Parent Concerns and Screen-based Media: Teens with ASD and Typically Developing Peers
Cheryl A. Cohen, M.S. and Alison R. Marvin, Ph.D.
Department of Medical Informatics/Interactive Autism Network, Kennedy Krieger Institute, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Background
- The use of technology is ubiquitous in teens with ASD and their typically developing (TD) peers. (Cohen, 2015)
- Many people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are interested in and prefer screen-based activities to other activities (Mazurek, 2012).
- Gaming and video viewing habits have become an important concern to parents. (Kuo,2015)
- Given that restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities are diagnostic of ASD, researchers are beginning to investigate the excessive and inappropriate use of screen-based media by people with ASD. (Mazurek, 2016; Engelhardt, 2014)
- Children with autism seem to be particularly vulnerable to bullying (Zablotzky, 2014); however, little research has been conducted on cyber bullying and ASD.

Objectives
- To understand parents’ concerns with the video, gaming, and online behavior of their teens with ASD
- To determine whether parents’ concerns are different for teens with ASD and typically developing (TD) teens

Methods
- An anonymous 80-question online survey developed in SurveyMonkey; University of Baltimore IRB: Exempt
- Recruited via email to Interactive Autism Network (IAN) Research registry participants, IAN Community (www.iancommunity.org), and Facebook
- Administered September 9, 2015 through October 24, 2015 to parents/guardians of children ages 13–17, with or without ASD, in the US

Results (continued)

Purchasing and signing up online: The TD teens were the most likely to be making purchases and signing up for websites (69%) followed by the ASD Normal (55%), and ASD Low (17%). Of those, the parents of the ASD Low teens were most concerned about inappropriate purchasing or joining, followed by the ASD Normal teens, with a statistically significant difference seen between the ASD Normal and the TD teens (see Table 1).

Gaming habits: A majority of the teens were gaming, with 91% of the ASD Normal, 83% of the TD teens, and 79% of the ASD Low. The difference between the groups was statistically significant (p < .029). Many parents expressed concern about their teens’ gaming habits, but male gender was the key factor across the groups (see Table 1). A thematic content analysis on parents’ concerns revealed the following themes for the ASD groups, in order of frequency: too much time, bad content including games that oversolicit, social game problems, frustration with gameplay, and safety.

Social media: The TD teens were using social media more than the other groups (88%), ASD Normal (87%), and ASD Low (33%). The difference between the groups was statistically significant (p < .001). Approximately one half of the parents of all of the groups expressed concern about their children’s social media comments and postings and there was no statistically significant difference between the groups (see Table 1).

"He spends far too much time playing games, he’s addicted to them. If I take the device(s) away he has a meltdown."
"He has had problems in the past about looking at porn and we have to be diligent to keep him from those sites."
"He likes Dora, Blues Clues."
"He has problems in the past about looking at porn and we have to be diligent to keep him from those sites."
"He plays too much and I don’t like the violence."
"He spends far too much time playing games, he’s addicted to them. If I take the device(s) away he has a meltdown."

Conclusions
- Parents of teens with ASD were concerned about the time spent using screen-based media as well as the content. Given recent research on the relationship between the excessive use of screen-based media and issues including oppositional behavior and sleep problems in teens with ASD, more research needs to be done to clarify these associations so that interventions can be developed.
- Parents were concerned with their teens’ safety and behavior online and wanted better ways to monitor and control that behavior.