Implications of the family expert role for parental rules regarding adolescent use of social technologies

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Abstract:

We conducted individual semi-structured qualitative interviews with a diverse group of 40 adolescents to assess their perceptions related to (a) the location of expert power within their families with respect to social technology use (cell phones and social networking sites) and (b) the implications of such power for parental rule setting and enforcement related to adolescent use of these technologies. Results indicated substantial variability in who adolescents perceived to be the family experts. Rules regarding access to social technologies existed in most families regardless of the technology type and regardless of whether parents or youth were perceived as technology experts. In contrast, family expert status had implications for the types of content rules that parents set regarding adolescents' use of social technologies and the manner in which such rules were enforced.

Keywords: Adolescence | cell phones | parenting | power | social networking | technology

Article:

Introduction

Contemporary society is increasingly characterized by exposure to and use of "social technologies"—technological devices and programs developed for the purpose of communicating with and maintaining connections to others (Fletcher & Blair, 2014). Such technologies may be Internet based, cell phone based, or may represent the intersection of the two as the popularity of cell phones that can be used to access the Internet increases. Yet, despite the prevalence of such technologies, evidence suggests that there are differences in the ways these technologies are perceived and used by adolescents as opposed to their parents. Although the overwhelming majority of adults and adolescents alike report owning cell phones (Smith, 2011), adolescents are more likely than their parents to be frequent and proficient users of the

texting function on such phones. A 2010 Nielsen survey (Nielsen Company, 2010) indicated that adolescents (ages 13–17 years) in the United States sent and received an average of 4050 text messages per month compared to an average of 1630 texts sent and received per month among young adults (ages 18–24 years). High school–aged students (ages 14–17 years) have increased their use of texting well beyond these levels within the past few years. In 2011, high school–aged youth reported sending a median of 100 texts per day and indicated that texting surpassed all other forms of daily communication within their lives (Lenhart, 2012). Similar trends have been found among youth around the world (Baron and Hård af Segerstad, 2010; Ling, 2010). Adolescents are also more likely than adults to be active users of social networking sites (Lenhart et al., 2011), and to report positive feelings about the role of social technology in their lives (Macgill, 2007). Also, adolescents use social networking sites differently than do adult users, having more "friends," more same-aged "friends," and using a variety of media as a part of their online social networking activity (Pfeil et al., 2009).

Parental mediation with respect to adolescent use of social technologies

In relation to technology, parental mediation is defined in terms of the interactions parents have with children related to children's use of media (Lee and Chae, 2012). Mediation is consistent with the broader role of parents as responsible for setting and enforcing rules concerning adolescent behavior across a wide range of domains. A small and growing literature has focused on parental mediation of children's Internet use (including social networking sites), but virtually no work has focused on parents' efforts to guide their children's use of other technologies, such as cell phones. Research on parental mediation has indicated that parents' efforts to set rules concerning children's use of the Internet are less likely to be reported by children than by their parents (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008; Wang et al., 2005), are less frequently reported for older adolescents than for younger adolescents and children (Lee, 2013; Rosen et al., 2008), and that parental rules do not always result in changes in children's patterns of Internet use (Sook-Jung and Young-Gil, 2007; Van den Eijnden et al., 2010).

Despite these challenges, parents do make efforts to mediate their children's use of technology. For youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years, 68% of parents report having content rules and 55% of parents report having time-use rules regarding adolescent Internet use as reported in a study from the Pew Institute of 935 parents (Macgill, 2007). In a sample of 1501 adolescents who reported on their parents' rules about Internet use, Mitchell et al. (2003) found that parents had rules about the activities adolescents were or were not supposed to engage in online, the number of hours spent online, and having to ask permission before going online. In 2005, 54% of parents in a national callback telephone survey indicated using Internet filters as a method of regulating adolescent Internet use (Lenhart et al., 2005).

It appears that parents use a variety of strategies to monitor how adolescents spend their time online. Some strategies require a certain amount of technical knowledge, and other strategies do not. For example, parents may place home computers in open areas of the house in an effort to

directly observe adolescent Internet behaviors or have Internet safety discussions with their adolescents about appropriate and inappropriate Internet behaviors (Eastin et al., 2006; Flemming et al., 2006; Shin, 2013). Other parents with more technical knowledge may monitor adolescent Internet activity by checking web histories, reviewing sent or deleted e-mails, and reviewing what adolescents post online (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008; Macgill, 2007). Rideout (2007) conducted a random digit dial telephone survey of 1008 parents and reported that 87% of parents indicated that they checked the names on their adolescents' instant messaging (IM) "buddy" lists, 82% looked at their adolescents' profiles on a social network site, 76% checked which websites their adolescents visited, and 39% read their adolescents' e-mails or looked in their inboxes.

Yet, descriptive information regarding types of parental mediation strategies does not provide information about factors that may predict parental rule setting and enforcement of rules regarding adolescent use of social technologies. A small body of literature has examined antecedents of restrictive mediation, the practice of limiting or denying access to particular social technologies. This literature has found that parents are more likely to utilize restrictive mediation when they believe the technology could have negative influences on children (Lee, 2013; Shin and Huh, 2011). Mesch (2006) reported that parent–adolescent conflict regarding adolescent Internet use was more frequent within families in which adolescents were perceived to be expert in terms of computer skills. Fletcher and Blair (2014) reported that the likelihood that mothers would retain authority over their adolescent children's use of social technologies varied based on both mothers' and adolescents' expertise regarding the technology being used. Findings such as these suggest that parental and adolescent expertise regarding use of social technologies may be an important factor to consider in relation to parental mediation related to the use of these technologies.

Social power theory as applied to parental mediation

According to social power theory (French and Raven, 1959), there are five potential sources of power within interpersonal relationships. Coercive power refers to the ability to make another person to do something he or she does not wish to do. It is utilized with the intention of forcing compliance by another. Reward power refers to the ability to provide desired outcomes to another. These desired outcomes can involve providing another person something they find valuable or removing something they find aversive. Rewards can be material or relational. Legitimate power has to do with a person's holding a role that is understood as encompassing elements of power. When individuals are perceived as holding legitimate power, others see them as entitled, by virtue of their role, as to provide rewards, punishment, and direction. Referent power is present when others look up to an individual, wishing to gain from approval or acceptance from that individual. Individuals who are perceived as holding referent power are viewed as role models. Expert power is present when an individual holds specific knowledge or expertise that confers power. An individual who is perceived as holding expert power is perceived by others to be trustworthy with respect to issues related to the area of expertise. All of

these forms of power may be present within parent–child relationships, may be held by either parents or adolescents (Henry et al., 1997), and may explain both the willingness of parents to develop and enforce rules in the parenting role and the willingness of children to comply with such rules.

Of particular interest for the current project is expert power as it relates to parental and adolescent knowledge and abilities in using social technologies. We suggest that this type of expert power may be particularly important as parents and adolescents negotiate issues related to rules governing adolescent use of these technologies. Although we are not aware of any research to date conducted on this topic, Schumm et al. (1986) found that adolescents were more likely to comply with parental instructions when parents were perceived by adolescents as high in expert power, in large part because parents who were higher in expert power were more likely to explain their instructions within the area of expertise. This finding is consistent with the work of Smetana (2000), which indicated that the effectiveness of parental authority depends in part on mothers' and adolescents' perceptions of the legitimacy of that authority and the work of Laupa and Turiel (1993) who demonstrated that when children judge the legitimacy of authority, they use their perceptions of the individual's knowledge as much as the individual's adult status.

It is important to recognize that expert power is specific to the domain of interest. In terms of social technologies, there is likely within-family variation in terms of which family members hold expert power as it relates to different technologies—specifically social networking sites as opposed to cell phones. Also, the meaning and importance of expertise as it relates to parental mediation may vary based on technology type. Adults and adolescents are similarly likely to use cell phones (Smith, 2011), which may provide adults with a minimal level of competence in use of these technologies that is not present for social networking sites (which are more frequently used by adolescents; Lenhart et al., 2005). This competence may result in parents feeling either empowered or over-confident concerning their own use of a highly familiar technology—with each possibility having very different implications in terms of parental use of mediation strategies. In terms of risk to adolescents, parents report high levels of concern regarding their children's use of Internet-based technologies that potentially place them in contact with strangers (Lenhart et al., 2005). Similar levels of parental concern have not been documented with respect to children's use of cell phones. Therefore, it may be that parental mediation is more frequent for use of social networking sites, regardless of who within the family holds the family expert role.

Summary and research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions related to the location (parent or adolescent) of expert power with respect to social technology use (cell phones and social networking sites) within families of high school–aged students:

- Who do adolescents perceive to hold expert power within their families as it relates to use of the social technologies of cell phones and social networking sites?

- How is expert power related to (a) the types of rules parents set regarding their children's use of these technologies and (b) the strategies parents use to enforce these rules?

Method

Participants

Participants were 40 high school–aged (ages 14–18 years) adolescents. One female participant deliberately chose not to respond to some demographic questions. Accordingly, the statistics that follow reflect a sample size of 39–40, depending on the specific demographic characteristics. The sample was diverse in terms of ethnicity, including adolescents who described themselves as European American ($n = 15$), African American ($n = 14$), Multi-Ethnic ($n = 5$), Hispanic American ($n = 2$), Asian American ($n = 2$), and Native American ($n = 1$). The sample was 85% female ($n = 34$) and 15% male ($n = 6$), likely reflecting the greater tendency for women and girls to volunteer to participate in research (Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1975) and due to our use of a snowball sampling strategy in which girls were more likely to recruit female friends into the study while boys simply did not refer friends. The participants were split fairly evenly across all grades of high school from 9th to 12th grades. The sample was diverse in terms of family structure, representing traditional intact two-parent families ($n = 25$), single-mother families ($n = 10$), mother/stepfather families ($n = 5$), and one single father ($n = 1$). Mothers' educational levels ranged from 1 (mother who did not receive a high school diploma) to 10 (who had received their graduate degrees) with a modal level of some college. Fathers' educational levels ranged from 1 (father who had not completed high school) to 2 (who had received graduate degrees with a modal level of some college).

Procedure

Adolescents were recruited in two counties in the Southeast portion of the United States. Initial participants were recruited from church youth groups, a public high school, community agencies/organizations that worked with youth, and through distribution of project flyers in the community. We then used a snowball sampling strategy to recruit additional participants who were referred by the participants. Research assistants met with participants at a location of their choice (e.g. their homes, a private space at the agency/organization from which they were recruited). Participants completed a digitally recorded semi-structured qualitative interview and a packet of questionnaires (questionnaire data were not analyzed for this article). As an incentive for participation, participants were entered into a drawing for a US$50 gift card to a local store of their choice.

Interview protocol

All data were collected during 2010–2011, a time period that immediately preceded the now widespread use of "smart phones" that permit Internet (and hence social networking site) access using cell phones. As evidence for this, none of our participants reported using their cell phones to access the Internet. Accordingly, interview questions focused on use of cell phones for purposes of calling and texting and discussed use of social networking sites as accessed through computers. Adolescents were asked a series of questions focused on (a) their own use of cell phones and social networking sites, (b) perceptions regarding parental use of cell phones and social networking sites, (c) adolescents' perceptions of their own as opposed to their parents' competence in use of these social technologies, and (d) adolescents' reports of parental efforts to set and enforce rules regarding adolescents' social technology use.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms assigned to all participants. First cycle coding (descriptive and process codes; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014)) was then conducted on all data "chunks" to develop and refine codes related to adolescent reports regarding parents' and adolescents' experiences with cell phones and with social networking sites. A cross-case, variable-oriented strategy was utilized to understand the meanings and challenges adolescents experienced related to visual media use. Codes were modified through an iterative process wherein coders engaged in multiple independent readings of these transcripts, meeting in pairs between each round of readings to add codes, delete codes, or clarify code definitions so as to accurately reflect adolescents' descriptions. Second cycle coding and charting were then used to identify and relate themes regarding adolescent reports of their own and their parents' experiences and expertise with cell phones and social networking sites. Reliability of the final set of codes was verified by having two coders code all transcripts using the final coding protocol and then comparing coding. Assignment of codes to transcript segments was highly reliable with 94% agreement across coders. Final codes focused on adolescents' reported comparisons of their own versus their parents' proficiency with cell phones and social networking sites and evidence supporting these comparisons, as well as adolescents' perceptions of parental rules and monitoring strategies related to these technologies and perceived reasons that parents had such rules. Exact wording from the coding protocol is presented in Appendix 1.

ATLAS.ti software was then employed to group data by code and examine intersections of codes and to look for patterns. Using a cross-case analysis approach (case-oriented and variable-oriented; Miles et al., 2014), grouped sections of code were analyzed to capture emerging themes as they related to adolescents' as opposed to parents' interest in and experience using social technologies, adolescent perceptions of their own as opposed to their parents' competence using these technologies, and parental strategies in monitoring and setting rules related to technology use.

Results

First, we were interested in understanding adolescents' perceptions regarding whether they or their parents held the expert power with respect to use of two social technologies: cell phones and social networking sites. Then, we sought to understand the ways in which parental rule setting (access rules and content rules) and enforcement varied based on these perceptions. We did not ask adolescents to reflect separately on these issues for mothers as opposed to fathers. Most adolescents who lived in two-parent homes did discuss differences in parental expertise for mothers and fathers. However, in most cases, reflections regarding rule setting and enforcement were discussed more generally, with reference to "parents" as a unit. We organize our presentation of findings by first presenting findings as they relate to cell phones, then as they relate to social networking sites.

Who is the family expert?

Families were categorized based on whether adolescents perceived either of their parents as more proficient than they themselves were in using each type of social technology ("parent-expert") or perceived themselves as more proficient than both of their parents ("youth-expert"). These classifications were made separately for the two technologies of interest: cell phones and social networking sites. Not all families could be clearly categorized (particularly in the case of cell phones) either because adolescents did not provide enough elaboration in responses to make categorizations or because expertise was perceived as balanced between adolescents and their parents. Such families were dropped from analyses for the specific technology of interest. For both cell phones and social networking sites, almost twice as many adolescents perceived themselves to be more proficient than both of their parents as opposed to having at least one parent who was perceived as more proficient than they themselves were. The role of family expert was highly specific to technology type—parents or youth who were perceived as experts for one technology were not necessarily perceived as experts for the other.

Cell phones

In 11 cases, adolescents perceived at least one of their parents to be the family cell phone expert. Adolescents discussed their parents' expertise primarily in terms of parents taking on a teaching role in relation to their children's cell phone use: "He showed me how to set up my Gmail account on my phone and how to get … email to my phone" (Dominique). Parent-experts appeared to gain their expertise based on extensive histories of cell phone use, histories that sometimes predated their children's use of this technology and were occasionally linked with use of cell phones at work: "he used to work with a cell phone company, so he pretty much knows what the deal is with phones" (Kendall).

In 21 cases, adolescents perceived themselves to be the family cell phone expert. In such cases, adolescents spoke of their parents' confusions and difficulties using this technology, as well as their own efforts to teach parents how to use cell phone functions: It took me forever to teach my dad how to text and he still doesn't, he's still not too great at it. Like, I mean, I had to teach him

the whole technique of how many times you press the button to get the letter that you want. And Mom doesn't even try to go anywhere near that stuff. She just knows, like, I have my number saved in her phone so she can just hit send and it'll call me. (Michelle)

Within youth-expert families, parents typically owned cell phones, but used them infrequently or for limited functions. Parents were particularly unlikely to make frequent use of text-based functions on their cell phones.

Social networking sites

Adolescents discussed use of a variety of social networking sites, including Twitter, Tagged, Tumblr, and Bebo; however, the vast majority of responses referred to use of Facebook. A total of 13 adolescents reported parents to be the family experts in terms of use of social networking sites. In such cases, the parent-expert was typically an extremely enthusiastic user of this technology, spending long periods of time communicating with others through his or her site even if it was a comparatively new acquisition: "He's had his Facebook for like half the time and he has like three hundred more friends than me" (Jessica).

A total of 27 adolescents reported that they themselves were the family expert with respect to social networking site use. In some cases, these youth-experts were upfront about their frequent use of this technology: "I'm more proficient 'cause I spend more time with the Facebook" (Alisha). In other cases, it was not necessarily that adolescents were particularly frequent or enthusiastic users of this technology, but rather that their parents were relatively unenthusiastic or infrequent users:My mom like she, she has a Facebook but she doesn't do like the apps and the events and all that. She "likes" people's statuses and comments. And my dad, he doesn't have one so he's not really savvy about it. (Keisha)

Expert power as shaping parental rules and rule enforcement strategies

Adolescents discussed three aspects of parental mediation as it related to use of social technologies. Adolescents discussed *access rules*, defined in terms of when and how often adolescents were allowed to use social technologies. Adolescents discussed *content rules*, defined in terms of what information adolescents were allowed to post or transmit. Finally, adolescents discussed the *enforcement strategies* parents used to make sure rules about social technology use were followed.

Access rules

Adolescents were tremendously consistent in the manner in which they discussed rules their parents set regarding access to social technologies. These rules focused on setting times after which these technologies could or could not be used and locations or conditions under which these technologies could or could not be used. The vast majority of adolescents reported that their parents had set rules of this sort for both types of technologies. Access rules were discussed

as existing regardless of technology type and regardless of whether parents or youth were perceived as the technology expert. For example, regarding cell phones, It's like one rule … No talking on the cell phone, no texting on the cell phone. Cell phone has to be off at ten o'clock. (Kevin, Cell Phone Parent-Expert) They don't let me text in like long conversations at school, like ya know texting like a couple times back and forth about homework, they don't mind, but texting through the school day, like where it seems I'm not paying attention, then they don't like that and they don't like me um texting and phone calls really late at night. (Timothy, Cell Phone Youth-Expert) Generic rules about being a decent person that like apply to everything, also applies to cell phones. So, like if I started harassing someone through texting, they'd be upset with that but that's because, it'd be because of the harassment not because of the cell phone. (Ashley, Cell Phone Parent-Expert)

And, regarding social networking sites, My mom doesn't really like me to get on Facebook before I do my homework just because I get on Facebook like once a week so I have to catch up a lot for like two hours um, but, that's really about it, and like no using it after ten o'clock. (Jessica, Social Networking Parent-Expert)On the weekdays I have to get off the computer at ten. (Natasha, Social Networking Youth-Expert)

Content rules

In contrast to the consistency observed in adolescents' reports regarding access rules, there was considerable variability in the ways in which adolescents talked about content rules. This variation reflected both differences in technology type and in family expert grouping.

Cell phones

In terms of cell phone use, for families in which parents were perceived as the family technology expert, adolescents indicated a clear understanding of parental expectations and rules and what behaviors constituted violations: "There's no taking pictures of yourself and sending it unless it's like you have clothes on, there shouldn't be pictures, nothing like that, sexting, none of that" (Brianna, Cell Phone Parent-Expert). In contrast, within families in which adolescents were the perceived experts, adolescents either indicated that no rules regarding content were present or that they were confused as to the nature of such rules: My mom will get mad if I talk to somebody too long, or if I send somebody too many text messages. But, she usually doesn't care. Umm, my dad doesn't care at all. Umm, (pause) as long as I'm not doing anything inappropriate with it, he, they're fine. (Brittany, Cell Phone Youth-Expert) They don't let me text in like long conversations at school, like ya know texting like a couple times back and forth about homework, they don't mind, but texting through the school day, like like where it seems I'm not paying attention, then they don't like that. (Timothy, Cell Phone Youth-Expert)

Social networking sites

Within parent-expert families, there were clearly understood rules regarding use of social networking sites. These rules focused on what defined appropriate content for postings and the role of adolescents themselves as responsible for posting appropriate material on their sites: Just need to be careful what we post on Facebook, no inappropriate pictures, umm, no bullying, like, no harassment or anything. (Kamia, Social Networking Parent-Expert)No cursing or anything like that. Don't put nothing up that might be hurtful to someone else or yeah, that's basically it, don't say bad things on there. (Maya, Social Networking Parent-Expert)

Within youth-expert families, adolescents generally indicated either a lack of rules or confusion as to the nature of rules: "Not really many … now that I'm older and I've given away a lot of my childish ways. Um, they look at it every now and again but I mean, I don't have anything to hide" (Monique, Social Networking Youth-Expert).

The only types of rules that were clearly understood by youth-expert adolescents focused on protecting adolescents from victimization by avoiding contact with strangers or not posting identifying information (which might result in a stranger trying to contact the adolescent): "They don't want me to put, um, personal information on there, like um, address, cell phones, because sometimes a stranger can look and probably like start stalking you or something like that" (Carmina, Social Networking Youth-Expert).

Enforcement strategies

Similar to content rules, adolescents' reports of parental enforcement strategies showed considerable variation with such variation reflecting differences in both technology type and family expert grouping.

Cell phones

In parent-expert families, parents enforced rules by checking cell phone histories or setting up cell phone accounts in ways that limited opportunities for adolescent misuse:They want to see my phone, I can't like just scroll through and delete what I want, like I have to give it to them right then. (Monique, Cell Phone Parent-Expert)I had a certain level of text messages that were programmed for our account. On our cell phones we had a limited number of text messages we could send and if I went over that, then my text messaging would be cancelled completely. So I never went over it. (Courtney, Cell Phone Parent-Expert)I don't send pictures, well cause first of all I can't send pictures, my mom took that off my phone. (Brianna, Cell Phone Parent-Expert)

In contrast, when youth perceived themselves to be the family experts related to cell phones, they tended not to mention parental strategies for enforcing rules.

Social networking sites

In terms of social networking sites, parent-experts required that adolescents be their "friends" on social networking sites, resulting in the ability to monitor postings and use on an ongoing basis:

"They had their own already, so it, the rule was that they had to be my friend on Facebook or Myspace if I want one" (Natalie, Social Networking Parent-Expert); "I have to be a friend with my parents and I can only add people that I know" Dominique, Social Networking Parent-Expert). When youth were the social networking experts within the family, monitoring occurred intermittently when parents stumbled upon information about usage patterns or else strategies that required adolescent cooperation:She thinks she slick … so she'll come in and she'll be pretending like she's wiping something off or getting something up and I'll be like okay, and I'll be scrolling down and she'll be like, "Who is that?" and asking me questions. (Natasha, Social Networking Youth-Expert)My mom, I left my email up by accident once and she was reading it which I was so unhappy about. (Ashley, Social Networking Youth-Expert)

Discussion

Descriptive data regarding adolescent use of social technologies have consistently shown that adolescents are more frequent users of these technologies than are adults (Lenhart, et al., 2005; Nielsen Company, 2010). Our analysis of interview data obtained from high-school students suggests that many of our participants also perceived themselves to be more competent than their parents in such use, particularly in the case of use of social networking sites. Still, there was substantial variability in who adolescents perceive to be the family experts with respect to the social technologies of cell phones and social networking. This variation was associated with the types of rules that parents set regarding adolescents' use of these technologies and the manner in which such rules were enforced.

Parental rule setting for use of social technologies

A key finding of this study involved the distinction between access rules versus content rules and how these did, or did not, differ for parent-expert versus youth-expert families. A considerable amount of research has focused on documenting the extent to which parents set rules regarding their children's use of technology in general (e.g. Wang et al., 2005), although not social technology per se. Our findings suggest that research on parental rule setting is only meaningful to the extent that it specifies the types of rules about which parents and adolescents are reporting. Virtually all of the adolescents within our sample reported that their parents set rules with respect to the conditions under which they could access social technologies. These rules appeared to represent an intersection of social technology usage with parental expectations and guidelines that can be applied across a broad range of behaviors. For example, parents who expected their children to be sleeping or working on homework after a certain time of night may restrict a wide range of adolescent behaviors after that time (e.g. television watching, talking on landline telephones). Adding social technology use to the list of restricted activities was reported by our participants to be a common parental mediation strategy among parents who had such rules.

In contrast, adolescents' reports regarding their parents' use of content rules was consistent with the idea that expert power (French and Raven, 1959) has implications for manner in which such

rules are understood by adolescents. Within our sample, adolescent discussion regarding parental content rules was considerably different for parent-expert as opposed to youth-expert families. Regardless of social technology type (cell phones or social networking sites), adolescents from parent-expert families were able to clearly and elaborately describe parental rules and expectations. These adolescents appeared to understand not only what constituted a rule (and a violation of a rule) but also why parents had such a rule.

This clarity and elaboration as it related to content rules within parent-expert families stood in sharp contrast to the manner in which adolescents discussed content rules within youth-expert families. For cell phones, adolescents in youth-expert families indicated that their parents either did not have content rules or struggled to articulate the nature of existing rules. For social networking sites, adolescents in youth-expert families indicated that their parents either did not have content rules or discussed rules that emphasized protecting adolescents from victimization online.

This difference in adolescent perceptions of parental rules regarding cell phones as opposed to social networking within youth-expert families is consistent with the premise that perceptions of expert power are highly specific to the area of expertise under consideration (French and Raven, 1959). The lack of content rules as they applied to cell phone usage in adolescent-expert families may reflect the intersection of adolescent-expert power with parental comfort regarding cell phone usage in general. Cell phone use is widespread among adults and adolescents alike (Smith, 2011), although adolescents are more likely to use these phones for texting (Nielsen Company, 2010). In families in which adolescents held the expert power regarding texting and other advanced functions related to cell phone use, it may be that parents did not set content rules because they did not understand the technology enough to set meaningful rules, but felt comfortable enough with the calling function of telephones that they did not perceive there to be enough potential dangers in their use to warrant rule setting. Such parents may not have fully understood the nuances of cell phone functions and may have assumed that this technology was basically similar to that of landline telephones because they themselves used their cell phones as they would use landline telephones. Alternatively, it may have been that these parents did attempt to set rules regarding adolescent cell phone use. However, adolescents in these families may have been confused about the nature of such rules—or even thought that there were no rules—due to their parents' difficulties clearly articulating expectations regarding adolescent cell phone use. This possibility is supported by the work by Schumm et al. (1986) indicating that parents who hold expert power are more likely to provide explanations for their rules.

In contrast, social networking represents a newer frontier for many parents, as even those who are regular users did not grow up using them. The combination of less expert power with respect to this technology, combined with a general unfamiliarity regarding how it works, has the potential to generate a particularly interesting parental response. Parents in this situation may have the sense that they *should* set rules for their children's use of social technologies, but translating this expectation into a consistent structure that their children can understand and

express is more challenging. Some parents may respond to this tension of being unable to provide coherent and meaningful rules by abdicating the role of rule-setter altogether (Fletcher & Blair, 2014) or by setting content rules that may not make complete sense to adolescents in terms of structure or rationale. But a subset of parents of adolescents within our sample implemented content rules designed to protect children from technology and the individuals with whom it might place them in contact. This emphasis is consistent with literature suggesting that parents fear their children's victimization through technologies that put them in contact with unspecified others—such as sexual predators who might lurk in online chat rooms (Lenhart et al., 2005). This focus on rules designed to protect adolescents from online victimization stood in stark contrast to the types of content rules established within parent-expert families, where content rules emphasized adolescent responsibility for not themselves using social technologies inappropriately by engaging in behaviors such as posting sexually explicit material, using profanity in communications, or using social technology as a medium for engaging in social aggression.

Parental monitoring and rule enforcement

Having established the manner in which parental provision of access rules differed in parent-expert versus youth-expert families, a second area of interest involved considering whether parental monitoring and rule enforcement concerning social technology use differed across these family types. In terms of rule enforcement, mediation strategies described by adolescents were highly similar for cell phone use and for use of social networking sites. For both types of technology use, rule enforcement in parent-expert families was reported by adolescents to make use of aspects of technologies themselves to enforce rules. Parent-experts set up their cell phone service to incorporate restrictions, knew how to check cell phone text histories, and maintained their own Facebook accounts through which they "friended" their adolescent children to monitor postings and other activity. Uniformly, parent-experts knew how to effectively use aspects of the very technologies they were seeking to monitor to engage in effective oversight of their use.

Within adolescent-expert families, such technology-based monitoring strategies were absent. In such families, there was again a difference in parental approaches as they pertained to rule enforcement as it related to cell phones as opposed to social networking sites. For cell phones, adolescents from adolescent-expert families discussed the lack of rule enforcement within their families. Again, it is likely that parents in these families were not proficient enough to utilize technology-based enforcement strategies, and were comfortable enough with cell phone technology (as they themselves used it) to abdicate rule enforcement as a mediation strategy.

In terms of social networking site use, within youth-expert families, parents attempted to enforce rules using the non-technological tools that they had available—their own eyes and ears as they looked over children's shoulders and asked them questions about their activities. While representing a genuine effort on the part of parents to ensure that youth were staying within set guidelines regarding use of social technologies, these efforts clearly have their limitations. Even

adolescents who are obeying the rules may resist conversations about their behaviors and resent parental efforts to be aware of their interactions with others through use of social technologies. And the adolescent who genuinely wishes to hide his or her behavior from parents would find it relatively easy to do so when parents' enforcement techniques rely solely on what they coincidentally observe or their children willingly disclose.

It is widely recognized that accurate parental knowledge concerning adolescent behavior is heavily dependent on adolescents' own willingness to disclose information (Stattin and Kerr, 2000). Yet, parents who are the technology experts within their families have available to them a larger and more effective repertoire of strategies to ensure that their rules are being followed. Clearly, it is harder to break a rule and get away with it when a parent regularly checks one's text history or requires that he or she is the adolescent's Facebook friend and is able to monitor at least some of what his or her child is doing on Facebook by checking the parental newsfeed. Through such strategies, technology expert parents are at a clear advantage in their ability to effectively enforce rules in this arena.

The role of expert power

French and Raven (1959) proposed that when individuals hold specific types of knowledge or expertise, it confers upon them power within relationships. Up until this study, the role of expert power within parent–adolescent relationships has focused primarily on the likelihood that expert power will shape the effectiveness of parents' efforts to direct adolescent behavior (Schumm et al., 1986; Smetana, 2000). This study suggests that for adolescents in our sample, expert power also exerted its influence by shaping not just adolescent response to parental socialization efforts but also the very nature of such efforts. When parents held expert power as it relates to use of social technologies, they were more likely to develop and articulate clear rules regarding technology use that emphasized responsible adolescent use of such technologies. In addition, they were better equipped to engage in effective strategies to monitor compliance with such rules—typically strategies that utilized aspects of social technologies themselves as mediation tools.

Limitations

The focus of this research is unique and important. The qualitative methodology we brought to bear on this inquiry allowed us to hear the words and perspectives of adolescents themselves as they reflected on their family positions and behaviors related to this topic. However, the current effort is not without its limitations. We relied on the perspectives of adolescents regarding their own and their parents' expertise in the use of social technologies as well as parental rule setting and enforcement related to these technologies. A richer perspective would have been provided had we also included parental perspectives on these topics. In addition, participants in this study represented a convenience sample. Although we were pleased with the diversity in age and race/ethnicity within the sample, it was predominantly female. This likely reflects the greater

likelihood that girls and women will volunteer to participate in research (Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1975) as well as the greater interest in social technologies documented among girls (Barker, 2009). Still, it lends a slated perspective to the conclusions drawn within this study. Finally, we feel compelled to point out that with the constantly changing nature of technology comes the tendency for research on technology to become dated quickly. Accordingly, we recognize that the findings reported here represent a snapshot of a moment in time characterized by availability of and interest in a specific set of technologies. With time, individuals of all ages increase their technological proficiency while moving on to become consumers of emerging technologies for which they in turn progress from being novice to more proficient users. While we believe that a number of our findings are likely applicable to parents and adolescents as they progress to become consumers of additional and different social technologies in the future, we also recognize that some of these technologies may be so different from those used by the adolescents participating in this study as to limit the generalizability of the findings reported here.

Conclusion

These findings have clear implications for application in that they lend themselves to the development of recommendations concerning how parents can best support safe and responsible use of the social technologies of cell phones and social networking sites. Given the omnipresence of these technologies in the lives of contemporary adolescents, it is clearly important that parents be supported in their efforts to guide and supervise their adolescents as they use them. Based on the findings reported here, it seems clear that parental knowledge concerning how these technologies work is the critical component distinguishing between those parents who are able to formulate, communicate, and enforce appropriate and meaningful rules concerning their children's use of social technologies as opposed to those who lack this capability. It is not reasonable to assume that all parents will develop expertise related to social technology use through their own interest in and direct experiences with these technologies. Accordingly, we propose that parents would benefit from the availability of workshops and educational opportunities focused on understanding advanced cell phone functions and current social networking sites function, the potential perils associated with adolescent use of such technologies, and concrete suggestions concerning guidelines, strategies, and techniques that parents might use to develop and enforce rules for their children regarding the use of these technologies. It is only by increasing their knowledge in this highly specialized and constantly changing arena. With such supports, we hope that parents will be able to assume the role of—if not the technology expert in their families—at least the technology authority.

Appendix 1

Final Codes Related to Cell Phone Use (Parallel Version for Use of Social Networking Sites)

1. Proficiency with cell phones compared with parents

    a. Perceived proficiency

        i.   Teen perceives self as more proficient

        ii.   Teen perceives self and parent approximately equal

        iii.   Teen perceives self as less proficient

  b. Example type

        i.   Teen demonstrates more knowledge or use than parent

        ii.   Parent demonstrates more knowledge or use than teen

        iii.   Expression of teen's own confusion/difficulties

        iv.   Expression of parent's confusion/difficulties

        v.   Discussion of use of specific functions or usage patterns

        vi.   Parent has access to technologies but does not use them or uses them in a limited way (e.g. has texting function but does not text, has a Facebook but only reads what is written on wall)

2. Type of rule parents have for cell phone use

  a. How much time can be spent on phone

  b. When or where phone can be used

  c. Who phone can be used to communicate with

  d. Number of minutes or texts that can be used

  e. Content of communications

  f. Take good care of the phone itself

  g. Rules regarding what adolescents have to do to have cell phone privileges or what behaviors can result in loss of cell phone privileges

  h. No explicit rules

3. Why parents have a rule or rules

  a. Safety concerns

  b. Morality concerns

  c. Financial concerns

d. Cell phones are a privilege or parents have the right to control their use

e. Concerns about teen's physical, emotional, or social well-being (e.g. needs sleep, needs uninterrupted dinners, a trust issue, academic concerns)

Article Notes

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