# Chapter 39
# Parental Mediation of Adolescent Technology Use

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## ABSTRACT

*Adolescents are major consumers of interactive technologies (e.g., cell phones, social media). They are motivated to use these technologies to maintain their social relationships in a convenient and private way. The private nature and ease of connectivity afforded by interactive technology has resulted in various parental concerns (e.g., victimization, content) about adolescent technology use. To mitigate these parental concerns, some parents have begun to implement parental mediation strategies. Research has primarily focused on describing the different parental mediation techniques parents implement, parent and adolescent perceptions of parental mediation, and potential barriers to the implementation of parental mediation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental time period marked by physical (e.g., puberty), psychological (e.g., identity formation), and psychosocial (e.g., negotiation of parent-child relationships) changes (Erikson, 1950, Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). Puberty is typically seen as the beginning of the adolescent developmental time period, although there is some disagreement regarding when adolescence ends (Bynner, 2007). Hall (1904), an early developmental scholar, posited that adolescence continued into the early twenties, and some current scholars have supported this proposition because the developmental tasks of adolescence are continuing into the mid-twenties (Shwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Consistent with these historical and contemporary conceptualizations (Bynner, 2007; Hall, 1904; Shwartz et al., 2005), in this chapter adolescence is defined as the time period between the onset of puberty and until the individual reaches their mid-twenties.

Contemporary adolescents have grown up with access to a variety of technologies. The majority of adolescents (13-17 years old) in the United States have access to cell phones (88%) and computers (87%), and 92% of adolescents report going online daily (Lenhart, 2015). Adolescents are the most frequent users of social media and 71% report using more than one social media site (Lenhart, 2015). Parents, too, are technology consumers with 91% reporting that they use the internet and 83% using social media. Technology appears to have become a normative aspect of family life, but parents and adolescents use technology differently (Vaterlaus & Tulane, 2015). Parents primarily use technology for instrumental purposes (e.g., cell phones to track location of child), while adolescents use technology for social reasons (e.g., cell phones to build social relationships).

As interactive technologies (e.g., cell phones, social media) have become a common feature during adolescence, parents have reported concerns about these technologies. Concerns about adolescent technology use have included worry about the potential psychological outcomes from viewing content (e.g., violent or pornographic), the risk of victimization, and access to illegal activities (e.g., illegal file sharing; boyd & Hargittai, 2013). Because of these concerns for children and adolescents, some limited government policy has emerged regulating website use among minors (Costello, McNiel, & Binder, 2016). For example, the United States' Children's Online and Privacy Protection Act (COPPA; Federal Trade Commission, 2016) requires parental permission for websites/online services to collect or use personal information from children under the age of 13. This particular policy has been criticized because it does not account for the privacy risks for adolescents older than 13 (Costello et al., 2016) and it is difficult to regulate with minors commonly falsifying their ages to access websites (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). "As legal regulations in this [technological] sphere are difficult to formulate and enforce, policy makers rely substantially on increasing risk awareness among parents and delegating to them the responsibility for protecting children from online risks." (Kirwil, 2009, p. 394). To mitigate the potential negative effects and facilitate the potential positive effects of adolescent interactive technology use, some parents have made attempts to be involved in their adolescents' technology use. These parental attempts have been researched under the term *parental mediation*, which refers to parental interventions and interactions with their adolescents regarding technology use (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Vaterlaus, Beckert, Tulane, & Bird, 2014).

## BACKGROUND

The early research on parental mediation focused on parent's attempts to mediate children's television viewing (Austin, 1990; Nathanson, 1999). Dr. Amy Nathanson (Nathanson, 1999), of The Ohio State University, has been a leader in identifying the methods parents have used to mediate children's television viewing. Dr. Sonia Livingstone (Livingstone & Bober, 2006), of the London School of Economics and Political Science, is a pioneer in researching the role of parental mediation with interactive technologies—publishing on parental mediation of children and adolescent's internet use. Additionally, Dr. Laura Padilla Walker and Dr. Sarah Coyne (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011), of Brigham Young University, have made recent contributions to the understanding of the implementation of parental mediation with adolescent interactive technology use.

The evolution of technology has led to technological convergence, which allows a single media source to be accessed from several devices. Brooks-Gunn & Donahue (2008) explained:

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