Impact of Non-Parental Early Childhood Education on Digital Friendship Tendency

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Abstract : Modern society in developed countries has distanced itself from the earlier norm of joint family living, and with the increase of economic pressure, parents' availability for their children during their infant years has been consistently decreasing over the past three decades. During the same time, the pre-primary education system - built mainly on the developmental psychology theory framework of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, has been promoted in the US through the legislature and funding. Early care and education may have a positive impact on young minds, but a growing number of kids facing social challenges in making friendships in their teenage years raises serious concerns about its effectiveness. The survey-based primary research presented here shows a statistically significant number of millennials between the ages of 10 and 25 prefer to build friendships virtually than face-to-face interactions. Moreover, many teenagers depend more on their virtual friends whom they never met. Contrary to the belief that early social interactions in a non-home setup make the kids confident and more prepared for the real world, many shy-natured kids seem to develop a sense of shakiness in forming social relationships, resulting in loneliness by the time they are young adults. Reflecting on George Mead's theory of self that is made up of "I" and "Me", most functioning homes provide the required freedom and forgivable, congenial environment for building the "I" of a toddler; however, daycare or preschools can barely match that. It seems social images created from the expectations perceived by preschoolers "Me" in a non-home setting may interfere and greatly overpower the formation of a confident "I" thus creating a crisis around the inability to form friendships face to face when they grow older. Though the pervasive nature of social media can't be ignored, the non-parental early care and education practices adopted largely by the urban population have created a favorable platform of teen psychology on which social media popularity thrived, especially providing refuge to shy Gen-Z teenagers. This can explain why young adults today perceive social media as their preferred outlet of expression and a place to form dependable friendships, despite the risk of being cyberbullied.

Keywords : digital socialization, shyness, developmental psychology, friendship, early education