



CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE IMPLICATIONS OF MOBILE DEVICE USAGE

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ABSTRACT

Mobile devices have become entrenched in today's culture. In light of the unprecedented surge in mobile device usage, its implications on child health becomes more pertinent. Aspects of child development, such as establishing a stable work-life balance and identity formation are paramount when considering the impact of mobile devices.

With the advent of mobile devices, the impact of technology on an adolescent's social-emotional development is one that cannot be overlooked. Features commonly associated with mobile devices, such as push notifications and increased access to social media, influence an adolescent's ability to achieve work-life balance and develop their identity.

Push notifications from mobile devices can disrupt work-life balance.[1] While beneficial in providing real-time updates, notifications can also be detrimental as they bombard users with alerts throughout the day.[2] In the context of children, the increasing frequency of notifications from school can pose a threat to their work-life balance, disproportionately impacting their sleep and physical activity.[2] For instance, notifications on e-learning platforms like MS Teams have increased the convenience of student-teacher communication during after-school hours, rendering it challenging for students to fully disconnect from school life during their downtime. This blurred line between work and play can lead to perilous physiological, emotional, and mental health outcomes on an adolescent's development.[3] Further emphasis on establishing personal device usage guidelines will undoubtedly help adolescent users navigate this fine line.

The rise of mobile devices also impacts the stability of an adolescent's self-identity. Self-identity is paramount as it sets adolescents on the

path of being their own individual, allowing them to grasp their morals, values, worth, and feel a sense of direction in the world.[4]

With the recent growth of social media culture—an increase from 33% reported usage among teens ages 13-17 in 2012 to 70% in 2018[5]—the exploration of its effect on self-identity is necessary. This is because social media can both secure and threaten the stability of self-identity. Proponents of social media claim that the platform can connect similar individuals together, which may otherwise be difficult to encounter without technology.[5] This can help form a sense of belonging and affiliation which are important to developing self-identity. An example of this is a youth reaching out to a sexual minority group for emotional support.

Despite these points supporting social media, common criticism argues that the hypercompetitive nature of social media can destabilize a youth's self-identity.[6] This typically stems from social comparison, which can lead to self-doubt and insecurities formed by social constructs like body shaming and glorification of unrealistic body images on social media.[6]

As conveyed, the pervasiveness of mobile devices in the lives of children impacts the development of social skills, their ability to establish work/school-life balance, as well as their perception of self-identity.

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