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# Children as little adults: a legal and sociocultural analysis of the loss of childhood experience in the face of premature adultification.

*Children as small adults: a legal and sociocultural analysis of the loss of childhood experience in the face of early adulthood*

Children as small adults: a legal and sociocultural analysis of the loss of childhood experience before early adulthood

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**SUMMARY**

The purpose of this study is to clarify and deepen the understanding of the point of view.
This study provides empirical evidence of the reality faced by many children and adolescents in Brazil, as well as demonstrating the constitutional recognition of the rights granted to children and adolescents as outlined in the Statute of Children and Adolescents (ECA). In this context, the study highlights the vulnerable situation to which these children and adolescents are subjected in order to satisfy desires beyond their control.

**Keywords:** Childhood adultification; Social networks; Children and adolescents; Fundamental rights; Social vulnerability.

***ABSTRACT***

*This study aims to clarify and deepen the empirical understanding of the realities faced by many children and adolescents in Brazil, as well as to demonstrate the constitutional recognition of the rights granted to them under the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA). In this context, the study highlights the situation of vulnerability to which these children and adolescents are subjected, often to satisfy interests and desires that are not their own.*

***Keywords:*** *Child sexualization; Social media; Children and adolescents; Fundamental rights; Social vulnerability.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Childhood adultification occurs when children begin to adopt roles, responsibilities, and...

typical adult behaviors before the appropriate time for their development.

ranging from sexualized exposure to the assignment of roles incompatible with the

infancy.

In this context, adultification manifests itself through the imitation of behaviors, the adoption of...

of aesthetic standards and the consumption of content inappropriate for the age group. Carvalho (2023)

It highlights that this exposure occurs, for example, due to the influence of digital influencers, to

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The spread of music and dances with sexual connotations and the overvaluation of appearance are factors.
which contribute to the distortion of children's self-image.
From a legal perspective, this issue is concerning, as it not only compromises the
healthy child development, but it also increases their vulnerability to practices such as
Sexual exploitation, which requires more effective action from protection mechanisms.
In recent years, the media has also played a significant role in promoting
Children's beauty pageants, in which children take center stage in various settings.
markedly adultified. Píres (2013) points out that such practices contribute to adultification.
subjecting children to the interests of parents or guardians, often to the detriment of their own needs.
own rights.
From a legal standpoint, the reality presented by the author implies a violation of the principle of
It is in the child's best interest, since these activities often impose rigid routines.
and deprive children of experiences essential to child development, such as play.
The principle of the best interests of the child, enshrined in the Brazilian legal system,
Especially in the Statute of Children and Adolescents, it is mandated that all decisions involving
Children and adolescents should prioritize their physical, mental, and social well-being. This is a key factor.
fundamental interpretative framework that guides the actions of the family, the State, and society, requiring the
consideration of the particularities of each specific case and the guarantee of a safe and safe environment
suitable for holistic development.
Within the constitutional framework, the 1988 Federal Constitution establishes, in its article 227, the
Shared responsibility between family, society, and the State in the comprehensive protection of the child.
and of the adolescent, ensuring them, with absolute priority, fundamental rights such as life,
health, education, leisure and dignity. This provision reinforces the centrality of child and youth protection.
in the Brazilian legal system and imposes positive duties on various social actors.
However, as Lima (2022) observes, despite the existing regulatory robustness, there are still
gaps regarding the excessive exposure of children on social media and the exploitation of their image.
in digital environments. Under critical analysis, it becomes clear that the legal system, although
While progress is being made in overall protection, specific instruments capable of addressing the challenges are still lacking.
imposed by the digital age, which compromises the effectiveness of protecting these rights.
Similarly, although the Statute of Children and Adolescents regulates the protection of
The image in articles 15, 17 and 18 shows that such regulation appears generic in the face of specificities.
of digital platforms. Motta (2022) reinforces that image protection must be understood
as an essential right of personality, encompassing the period from conception to death.
In this way, the need for a broader and more up-to-date interpretation of this right becomes evident.

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of new forms of digital exhibition.

Furthermore, technological transformations have significantly expanded the means of communication.
and social interaction. Meira (2021) highlights that the new digital channels enable a
Faster, more dynamic, and globally reaching communication, connecting individuals in real time through
through the sharing of diverse content. From a legal perspective, this expansion of
The increased reach intensifies the risks to children's privacy and dignity, requiring greater vigilance and
regulation.

Along these lines, Weber (2016) observes that many children end up having their image exposed on social networks.
social factors even before birth, remaining constantly visible throughout
their childhood. This reality highlights a situation of vulnerability, in which minors do not
They possess full capacity to consent, which reinforces the need for accountability.
parents and guardians are responsible for managing children's image in the digital environment.

Given this context, the objective of this article is to diagnose, through an analysis
From a legal and sociocultural perspective, how have social networks contributed to the loss of lived experience?
This study aims to describe the impact of early childhood development through the premature adultification of children and adolescents. It also seeks to describe...
How do these platforms influence this process? Identify the appropriate legal mechanisms to...
to protect the child and analyze how the Brazilian legal system acts in defending the image and
of the dignity of children and young people, especially with regard to the prevention of undue exposure and
premature adultification.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the elaboration of this study, the bibliographic research method was adopted, based on...
Analysis of scientific articles, current legislation, doctrines, case law, and precedents.
relevant to the topic. The research was developed from the systematization of productions
academic and normative frameworks enabled the construction of a consistent theoretical framework.
Regarding the adultification of children in the context of social media.

According to Souza et al. (2010), a literature review is a method capable of promoting
a synthesis of existing knowledge, allowing for the integration of study results.
relevant to scientific practice. From this definition, it can be seen that this methodology made possible
to identify, analyze, and articulate different perspectives on the phenomenon being studied, contributing
for a deeper understanding of the current state of the subject.

In this sense, publications related to the topic were selected and examined, with the objective
to understand the main difficulties faced by parents in dealing with adulthood.

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childhood in a setting marked by the intense presence of social media. The analysis focused on in productions made in Brazil, considering the need for alignment with regulations. national legal framework, especially the guidelines established by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent. Adolescent and the Federal Constitution of 1988, which guide the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents. adolescent.

Furthermore, a time frame was defined between 2015 and 2025, including only the works published during this period, because they reflect social transformations in a more up-to-date way and Technological aspects related to the topic were excluded. Productions that did not fit the criteria were also excluded. problematic issues that were proposed or that fell outside the established time frame, ensuring greater accuracy and relevance to the data analyzed.

For the consolidation of the study, institutional guidelines and documents were consulted. prepared by bodies such as the Ministry of Justice and the National Secretariat for Children's Rights. and the Ministry of Adolescents and the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, as well as books and articles scientific. The bibliographic search was conducted using descriptors such as "adultification", "family", "Statute of Children and Adolescents" and "social networks", with results obtained in databases such as the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the Coordination of Professional Development for Higher Education Personnel and Google Scholar, which guarantees the The reliability and relevance of the sources used.

## 3. RESULTS

The promotion of the adultification process in children and adolescents is evident as a factor capable to directly compromise cognitive development and the full exercise of the right to childhood, especially when associated with early exposure to content inappropriate for the age group. Under these circumstances, significant impacts are observed on the psychological development of minors. such as the construction of a distorted self-image based on external standards.

The results indicate that continuous exposure to sexualized content can trigger consequences such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and other mood disorders, affecting not only emotional well-being, but also social development and behavioral. On the other hand, such harm can be mitigated when there is effective action. of the family, the State and society in regulating access to digital media and in promoting safe environments, capable of preserving the dignity and healthy development of the child and of the teenager.

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## 4. DISCUSSION

From Almeida Neto's (2007) perspective, when stating that "visibility generates new interpretations,"
It is evident that the expansion of access to and circulation of information in the digital environment does not...
It not only makes certain phenomena more noticeable, but also enables identification.
of social demands that were previously invisible.

From a legal perspective, this reflection demonstrates that the law must keep pace with these transformations.
reinterpreting traditional institutions in light of technological reality, especially with regard to
Protection of vulnerable groups, such as children and adolescents.
According to Oliveira et al. (2020), many parents and guardians do not fully understand the
long-term effects of their children's digital exposure, focusing on the legitimate intention of
Sharing affectionate moments. However, from a legal perspective, this conduct may constitute...
Negligence regarding the duty of protection, since it exposes the child to concrete risks, such as
Cybercrimes and psychological harm reinforce the need for awareness and...
Accountability in the exercise of parental authority.
With regard to legal protection, Carvalho (2023) highlights that image and image rights
The rights to privacy, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988, also apply fully to
children and adolescents. From a legal perspective, this implies recognizing that such rights exist.
full effectiveness and require enhanced protection, imposing on the family, the State and society the duty to
to guarantee the dignity and protection of minors against any form of violence or exposure.
improper.

The choice of theme, in this context, proves to be legally relevant, as it allows not only
to problematize the effects of children's overexposure on social media, but also to analyze the
The sufficiency of current regulations in the face of new digital dynamics. As a law student,
It is understood that the proposed research contributes to the improvement of legal debate.
especially with regard to preventing violations of the fundamental rights of children and
adolescents. Furthermore, the relevance of the research becomes important due to the need for
to understand the aspects of the adultification of children on social media and its repercussions on their lives.
of contemporary childhood. From a critical legal perspective, this is a topic that demands
constant normative and interpretative updating, in order to ensure the effectiveness of the principle.
of comprehensive protection and ensuring that technological advancement does not override rights
fundamental for children and adolescents.

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**4.1 Child Protection in accordance with the Statute of Children and Adolescents**

The 1988 Federal Constitution enshrines the protection of children and adolescents as a duty.
shared between family, society and the State, ensuring them absolute priority in
realization of their fundamental rights. Article 227 occupies a central position in guaranteeing rights.
such as life, health, education, leisure and dignity, as well as protecting them against neglect,
discrimination, exploitation and violence.

In this sense, Sarlet (2018) emphasizes that the dignity of the human person is the axiological core of
legal system.

Thus, it is understood that the protection of the child stems directly from this principle.
imposing on the State and society the duty to ensure minimum conditions for development.
This is especially true because these are individuals in vulnerable situations.

The Statute of Children and Adolescents represents the normative implementation of these mandates.
constitutional principles, by establishing the Doctrine of Integral Protection and by recognizing children and adolescents
as subjects of rights.

As Rizzini (2011) teaches, this change breaks with the logic of the old Minors' Code,
which treated the minor as an object of guardianship. Thus, it is observed that the ECA inaugurates a new
A legal perspective, focused on promoting rights and valuing childhood as a developmental stage.
essential to human development.

By guaranteeing fundamental rights, the Statute establishes broad duties for the family, the
society and the State. Lôbo (2019) highlights that the contemporary legal system has become
To prioritize the human person as the center of legal relations.

Therefore, it is understood that the child must be protected in a differentiated way, considering their
relative disability and the need for specific care, which justifies the existence of a
special legal regime aimed at its protection.

The principle of absolute priority, provided for in Article 4 of the ECA (Statute of the Child and Adolescent), determines precedence in...
service, preferential allocation of public resources, and priority in protection in any
circumstances.

Tartuce (2020) emphasizes that this principle is binding and should guide the interpretation of
all regulations concerning children and youth.

Thus, it is possible to understand, from the author's perspective, that this is not merely a guideline.
programmatic, but a concrete legal imposition that demands the effective action of the Power.
Public and society.

Furthermore, the Statute reaffirms that children and adolescents are entitled to all rights.

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fundamental aspects inherent to the human person, requiring the joint action of various social actors.
for its effectiveness. Dias (2021) argues that comprehensive protection demands co-responsibility.
between family, society and the State.
In this context, the author identifies that the effectiveness of children's rights does not depend exclusively on...
from the legislation, but also from the conscious and responsible actions of everyone involved in its protection.
It can be observed, then, that the Statute of Children and Adolescents embodies the commitment.
constitutional protection for children, establishing clear guidelines for the promotion of a
dignified and healthy development. However, as can be seen from the doctrinal contributions
As presented, the great challenge lies in the practical implementation of these rights, which requires not only
The existence of norms, but also their concrete application in everyday social life.

**4.2 The role of media in the adultification of the child's body**

The advancement of information and communication technologies has brought about profound transformations.
contemporary forms of socialization directly influence how children and
Adolescents construct their identity and become aware of their own bodies. In this context, the media and...
Social networks play a central role in the dissemination of behavioral, aesthetic, and...
cultural norms that often anticipate experiences typical of adult life.
In this context, Borges (2017) clarifies that contemporary childhood is...
deeply influenced by the media environment, since children are exposed, from
very early on, to the discourses and products of the culture industry.
From this reflection, it becomes clear that the author seeks to highlight that childhood today is not...
It develops independently of social dynamics, but is embedded in a communication system.
which directly influences behaviors, values, and perceptions.
Thus, it can be observed that the media contributes to the construction of new cultural references.
often replacing childhood experiences with patterns linked to consumption, to
appearance and social performance.
In further elaborating on this analysis, the author Borges (2017) also highlights that the media
They do not act independently, being directly connected to the social transformations that...
They characterize contemporary times.
This understanding allows us to identify that childhood is now being incorporated into the logic of societies.
capitalists, marked by the valorization of consumption and the commodification of images and
behaviors. Thus, it is understood that the child's body ceases to be perceived only as
expression of the child's natural development and comes to be interpreted as an object of

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social representation and, in many cases, symbolic exploitation by the culture industry.

In addition to this discussion, Postman (1999) highlights that the advancement of the means of Mass communication has contributed significantly to the weakening of boundaries between The worlds of children and adults.

According to the author, the expansion of access to information, without age-appropriate filters, causes... children have early exposure to content and behaviors previously restricted to the world adult. From this perspective, it becomes clear that the phenomenon of adultification does not occur only through visual exposure, but also through the anticipation of knowledge, discourses, and practices that They interfere with the child's emotional and social development.

In this same debate, contemporary social relations are also reproduced in the environment. digital technology, which can both promote protection and contribute to the violation of rights. children and teenagers.

Almeida Neto (2017) states that digital technologies have come to penetrate virtually all the spheres of social life, significantly altering the roles assigned to childhood and life. adult.

From this statement, it is possible to understand that technological development is not only It expands forms of communication, but also redefines the social experiences of new generations. generations. In this way, children begin to interact in environments that, often, were not originally structured to meet their protection and development needs.

Another relevant contribution to this discussion is that of Buckingham (2007), who analyzes the relationship between media, culture, and childhood. According to the author, children are not merely passive recipients of media content, but also active participants in the construction of meanings from from these experiences.

In this sense, it is observed that constant exposure to content that values aesthetic standards Adults can stimulate early identification processes with incompatible behaviors. with childhood.

Along the same lines of thought, Bauman (2001) argues that contemporary society is marked due to the fluidity of relationships and the intense emphasis on image and consumption. By relating this From a perspective on childhood, it becomes clear that the child's body is being inserted into a logic of visibility and social recognition, in which appearance and public exposure gain importance. highlight. Thus, it is understood that social networks amplify this dynamic, stimulating practices. self-promotion and comparison that can compromise the healthy construction of identity. children.

Given these theoretical contributions, it becomes possible to understand that the media plays a role.

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The presence of children plays a significant role in transforming children's experiences in contemporary times. constant media content, associated with the logic of consumption and the valuation of image, contributes to the construction of behavioral patterns that anticipate experiences specific to adult life.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the analysis carried out, it is concluded that the adultification of children, intensified by the influence of Social networks constitute a complex phenomenon that directly compromises development. comprehensive care for children and adolescents. Early exposure to inappropriate content, associated with excessive emphasis on image and the consumer logic present in the digital environment contributes to anticipate behaviors typical of adult life, hindering the full experience of infancy.

From a legal perspective, it was found that, although the Brazilian legal system, especially through the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent Adolescent, establish mechanisms to protect dignity, image, and privacy, even There are gaps regarding the effectiveness of these standards in the digital context. This scenario highlights the... The need for a more up-to-date and effective interpretation in light of technological transformations. Furthermore, it was found that the responsibility for the protection of children and adolescents should be... shared between family, state and society, making the strengthening of policies fundamental. public safety measures, oversight mechanisms, and awareness strategies regarding the use of social media.

Finally, it should be noted that the topic requires continuous in-depth study, given its rapid evolution. of technologies and their impacts on contemporary childhood, making it essential to development of legal and social instruments capable of ensuring comprehensive protection and preservation of the fundamental rights of children and adolescents.

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