Parent Perceptions of Adolescent Technology Use: Implications for the Parent-Child Relationship

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Abstract

Technology and social media use are now more popular than ever with adolescents. Excessive technology use has often been associated with decreased mental health and relationship quality. Researchers have typically identified problematic technology use by time spent on a device rather than in an interpersonal context. Phubbing and technoference are two constructs that describe how technology use can potentially be disruptive to in-person interactions. Little research has investigated technology use in the context of the parent-child relationship despite reports from parents that technology use is a frequent source of conflict. Through the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner’s neo-ecological model and structural family therapy, the two studies in this dissertation sought to increase knowledge of the phenomenon of adolescent technology use within the parent-child relationship, from the perspective of parents. Connectedness, shared activities, and hostility were aspects of the parent-child relationship explored in these studies. Study 1 (n = 749) investigated whether conflict over technology mediated relationships between technology use behaviors and qualities of the parent-child relationship. Results were mixed as conflict over technology served as a significant mediator in some models, including between phubbing and connectedness and between technoference and hostility. Significant mediation did not occur in all tested models, and some directions of relationships differed from what was hypothesized. Parents often utilize technology mediation strategies as part of their parenting style. Different strategies have varying effects on adolescent technology use behaviors, but few studies have explored the implications of these mediation strategies for the quality of the parent-child relationship. Study 2 (n = 749) investigated whether the technology mediation strategies of non-intrusive inspection and active mediation moderated relationships between technology use behaviors and qualities of the parent-child relationship. Results indicated that non-intrusive inspection served as a significant moderator in some models, including between phubbing and connectedness and between phubbing and hostility. Active mediation served as a significant moderator in some models, including between phubbing and shared activities and between technoference and connectedness. Results of Study 2 were mixed as the technology mediation strategies did not significantly moderate all tested models. Limitations and implications of both studies are discussed.

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