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Virtual Parent-Child Relationships: A Case Study

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Abstract

Studies on parenting and online gaming abound, most of this literature considering the role of parents in educating their children about online safety, maintaining boundaries and limiting time spent online. Embedded within these inquiries is often the assumption that parents live with their children and must balance the physical-virtual divide. Relatively little research has considered the role of the virtual in the lives of parents who do not live with their children. In this inquiry, I present a narrative-ethnographic account of my experiences as a father living apart from my six-year-old son, communicating daily through various online games. I draw on my own experiences over the past three years, as well as formal and informal interviews with my son. I consider how our relationship has evolved in relation to virtual constructs including spaces, characters, and stories, and the extension of the virtual worlds we inhabit into our face-to-face conversations, play, and subjective individual and collective constructions of the reality of our relationship. Ultimately, I propose broader implications for the study of virtual worlds and relationships, as well as an expansion of the understanding of parenting in a digital age, where gaming is not always a distraction from familial engagement but can in fact integrate with family life.

1. Introduction

In Mike Meginnis' (2011) short story, *Navigators*, as a father and son play a video game together, the trials in the game become a metaphor for their own struggles, bringing them closer together through an understanding of their relationship and the hardships they confront together. While that father and son shared a physical presence, the story nevertheless presents a compelling image of parent and child, bonding together through virtual space.

Reading *Navigators* as a "distance parent" (i.e., one who does not live near their child), of a six-year-old son, I am prompted to consider the role of the virtual in our relationship, and as a scholar, to consider the empirical questions arising from and surrounding concepts of virtual parent-child relationships. As Brown (2011) points out,

"cyberspace enables families and friends to converse, in effect, as if they were in the same room. This is part of the reason that the Millennial generation reported feeling closer to their parents than did their older siblings during adolescence, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Survey" (p. 30).

Here, Brown refers mostly to video conferencing, and indeed, little scholarship has considered the extent to which virtual relationships between parents and children manifest beyond video conferencing, email, and texts. In other words, the role of virtual parent-child relationships through gaming is underexplored. Instead, the focus has been on virtual technologies such as video's impact on "real," or offline relationships.

The focus on video conferencing as a supplement to face-to-face relational interaction seems an oversight considering the evidence that virtual play can be satisfying to children when engaged with other peers through video, not because of the video, but because the traditional forms of play (e.g., with objects, stories and spaces) is shared in some way (Yarosh, Inkpen and Bernheim Brush, 2010). In theory, video game play may, in fact, offer the virtual spaces and connections to help alleviate some of the problems associated with synchronous video recording's disparate physical play spaces and associated objects. Research on distance play between children and adults has also suggested that video-only communication lacks an "active" component that allows for playfulness, suggesting that games could bridge this gap (Follmer et al., 2010), perhaps through their abilities to stimulate the development of stories and characters.

In the current inquiry, I seek to help fill this gap in the literature by drawing on a narrative, ethnographic case study, exploring various dimensions of my virtual relationship with my son. I draw from personal reflections, formal interviews and informal conversations with my son, as well as art created by my son to depict our virtual and offline relationships. Together these data sources help form a case study that is exploratory in nature and meant to form some foundational conceptual frameworks for future research (for more on exploratory case studies, see Yin, 2003).

I begin with an overview of some commonly examined areas on parents, children, and virtual worlds and then consider three primary dimensions of the virtual parent-child relationship: spaces, characters, and stories, examining how each may be interpreted and engaged by a child and parent. I continue by integrating extant research with the experiences drawn from the current case study, and conclude with implications for future study in this area.

2. Parents, Children and Virtual Worlds

Considerable attention has been paid to the potential risks and harms associated with children playing video games (Salonius and Gelfond, 2005). Much of this research positions parents as "guardians," considering how well they monitor, control, and understand their children's play habits. This body of literature generally suggests that parents are relatively disengaged with gaming

themselves, as well as largely unaware of their children's gaming habits (see e.g., Funk, Hagan and Schimming, 1999). Even research that has considered children's virtual-play tends to focus on childhood interaction with virtual spaces, rather than relationships, particularly with adult family members – there is an emphasis on “safe environments” that makes research on relationship facilitating virtual interactions difficult (e.g., Marsh, 2010).

Studies that consider parent and child preferences about games may also focus on issues of child health, rather than interactivity between children and parents (see, e.g., De Vet, Simons and Wesselman, 2014). Even given this concern, there is evidence that gaming has positive emotional and social benefits for children (see Granic, Lobel and Engels, 2014).

Despite an overwhelming focus on concerns about children's use of new media, research and policy have recommended that parents “co-use” media with children. However, some research suggests parents are relatively unlikely to use video games with their children compared to other forms of media, and that a gap in research exists in this regard (Connell, Lauricella and Wartella, 2015).

Some research has considered the promise of augmented virtual/real spaces using video-conferencing between parents and children, suggesting that the presence of real spaces and objects in virtual interactions is socially and emotionally meaningful and useful (Yarosh et al., 2009). Coyne et al. (2014) provide an exploration of social networking between adolescents and parents, finding that these connections, increasingly common as social network users become parents, can lead to positive, pro-social outcomes. This type of research has not been extended to younger children, nor within the specific context of distance parenting.

One recent study by Willett (2017) examines some of the concepts presented in this inquiry, namely the concepts of relationships, values and histories within a family as they relate to gaming. Willett (pages 157, 158) astutely observes that “As with any media, online games are not neutral objects – they are embedded with meanings and framed by particular understandings as they enter and are integrated Children's Geographies 157 into homes. Domestication theory moves beyond analyzing children's media practices in relation to benefits and risks. Parenting in the age of digital media is fraught with tension as parents navigate conflicting discursive constructions of online gaming, draw on their personal values, and strive for a sense of ontological security in their homes.”

Willett's call is a relatively new one, and a departure from traditional approaches to parent-child relationships and gaming, and in spite of this emerging body of literature, as Coyne et al. (2017) point out, “researchers are often focused on the negative influence that media can have, both on individuals and in families. However, research is just beginning to examine how media (particularly, new media) can be a positive force in families” (p. 114). The current inquiry seeks to serve as a starting point for developing such lines of inquiry, and as Coyne et al., call for, future, longitudinal, and cross-sectional studies that expand on some of the areas of inquiry presented in this case study.

As Reich, Black and Korobkova (2014) point out in their study of children's use of virtual spaces, there is also an important opportunity for research such as this to explore the subversive, unintended and emergent use of such technology and spaces, in relation to peers but also in relation to family members.

3. Aims and Scope of the Current Inquiry

Recognizing the scarcity of research on parent-child virtual relationships, and how virtual worlds mesh with traditional spaces, I develop three primary aims for the current inquiry:

1. To consider broadly, what makes a virtual relationship a relationship. Specifically, I consider the roles that virtual spaces, characters, and stories play in forming a relationship, especially between parent and child;
2. How the subjective experience of parent and child inform their unique view of the virtual relationship, and how this subjectivity contributes to the negotiation of the virtual relationship;
3. The ways in which virtual relationships interact with face-to-face relationships between parent and child, particularly with respect to the creation of stories and memories.

The scope of my inquiry into these areas is constrained by the methodological orientation of this research. Since this is a case study focused on only myself and my child, no claims to generalizability can be made. However, there remains a precedent for this type of research, particularly as it aims to prompt theoretical questions and inform future empirical research. Ultimately, the goal of this inquiry is to provoke thought about parent-child virtual relationships and spur additional research designs aimed at expanding this area of study. The goal of the inquiry is not to valorize a parenting approach, nor is it to problematize the use of technology by youth – it is to interrogate the multifaceted nature of a virtual parent-child relationship and its interconnectedness to traditional relationship models.

4. Story as Method

This inquiry adopts a narrative ethnographic approach, incorporating observations about the self and the other through a combination of research findings and researcher reflections (Tedlock, 1991). Other researchers examining family issues and relational dynamics have used similar approaches (see, e.g., Young, 2009; Voloder, 2009), adopting a highly reflexive strategy to unravel personal and shared familial feelings. This approach also lends itself to an exploratory case study design, which is well suited to phenomenon that may be highly contextual with respect to observations and outcomes (Yin, 2003), forming the conceptual framework for future study but acknowledging the uniqueness of something like a specific parent-child relationship, bound in a particular space and time.

Narrative inquiry has several labels that are used in the social sciences, including, but not limited to, narrative ethnography, autoethnography, and autobiography (Goodall, 2008; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Regardless of the label attached to the method of inquiry, eliciting stories and memories in (auto-)ethnographic work may draw on various types of narrative formation, ranging from disparate reflections to more cohesive “chapters” in which one recalls significant periods of time, framed around memories (see Kirkegaard Thomsen, 2008). In this inquiry, I draw on a chapter of my own life in which my child has lived apart from me (approximately three years) and communicated most days of the week through gaming and video chat. I also evoke memories from other chapters of my life, including my own childhood, during which I played games with my parents and sibling.

Analytically speaking, a key facet of constructing a narrative inquiry, whether around chapters or discrete memories, is to convey the associated memories through language, a process that requires “[piecing together] spatially by deeper emotional/semiotic logics” (Goodall, 2008, p. 84) and storytelling as method is not without peril – stories have the potential to unravel, and voices lacking certain vocabularies (e.g., a child’s) can be muted or distorted (Taylor, 2009), and familial retellings surrounding trying subjects can be difficult (Poulos, 2008).

To navigate the perils of storytelling (especially involving a child), in this inquiry I piece together textual, auditory, and visual artifacts (e.g., drawings, conversations, and images from games) to form a semiotic understanding of individual and shared experiences between my son and

me. For example, as part of my method, I prompted my son to draw pictures of he and myself playing games together in different context (i.e., in the same room, and when we are playing remotely). This method helps participants make sense of phenomenon as well as serves as a method for unravelling often complex social and emotional feelings (Guillemin, 2004). Such an approach also evokes Geertz (1973) notion of “thick descriptions” as imperative to forming a “vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself” (p. 319). In other words, by providing a thick, reflexive account of this particular case, I seek to understand the symbolic meaning of self (me) and other (child) in given spaces and times that orbit around a digital landscape (games).

When interviewing my son, I combined open ended questions with vignettes used as probes to elicit more specific information about his feelings regarding us being apart, and how games might affect these feelings. I drew on vignettes from actual play and life experiences (e.g., a time we were apart but played a specific game), and the result was typically a more pointed discussion of how he felt at the time, or rather, how he imaged himself to feel in that moment as a reaction to the vignette (see Barter and Renold, 2010 for more on the usefulness of using vignettes when researching children.)

I also engaged my son in “action interviews” during game-sessions to acknowledge and engage him as an active participant, rather than a subject on which I conducted research. This approach also made the research more “fun” for him, and thus increased his patience and elicited more thorough responses (see Barker and Weller, 2003). While the current research approach lacks generalizability, the level of internal validity is high, in part because I am extremely proximate to the members of the sample (i.e., myself and my son) and because I was able to employ mixed data collection techniques with the same participant over a long period of time (e.g., repeated interviews with the same or similar questions to test validity of responses.) With these strengths and weaknesses in mind, I move forward by presenting key concepts and findings below, using narrated personal experiences and excerpts from interviews and conversations with my son.

It is common to conceive of spaces as contexts containing relationships, but in the current discussion, I suggest that the virtual relationship encompasses virtual spaces. This is not to suggest that reciprocity between space and relationships emerged only alongside the virtual. As Bittarello (2008) suggests, virtual spaces pre-date digital spaces, emerging through mythic (re)-telling. In other words, they not only tell stories, but are themselves, storied. In the case of parent-child relationships, the storying of spaces may take the form of playfulness between child and parent, where virtual worlds can contain spaces that diverge from that defined space of reality through a process of creativity resulting in a formed mythos between parent and child, much as they would be in an imaginary mind-space. Indeed, as Lehdonvirta (2010) argues, in the creative space of imagination, virtual worlds merge with offline worlds.

To illustrate the merging of virtual and physical in the relational contexts, I consider an experience between my son and I: He [my son] was coming to spend spring break with me, and had little memory of the condo in which I live. To prepare (and excite him) for the trip, we created a replica of the condo in Minecraft. We walked through each room, and even created shells of the floors beneath ours in the building. This was a way to introduce him to concept of living in a shared space, but also to provide a fantasy virtual world in which he could acclimate to a new and potentially overwhelming space. When he arrived, he almost immediately remarked that the condo was “like Minecraft” and wanted to explore each room in real life that we had created in the game. In this way, the space occupied by our relationship crossed virtual-physical barriers. He came to the physical space prepared to fill it with memories, having already filled it with virtual memories.

My son shared that building virtual spaces together makes him feel “good, and happy, because you’re actually like a carpenter or a builder.” The functional products produced by builder and carpenter can be examined with respect to the role they play in social relationships. Riggins (1994) writes of the sociological practice of examining the “living room,” as a social space where “symbolic and functional artifacts” help inform both the scene of analysis and the dialogues between actors navigating these spaces and artifacts. Saunders et al. (2011) support the concept of virtual spaces as facilitating interaction and creativity through not just characters, but characters’ orientation to and interaction with meaning-imbued objects and spaces.

5. Players as Characters

Space clearly plays a significant role in the virtual relationship, but in most cases a character inhabits these spaces, and even when this is not the case, the player does. Here I envision the player both as self, and as character, exploring the various conceptualizations of this connection and how they relate to the virtual relationship at hand, between parent and child.

Loyer (2015), for example, draws attention to one conceptualization of characters as elaborate “pointers” used to interact with worlds, versus characters imbued with the agency and intent to interact with other players or non-player characters. Evidencing a hybrid of these conceptualizations of the player was illustrated by a drawing my son created and then explained when prompted to depict us playing games together while I am away.

He draws himself sitting at a chair in front of a computer screen on which a mini-game is being played by us in which we must excavate a fossil. Above the computer he draws a set of tools for excavating and writes “incomplete.” He does not draw me in the picture, but instead seems focused on the game mechanics. I ask why he doesn’t draw me and he replies by saying he “didn’t have enough room to draw me” but then he draws “me” in a tiny window on the computer screen.

This example suggests that my son views the “player” as Loyer (2015) envisions them, as a collective between he and I, both working to control the mechanisms of the game, but in doing so, interacting with one another as agents in a relationship. In this sense, the player’s interaction with the virtual world has become a part of the virtual relationship. It signifies collaboration and shared experience.

Players are, however, often also characters in the broader game world. Studies have considered the importance creating avatars has on a feeling of presence in a virtual environment (see e.g., Bailey, Wise and Bolls’ 2009 study of 10-12 year olds) and research suggests that believable avatar interactions are important to investment and belief in a game world and achievement of social agency (for characters) and social meaning (for relationships) (Banks, David Bowman, 2014).

It is worth considering Neustaedter and Fedorovskaya’s (2009) avatar-creation typologies when examining the parent-child virtual relationship. They identify realists, idealists, fantasy-oriented, and role-players as developing avatars to match their desired goal in playing the game and interacting in the game space(s) with other avatars. As my son and I play games together, he sometimes wishes to create fanciful avatars, but I find myself discouraging him from doing so because I want our avatars to look as close to our real-selves as possible to increase my feeling of connection to him in the game. However, I feel less inclined to discourage fantastical avatars if we can overlay video chat onto our game windows, suggesting a hybrid presence created through video, audio, and game imagery. However, even without video chat, and when we both created or chose fantasy avatars (e.g., a “spider in a suit” in Minecraft) we came to associate one another with these avatars. My son has on occasion referred to me (in person) as a “spider in a suit.” I reflected on this phenomenon by recalling that,

...at one point while playing Minecraft with my son without a video chat running, I realized that I was imagining him as his avatar, during that play session. I imagined hugging his avatar with mine, and felt genuine joy as we built and explored together.

Speaking to a hybrid digital presence and how this informs virtual relationships in which subjective experiences are negotiated into shared ones, some research suggests that eye contact between play-partners increases connectivity and enjoyment of play, and that a lack of either face-to-face or video “gaze” limits the relational power of play (Shahid, Krahmer and Swerts, 2012). Based on my experiences with my son, I suggest characters themselves take on a personal quality – in other words, becoming a representation of the individual member of a relationship – able to gaze at the other during video game play, even without “real” eye-contact, thus maintaining a relational connection. To this end, nonverbal interaction through body language and object interaction is important (see, e.g., Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila, 2012). Indeed, researchers have stressed the importance of designing electronic interactions that move beyond “talking heads” (Oduor et al., 2013). My son and I have experienced this phenomenon in several games, even when the characters are not human, in which we manipulate the characters’ movements to send messages without speaking.

The real/virtual relational quality of avatar interactions is further complicated by questions related to the level of control players have over their avatar. As Waggoner (2009) ponders, what relationship exists between real-world and virtual identities, and how much control do players have over their avatar’s development as “selves?” These questions are particularly important given that “control” over characters and worlds are important to the enjoyment of online game interactions (Wu, Li and Rao, 2008). As my son and I have experienced, even relatively simple games, mechanically, can facilitate high levels of relational interaction if control over avatars is robust. In *Don’t Starve*, an “emote wheel” enables us to create virtual experiences such as “dance parties.”

It is also worth considering the role of non-player characters in the virtual relationship. As researchers have noted, objects in the game world may help connect players with one another through interaction with these objects. I asked my son to draw a second picture of us playing games while I am away, and he drew a “dragonfly pet” from *Don’t Starve* hovering over his computer. He explained that the pet was there, playing with us. The presence of this NPC and its role in informing the imaginative qualities of our relationship is significant – NPCs, like spaces, can provide contextual ingredients for the creation of stories, which, I suggest, form an important foundation in sustaining a virtual relationship with one’s child.

6. Stories and Memories

There is evidence that children’s play in virtual spaces is similar to their “real” play, of which imagination and the formation of stories is integral (Marsh, 2010). In this inquiry, I operationalize the formation of stories as a shared (or negotiated) process of creating and inhabiting memories. As Goodall (2008) emphasizes, memories often inform stories that are larger and more cohesive than at first reading. In other words, memories serve as a sort of index, binding stories together and providing headings and footnotes, where needed. Indeed, gaming helps create what Kirkegaard Thomsen (2008) calls “chapters” formed around narrative memories. These co-formed chapters create virtual narratives that incorporate both game components and the emotional and social experiences of, in this case, parent and child.

Just as stories are important to children’s play and relationship formation, playfulness and creativity are integral in the formation of story-binding memories. Here I evoke the term “silliness” to describe one dimension of this dynamic particularly relevant to childhood play and memory

formation (also see Follmer et al., 2015). When I asked my son about his experiences playing games with me, he frequently evoked this concept, telling me how “funny” and “silly” the experiences are.

I recall my own memories of gaming with my family. When I was about my son’s age, my parents purchased a Nintendo Entertainment System and as a family we sat in our living room and for the first time shared the experience of playing a video game together. I distinctly remember the laughter – so much that I literally rolled on the floor – and feel a sense of connectivity through that utter abandonment of formality and seriousness. My family and I bonded because we were playing – it was, and we were, silly. The moments when my son and I laugh with abandon while playing games are, similarly, the times I feel our relationship is strongest, whether the presence is virtual or not.

Silliness, through improvisation during play, for example, is also important to socializing children into understanding social, institutional, and cultural parameters, as well as the ability and need to navigate (and sometimes challenge and circumvent) such boundaries (Ladousse, 1987). Video games provide an important contextual opportunity in which to do so (Salonius and Gelfond, 2005). To illustrate this phenomenon, I consider a case with my son:

My son is very concerned with following rules, and I sometimes think this inhibits his creative play, so I often try to encourage him to break rules and challenge authority. To this end, using a “level editor” in Duck Game, we created a “Christmas morning” level. The level consisted of a house with a Christmas tree, a room for the “kids” and a room for the “adults.” There were gifts under the tree (that when opened, contain items used in the game, some destructive) and the parents’ room was locked. My son immediately began yelling “mom and dad aren’t home!” and laughing. We created a story around the space and acted out a scenario in which the two “kids” – “played” by my son and I - woke up and explored the house, opened gifts, and “acted bad,” even finding a key we had placed to get into “mom and dad’s” room. My son wanted to play this scenario over and over, and it was one of the times I felt most close to him while gaming, either remotely or in the same space.

Through improvisation, my son and I created a shared story, in a shared space, with shared characters. Though not all moments of gaming with my son online are so distinctly engaging – indeed, many times we drift into our own character’s behaviors and it becomes almost mundane – these are the ideal forms of interaction that, based on the afore-discussed literature, typify some potentialities of the virtual parent-child relationship.

7. Conclusion and Implications for Future Research: Virtual Parent-Child Relationships and Beyond

Researchers have considered various types of virtual relationships, including team building (Davis et al., 2009), romance (Turkle, 2009), offender-victim (Downing, 2010), and the aforementioned child-friend and child-parent relationships, but in examining MMOs, Lee (2006) provides one of the few direct examinations of parent-child virtual relationships. Lee states that “many parents commented on how the environment allowed them to observe their children in social interactions that they usually had no access to in the material world. For them, the MMORPG environment became a window into parts of their children’s identity that they hadn’t known about before” and that the game environment “restructures them [relationships] by allowing the participants to redefine the boundaries of their material world roles” (p. 201).

In the previous sections I considered how virtual spaces, characters, and stories operate in this restructuring process, and with respect to relationships, how they supplement the structure of a dynamic that is traditionally considered “physical,” “offline,” or “real.” The virtual relationship

between parent and child challenges the notion that physical boundaries form the outline of familial bonds, but it is not without its perils, of which I will briefly discuss one example before offering some concluding thoughts and suggestions for future research. Such perils include the potential for offline interactions to constantly drift toward game concepts, even when there is a desire to involve different activities. For example, with the case of my son and I, it is often the case that we refer to one another as our in-game names/identities, and while at times we mesh these identities with our offline ones, the line has potential to blur. It has the potential to be silly and playful like any other identity-play, but the blending of in-game and extra-game concepts, characters, and stories is thus both an area of potential bonding and a potential impediment to other areas of relational development. Future research should consider these dynamics and draw out specific approaches to balancing such concerns.

In spite of these potential pitfalls related to virtual parent-child relationships, in my case, when faced with the real limitations of time I could spend with my son, physically, I drew on memories of gaming with my family to...

create ways in which to play with my son because I anticipated that if we tried to stay connected through methods that were not entertaining and interactive, it would bore us both and we would dread, rather than look forward to, our daily interactions. Thus, I manufactured a system of connectivity through virtual worlds. This system of interaction still surprises me with its emergent stories, spaces, and capacity to alter our offline relationship. Our storied play, even face-to-face, takes on components of the fanciful and whimsical game elements we share when apart.

The continuity of our virtual and physical relationship speaks to the hybrid nature of relationships in a digital age more broadly. For example, the VR program *Sansar* already enables developers and users to create multiplayer virtual spaces in which facial and body tracking integrate to form immersive social experiences, and *High Fidelity* boasts that it helps developers create VR experiences that are more social and realistic in nature, with the intent to blur the lines between virtual and “real.” Both of these initiatives represent what is probably only the tip of the iceberg with respect to the impact of emerging mixed-reality on relationships. As body and facial tracking, image quality and resolution improvements, and haptics develop, it is likely that the concepts presented in this inquiry will become even more relevant to parent-child relationship studies, even for those that do not involve any geographic distance.

However, I would argue that innovation, while welcome, is not necessary to achieve meaningful virtual relationships in the present. For example, speaking to the increasingly hybrid quality of virtual relationships, Yarosh and Robert Kwikers (2011) offer findings suggesting that computer-mediated video chat is more conducive to narrative play than audio chat, however, research has shown that online games with text only (e.g., MUDs) provide a space for shared narratives to emerge (Turkle, 1994).

Given the power of interactive text alone to form and sustain virtual relationships, it is imperative that as hybrid forms of communication such as augmented and mixed reality gaming become more accessible to consumers; researchers consider the impact of such technologies on parent-child virtual relationships. These technologies may appeal to both parents and children because they are often “active” rather than sedentary (De Vet et al., 2014), and because they offer a virtual/tangible intersection that heightens the emotional and social benefits of telecommunication between parents and children (Yarosh et al., 2009; Oduor et al., 2013). My son and I have already glimpsed this future. Not long ago, we acquired an *Oculus Rift*, and as we swapped the headset and experienced the introduction sequence in which you interact with a robot using your virtual hands, our eyes lit up, we abandoned formality and seriousness – the gravity of a parent and child distanced from one another eroded. I thought of playing with my parents, and brother, and realized that as

gaming becomes a part of culture and life across generations (see Willett, 2017), likewise there are stories emerging across and between generations, and these stories interact with relationships. These broad, sometimes abstract concepts need to be explored in an interdisciplinary way that incorporates history, culture, society, the individual, and the interpersonal. Samples of multiple parents and children will help inform this research path moving forward, as will research that drills down on more specific hypotheses related to the numerous experiences and dynamics involved in this emerging social phenomenon and body of inquiry.

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