. Just as Vygotsky (1978) and other sociocultural learning theorists have suggested, the adolescents’ social engagement through social media, which often involved texting, contributed not only to the development of their social relationships, but also to their learning. They were digital technology enthusiasts and interacted frequently with their peers and family members.
about current life happenings. Textisms were used in the homeschoolers’ written and oral discourses as a preferred immediate communication method, even though misunderstandings sometimes occurred due to unfamiliar language use or lack of social cues. Madell and Muncer (2007), as well as Plester, Wood, and Joshi’s (2009) research supported the homeschoolers’ assessment that text messages can be easily misunderstood if the language used is unfamiliar or due to the lack of social cues available on a digital screen (Ling, 2005; Madell & Muncer, 2007). Ultimately, this group of homeschoolers maintained ownership of their personal and social communications and intentionally used or avoided text language in correspondence with their peer group members, depending on the recipient and the topic of the message.

As the adolescent homeschooled participants consciously choose to omit any typical “textisms” from their text messages when they socially communicate with their peers, they are constructing their written literacy (Burns & Darling, 2002). Adolescents learn from each other and share language in the texting world; therefore, as they text, they are constructing the ways that they write and making meaning from text messages as an affinity group. They are also very much aware of the impending potential consequences of academic failure, parental disappointment, and peer group exclusion, should they have a lapse in formal language use for academic assignments. As in previous studies that found adolescents’ avid use of text messaging to be an influence on their academic writing (Bauerlein, 2010; Drouin & Davis, 2009; Jago, 2009; Rosen, et al., 2010), some participants in this study identified texting and text language as having informed their academic writing (Burns & Darling, 2002). However, the findings also showed that the homeschoolers in this study compartmentalize writing tasks and are
acutely aware of the negative consequences of blending text language and formal language for writing connected to academic instruction.

Implications

In the vast world of social media, texting and text language are influencing adolescents in ways that as yet are not fully known. Because homeschoolers are an understudied population, even less is known about the influences of social media on their learning. Due to little or no homeschool educational regulations in most states, and the fact that many homeschooling families prefer to limit their children’s contact with the outside or secular world, there is very little information academic information readily available. This research into the topic of homeschoolers and the influence of texting can assist educators and literacy researchers in understanding better what social literacy means to this specific population. Learning is no longer instruction in traditional reading and writing. According to Jewitt, Kress, Ogborn and Tsatsarelis (2001), “Visual realization of meaning is important. Learning can no longer be considered a purely linguistic accomplishment” (p.17). In order to address the full potential of multiliteracy in the digital age, we must understand what social literacy means to all adolescents, including those educated at home.

Although the information presented in this study is inconclusive, it can suggest possibilities of how adolescents in general could perceive texting as a cognitive tool in order to scaffold their writing process. Some of the adolescent participants believed the texting process was similar to the writing process and that texting has helped reinforce the cognitive skills necessary for streamlining thinking, pinpointing point of view, and even clarifying word choice as schema for quick writing situations. Adolescents
communicate regularly via social media and using texting to enhance the writing process could encourage a narrowing of the gap between in-school and out-of-school literacies.

While I conducted this study using a sociocultural theoretical lens in which I viewed the participants as one case in which they were a social group that influenced and informed each other’s learning, it would be interesting to view this study as individual cases. In that way, each adolescent homeschooled participant, their texting, and text language could be analyzed individually and in detail and then compared to others within the peer group. This approach would allow for a more traditional case study model that was not used in this project.

The participants in this research volunteered to share their communications and homeschool-based writing, and through this experience, I was given a glimpse into their homeschooled world. These adolescents are not only differentiating their discourses and attaining academic success, they are also creating and constructing their language together through the use of social media. According to Eckert (2004) and Gee (2008), adolescents are the innovators of language, and this study has shown the veracity of that statement.
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### APPENDIX A – PARTIAL LISTING OF POSSIBLE TEXTISMS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textism</th>
<th>Standard Word</th>
<th>Textism</th>
<th>Standard Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:-) bday,</td>
<td>happy birthday</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>just kidding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-X</td>
<td>kiss</td>
<td>l8r</td>
<td>later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-X me</td>
<td>kiss me</td>
<td>lol</td>
<td>laughing out loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2day</td>
<td>today</td>
<td>msg</td>
<td>message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4ever</td>
<td>forever</td>
<td>nvm</td>
<td>neversmind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b4</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>omg</td>
<td>Oh my God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bcnu</td>
<td>be seeing you</td>
<td>pls</td>
<td>please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bf</td>
<td>boyfriend</td>
<td>ppl</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b l8</td>
<td>be late</td>
<td>prw</td>
<td>parents are watching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brb</td>
<td>be right back</td>
<td>ru</td>
<td>are you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>btw</td>
<td>by the way</td>
<td>ruok</td>
<td>are you okay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cu</td>
<td>see you</td>
<td>sup</td>
<td>what’s up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuz</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>thx</td>
<td>thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cya</td>
<td>see ya (= you)</td>
<td>tmi</td>
<td>too much information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dnt</td>
<td>don’t</td>
<td>ttyl, t2ul</td>
<td>talk to you later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f2t</td>
<td>free to talk</td>
<td>wbs</td>
<td>write back soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYI</td>
<td>for your information</td>
<td>wbu</td>
<td>what about you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gtg</td>
<td>got to go</td>
<td>wru</td>
<td>where are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gf</td>
<td>girlfriend</td>
<td>xlnt</td>
<td>excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gr8</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>smiley face = happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>idk</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>frowny face = sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ilu, ily, i&lt;3u</td>
<td>I love you</td>
<td>;-)</td>
<td>winking face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imo</td>
<td>in my opinion</td>
<td>:-p</td>
<td>winking face w/ tongue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B – ADOLESCENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why do you text? (If the participate says “I don’t know”, I will then ask if they text because everyone else does it, to stay connected to family/friends, or maybe quick communication?)

2. Who do you text most often? How many times a day, do you think, you text back and forth with ______________? (If the participant names one person, I will focus on that person. However, if the participant names a group of people, I will ask about each one individually.)

3. Could you translate this example of formal language into text language?

Female language:
It was great to see you! Kate and I were laughing out loud when you walked up and Brian said, “I love you”. Boys are weird, right? Talk to you soon. Love you forever!
Laura.

Male language:
Spy games was great yesterday. Youth group rocks! Kate and Bobby were gross saying “I love you” all the time. I was rolling on the floor laughing when Pastor Tim put them on separate teams. By the way, when is “The Mix”? - Jake

4. When you text, do you find that you write in formal language, text language, or a combination of the two? Why do you think you make that choice? (If the
interviewee asks what formal language is, I will call it “school language” with periods, capitals, correct spelling, etc.)

5. Where do you use text language besides texting on a cell phone?

6. How does knowing text language influence the way you write e-mails or do your school work? Do you think either your social writing or your school-based writing has changed since you began texting? If not, why not? If so, how?
APPENDIX C – PARENT-EDUCATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Your child has said that he/she texts frequently. Why do you think ____________ likes to text? (If the parent says, “I don’t know”, I will then probe with the following: could it be because everyone else is, or to stay connected with family/friends, or because it’s a quick way to communicate?)

2. What have you noticed about the way ____________ texts? How often does he/she text? Does ____________ share with you who he/she texts with most often and what they text about? (If the parent answers yes to the last part of the question, I will then ask: Are the texts usually social or more informational in content?)

3. Are you familiar with text language? How do you think it differs from formal language? (If the interviewee is unfamiliar with the mechanics of text language, I will show an example of a translated piece of writing. If the interviewee asks what formal language is, I will call it “school language” with periods, capitals, correct spelling, etc.)

4. Does ____________ share his/her social communications, such as texts or emails, with you? If so, what kind of writing have you noticed is in them? Is there more text language, is he/she using the rules of formal language, or is it a combination of both?
5. Why do you homeschool?

6. Do you think ________________ ’s social writing or school assignment writing has changed since he/she began texting? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think text language is not showing up in ________________ ’s writing?
APPENDIX D – “MEAN” LYRICS BY TAYLOR SWIFT

You, with your words like knives
And swords and weapons that you use against me
You have knocked me off my feet again
    Got me feeling like a nothing
You, with your voice like nails on a chalkboard
    Calling me out when I'm wounded
You picking on the weaker man

Well you can take me down with just one single blow
    but you don't know, what you don't know...

Someday I'll be living in a big ol' city
    And all you're ever going to be is mean
Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me
    And all you're ever going to be is mean
    Why you gotta be so mean?

You, with your switching sides
And your wildfire lies and your humiliation
You have pointed out my flaws again
    As if I don't already see them
I walk with my head down
    Trying to block you out 'cause I'll never impress you
    I just wanna feel okay again

I bet you got pushed around
    Somebody made you cold
But the cycle ends right now
    Cause you can't lead me down that road
And you don't know, what you don't know...

Someday I'll be living in a big ol' city
    And all you're ever going to be is mean
Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me
    And all you're ever going to be is mean
    Why you gotta be so mean?

And I can see you years from now in a bar
    Talking over a football game
With that same big loud opinion
    But nobody's listening
Washed up and ranting about the same old bitter things
Drunk and grumbling on about how I can't sing
But all you are is mean

All you are is mean
And a liar, and pathetic, and alone in life
And mean, and mean, and mean, and mean

But someday I'll be living in a big ol' city
And all you're ever going to be is mean, yeah yeah
Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me
And all you're ever going to be is mean
Why you gotta be so mean?

Someday I'll be living in a big ol' city
And all you're ever going to be is mean, yeah yeah
Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me
And all you're ever going to be is mean
Why you gotta be so mean?