Digital technologies, children and young people's relationships and self-care

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## Authors

Wilson S.

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## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities
* Wellbeing

## Sample

22 participants (13 men and 9 women) aged 10–23 young people who have had the experience of not living with their biological parents. The participants were from urban, rural and remote island communities across Scotland recruited through voluntary sector organisations providing services including advocacy and accommodation.

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Other

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Child welfare practitioners

# Abstract

Children’s and young people’s access to and use of digital technologies have received
increasing attention in recent years. While influential UK media commentators have often
focused on associated risks, researchers have taken a less exclusively problem-focused
approach. Children and young people’s use of, for example, social media and computer
games to extend the spaces available to them in which to maintain relationships, to
experiment with social identities, and to engage in an ‘economy of dignity’, however
fragile, have all been highlighted. This paper builds on this work to further consider the role
of such resources, accessed primarily through computers and mobile phones, as means of
caring for oneself or ‘self-care’. It draws on a qualitative study which employed visual and
audial methods to explore the sense of belonging (or not) of young people who have been
‘looked after’ by others than their biological parents, often in less affluent circumstances.

# Outcome

"The findings presented in this paper reflect more difficult minority world social circumstances
to those on which much of this research work has been based, but confirm their interest. Dylan’s
pride in his new phone might be seen as misplaced. However, it is important to recognise that he
felt such possessions allowed him to belong to a broader community, as well as illustrating that he
was worthy of the care, love and esteem of the person who bought them for him, a former foster
mother, who in his account was definitely ‘someone’. The multi-functionality and sometimes
portability of many technologies also often served other relational purposes, including storing
photographs and providing affordable means of communication. They were, as for Reggie who
had very little money, and for Penfold who had experienced multiple moves, a means to build
and maintain significant relationships and to be part of some form of (online) community,
however precarious... Rather than considering only the potential risks of such new online contacts, and thus reproducing
conventional assumptions that such interactions are necessarily more risky than those
encountered in the (family) home, such research might also consider digital technologies as providing
technologies of self-care. As suggested by the work of DeNora (2000) and Bull (2007),
sources of music and other sounds were important for many respondents. Leah, for example,
used her i-Phone™ to negotiate difficult, even hostile encounters in public space, while
Channel emphasised her discomfort in home spaces where she could not play music. Online computer
games and music videos had also been used to blank out sources of stress, including volatile
home circumstances (Reggie) or a new foster placement (Penfold). They also provided some, like
Drab, with resources with which to think through difficult relationships and events, and to develop
more positive interpretations of these." (Wilson, 2019: 291-2).