ARE SMARTPHONES TRANSFORMING PARENT-CHILD EVERYDAY LIFE PRACTICES? A CROSS-GENERATIONAL QUALITATIVE STUDY COMPARING PARENTS' AND EARLY ADOLESCENTS' REPRESENTATIONS

GLI SMARTPHONES STANNO TRASFORMANDO LE PRATICHE COMUNICATIVE TRA GENITORI E FIGLI? UNO STUDIO QUALITATIVO CROSS-GENERAZIONALE SUL CONFRONTO TRA LE RAPPRESENTAZIONI DI GENITORI E PRE-ADOLESCENTI

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, a substantial number of studies has aimed to understand the role of smartphones in parent-child communication as well as in youth cultures; however, little attention has been given to the systematic analysis of what dimensions of parent-child everyday life communication and practices have been transformed by the usage of smartphones. The present study builds upon the Couple and Family Technology Framework (CFTF), to investigate parents' and children's representations of the impact of smartphones on family struc-

ture and process as well as the similarities and differences between parents' and children's representations. Fifteen parents (9 mothers, 6 fathers; M = 46.07; SD = 4.25) and 15 early adolescents (7 females, 8 males; M = 11.73; SD = 0.46) participated in six focus. The analyses showed that: (a) parents of early adolescents use smartphones' for several everyday life tasks; (b) according to both parents and children smartphones facilitate organizational tasks; (c) smartphones have more impact on family structure dimensions (especially, family rules and roles) than on family process dimensions (intimacy, formation and maintenance of relationships); (d) parents and children's representations diverged only on structure dimensions; (e) gender differences with respect to smartphones representations emerged on both parents and children's groups. These findings pave the way for further investigations on the role of smartphones in family dynamics and their practical implications on parents and children's everyday life practices.

KEYWORDS

Smartphones, everyday life practices, early adolescents, family dynamics, communication

SOMMARIO

Nell'ultimo decennio un ampio numero di ricerche ha rivolto l'attenzione allo studio del ruolo degli smartphones nella comunicazione tra genitori e figli e nelle culture giovanili; tuttavia, è stata data scarsa attenzione all'analisi sistematica di quali dimensioni delle pratiche comunicative quotidiane tra genitori e figli sono state trasformate dall'uso degli smartphones. Questo studio intende sia esaminare le rappresentazioni di genitori e figli in merito all'impatto degli smartphones sugli aspetti strutturali e processuali del funzionamento familiare sia delineare somiglianze e differenze tra le rappresentazioni di genitori e figli facendo riferimento al Couple and Family Technology Framework (CFTF). Quindici genitori (9 madri, 6 padri; M = 46.07; DS = 4.25) e 15 pre-adolescenti (7 femmine, 8 maschi; M = 11.73; DS = 0.46) hanno partecipato a sei focus group. Le analisi hanno dimostrato che: (a) i genitori di preadolescenti sono utilizzatori di smartphones per svolgere compiti e routine nella vita quotidiana; (b) dal punto di vista sia dei genitori sia dei figli gli smartphone sono facilitatori dell'organizzazione di compiti quotidiani; (c) gli smartphone hanno un impatto maggiore sulle dimensioni strutturali del funzionamento familiare (nello specifico regole e ruoli familiari) che sui processi familiari (intimità, formazione e mantenimento delle relazioni); (d) le rappresentazioni di genitori e figli divergono solo sulle dimensioni strutturali; (e) differenze di genere sulle rappresentazioni degli smartphone

sono state riscontrate sia nel gruppo dei genitori sia dei figli. Questi risultati aprono la strada a ulteriori ricerche sul ruolo degli smartphone nelle dinamiche familiari e sul loro impatto nelle pratiche quotidiane tra genitori e figli.

PAROLE CHIAVE

Smartphones, rappresentazioni, pratiche quotidiane, pre-adolescenza, dinamiche familiari, comunicazione

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1 Introduction

Over the last decade, increased attention has been paid to the role of the Internet and digital devices in child development, parenting practices, and parent-child communication (The London School of Economics; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2017). The majority of studies have considered the role of online communication through the Internet regardless of the characteristics of the device; however, the rapid penetration of smartphones in people's lives has paved the way for a new strand of studies specifically focused on the device (e.g., Vincent & Haddon, 2017).

Smartphones afford multi-functionality and perpetual connection (i.e., every time and everywhere), thereby allowing a series of operations «on the go». Because of its feature, smartphones usage has been framed as a generational phenomenon, which mainly characterize younger generations. Conceptualizations such as digital natives or, more recently, mobile digital youth call researchers' attention to an in-depth investigation of new emerging phenomenon in youth cohorts, but at the same time overshadow cross-generational processes occurring between teenagers and their parents, that, similarly, are smartphones' users. Parents function as role models not only for their children's socialization and education practices, but also for the ways in which they use technologies and values and meanings they attribute to them. In this vein, smartphones have become integral part of family dynamics and influence the everyday-life practices of parents and children (Carvalho, Fonseca, Francisco, Bacigalupe, & Relvas, 2016).

The present study adopted a cross-generational approach based on the qualitative examination and confrontation of parents and early adolescents' points of view on the role of smartphones. More specifically, building upon an integrative model developed in the field of family communication studies by Hertlein and Blumer (2013; 2015), this study aimed to provide new insights to the understanding of the role of smartphones as a cross-generational phenomenon which is re-shaping parents and children's practices, tasks and routines.

2 Smartphones usage across generations

Despite children are generally considered as early adopters of new and emerging technologies, as it happened for smartphones, their parents have become frequent users as well (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2017). As for children, smartphones' adoption happens in early adolescence, namely between 12 and 13 years; children largely prefer smartphones compared to other mobile devices such as tablets and laptops (74% versus 44%) (Mascheroni & Òlafsson, 2013). In Europe, almost two out of three children aged 13 years own a smartphone and use it accomplish several tasks (Mascheroni & Vincent, 2016). Between 13 and 16 years the number of activities supported by smartphones increases, especially those related to entertainment (gaming and listening to music and watching vid-

eos), and instant messaging services, which enable rapid communications with friends and families (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2016). The reasons for this can be found in the easy and quick access to the internet through application systems and to the possibility to carry out several activities without direct supervision by parents (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016).

The intensive use of mobile devices in developmental age has questionned psychological studies who considered the impact of smartphones on cognitive and interpersonal skills, raising the alarm for risks associated with overuse (Griffiths, 1996). Perpetual connection can put children at more risk of exposure to adult (sexting, pornography) or aggressive (cyberbulling) contents; make children less able to concetrate and focus on school duties as well as develop emotional problems such as anxiety and isolation (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). However, smatphones can reduce the digital divide affording easy and cheap access to the web, supporting minorities and marginalized people's expression (Levinson & Barron, 2018), expand relationship networks, learn new skills connected to the Internet, and get involved in political and voluntary activities (Zahng, 2013), besides allowing emancipation, self-presentation and impression management (Mascheroni, 2018).

Over the last decade, research studies showed that adults' usage of smartphones has rapidly increased as well. An American survey carried out with a sample of 1,800 parents of both young (8-12 years) and older adolescents (13-18 years) about parents' media use showed that all parents involved (99%) declared to both have used some sort of screen media «yesterday», the day before the survey, and have spent almost 8 hours per day using a personal screen device (Lauricella et al., 2016). A more recent report carried out in the United Kingdom, which involved 618 teens and their parents to investigate media habits and attitudes of UK families, highlighted that parents feel addicted to and distracted by mobile devices (Robb, Bay, & Vennegaard, 2018). Overall, these studies show that smartphone's usage is not exclusively a phenomenon characterizing younger generations, rather it has penetrated the everyday lives of different cohorts regardless of their age.

3 Smartphone-related parent-child communication and practices

If parents and children activities are widely influenced by the usage of mobile technologies, parenting practices and communication have been increasingly shaped by them. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2017) claim that today the distinction between parenting and *e-parenting*, i.e. the practices to regulate the usage of media and the Internet (parental mediation), is more nuanced given that contemporary parents' practices are often addressed to the regulation of children's online activities. In a qualitative study, Mascheroni (2014) found that «parenting the mobile», especially smartphones, can happen according to differ-

ent parenting styles: For instance, in the «parenting out of control» style, parents supervised their children's activities being responsive and warmth, while in the authoritarian style parents were more restrictive and controlling. In the same study, differences were observed between mothers and fathers: mothers, more than fathers, expressed concern and preoccupations for the impact of mobile phones on children's wellbeing, especially those who defined themselves as «digital immigrants», since they acknowledged the generational gap and based the regulation of children's online activities on that aspect.

Other studies showed that smartphones afford the expansion of spatial and temporal boundaries beyond the household; therefore, parent-child talks and negotiations can be extended over the phone without being physically present to confront on issues. Consistently, smartphones can positively sustain parent-child communication; however, mobile communication can be interrupted or avoided easily, ignoring text messages/phone calls, or pretending not having enough credit or lack of connectivity to respond (Haddon, 2016; Ling, 2007). When children perceive parents being controlling and intrusive in their online activities, they resist or ignore parental regulation (Haddon, 2015; Mascheroni, 2014; Livingston & Sefton-Green, 2016). In fact, children's appropriation of smartphones is an important occasion of emancipation from their families and feel more independent (Mascheroni, 2018), but at the same time the possibility for parents to reach them «anytime and anywhere» becomes an «extension of the umbilical cord», which can limit children's autonomy (Ling, 2007).

4 Impact of smartphones on family relational dynamics

As showed by recent publications (Gee, Takeuki, & Wartella, 2018; Haddon, 2018), there has been an increased interest in understanding the role of smartphones in parent-child communication as well as in youth cultures; however, little attention has been given to the systematic analysis of what dimensions of parent-child everyday life communication and practices have been transformed by the usage of these devices. In other words, little is known about the impact of smartphones on family relational dynamics, such as parent-child power relations, intimacy and distance regulation as well as redefinition of competences (Everri, Fruggeri, & Molinari, 2014).

According to Hertlein and Blumer (2015), an integrative approach can provide better account of the influences of technologies on these aspects. Built upon the integration of three theoretical approaches, namely the family ecology perspective (Granic, Dishion, & Hollenstein, 2003), the structural-functional perspective (Johnson, 1971) and the interaction-constructionist perspective (Berger & Kellner, 1970), the *Couple and Family Technology Framework* (CFTF) encompasses three main aspects: ecological influences, changes to family structure and changes to process. The first refers to the properties of digital technologies that influence and transform family relationships. Technologies share a set of

properties such as: accessibility, affordability, anonimity, acceptability, approximation, ambiguity, accomodation which independently affect family structure and process. Changes occuring to family structure pertain family rules, roles and boundaries; while changes to process concern intimacy and the initiation, formation and maintenance of relationships. Ecological influences, family structure and family process influence each others (Hertlein, 2012).

Transferring these concepts to the investigation of smartphones influences on parent-child everyday life practices in early adolescence, CFTF can be considered as a useful theoretical and interpretative framework. However, because of the specific characteristics of the medium here considered, the smartphone, the ecological factors should be redefined in terms of the specific features of the medium, namely multi-functionality and perpetual connection (Vincent & Haddon, 2018). Additionally, CFTF provides only general explanations of the ways in which technologies influence the six dimensions described by the model: rules, boundaries, roles, intimacy, intiation, formation and maintenance of relationships. Therefore, the present paper also intends to provide more details to ways in which smartphones contribute to transform both structure and process dimenions.

5 | Aim of the study

The present study intended to investigate the ways in which smartphones transform parent-child everyday life practices and family relational dynamics during the early stages of adolescence adopting a cross-generational approach. More specifically, using the Couple and Family Technology Framework (CFTF) (Hertlein & Blumer, 2015) as a theoretical and interpretative approach, the following questions were investigated:

– What are parents' and children's representations on how smartphones transform *structure aspects* of contemporary families in terms of relational *rules, boundaries and family roles*?
– What are parents' and children's representations on how smartphones transform *process aspects* of contemporary families in terms of *intimacy*, *relationships initiation* and *formation,* and *maintenance*?
– What are similarities and differences between parents and early adolescents' perspectives on the role of smartphones in their everyday lives?

6 | Method

6.1 | *Participants*

Participants were recruited through the collaboration of educators working in three youth centres of a city located in Northern Italy. The research study was illustrated to the educators of the centres, who promoted it among parents

and children attending the centres and having the considered age range (10-12 years). A letter containing a brief description of the goals and methods of the study was provided to parents. Signed informed consent was obtained from participants: parents signed an informed consent form for minor children that participated in the study. Fifteen parents (9 mothers, 6 fathers; M = 46.07; SD = 4.25) with at least a child in the age range 11-13 years, and 15 early adolescents (7 females, 8 males; M = 11.73; SD = 0.46) participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The majority of parents (N = 13) and children (N =12) had a personal smartphone that they declared to use very often (N = 11 in both parents' and children's sample).

6.2 | *Instruments*

A questionnaire was administered to both parents and children to collect socio-demographic information (e.g., age, household composition, profession, etc.) and assess the frequency of smartphone usage. Six focus groups (three with parents and three with early-adolescent children) were carried out to investigate parents and children's individual perspectives and shared meanings about smartphone usage. Two focus groups with adults comprised mothers only (respectively, n = 4 and n = 5); while one focus group comprised fathers only (n = 6). Two focus groups with children comprised both males and females (respectively, n = 4 and n = 7); while one focus group comprised females only (n = 4). One of the authors of this paper conducted the focus groups, which were centred on an in-depth investigation of two main fields of participants' experiences: (a) the use of smartphones in everyday life, with a particular focus on parental mediation, and the (b) transformations of interpersonal relations, especially how they imagined the future of communication and relationships mediated by technology. All focus groups conversations were audio-recorded and lasted from 1:50 to 2:00 hours.

6.3 | *Analysis of the material*

The material collected using focus group was transcribed verbatim and analysed using a software for qualitative analysis (NVivo11, QSR International). The analysis of children's and parents' discussions was carried out using a content analysis approach (Krippendorf, 2004) and relying on the dimensions defined by the CFTF, namely structural (relational rules, boundaries, roles) and process (intimacy, relationship initiation and formation and relationship maintenance) (Hertlein, 2012). A coding system for the analysis of the content was developed following four-steps.

First, two independent researchers analysed the transcripts to identify and codify the textual extracts (one or more sentences) in which both parents and children referred to *structural* and *process* changes according to the CFTF dimensions. Therefore, the operational definitions were considered (Table 1).

TABLE 1

CFTF dimensions considered

Structure dimensions	Process dimensions
Relational rule: contents on the ways in which smartphones impacted family members' rules to manage time, duties, and tasks.	*Intimacy:* contents on families' emotional bond
Boundaries: contents on the blurring between the offline and online of social relationships.	*Relationship initiation and formation:* contents concerning how smartphones affected the creation of relationships
Roles: ways in which smartphones impacted parenting, monitoring, and mediation practices.	*Relationship maintenance:* contents on the ways in which smartphones influenced the possibility to maintain social relationships over time

Second, the agreement between the two researchers was calculated: the level of agreement reached for every dimension reported in Table 1 was between 80% and 85%.

Third, researchers carried out an in-depth analysis of the textual parts classified in each dimension to identify emerging topics that could better specify each of them.

Fourth, researchers confronted the topics identified for each dimension and discussed the selection until reaching a satisfactory level of agreement. A percentage of agreement above 85% was considered as reliable.

In total, researchers reached the agreement on 285 extracts. The number of the extracts for each dimension of the original model and for each topic extracted from the in-depth analysis is reported in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2

Number of extracts identified in analysis of focus groups

Changes	Dimensions	Topic	Parents	Children	Total
… to family structure	Relational rules	– Everyday life routines	31	21	52
		– Learning dynamics	13	6	19
		– Emotional dependence	10	10	20
	Boundaries	– Privacy	2	4	6
		– Privacy of the medium	5	2	7
	Roles	– Switching	7	2	9
		– Emancipation	10	4	14
		– Control: hyper-responsibility	18	2	20
		– Control: restriction	17	10	27
		– Supervision	12	9	21
		– Elusion	3	3	6
	Total	128	73	201	

	Intimacy	– Conflict	3	2	5
		– Closeness	1	0	1
		– Distance	4	6	10
… to family processes	Relationship initiation and formation	– Opportunity	1	5	6
		– Ambivalence	0	2	2
		– Caution	0	2	2
	Relationship maintenance	– Facilitation	19	22	41
		– Interruption	7	11	18
	Total	35	50	85	
Total			163	123	**286**

As shown in Table 2, both parents and children talked more about the influence of smartphones on family structure (rules, boundaries, roles) than on family process (intimacy, relationship initiation, formation, and maintenance): Respectively, 128 (78.5%) extracts for parents; and 73 (59.0%) extracts for children. However, parents discussed issues concerning family structure significantly (chi square (1) = 12.34; $p < .001$) more than children did. In the following sections, a detailed analysis of the extracts concerning structure and process dimensions is reported and discussed considering similarities and differences between parents and children's perspectives.

7 Results

7.1 Parents' and children's representations of smartphones impact on family structure

According to both parents and children, *relational rules* and *family roles* were more affected than *boundaries* by smartphones usage.

Relational rules (91 extracts). Both parents' and children's discourses concerning the dimension of relational rules revolved around three main topics: (a) the penetration of smartphones on their everyday life routines (31 for parents and 21 for children, Table 2), (b) the smartphone impact on learning dynamics (13 for parents and 6 for children), and an on (c) emotional responses (10 for both).

Regarding everyday life routines (52), *parents* built upon two repertoires of meanings to make sense of the role of smartphones in their lives: one repertoire concerned their own experience with these devices. They highlighted that smartphones had become fundamental objects to accomplish a series of tasks for their jobs and families. For instance, one mother stated that she would prefer to «be late at work than leaving her smartphone at home», or a father claimed that smartphones changed many things in his life, from the ways he used to access

daily news to the ways in he listened to music. A difference between mothers and fathers was also found: mothers highlighted both negative and positive aspects afforded by smartphones, while fathers were more consistently focused on positive aspects. Another repertoire used by parents referred to their children's experiences with mobile devices and how that changed youngsters' ways of organising their own times as well as family time. For instance, one mother reported that the WhatsApp family group allowed her to quickly inform her daughter about the time to have dinner; instead of going upstairs and talk to her, she texted her.

Referring to the same topic, *children* reported that their smartphone supported several daily routines. Interestingly, their arguments were anchored to an intergenerational comparison between their own experiences and those of their parents and grandparents. In the extract below, one child recalls their grandparents' stories about playing games outdoor and expressed the desire of going back to those times:

> (girl, 12): My grandmother told me… I'd like to live in those times, now you are always on computer, Nintendo, mobile phone, and so… instead, before that, you went outdoor, you played with friends, always invented new games, so… I still like playing.

As for *learning dynamics* (19), mothers and fathers showed opposed views: Fathers were more optimistic about how technologies, in general, could improve some skills, for instance mathematical reasoning, and defining technology as an «important stimulus» for their children. Mothers, instead, showed a more traditional view, since they regretted the substitution of books and pens with digital devices.

Children's discourses emphasized that smartphones can be a useful and practical support for their homework, especially for quick Internet search, but they were pessimistic about the long-term impact of digital technologies on learning. This position, however, seemed to be influenced by their teachers' perspectives on this topic, which essentially demonized the usefulness of technologies for learning.

> (girl, 12): I never use Google Translate, I trust traditional dictionaries of foreign languages because they are more reliable, because maybe the first thing found in Google translate is wrong. For school research, I usually don't use Wikipedia, I use other sites that seem better, but usually yes, I use it… because my teachers say that sometimes Wikipedia is wrong and also because my classmates were doing a research and it was full of bad words and there was written «false Wikipedia» below, but they weren't aware of that.

> (girl, 12): I think it is not good (using technology at school, ndr) because after that you are no more able to write. Our French teacher said that in her old school this method was used, when she arrived, she asked «take a sheet and write», they weren't able to write in cursive, they wrote in distorted capitals.

Emotional dependency (20) emerged as a relevant topic for both parents and children; ten extracts in both groups were identified. Parents discussed this topic relying on their own experience with smartphones, and both mothers and fathers reported the feeling of being «quasi-addicted» to the use of smartphones, referring to the urgency of a «rehabilitation treatment». In different moments during the focus groups they used words such as «detox» or «purification» when describing their feelings when using smartphones, as one father told:

> (father, 48): I am totally addicted, I am phone-addicted, absolutely, I mean, I'm not ashamed of this, absolutely phone-addicted, well, I, to the question «you could be able to stay without phone for one week», neither two hours, I would be totally unable to do that!

Similarly, children mentioned the issue of «addiction» making explicit comparisons between the usage of smartphones and addiction to cigarettes or slot machines. In all focus groups, children reported episodes involving their peers spending hours on their smartphones, isolating themselves from interactions and conversations. A child described a scenario in which a friend suffered from «withdrawal symptoms» after his classmates stole his smartphone as a joke:

> (girl, 12): My classmates stole his [referring to another classmate] smartphone for one hour […] he was biting his nails and sweating, because he wanted his smartphone. He became hysteric! I don't understand, I think he has a kind of obsession for his mobile phone!

Boundaries (13 extracts). Participants' discourses referring to the topic of boundaries, namely smartphones allow one to overcome public and private barriers spatially and temporally, were limited (7 extracts for parents; 6 for children). Participants addressed this issue talking about the risks for *privacy* (6), referring to an episode happened at school concerning the circulation via WhatsApp of a young girl's sexed pictures. Mothers were more concerned than fathers when talking about that episode. Two mothers used that episode to talk to their daughters about the dangers of the Internet. The same episode was also mentioned in a focus group with children, who blamed parents for the lack of supervision of the girl involved.

> (boy 1, 12): […] once I heard that I remember I thought: «well, where were her parents?».
>
> (boy 2, 12): Exactly. I was told that he put her picture on YouTube.
>
> (girl 1, 12): Her parents have restricted the use of her sim card and her phone, she does not have a phone any more, that's all.
>
> (girl 2, 12): She wanted to change school because she felt ashamed.
>
> (boy 1, 12): I can imagine!
>
> (girl 2, 12): Her parents told her «well, you have to pay for your own faults, you have done it… everybody knows her… they know you have done it, even though you feel ashamed, pay your own fault.

Another topic referred to smartphone boundaries concerned the *privacy of the medium* (7), namely who is entitled to access one's own smartphone and what one is allowed to do. According to parents' accounts the majority of their children allowed parents to access children's smartphones; in two cases, instead, children kept a password to access their smartphone to purposely prevent parents to use their smartphones. Mothers noted that girls were stricter than boys. Parents cared for the privacy of their own medium, and they rarely let their children look at their smartphone and use it. Consistently, parents tended to advise their children to care for their own phones and to not lend them to friends. Children rarely reported concerns for the privacy of their medium; even though, they were aware that parents controlled their smartphones secretly. In addition, they used to lend their smartphones to their friends to play games or for particular needs, such as calling their parents.

Roles (97 extracts). Topics concerning changes to family roles were at the core of parents' discourses, especially the topics related to the control (*hyper-responsibility, restriction, supervision and elusion*: 50 extracts for parents vs. 24 extracts for children). Both mothers and fathers reported the need to control children's online activities since it was their duty as a parent (*control: hyper-responsibility*, 18); however, these statements were imbued of terms concerning fears, anxieties, and preoccupations for the risks that children might encounter online. Concerns as well as justifications for not being able to control everything were the *leitmotiv* of parents' conversations:

> (mother, 45): I think, this kind of over control makes me…
>
> (mother, 38): … anxious…
>
> (mother, 44, nods)
>
> (mother, 45): Yes, I can't stand it.
>
> (mother, 43): Honestly, I control, some times. I'm not the one that needs to control everyday.

Parents felt pressured to regulate their children's online activities. They referred to practices of mediation based mainly on *restriction* and *supervision* (respectively, 17 vs. 12 extracts); however, being aware that children could easily *elude* control (3). More specifically, mothers expressed the need to restrict and set regulations to prevent children from accessing explicit online contents, such as pornography or the sharing of sexualised images. Mothers' concern for pornography was referred to boys, while private images circulation concerned girls. Fathers did not seem as concerned as mothers, however they lamented that children's persistent use of digital devices drove them to waste time. Only one mother and one father presented contrasting views stating that excessive control could damage parent-child relationship in that smartphones can easily support control but it makes children feel over-controlled. In the extract below, parents articulated their views:

(mother, 43): It is a convenient tool [the smartphone] because every half-hour you can call them [children] and ask: «where are you?»

(mother, 47): What?! Excuse me…

(mother, 42): If you do that, you'll bother them!

(mother, 43): Well… all those people out there! Who knows who they'll meet in the streets you know when they come back home.

(mother, 47): I'll never call my daughter every half-hour to know where she is! I call her if she is late or for other important issue.

(father, 53): I remember that I wondered: «Am I bothering him [his son]? Am I making him feel over controlled… and that's why he does not answer me on the phone? I decided to talk to him about that […] You won't believe but our communication has changed and he started calling me when he felt he wanted to tell me something»

As for children, discourses on parental mediation confirmed what reported by parents. They did not complain about their parents' control, but stressed some contradictions observed in their parents' practices. One group of children reported that parents used to complain about children's full-time use of smartphones, but, at the same time, they wanted them to be reachable over the phone constantly when not at home. Another group elaborated on the strategies they developed to elude parental control, such as delete text messages or Internet search history regularly.

Emancipation and role switching (23 extracts) were other two topics identified as indicators of smartphones' impact on family roles. The emancipation topic concerned contents about smartphones as devices that afforded an acceleration of child development. According to the majority of parents, the easier access to the Internet has exposed children to images and contents intended for adults; that happened earlier compared to what happened when they were children. That has driven to a premature emancipation that could expose children to more risks, especially for girls. Additionally, parents argued that because of the emancipation afforded by the Internet, children believe to have more knowledge than their parents on several issues, comprising sexuality and intimacy. In the following exchanges, one mother uses the Italian word «sapientini» to stress that children pretend to have an expertise on some issues, instead they only have either partial or misleading information. According to these mothers, children feel entitled to challenge adults' authority because of the knowledge acquired using the Internet.

(mother, 38): […] they [smartphones] made them kind of… I mean kind of not more secure, because they aren't secure… but they act like… you know like «wise men» and are kind of arrogant, to be honest.

(mother, 44): Yes, like they say: «What? Do you want to explain that to me? I already know everything!».

(mother, 43): They play the role of the wise man, they look like «sapientini». Don't they?

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(mother, 38): Oh, yes!

(mother, 43): Mum, look, I already know that! Stop bothering me!

(mother, 38): Exactly like that! Then, if they need a hand with math homework, they come to you and: «mum can you help me with this?».

Children's points of view on risks and negative experiences were similar to those reported by parents: They referred to an easy access to adult online content, such as pornography, which is a common activity among their peers, despite some of them were negatively affected. Also, as reported by a girl in the extract below, children would have had the possibility to live in a pre-technological era, when children used to play outdoor most of the time, like in the case of their grandparents, and parents' supervision was limited. This nostalgia was justified by the fact that children felt the pressure of parental control; according to them, the fact of having smartphones authorized parents to constantly check their children's activities and movements as well as to be inform about any change of plans. In this vein, children perceived that smartphones do not support their emancipation.

(girl, 12): If I had a time machine, I'd like to go back to my grandmother time […] I'd like to go back to those times when they had nothing, but they played in the streets, there weren't cars, they ran, they moved from one place to another without calling their mums every minute to say «mum, I go…». I mean, I know this is a way to reassure parents… but in the past children did not have to do that, they had more freedom!

Together with emancipation, participants referred to episodes in which parents and children's roles were *switched* (9). *Children* reported that parents tended to break family rules, such as using their smartphones during mealtime or checking notifications while walking or driving their cars. One child reported an exemplar scenario: he had to call his father twice to inform him the dinner was ready because he was playing online games. *Parents'* involvement in gaming activities was also reported by parents, who admitted their passion for online games discovered thanks to their children. Lastly, a small number of parents stressed that their children reproached them as they spent too much time on their smartphones.

7.2 *Parents' and children's representations of smartphones impact on family process*

Family process refers to the dimensions of *intimacy*, *relationships initiation and formation*, and *relationship maintenance* for which specific topics were identified and reported below.

Intimacy (16 extracts). It refers to the topics of (a) *closeness* (1 for parents), (b) *distance* (4 for parents and 6 for children), and (c) *conflict* (3 for parents and 2 for children). As the number of extracts shows, distance and conflict were the

most discussed topics by both parents and children. From *children*'s perspective, in general, smartphones put more *distance* among people and made relationships more superficial. Specifically, in girls' focus group smartphones were described as objects that increased distance with their parents, while allowed for closer and intimate relationships with their peers. For instance, they reported that texting enhanced *closeness* in that it allowed them to have exchanges about topics that are rarely discussed in face-to-face interactions, such as sexuality, because of shame. Girls emphasized that they felt safer thanks to their smartphones, because they could contact either parents or friends instantly when in need of something. In addition, they reported that emotional states can be expressed via text messages, like writing «I love you»; however, they also acknowledged that texting can cause misunderstandings as well as the perception of something «fake» since it has not been mediated by face-to-face interaction (see extract below).

> (girl 1, 12): It's easier but for me it's a little bit fake, I mean… to a friend, you can text whatever you want and say it in person as well, but for instance, I don't know, saying something else, you feel like texting this stuff, and it seems a little fake given that you talk through a screen.

> (interviewer): And what do you do in your experience? I mean, if you want to say something important.

> (girl 1, 12): We say that in person.

> (girl 2, 11): I say that in person.

> (girl 3, 12): Well, it depends (laughing) because I'd be ashamed.

Similarly, *fathers* stressed a distinction between *distance* within the family and *closeness* within peer group, referring to smartphones usage in the family with words such as «barriers» and tools that create isolation. *Mothers* reiterated the pervasive and negative impact of smartphones, especially isolation, not only on family communication but also among friends and colleagues. As for the topic of *conflict*, from *parents*' perspective smartphones were an issue of confrontation for three main reasons: (a) adoption of a smartphone, (b) parental control, (c) smartphone overuse. Accordingly, they claimed that smartphones made parenting more challenging, since they needed to engage in more negotiations with their children. According to *children*, instead, the main reason of conflict with parents was the frequency of use of these devices, which limited family time, as reported in the extract below:

> (girl, 11): Well, if one keeps on using the phone, then she doesn't spend time with her family, so you know, perhaps parents get angry, so better not to use the phone to not have fights with them.

Relationship initiation and formation (10 extracts). It accounts for the ways in which smartphones can support the building up of relationships and emerged as central in children's discourses. All *children* stressed that smartphone offered

them many opportunities to initiate friendship given the easy and quick connectivity. However, they assumed an ambivalent position about online relationship reporting that face-to-face interaction or even having pen friends continue to be important practices for building close relationships:

> (boy, 12): Smartphone is useful to maintain friendships as well as to start them. For instance, one can find a person on the Internet by chance, like her post, so she wants to meet her. it's useful to start a friendship, then she could even meet her in the future […]

Furthermore, a child reported that he found a friend on Facebook via a common interest in sport activities; they started to communicate via Facebook, they discovered they lived far away, so they decided to continue by writing letters, thereby becoming pen friends. Children seemed cautious in the process of initiating relationships, especially for what concerned online self-presentation, acknowledging that identities can be hidden and risks can be encountered online. According to children, the possibility to have detailed information about the persons they are interacting with is the precondition to initiate online friendship.

This dimension was marginal for *parents*, except for one case. One mother reported she found an online friend thanks to her daughter. She got in touch with the mother of her daughter's online friend, they started to become close, and planned to go out together. However, she confessed that it happened when she was controlling her daughter's phone and the content of her online conversations.

Relationship maintenance (59 extracts). Discourses concerning this dimension included two topics, namely *facilitation (19 for parents and 22 for children)* and *interruption (7 for parents and 11 for children)*. Facilitation was the most frequent topic reported by both parents and children. *Parents* reported several examples of smartphones integration in everyday life activities: their smartphones allowed them not only to manage their children's life at home but also to monitor their children's school activities. In addition, they considered smartphones as a useful tool to maintain relationships with their friends or reconnecting with old friends. Fathers, in particular, specified that smartphone had significantly improved the communication with their children, colleagues, and friends thanks to messaging services. However, they acknowledged that full-time contact had a negative impact on family's face-to face relationships. For instance, in the extract below one father reported that a WhatsApp family group was a useful solution to keep connections with family members when abroad, however it can become an obstacle when family members meet at home and have face-to-face interactions.

> (father, 52, 3): Having a family WhatsApp group is very nice! Like when we go on holiday like last Summer… one of us was in Munich, the other in London, we were at home… It was a nice way to stay in contact! Then, it is not only a one-to-one conversation […] then, if think of our everyday life, well… these tools do not really help like when you are at home and talking to each other […]

A similar perspective was identified in *children*'s focus groups. According to children, the main function of smartphone-mediated communication was to keep them in touch with offline friends, especially those living far away. This aspect was facilitated by the usage of WhatsApp groups, which were acknowledged as the tools that facilitate their connections with friends and family members. In all focus groups, children listed different kinds of online groups that matched their offline interests and activities, besides social connections. As reported in the conversation below, children belonged to online groups for their sport activities, school duties, connections with relatives, and online games:

(boy 1, 12): I have a group with my family, grandparents, aunties, cousins, parents, brother and so on.

(boy 2, 12): I have a group too with kids of my age, and one for my football team.

(boy 3, 12): I have a group for my sport, notification, like if there is competition, one with my family and schoolmates, mainly these. Then, I have private chats as well.

Consistently with parents' perspective, children acknowledged that smartphones could interfere with face-to-face communication. Also, they provided an accurate analysis of the factors that might contribute to the *interruption* of communication afforded by smartphones usage, namely (a) distraction, (b) gender differences in the approach to smartphone-mediated communication, and (c) less occasions to have face-to-face contacts. Distraction was identified as the main cause of interruption of the flow of face-to-face communication, especially when doing group activities either at school or during leisure time. Children connected distraction to differences between male and females in the use of smartphones. Girls underlined that boys tended to be distracted by online gaming, while involved in face-to-face communication. In addition, they pointed out that females got involved in collective activities using their smartphone, while boys tended to dedicate more time to individual online activities. In the conversation below, a group of girls articulate these points:

(girl 1, 12): Once, I did a research for homework with a group of classmates who came to my home to work together. We were three girls and three males. The girls were working most of the time instead boys were using their smartphones most of the time.

[…]

(interviewer): Do you think there any difference between boys and girls in the ways they use their phones?

(girl 1, 12): Yes, I do.

(girl 2, 12): So do I! Boys don't text, but they stick to Clash Royale (laugh)

http://riviste.erickson.it/med

(interviewer): It's an online game, isn't it?

(girl 1, 12): Yeah.

(girl 2, 12): Yes, only that game! They don't do anything else!

(girl 1, 12): They play only that game!

(girl 2, 12): Oh yes, only that game! We girls sometimes do Musically.

(interviewer): So, you have a preferred online activity as well?

(girl 2, 12): Yes, we do, but we use Musically together! Not while during homework.

[…]

(interviewer): When they play Clash Royal, do they do it alone?

(girl 1, 12): Yes, they do. Each one on their own on their own phone.

[…]

(girl 1, 12): This makes us a bit sad, well not really sad but perhaps depressed because…

(girl 2, 12): Yeah, because they are there one next to the other and play alone! it seems that they don't have a social life.

(girl 1, 12): Actually, they don't have it!

8 | Discussion and conclusions

The present paper aimed at providing further insights to the understanding of smartphones role in parent-child everyday life practices and relationships building upon an integrative model which looks at the changes introduced by technologies in family structure and process, namely the Couple and Family Technology Framework (Hertlein & Blumer, 2015). The dimensions that specify family structure (rules, boundaries, roles) and process (intimacy, relationship initiation and formation, relationship maintenance) were used as reference points to analyse parents and early adolescents' representations on smartphones adopting a cross-generational approach. Findings accounted for specific topics which provide further evidence on the ways mobile devices are re-shaping contemporary families' everyday life practices and family relational dynamics in terms of both structure and process aspects.

Overall, according to both parents and children, smartphones have an impact on the structure more than on the process dimensions. In other words, smartphones seem to influence first of all dimensions related to *family power*, in particular family rules and roles, more than intimacy and formation and maintenance of relationships. Parents' representations, in particular, referred to the fact that smartphones are ubiquitously present in their own lives, not only in those of their children. Both parents and children acknowledged that smartphones are fa-

cilitating tools, above all for organisational tasks, in that they allow to save time and coordinate with others being them family members or friends, and especially through text-message based chat groups. In other words, they support micro-coordination activities for the accomplishment of everyday life tasks (Ling & Lai, 2016). This result is consistent with recent surveys showing that parents are digital users as well (Lauricella et al., 2018), therefore overcoming the idea of a substantial cross-generational gap on usage and meanings attributed to smartphones. Furthermore, parents and children shared similar perspectives on the risks derived from smartphones overuse, mentioning addiction and the need to «detox» from technologies, mirroring a shared societal representation about the threat of technologies for individual's wellbeing.

Not surprisingly, differences between parents and children were found on dimensions related to practices of regulations (parental mediation), specifically control and monitoring. Children seem to be aware that parents set regulations because concerned for online risks that can affect children's wellbeing; however, they perceived parental mediation as restrictive and as a limitation to their emancipation to the extent that they regret not having lived in a pre-technological era in which children were not pressured by parental control via phone calls and text messages. In so doing, children highlighted the ambivalent nature of smartphones, which, on the one hand afford autonomy and emancipation, and on the other, favour control and intrusion from parents (Mascheroni, 2018). Being aware of parents' attempt to control their smartphones secretly, children engage in practices of control elusion. This was reported as a conflicting issue especially by parents, who framed their «intrusion» in terms of responsibility as part of their role as a parent. In addition, parents and children diverged on the value attributed to smartphones, namely on the privacy of the medium. In other words, if for parents the smartphone is a private object, which supports private contents (parents do not allow children to use their phones), for children it is an object that can be shared with friends or lent them in case of need. Another difference emerged on family roles: children pointed out that parents are often immersed in the usage of their smartphones, to the point that they sometimes need to reproach their parents, signalling what we named a «role switching». Parents, instead, lamented that smartphones allowed for an accelerated emancipation that made children feel more competent (and by time arrogant) than their parents, and adults more broadly.

As for process, smartphones do not seem to impact the initiation and formation of relationships; parents and children agreed on acknowledging the relevance of face-to-face encounters. For instance, children mentioned that writing letters, especially having a pen friend, is still an activity they want to be engaged in. The maintenance of relationship, instead, was described as significantly supported by smartphones thanks to their portability and full-time connectivity. More specifically, text messaging services and social platforms allowed both parents and children to sustain and nurture their social capital. This result is not new, since digital devices afford the expansion and extension of «offline» networks (Webb, 2015); however, it is noteworthy that children introduced a new aspect. More specifically,

according to children, smartphones bring more distance among family members and more closeness to their peers. In so doing, children represented the smartphone as a sort of «distance regulators», thereby acknowledging that «technoference» (McDaniels & Coyne, 2016), namely the interference of technology in social relations, can be mainly confined to the family context. This is also in line with the notion of smartphone as a cultural artefact that supports the sense of belonging deriving from youngsters' peer cultures (Vincent & Haddon, 2017).

Lastly, a gender dimension emerged from the analysis of both parents and children's focus groups. As for parents, fathers acknowledge the positive side of smartphones, and technology use more broadly (i.e., the possibility to learn new skills), except for acknowledging the risk of spending excessive time on its usage and do not invest in study or outdoor activities; while, mothers emphasized the negative side, especially for what concerned the dimensions of family roles and rules. More specifically, mothers expressed several concerns and preoccupations related to the usage of mobile devices constantly connected to the Internet, above all pornography and the circulation of girls' private images. Similarly, differences were observed between boys and girls with regard to the activities and communication modalities afforded by smartphones. These differences reflected gender stereotypes: For instance, boys were described as more interested in gaming, individual activities, and as having problems in being concentrated on tasks when holding their smartphones. Differently, girls were described as more orientated towards sociality even when using their smartphones which used to be physically shared, namely passed by hand to hand, to share comments on contents visible on the phone.

In conclusion, according to both parents and children, smartphones are introducing transformations in everyday life practices; these transformations become observable in the re-configuration of family structure, namely rules, roles and boundaries. From a cross-generational perspective, the differences between parents and children were limited and confined to issues of power and negotiations about the regulations imposed by parents on smartphone usage. Negotiations and challenges to family hierarchy characterize family dynamics during adolescence (Everri, Fruggeri, & Molinari, 2014); therefore, smartphones amplify these dynamics. Furthermore, the metaphor of smartphones as «distance regulators» provided by children signals that these devices support individuation, a central developmental task in adolescence. Taken together these results paved the way for further investigations on the role of smartphones in family dynamics and suggest some practical implications; above all, the need to identify strategies through which parents and children can dis-connect when «other» activities must be performed.

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