

Mobile Phone Use by Parents and Children in Public Space and its Implications on Interactional Synchrony

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Taking part in outdoor activities and visiting public places together with parents is an essential part of the childhood. Despite their routine and obvious nature, these situations provide children with stimuli that enhance general knowledge, foster encounters with new people and challenge them with experiences in which they may acquire significant social skills, such as patience, restraint and courtesy. The enriching potential of public space emphasizes the parents' role as primary agents of socialization who interpret social realities for children and help them integrate successfully in public places. Hence, spending time together at the playground, on public transportation or while waiting to be served at a restaurant might provide parents and children with a wealth of opportunities for dialogue, play and enriching interaction so important for children's healthy development and wellbeing.

Over the past few years communication between parents and children spending time together in public places has been affected by the massive penetration of mobile touchscreen media. Hence, it is becoming increasingly common to see both parent and child isolated in their respective "digital

bubbles” during their time away from home. The research literature, however, fails to emphasize the implications of media use in the public places on the quality of parent-child communication. In line with Harrist and colleagues’ (1994) model of interactional synchrony (i.e. mutually focused, reciprocated exchanges between interactional partners), the objective of this study was to examine how the use of mobile media in public places affects parent-child interactions. The study was based on a series of nonparticipant observations conducted at various playgrounds in Israel during summer and autumn 2016. Altogether we observed 28 dyads of parents and children aged 18 months to 6 years, while at least one of them (a parent or a child) was using a touchscreen mobile device during the time at the playground. The patterns of parent-child communication will be evaluated using a series of criteria testifying for the quality of interactional synchrony.