

## **Digital Media's Impact on Youth: Fresh Research**

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"America's young people spend more time using media than they do on any single activity other than sleeping," according to The Future of Children, a joint project of Princeton University and the Brookings Institution. So we all need to know how our children and students use media - the Web, phones, videogames, instant messaging, music, video, TV, etc. - and how they affect their users. The just-released new issue of the project's journal Children and Electronic Media, published semi-annually, "looks at the best available evidence on whether and how exposure to different media forms is linked to child well-being."

Among the key findings in the Executive Summary are....

- "Content matters" to young people much more than delivery devices or platforms (I was glad to see this because my own observation has long been that "the message is [increasingly] the medium" where youth is concerned, seeing how fluidly they move from uploading to downloading, online to offline, and device to device when socializing and using media).
- They use media to communicate better with their friends not strangers.
- Their exposure to media "can enhance healthful behaviors—such as preventing smoking and alcohol and drug use, and promoting physical activity and safe sex—through social marketing campaigns."
- "Some risky behaviors such as aggressive behavior and cigarette and alcohol consumption are strongly linked to media consumption," but others such as obesity and sexual activity "are only tangentially linked" or need more research.
- Advertising is an "integral and influential" part of children's daily lives - just another message being communicated (they don't understand it's about getting them to buy stuff and not just information) - "and many of the products marketed to children are unhealthy."
- Government regulation of media content either won't work or won't happen.

What should be done, then? Rather than regulate, the project says, government should help parents and educators do the regulating in homes and schools. It should also help the development of positive content that educates and counteracts negative or non-constructive messaging in electronic media - it should "fund the creation and evaluation of positive media initiatives such as public service campaigns to reduce risky behaviors."

Chapters of particular interest to anyone involved with children's online safety: "Media and Children's Aggression, Fear, and Altruism," "Online Communication and Adolescent Relationships," and "Media and Risky Behaviors."