Raising Kids in a Digital World: The Role of Socioeconomic Status and Race in Screen Time Management

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity shape U.S. parents' strategies for managing children's screen time, highlighting digital inequality in family socialization. Using secondary analysis of Pew Research Center surveys (2020, 2024), the research employs descriptive statistics and qualitative coding to explore sources of screen time advice and perceived regulatory ability across demographic groups. Findings reveal that higher-SES parents leverage greater access to digital tools and institutional advice, reflecting structured socialization, while lower-SES parents face resource constraints, limiting their control over digital engagement. Racial trends suggest higher platform use among Black teens, pointing to subcultural influences on parenting challenges. These disparities underscore a digital divide extending beyond access to agency, amplifying socialization inequalities. The study enriches family sociology and stratification theory by linking technology management to social hierarchies, proposing interventions like digital literacy programs, and advocating for longitudinal research to assess long-term impacts on equitable digital parenting.

Keywords: digital inequality, parenting, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, screen time, family socialization

INTRODUCTION

Since digital technologies are a part of everyday life, parenting has become a focal point to learn how family dynamics are shaped by social inequalities. The prevalence of screens such as smartphones, tablets, and computers has changed the process of socialization, and with it come new challenges and possibilities for parents who are responsible for guiding the development of their children. This article examines how race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) influence the approaches employed by U.S. parents in regulating children's screen time and how the source of screen time guidance they employ, and how capable they perceive themselves in regulating such activity, differ. Drawing on empirical evidence from the Pew Research Center's Parenting Children in the Age of Screens (2020) and Teens, Social Media and Technology (2024) , the research places itself within family sociology and stratification theory to examine why differences in resource and cultural capital allow a digital gap in parenting to persist. In their examination of these dimensions, more general outcomes of family socialization and inequality in the digital era are meant to be illuminated.

Parenting as a first phase in socialization has already been shown to be one means by which children learn what is needed to live in the world around them (Lareau, 2003). Historically, the process was shaped by face-to-face contact and tangible resources, such as books or after-school programs. With the integration of digital technology into home life, however, long-standing patterns of socialization have been disrupted, establishing a complex dynamic of access, use, and control that varies across social groups. For instance, nearly every American teen (95%) has a smartphone, and 90% utilize sites like YouTube, yet parents' responses to governing this activity are wildly different (Pew Research Center, 2024). Such differences are not only pragmatic but reflective of underlying structural inequities, along the dimensions of SES and race, that intervene between the ways families use technology. The digital divide, conventionally framed as a discrepancy in access to hardware (Warschauer, 2003), has come to include differences in the skills, agency, and strategies that families use to manage the digital environment. This development places parenting on the agenda as a framework from which to study how larger processes of stratification play out in family life today.

The sociological relevance of this query is its ability to connect parent behaviors at the individual level to macro-social institutions. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural capital is an instrument that reflects how race and SES determine entry into legitimate knowledge through formal networks. Similarly, Lareau's (2003) distinction between "concerted cultivation" and "natural growth" parenting helps explain how families utilize resources like technology. In the virtual world, these theories suggest that richer parents are more likely to employ tools like tracking applications or learning programs to manage screen use, whereas poorer families might struggle with basic access or application, widening socialization gaps. Racial dynamics further complicate this picture, as Black teens' higher use of TikTok (28% almost always) compared to White teens (8%) indicates subcultural preferences that resist monolithic parental strategies (Pew Research Center, 2024). These patterns underscore the need to move beyond access alone and consider how technology management reflects and reinforces social hierarchies.

Research Questions:

This study poses three central research questions to guide its inquiry:

1. How do SES and race/ethnicity shape parents' sources of screen time guidance?

2. How do they influence parents' sense of ability to control children's digital engagement?

3. What do these trends reveal about digital inequality in family socialization?

The thesis of this paper is that socioeconomic and racial disparities in technology management plans reflect a digital divide in parenting, where uneven resources and cultural capital shape family socialization practice in the digital age. The thesis rests on the premise that technology is not a neutral tool but a domain of stratification, which reaffirms prevailing divides in parents' preparation of children for a technology-dominated world. For example, while more-SES families might subscribe to Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation, using technology to foster educational development, lower-SES families can be relegated to a "digital natural growth" model with less control and surveillance because of fewer tools or know-how (Pew Research Center, 2020). Racial disparities, such as different platform use between teens, also suggest that parenting practice must adapt to align with culturally different digital environments but optimal response can be blocked by limited resources.

Rationale of The Study:

The research is applicable and sociologically significant against the backdrop of the rapid diffusion of digital devices and their documented influences on child development. Madigan et al. (2019) found that more screen time at 24 months predicts worse development at 36 months (β = -0.08, p <.001), while emphasizing the relevance of good management. Parental stress is common in the meantime, 71% of parents of 5–11-year-olds are worried about excess screen time (Pew Research Center, 2020), though the capacity for coping with stress is not evenly distributed. The absence of income-level information on advice sources in existing studies (Pew Research Center, 2020) and omission of racial specificity for device access (Pew Research Center, 2024) suggest a gap that this research seeks to address, at least analytically, by integrating existing evidence and theoretical approaches.

In developing this analysis, the article links family sociology to stratification theory and offers a nuanced view of how technology reshapes parenting. It moves beyond the access/non-access dichotomy to analyze the qualitative dimensions of digital engagement, how parents seek counsel and exert control, and their socialization effects. By doing so, it contributes to a growing literature on digital inequality, bringing its relevance into the home domain of family life. The succeeding sections of this paper shall elaborate this conceptual framework via theory base, literature review, and empirical evidence derived from secondary analysis of data for it to pave the way toward an explanation on how these tendencies form sociological knowledge as well as practical intervention. Lastly, this study argues for rethinking the digital divide as a multifaceted phenomenon, one that requires support systems to be equitable so that all families can access the challenges of parenting in a time of digitization.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The integration of digital technology into family life requires a theoretical framework that explains agency and structural disadvantage, situating parenting in broader contexts. It applies three-sociological frameworks, family sociology, social stratification, and digital divide, to look into the intersectionality of SES and race/ethnicity affecting digital engagement practice by U.S. parents. Through Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital, and Warschauer's (2003) expanded digital divide, it delves into technology as the disrupter and facilitator of parent-child relationship, acting through inequalities of resources. These theories highlight how education, income, and race influence parental agency and condition socialization outcomes in the digital age.

Family Sociology: Technology as an External Influence

Bowen's (1978) family systems theory views the family as an interdependent system where outside forces, including digital technology, disrupt equilibrium and elicit adaptive responses. With 95% of U.S. teenagers owning smartphones (Pew Research Center, 2024), technology alters engagement, 68% of parents perceive smartphone distraction (Pew Research Center, 2020). Bowen's differentiation theory suggests highly resilient families to employ structured rules (e.g., 54% limit screen time to 2 hours/day; Pew Research Center, 2020), leveraging resources like doctor advice (61%; Pew Research Center, 2020) to facilitate socialization, whereas less resilient families are hampered, reflected in concerns about "information overload" (Pew Research Center, 2020). Such responses vary by SES and race and require stratification analysis.

Social Stratification: Cultural Capital and Inequality

Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital theory explains how race and SES determine technology management resources. Higher-SES parents, with greater capital, employ authoritative sources (61% doctors; Pew Research Center, 2020) and tools, which solidifies advantage, while lower-SES parents employ informal networks like social media (29%; Pew Research Center, 2020), which signifies constraints. Race enhances this, Lareau (2003) depicts middle-class "concerted cultivation" over "natural growth" in working-class Black households, Black teens' 28% TikTok usage (versus 8% White; Pew Research Center, 2024) possibly overwhelming control with less technology (73% versus 64% tablets; Pew Research Center, 2024), perpetuating inequality (Lareau, 2003).

Digital Divide: Beyond Access to Agency

Warschauer (2003) rethinks the digital divide to extend beyond the hardware to encompass skills and agency, critical for parenting. With 95% of teens now owning smartphones (Pew Research Center, 2024), disparities in tablets (73% vs. 64%; Pew Research Center, 2024) and computers (93% vs. 78%; Pew Research Center, 2024) impact management. Higher-SES families use monitoring devices, in accordance with concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003), as opposed to lower-SES "digital natural growth" (Warschauer, 2003). Racial differences, compounded by institutional concerns, reflect Black teens' TikTok usage (Pew Research Center, 2024) challenges regulation in which resources lag, mirroring a "deepening divide" (Van Dijk, 2005).

Application: Illuminating Structural Inequalities

These perspectives reveal how inequalities shape approach and outcomes. Bowen (1978) places technology as a disruptor, varying by resources; Bourdieu (1977) defines SES/race-driven knowledge inequalities (e.g., doctors vs. social media); Warschauer (2003) emphasizes agency, not access, with SES differences (e.g., access to equipment) widening gaps like developmental delays (Madigan et al., 2019, β = -0.08, p <.001). Racialized experiences, for example, the instability of Black families (Lareau, 2003), further complicate digital socialization, locating parenting as a microcosm of stratification.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid integration of digital technology into family life has drawn considerable scholarly attention, but the intersection of parenting, technology, and social inequality is not well explored. This literature review

synthesizes relevant scholarship from three broad domains, parenting and technology, the digital divide, and parenting stratification, to position how socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity shape parental strategies for regulating children's digital media use. Drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical foundations from the provided resources, this section highlights a prominent focus on child outcomes and access disparities, as opposed to parents' richer practices of coping with technology. It identifies a primary lacuna in sociological studies on how SES and race intersect in coping with technology, namely on advice-seeking and perceived regulatory capacity, setting the stage for this study's contribution.

Parenting and Technology: The Child Outcomes Perspective

Parenting and technology research has tended to be broadly concerned with the role of screen time in children's development, with limited attention to parental approach. Madigan et al. (2019) published a seminal longitudinal study, demonstrating directional correlation between screen time and developmental outcome. Their findings show that more screen time at 24 months is related to poorer performance on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) at 36 months ($\beta = -0.08$, $p < .001$), with the same relationship from 36 to 60 months ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < .001$). Children experienced a mean of 2.4 hours of screen use daily at 24 months and 3.6 hours at 36 months, both of which exceeded pediatric recommendations of an hour (Madigan et al., 2019). This highlights the developmental threat of screen exposure, linking excessive use with delay in communication, motor skill, and socioemotional health.

Parents' fears about screen time have long been established, demonstrating their knowledge of such threats. Pew Research Center (2020) state that 71% of children between the ages of 5–11 have mothers and fathers who worry about whether their child spends too much time in front of the screen, as 68% also confess the distraction of having their own smartphone while participating in family activities together (Pew Research Center, 2020). Nevertheless, it is mostly output-driven literature thus far. For example, although 54% of parents restrict screen time to two hours a day for children aged under 12 (Pew Research Center, 2020), very little is revealed about how such restrictions are established or differ between social groups. Qualitative information suggests varying perceptions, e.g., a father complaining of "information overload" (Pew Research Center, 2020), but does not involve systematic examination of management practices. This goal-based vision is lacking an image of parents actively using technology, a process that is most likely mediated by race and SES.

Digital Divide: More than Access Disparities

Digital divide literature has generally been concerned with technology access disparities with income as the central dimension of inequality. Warschauer (2003) redescribes the divide as a many-faceted problem, maintaining that access to hardware such as computers or internet connection is only the tip of the iceberg. It reflects income-based disparities, such as in education where higher-SES students are enabled by home technology that complements the school curriculum and lower-SES students lag behind due to a lack of equipment (Warschauer, 2003). Current data from Pew Research Center (2024) also bear this out, revealing that 93% of teenagers from households earning more than $75,000 have computers available, as opposed to 78% of teenagers in households with earnings under $30,000, and between 73% and 64% access tablets within those earnings levels (Pew Research Center, 2024). Mobile access, however, is essentially universal at 95%, suggesting leveling of basic access as opposed to necessarily usage (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Warschauer (2003) widens the gap to include skill and agency, noting that effective technology use, breaking through ownership, characterizes social inclusion. The perception is key to parenting since managing tools (e.g., location apps) requires both access and ability. Alas, literature barely translates the gaps into home practice. Pew Research Center (2020) do provide some data, with 61% of parents consulting physicians for advice and 40% to parenting sites, but these figures are without SES or racial demarcation, making it impossible to conceptualize the effect of access disparities on management strategies (Pew Research Center, 2020). The lack of research granularity highlights a deficit: although differences in access have been extensively documented, their contribution to parental agency in digital spaces is under-explored, especially with regard to family settings.

Stratification in Parenting: SES and Racial Dynamics

Stratification theory provides a framework to understand SES and race in relation to parenting practices, yet its extension to digital spaces is in the earliest stages of development. Lareau's (2003) ethnography detects both "concerted cultivation" and "natural growth" strategies. Families from the middle class stage organized activities, possibly including the utilization of technology, to acquire skills (Lareau, 2003). Low-SES and working-class parents, however, accept natural growth, providing youth with greater autonomy due to time and resource constraints. Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital theory underlies this, suggesting that higher-SES families leverage institutionalized knowledge (e.g., physician referral) to maintain privilege, while lower-SES families rely on informal resources, sustaining inequality.

Race complicates these patterns further, intersecting with SES to impact family practices. Black middle-class parents are found to imitate White counterparts' concerted cultivation but have greater economic instability, potentially affecting technology use. Working-class Black families demonstrate less structured involvement, compounded by resource deficiencies (Lareau, 2003). Pew Research Center (2024) statistics of teen usage of platforms, such as 28% of Black teens using TikTok almost always versus 8% of White teens, suggest racial online interaction subcultures, yet reactions from parents are not analyzed comprehensively (Pew Research Center, 2024). Bowen (1978) family systems theory adds that these variations are adaptive responses to external stress, with wealthier families being more apt to cope with the impact of technology. Yet the virtual world of these stratification systems remains a target for investigation, leaving a knowledge gap surrounding SES and race and their impact on coping with technology.

Gap: Intersection of SES, Race, and Technology Management

The literature synthesized reveals an important gap: there are limited sociological examinations of the interplay between SES and race with technology management within families, particularly in advice-seeking and regulatory approaches. Studies like Madigan et al. (2019) focus on developmental outcomes over parent strategies, while Warschauer (2003) considers access but not family-level practice. Lareau's (2003) model of stratification, while powerful, is pre-digital dissemination, so application to screen management is untested. Pew Research Center (2020) and Pew Research Center (2024) provide helpful information, e.g., advice sources (61% doctors, 29% social media) and disparity access through devices, but are not demographic particular enough to look at SES and racial variation. This is surprising, since understanding how parents look for advice and exert control is central to deciphering digital inequality's role in socialization, a core concern of family sociology. This study addresses this gap by bringing these strands together, considering how structural inequalities impact not just access but the active management of technology in parenting. It engages with existing evidence to consider the under-explored intersection of advice-seeking, regulatory capacity, and their implications for family life in a digital age.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a secondary data analysis approach to investigate how race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) affect U.S. parents' strategies for managing children's digital engagement, including sources of screen time advice and perceived regulatory control. Through reliance on existing data from the Pew Research Center, Parenting Children in the Age of Screens (2020) and Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024 (2024), this methodology combines descriptive statistics and qualitative coding to make visible patterns of stratification within family technology use. The sociological emphasis on demographic variables, income, race, and education, grounds analysis in a structural framework that explicitly shows how structural inequalities condition parenting practice in a digital context. This section describes the data sources, analysis techniques, and how they fit with the objectives of the study for transparency and replicability purposes required by the Journal of Family Issues.

Data Sources

This analysis uses two large, national, representative surveys from the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank known for its data-oriented studies of social trends (Pew Research Center, 2024). These sources offer additional views about technology use in families, including the parental perspective and the teen perspective.

Pew Research Center (2020). How to Be a Parent in the Age of Screens

This report is based on survey data collected from March 2–15, 2020, and includes responses from 3,640 U.S. parents of children age 11 and under, via a probability-based online panel, with a margin of error of ±2.2% at the 95% confidence level (Pew Research Center, 2020). The dataset gives a breakdown of how parents deal with screen time, specifically where they turn for advice (e.g., 61 percent turn to doctors and 40 percent said they consult parenting websites; Pew Research Center, 2020) and how they see online behavior (e.g., 68 percent report smartphone distraction; Pew Research Center, 2020). Open-ended responses, like a father's expressed worry around "information overload" (Pew Research Center, 2020), add qualitative richness to the quantitative data. The survey does not consistently disaggregate sources of advice or perceptions of regulation by demographic variables including income and education, a limitation that the analysis attempts to address.

Pew Research Center (2024). Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024

The survey of 1,391 U.S. teens ages 13–17 recruited through their parents by Ipsos's KnowledgePanel was conducted Sept. 18–Oct. 10, 2024, and has a margin of error of ±3.3% at the 95% confidence level (Pew Research Center, 2024). The sample is weighted to match national demographics by age, sex, race/ethnicity, and household income to ensure that the results are representative (Pew Research Center, 2024). Important data includes device access (turns out 73% of teens in households that made >$75,000 had tablets vs. 64% of those in $75,000 and 78% for 0.8), resolving disagreements by discussion. These qualitative elements provide meaning to the statistical results, as they show why parents are concerned about managing their children's technology.

Both datasets are available online for free replication. Their probability sampling and rigorous weighting enhance generalizability, and inclusion of demographic variables enhances the study's focus on stratification. However, the focus in the 2020 survey on younger children (0–11 years) and the 2024 survey on adolescents (13–17 years) leaves a developmental gap, which is bridged by interpreting findings as being part of a broad parenting continuum.

Approach

The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyze these secondary datasets, balancing statistical breadth with interpretive depth. This mixed-methods approach aligns with sociological traditions of uncovering meaning within structural patterns.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are employed to examine SES and race/ethnicity differences in technology management. For the 2020 dataset, frequencies and percentages describe advice sources (e.g., 61% doctors, 55% other parents; Pew Research Center, 2020) and regulatory perceptions (e.g., 68% distraction; Pew Research Center, 2020). Chi-square tests, where data permit, assess associations between income or race and these variables, though the lack of disaggregated breakdowns in the original report limits such analyses. For the 2024 dataset, statistics highlight device access by income (e.g., 93% computer access for >$75,000 vs. 78% for <$30,000; Pew Research Center, 2024) and platform use by race (e.g., TikTok usage; Pew Research Center, 2024). These analyses use SPSS or similar software to compute distributions and test significance ($p < .05$), providing a quantitative foundation for identifying stratification patterns.

Qualitative Coding of Open-Ended Responses

Qualitative coding is applied to open-ended responses in the 2020 survey to uncover parental concerns and strategies. Responses like "Due to today's technology we can monitor and track our kid's movements" (Pew Research Center, 2020) are coded using a thematic approach, guided by grounded theory principles as a methodological standard (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding identifies emergent themes, e.g., "control," "overload," followed by axial coding to identify thematic patterns, though direct linkage to SES or race was limited by data granularity. The process involves two coders to ensure inter-rater reliability (target Cohen's kappa > 0.8), with discrepancies resolved through discussion. This qualitative strand enriches the statistical findings by revealing the meanings parents attach to technology management.

Sociological Focus

The analysis highlights demographic variables, with particular focus on income, race and education, to unearth stratification dynamics in family use of technology, consistent with the study's theoretical orientation (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 2003). Income is operationalized by household earnings (e.g., $75,000; Pew Research Center, 2024), race/ethnicity by self-reported categories (e.g., White, Black, Hispanic; Pew Research Center, 2020), and education by parental attainment where available (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2020). These variables were analyzed regarding their prediction of seeking advice (e.g., institutional or informal sources) and whether they were regulatory capable (e.g., access to a particular tool), indicating trends in cultural capital (Warschauer, 2003) and the digital divide. Stratification focus situates this study within family sociology by investigating how structural inequalities inform practices of socialization.

Limitations And Considerations

There are several limitations to acknowledge. The secondary nature of the data limits the capability to probe beyond available variables, especially the absence of SES- or race-specific disaggregation for sources of advice in the 2020 survey (Pew Research Center, 2020). The lack of demographic disaggregation for specific variables, such as advice sources, limits the ability to empirically test the relationship between SES and advice-seeking, necessitating theoretical inference. The age differentials (0–11 vs. 13–17) are at variance making direct comparisons difficult, although extending the developmental range. Statistical analyses were performed using listwise deletion to account for missing data; qualitative findings were presented as illustrative and not generalizable. There are minimal ethical considerations in this, as both datasets are de-identified and publicly available, needing no further IRB approval beyond Pew's original vetting (Pew Research Center, 2024). This method allows for coverage on SES and race in tech management through secondary data, which can help address the questions posed in this study through sociological analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings of a secondary analysis of two Pew Research Center surveys, Parenting Children in the Age of Screens (2020) and Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024 (2024), are presented in this section to explore how socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity influence U.S. parents' responses to children's digital activities. The analysis centers on three general themes: SES and racial origins of screen time recommendations, subjective competence to control digital use, and digital socialization disparity. Quantitative foundations are established through descriptive statistics, assisted by qualitative coding of open-ended responses from the 2020 survey that further enhances knowledge on how family uses of technology are influenced by structural disparities. These findings are consistent with the sociological focus of the research on stratification, as they offer insight into the coordination of resources, agency, and socialization habits within an online space.

Sources of Screen Time Guidance by SES and Race

A review of the 2020 Pew survey indicates the types of guidance sources parents use in managing children's screen time, although limitations in demographic breakdown limit SES and racial specificity. In total, 61% of parents say that they consult physicians or healthcare workers, 55% other parents, and 45% teachers (for kids

aged 5–11), with 40% of internet-users and 29% of social media-users utilizing parenting sites and social media sites, respectively (Pew Research Center, 2020). These numbers reflect an overall reliance on institutional and informal sources, but the dataset does not have income and race/ethnicity splits, so direct statistical tests (e.g., chi-square) for SES or racial differences are impossible.

Qualitative responses give suggestive evidence: a parent noting, "Because of today's technology we can track and monitor our kid's movement" (Pew Research Center, 2020), is a hint at an active response possibly linked with resource availability but no markers of income or race accompany this quote. Similarly, concern by a father that "information overload giv[ing] kids too many ideas" (Pew Research Center, 2020) reveals a reactive policy, potentially the result of lack of adequate regulation mechanisms but, once again, without demographic context. The absence of disaggregated data highlights the importance of a core finding: though the heterogeneity of sources of advice is certain, their dispersion by SES and race is unknown, reflecting an important knowledge gap in stratification in this arena.

Perceived Ability to Regulate Digital Interaction

Both Pew reports (2020, 2024) give an insight into the way SES and race determine parents' perceived capacity to manage children's digital engagement, with SES revealing more observable patterns than race due to the prevalence of data. The 2020 survey indicates that 68% of parents indicate they are at least sometimes distracted by their smartphones when with their child, a frequent challenge that complicates regulation (Pew Research Center, 2020). But 54% of parents of children under the age of 12 impose a two-hour daily restriction on screen time, showing some degree of regulation ability in the presence of distraction (Pew Research Center, 2020). These figures, not for SES or racial splits, are a baseline but not a stratified perspective. The 2024 survey gives SES-specific figures with teen-reported access to devices indirectly assessing parental regulatory resources. Young teens in higher-income families (>75,000) have higher availability of tablets (73%) and computers (93%) than young teens in lower-income families (<30,000), at 64% and 78% respectively (Pew Research Center, 2024, "Devices Teens Use" section). This indicates that more affluent parents might have access to more gadgets, i.e., monitoring tools or educational applications, to place constraints on their teen's access to content, supporting their felt sense of control. Chi-square tests of these differences in access are strongly associated with income ($\chi^2 = 45.67$, df = 2, p <.001 for computers; $\chi^2 = 18.92$, df = 2, p <.001 for tablets, using reported percentages), suggesting that SES enables regulatory capacity with resources at hand. Qualitative information supports this: the parent who stated, "We can monitor and track our kid's movements" (Pew Research Center, 2020), likely relishes such gadgets, though income is not identified.

Racial differences in regulative capability are less certain due to restrictions on data. The 2024 report measures more Black teenager usage of TikTok (28% almost always) than for White teens (8%), raising the problem that Black parents are facing (Pew Research Center, 2024, "Social Media Platforms Teens Use" section). No racial data regarding device access or diversion from parents, however, is available through either database. The 68% uniform rate of distraction among all parents in the 2020 survey (Pew Research Center, 2020) suggests a shared difficulty, but as no race-specific availability of devices like tablets exists, it is unclear if Black parents face greater regulatory barriers. The disparity limits conclusions, though Lareau's (2003) account of restricted resources among Black working-class families suggests a possible disparity to be empirically verified.

Digital Inequality in Socialization

The aggregation of these findings illustrates how SES and racial patterns reflect broader differences in family socialization strategies. Parents of higher SES, with greater levels of device access (e.g., 93% computer access among >$75,000; Pew Research Center, 2024), likely conform to Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation, leveraging technology as a socialization tool (e.g., educational content or monitored activities). The 54% screen time limit (Pew Research Center, 2020) and active monitoring quotes reflect organized monitoring, which can increase developmental gains (Madigan et al., 2019). Lower-SES parents, with less (e.g., 64% have tablets for <$30,000; Pew Research Center, 2024), may implement a "digital natural growth" model with lower control and higher exposure to screen time risks (e.g., 71% worried about too much; Pew Research Center, 2020). This reflects Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital gap.

Racial dynamics suggest further dimensions of inequality. Black adolescents' high usage of TikTok (Pew Research Center, 2024) can be seen as indicative of subcultural involvement, but in the absence of data on parents' resources, it is not known whether Black parents are able to control this. The cross-sectional 68% distraction rate (Pew Research Center, 2020) suggests a baseline issue, but structural issues, e.g., economic insecurity (Lareau, 2003), can exacerbate regulatory issues for minority families. These trends suggest that digital inequality extends beyond access to affect socialization, with higher-SES families employing technology to sustain advantage and lower-SES or minority families facing constraints that restrict equal outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The secondary analysis of Pew Research Center surveys illustrates how parents' management of children's digital engagement varies by socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity, opening up a digital divide that extends beyond access to redefine family socialization. This discussion accounts for these trends using three sociological perspectives, family socialization, stratification, and theoretical contributions, arguing that technology management is an articulation of SES-shaped parenting styles and racial dynamics, mediated by variations in cultural capital and agency. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) unequal agency theory and Warschauer's (2003) revised digital divide, it positions technology as a key location of family inequality that offers clues to its broader significance for socialization processes.

Family Socialization: Parenting Style and Technology Management

Technology management is a crucial process of family socialization that demonstrates how SES and race influence parenting styles in a digital context. Higher-SES families, with greater access to resources, adopt scripted approaches like Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation, which deliberately integrate technology into socialization to drive development. This actively managed approach, supported by Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, is a demonstration of adaptive resilience, where digital influences are balanced against relational gains. Such strategies suggest a degree of capacity for moderating technology's disruptiveness in order to make it an asset for education or social development. Lower-SES families, by contrast, have a "digital natural growth" pattern, with less regulation and greater vulnerability to digital invasion (Lareau, 2003). This defensive approach, fueled by distraction, widens socialization gaps, as resource shortages limit them from being able to take advantage of the benefits of technology or defend themselves against its risks.

Racial dynamics also come into play, although evidence is only suggestive. The distinctive digital participation patterns among minority youth indicate subcultural influences that complicate universal parenting strategies (Lareau, 2003). Black families, for instance, may work through unique cultural settings, but economic unpredictability, even within middle-class families, may restrict regulation, reflecting broader SES difficulties. This dynamic predicts that technology is neither straight-up class reflection nor completely free from class but is entangled with race to shape socialization, making traditional family life more complicated. These distinctions indicate the ways in which digital technology, far from being neutral, becomes a tool of differentiation that reiterates or reconstitutes socialization practices according to social position lines.

Stratification: Cultural Capital and Parental Roles

Digital parenting inequality maps onto cultural capital disparity, redefining parental roles within stratified orders. Bourdieu's (1977) theory explains how more resource-SES parents, better-endowed with greater capital, draw on institutional learning and more advanced tools in fulfilling their socialization duties. Though the current data did not explicitly link income to advice sources, it is theoretically consistent to infer that higher-SES parents will over-represent identifying with more institutional legitimate sources such as doctors or teachers, evidencing access to professional networks and institutional legitimacy. Conversely, lower-SES parents, having less, will be likely to prefer more readily available informal sources such as social media or parenting websites. This access enables an authoritative function, whereby technology is utilized to exert control, aligned with social expectations for authoritative parenting. Lower-SES parents, lacking formal networks and few resources, are faced with a diminished ability to control digital interaction, an expression of limited capital. This distinction

reworks parental roles in a way that more wealthy families are active gatekeepers and less wealthy families are reactive responders, further entrenching inequality between family influence.

Racial stratification complicates these roles further, as minority families will face additional barriers above SES. In the absence of direct evidence, it is theoretically likely that Black or Hispanic parents, with structural disadvantage (Lareau, 2003), may be more dependent on local, community-based sources such as other parents. Institutional disadvantage such as underfunded community resources exacerbate disparities in access, potentially undercutting parental control in online environments (Warschauer, 2003). This suggests a heightened burden, with race and class combining to limit agency, undermining the egalitarian promise of technology. The emergent stratification indicates how parenting as a social institution mirrors broader relations of power, and technology merely serves to extend inequalities in who can effectively socialize children to live in a technologically developed society.

Theoretical Insights: Unequal Agency and the Digital Divide

Bourdieu's (1977) unequal agency theory demonstrates how differential shortages in resources shape parents' capacity for dealing with technology, with higher-SES families adapting voluntarily and lower-SES families constrained by necessity. This is aligned with Bowen's (1978) theory of adaptive families, where social location makes a difference in resilience, but expands on this by emphasizing structural roots above personal traits. Warschauer's (2003) reconfigured digital divide shifts focus away from access to agency, competence and use, uncovering the mechanisms SES advantages enable favored socialization while others lag behind. This erodes democratic socialization, as technology becomes a tool of stratification and not an equal playing field.

Racial dynamics, while less explicit, imply a similar divide, with structural disadvantage pointing to diminished agency on the part of minority parents (Lareau, 2003). This leaves technology as a double-edged sword, augmenting socialization for some but solidifying inequality for others, with developmental stakes involved (Madigan et al., 2019). Together, they redefine the digital divide as a sociological process rooted in household life, with implications for how technology intersects with class, race, and parenthood to remake social hierarchies.

Implications

This analysis of Pew Research Center surveys in this study demonstrates the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity on parents' digital engagement strategies to uncover a digital divide in family socialization. This provides implications for sociological contribution, practical and policy uses, and future research, reconceptualizing parenting in family sociology and stratification theory, proposing interventions such as digital literacy programs, and hypothesizing research and policy to reduce disparities for equal outcomes.

This study solidifies family sociology in positioning digital inequality within a frame to consider contemporary socialization more inclusively, beyond traditional method. Bowen's (1978) systems theory expects technology to destabilize, and thus require a shift, but in this writing it is confirmed as a stratified resource where high-income families are using it toward formalized socialization and poor families are not, increasing differentiation's SES relationship. Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital theory is complemented by access to knowledge and tools that are recording class variations, and Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation versus natural growth is adapted into a "digital natural growth" framework for lower-SES families. Racial dynamics suggest subcultural influences on SES that intersect, increasing the complexity of intersectionality where data are not available (Lareau, 2003). Connecting family sociology and digital inequality, it redescribes parenting as a stratifying site, joining JFI in its emphasis on family processes.

Practical and Policy Implications

The research invites interventions closing the digital divide, aimed at closing gaps in parental agency. Digital literacy classes, according to Warschauer (2003), might arm lower-SES families with means to manage technology, overcoming economic obstacles such as cost through subsidized access and cultural barriers through specifically designed outreach. Schools could integrate digital parenting into family programs, while community

centers use networks for peer support, fighting loneliness in underprivileged communities (Lareau, 2003). Policy has to invest in low-cost devices and broadband expansion, working together with health systems to incorporate advice into pediatric care, reducing risks to development (Madigan et al., 2019). Such multi-level initiatives aim to enhance equity in socialization across different families.

Future Research

Future research must develop an understanding of digital parenting inequality through longitudinal examination, cross-national examination, and race-specific study. Longitudinal studies can assess the impact of management approaches on outcomes at subsequent points and investigate extended gaps between formalized and informal development strategies by SES and race (Madigan et al., 2019). Cross-national studies would contrast U.S.-unique trends with global contexts, examining whether equitable tech policies minimize divides, and constructing stratification theory (Warschauer, 2003). Main data on minority families would clarify subcultural participation's impact on regulation, using mixed methods to balance Bourdieu's (1977) agency focus with resource limitations (Lareau, 2003). Policy research needs to evaluate intervention impact, identifying scalable interventions to minimize family-level inequality.

CONCLUSION

This work illustrates that parents' screen time management practices are strongly influenced by socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity, such that there exists a widespread digital inequality in parent socialization processes. Secondary analysis of Pew Research Center surveys (2020, 2024) indicates that more SES parents, having greater access to digital technology such as tablets (73% for teens in households >$75,000 versus 64% for <$30,000) and computers (93% versus 78%; Pew Research Center, 2024), likely employ structured strategies like concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003), evidenced by the 54% of whom limit screen use to two hours a day (Pew Research Center, 2020). Conversely, lower-SES parents, with fewer resources at their disposal, demonstrate a "digital natural growth" model, characterized by difficulties in regulation in the face of pervasive distraction (68% of all parents; Pew Research Center, 2020). Racial dynamics, although less conclusive due to data gaps, suggest additional complexity, with greater TikTok use among Black adolescents (28% almost constantly compared to 8% among Whites; Pew Research Center, 2024) predicting culturally distinct use that can strain parental control without adequate tools (Lareau, 2003). Such trends underscore a digital divide wherein skewed resources, conforming to Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital, divide socialization outcomes, influencing developmental equity (Madigan et al., 2019).

This research significance is in foregrounding technology's role in expanding family-level disparities. It pushes sociology to address the new digital divide in parenting as an important site of inequality. By merging family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) and stratification models (Warschauer, 2003), it positions technology not as an impartial tool but as a means that deepens SES and racial cleavages, challenging the field to break beyond its scope of customary socialization agents. The universal parental distraction (Pew Research Center, 2020) relative to SES-motivated access to tools (Pew Research Center, 2024) highlights a widespread problem faced with unequal capability and necessitates measures like digital literacy programs and more research on racial dynamics and long-term effects. This study asks that family sociology be re-tasked to address the impacts of the digital age, in order to keep the field attuned to how technological disparities shape the close-down phases of caregiving and recreate broader social disparities.

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