

Parental Interpretations of Screen Time Regulation in 2020
A Case Study on Parents in Washington, D.C.

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I. Introduction

Screen time among children is increasing and parents are struggling to impose limitations, which is made even worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and e-learning. Current literature renders that screen time among children is above the recommended amount which harms them, parents should impose limitations, and limitations are effective in reducing screen time. Despite the literature, parents are failing to regulate their children's screen time. Thus, to understand the lived experiences of parents, specifically how and why they make their limitations, I will use an interpretivist approach. My case is parents in Washington, DC because this fall DCPS is online and parents are grappling with technology regulation, meaning they are informed on this issue. Therefore, despite the literature suggesting that parents should limit technology usage for children, how do parents in DC interpret technology regulation and make meaning of these regulations in 2020?

Figuring out how and why parents make technology boundaries is important to a child's development and the family dynamic. Only when parents are aware of this information and its implications will they consciously enforce adequate limitations, and be able to counteract the negatives of high screen usage. This question is more important than ever to parents in DC as school has moved online (DCPS 2020).

The existing literature acknowledges that children's current screen usage is above recommended amounts (Sanders 2016). Many parents are aware heightened screen usage has many negative implications for children (Domingues-Montanari 2017). Parents are the most important factor in reducing a child's screen time because imposed regulations can be effective, however many parents fail to impose adequate limitations (Ramirez 2011). Current literature also

acknowledges that parents' ideologies and own screen usage impact how they impose regulations (Hamilton 2016).

I will study how parents regulate their children's screen usage, and how they impose these regulations. My case is parents in Washington DC, because the parents are knowledgeable about this topic, have access to technology, but differ in their backgrounds, incomes, and family situations, which may influence their differing choices (Coffin 2018). I will interview parents, analyze screen usage reports, and conduct observational studies of families in their home, to ultimately build an interpretation.

The contributions of this project are to gain a deeper understanding of how parents in DC form and impose technology usage limitations. By understanding this perspective, this will make them more aware of their practices, and perhaps give insight into how to better approach technology usage regulation in 2020. While the findings are not necessarily generalizable, this project will advance the literature to understand how parents' are approaching technology regulation in 2020.

1. Literature Review

The existing literature illustrates how technology is overused among children, an average of 6 to 8.5 hours of screen time, which is above the recommended 1 to 2 hours (Sanders 2016, AACAP 2020, AAP 2013). This heightened screen usage is negatively associated with physical and cognitive development, and positively associated with depression, anxiety, obesity, and sleep problems (Domingues-Montanari 2017, Hale and Guan 2015).

However, despite parents being aware of these facts and being concerned about screen usage, they fail to impose effective limitations (Auxier 2020, Sanders 2016). Research has shown that parental rules around screen usage are the greatest factor in reducing screen time for

children, and clear rules are essential (Ramirez 2011, Lauricella 2015). Parents knowingly and unknowingly cannot enforce these boundaries because of inconvenience, and lack of time when focused on other things, and influenced by their own personal screen usage (Hamilton 2016, Lauricella 2015).

Current literature illustrates the known harms of screen usage and some different factors that influence parents' regulation. However, I want to investigate in practice what parents do and why they struggle to limit their children's technology usage. Thus, creating ethnographic data on parents' lived experiences furthers the existing literature on parents' choices, and justifies interpretivist research.

2. Research Design

Despite the literature suggesting that parents should limit technology usage for children, how do parents interpret technology regulation and make meaning of these regulations in 2020? To answer this question, I will use relational interviewing to investigate how parents construct meaning of their lived experiences with technology with their children (Fujii 2017, 9). I will not answer this question with causality rather, acknowledge it is constituted by the parents who experience technology in the home (Schwartz-Shea 2012, 99). Finally, I am going to be transparent about how my identity and experiences shape my bias, and my access (Fujii 2017, 101, Emerson 1995, 4). This information justifies an interpretivist approach.

I will observe parents in Washington, DC, because they are knowledgeable on this topic, have access to technology, but differ in their backgrounds, incomes, and family situations, which may influence their differing choices (Coffin 2018). Further, DCPS is online for Fall 2020, and amid implementing a 1:1 technology to student ratio (DCPS 2020). My interpretivist approach

will allow me to understand parents' ideological framework and lived experiences, which I can bring an interpretation to, to better understand their experiences (Emerson 1995, 17).

As my primary source of data, I will interview parents, though also analyze screen usage reports and observe their in-home dynamics. Specifically, I will investigate parent's screen policies, discrepancies between desired amount of time and actual usage time, how parents enforce limits, and reasoning for limits, among others. I hope to talk to parents of elementary-aged students, because they have the authority to assign more effective rules than for older students (Sanders 2016). To ensure diversity of perspectives, I will investigate parents with different backgrounds in DC, specifically different socio-economic backgrounds. Beyond data, my metadata will be what I observe in the home, such as parents' body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal forms of expression in response to my questions or experiences with their children.

A central component of interpretivist research is reflexivity and acknowledgement of positionality (Schwartz-Shea 2012, 101). As a young, frequent user of technology, this leads me to be less wary of technology, and different from a researcher from an older generation. For my case, I am connected to multiple families in the DC, which gives me access for interviews (Schwartz-Shea 2012, 58). However, many of my connections are in Northwest DC, a predominantly white upper middle class area, so I will have to use my connections to find more families to get a diversity of experiences.

I will use an abductive approach, meaning I will make observations and come to a theory (Emerson 1995, 198). For my field notes, I will note my initial impressions, what is significant or unexpected, what parents react to and see as important, and how routine action in the home is organized (Emerson 1995, 34-29). I will use limited jottings to ensure that I do not off-put

parents during our conversation, but also note important data (Emerson 1995, 29-37). To analyze my field notes I will close read them to see how they have developed, open code, and then craft integrative memos to link different experiences together and find the main themes with parents' regulations (Emerson 1995, 171-173). I will then bring my interpretation to understand how and why parents struggle to limit screen usage.

To ensure transparency, first I will get the consent of all parents, and be clear what I am doing (Fujii 2012, 719). I will also be clear about how my location in DC will influence the information accessed or blocked, how my identity as a young white female informs the data co-creation, how my presence may influence an interaction of a parent with a different background, and how my material generates my understanding (Schwartz-Shea 2012, 101). To validate the knowledge I co-create, I will compare across interviews and also to the meta-data I gather from homes. Meaning, if a parent tells me they limit their child's technology usage to 3 hours a day, but in reality their child then uses 7 hours, I will check this, and use these discrepancies to further create knowledge.

One potential limitation is the data and analysis of this project will be specific to DC and a specific group of parents. Another limitation is that this approach is ethnographic, and therefore will not provide concrete actionable plans or policy suggestions to solve the problems. Finally, this approach does not suggest better ways of approaching technology in the home, rather just investigates how parents in DC are dealing with technology limitations.

IV. Conclusion

Despite the literature suggesting that parents should limit technology usage for children, how do parents interpret technology regulation and make meaning of these regulations in 2020?

To answer this question, I will use relational interviewing and observation of parents in DC, to better understand their experiences and ideologies.

This project qualifies existing literature about technology usage limitations by understanding the lived experiences of parents. By understanding parents' experiences this can help explain the cognitive dissonance between parents knowing technology usage has adverse effects and failing to impose limitations.

However, there is still room for further scholarship, specifically, how can parents better impose technology usage limitations on their children? And what are realistic technology boundaries in 2020?

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