

**DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**DIGITAL OBJECTS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND THEIR IMPACT ON  
THE EARLIEST SOCIAL BONDS**

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*“Come at the world creatively, create the world; it is only what you create that has meaning for you.”*

*“For most people the ultimate compliment is to be found and used.”*

**Communications between infant and mother and mother and infant, compare and contrasted; D. W. Winnicott 1968**

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
- Aim and objectives	4
Chapter 2 - The cyber landscape	5
- Contemporary objects	5
- A shift in a behaviour	5
- The cyber playground	7
Chapter 3 - Cyber interruptions	9
- Mothers gaze	9
- First play and touch	10
- Childs play	11
Chapter 4 - The good-enough environment	13
- The maternal function	13
- Mirror-role	15
- Playing	16
Chapter 5 – Conclusion	19
References	22

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## **Abstract**

The mother-child bond is the earliest and most important relationship for the developing infant. In this critical phase of development, the interactions between the child and its environment, particularly with the mother, is the determining factor in the development of the child's psychological wellbeing (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 49). "Digital Objects" in everyday life are changing behaviour patterns, in particular those of connection and communication. This study aims to explore early childhood development and maternal connection in view of digital object proliferation. It will seek to understand the influence of technology on human behaviour. The study will explore the Winnicottian concept of the mother-child dyad and his theoretical concept of play. The research will assess if the presence of digital objects is sufficient to disrupt the '*good-enough*' environment in the child's emotional development.

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years the rapid evolution of new contemporary ‘digital objects’ has infiltrated every component of society. These new ‘digital objects’ include cyberspace, smartphones and social media, have expanded into everyday life, at a speed that has allowed little time for reflection. The impact of interactions between digital objects and changes in human behaviours have been observed, by researchers and psychologists. But what about the effect of digital objects on the developing infant?

The earliest social bond is being challenged; it has a new competitor. There have always been distractions and competitors for the mother’s devotion – siblings, family, work, health but digital objects are the new compelling preoccupation in what is already a crowded space. The prevalence and compelling nature of digital technology has changed the landscape of society, and this includes motherhood. The addictive nature of social media (Aiken, 2016, p. 10), combined with the nursing mother’s isolation, has driven a tendency for mothers to spend extensive time online, preoccupied with this attraction (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016). The outcome for the infant is that they are competing with social media for the mother’s attention (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2018).

Chapter 2 discusses the cyber landscape and the addictive nature of mobile technology (Aiken, 2016). It will explore changes in behaviours (Suler, 2004, 2016; Turkle, 2010) that are more prevalent when individuals are in cyberspace. Children are engaging from a young age directly with digital technology and studies indicate that this can have a significant effect on the development of the child (Radesky & Christakis, 2016, p. 827).

Chapter 3 will look more closely at interruptions that may occur as a result of the use of digital technology in the mother-child relationship and patterns of use of technology for

children under two years. In examining aspects that impact child development – mother-infant eye contact, mother-child interactive chat & play and early childhood individual play, there is evidence that digital technology is changing behavioural patterns in the child's early life.

Chapter 4 explores some of the fundamental aspects of Winnicott's teachings related to the mother-child dyad and the child's emotional evolution. The mother needs to facilitate a '*good-enough*' environment consisting of holding, handling and object presenting to give the infant confidence and reliability in her alive presence (Winnicott, 1965a). The first reflection for the infant is the mother's gaze, validating the infant's existence and starting the process of constituting the subject in identifying me/not-me through her gaze and later through the infant's reflection in the mirror (1971). The "transitional object" determined by the child, provides emotional comfort as the child separates from a state of complete dependence on maternal care, towards independence (1965b). Playing is essential for the child's growth and is seen as an achievement by Winnicott. For this to succeed the child must have already comprehended objects as separate from himself. Playing connects the inner world and outer experience through a transitional space (1971). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, states that play requires a 'more knowledgeable other' to enable the child's development through social learning.

In conclusion, chapter 5 summarises how cyber intrusions of digital objects have the potential to alter the connection between mother and child. Digital objects by themselves are neither good nor bad. Rather, it is the usage and the limits the mother places on herself and the child that determines the potential effect of the child's development. Parallels can be drawn between the necessary conditions for healthy development and the potential of an emerging gap in the new social patterns of mother-infant and child-play engagement. The

hypothetical question which arises, is a law required to impose a limit? Or can the mother take this up herself ?

## **Aims and objectives**

The study aims to explore early childhood development and maternal connection in view of digital object proliferation.

- Explore the current literature regarding the influence of technology on human behaviour.
- The study explores the Winnicottian concept of the mother-child dyad and the theoretical concept of play.
- To evaluate if the presence of digital objects is sufficient to disrupt the *'good-enough'* environment in the child's emotional development.

## **CHAPTER 2 - THE CYBER LANDSCAPE**

### **Contemporary Objects**

The prevalence of smartphone devices has risen significantly over the last 5 years (Statista, 2020). Mobile app companies last year estimated American adults spend more than 3 hours a day on their smartphones on social media content (Wurmser, 2019) and "check" their phone, on average, 200 times a day (Aiken, 2016, p. 54). It is clear from this that smartphones now form an integral part of our daily lives. While there are many advantages to technology advancement, allowing faster access to information and ease of connecting with others, anywhere, at any time, there are also negative effects triggered by overuse and regular digital interruption.

### **A shift in behaviour**

There is an addictive nature to our relationship with digital technology and its content is designed to be this way (Aiken, 2016, p. 50). It is highly interactive, highly engaging, immersive and compelling to human nature (Aiken, 2016, p. 51). The latest social update removes the "here and now" moment and takes us to cyberspace. Cyberspace, is a distinct place, different from our natural world (Suler, 2004b, p. 3). It may be accessed from a familiar setting but once in cyberspace awareness, consciousness, emotions, responses and behaviour are all affected or altered (Aiken, 2016, p. 10).

*"Cyberspace has seeped into our physical being at an unconscious level"* (Suler, 2016, p. 180). John Suler (2004, 2016), has written extensively about the behavioural changes that can occur to individuals when online. The regular 'bing' for attention is rarely ignored, the need to seek out interaction and approval, relates to the innate human desire to connect with others. There is a tendency towards investing in creating a different version of ourselves

online, imaginary and superficial – a false-self façade (Suler, 2016, p. 181). It can create an illusion of connection with others without the demands of complex human connection.

Disinhibition can occur, where the consequences of actions and relationships don't seem real (Suler, 2004a, p. 325). Being online can resemble a dream state, a distraction from reality and a large unintended consumer of time (Suler, 2016, p. 182). These states of consciousness can affect parents' responsiveness to their children (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2018, p. 11).

Technology holds a promise, that it can serve our needs (Turkle, 2010, p. 13). Sherry Turkle, in her book "Alone together: why we expect more from technology and less from each other" (2010), looks at how individuals are changed as digital technology offers a substitute for connecting face to face. Technology promises much to the individual, freeing us up, making life easier, allowing frequent connection to others and ease of communications (2010, p. 11). But is this a fantasy? In giving attention to digital objects, they consume vast amounts of time and headspace. The new technologies allow human contact to be "dial down" changing the rules of engagement and intimacy with others (2010, p. 15). Turkle reflects that digital objects "*serve as both symptom and dream: as a symptom, they promise a way to sidestep conflicts about intimacy; as a dream, they express a wish for relationships with limits, a way to be both together and alone*" (2010, p. 11). For the mother-child dyad, engagement and intimacy are vital, and there are no short cuts. Like all real, deep relationships, building the bond between mother and child requires substantial time and effort.

Fortune (2017, p. 225), argues that the smartphone lens has become a substitute for the desire of the Other. This substitution has the potential to interfere with how the psyche becomes structured and formation of the ego. Fortune contends that the smartphone is intruding in this psychic development of the child. In her experience, there is a significant increase in young children that are presenting to her practice with extreme anxiety and/or

aggression for their age. In many cases she has found high usage of smartphone devices of parents and minimal evidence the child has completed the Mirror Stage within Lacan's theory of development. If the child links with the substituting lens of the smartphone rather than the desire of the other (the mother), then their ego cannot be resolved by the desire of the other. The child realises that there are siblings/others and jealousy ensues, as they are rivals. This can only occur if the child has identified, firstly with self as a person who exists and then recognises that others separately exist. For the child not to accept this is to not accept the Real (Lacan, 1949 as cited in Fortune, 2017, p. 227).

### **The cyber playground**

In 2016 the America Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) recommended that screen time, the majority of which was TV, should be limited for children under two. The AAP indicated in their policy that there was little evidence of positive cognitive, emotional or social benefit to the child (AAP, 2016) . They actively discourage any screen media, except to connect via video-chatting with remote family member (AAP, 2016). With mass media and financial power sitting at the other side of this argument, little is known regarding this recommendation across the Western World.

Digital technology is increasingly being used by young children at a stage where critical brain development occurs (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2019, p. 60). Fourteen percent of infants (6 to 23 months) watch at least two hours of media per day (Aiken et al., 2015, p. 504) and more than one-third of babies in the UK have touched or scrolled the screen of a smartphone by the age of two (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2018, p. 13). The effects of these rapidly changing screens, can overwhelm the young child's senses and leave them feeling 'wired' after screen time (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2019, p. 61). Studies

on the potential negative effects of TV on younger children have shown an impact in the following areas - cognitive development, aggressive behaviour, executive functioning, sleep and physical coordination (Radesky & Christakis, 2016, p. 832). Devices that are now small and portable have enabled the increase and ease of children's access, to a vast world of digital experiences (Radesky & Christakis, 2016, p. 828), raising the already mounting time spent in front of screens.

Technology can come between parents and their infants (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2018, p. 12). Time spent with digital objects decreases time spent doing other activities with children (Kildare & Middlemiss, 2017, p. 580). Having and raising children has not slowed down the social media use of parents (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016, p. 557). Quantitative research on the long-term impact to child development struggles to stay relevant, as the pace of technology change evolves with breath-taking speed (Aiken, 2016, p. 60). Examining new observable phenomena can provide insight into the effect of the use of technology on child development within the early family setting.

## **CHAPTER 3 – CYBER INTERRUPTIONS**

“Cyber babies” is a term coined by Mary Aiken, in researching the impact of technology on the developing infant. She indicates that early childhood interpersonal interactions are essential for building relationships, establishing secure attachments and maturing emotionally (Aiken et al., 2015, p. 504). In this study, examining three aspects of child development – mother-infant eye contact, mother-infant interactive chat & play and early childhood individual play, there is evidence that digital technology is changing behavioural patterns in these aspects of the child’s early life.

### **Mothers gaze**

The earliest social connection of the child, is that of the mother’s gaze, making eye contact with the infant. In this co-created experience, the child is validated in its existence (Winnicott, 1971, p. 151). Traditionally, breastfeeding & bottle feeding are recognised as natural intimate moments, where mother and baby have an opportunity to bond, frequently through nonverbal interactions. With bottle feeding, the mother, must be attuned to the flow of milk and infant’s ability to swallow successfully. Breastfeeding is more of a “Hands-Free” model. Once the baby is latched on, the flow of milk is controlled by the infant. Several studies have shown an increase in breastfeeding mothers engaging in social media interactions, while feeding (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016). The child looks to the mother, but only sees the line of her jaw as she scans the latest social media event in cyberspace, unknowingly distancing herself from the infant in arms. If social media connection becomes the habituated pattern for the parent during feeding time, then the opportunity for mother to look and connect with her baby is lost (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016, p. 557). The infant needs the rich experience of real face-time with the mother to “see themselves” and start to

comprehend facial expressions, which equip the child with the necessary skills for social interaction later in life (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2018, p. 11).

The gaze of the parental figure at the smartphone becomes something of a point of reference for the young child. The child looking on has to compete for attention, with the captivating, entrancing smartphone, making it an object for the child to desire (Noctor, 2015, p. 106). From a very early age, the mother reflects the importance of her relationship with the phone, carrying it around with her, frequently checking it, emotionally engaging with it smiling, laughing, being angry or sometimes sad. Clearly, something so attractive is to be envied (Noctor, 2015, p. 107). In the Still Face Experiment (Tronick & Beeghly, 2011, p. 113) shows how a young child becomes progressively distressed when they try to engage with the mother to get her attention. Tronick states, that prolonged mismatches and failure to re-establish positive connection can lead the child to ‘making meanings of themselves as helpless or hopeless’ (Tronick & Beeghly, 2011, p. 107).

### **First play and touch**

In the early months of childhood, mother-baby play, interactive talking, and the parental role of teaching the child is critical to their development (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2018, p. 11). Parents who are absorbed in their phones are interacting less with their babies, reducing the opportunity to teach them crucial skills, such as the sensation of touch, interactive play and language (Radesky & Christakis, 2016, p. 831). Playing such games as peek-a-boo, making raspberrying sounds, playing with baby’s fingers and toes generates connection between mother-infant that are important learning opportunities that build social connection and help the child develop understanding that is vital for their cognitive development (Aiken, 2016, p. 37).

There is a direct correlation between quantity and quality of language interactions between mother & infant and the child language outcomes a year later (Zimmerman et al., 2009, p. 342). Studies show that parents that frequently use their mobile devices, speak in shorter sentences and are sensitively less attuned to their child's signals (Courtney & Nowakowski-Sims, 2019, p. 60). Parents who chatter with their babies, as they change their clothes, touch the baby's body and describe what they see as they stroll in the park, are introducing vitally important elements of the external world. The evolving pattern for these interactions, is of parents engaging with digital objects rather than focusing on the activity with the child (Kildare & Middlemiss, 2017, p. 589).

### **Childs Play**

Today's children or "digital natives" (Suler, 2016, p. 179) are growing up with digital objects that have change the landscape of how they play. Digital play is more insular, sedentary and requires less use of imagination (Fortune, 2018, p. 63). Technology is seen as a 'pull' factor in keeping children indoors, keeping them safe and occupied via screen time (Sakr, 2020, p. 45). In digital play, there is a difference experience – touch, connectiveness and emotional attunement are all altered when compared to "real" face-to-face play (Sakr, 2020, p. 63).

Fortune (2018, p. 56), indicates that play can solidify attachment and outlines three stages of progression in play for the child. In embodiment play, the infant learns that their skin contains them, where they end and the world begins. For the toddler, projective play shows an increased awareness of the world outside of themselves. With the older child, role-play occurs where they are architects of their own play, exploring what it means to be in and out of control. In all of this parents play a crucial role in being available, spending time and

creating a space within which play can occur. In these stages the parent moves from being the leader to being the follower (2018, p. 65). For parents this means getting down on the floor, paying attention and showing the young child what to do - clapping hands, building with bricks, and playing with toys are all actions that need to take place repeatedly for the young child to follow the action. Enough engagement must be provided to enable the child increase their coherence, complexity and to self-organise new capacities (Tronick & Beeghly, 2011, p. 108).

Fortune indicated that by going through these stages the child will learn to emotionally regulate (2018, p. 80). Until they have learned to regulate, co-regulation with parents is the learning ground. Parents need to control and manage the intensity of the emotional engagement rather than just notice it or match it. Play allows children explore their own environment, to make meaning and process the world around them (Tronick & Beeghly, 2011, p. 108). Excessive digital object use in a child's play time cuts into unstructured play time. While there are benefits to some digital play, for children over 2 years, this needs to be a well-managed mix, with the excess leaning towards "real-play".

The above chapter has outlined but a few examples of activities and behaviours that digital technology is activating in the family setting. This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it to indicate that these activities are occurring in all families, all the time. Much quantitative research is required to examine these phenomena in further depth. In the absence of this a review of the writings of D.W. Winnicott can provide insight into his theoretical position on child development.

## CHAPTER 4 – THE GOOD ENOUGH ENVIRONMENT

Study of a theoretical model allows evaluation of the potential impact of the cyber interruptions discussed above on the mother-infant relationship and the development of the child. Donald Winnicott (1896 - 1971) was a paediatrician and the first male child psychoanalyst, who wrote prolifically throughout his life. He wrote about environmental conditions that were required for healthy development, particularly in the first 2 years of life. The formation of a healthy individual is not a given. It requires the available presence of an alive Other, that can facilitate creating a “*good enough*” environment for the infant to achieve success. In a series of radio broadcasts with the BBC in 1949 Winnicott coined the term the “*ordinary devoted mother*” to highlight what commonly escaped other psychologists scientific gaze and to emphasise the valuable role mothers played in society (IstituWinnicot, n.d.).

### **The Maternal Function**

In the earliest phase the state of the mother is that of “*primary maternal preoccupation*” (Jacobs, 1995, p. 48). The mother develops heightened sensitivity & needs to identify with her baby. Winnicott does not see them as individuals but as a nursing-pair. The infant has not yet reached the state of “I am” but has the potential and a natural tendency toward growth. Winnicott emphasises what the mother does “naturally” is create a good enough environment. There are three components to this environment that support the child’s inner growth - holding, handling and object presenting (1965, p. 27) .

Holding represents not only the physical holding of the infant but also the total care of the child, showing love, keeping safe from unpredictable events, empathy and soothing. This

is a time of absolute dependency on the part of the infant. The object-mother in this role needs to meet the infant's needs, that allow the baby go-on-being. Frequent failure registers as unreliability, will frustrate and cause anxiety in the infant creating a threat of annihilation which is experienced as a sense of falling to pieces, falling endlessly or having no relation to the body. The infant is more likely to develop the capacity to integrate experience and develop a sense of "I AM", because of good-enough holding (1971, p. 150).

Handling refers to the way the mother manages the day-to-day detail of the child's care that contributes to the sense of real. It results in '*personalization*' (1965b, p. 224) which describes the close relationship between the psyche and the body. It is a feeling of the mind-connecting with the body. The opposite to this is a mind-body split, where the infant does not feel himself inside his body, referred to as depersonalization.

Object presenting is the mothers' capacity to produce reality at the right moment for the infant. This may be the breast or whatever the infant needs. In this, the infant has the *illusion* he has created what is needed just there and then. Without this consistent illusion there is no capacity for trust to be developed in the infant. The infant has not yet worked out 'me' from 'not-me;. Gradually with attunement to the infant the mother will disappoint the infant, through weaning. The child will realize they are not omnipotent. Their perception will develop from perceiving subjectively objects ('me') to objectively perceiving objects ('not-me'). This process needs to be managed carefully, allowing the infant to integrate a sense of self in relation to the world (1971, p. 19).

In these concepts, Winnicott identifies the infant's total dependence on the mother and the demand of her to create a facilitating '*good-enough*' environment. Throughout this there is a communication going on, in the mother-infant relationship, often nonverbal and unconscious (Abram, 2018, p. 80). "Mutuality" or attunement is necessary for the mother to

recognise the needs of her baby. A mother who is distracted or preoccupied will, often without being aware, miss signals from her baby. The disruption by digital objects, is invasive in a silent manner, where many go unaware of its disruptive nature. The presence of the mother is tantalizingly close, yet so distant for the child, as he tries to connect with her. Digital object usage needs to leave a gap for deepening the mother-infant relationship, she needs to protect the child from the external reality of her preoccupation.

### **Mirror-role**

Another concept Winnicott proposes, is that the mother's face is the precursor of the mirror. When the baby looks away from the breast, what he sees is him or herself. When the mother is looking at the baby what she looks like is related to what she sees there (1971, p. 149). The importance of this cannot be taken for granted. When the mother gazes lovingly at the infant then this is what is introjected, however if the child is not getting back what they seek, they do not see themselves. He suggests a progression of perception in the child which depends on being seen:

*When I look I am seen, so I exist.  
I can now afford to look and see.  
I now look creatively and what I appreciate I also perceive.  
In face I take care not to see what is not there to be seen  
(unless I am tired.)*

(1971, p. 154)

Conversely, the child that cannot see its mirror, he eventually gives up hope, withdraws as it may suffer insult, it will not look to perceive but only as a defence. Such a baby, according to Winnicott, will be puzzled about mirrors and what they have to offer. *"If the mothers face is unresponsive, then a mirror is a thing to be looked at but not to be looked into"* (1971, p. 152).

From the Winnicottian thesis above, we see that a mother who can identify with their infant, and who can allow him to develop and become himself. This will set the foundations for development of the social being, who has the capacity to over time, with maturity self-regulate and relate to others. To achieve this the mother does not need to be in a constant state of attentiveness to the child, this would overburden the child, and smother the development of “self”. In their role the mother needs to gently disillusion the child, allow them to survive this and know their own capacity (Abram, 2018, p. 221). If the infant must deal with too many infringements his ‘*going-on-being*’ is disrupted and causes the infant to react. If deprivation is extreme enough the child will fail to thrive and will struggle to learn to relate to others (Aiken, 2016, p. 92). The implications for future relationships are based on these early experiences, where an individual may struggle with eye contact, trust, intimacy, and ultimately connection with other(s).

## **Playing**

Playing is an essential part of the child’s progression and is full of excitement (Winnicott, 1971, p. 47). There is a sequence of development that must occur for a child to have the capacity to play. The development starts from the early use of the transitional object (e.g. blanket or cuddly toy), which initially represents the breast. A “transitional object” is selected for its importance by the baby (provided by the mother), which is recognised by the child as ‘not-me’. The ‘transitional space’ is the ‘intermediate area of experience’ between the baby and object. This transitional phenomena allows the infants inner experience to tolerate their anxiety when separated from the mother. The ‘transitional object’ provides the child with comfort and security, through emotionally challenging experiences, as he comes to terms with being alone. As before the mother’s role in facilitating and tending to the growing infant is vital in successfully separating inner and outer worlds. Achieving this is an

important step in psychic development, that awareness of being a separate entity from the mother. Playing takes place in the ‘potential space’ between the baby and the mother. This space belongs to the baby’s confidence that has a sense of reliability in the environment, that allows the mother to be separated (Abram, 2018, p. 351). Playing creates a focused, yet spontaneous state where the child can make sense of the outside world in their own terms, using objects to knowingly represent other realities.

*“To get an idea of playing it is helpful to think of the preoccupation that characterises the playing of a young child... what matters is the near-withdrawal state akin to concentration of older children and adults... Playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world.” (1971, p. 69)*

From the above thesis, it can be concluded that play exists in the context of a relationship established by mother and her attunement to the child. In the infant stages, the mother creates the facilitating environment that allows the child to develop the mental capacity to creatively conceive of play. The ‘*transitional object*’ determined by the child, provides emotional comfort as the child separates from a state of complete dependence on maternal care. Additionally, the mother’s attention and cooperation is essential for the child to build trust and confidence in the space where individual play can take place. Play allows the child experiment with relational activities such as aggression, anxiety, self-experiencing, friendship and integration (Abram, 2018, p. 249).

Vygotsky, a sociocultural theorist, believed that development was a social process: social interactions with more experienced members of their society – parents, older siblings, relatives, teachers or peers (Keenan et al., 2016, p. 44). These were identified as ‘*more knowledgeable other(s)*’ who were more skilled and help the child learn through social guidance.

Vygotsky believed that development occurs on two levels – firstly, on a interpersonal level, interactions between themselves and others and later intrapersonal level, on an

individual level inside the child's own mind (2016, p. 47). In addition, "Real" play, according to Vygotsky, features three components: children create an imaginary situation, take on and act out roles, and follow a set of rules determined by these specific roles. *"The role the child plays, and his relationship to the object if the object has changed its meaning, will always stem from the rules, i.e., the imaginary situation will always contain rules. In play the child is free. But this is an illusory freedom"* (Vygotsky 1967,10 as cited in (Bodrova & Germeroth, 2013, p. 113) ). Engaging in "make-belief" play is an opportunity to practice self-regulated behaviours. This is possible because of the relationship that exists between the roles children play and the rules they need to follow when playing these roles (Bodrova & Germeroth, 2013, p. 115) .

The relationship between mother and child is unique and each child is individual. While the above provides an outline of elements of a "*good-enough*" environment, it is difficult to say how much is too much or too little of any element within the environment. The mother must be guided by the child, and his individual needs. And yet, if there is trust that mother knows best, mothers have to fail, not to be perfect, for the majority of mothers this means a trust in their ability to manage their digital time.

## **CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION**

This paper sought to explore the relationship between digital objects and the mother-infant relationship, and its impact on the child's development.

Cyberspace as a social experience induces changes in behaviours and behavioural patterns as individuals interact with others using digital technology. The rules of engagement in social contact are altered with the presence of false-self façade, disinhibition and simpler conflict-free social contact (Suler, 2016). Intimacy in relationships is “dial-down” by reducing face-to-face contact time (Turkle, 2010). Being online can be a dream like reality, with the passage of time distorted, displacing time that was previously spent on other activities, such as real-face time with others including our children. Screen time prevalence is also increasing for the under two (Aiken et al., 2015, p. 505). Digital devices are now small and portable, along with pervasive child-focused content, the amount of time children spend in front of screens is increasing (Radesky & Christakis, 2016).

Interactions between mother-infant and the young child at play, are being interrupted by digital objects. The mothers gaze, in particular during feeding time, is often a non-verbal opportunity for intimacy and connection between mother and infant. Early interactive play, touch and talk, exchanges are critical, for developing the child's senses and start language foundations. Play requires engagement of an Other, to teach the child how to engage with the process of playing. The literature reviewed indicates a significant rise in digital object usage during these moments, inducing new behavioural patterns, that cause disruption for the developing child.

Using the theories of W.D. Winnicott, an understanding of the elements required for child development can be identified. The maternal function is to facilitate a ‘good-enough’ environment, which consists of holding, handling and object presenting. The mother's role is to produce reality at the right moment, giving the infant the illusion that he created the reality.

Being attuned to and communicating with the infant is necessary to facilitate these processes. The importance of the child's reflection in its mother's eyes is emphasised. Lack of recognition can leave the child in a disintegrated state, with consequences for social contact in later life. Playing demonstrates health in the child. It shows the capacity for imagination and creativity.

Digital objects by themselves are neither good nor bad. Rather, it is the usage and the limits the mother places on herself and the child determines whether digital technology has a good or bad effect on the child's development. Parallels can be drawn between the necessary conditions for healthy development and the potential of an emerging gap in the new social patterns of mother-infant and child-play engagement. Winnicott recognised the needs of the infant and young child, consistency and reliability in – love, demonstrated through mutuality and a nurturing gaze and attention – demonstrated through interaction and play. These simple actions will give future 'digital natives' the best opportunities to grow up with a stability of inner capability that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

This study only briefly examined the impact of play on child development. Digital objects can interfere with play, which limits the child's opportunity to process learning and experience self-expression through play. Further analysis of how digital games affect children's learning, health, and social emotional development requires much more research. Like adults, quality of content and quantity of use are likely factors that influence the overall effect.

For the mother the question regarding her compulsion toward attending to the smartphone, is left unanswered. What is it that the mother desires? What is attracting her attention, what is she searching for? The new cyber reality is limitless, there is no law to the limit of attention that the mother can give. Her desire to search, seek, find something that is elusive goes on, but at what cost to the child. In time, how will society come to assess, the

impact of excessive use of digital objects on the nursing-pair and on the young child? Will the digital object of the future, like the evolution of alcohol and cigarettes, come with a health warning, banning children and warning of excessive use for adults!

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