Space invaders: the negotiation of teenage boundaries through the mobile phone

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Abstract

Drawing on interview data, this paper explores the area of child/parent negotiation. Specifically, we examine the increasing significance of the mobile phone in the way teenagers negotiate spatial boundaries with their parents. Utilising theories of time and space, especially Giddens' concept of 'distanciation', we show how parents and their children use the mobile phone as a tool for negotiating curfews in public space, thus extending household discussion and negotiation outside of the home. We point out that parents are using the mobile phone to enter their children's time and space as an 'absent Other', and see this as a means of extending parental authority and control. Children, conversely, see themselves gaining a degree of empowerment from the mobile phone, as parents are more lenient with curfews if they posses one. The mobile phone, then, has become an important facilitator of negotiations between parents and teenagers regarding boundary setting. We conclude that the mobile phone has enabled teenagers to gain increased leverage in their negotiations with their parents, but underline that parents still hold control and authority by 'invading' their children's space.

Over the last decade or so sociological discussions of postmodernity, and more recently reflexive modernity, have increasingly raised questions about the putative impact of individualisation, expanding life choices and challenges to tradition, among other social forces (Beck, 1989; Giddens, 1990; Lash, 1996; Sennett, 1998; Bauman, 2001). These more generic discussions have prompted efforts to turn attention towards examining changes underway within specific institutions, such as the family (see Kaltenborn, 2001). Indeed, in the case of the discussions of reflexive modernization one finds in the works of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1996, see also Beck and Beck-Gersheim, 1995) consideration of the evolving relationships within the family and, more broadly, the concept of the 'family' have been central to the working out of the ideas of reflexivity and detraditionalisation. At the heart of theories of reflexive modernisation is the suggestion that institutions are in a state of flux brought about by detraditionalisation. As Beck *et al.* put it, 'detraditionalization . . . is not to talk of a society without traditions – far from it. Rather, the concept refers to a social order in which tradition changes its status' (1996: vi). This study

locates the relationship between parent and child within this fluidity. In particular, it examines how the mobile phone accelerates the process of detraditionalisation within the family by increasing the possibilities for negotiation between parents and children. Negotiation in this context is taken as being a contested and conflict driven arena where parents and teenagers adopt different strategies when reconstructing their reflexive relationships. Though the specific focus of the discussion, then, is on the way in which the mobile phone has become quickly integrated into family practices, with important consequences, our wider concern is with changes within child/parent relationships and the family within reflexive modernity.

Consideration of the effects of expanding life choices and the gradual challenges to traditional family practices in giving rise to 'new' parent and child relationships have been the focus of a number of sociological studies since the early 1990s. These studies have included Solberg's (1990) study of 'negotiated childhood' in Norway, Ferchhoff's (1990) analysis of a shift away from authoritarian households in West Germany, Jones and Wallace's (1992) discussion of shifting power relations within families and, more recently, Coleman and Hendry's (1999) *The Nature of Adolescence*, which looks at role conflict and change within families. This work has concentrated on various aspects of late modern family life, including negotiation, the democratisation of the family in the guise of the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1991), and the weakening of conventional ideas of parental authority. These phenomena have also informed analyses of wider changes within the family, notably how much traditional household relationships and roles are changing (Jamieson and Toynbee, 1990; Finch and Mason, 1993; Giddens, 1993; Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995; Valentine, 1997, 1999).

Many of these authors see traditional forms of relationships as breaking down and being replaced by more reflexive, and often more democratic interactions. They do not, however, hold that traditional ideas are completely disappearing, but instead suggest that these are subject to reflexive monitoring. Nevertheless, theories of reflexive modernisation do tend to stress the transformation of traditional family relationships and roles. Thus, for Giddens reflexivity leads to all social relationships becoming more democratic, a development that sees changes to the power dynamic in formerly traditional relationships. As he remarks, 'in the areas of marriage and the family we now live in a society in which for the first time not just men and women, but men, women and children, are equals before the law – and are much more equal on a substantial level than formerly was the case' (Giddens, 1998: 135–6). Central to the claim that intra-family relationships are experiencing substantive democratisation is the argument that relations between children and parents are increasingly characterised by negotiation, replacing more conventional relations and traditional ideas of parental authority. In this context, greater intimacy and more emotional parent/child communication replaces the old hierarchical authority taken as typically marking these relations. For theorists of reflexive modernisation, parents are becoming progressively more

open with their children as they attempt to become 'friends' as well as their parents. Indeed, this is precisely what Giddens (1994, 1999) argues when he employs the concept of the 'pure relationship' to analyse what he understands as the democratisation of the family. For Giddens the pure relationship is qualitatively different from the 'more traditional kinds of social ties'. It depends upon processes of active trust – opening oneself up to the other. Disclosure is the basic condition of intimacy. 'The pure relationship is implicitly democratic' (1999: 61). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) give the idea of the pure relationship even more prominence in their work on the parent/child relationship. They claim that due to the instability in contemporary adult relationships, resulting from separation and divorce, the emphasis shifts away from them towards strengthening the relationships with their children. In other words, the classic functionalist idea that marriage stabilises adult personalities is challenged. Instead, it is the unconditional love that comes from the child, which is now the stabilising factor. It is the parent's reliance on this 'new' child/parent relationship as a source of unconditional love that makes this relationship more intense and more intimate.

There are critics of this theory. Jamieson, for example, takes a different view and argues that child/parent relationships are still fundamentally subject to social control, and as such could never be negotiated on an equitable basis. As she maintains, 'the loss of traditional authority is not the loss of parental control; authority rests on an alternative basis' (1998: 65). She further suggests that contemporary parents very often play down the power they have over their children, forgetting that within the parent/child relationship they are undoubtedly more powerful than their children. Jamieson (1998) accuses Giddens of downplaying inequalities within the wider social context. She further blames Giddens for reducing relationships to a simple personal appreciation of each other with a concentration on individual wants and 'needs', thus leaving out power inequalities and conflict, which may enter into relationships. Jamieson calls this '*hyperindividualism*' (Jamieson, 1998: 172) and argues that nobody is completely free from traditional responsibilities and roles. Jamieson thus argues that Giddens' idea of the pure relationship is not an adequate account, as there can never be a purely democratic relationship between parent and teenager. She asserts that teenagers are constantly exploring their freedom and will battle with their parents over this and many other issues, but in the final analysis parental authority is still maintained. Indeed, Solomon *et al.* share Jamieson's view, arguing that:

> There is a clear disjuncture between the quest for intimacy as encapsulated by Giddens' 'pure relationship' and the lived reality of the inequalities between parents and children, in which mutual disclosure is undermined by the struggle for control (Solomon *et al.*, 2002: 980).

We nevertheless hold that a form of negotiation is taking place within child/parent relationships, using discussions between parents and their chil-

dren over the latter's spatial boundaries as evidence of this negotiation. This particular case draws on data derived from interviews on household negotiation. We suggest that the data reveal a shift from more traditional parental authority in the setting of curfews and boundaries towards to a more liberal approach, a change facilitated, in this instance, partly by the mobile phone. Parents and teenagers were asked how, or if curfews were established and maintained. Both sets of interviewees responded by stating that curfews were being lifted or re-negotiated by the fact that teenagers had the use of a mobile phone.

Methodology

The data in this paper were gathered in the course of a study involving 36 qualitative interviews and 50 self-fill questionnaires concerned with the subject of child/parent negotiation. The parents and teenagers in this study come from various forms of household, including two parent families and single parent families. This allowed us to consider the possibilities of variations in family practices. The parents were of various ages, but the teenagers were all either 15 or 16 years of age. The interviews lasted between 30–90 minutes. The qualitative section of the sample was equally divided into parents and teenagers, with these categories then broadly divided into those coming from affluent 'professional' families and schools and those from less affluent backgrounds and underachieving schools. The access to these interviewees, as we explain below, was achieved in several ways.

Gaining access

The first point of access was through pupil post at an underachieving school on a council estate in Cardiff. A letter was sent out via pupil post for volunteers to be included in the survey. This eventually led, after filling in the questionnaire, to parents and pupils agreeing to be interviewed on a one-to-one basis. The second point of access took part at Family and Community Centres in the Cardiff area where individuals were also invited to complete a questionnaire, and then asked if they wished to be involved in the qualitative phase of the survey. The qualitative interviewees were then selected to take into account their socio-economic status, family type and whether they were a teenager or parent. The interview data were analysed using a manual qualitative analysis technique. Each interview was read and analysed for opinions on a variety of issues that were subsequently placed into files derived from the sample. These files were examined for similarities and differences, and a consolidation was then written on each file. These consolidations were used as the basis of the argument within this paper. In order to frame the analysis

of this data it is necessary to begin by further exploring the concept of negotiation.

Negotiation

As we have noted, the child/parent relationship has been described as changing, with less emphasis on 'authoritarian parenting' and more on what we term 'authoritative negotiation'. By 'authoritarian parenting' we are referring to situations wherein children are told when and how they should behave and therefore consequently have comparatively little opportunity for contributing to household discussions, even where they directly involve the child. 'Authoritative parenting', we define as involving a degree of discussion between child and parent but with control ultimately remaining with the parent. We are therefore signalling that negotiation in child/parent relations is not typified by the disclosure and equality that reflexive modernisation theorists sometimes portray as happening between children and parents. We nevertheless share the view that within the contemporary household children have increased rights and choices and that they are increasingly (skilful) negotiators in their relations with their parents. It is also necessary to add that this changing relationship between child and parent(s) does not just *involve* negotiation; in a sense, it is *defined* by negotiation, or, more accurately, by *re*-negotiation as an ongoing occurrence.

One of the first sociological studies to apply the concept of negotiation to the analysis of intra-family relationships was Finch and Mason's (1993) *Negotiating Family Responsibilities*. Here, they sought to unravel the concept of negotiation in traditional family ties. They suggest that, even in seemingly traditional roles, responsibilities between family members are not simply hierarchical and obligations to each other are not simply given. Rather, even traditional responsibilities between family members are a matter of negotiation. Correspondingly, their theorising is similar to the detraditionalisation thesis in so far as they see all traditions today as being subject to reflexivity.

Valentine (1999) focuses more directly on negotiation in relation to how parents and children establish an understanding of the limits of the latter's movements outside the home. According to her, children extend their freedom beyond the household by performing tasks in the home and use this 'good behaviour' as a negotiating chip to expand their boundaries and autonomy. One example Valentine highlights is where children tidy their bedrooms and thus are seen as being 'good' and obedient. This behaviour is then transformed into a tangible reward by the parent, such as the children being allowed greater freedom outside of the home. Children also exploit their better knowledge of their locality in negotiations with parents, and this is another method of increasing spatial boundaries. Valentine argues that because they 'play outside' children are more aware of their local surround-

ings than are their parents. They then use this knowledge to convince their parents that they are safe because they know the area well. On the other hand, parents use 'stranger danger' and traffic problems to restrict their children's movements outside the house. Valentine notes that children typically view their parents' risk assessment as a naïve attempt to control and maintain authority over *their* space.

To varying degrees, therefore, children/teenagers are actively challenging their parents' authority and often have an increasingly significant voice in household decisions. They are no longer passive bystanders; rather, they progressively challenge parental authority *through* negotiation (Valentine, 1997). Valentine's study provides an insight into the complex negotiations within households. With the advent of the mobile phone, however, these negotiations are no longer restricted to the physical home. This new technology allows for these relations to be stretched over distance and for negotiation to take place within a broader spatial framework. To this end, children are increasingly playing an active role in the negotiation rather than a receptive, even if begrudging one, and a vital bargaining chip is allowing *their* space to be 'invaded' occasionally by a parental telephone call. Negotiation, here, does not necessarily result in one party being successful; instead, negotiation needs to be conceptualised as involving greater communications between children and parents. Instead of the parent dictating all the terms to the child/teenager, there is greater latitude and more flexibility when setting boundaries.

That said, most parents still have some fixed opinions on how to parent. In a relatively early study Backett (1982) nevertheless suggests that even by the 1980s traditional views on parenting were being challenged and parents were gradually coming to rethink what it meant to be a 'parent'. More recently, and emphasising the rise of the child's voice as juxtaposed to the parents', is the work of James and James (2001). They suggest that the matter of children's civil rights are being brought to our attention by researchers interested in separating their opinions from their parents' point of view, and therefore expressing children's voices in citizenship and family debates. Before this Jamieson and Toynbee (1990), in a discussion of the changing economic, social and political contexts of parenting, identify what they view as some of the principal challenges to parental authority and control in Western societies. The factors that contribute to the gradual transformation of parental authority range from changes in family size to increased geographical and social mobility. These factors, Jamieson and Toynbee argue, have facilitated a shift in the dominant child rearing paradigm. As they argue, these changes have resulted in:

parents having more time and money for 'spoiling' their children; changes in patterns of consumption and the development of children and youth as markets, increasing parents' opportunities for indulging children on the one hand, and for 'youth' to express tastes in contradiction to those of their parents on the other: Industrial restructuring and/or increased geographi-

cal and social mobility resulting in the breaking of homogenous communities and replacing parents in positions of uncertainty and contraction concerning the rules of good parenting (Jamieson and Toynbee, 1990: 87).

In this way, increased negotiation between children and parents might be understood as a consequence of underlying changes in late modern society. For Jamieson and Toynbee, parents in advanced industrial societies in Europe and North America no longer live in social worlds that support traditional authority. However, this does not mean that tradition is disappearing entirely; it continues to flourish everywhere, but increasingly it does so in a diluted form, or to be more specific, in a detraditionalised form. Thus, parenting has become detraditionalised and is being altered by diverse forms of negotiated behaviour (Giddens, 1999). Indeed, Heelas (1996) defines detraditionalisation as a shift in authority that results in individuals having to increasingly make decisions for themselves. Traditional ideas, then, are being replaced by flexible adaptations negotiated by individuals. We wish to examine further this process of change within the family, specifically considering the idea of detraditionalisation, by exploring the impact of the mobile phone in facilitating reflexive negotiation across time-space.

The mobile phone, technology and time-space

The idea of the private or domestic sphere as not only a conceptual notion, but also as a spatial entity, and as distinct from the public sphere (marked in part by the 'world of work'), has been central to sociological discussions of 'the family'. As Morgan suggests, however, the implications of the spatial and temporal ('lifecycle' and 'lifecourse') dimensions of family life have not been given due consideration in how we actively theorise the family. Yet, as he comments:

> time and space are key axes around which the analysis of family processes should be developed . . . Definitions and distinctions between family and household revolve in part around issues to do with time and space: the latter is defined largely in terms of place (although time is implied), while the former is defined in terms of time, of past relationships shaping and influencing present relationships and obligations. (1996: 137)

Morgan and others (Ferree, 1990) question the idea of the family as occupying, and indeed defined by the physical space of the domestic sphere or the home. In Morgan's work he uses the concept of household 'practices' to refer to the way each individualised family unit responds to, and works out the practicalities involved in everyday living and are significant in shaping, and being shaped by gender. For Morgan, these practices are neither static nor isolated within the physical space of the home. Thus, negotiations between household

members are occurring and affecting relationships with the private and public spheres and these, in turn, are important in shaping 'new' family/household relations. As Morgan explains: 'one implication of a shift to talking about 'family practices' may be added. This is that family practices are not necessarily practices which take place in times and spaces conventionally designated to do with 'family', that is the home' (1999: 20).

In this paper we show how these family negotiations are spread outside of the home by the use of the mobile phone stretching and expanding household interaction. In this way, we build on the work outlined above regarding family 'practices' and the individual negotiation of roles by introducing a facilitating technological factor: the mobile phone. Analysis of the social impact of technological innovations have been at the heart of the growth in sociological reflections of space and time over the last decade or so, such as in Harvey's (1989) pioneering work on 'time-space compression' and Giddens' (1990) notion of 'time-space distanciation'. In fact, there is an increasingly rich vein of research concerned with 'the social' and technology. Thus, among recent work, Livingstone and Bober (2003) look at teenagers online and how this is transforming family relationships, Harkin (2003) considers some aspects of how mobile technologies are impacting on social life, while Rheingold, too, focuses on the mobile phone in his book *Smart Mobs* (2001). Beynon and Dunkerley express a view shared by many sociologists that 'we are witnessing a blossoming of communicational and informational technologies linking the computer, television, telephone, satellite and cable. Space has been 'technological eliminated' (2000: 31). Discussions of the social effects of technological change often acknowledge the double-edged quality of the developments they engender. Thus, Lash, for example, notes that 'developments in communications technology, especially the telephone line and the computer, which facilitate instantaneous flows of information internationally, so enabling distant parts of a global company to be informed, surveilled, and controlled' (1996: 380). In a similar manner, while we will show that for teenagers the mobile phone enables them greater leverage in bargaining with their parents for greater autonomy, and in doing so often lift these negotiations outside of the spatial constraints of the household, at the same time teenagers remain under control and surveillance by their parents who use this technology to enter their children's time and space.

Giddens' work is especially apposite to our analysis. Arguably more than any other sociologist, Giddens is concerned with the impact that globalisation and global communications have on the social. 'Disembedding' forces make individuals confront and deal with mediated interaction on an equal basis to more conventional face-to-face interaction. In particular, Giddens asks how human relationships are altered and yet also maintained in the absence of face-to-face interaction, enabled by innovations in communications technology. Indeed, his theory of time-space distanciation is concerned with how the absent Other interacts with the present locale. As he comments:

> The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between 'absent' others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly phantasmagonic: that is to say, locals are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene; the 'visible form' of the locale conceals the distanciated relations, which determine its nature (Giddens, 1997: 18–19).

In a similar manner, parents are able to keep in contact with their children and to a certain extent control them. The parent uses the mobile phone to enter into teenage space, and as the absent other can influence the behaviour and social space of the teenager. In relation to Giddens' remarks above, the parents are able to socially influence the behaviour of their teenagers by potentially being at the end of the phone. Parents are able to keep in contact with their children and to a certain extent control them. Clearly the mobile phone is becoming central to the parent/teenager relationship because it facilitates negotiation and authority outside of the private sphere in a more public arena.

It is worthwhile noting that the use of the mobile phone has continued to grow in spite of the various risks associated with them. Though the figures increase daily, in 2001 there were 40 million mobile phone users in the Britain, two thirds of the British population (Wearden, 2001). With the unprecedented expansion of mobile phone ownership – over 90% school children now own a mobile (www.capacitybuilder.co.uk, 2001) – owning a phone has become increasingly important for social interaction among teenagers and also for issues related to their safety. The latter include the continuing worry of 'stranger danger' (the risk of abduction and attack), mobile phone crime and health issues. As we found in the course of our research, parents are constantly monitoring information relating to health and theft issues. For example, mobile phone shields are now being introduced and this will help apparently reduce the harmful effects of radiation (Carter, 2002). In addition, according to a BBC news report, more than 700,000 mobile phones were stolen in 2001 (Wilson, 2002). Most victims of mobile phone theft are under eighteen years old and are targeted by youths of a similar age. Parents still nevertheless encourage the use of the mobile phone. The dramatic increase in mobile phone related crimes and even the health issues around radiation do not apparently deter parents wanting their child to carry mobile phones.

Arguably this is because parents and teenagers use the mobile phone in order to negotiate childhood time-space and alleviate the growing fear of 'stranger danger'. According to Taylor, the mobile phone gives flexibility and mobility to those who need to be in contact with each other on a permanent basis (cited in Beynon and Dunkerley, 2000). Thus, with the unprecedented expansion of mobile phone ownership, especially amongst the under-18s, this was bound to have enormous social as well as economic implications. As

Castells argues, 'individuals are in fact reconstructing the pattern of social interaction, with the help of new technological affordances, to create a new form of society: the network society' (2001: 133). It is this new form of social interaction that is taking place within parent/child negotiation with the use of the mobile phone. This interaction, we suggest below, is also having the affect of extending the already changing family/household negotiations beyond the physical immediacy of the household and into the world of cyber-space.

Negotiation in practice

One of the primary concerns of the research was to examine the extent to which parents are prepared to negotiate with their child(ren) with regard to the latter's movements outside of the home. In nearly all of the interviews parents stated that they set limits on the time by which their children had to be in and often *where* they could go. For their part, their children admitted that they were both aware of the boundaries established by their parents and that they adhered, largely, to them. Thus, to some extent the 'negotiation' between child and parent appears to be fairly circumscribed and therefore characteristic of 'authoritarian parenting'. Helen (aged 16 years old), for example, remarked that her mother gives her times by which she must return home during the week and at the weekend, though it should be noted that in this instance the 'curfew' was more generous than that allowed by most other parents. As she commented, 'yeah, I usually have to be in by . . . It depends really, on a weeknight she wants me in about eleven-ish, something like that. Or on a weekend she don't mind about half past eleven, but I wouldn't stay out all night or something like that (laughs)'. Tania (16) similarly stated that she had limits on her movements beyond the home. She nevertheless went on to explain that the 'rules' set by her mother were flexible, especially if Tania's boyfriend was present:

> Yeah, mum makes sure that I'm always home by . . . like, she'll set a time. But it depends what I'm doing and who I'm going with. And she's actually more lenient if I'm with my boyfriend 'cos she trusts him and so she's like . . . if I go out with him she doesn't mind when I get back.

Charlotte (15) also replied that the presence of 'male friends' worked in her favour, notably, and illustrating the kind of autonomy a number of the interviewees had, if she was 'at a club'. Tania and Charlotte were the only two female teenage interviewees to openly remark that an accompanying boyfriend was advantageous to their negotiations with their parents, but as we shall show their ability to be able to extend curfews or their spatial boundaries is very typical. For boys the limits on their movements were generally less restrictive and indeed sometimes they were vague to the point of being

non-existent. As Ricky (16) explained: 'I have to be in by 9 o' clock on week nights, at weekends I can go where ever I want but after 12 o' clock. If I'm not back then I have to find somewhere else to stay'.

If parents, in setting spatial and temporal limits on their child's(ren's) movements, illustrated that child/parent interaction is guided to some extent by traditional attitudes, their children also displayed an element of traditional deference to parental authority. All those teenagers interviewed were asked whether they obeyed their parents' curfews; without exception, all commented that they did abide by the limits set by their parents. Two principal reasons were given for their behaviour. The first was concern that to not do so would lead to some form of punishment, notably limits on future movement. Expressing a view stated by a number of her peers, Helen put the situation simply: 'I have to be in or I'd get grounded'. Another common reason given was that to not follow the rules would cause anxiety to their parent(s). Karen spoke for many of the other teenage interviewees when she explained that she appreciated her mother's concerns: 'I know when it's getting a bit late and she's going to start worrying so I just like go home'. As already illustrated above, it should be noted that not all children adhered in practice to their parents' demands, as Ricky's allusion to not previously negotiated overnight stop-outs illustrates.

The flexibility of curfews and the expansion of spatial boundaries were significantly altered once the teenage interviewees were in possession of a mobile phone. It was clear from the interviews with parents and their children alike that mobile phones facilitate the extension of children's boundaries, while simultaneously stretching the authority of the parent across time-space. Remarks made by Stacey and Karen (both 16) typify the general perception among the teenage interviewees towards the implications of the mobile phone for their autonomy beyond the home. Thus, Stacey remarked that if she 'didn't have a mobile phone there would be more curfews'. Karen went further, explaining that she no longer has curfews, 'not since I've had a mobile phone'. The teenagers are, then, only too aware that the mobile phone has encouraged their parents to become considerably more lenient towards them, so long as the teenagers are willing to tolerate the stretching of parental ties. Anita (16), for example, stated that without the mobile phone she would have to find a landline and contact her parents because 'they'd worry' about her, but the possession of a mobile phone often meant that the onus was now on her parents to get in touch with her. Leon (15) also explained that he wanted his parents to have 'peace of mind' and was genuinely willing to accommodate his parents' concerns about his safety. While in some respects the acknowledgement of their parents concerns might be read as simply a continuation of more traditional type of relationship between parent and child, with Leon, and indeed most of the teenage interviewees, it is evident that negotiation is predicated by increased openness. Leon can, then, still negotiate his freedom with a certain amount of autonomy, but also keep his parents happy with the use of his mobile phone. As he explained:

> Normally I have to be in by about 9 o' clock – well before it gets dark anyway. They check up on me for their peace of mind. They know they can get hold of you and that you're not isolated and if you need an ambulance or anything. I don't mind if it makes them happy, I don't mind.

While for their parents, then, the principal motivations for their children carrying a mobile phone are concerns about abduction as well as attack and a desire to contact their children, for the teenagers the availability of this technology has had the affect of lessening direct parental control. For us, the mobile phone is therefore having the dual effect of giving young people increased leverage to negotiate with their parents and thus progressively move away from the home, while also allowing parents to feel that they can have a presence in their child's(ren's) lives in spite of the absence of actual 'presence availability' (Goffman, 1984).

Young people clearly feel empowered not so much by their possession of a mobile phone, but more precisely by their understanding of how it affects the behaviour of their parents and thus their relations with them. As Caroline (16) told us, 'as long as I've got my mobile on me and she can get hold of me . . . as long as she knows where I am she doesn't mind'. Karen emphasized that the mobile phone almost performs the function of *in loco parentis*: 'I just say "Can I go out?", and she says, "Take your phone". And that's it. It's okay'. In this way the mobile phone, an important (and coveted, as figures of mobile phone theft indicate) fashion accessory for young people, also has quickly acquired a significant symbolic value not only for young people but also for their parents.

The mixture of negotiated control by, and increased freedom from parents was also evident in discussions of curfews. For while parents are prepared to allow their children a greater degree of freedom if they have a mobile phone on them, and young people are also, from their perspective at least, able to progressively push back parental control, even the temporary absence of a phone can lead to a swift return to more interventionist parenting. This situation is illustrated in the negotiated relationship between Ricky (16) and his mother. Discussing the benefits of the mobile phone for the relationship with his mother he explained:

> Yes, my mum can get in touch with me at anytime on my mobile. She knows that I'm safe when I have my phone with me. But once, when I broke my mobile, I had to be in earlier and she set me times when I had to be home.

For all its declared advantages, owning a mobile phone does nevertheless allow parents to 'invade' their children's space beyond the home in a manner not hitherto possible. For example, Tania explained that when she is out late at night her mother insists that she phones home at regular intervals: 'it . . . depends on what I'm doing. She'll be like 'Ring me at 12 o' clock' and 'Ring me at 1 o' clock' and 'Ring me at 2 o' clock'. Just so she knows I'm all right'.

This parental intrusion into the boundaries of teenage space is not confined to telephone conversations, but also comes in the form of texts. Parents often use the text message facility to keep tabs on their children. Texting is itself an interesting illustration of a negotiated compromise between parent and child since it allows the parent to have a presence without direct communication and is also viewed more positively by their child(ren). As Caroline (16) told us, 'it's like when I went to the 'Big Weekend' [a summer festival in Cardiff]. She knew there would be people drinking, so she was worried about that and where I was, and she was texting me all the time . . . And I would prefer her to text me'. Karen provided another example of a further way in which parents attempt to maintain an element of presence beyond the home when she explained that when she is out she must text her parents at regular inter- vals with information: 'it's like "Text me when you're on your way", "Text me when you're there" and "Text me when you're on you're way home"'. Parents typically use the mobile phone as a method of identifying their children's whereabouts and maintaining a form of dialogue more characteristic of face- to-face interaction. Though this authority-at-a-distance is in some senses illu- sionary since parents have little way of ascertaining the exact location of their children, the mobile phone to some degree enables parents to maintain a pres- ence beyond the immediate domestic space.

These types of exchanges between parent and child are nevertheless illus- trative of growing negotiation wherein the mobile phone plays a crucial role and in the course of which the child/parent relationship becomes progressively detraditionalised. For parents, these small-scale, recurring negotiations are understood in a similar way to their children. Negotiations are very clearly influenced by their children having a mobile phone and the teenagers know that their negotiating position with parents is made far easier if they have the phone. Parental concerns about their children's well-being *are* alleviated somewhat by the knowledge that both parties can get in touch via the mobile phone. Yet, they also expect to be kept informed of the whereabouts of their children. For example, Kate, a 37-year-old mother of two teenage boys (aged 14 and 15), sets her sons curfews but also explained that they have a practice that is to be followed if they are unable to get home in time:

> On weekdays, if they are going out I set a time for when they have to be home by 9 o' clock. If they're not home by that time then they are grounded, unless they notify me . . . Len is okay because he's got his mobile and Jack lends his friend's (mobile) phone.

For Kate, like most of the parents interviewed, the mobile phone is a positive tool in enabling the extension of parental authority outside of the house, and also in affording them some 'peace of mind'. The latter issue has important implications for the child(ren) since it is on the basis of this that they are able to negotiate with their parents. As Kate went on to add:

> By having a mobile they can have extensions . . . because they can contact me. My younger son borrows his father's mobile and I can get hold of him anytime of the day, which gives me peace of mind.

The parents also made it clear that the absence of a mobile phone, either one owned by their child(ren) or one held by an accompanying friend, will result in a halt to any privileges. Thus, Sandra, a 37-year-old mother of two boys aged 11 and 14, explained how the availability of the mobile phone has altered her attitude towards her sons' movements in the evening:

> On school nights he has to be in by 7.30pm. When there's no school, about 9 o'clock. He takes his phone (mobile) and I'd have to ring him when he has no money on his phone. If he didn't have a mobile he'd have to come home earlier, and they'd have stricter curfews.

Even if children possess a mobile phone, in the final analysis the parents will use their ultimate sanction and ring the teenager if they fail to materialise by the agreed time. Daniel, a 40-year-old father of two teenage boys, makes this clear when discussing alterations in their curfew arrangements. Daniel allows flexibility and some negotiation, but tells his eldest boy the final time and is also prepared to ring if his son does not ring the house. As Daniel says:

> He can phone in, but we still tell him what time to be in, which is usually 11 o' clock . . . He can ring us to tell us what time he is coming home, but we phone him if he doesn't phone us.

Daniel's idea of negotiation is slightly more traditional when compared to other parents. In most other cases the mobile phone is used to re-negotiate arrangements rather than to *order* an immediate return. Sophie (16) stated that negotiations with her parents were situational, dependent on where she went and with whom:

> It depends on the situation really usually I get a lift home. I'm not allowed to get a taxi or anything my mum picks me up. I'm not allowed to make my own way home. You just adapt things to a situation, if the situation changes when you're out then you can ring up and change the arrangements and then they (parents) know that you are safe.

There is, of course, one very simple way for teenagers to avoid contact with their parents: switch off their phone. From our interviews it is clear that this happens, but the young people to whom we spoke appreciated the advantages of keeping an open line to their parents. Parents would appear to acknowledge this accessibility favourably and are more often than not prepared to reciprocate positively. This is clearly seen in an interview with Lucy, a 43 year-

old mother of a teenage daughter and son, during which she commented on her experiences of the mobile phone and its effect on relations with her daughter. As she said:

> I prefer her to have a mobile to keep tabs on her, but she does switch it off most of the time. It [the mobile phone] doesn't affect the curfews I place on her, but it does give them an element of negotiation . . . I was ringing her once on her mobile and I couldn't get through. . . . I went to pick her up from a party and I said I'd pick her up at midnight. Well, her friend phoned me on her mobile to ask me if they could stay until 2.30 in the morning, and I said no way, then [her daughter] phoned me on her mobile and I agreed.

As these comments illustrate, the mobile phone has become increasingly important for the conduct of child/parent relationships. It is used as both an enabling tool by teenagers to expand their spatial boundaries, but simultaneously as a constraining tool in the implementation of parental authority. The remarks by both parents and their children also illustrate Giddens' argument that time-space distanciation turns social interaction into a form of trust that enables social relations to be stretched across distance – in this case, the 'stretching' of parental negotiation. To some extent they also highlight the limits of more conventional ways of understanding human interaction, such as in Goffman's work, where individuals are physically present in the same space and rely on verbal communication and the ability to read non-verbal signs. As Giddens says of Goffman, his 'main concern throughout his writings, involves individuals directly attending to what each other are saying and doing for a particular segment of time' (1987: 115). In the case of interaction via a mobile phone the aspects of communication to which Goffman refers are absent. For this reason, trust is the essential of the interaction between parent and child through the mobile; without this ingredient, negotiation breaks down.

Discussion

At one level, the concern of our research has been to examine the 'stretching' of social relations over distance through technological innovations, a phenomenon that some, such as Giddens, regard as integral to modernity and which is central to contemporary sociological reflections on globalisation. Our specific focus has been with the way in which the household is 'stretched' as a consequence of the now common device of the mobile phone. We have highlighted that through the use of the mobile phone both parents and children continue discussions that would ordinarily be conducted within the physical space of the home. Unlike conventional landlines, which may be difficult to find or, for the teenager, be *said* to be unavailable, mobiles enable 'presence

availability'. Parents expect to be able to contact their children, and the children are, in turn, aware of this. From the perspective of parents, especially, the mobile is used to alleviate their concerns about 'stranger danger' or any mischief in which their children might find themselves. More generally, it is used by parents to keep tabs on their children's movements outside of the home, to 'invade', as we have suggested, their 'private' space. The phone has undoubtedly helped to retain parental control by giving them the opportunity to enter their children's space at any time. For their part, the teenagers to whom we spoke were frequently in touch with their parents while they were away from the home. Thus, while the mobile has enabled them a greater degree of freedom of movement and negotiation over their movement, they nevertheless are aware that the mobile means that must still remain in contact with their parents. For these reasons the increasing use of the mobile phone is, we would suggest, having the significant effect of 'stretching' relations between parents and their children.

Beyond this effect the discussion has also highlighted the implications of the mobile for negotiations between parents and their children. What we argue is that the mobile is increasingly being used as a bargaining chip in the negotiations between child and parent. Though we encountered examples of resistance, the teenagers we interviewed appreciated that by putting up with their parents' 'invasions' they could gain greater empowerment. Parents are also more willing to negotiate over curfews and the movements of their children if a phone is immediately available. What is especially interesting about the impact of the phone in this respect is the way in which parents and children have clearly developed a set of rules that are to be followed – such as keeping open lines of communication – as well as compromises, such as texting rather than phoning in certain situations. These phenomena illustrate the degree to which the mobile has quickly become an embedded and vital aspect of relations between parents and their children. Negotiations in which the mobile is a point of reference are then, we suggest, contributing to the detraditionalisation of the family described by Beck and Giddens, among others.

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