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Parental mediation and children's digital well-being in family life in Norway

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ABSTRACT

Because children are introduced to digital technology at an early age, their digital skills are influenced by digital learning and well-being in everyday life. This article examines how family values may influence children's digital lives. The study is based on qualitative data from individual interviews with family members from ten different families and ten focus groups with children aged five to ten years. The analysis shows how values linked to parental mediation are important in determining how family members relate to digital technology. In the discussion, we examine how established values may affect parental mediation, and how children can participate in a digital culture. This work posits that the ability to communicate about digital lives is an important value regarding the well-being of young children.

IMPACT SUMMARY

Prior state of knowledge: Previous research shows how children develop their digital skills in educational settings. However, the research field has had a limited focus on the role played in other arenas, such as contemporary family life, in contributing to the development of digital skills.

Novel contributions: Our research shows how family values influence children's digital learning and well-being. It also contributes knowledge about how children's disparate possibilities to develop digital skills depend on interactions with digital content inside the family.

Practical implications: The responsibility for giving children these opportunities cannot be placed on parents alone but must also include policies and the educational system. Children's opportunities for digital agency and developing digital skills and safety online are related to children's well-being.

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Introduction

Young children across Europe are introduced to digital technology at an early age (OECD, 2019). According to Barassi (2020), digital technology is structuring both

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parenting and home life, thereby imposing a need to understand contemporary family life. Currently, research that focuses on families in the digital age includes questions about the role of technology in the changes we see in family life (Clark, 2013). Other research focuses on practices, values, and imaginaries from a parental point of view (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Our understanding of families is represented by an environment (i.e., the home) where individual members live. But it is also seen as a complex system that involves processes and interactions in which individual members need to make decisions and define their goals and values (Braithwaite et al., 2018).

A growing assemblage of research-based literature now covers how children develop their digital skills. However, most of this literature still focuses on educational settings and less on other areas, such as the family setting or leisure time (Haddon et al., 2020; Lafton et al., 2022). According to Haddon et al. (2020), more research is needed to understand how diverse conditions in areas other than education influence children's digital skills. A range of stakeholders, from governments and organisations at transnational and national levels to scholars and academic work, have co-opted the terms digital literacy (Godhe, 2019; Tinmaz et al., 2022), digital competence (Godhe, 2019) and digital skills (Beilmann et al., 2022; Livingstone et al., 2023). Currently, several different conceptual frameworks exist and overlap, adding to the confusion about terminology. For instance, the Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, 2018) makes no distinction between digital skills and competences, but the term digital skills *is* commonly used within networks and projects, such as the EU Kids Online (EUKO) network and the Youth Skills (ySKILLS) project (Livingstone et al., 2023).

In this article, we use the four-dimensional classification of digital skills identified in a recent analysis by Helsper et al. (2021). We also draw on the work by Livingstone et al., (2023) and their definitions of these four dimensions presented in Table 1, which, they argue, are crucial for well-being in a digital society (Helsper et al., 2021).

However, in a study involving family life, the term digital skills *is* challenging, because the function of family practice creates difficulties in locating clear expectations or established evidence that links children's digital skills with outcomes (Livingstone et al., 2023). Thus, we also include in this article a focus on how joint values in the family influence children's digital skills, while also focusing on attitudes, values, and meaningful practices related to the everyday family life. Whereas education contributes to the development of digital skills, the family, which Katz (2010) refers to as the domestic infrastructure, is a significant part of children's everyday lives, and digital media are deeply integrated

Table 1. The four dimensions of digital skills. Adapted from Helsper et al. (2021, p. 15) and Livingstone et al. (2023, p. 1179).

Dimension	Description
Technical and operational skills ("Tech")	The ability to manage and operate ICTs and the technical affordances of devices, platforms, and apps, from 'button' knowledge to settings management to programming
Information navigation and processing skills ("Info")	The ability to find, select, and critically evaluate digital sources of information
Communication and interaction skills ("Comm")	The ability to use different digital media and technological features to interact with others and build networks as well as to critically evaluate the impact of interpersonal mediated communication and interactions on others
Content creation and production skills ("Create")	The ability to create (quality) digital content and understand how it is produced and published and how it generates impact

into family life (Livingstone et al., 2017). Furthermore, a strong relationship seems to exist between parental expectations of the role that digital media have in the everyday lives of children and families and the everyday practices of media engagement and how children are socialised into using digital media at home (Helsper, 2021; Mascheroni et al., 2016). Livingstone and Byrne (2015) note that the role of parents and families varies depending on the local context. They suggest that greater investments should be made, so that parents can support their children in the digital age.

In this article, we focus on the family as a key arena wherein digital skills are supported and developed. We aim to shed light on the research question: In what ways do family values and parental mediation influence children's learning and well-being in a digital world?

This article contributes to the overall project DigiGen, a European research project that aims to illustrate and describe the different contexts of a child's life and development, including a focus on their digital lives and the role of the family (Milosevic et al., 2022).

Parental mediation, values, and children's well-being

In families today, the integration of digital technology is widespread. Simultaneously, many parents are overwhelmed by alarmist headlines (Bell, 2010), conflicting guidelines (Straker et al., 2018), and warnings about technology – in terms of both addiction (Bosker, 2016) and excessive use (Royal et al., 2017). These are often discussed in research and the media as concerns over screen time, but without consideration for what is being done. Until recently, the ambiguous concept of screen time has been a concern in much of the research (Lafton et al., 2022). Yet, as Mascheroni and Zaffaroni (2023) point out, the limits of the discourse around screen time have led to a contested concept that results in a "troubling paradox" (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018) for many parents. Even though some researchers indicate no direct relationship between the time children spend using digital technology and their well-being (see, e.g., Kardefelt-Winther, 2017), Orben and Przybylski (2019) show that still little consensus exists in the results of studies as to whether (and, if so) digital-screen engagement affects adolescents' psychological well-being.

In their review, McCrory et al. (2020) find that earlier studies lean heavily on quantitative studies that measure time, whereas depth and context are less visible. Nevertheless, several studies do highlight how social support and social connectedness are important in determining how adolescents cope with screen and online content (Hong et al., 2016). Still other studies show the importance of family climate on children's well-being related to screen time (Martínez et al., 2019). Furthermore, parental mediation and parenting style matter when considering the conditions that contribute to whether children and young people are either negatively or positively impacted by information and communication technology (ICT) use in family settings (Lafton et al., 2022). How parents show their care about children's digital lives strongly impacts their children's well-being (Tronto, 2013).

Children's use of ICTs is an object of negotiation and may be handled differently in different families (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Thus, there is an evident need for research to move beyond simply measuring children's time on digital devices and towards examining in what ways engaging in creative and educational play, family values, family rules, and developing critical digital literacy skills (Livingstone, 2004; Richardson &

Milovidov, 2019) can contribute to children's digital well-being. Well-being has emerged as "something everyone seemingly aims for, and arguably has a right to" (McCallum & Price, 2016, p. 2). According to Camfield et al. (2009), because the concept is so multifaced, it is challenging to identify an agreed-upon definition of well-being and to establish a consensus on how well-being can be achieved and sustained. In the present study, we align with Ben-Arieh et al. (2014, p. 3), who claim that well-being encompasses children's lives in the present as well as how the present influences their future.

The overall effect of a child's use of digital technology on a specific dimension of well-being depends on the interplay between several aspects of activities involving digital dilemmas. These dilemmas act as a "lightning rod for contemporary contestations over values, identity and responsibility" within the family (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 2). Although parents recognise how children grow up in a digital world, they are not necessarily able to link the experiences of the children of today to their own childhoods and experiences (Clark, 2013).

Parental mediation encompasses the strategies adopted by parents to regulate, discuss, and monitor their children's media use (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). It describes the interactions between parents and children concerning the use of digital technology and media (Lee & Chae, 2012). Several scholars have defined parental mediation as strategies that parents adopt to reduce the negative effects of media on children (Atkin et al., 1991) or to focus on children's agency and opportunities (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Nevertheless, parents' tendency to pursue their own conceptions of a good life within their own family acknowledges the opportunity to mold a small intimate community in line with one's own values and beliefs, thus building the family out of an emotionally informed response to what one has come to regard as positive and healthy (Lotz, 2014). Parents' values and attitudes are important factors in enabling or limiting opportunities for children's learning through technology at home (Plowman et al., 2011, p. 367). When parents and children share their stories of living digital childhoods in the family, the stories function as a way of communicating values and parental strategies (Clark, 2013). Lotz (2014, pp. 157–159) argues that shared values bond people together, and that attachment and closeness within the family will be enhanced if the parent and the child "see the world" in similar ways (Lotz, 2014).

Values and beliefs are closely linked to a set of rules within families. Livingstone et al., (2017) demonstrate how restrictive parental mediation in the form of rule-setting and with follow-ups regarding the respect for the rules can be associated with fewer online risks. Alternatively, active mediation can also facilitate child learning (Troseth et al., 2016) by assigning a vital role to dialogue between parents and children.

Co-use means that "the parent remains present while the child is engaged with the medium," and, as such, it becomes a shared experience (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008, p. 582). Yet, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) argue that the term co-use has become somewhat blurred with active mediation. A quantitative study by Milosevic et al. (2022) shows how the positive effects of restrictive mediation could be contingent upon different factors, such as a supportive family environment and mediation involving communication. When attempting to understand how children cope in their digital lives, parental mediation seems to be one factor among several.

According to Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020), each act of parenting holds in it an intervention of today and a hope for a particular future. As such, values are continuously

"in play" by considering the potential moral impact on parents. Thus, "asking parents to temper their explicit, wholehearted and unqualified endorsement of their substantive values in raising their children, even while we allow them full expression of those in their interactions with other adults, may well necessitate a level of detachment or predispose a parent to a kind of moral schizophrenia or alienation" (Lotz, 2014, p. 158). Value judgments, such as "too much screen-time is harmful to children" or "children must learn to deal with digital technology because they grow up in a digital society" are examples of normative value judgments. When navigating in today's complex society, how parents interact with and mediate their children's media use connects values to the idea of parental mediation. However, an important consideration here is that we do not intend to create a manual or a "best practice" regarding values and parental mediation. Parental mediation cannot prove whether someone is right or wrong in their parenting role (Clark, 2013). Rather, the discussion should address how parental mediation may vary because of the complexity of the situation and the values at stake.

Methodology

As shown by several scoping reviews (Haddon et al., 2020; Lafton et al., 2022; Lorenz & Kapella, 2020, little research has been conducted on children under the age of twelve and their digital lives, even though such research is emerging (Livingstone et al., 2023). To gain access to children's and parents' stories about how the use of digital technology affects the family, we interviewed ten families. In the recruitment process, we requested families with children aged five or six or eight, nine, or ten years old, because social research has shown that children under ten years of age and especially those under six years of age are underrepresented. Studies involving children's well-being have generated almost no primary data from children themselves, although there are exceptions. From a life course perspective, these two age groups were chosen because the five- to six-year-olds would be in their last year of kindergarten or in the transition between kindergarten and primary school, whereas the eight- to ten-year-olds would be in grades three or four.

In October 2020, we distributed information about the study through schools and kindergartens. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the institutions were overloaded and did not have the capacity to distribute the call. Rethinking our recruitment strategy, we chose to exploit the networks of researchers and the national stakeholder committee in the project to distribute our call in a snowball sampling. One of the disadvantages of snowball sampling is the risk of recruiting a homogenous group of participants, because the peer network may include little variety in terms of socio-economic background (Browne, 2005). However, our sampling did result in a selection of families from urban and suburban areas with diverse cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds. Regarding the family interviews, we recruited seven children aged five or six (two girls and five boys) and seven children aged eight, nine, or ten (four girls and three boys). We also interviewed at least two other family members of each child. In all the families, we interviewed the child's mother; in four families, we also interviewed the child's father. A child's sibling was interviewed in six cases and a child's aunt in one case.

Children develop their digital culture through their interactions within the family but also through the collective production of culture together with peers; the latter is just as important as their interactions with adults (Corsaro, 2018, p. 128). Therefore, in

this study, we included five focus groups with children aged five or six and five focus groups with children aged eight, nine, or ten to gain insight into how a group of children gives their opinions and connects with contributions from other children. We chose this bringing of children together in a focus group to elicit different viewpoints on the issue of digital technology and family life (Vogl, 2012; Vogl et al., 2023). We recruited four focus groups through a snowball sampling approach, and the parents helped us organise them in private homes. During the last phase of our fieldwork period, the pandemic restrictions in Norwegian institutions were eased. Thus, we were able to distribute the call again via kindergartens and schools to recruit children for the last six focus groups. These groups consisted of three to six children each. The size of the groups allowed sufficient room for discussion and provided an opportunity for all participants to be heard.

By conducting individual interviews, we ensured confidentiality and gave every family member an equal say in the family interviews. All participants provided a written informed consent. The guardians gave consent for the children's participation in addition to the children providing their own assent. Even though not mandatory or legally binding, the children were given the opportunity to sign an assent form after the interview to ensure that they understood what they were agreeing to, because such young children might be confused beforehand about what an interview is. For the children, this underlined their expert status and showed that we took seriously their willingness to participate.

In our methodological design, the voices of the children and adult participants are treated equally. At the same time, we acknowledge Spyrou's argument (2011, p. 159) that children's voices tell us about the discourses to which the child has access rather than about the whole environment of which they are a part. Thus, the triangulation perspective was not applied to validate the children's statements but rather to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the constructive nature of childhood as part of family life.

A non-directive style of interviewing characterised the interviews and the focus groups. The researcher interviewing the children was conscious of the responses provided during the interview to respect the children and was highly focused on the children's role as experts in their own lives (Vogl, 2012). To facilitate communication, the researchers brought a kit of crayons, paper, and games for the interviews (Garbarino & Stott, 1989).

The interview structure was maintained the same for children and adults to allow comparisons of the different perspectives and development of a holistic understanding of family life. Because we were also taking part in a larger study named DigiGen, we developed a manual with interview guidelines, consent forms, information sheets, and templates. These were developed for our initial results to ensure a similar procedure in collecting and analysing data across the countries involved in this work (Kapella and Sisask, 2021).

The project has approval from Norwegian Centre for Research Data, ensuring that our data are collected, stored, and shared safely and legally. Even though we do not report on findings from the other countries involved, we have followed the project procedures of (Norway) when collecting our empirical material. Norway is one of the countries in which no ethical approval is required for research, but, due to our ethical deliverables to the European Commission and our close collaboration with countries where ethical considerations of the project's impact on children were considered, the Norwegian team took part in those discussions, as well as submitting several ethical requirements to the European Commission.

Two limitations of this study are its small sample size and that we report on the Norwegian data only. However, Norway does provide us with the possibility of examining data from a country considered to have one of the highest access rates in Europe when it comes to digital tools (Lafton et al., 2022; Milosevic et al., 2022) and the greatest amount of time spent online for children aged 9–16 in Europe (Smahel et al., 2020). Meeting the informants through in-depth interviews provided us with nuances and diverse aspects of digital life in families to which we would not have had access through, for example, a survey approach. Our design also allowed us to obtain insights into young children's ideas and stories of how digital technology matters in their everyday lives. Our study also contributes to the call for more qualitative research within the paradigm of digital studies (Lafton et al., 2022).

Analysing the data material

In our analysis, we attempt to bring in impressions from the parents' and children's points of view, because both groups are seen as equally important in a family. The empirical material contains transcripts from (1) family interviews ($N = 10$) (i.e., semi-structured individual interviews with children aged five or six and eight, nine, or ten, one parent, and one more family member chosen by the family), and (2) a total of ten focus group interviews with children aged five or six and eight, nine, or ten. We have followed a three-step analysis process.

Step 1: Open inductive coding

In analysing the material, we conducted an inductive empirical close coding inspired by Tjora (2019, p. 28). All transcribed interviews were coded openly, based on the empirical data. At this point, we were highly conscious of making no themes or theoretical connections. As Tjora (2019, p. 29) argues, we can reduce the risk of presumptions without jumping to conclusions based on theories and already known facts. This empirical, close-coding process was performed by dividing the informants into three groups: children aged five or six years, children aged eight, nine, or ten years, and parents.

Step 2 : Developing a research question from the empirical codes

We used NVivo software, because it allowed us to separate the material and examine themes across the three groups (children aged five or six years, children aged eight, nine, or ten years, and parents). Across the empirical codes of the different groups, we found several quotes that established a connection between family values and parental mediation, which seemed to have a possible influence on children's digital lives, even though we had not directly asked for this. We developed our research question as follows: In what ways can family values and parental mediation influence children's digital learning and well-being?

Step 3: Constructing themes from our empirical codes to answer our research questions

By finding our research question from our first empirical coding, we could now look for categories in our data material to answer our research question. We cannot capture or measure children's skills in our findings, but we can show how the family members and the groups of children express themselves in the interviews about family values and parental mediation, and how this can play a part in children's digital learning and well-being.

Table 2. Ways in which the family can influence children's digital learning and well-being.

Category 1	Sharing values; how and in what ways
Category 2	The degree of children's agency in the family
Category 3	Opportunities for learning digital skills
Category 4	Regulation of the use of digital technology
Category 5	Degree of rules and regulations versus communication and negotiation
Category 6	Degree of moralizing of the use of digital technology

Results

The six categories identified in step 3 were thematised under the heading, "Ways in which the family values and mediates children's use of digital technology", as presented in table 2.

Based on these categories and our research question, we developed three themes from our research results, showing how the family members express the importance of family values and parental mediation.

Theme 1: sharing or not sharing values and rules inside the family

Parents are aware that they do not have first-hand experience with all the possibilities and the content to which the children of today have access, and they express how they bring their own experiences with them into their parenting. Nevertheless, they are also conscious that their experiences differ from those of their children. One of the mothers reflected upon this:

> It is a huge responsibility to help them navigate this [the children's digital life]. I think a lot about that. And my generation may not be the best at guiding them, either. We must talk a lot together.

The parents with whom we spoke acknowledge their own shortcomings in simply transferring practices and values to the next generation. They also express how they find it hard to adjust their values based on the discussion and advice to which they have access about digital technology in their young children's lives, because they find this advice based more on assumptions than on research. As one mother points out:

> I am, however, skeptical about making rules and regulations based on assumptions and something that feel like a common moral panicking about what is the best for my children. I really would have liked more knowledge about how digital life affects them.

Other parents express the same insecurity about how to gain access to knowledge about children and digital media. At the same time, both children and parents share that security issues are an important value across all families. Another mother said:

> Talking about what is going on digitally has both to do with my security and her security. It is as natural as asking what you are reading in that book.

Nevertheless, parents find it necessary to have oversight to give advice and ensure that children feel safe and can come to them with questions or if they experience frightening content online. Likewise, children find their parents' involvement important to their feeling of security. One of the children in a focus group (aged eight, nine or ten years) tells us that "I can tell my mother almost everything," whereas another child mentions that

"if I experience something bad, then it helps to talk about it." When the researcher asked if it was fine that adults look out for them, one child answered: "Yes, that's really good because then they can make sure that you look at something safe and that you don't get nightmares."

Security is also closely linked to sharing digital experiences across generations. One nine-year-old girl told us: "Every Saturday, we usually have a movie night with the family." Other shared experiences included playing digital games on Nintendo Switch or playing Pokémon Go outside with the whole family. One girl says:

> I really liked Pokémon Go during [the COVID-19 pandemic]. My mum used to say: "I thank God for Pokémon Go." She thought we'd be bored to death if we didn't have it.

Several of the families describe how a game like Pokémon Go has been valuable to them. The shared values are connected to how the game motivates the whole family to go outside and do something together. In some families, the parents play as well, but more often, the children play on their parents' phones or on an old phone they have inherited and can use for such gaming purposes, while the parents enjoy the walk.

Shared experiences can also involve family members sharing the room without necessarily being occupied with the same content – a kind of co-presence. The parents are more unsure if this way of being together is valuable. The children, on the other hand, find that experiences of individual use in common areas contribute to family togetherness and empathetic engagement. When playing digital games or individually watching streaming content, one nine-year-old child describes it as "cosier" to use the devices in the living room with other family members present:

> When I play alone, I tend to be in the living room because it's cosy to be with my mom and brother and my dad.

If the children play online with friends or need to concentrate, they tell us that they go to a quieter place, such as their bedroom.

The children tell us how rules and regulations in the family can lead them to go elsewhere to explore without their parents being informed. An eight-year-old boy said he learned through friends about a game that his parents forbade him to play because of the 12-year age limit. The same boy also explains how, from a young age, he would sneak into his older brother's room to watch content he was not allowed to view. Another eight-year-old describes how his brother formed a friendship with other children to play:

> My brother's friends get to play more than we do. I know that because my brother only visits them so that he can play.

Other children underline that they get access to content the parents are unaware of, and one child says:

> There's something about Roblox. Because if you want to play a game that you are not allowed to play, you are allowed to play Roblox. Then you can just go into Roblox to play whatever you want.

Roblox is a gaming universe containing alternative versions of a range of games and can be used to find games that are similar to games children might not be allowed to play. When parents and children have different values about what is appropriate digital

content and parents make rules with which the children do not always agree, the children seem to turn elsewhere to gain access and develop their skills in certain arenas.

Theme 2: allowing children agency and giving them opportunities for learning digital skills in the family

In most families, the parents address how dialogue is important as part of their parental mediation. Even though parents are worried about how time-consuming digital technology can be, several see technology as valuable and reflect on how to use digital content wisely:

> . . . and digital tools provide lots of opportunities. You must be curious about the benefits. By having a conscious and balanced relationship with it, it should not only be about screen time. One should be positive and accept it, but be aware, and yes, make the choices that are right for oneself and one's family.

The idea of their own family as a system is evident in several of the interviews. Parents elaborate on how they make choices based on what they consider "best" for their family, highlighting their sense of family values. One of the mothers who did not want her daughter spending too much time in front of the screen was asked what she would do if her daughter's interest in the game Minecraft increased:

> She could have played a little more Minecraft, but then I would have suggested something else. Like telling her, you can´t watch so much TV, and Minecraft is included in the sum of screen time. We can go for a walk or write a letter to grandmother. But I wouldn't just say no. Rather introduce something else.

How they mediate time spent with digital technology differs among the families, and parents and children tend to compare their practice to how other families do it. One mother says:

> We are perhaps a bit older than some of the other parents and don't play too much computer games ourselves. Some might have young fathers who like video games as much as their kids. We are more restrictive, I think.

Different rules in different families are also an issue for the children. One eight-year-old boy says:

> I don't even have a phone, and two of my friends have them. My mother says that when I need a phone, because I will be walking alone home from school, I can get a phone that you can't download any games—a phone that has only a lot of numbers that you can call.

From the children's perspective, the possibilities that digital technology offers are clear, but the children rarely mention that their parents are especially supportive of their digital interests. Although parents describe varying degrees of involvement in their children's digital lives, the children themselves seldom say that their parents engage in digital activities with them. One boy says: "I think that has never happened. The whole family has never played together." However, the children often mention older siblings as important regarding inclusion in the digital media culture. One six-year-old girl says: "My brother has played the game a lot with me, so I have become very good." Thus,

our data suggest that children's media use happens primarily with less direct parental involvement or co-activity, demonstrating the blurriness of active parental mediation.

In one of the focus groups, however, a group of nine-year-old boys tells us about a father helping them get started with Discord as a platform to have conversations during their online gaming sessions. As such, the father is not only providing his son with gaming equipment but helping him to find digital solutions to allow him and his friends to collaborate. Further, an eight-year-old boy explains to the researcher how his father tests a game to find out if it is suitable for him. This father also tells us how he wants to support his son's digital activities and recognises his son's expertise and interests in digital technology. These two fathers are exceptions in the material. In both cases, family values influenced how these fathers viewed the digital technology and how they worked in various ways to support the gaming interests of their sons.

In both the individual and focus group interviews, the children talk a lot about gaming and apps for connecting and entertainment purposes, but few tell us about having coding experiences. Only one boy in a focus group of children aged eight, nine, or ten years told us: "I learned to code in kindergarten, and I have done lots of programming. I joined a code club as well." In addition, one girl from a focus group of children aged five or six years told us that she had tried bee-bots at home. None of the parents mention the need to introduce their children to coding or programming as a part of their parental role. We can only speculate that parents might see this skill as the responsibility of the education ecosystem.

Theme 3: regulating and moralizing the use of digital technology in families

One mother is worried because she has observed how parents use the screen as a pacifier for their children and expresses that sometimes she thinks it is a failure in terms of care. "I see how some of my friends let their children play and play and play, and I am worried. But I can't tell others how to bring up their own children."

Values of upbringing and best practices regarding children's well-being seem difficult for most parents to discuss with other parents. These difficulties are also exemplified when parents reflect on the blurred line between their work and their children's activities. One of the parents thinks it is a good thing he has email on his phone because then he can be more effective and focus on important work, whereas at the same time be present at football practice or ball games. Other parents describe these kinds of incidents as "irritating to see parents who just sit there with their heads facing down on their phones and their kids are just running around the field trying to gain their parents' attention."

One mother, however, does describe how she regularly discusses the impact of the use of digital content on children's lives with friends, but she admits that this can still be challenging.

> We never agree, though. We are about the same age and not that different, but we totally disagree on how digital tools affect our children and how we can let them use them. I do wonder if children of really strict parents will learn how to make wise decisions on their own when they get older.

This parent is not saying what she thinks other parents should do, but she is worried about what restrictive parental mediation and restricted access to digital tools might mean for the children themselves.

In a focus group with children aged five or six years, one girl elaborates on how she connects with her sister through making videos on TikTok or with her family when playing Fortnite (recommended age limit is 12 years) with her whole family. This experience differs from what the other five- to six-year-old children tell us. The interviews indicate a possible expectation that parents need to express moral values about age limits in different games and applications. The girl who played Fortnite with her whole family had a single mom and four siblings, who lived in a relatively small apartment, which can make it more difficult for the mother to individualize the upbringing of her children, including their access to digital content. Yet, the example of the two fathers who assess the digital environment for their sons, not based on age limits, can show how values and parental mediation work in tandem. On the other hand, a challenge can arise in all families when a child has older siblings or friends with more liberal family practices concerning digital upbringing.

In the discussion, we examine how our findings of family values and parental mediation can influence children's digital learning and well-being.

Discussion

As shown in the results section, families are diverse. Some parents are protective and worried about the negative impact digital technology will have on their children, whereas others are more concerned about how to help their children live with and in a world of technology. The concept of well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014) is changing as digital technology becomes part of family life. Even though age limits are not necessarily bound by law, they are guidelines that steer parents to what content is appropriate for different age groups. The group of parents arguing in favour of following the age limits connect their ethical considerations to the security dimension (Lorenz & Kapella, 2020). As shown in the results, their rules are in line with age limits to make sense of what content to allow their children to access, very much in line with how parents are linking rules and values (Richardson & Milovidov, 2019). Parents with a candid interest in digital technology are aware of the frames and recommendations, but they choose to override them if they find the content appropriate for their own children. Those parents seem to examine various technologies to understand the ethical issues and challenges children can meet. As such, the parents' own digital experiences and interests affect the intra-familiar processes, as mentioned by Plowman (2016). According to our findings, it can seem that children are offered different possibilities for interacting with digital content; therefore, they may be at risk of developing digital skills that depend on their parents' own digital experiences, which can be limited in some cases.

Children who have an interest in content that is not in line with their parents' values and rules will nevertheless find ways to explore and support their own interests, such as going to a friend's house where parents might have more liberal values than their own parents or getting access to restricted content from older siblings. These actions contribute to how the family is formed (LaRossa & Reitzes, 2004). All the parents in the study create rules for age limits or screen time. Some are quite strict, demonstrating restrictive parental mediation in which rule-setting is often non-negotiable and decided upon by parents and their family values. For

Livingstone et al., (2017), this can be associated with fewer online risks (Livingstone et al., 2017), but also fewer opportunities to develop digital skills and tackle risks. Other parents are more concerned with discussing rules with their children. These results demonstrate how parents link their parental mediation to conflicting rules (Straker et al., 2018). When children break the rules, the communication climate in the family contributes to how and whether the children can discuss their online experiences with their parents, and consequently, contribute to their well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014).

Children who sense that they can talk to their parents about "everything" describe a feeling of confidence and security through creating solidarity and enhancing a "sense of closeness and involvement" with their parents (Lotz, 2014, p. 257). Parents can provide advice if children experience something frightening online. A consequence of a more restrictive parental mediation (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020) is demonstrated when children sneak out to access digital content that they are not allowed to access at home and seldom tell their parents about their experiences. Thus, a parental sense of closeness and involvement, in addition to parental mediation style, may be important in determining how the children develop digital skills related to critical reflection in use and content.

The idea of how care is linked to children's digital well-being (Tronto, 2013) does not, however, emerge as clearly. One mother is worried about the extensive use of screens and sometimes thinks it is a failure in care. Other parents, such as the father helping his child and friends connect via Discord, are giving children access to an arena to discuss and meet up online – an act that may contribute to the boys' interaction skills (Helsper et al., 2021) on various levels. The father is not only providing them with a platform to communicate, but he can set up a secure arena for the boys because of his digital knowledge.

When combined with how parents express their lack of experience growing up in a digital society, the question of care ethics is no longer merely a question about screen time but of meaningful practices related to children's everyday life. Our study shows how important those meet-ups online are when they allow the children to pursue their own concepts of happiness, including engagement with peers, inside their family (Lotz, 2014). A conflict seems to arise in the gap between protecting the child and the child's agency in digital environments. This gap cannot be filled by transferring values from one generation to another or by developing moral standards for how to interact with digital technology. Instead, greater discussion is required that involves critical evaluation (Helsper et al., 2021; Wilhelmsen & Lafton, in press) as part of active parental mediation (Lee & Chae, 2012) for the children to develop the skills needed to navigate such a complex arena.

The children with whom we spoke are often left on their own to explore and experience the digital world. The parents who have their own general positive interest in digital technology or have extensive experience as gamers or working with digital technology are mainly the ones who take an active, facilitating role in their children's digital lives. This might result in greater diversity in developing digital skills, especially those related to communication and the creation of knowledge and content (Helsper et al., 2021). When parents talk about the creation of content (Helsper et al., 2021), they do not mention digital creativity, but primarily address non-digital creative activities. As Ben-Arieh et al., (2014) pointed out, children's well-being is connected to the situation here and now and how their experiences of today affect their future. We dare ask if a lack of parental digital skills may hinder families in identifying the need for a deeper understanding of digital

content and the ability to engage in creative digital play together (Richardson & Milovidov, 2019). A need might possibly exist to discuss whether children's emerging digital skills would be more multi-faceted if they had a larger variation in the digital content that they related to in their leisure time and had strengthened the children's technical, operational, and critical skills.

In one of the focus groups, four boys aged eight and nine years argued that they learn more by gaming than they do in school. If taking the children's voices seriously, parents can provide an essential contribution to children's digital skills and possibly their well-being by simply facilitating these activities, regardless of their own competence. Furthermore, parents express their insecurity in how to help children navigate in today's digital world, and they articulate the need for arenas to discuss knowledge-based insights in digital use. Although only a few of the parents with whom we spoke understand and appreciate the educational potential of social media and games, the responsibility of developing and supporting children's digital skills cannot be left up to the family alone. This is mainly due to the diversity in parents' digital knowledge, but also because of their lack of arenas for developing their digital knowledge and the idea of what digital literacy might mean in their children's upbringing. The link between the family, on the one hand, and the school, on the other, raises additional questions and knowledge gaps concerning the link between educational systems and families when developing digital skills. Our results show that all the relationships, values, and mediations surrounding children's everyday lives are involved in the development of digital skills. Taking the opportunity to establish new arenas in a space where families and schools can work together creatively to support children in developing digital skills, using the devices and apps most familiar to their everyday lives, may be of importance to support children's digital well-being.

Concluding remarks

In this article, we have investigated how family values are connected to children's digital skills in an increasingly complex and digital world. As pointed out by several researchers, children's digital lives and family lives are multi-faceted (Clark, 2013; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020); we have shown how parents' values can affect their mediation. When parents find themselves in a dilemma between moral values and attachment values, this seems to affect the child's access to developing digital skills, in line with how this term is understood by Helsper et al., (2021). Parental mediation can hinder or support children's ability to participate in social, peer relations online. Strict regulations may also imply that children choose not to discuss their online experiences with their parents, thereby hindering parents' insight into important parts of today's childhood. We recognise that family values can influence parental mediation styles and can, in turn, interact with the development of complex digital skills. Our discussion shows how family values, such as togetherness, well-being, and learning, are shaped and challenged. How and to what degree parents facilitate their children's possibilities to participate and explore the digital society is highly dependent on the parents' own values. Family values are diverse, but they seem to resonate in the digital skills that children are developing. These findings also invite discussions about future research. Research that investigates local contexts and

their nuances may elicit emerging discussions of great importance to understanding the relationship between parental mediation, values, and the development of digital skills.

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