



## Existential Field 8:

### Appendix to the Report – Special Focus Pieces Working Report (April 2010)



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## **Working Reports**

Funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme and co-ordinated by Technical University Dortmund, FAMILYPLATFORM gathers a consortium of 12 organisations working together to articulate key questions about the family for the *European Social Science and Humanities Research Agenda 2012-2013*.

There are four key stages to the project. The first is to chart and review the major trends of comparative family research in the EU in 8 '*Existential Fields*' (EF). The second is to critically review existing research on the family, and the third is to build on our understanding of existing issues affecting families and predict future conditions and challenges facing them. The final stage is to bring the results and findings of the previous three stages together, and propose key scientific research questions about families to be tackled with future EU research funding.

This *Working Report* has been produced for the first stage of the project, and is part of a series of reports, as follows:

- EF1. Family Structures & Family Forms**
- EF2. Family Developmental Processes**
- EF3. Major Trends of State Family Policies in Europe**
- EF4a. Family and Living Environment**
- EF4b. Local Politics – Programmes and Best Practice Models**
- EF5. Patterns and Trends of Family Management in the European Union**
- EF6. Social Care and Social Services**
- EF7. Social Inequality and Diversity of Families**
- EF8. Media, Communication and Information Technologies in the European Family**

Both full versions and summaries of *Working Reports* are available to download from the FAMILYPLATFORM website, where stakeholders are invited to comment on the findings, and have an input into the project.

## **Appendix to the Existential Field 8 report: special focus pieces**

<b>1. Diasporic families and media consumption, by Myria Georgiou</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. The place of mobile technology in European families, by Leslie Haddon</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3. Families' digital disadvantage and exclusion, by Ellen Helsper</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4. ICT and intimate relationships, by Ellen Helsper</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>5. Girl culture and Web 2.0, by Yinhan Wang</b>	<b>36</b>

## 1. Diasporic families and media consumption, by Myria Georgiou

### Introduction

When in the spring of 2007 US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials announced the arrest of '350 illegal workers' in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the press office of a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) (Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, MIRA) 'appropriated' the news and instead announced "the arrest of 350 mothers and fathers" ([www.citiesofmigration.ca/taxonomy/media](http://www.citiesofmigration.ca/taxonomy/media), accessed 10/12/09). MIRA's personalised and family-focused campaign has since been celebrated as a success in shifting the migration agenda focus. It managed to achieve sympathetic coverage in the local press, as well as in *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. It also gained unprecedented support among the local community and across families of different backgrounds and class.

This case indeed represents a characteristic example of the 'power of the family' as a media narrative. It also reflects the power of the family as a discourse that captures realities of migration and diaspora often underrepresented in the media, and even in research on migration, diaspora and the media. This special focus report summarises the position that family takes in the migration, diaspora and transnationalism literature on the one hand, and in the literature that focuses on ethnicity, migration, diaspora and the media on the other. Learning from these two very broad areas of research (which could be broken down to distinct subcategories, each having particular limitations), this report approaches the diasporic family in two ways.

First, the diasporic family is, like all families, a specific representation of the more universal category of family, that is, an institution playing a key role in the organisation of modern societies. Thus, and unsurprisingly, diasporic media consumption often reflects very familiar media consumption patterns, widely studied among other kinds of families (for example cross-generational tensions for control of media; gendered choices of certain media genres). Second, the diasporic family is discussed in its particularity. This particularity is characterised by a paradox: while migration can interrupt family life, at the same time it can strengthen family relations. This is the case in the diaspora, when the family becomes reaffirmed as a system of support, providing a sense of security and continuity in a life disrupted by mobility and resettlement. Diasporic particularity is as central to media consumption as is family organisation. The consequences of this paradox for media consumption can be summed up in three key points: (i) the interruption of physical contact between family members – a result of migration – has advanced the use of transnational media and communications (especially the mobile phone, the internet and television); (ii) the close relations within families, often intensified in the diaspora, have come hand in hand with everyday shared familial media consumption of certain genres and media (especially television); and (iii) media consumption choices in diasporic families vary between generations. The choices family members make as media consumers between national and transnational media is largely the result of the position they occupy in relation to migration, generation and age.

This special focus report outlines the main elements of academic research on diasporic family and on diasporic media consumption. The report consists of three main sections. The first section provides an overview of the family, migration and diaspora research, thus providing a context for the specific focus. The second section focuses on diasporic media and communications within the European Union (EU) and cross-European research in this area. The third section focuses on migrant and diasporic families and their media consumption, with an emphasis on European research and a brief discussion on future directions and policy implications of this research area.

### **Diasporic and migrant family and migration**

The provenance of most everyday migrant transnationalism is within families. (Vertovec, 2009: 61)

Family is of great relevance to migration and relevant decisions are often made by families and not individuals (Castles and Miller, 2009). For this reason, family tends to be considered to be a central category, or more often it is approached as the taken-for-granted background in the study of migration and diaspora. Relevant literature – mostly within sociology, geography and social policy – approaches family in one of these ways: (i) by focusing on economic life; (ii) by exploring cultural, identity and community continuity or discontinuity; and (iii) by addressing specific challenges presented by diasporic families to multicultural societies. These three broad areas can be broken down in five themes:

- *Family as an economic unit*: the focus is on the contribution of one or more family members to the economic life of the country of origin and to the country of settlement. This research is primarily conducted within the sociology of migration, geography (cf. Sassen, 1999; Stark, 1991; Solomos, 2003), and more recently in transnationalism studies (cf. Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Vertovec, 2009). Family is approached in three ways: the nuclear/extended family migrating; family as a split unit between locations (with the migration of one or more of its members); and family as a unit (re-)created in the country of residence, especially through family reunification systems or marriage in the diaspora.
- *Family in the context of multicultural societies*: this research emerges primarily within sociology and social policy. It looks at the role of the family in mediating specific values in relation to work, participation in the mainstream society and local life and the family in relation to racism. Such work often focuses on social exclusion and standards in housing, employment and education among migrant and minority ethnic families (cf. Solomos, 2003; Benhabib and Resnik, 2009).
- *Family as a component of community and identity construction*: the focus is on the family as a component of diasporic and transnational communities, and the role of the family in sustaining communities, and securing intergenerational cultural reproduction (Guarnizo, 1997). Emotional and cross-generational links within nuclear and extended families are examined in their significance for sustaining distinct communities, especially after long periods in the diaspora. This work is mostly done within diaspora studies and transnationalism studies across social sciences and the humanities (cf. Orellana et al, 2001).
- *Family and gendered migration*: focusing on gendered experiences of migration and diaspora in two ways: first – and mostly within the sociology of migration – specific patterns of gendered migration are examined in their consequences for individuals and for their

participation in/absence from family life (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, quoted in Vertovec, 2009); and the position of men and women within families in the diaspora and how traditional, hegemonic family relations are either reproduced (cf. Koffman) or challenged (cf. Parrenas, 2005) in the diaspora.

- *Family, migration and children*: a smaller number of studies focus on children in particular and on the role migration and diaspora play in their sense of identity and their participation in local, national and transnational communities. There are two distinct elements of research on children. The first focuses on diasporic children within social, economic and cultural contexts in the country of settlement. Wolf (2006) talks of 'emotional transnationalism' among diasporic children, who struggle to find their own identity between the world of their parents and grandparents and their own particular cultural environment. The second strand focuses on fragmented families and the separation of parents from children through parental migration. For example, Lobel (2003) discusses 'long-distance parenthood' as a condition many families live with in the context migration. Often, mothers' migration reshapes families and the mothering role (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, quoted in Vertovec, 2009).

### **Mapping diasporic media in Europe<sup>1</sup>**

A number of European Commission (EC)-funded projects have provided an intellectual space for the development of cross-national and comparative studies on diaspora and media consumption (cf. especially the completed EMTEL2 – Mapping Diasporic Media across the EU; Children in Communication about Migration [CHICAM]; Changing City Spaces: New Challenges to Cultural Policy in Europe; and the ongoing Media and Citizenship: Transnational Television Cultures Reshaping Political Identities in the European Union). All of these projects have applied cross-national frameworks and have combined qualitative and quantitative methods (with an emphasis on qualitative methodologies) in exploring aspects of media production and consumption among diasporic individuals and families. One of their common characteristics, which to a large extent cuts across this field of study, is the little conceptual engagement with *the family*. This is the case, even when family appears as an important empirical category (much of the research takes place with family members, or records family relations and dynamics in

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#### <sup>1</sup> ***EC-funded projects referenced***

- Changing City Spaces: New Challenges to Cultural Policy in Europe (2005), final report available at: [www.citynexus.soton.ac.uk/publications01a.htm](http://www.citynexus.soton.ac.uk/publications01a.htm)
- CHICAM (Children in Communication about Migration) (2005), final report available at: [www.chicam.org/finalreports/index.html](http://www.chicam.org/finalreports/index.html)
- EMTEL2 – Mapping Diasporic Media across the EU (2003), final report available at: [www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EMTEL/main1.html](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EMTEL/main1.html)
- Media and Citizenship: Transnational Television Cultures Reshaping Political Identities in the European Union ([www.media-citizenship.eu](http://www.media-citizenship.eu)) (ongoing project)

media consumption and identification). For example, findings about who holds the remote control at home, how women describe their media consumption in gendered home spaces, such as the kitchen, or how young people shift their television choices when watching with their parents and when in their bedrooms, are among some of the most interesting findings of such research. However, in this analysis, there is little discussion about the role of the family per se. Although this research comes with its limitations, it has made a significant contribution to understanding diaspora, media consumption, the family (even if primarily empirically) and culturally diverse Europe. The major conceptual, methodological and empirical contributions of these studies to research on diaspora and the media as a broader field are outlined below. The more specific contributions of research on media, the family and diaspora are outlined in the following section.

- *Media worlds*: boundaries between media production and consumption are often blurred in migrant and diasporic media and communications practices (Georgiou, 2003, 2007; Kosnick, 2004). This happens in two ways. First, and in the case of small-scale local ethnic media, producers and consumers come from the same community, and even from the same extended families and networks of kin; second, in the case of the internet, which is the area of the most active diasporic media production alongside local media, the producers are also consumers; online diasporic media environments tend to be interactive and they tend to avoid boundary-setting between producers and consumers.
- *Blurring of borders between cultural and political spheres*: the extensive and cross-national empirical research conducted within these European consortia has revealed anxieties and tensions that relate to migration, to the culturally diverse environments where diasporic groups live and to political and policy frameworks of exclusion. While the projects have had a primarily cultural (and media) focus, they have in various cases revealed anxieties that cut across the political, economic and cultural spheres.
- *Methodological diversity*: these large-scale research projects have employed different methods to examine the diverse elements of diasporic mediascapes and media practices across Europe. In this way, they have contributed to research that applies multilevelled, comparative and cross-national methodological approaches to the study of media consumption.

### **Migrant and diasporic families and media consumption**

[Transnational] networks surrounding transnational families allow for the circulation of people, goods, jobs, and information as well as for the re-creation and modification of cultural values and practices. (Vertovec, 2009: 63)

There is a paradox in the discussion of the family in media and diaspora literature: family is both on the background and on the core of research. The family is the assumed context in most of the migrant and diasporic media consumption research but it is rarely discussed as a significant analytical category per se. In its ever presence, the family is studied with the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, and through long and short-term empirical studies. What a large number of studies in this field observes is a high level of mediation in family relations. The main themes that appear in the discussion and analysis of diasporic families and media consumption research are outlined below:

- A number of empirical studies illustrate the negotiation of gender, age and generation identities around the use of the media (cf. Gillespie, 1995; Georgiou, 2006; Guedes-Bailey, 2007). The gendered control of the remote control, for example, is an element of the discussion. However, this particular discussion is enriched by others focusing on the shifts observed in the control of the remote control between the mother and the father, or even, the grandfather and the grandmother, who are sometimes granted privileged control of the remote control as a sign of respect within the extended family (Aly and Georgiou, 2009).
- Television consumption shapes a cultural space of commonality for diasporic families and cross-generational communication (Gillespie, 1995; Georgiou, 2006; de Block et al, 2005). Around the television set a process of cultural and linguistic translation often takes place, with parents translating diasporic televisions' language and meanings to their children and children fulfilling the same role in the case of national television.
- Diasporic media consumption is diverse. Individual family members consume diasporic media in the banal ways they consume any other media, making their choices based on preferences and interests, not based on essentialist identities and pre-given commitments to a specific (national) community (Aksoy and Robins, 2000). Young people's diverse media use reflects more clearly than in the case of other generations the complexity of their media worlds (de Block et al, 2005).
- The media, and especially television, become important tools in sustaining ethnic and transnational identities and transnational connections (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Adoni et al, 2006). Across generations, media and communication technologies have been appropriated and are being acknowledged as tools that sustain links with friends and family across boundaries and provide a lively and immediate space for everyday transnational interpersonal and familial connections.
- The focus on young family members and their media use has provided an interesting insight into the diasporic family life. Like other young people, children in diasporic families shift their media consumption between different spaces of the household (for example group television viewing in the living room and private television viewing or use of the internet in their bedroom) (Georgiou, 2006; Gillespie, 1995). An additional interesting element of this discussion is the shift between linguistic zones in media consumption, with media in diasporic language consumed in the living room and media in the language of the country of residence dominating in individual consumption. An exception to that linguistic pattern is music. Pop music from the country of origin is often consumed across generations and domestic spaces, in groups and individually.
- Children in diaspora are active agents who construct their identities and make meanings through their use of the media and communication technologies. In this way, children shape cultural spaces that are separate from the adult world (de Leeuw and Rydin, 2007).
- Long distance relations sustained between parents and children separated through migration represent a distinct communication space within and across transnational families. Parrenas (2005) discusses the intense exchange of text messages and phone calls between migrant mothers and their children, while Madianou (2006) writes about uses of the internet and mobile phone among separated families primarily in order to sustain relationships more than for the purpose of sustaining ethnic identities. This distance (mediated) parenting causes stress and financial pressures to parents who have to organise the family through mediated communication (Mahler, quoted in Vertovec, 2009).
- Diasporic families often appear critical towards mainstream national and transnational media. The main reason mentioned in various research projects and across generations is



the sense of misrepresentation of minorities in mainstream media. This is an important issue with political and policy implications and has raised concerns about the alienation of minorities from the mainstream public sphere (Campion, 2005; Downing and Husband, 2005; Georgiou, 2010).

### **Reflections on future trends**

The field of diaspora and media consumption research is quite young. Its focus and direction thus far has been primarily empirical. This orientation has two implications as regards its relevance and influence. First, its theoretical influence on the family and media consumption research, and even more so, on the broader field of media consumption research, has been quite limited. At the same time, and as some of the most rigorous and extensive recent research with media audiences has taken place with diasporic groups, and families in particular, this subfield has made significant methodological and epistemological contributions. The short history and intellectual heritage of this field, as juxtaposed with current theoretical developments in social sciences and the generational shifts in both families and the media, could lead to a number of developments as regards this field's intellectual orientation:

- Qualitative empirical studies – with ethnographic approaches predominating – will continue defining the directions of research on diasporic family media consumption to a large extent.
- The transnational and cross-national orientation of empirical research will probably intensify, with more studies looking at networks and connections across geographical and national boundaries. This area of study is largely influenced by theoretical work in the wider fields of transnationalism, globalisation, cosmopolitanism and the media. As these fields increasingly emphasise the significance of transnational networks and connections, it is very likely that research on diaspora and the media will do so as well.
- The currently *niche* studies focusing on interfamilial relations and emotional attachments to loved ones through transnational mediated networks will possibly expand as it provides a new way to look at the cosmopolitan orientation and experience of transnational subjects (beyond the national and community framework).
- The generational change within diasporic families, the increasing levels of media literacy and the growing diversification of media consumption among young diasporic subjects will provide increasingly interesting and challenging areas to explore empirically.
- The political context, characterised by the retreat of multicultural politics across Europe and the growing public debates on minorities' rights and responsibilities in European societies, has increasingly put its mark on this area of study. Questions of citizenship and belonging in relation to media consumption, especially among young people, will probably become more central to this area of study in the very near future.

### **Reflections on relevant policy issues**

The policy implications of the research outlined above are multiple and cut across policies on citizenship, cultural diversity, migration policies, media representations and diversification of mediascapes. The main implications are briefly presented in this section:

- Fair representation of ethnic and diasporic minorities in mainstream national and western media remains a key area that attracts the attention of diasporic audiences. Very often they

feel they are misrepresented, and while they continue using mainstream media, their discourse often reveals a distance and alienation from those media. Importantly, such attitudes cut across generations.

- Media consumption among diasporic families tends to be very rich and cuts across linguistic and geographical zones. More often than not research shows that diverse media uses – including diasporic media and media from the country of origin, as well as national and transnational media of various origins – advance media literacy. There is little evidence to support concerns sometimes heard among political and policy circles about the emergence of competing to the national and European public spheres around diasporic media uses; although this is a possibility, empirical research shows that this is a marginal phenomenon.
- Young diasporic people born in the diaspora often find themselves in spaces ‘in-between’ different cultural spheres they have attachments to. It is important for media policy to address the informational and representational needs and interests of this generation, especially when they do not necessarily fit within a singular national imaginary.
- Media consumption among diasporic families reveals the juxtaposition of politics and culture in everyday life, especially as it becomes part of the narratives of identity and belonging within family domains and around media use. Policy in both the cultural sphere and the sphere of political representation needs to draw from research (and possibly develop it further) in order to understand how some minority groups develop a sense of exclusion and alienation in relation to (mediated) dominant narratives of identity and citizenship.

## 2. The place of mobile technology in European families, by Leslie Haddon

### Introduction

In order to understand the logic of this report, we start with a broad overview of research on mobile technologies (and the family):

- The majority of research on mobile technologies has focused on the mobile phone.
- In principle, mobile technologies could include a range of devices including laptops, audio-visual devices (for example portable DVDs, MP4 players) and mobile games. In practice, apart from a few studies of mobile audio devices (Du Gay et al, 1997; Bull, 2007), there has been little to no research on these developments and none specifically relating to the family or children.
- While most mobile phone research has focused on mobile communication, there has been research on the mobile phone as a platform for other functionalities: the camera phone, its capacity to support audio and more recently the internet and television (Green and Haddon, 2008). Again, almost none of this relates to the family.
- Finally, the launch of the iPhone and related apps is still sufficiently recent that no research on usage has been published.

Although the last decade has seen the growth of a substantial literature of mobile phones, only a small part of that covers young people and the mobile phone, and most of this does not relate to family interactions but rather to peers, texting, sharing camera phone photos, identity, behaviour and regulation in public spaces, etc (for a review, see Green and Haddon, 2009). Hence, only a very small subsection of the mobile phone literature is actually relevant to this report and geographically within Europe<sup>1</sup> most of this material comes from the UK and Norway, with some from Finland.

The main topic of this literature is parent–child relationships. While these are not the only aspect of family life, there is almost no research specifically on mobile technologies' role in relation to the parent's relationships with each other, apart from that focusing on how the mobile phone allows them to coordinate better the logistics of everyday life (Ling, 2004). The only dimension, for example, that related to the division of domestic labour was very early US research pointing out how the mobile phone supported remote mothering (Rakow and Navaro, 1993).

Hence this report outlines the findings of qualitative and quantitative empirical research on parent–child relations:<sup>2</sup>

- outlining current trends in terms of the age when children acquire mobile phones as well as changes in the technology itself;
- examining:
  - factors shaping the initial willingness of parents to give or allow children to have mobile phones;
  - issues concerning parents' ability to monitor their children; and
  - the role of the mobile phone in supporting children's independence from the family.

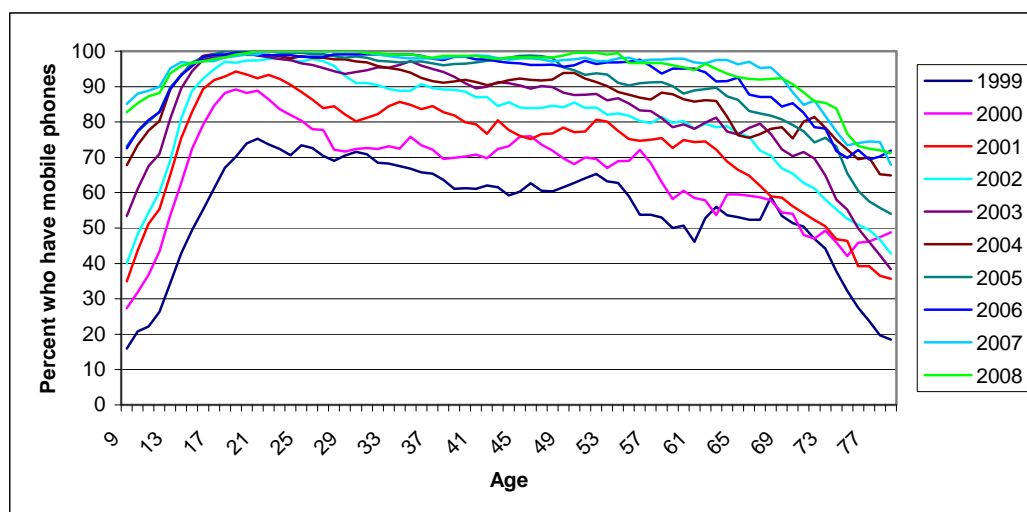
The report then puts this into a wider context by considering the implications of the social construction of childhood and parenthood literature, before outlining other roles that the mobile can have in family life, potential further research and finally areas of policy interest.

## Trends

### *Age trends*

If the mass market for the mobile phone opened up in the mid-1990s, teenagers started to have (and sometimes own) this technology within a few years and over the last decade the age at which children acquire mobile phones has steadily declined (a trend already being discussed by Ling and Helmersen in 2000). This can be seen in Figure 1 for Norway.<sup>3</sup> The bottom lines on the graph chart the earlier years, starting in 1999, when about 50% of 17-year-olds had mobile phones while by about 2004 100% of 17-year-olds had them. About 70% of Norwegian nine-year-olds had mobile phones by 2004 and, looking at the top line, the figure was over 80% by 2008. By comparison, one small-scale UK survey in 2004 found that 45% of 10- and 11-year-olds at primary schools had mobile phones (Davie et al, 2004), while 53% of British 8- to 10-year-olds had mobile phones in 2009 (Ofcom, 2009a). This underlines the fact that Norwegian figures are generally high compared to other countries, but nevertheless the general trend they show applies elsewhere.

Figure 1 Norwegian adoption of mobile phones by age (7- to 79-year-olds)



Source: Norwegian statistics bureau, assembled by Rich Ling, 2010, personal communication

- While one must be very wary of interpreting the claims of young children, there is some evidence that an interest in mobile phones is spreading down to these pre-teens, rather than mobiles simply being issued to them by parents (Haddon and Vincent, 2007).
- It is often argued that the interest in this technology and mobile phone usage of teenagers reflects aspects of their lives at this age stage, implicitly in contrast to younger children: they have wider social networks to stay in contact with and more independent mobility (discussed below). Existing figures suggest that while there is

some truth in this, the behaviour of older pre-teens may to an extent overlap with that of teenagers (Haddon and Vincent, 2007).

### *Technology trends*

Beyond looking at adoption patterns, the mobile phones that children have are themselves evolving and supporting new practices:

- The most significant technological development discussed in the research literature is texting, pioneered by teenagers and young adults (Ling, 2004; Green and Haddon, 2009).
- The camera phone made it easier for young people to take pictures, share and post them, which also raised issues around what they could take pictures of (for example in schools) and around cyberbullying using these pictures.
- The audio-capability not only supplied an alternative functionality to MP3 players but also, in conjunction with the Bluetooth facility increasingly present in phones, supported the practices of peer-to-peer face-to-face sharing of audio and other material (Haddon and Vincent, 2009).<sup>4</sup>
- Internet access via the mobile phone has given rise to concerns about what children may be able to access online in private (Haddon, 2007).

### **Children's changing circumstances and the mobile phone**

There is some evidence to suggest that the changing circumstances of children have had some bearing on their acquisition of mobile phone technology. One key change in the experience of many children, more so in some European countries than others, relates to children's greater absence from unsupervised public spaces (Büchner, 1990; Livingstone, 2002). Many social activities that in the past took place in public are increasingly taking place in the home. A number of factors shape this experience besides general affluence, some more country-specific than others. For example, in Britain, the last decade or two has also seen a growing concern about children's safety in public spaces.

### *Bedroom culture and the mobile phone*

- This socialising in the home has been identified in a European study of children as 'bedroom culture', reflecting the fact that a high proportion of European children, especially teenagers, who had their own room (for example 82% of 15- to 16-year-olds in the UK) (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001).
- This is relevant for parents' ability to monitor what their children are doing: while they can have peace of mind through knowing where their children are, they are less able to see what various technologies are being used for and who children are communicating with in these private spaces within the home.
- This is also relevant for the mobile phone, because it is not just a portable device but a personal one, enabling children to make private calls within the home rather than using fixed lines where conversations can be overheard and calls can be answered by other family members. In one Scottish study, children said that this was one of the main motivations for children to use mobiles in the home instead of using the home phone (SACOT, 2003), and subsequent UK research showed how some children had to trade off making 'free' fixed line calls against paying for private mobile phone calls (Haddon and Vincent, 2009).

### *Children's mobility and the mobile phone*

The increase in time spent in supervised spaces has also had implications for children's mobility. They spend time not just in their own homes but also in those of their friends and time involved in post-school activities (Büchner, 1990; Klamer et al, 2000), which often requires parents to ferry their children around by car. Hence parents provide children with, or partly subsidise, their mobile phones in order to organise the logistics associated with this mobility, as well as addressing more general parental concerns about times when children are out of the home (Fortunati and Manganelli, 2002; Oksman and Turtiainen, 2004; Green and Haddon, 2009).

### **The meaning of the mobile phone for children**

- A collection of national reports on mobile technology adoption covering many European countries showed that the youngest of young people see the mobile as something natural, the same as the previous generation saw the television as natural on being born and growing up with it (Lorente, 2002: 16). In that same collection Fortunati and Manganelli (2002) note the concept of virtual brother/sisterhood whereby the mobile phone creates siblings outside the family and in Finland, Rautiainen (2002) concludes that mobile communication of under 10-year-olds is usually directed to the family: its primary function is to serve as a link between the child and the parents.

### **Parental surveillance**

The arrival of the mobile phone has had mixed implications for parental surveillance of children,<sup>5</sup> especially teenagers, outside of the home.

- Parents can phone to check up on their children when the latter are out of the home – where the mobile phone has been referred to as a 'digital leash' (Ling, 2004).
- Teenagers sometimes allow such parental surveillance simply in order to gain possession of a mobile phone (Green, 2001). Indeed, some teenagers accept parental arguments about safety as being legitimate (Green, 2000).
- Yet, at other times they resist such monitoring, as documented in more detail below.
- The mobile phone has increased children's capability to organise their social life beyond the surveillance of parents (Ling and Helmersen, 2000), that is, the parents cannot know who they are talking to and about what.<sup>6</sup> While from the viewpoint of the parent, this decreases the parents' ability to monitor children's communications, from the viewpoint of the child it increases their own privacy.
- The introduction of mass market location-based services has at least the potential to renew tensions around the parental monitoring of their children. In a UK study, 71% of parents thought it was reasonable to use such services to keep track of 13- to 16-year-olds, while only 35% of the 11- to 17-year-old interviewees agreed (Mobile Life, 2006). In the UK, children can opt out of this service independently, whereas in other countries this is not always the case – similar services in Finland, for example, do not allow children under 14 to opt-out (Wray, 2004).

Vincent (2004: 2) stresses that mobile phones are now "a key feature in the maturation of 11 to 16 year olds being used by them as a symbol for the 'coming of age' and by their parents as a means of contributing to managing the social and economic development of their children". Her

findings from a qualitative study involving the maintenance of diaries reveal further details about this surveillance:

- some parents are more tethered to their children than vice versa, making more calls to them to check they are okay at times when the child feels this is an unnecessary intrusion;
- fathers will text children, mostly daughters, with messages to say they are thinking of them, mothers are more direct and phone to check if they are okay or need help. Girls complained about their mothers but quite liked the texts from fathers;
- distance from home, parents working and not at home, and other family issues appear to affect when the mobile phone is acquired for children's use, how much it is used and how dependent families are on it.

There is another, different issue, relating to parental monitoring of the mobile phone. This relates to its role as a platform for accessing the internet:

- There are a number of policy concerns about, and research related to, online risks faced by children (see Livingstone and Haddon, 2009a).
- This has led to various degrees of parental monitoring of children's internet use when in the home.
- The increasing availability of internet access on mobile phones raised issues of what children could access when out of the home, beyond overt supervision.

However, recent research has shown that at this point in time, most children have limited resources and are cost sensitive and so internet access through the phone is for many too expensive (Haddon and Vincent, 2009).

### **Managed independence**

#### *Children's resistance to surveillance and management of parents*

Some studies emphasise the exercise of power within the family, and hence tensions and conflict between parents and children, where if parents are trying to manage their children the reverse is also true:

- Children develop various 'parent management strategies' to maximise their use of the mobile phone and avoid parental monitoring (Green and Haddon, 2009), including switching the phone to voice mail, turning the phone off or giving the excuse that 'the battery ran out'.
- In a UK survey, 37% of children claimed they sometimes dodged calls from their parents in this way (Mobile Life, 2006).
- A Japanese study described a phenomenon whereby young people often made an effort to keep their parents 'in the dark' about the content of their personal emails and voice calls (Ito, 2005).
- Young people also employ strategies such as appealing to one parent or another for further payment on the mobile phone, and use the argument of 'safety' to secure additional funding for their use (Green, 2000; Ling and Yttri, 2006).

However, not all studies view family relationships in terms of such conflicts, with winners and losers. In fact, some writers suggest that in general there is a trend towards more parent–child negotiation as opposed to more traditional forms of exercising parental authority (Williams and Williams, 2005). This, they argue, reflects a trend whereby family life has become more ‘democratic’ in recent decades, allowing the greater involvement of children in household decision making, as also noted by French researchers (Jouet, 2000; Pasquier, 2001).

- One British qualitative study of households showed how providing a mobile phone was a way for parents to help manage the process by which their teenage children became more independent, a gesture allowing young people more privacy yet enabling parents and children, for example, to check in with each other when young people were exploring new spaces (Nafus and Tracey, 2002).
- Another qualitative study of 15- to 16-year-olds also demonstrated not so much conflict between children and parents over their contactability but rather trade-offs and compromise (Williams and Williams, 2005). For example, if they provided reassurance in relation to parents’ concern about ‘stranger danger’, then they could often negotiate staying out longer, past the original curfew time; 53% of children claimed that they could stay out later by virtue of having a mobile; 35% of the parents agreed (Mobile Life, 2006).
- In order not to be too disruptive to children’s social life, a number of parents choose to text rather than make a phone call, which teenagers certainly appreciate as being more discrete (Williams and Williams, 2005). One Finnish study noted how some teenagers requested this (Oksman and Turtiainen, 2004).
- Both young people and their parents recognised the importance of children’s mobile phone use as an important step towards independence, both symbolically as a ‘foot in the door of adulthood’ (Ling and Helmersen, 2000: 23), and practically, by encouraging children to take more responsibility for themselves. One example from a qualitative British study of teenagers and their parents involved parents persuading children to think about and limit the mobile calls they made if these were paid for from the family budget (Harper, 2005), and sometimes parents arrange for older teenagers to pay for some of their own bill (Ling and Helmersen, 2000; Haddon and Vincent, 2007).

### **The social construction of childhood and parenthood**

At this point it is worth taking a step back from the details of mobile phone research to consider some broader discussions of children’s (and parents’) changing experiences.

- The social construction of children literature demonstrates how expectations of children’s roles, their independence, their knowledge etc, are relative both in the sense that they can vary by culture and country and change over time (see, for example, James and Prout, 1997). For example, in different time periods (and in different cultures) we might anticipate variations in adults’ understanding of how children will make sense of media images or content, as well as adults’ views about what children have to be protected from or can be exposed to.
- To talk of parenthood as a social construct refers to social factors influencing what counts as being a ‘good parent’, the expectations parents feel they should have of their children and how they should approach the parental role.



- Over a decade ago one Norwegian researcher raised the question of whether such advice to parents, or concerns raised about risks to children, was leading to children having less autonomy and responsibility and being more protected, making less decisions and experiencing more restrictions in their daily activities (Vestby, 1994).

Moreover this has a cross-national dimension:

- In a recent comparative study of newspapers in 14 European countries, although these media advised readers (and hence parents) about online risks to children, different national media emphasised different risks (for example online content encountered, versus contacts made online, versus children's conduct online) (Haddon and Stald, 2009). Those media may themselves reflect wider perspectives in their cultures, but the result is that they are potentially drawing parents' attention to different risks, different concerns, in the various countries, that is, constructing parental roles slightly differently.

This has implications for European-wide policy, since the same policy, the same recommendations, may be adopted differently in different countries because of different national perceptions of concerns parents should have about children, how interventionist they should be and how they should mediate their children's lives.

This wider context contributes to parents being concerned about the potential dangers to their children and wishing to monitor their lives. That said, there seems to have been little media, expert or policy advice to parents specifically about the mobile phone and children (apart from health concerns) compared to that relating to the internet.

### **Other roles of mobile technologies**

Apart from the more general issues of surveillance and achieving independence, mobile technologies can also play other roles in children's lives. While some may be specific to children and young people, others can be similar to their use by adults, although perhaps framed slightly differently.

#### *Time filling and occupying children*

- When adults discuss using the mobile phone (and by implication other technologies like the laptop) in otherwise 'dead time', this is sometimes justified (or rationalised) in terms of making efficient use of time. This rationale appears to be used more rarely by children, or when researchers describe children's use. Instead, where mobile technologies of various sorts seem more likely to serve as 'time-fillers', captured for earlier generations by the term 'pastimes' (which could be card playing or board games, but be expanded to cover reading).
- In a British qualitative study of 11- to 16-year-olds, the example most cited by children of situations where these became most attractive was the 'long car journey' (for example to see a relative) (Haddon and Vincent, 2009). But there were many more occasions, especially when visiting as part of a family trip, where children preferred to resort to using mobile technologies, even less demanding ones like playing simple games on mobile phones, 'if you're somewhere where you don't want to be'.

Hence mobile technologies can appeal to parents as devices for managing children in terms of occupying children under these circumstances, although sometimes this evokes mixed feelings if

children prefer to withdraw into their interaction with devices (in past generations, perhaps reading) rather than engaging with those around.

#### *Supporting other activities*

Just as adults say how mobile technologies facilitate working when on the move, children volunteered how more affordable internet access on the mobile phone might help them with doing homework when travelling (Haddon and Vincent, 2009).

- Just like adults, children could think of how accessing information could be very useful in certain circumstances, such as the ability to look up transport timetables. Some children had already checked shop opening hours via their mobiles when travelling around with their families (Haddon and Vincent, 2009).
- Like adults, they can use some mobile technologies to share some experiences, such as using the camera phone to take pictures of spontaneous moments such as at family events.

This reminds us that although there may be concerns about mobile phones and cyberbullying, or concerns about access to the mobile internet, children's lives can be enhanced by mobile technologies, which parents can potentially appreciate.

#### *Communication as gifts*

The purpose of some messages lies not so much in the content but rather in the act of having made contact, demonstrating that the sender had thought of someone enough to give them the gift of a text or a call, known as 'phatic' communication. A number of European studies of teenagers have therefore drawn on the anthropological concept of the 'gift relationship' (for example Nafus and Tracey, 2002; Taylor and Harper, 2003), where some gifts, such as the 'goodnight' text to a boyfriend or girlfriend, may also be expected, and where one may also be expected to reciprocate, responding to such gifts. In the mobile phone literature this has mainly been discussed in relation to communication as gifts between peers, but in principle it could be extended to communication gifts between family members.

#### **Future research**

Much of the research on parent-child relationships and mobile phones is in the UK and Norway, whereas more of the Finnish, German, Italian and other national literatures focus on peer relationships. Therefore, it would be useful to research the extent to which some of the parent-child analysis emerging from these two European countries applies in others.

- For example, how common in other countries is the combination of bedroom culture, the movement of children between supervised spaces and fears about children's safety in public spaces, all of which can effect how parents feel about children's mobile phone use and their interest in knowing their children's location?
- Since parent-child relations (including those relating to the mobile phone) can also be affected by national social constructions of parenthood and childhood, how much country variation is there in the age at which children are allowed to be more independent and unsupervised (and have mobile phones) and are there differences in (societal expectations about) parental mediation of mobile phone use?

As regards other research topics:

- It is worth continuing to monitor children's use of (and parents' concerns about) the internet accessed via the mobile phone, especially if prices change to make this more affordable for children or if changing fashions influence children's internet use (for example with the iPhone).
- Given that previous research showed that even young people pointed to the limitations of the mobile phone's screen size and mode of input (Haddon and Vincent, 2009), children's use of laptops to access the internet merits future research.
- Previous cohorts of teenagers who first adopted the mobile phone are just starting to reach the point in the life course when they are becoming parents. Future research might pay attention to what difference this makes to parent-child interactions relating to the mobile phone (for example if the new parent generation had themselves been used to texting in their youth).
- Given the lack of research on how the mobile phone (or mobile technologies) fit into the relationship between parents, there is scope for asking how such these technologies help parents to manage being a couple (who have children), to manage (the division of) domestic labour, to manage connections with the wider extended family (including their own parents) and wider social networks, to manage family leisure, to manage how the family presents itself to the rest of the world, etc. In general, this is the agenda of those researchers looking at the 'domestication' of technologies, here applied to mobile technologies.

### **Connections with existing policy**

- Apart from perhaps some health concerns about mobile phone radiation, the mobile phone as a communications device appears to have attracted very little overall policy interest. Carrying them or using them in schools has been an issue for schools and led to regulations in those institutions, but it is unclear whether this has affected negotiations within families.
- The camera phone raised regulation issues as regards what pictures could be taken where – they are banned from use in certain settings (for example changing rooms). Again, what implications this has had for families is unclear (apart from how taking pictures of children generally is affected by child pornography legislation).
- Cyberbullying concerns have emerged about bullying by texting and the sending and posting of pictures children take of other children using the mobile phone, a topic that has also been researched (see Save the Children, Finland, 2005; Smith et al, 2006; Noret and Rivers, 2007). This is a growing area of interest in the EC's Safer Internet programme.<sup>7</sup>
- The link to the internet brought mobile phones into the policy field, leading to some EC discussions with mobile phone operators and a self-regulatory code of conduct relating to the mobile phone as a platform for accessing the internet.<sup>8</sup>
- One recent development that might now be an issue is whether children are allowed to opt in or out of services that might locate them.
- Turning to a different technology, there have been court cases in the UK concerning the 'stealing' of internet access using a laptop to make use of people's unencrypted WI-Fi, which could become more relevant to children's use of this technology.

### 3. Families' digital disadvantage and exclusion, by Ellen Helsper

#### Introduction

The implications of socioeconomic exclusion on everyday life have been well documented. For example, poverty has been related to low educational attainment, health problems and family instability as well as to material disadvantages (Farrington, 1992). This link between exclusion and family life can also be seen in other areas. The European Human Rights Charter (2007) included family, social and informational rights besides economic, health and freedom-related rights. For example, Article 7 directly links the right to family and private life to communication.<sup>9</sup> Thus information and communication as well as family life are now explicit rights.

Besides in policy, information and communication enter into the discourse about social exclusion because widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is seen as one of the ways to overcome economic and social inequalities (EC, 2006). Access to ICT is argued to be vital for participation in society and general well-being because services, products and interactions are moving onto digital platforms. The idea is that universal access to these platforms will create a level playing field in terms of participation in society in which traditional barriers based on social exclusion will no longer play a big role (DeMiranda, 2009). This chapter explores the relationship between social exclusion and engagement with ICT in the context of the contemporary family and its future. It presents definitions of social and digital exclusion, focusing on the current debates about how the two are linked. This discussion is followed by examples of three common types of social exclusion (low education, social isolation and minority status) at the family level and how these are related to (dis)engagement with ICT.

#### Social exclusion: policy and practice

Social exclusion in policy and practice shifted from an economic focus to a broader focus on general well-being.

##### *Policy*

The 1980s saw the rise of the term 'social exclusion' in policy making and academic literature (Chakravarty and D'Ambrosio, 2006; Percy-Smith, 2000; Room, 1999). This use was a reaction to the dominating economic approach to understanding disadvantage in society and had its origins in Europe (Gordon et al, 2000). In 1995, the European Commission (EC) stated in its specification for targeted socioeconomic research, that "for individuals in particular groups, social exclusion represents a progressive process of marginalization leading to economic deprivation and various forms of social and cultural disadvantage". This policy definition clearly goes beyond the economic aspects of deprivation such as employment and income (see also Atkinson et al, 2002; Room, 1999; Sen, 1995).

##### *Practice*

Social exclusion is still mostly measured through economic deprivation as indicated by income, occupation and education, and less frequently by the health and safety aspects of a person's life (Alvi et al, 2007; Social Exclusion Task Force, 2007). Scholars now agree that any study of social inclusion should include at least the following classes of social inclusion (see also Bossert et al,

2007; Chakravarty and D'Ambrosio, 2006): economic, social, cultural, political, psychological and physical. For example, Burchardt et al (2002) proposed that "Measures of social exclusion attempt to identify not only those who lack economic resources but also those whose non-participation arises in different ways: through *discrimination, chronic ill health, geographical location, or cultural identification...*" (p 6). Amartya Sen's (1995, 1999) work on 'capabilities' has motivated practitioners to look at how the environment creates opportunities or excludes people from these; this approach has been influential in digital inclusion research.

### *Current definitions*

Ultimately, policy and practice discussions led to broad definitions of social exclusion that do not explicitly mention the economic aspect traditionally associated with exclusion. A person is seen as socially excluded "... if he or she does not participate in key activities of the society in which he or she lives" (Burchardt et al, 2002: 30); this links disadvantage and exclusion to social isolation (Barry, 1998). The family and peer environment is important in shaping access to resources associated with social inclusion and social isolation (Harris, 1995; Hobcraft, 2002). Parental education and stability of relationships during youth in particular shape general social exclusion of adults (Bynner, 2001; Hobcraft, 2002).

### **Digital exclusion**

Digital exclusion research initially followed the pattern observed in social exclusion policy and practice. It began by focusing on economic barriers to inclusion that prevented people from accessing ICT but moved towards a broader definition that incorporated skills and different types of engagement.

### *Policy*

European Commissioner Reding's statement "Inclusion is a cornerstone of the EU policy in the information society" (EC, 2006) links inclusion and information (and ICT) explicitly. It indicates the recognition of information as a distinguishing element of current society and as a source of inequality. That ICT is seen as a tool that might break down traditional inequalities based on economic and sociodemographic factors is illustrated by a statement made by the EU Employment and Social Affairs Committee (2004): "... eInclusion means also tapping new 'digital opportunities' for the inclusion of socially disadvantaged people and less-favoured areas. The Information Society has the potential to distribute more equally knowledge resources and to offer new job opportunities, also by overcoming the traditional barriers to mobility and geographic distance" (p 1).

**Access:** a lack of access to ICT is potentially problematic not just because access might offer new opportunities but also because many traditional products and services are moved to digital formats such as the internet. Individuals and groups without access might thus be excluded from crucial economic and social resources. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), stated in 2003 that: "A 'digital divide' threatens to exacerbate already-wide gaps between rich and poor, within and among countries. The stakes are high indeed. Timely access to news and information can promote trade, education, employment, health and wealth. One of the hallmarks of the information society – openness – is a crucial ingredient of democracy and good governance. Information and knowledge are also at the heart of efforts to strengthen tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for diversity" (Annan, 2003: 1). In the UK local government plays an important role in this. Helen Millner of the UK Online Centres emphasised

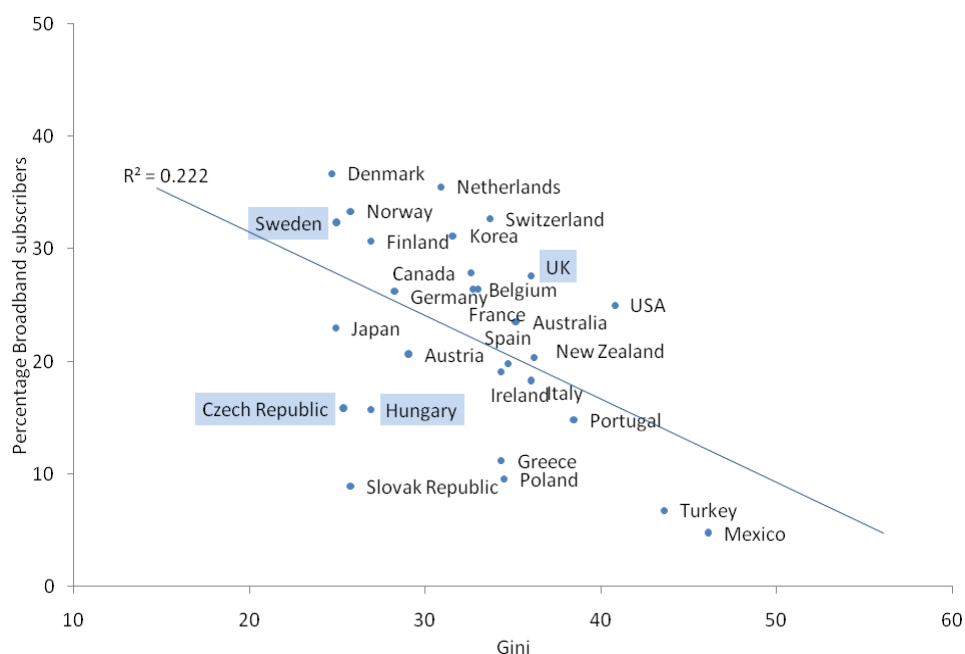
the link between social and digital inclusion by stating: “An estimated 75 per cent of people who are at a ‘social disadvantage’ are also not online which in turn does not bode very well for their economic and/or educational opportunities. Another factor, which must be kept in mind is that while we have narrowed the digital gap somewhat, in the past 3 years, the number of people on the Internet in UK has not gone up” (Milner, 2007).

*Skills and engagement:* based on the idea that access to ICT gives people access to education, information, services and leisure pursuits, policy targets were set by the EU in its Riga Declaration to halve the gap in internet use between groups at risk of exclusion and those who were considered to be advantaged. Further goals were to increase broadband coverage to at least 90%, to make 100% of public websites accessible for people with disabilities and to halve digital literacy gaps for disadvantaged groups.

#### Practice

The reality is that the relationship between social disadvantage and engagement with ICT remains strong in Europe; countries with high levels of inequality tend to have low levels of access (see Figure A).

**Figure A Relationship between the percentage of broadband subscribers in a country and the Gini coefficient (highlighting Sweden, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the UK)**

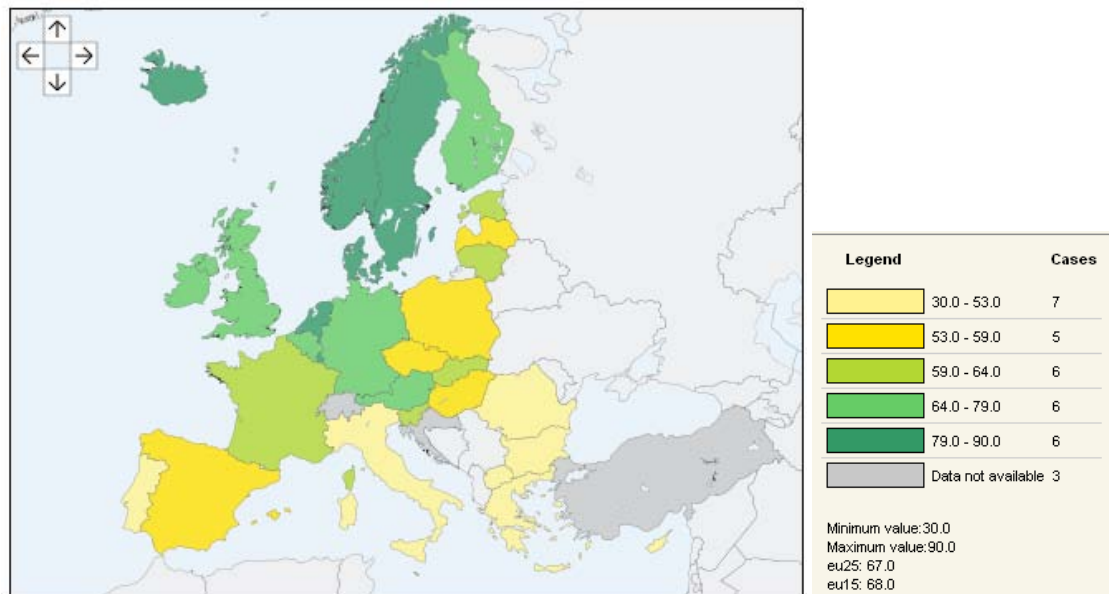


Source: Helsper and Galacz (2009)

The literature about digital exclusion generally identifies four areas from which one can be excluded (Livingstone et al, 2005a; Selwyn, 2004; van Dijk, 2005): access, skills, motivation and types of engagement. While the first three have been the end goal of most digital inclusion initiatives, practical engagement with ICT is what research and interventions seem to be shifting towards (Helsper, under review; Selwyn, 2006).

- **Access:** there continues to be a problem as regards access to ICT, especially in Southern and Eastern European countries (see Figure B).

**Figure B Level of internet access (% of households who have internet access at home, 2009)**



Source: © EuroGeographics Association for the administrative boundaries – Eurobarometer

High quality access to ICT remains strongly linked to social exclusion across the EU (Helsper et al, 2008; Helsper and Galacz, 2009). A few indicators of high quality access are:

- *speed*: always-on and broadband access should lead to a higher quality experience and broader use (Anderson, 2004; Choudrie and Dwivedi, 2005);
- *ubiquity*: a high number of access platforms as well as a greater mobility in accessing content, for example through wireless or 3G connections, are other indicators of high quality access;
- *home access*: the most important entry point to engagement with and access to ICT (Livingstone et al, 2005a; Mumtaz, 2001). The home is in this context more important than community and school access which is often restricted and does not allow for trial and error learning which is the most popular and some say most effective way of learning ICT-related skills (Buckingham, 2005; Jackson et al, 2006; Livingstone, 2003);
- *media richness*: those in a media-rich environment have more skilled, literate and motivated users independent of their socioeconomic background (Helsper and Eynon, 2009).
- **Skills**: skills come with but are not the same as experience with and exposure to technologies (Zillien and Hargittai, 2009). Skills and confidence go hand in hand, that is, skills breed confidence and confidence leads to further skill development (Durndell and Haag,

2002; Eastin, 2005; Harris, 1999; Yang and Lester, 2003). Other ICT skills include (Dutton et al, 2009) (Ofcom, 2006a):

- technical insight
- social and mediated interaction skills
- creative skills
- critical interpretation skills

Based on Bandura's self-efficacy and social learning frameworks one can conclude that the family and its sociocultural context influences self-efficacy levels in relation to all aspects of ICT from a very young age onwards (Bandura, 2006a, 2006b; Bandura and Locke, 2003).

- *Attitudes*: whereas there are classifications emerging of ICT access and skills, there is a less clear development in the classification of different fields of attitudes and motivation. Selwyn's (2004) work suggests that a lack of interest in a technology can be related to a feeling that ICT use is not suitable for a person's social group as well as one's personality. Researchers and practitioners have included opinions about:
  - regulation of content (Dutton et al, 2009; Ofcom, 2009)
  - effects of problematic content such as violence, sexual, political and commercial content (EC, 2008; Milner, 2007; Ofcom, 2009)
  - improvements in productivity, effectiveness and social interaction (Dutton et al, 2009; Volken, 2002)
  - functions of ICT (Helsper, 2009; Millward, 2002)
  - the centrality or importance of ICT in everyday life (Cummings and Kraut, 2002; Jung et al, 2001; Loges and Jung, 2001).
- *Engagement*: most researchers agree that there are different levels of engagement with ICT but agreement about what constitutes high quality engagement is more controversial. Gradations of inclusion should be conceptualised that reflect the different ways of engaging with technologies (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Warschauer, 2004); this has been done in terms of:
  - *breadth*: simple distinctions can be made between basic, intermediate and broad engagement with technologies (Eastin and LaRose, 2000; Helsper, 2008; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007);
  - *type*: there are as many classifications of use as there are researchers; commonly the following can be distinguished: information, financial, social, educational, participatory and entertainment uses (Cho et al, 2003; Helsper, 2009; Stafford, 2004; van Dijk, 2005).

### **Links between social and digital exclusion**

In both social and digital exclusion literatures three important concepts should be flagged up in the context of the family: relativity in exclusion, choice or forced exclusion and compound disadvantage.

- *Relativity*: social exclusion depends on the society and social context the person is in and what activities and resources count towards inclusion at that moment in time (Atkinson et al, 2002; Chakravarty and D'Ambrosio, 2006; Bossert et al, 2007). It is therefore difficult to give an universal definition of the activities that constitute inclusion; research should look at people's estimates of what it means to be digitally included (Anderson, 2005; Anderson and Tracey, 2001; Haddon, 2000; Selwyn, 2004, 2006; Selwyn et al, 2001). The family



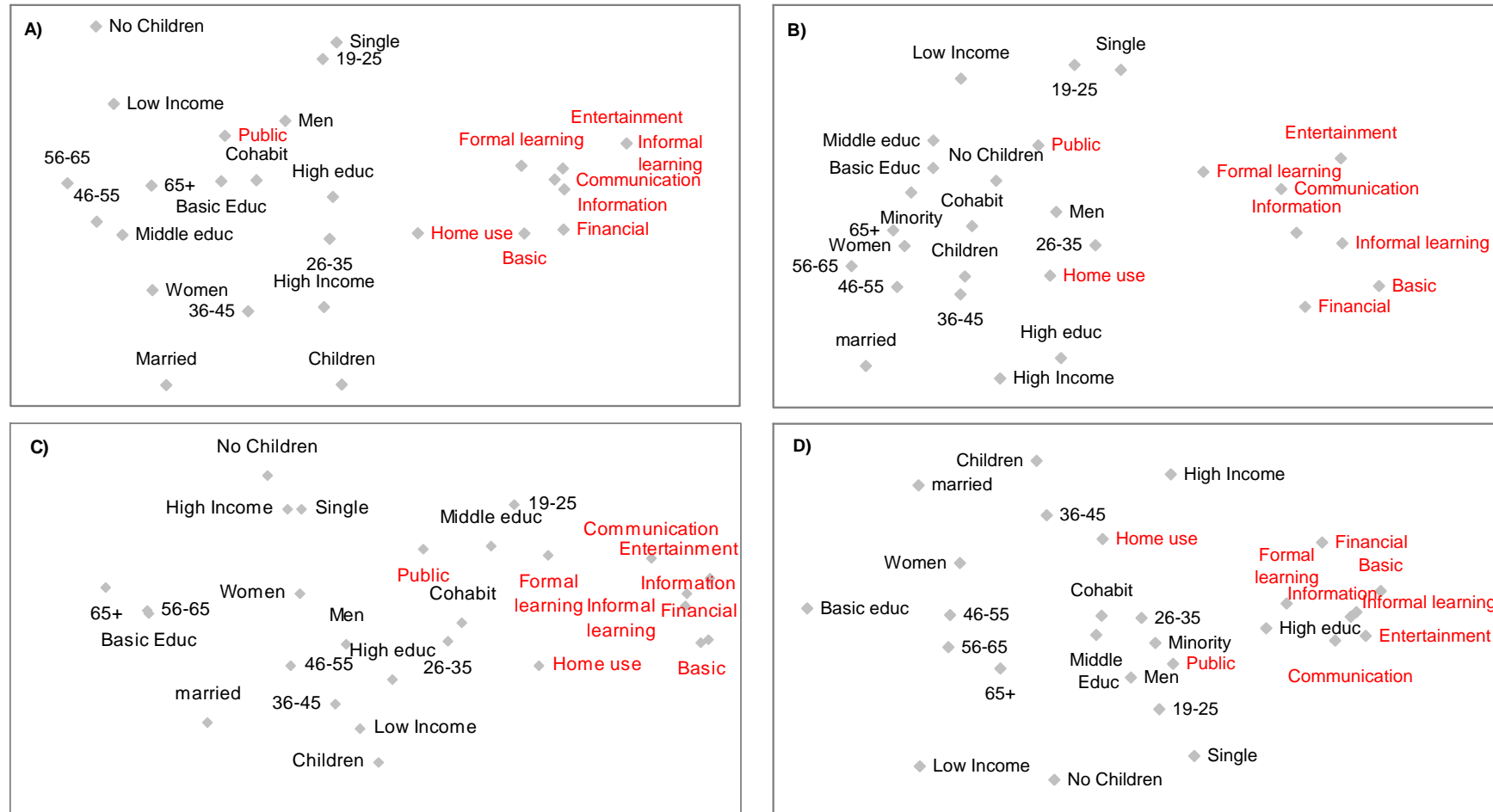
environment is where most people get their reference framework from – what is considered useful or important in everyday life has much to do with how and what we have been brought up with (Bandura, 2006a, 2006b).

- *Choice or forced exclusion*: current research on digital exclusion distinguishes between those who are forcefully excluded ('have nots') and those who choose not to use the technology ('want nots' or 'refuseniks') (Beetham et al, 2009; Eynon and Helsper, under review; Ofcom, 2009; Selwyn, 2006). When asking people directly what motivates them not to engage a mix of reasons are given (Eynon and Helsper, under review). Those who say that it is a cost issue also mention a lack of skills and a lack of interest (Helsper, 2009). This suggests that explanations of digital disengagement are not as straightforward as 'people are just not interested' nor of 'if it would be cheaper everyone would go online', making these black and white categorisations problematic.
- *Compound disadvantage*: when people are excluded in one area they are often also disadvantaged in another (Murie and Mustard, 2004; Shaw et al, 2006; Wolff and Shalit, 2007). Digital inclusion is no different; people who are engaged with one aspect of ICT are also likely to be engaged with others. Families are rarely just disadvantaged in one; they tend to miss out on a range of social and digital opportunities (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007).

There are two paths that are important for this type of research area; the first is whether social exclusion leads to digital exclusion and the second whether engagement with ICT leads to greater social inclusion.

- *Social exclusion > digital disengagement*: classic patterns of exclusion are mirrored in engagement with ICT, that is, people who lack certain resources in everyday life also do not tend to engage with these resources through ICT (see Figure C). Age plays an important role in determining the level of use but social grade, income, education and health within the household determines the variance of use within each age group. In most EU countries, the strongest link is found between engagement and education (Helsper and Galacz, 2009).
- *ICT engagement > social inclusion*: there is little generalisable evidence showing significant improvements in social exclusion after engagement with ICT (LeGuyader, 2009). The *relevance* and *nature* of the experience people have while engaging with ICT have been shown to be important in continued use of ICT, and it follows that these are therefore important in the impact engagement has on social inclusion (Helsper, under review; Selwyn et al, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Warschauer, 2004).

**Figure C Distance between types of digital engagement and social indicators in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Sweden and Britain**



Base: adult internet users (>18 years): (a) Czech Republic ( $n=667$ ); (b) Hungary ( $n=1,150$ ); (c) Sweden ( $n=1,535$ ); (d) Britain ( $n=1,494$ )

Note: Black lettering: social exclusion factors; red lettering: engagement with different aspects of the internet (Helsper and Galacz, 2009). Large distances between social exclusion factors and digital engagement factors indicate strong relationship (for example in Britain [C]). Basic education and 65+ years furthest from any type of engagement).

### A closer look at education, isolation and minority status

The rest of this chapter looks at the links between three specific types of social exclusion: low education, social isolation and minority status are reflected in engagement with ICT within the family. The population in Europe, their engagement with the internet and mobile phones and special issues within these specific groups are discussed.

#### *Low education*

- *Population:* 28% of 25- to 64-year-olds in Europe have no more than secondary education (Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2009).
- *Internet use:* 38% of those with low or no formal education use the internet frequently (87% of those with higher education) (Eurostat, 2009).<sup>10</sup>
- *Mobile phone use:* 87% of those of those with low or no formal education use a mobile phone (97% of those with higher education) (Eurostat, 2009).
- *Special issue – strength of relationship:* the existing evidence suggests that low education more than other socioeconomic factors will determine the level of skill and engagement with ICT (Hargittai, 2007; Hargittai and Walejko, 2008; Jackson et al, 2006). Adults with low levels of education are the least likely to engage with ICT, and when they do engage, the least likely to use it for educational purposes (Helsper and Galacz, 2009). Education level is one of the aspects strongly related to the family context (Goldthorpe, 1996); this means that skills that might be useful for the use of ICT are passed on to the next generation. The EU Kids Online project will offer up-to-date data about this relationship on completion. Similarly evidence is being collected to understand whether generational differences in engagement with ICT are larger in households with lower educational levels. The drive in the UK to give all households with children a broadband internet connection has been criticised for not taking these intergenerational factors into account (Milner, 2009). Mobile phones have a relatively high take-up in lower educated households but their use is less broad (Dutton et al, 2009; Rice and Katz, 2006).
- *Special issue – proxy use:* many individuals who do not have access or use the internet themselves have access to someone who does (Dutton et al, 2009). However, those with lower educational levels are more likely to resort to family members and friends than those with higher educational levels who have a wider range of sources to rely on. This means that the family context for lower educated digitally excluded people is of greater importance in engaging with ICT than in other types of households.

#### *Social isolation (lack of mobility, disability, lack of community ties)*

- *Population:* 3% (social democratic countries) to 11% (in post-Communist countries) of European citizens are socially isolated (Bohnke, 2008); 25% of Europeans have a family member with a disability that impedes participation in society (Eurobarometer, 2001); 16% have a disability (Eurostat, 2009).
- *Internet use:* 28% of people with disabilities use the internet in Europe (SIBIS GPS, 2002, SIBIS GPS-NAS, 2003); 74% of those who feel left out of society do not use the internet (53% of those who do not feel left out) (Eurobarometer 66.2, 2006).
- *Mobile phone use:* limited data<sup>11</sup> suggests that 63% of people with disabilities have their own mobile phone in Europe (Eurobarometer 66.2); 65% of those who feel left out of society have a mobile phone (83% of those who do not feel left out – Eurobarometer 66.2).
- *Special issue – mobility:* families with a person with a disability in the household are expected by outsiders to rely more on ICT but in reality they are still one of the most

disconnected groups in relation to technology (Foley et al, 2003). Disability, especially in combination with older age, is still one of the most important factors in determining digital disengagement (Helsper, 2009). The EU's eAccessibility initiative was formed to make sure that what is available is available to all family members and not only those without a disability (Empirica, 2007).

- *Special issue – reinforcement:* research shows that those who are socially isolated do not have extensive online networks and relationships while extroverts use ICT to strengthen their existing networks (Kraut et al, 2002; Matanda et al, 2004; McKenna and Bargh, 2000). Nevertheless, while people with strong family ties maintain these online more than those with weak ties, those who have the need but lack the ability to interact face-to-face use ICT for these purposes (Mazalin and Moore, 2004). In addition, since the relationship between social isolation and other participation in society differs between countries (Bohnke, 2008), the link between social isolation and digital exclusion is also likely to differ. There is no cross-cultural research in this area so far.
- *Special issue – community isolation:* some groups that have strong family bonds are nonetheless excluded from wider society; Travellers or gypsies are an example of this. Their mobility and cohesion within their community is in contrast to their isolation from and standing in the rest of society. They score very bad on material, physical and mental well-being indicators (Cemlyn et al, 2009; Zeman et al, 2003). There is some evidence that mobile technologies, that is, mobile phones, are widely used by these communities to support existing activities and trades (Jesper et al, 2008; McCaffery, 2009). However, ICT such as the internet that can be more broadly used for, for example education, information and social interaction, remain low in the uptake. Research with this group has focused on the socioeconomic benefits of long distance education (EFECOT, 2006; Padfield, 2003, 2006), but literacy levels are often too low in this community to reach adults and young people suffer from isolation from other communities that might offer to support in this regard. The ready availability and strong oral culture might make these families resistant to using largely text-based modes of interaction such as the internet.

#### *Minority status*

- *Population:* a small proportion of European citizens have experienced discrimination (5% based on age, 3% on 'race'/ethnicity); between 6% and 22% have witnessed discrimination (Marsh and Sahin-Dikmen, 2003). These official numbers are likely to be an under-estimation because they exclude mobile and non-citizen groups (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009); 11% of young people (11- to 15- year-olds) in Europe have been bullied almost weekly, but there are large differences per country (WHO, 2004).
- *Internet use:* 57% of non-European ethnic migrants have internet at home (41% of non-immigrants – Eurobarometer 66.2, 2006); 12% of young people have been bullied online (Hasebrink et al, 2008); there are no European statistics on internet discrimination.
- *Mobile phone use:* 85% of immigrants from outside Europe have a mobile phone (78% of non-immigrants – Eurobarometer 66.2, 2006); there is no data on mobile bullying or discrimination for Europe.
- *Special issue – immigrants:* the studies on technologies with immigrant populations in Europe shows that minority ethnic groups frequently use ICT but that the scope of their use is limited, often confined to person-to person communication and news (Ofcom, 2006; Wilson et al, 2003). Cultural influences as well as a need to network/communicate at a distance determine for different groups how likely they are to use technologies and how likely they are to use them for a wide range of things. There is evidence that access to ICT leads to solidifying of within-group bonds (within the family or minority

community) but not necessarily to increased connections with those in other groups (Byrne, 2007; Parker and Song, 2006).

- *Special issue – bullying*: there is little known about discrimination in participatory online environments (beyond hate sites) even though person to person discrimination is an important source contributing to social exclusion and well-being in general. Bullying and discrimination (Fox, 2005; Guerin, 2005) are clearly linked, and there is no reason that ICT-based bullying is different. Nevertheless, there is scarce research that looks at person-to-person discrimination through ICT. More research as regards how social exclusion factors related to discrimination (for example ethnicity, disability, sexuality) are linked to discrimination through ICT is necessary.

### **Implications of digital inclusion for the future family**

ICT such as the internet and mobile phones are first and foremost about communication and social interaction (see Section 4 that follows); both are important for a healthy family life (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002; Segrin and Flora, 2005; Sillars et al, 1984, 2004). Exclusion from opportunities for learning about ICT and interaction with them at home can therefore mean exclusion from support networks and wider society for those who do not have access or skills to use the communication tools available (Selwyn, 2002, 2004). Socialisation and sociocultural influences within the family strongly influence the way in which people behave and think. The home and the family environment will thus have a large impact on how future families engage with ICT; family life is the basis for skill, motivational, engagement and access aspects of digital exclusion. Inequalities in how ICT skills and types of engagement are distributed among families with different economic and socio-cultural backgrounds are likely to result in persistent disadvantage in the future for children from less fortunate families.

The most recent research shows that currently economics and educational resources of the family are replicated in digital environments. To create societies in which all families are equal, it is important to understand how we can break this vicious cycle for disadvantaged families so that access to services, social relationships, education and information is not dependent on cultural, social or economic background. Of course this is something that cannot be done without a wider focus on social exclusion. Widespread distribution of ICT devices, whether it is mobile phones or internet connections, will not overcome inequalities in skills, motivation and types of engagement since social inequalities are important in determining every stage of the digital inclusion process.

If the family, in whatever shape or form, is seen as the cornerstone of society, it will without doubt continue to be so in a digitised future society. It is therefore important to understand what the influence of family life and resources is on the way we participate in a society that, while sharing many characteristics with current everyday life, requires a greater knowledge and interaction with digital services and products.

## 4. ICT and intimate relationships, by Ellen Helsper

### Introduction

#### *Intimate relationships and interpersonal communication*

The study of interpersonal communication in intimate relationships has a long history in the social sciences, in particular in psychology. Frequent and open communication is one of the most important principles of success in relationships especially in the intimate relationships that make up the family environment (Allen et al, 2008; Burleson and Denton, 1997; Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1990; Stafford and Canary, 1991). This section focuses on how new modes of communication and interaction are influencing the establishment and maintenance of these intimate relationships. It is divided broadly in the following three sections: (i) policy; (ii) establishing relationships; and (ii) maintaining intimate relationships.

### Policy

Two EU policy areas, data protection and harassment protection, have implications for the use of ICT in relation to intimate relationships.

#### *Data protection*

The data that people share through ICT in intimate relationships is highly personal. It is protected from abuse by third parties through the Data Protection Directive (EU). Under this directive personal data can only be shared with others when it complies with quality (collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes), legitimacy (consent), transparency (information of use and 'ownership' of data), right of access (right to see the data kept about you), right to object (right to remove data) and confidentiality of processing requirements (protection against misuse by others).<sup>12</sup> Data about European citizens can only be transferred to third parties outside the EU when they have the same data protection laws. Nevertheless, privacy researchers have argued that very few people read the terms and conditions of the ICT platforms they use for intimate interactions and that continued awareness of information that is kept and transferred to others is very unlikely, even if consent is given when first signing up (see, for example, Acquisti and Gross, 2006).

#### *Stalking and harassment*

There is currently no EU policy that specifically focuses on preventing harassment. It is argued that current laws such as the Protection of Harassment Act (1997) in the UK are sufficient to cover mediated spaces as well. Nevertheless, there are issues of traceability of people committing these acts and debates about whether psychological harassment should be covered as well as acts that might be life threatening.

### Establishing relationships

Widespread use of ICT could change who we meet and who we form intimate relationships with. ICT can be expected to change where we meet and who we meet.

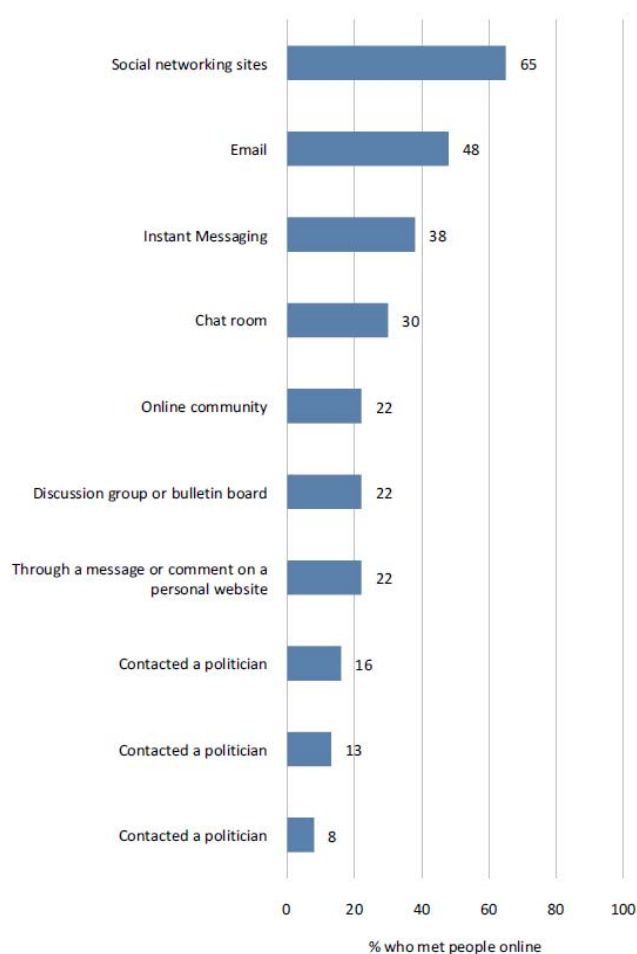
#### *Meeting places*

The first question to be asked is whether we are meeting our potential romantic partners in different locations now that we have access to new spaces for social interaction.

*Prevalence:* while online dating sites are relatively popular, meeting potential partners through traditional means is still far more common (Dutton et al, 2008; Yougov.com, 2007). It is still very uncommon for people who are currently in relationships to have met romantic partners online. Dutton et al (2008) showed that in different countries, between 5% and 10% of married couples who use the internet met their spouse online. This corresponds to data from other sources that shows that about 10% of internet users use the internet for romantic purposes (Gunter et al, 2004; Madden and Lenhart, 2006).

*Location:* the most common sites for meeting new people on the internet are social networking sites or through email and instant messaging applications (see Figure A).

**Figure A UK data on where people meet others online**



Current users who met people online. OxlS 2009: N=538

*Source:* Oxford Internet Surveys 2009 (Dutton et al, 2009)

*Everyday life and practicalities:* researchers argue that the growth of the singles market and the time pressure associated with modern lives has pushed young adults in particular to look to the internet as a place for safe and efficient dating (Barraket and Henry-Waring, 2008; Brym and Lenton, 2003). Among internet-using singles the internet is popular. In the US, about a third of internet users had used online dating sites to look for romantic partners and about 74% said they had used it to look for romance in a variety of ways (Madden and Lenhart, 2006). The EU project, Me, My Spouse and the Internet,<sup>13</sup> should soon release data

on the popularity of online dating in all European countries. Their UK data shows that about one third of married couples who met online used online dating sites in particular; this means that this is a growth market to be reckoned with (Gunter, 2009).

*Acceptability and future prospects:* this percentage is likely to increase, however, since most of these people were young adults and avid internet users and children and teenagers are likely to grow up in an environment in which meeting partners online is more acceptable. Acceptability of online romance is a factor that is strongly associated with establishing long-lasting and committed intimate relationships through the internet (Madden and Lenhart, 2006).

#### *Who we meet*

The reconfiguring access hypothesis posits that ICT could fundamentally change society because it will have an impact on who we meet and thus on who we have children with (Dutton et al, 2008, forthcoming). Taking to extremes, this would implicate that the human gene pool might change.

*Opposites attract:* recent research suggests that there are larger differences in age and income between people who have met partners online, but these differences are not significant (low numbers of people who have met their partners online makes significance testing difficult) and might be due to the special nature of those who have so far been in a position to meet their partners online (Dutton et al, forthcoming).

*Like prefers/marries like:* most research on how we meet new people online focuses on weak ties, that is, on how we make new friends or acquaintances. This research on friendship shows that while we meet people offline that we did not know online, most of our interactions are with people who are very close to us geographically and in socioeconomic background (Baker, 2008; Mesch and Talmud, 2007). Most people we interact with online are already known to us either directly or through friends (Stafford et al, 1999; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 2008). In real life mate selection opposites do not necessarily attract; couples are likely to be similar in, for example, education and ethnicity (Hitsch et al, 2006; Schulz et al, 2008). Recent research suggests that we also tend to seek similarity on the internet (Helsper and Whitty, under review). Using ICT which offers us potential access to a wider variety of people might lead people to look for mates that are more similar to them than they would in everyday life, since in everyday interactions we can be less picky about who we choose to meet or ignore.

*Online dater sociodemographics:* research shows that those who use online dating sites have higher incomes, are more likely to be highly educated and in professional employment (Brym and Lenton, 2003; Schulz et al, 2009). However, reflecting the average internet user, they are not socially more isolated or desperate than those who do not use ICT to meet up with others (Brym and Lenton, 2003; Wellman et al, 2001).

*Relationship experience:* it is more common among young adults than among teenagers or tweenagers to attempt to find a partner online, and research suggests that people who have met their current partner online are more likely to be in a second relationship (Dutton et al, 2009). This means those establishing such relationships have more experience with intimate relationships and establishing a family offline and are probably more aware of what they want and do not want.

#### *After first contact*



After initial contact with a potential partner has been established through ICT, the understanding of and trust in what people present about themselves will determine whether these relationships are taken to a non-mediated context.

*Hyperpersonal interaction:* mediated environments push relationships with strangers to develop more rapidly and intensely. People are more likely to tell very personal things about themselves and tend to be more honest than when they know the person or meet face-to-face (Bargh et al, 2002; Joinson, 2001; Walther, 2007) – the stranger on the bus effect.

*Goals and aims:* if people expect to have to interact with each other again in the near future and have a goal that is shared (for example a romantic relationship), then they are more likely to present themselves honestly (Gibbs et al, 2006; Walther, 2007). In addition, they are likely to use less hyperpersonal and more traditional styles of interaction. On the other hand, people who have met through ICT have been shown to act more like they would ideally like to be in offline relationships because they had to confirm to the (idealised) image presented initially in a mediated context (McKenna and Bargh, 1998; McKenna et al, 2002).

*Strategic interaction:* the presentation of visual images and personal information in phases and the order and timing of these is very important to the success of establishing a relationship through ICT (Rosen et al, 2007; Toma et al, 2008). Intimate relationship formation through ICT is therefore more strategic and controlled and, at the same time, more intense and personal than traditional relationship formation.

*Netiquette and deception:* in relation to digital interpersonal communication researchers distinguish between identity-based (depicting to be someone else or somewhat different) and message-based deception (lying when communicating) (Hancock, 2007). Pure message-based deception is more common in established relationships because identity aspects are clearly already known by the partner (see Section 2 and Hancock, 2007). Those who use ICT to find potential mates mostly share a netiquette which includes an understanding of what is acceptable in terms of extent and type of deception, just like white lies are understood to be acceptable in offline dating rituals (DePaulo et al, 2003; Whitty, 2008). One form of identity-based deception that is not acceptable under established netiquette is married people pretending not to be married on online dating or social interaction sites. Numbers as regards this type of online deception vary widely from 18% to 30% of online daters currently in a relationship (see Section 2 and Gunter, 2009).

### **Maintaining relationships**

Media and popular attention in the area of maintaining relationships emphasises how an obsession with or proliferation of ICT could ‘destroy’ what people see as the nexus of all intimate relationships: face-to-face contact. Addiction to digital content such as pornography, gaming and social interaction and networking are often blamed for breaking up family relationships in the popular press (Tyler, 2002). Academic research is less black and white on how prevalent these activities are and how large and generalisable an impact they have had in changing our everyday interactions (Whitty and Joinson, 2009a). Considering the widespread use of ICT for everyday communication, it is surprising that there is relatively little research about the role that media play in maintaining the most intimate of these relationships (Walther and Tong, 2009). Although there is a growing area of research that deals with infidelity as related to ICT, and some research on how parents and children interact through ICT, there is less research on how they are used in everyday life to maintain relationships between adults and their significant others.

### *Means*

An important question in maintaining relationships is whether the nature of communication has changed with the widespread introduction of ICT.

*Substitution or supplementation:* there is some research on whether in general new media replace old media, which suggests that supplementation of old media with newer media is more likely than substitution (Helsper et al, 2008), but there has been very little research in relation to intimate relationships and family communication in this particular field.

There is generally more evidence for supplementation than for substitution; those in intimate relationships who communicate frequently face-to-face are also more likely to use other means of interaction (Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1998; Whitty et al, 2010).

*Platform choice:* media richness research asserts that the more cues (visual, audio, textual) and the more immediate the medium is, the more likely it will be used for relationships that require trust and intimacy (Hancock et al, 2004). However, this conflicts with the idea promoted by social distance research that says that some types of communication and interaction are actually better served by creating a non-confrontational situation (that is, spatial and temporal distance; see Whitty and Joinson, 2009b). For example, non-emotional, practical communication or interactions where some kind of deception is beneficial would be most likely to occur through ICT that creates more distance between sender and receiver. A feature-based (Hancock et al, 2004) approach has been offered as a solution. This approach argues that it depends on the features of the communication and of the ICT that will be used. For example, deceitful communication requires less recordable, but more synchronous and distributed (not co-present) types of ICT. The idea of recordability is of course also important in intimate relationships. The latest research shows that people in intimate relationships prefer email (a recordable medium) to tell their significant others a lie or something difficult (Whitty and Carville, 2008) over more synchronous modes of communication.

*Support and ubiquity:* important especially when looking at mobile technologies is that people have established what has been described as a 24-hour instant support network by using multiple and mobile ICT (Wajcman et al, 2008). There is always someone available to help out in time of need and as a consequence the boundaries between public and private or between work and home blur in terms of family support (Haddon, 2004). The consequences of this for mutual dependency and individual problem-solving skills are as yet unclear.

*Frequency:* communication using ICT within a family is becoming common place, for example in the US almost two-thirds of grandparents kept in touch through email (Harwood, 2000; Holladay and Siepke, 2007). And students sent emails to their parents almost every day (Trice, 2002). In couples email is still the most popular, but text messaging is gaining in popularity (Stafford et al, 1999; Whitty et al, 2010).

### *Content*

The previous section showed that the frequency with which we communicate and the platforms we use to do this have changed. It is not clear if the nature of the interactions has changed as well.

*Information:* most of the communication over ICT such as mobile phones is what can be called banal or mundane types of communication (Haythornthwaite, 2002, 2002a; Walther

and Tong, 2009). Informational content is not the most important aspect of these types of communication. Researchers argue that the main function is as the cement that holds together the bricks of the family by showing a desire to share with the other (Duck, 2005). ICT can thus strengthen bonds between those in intimate relationships. The research that looks at how people use ICT to manage intimate relationships focuses on long distance relationships.

*Intimacy:* there has been a considerable body of research on the nature of online sexual and romantic communication, also known as cybersex and flirting (Daneback et al, 2005). There is very little knowledge of how cybersex and flirting is used to maintain existing intimate relationships, so it is unclear whether partners use it to supplement existing intimacy or whether there are couples where virtual sexual relationships with their long-term partner are more fulfilling than the 'real life' version. From general research on intimacy it is clear that intimacy is more frequent in the beginning of a relationship and younger couples are indeed more likely to engage in mediated intimacy (unpublished results, Me, My Spouse and the Internet project). Researchers interested in this area are looking at ways in which online environments might be used to solve marital problems in intimacy (Pollock, 2006).

*Pornography:* there is a larger body of research that looks at how these forms of online interaction through ICT might undermine the central adult relationship in the family. A decade ago research showed that general internet addiction led to marital problems in about half of the cases (Young, 1998), and this is not likely to have diminished. Online pornography and sexual interactions have been argued to be more detrimental to intimate relationships because of the ease in availability and the seamless experience of going from one online sex or pornography site to another (Young et al, 2000).

*Infidelity:* under the terms cybercheating and online infidelity researchers have looked at whether the easy access and high levels of anonymity on ICT such as the internet might lead to higher levels of infidelity (Griffiths, 2004), and also into how people perceive online types of intimacy with others in comparison to offline infidelity (Whitty, 2005). This research shows clearly that infidelity is considered just as painful, whether it is done offline or online (Whitty, 2003; Whitty and Joinson, 2009b).

*Netiquette:* research shows that in established intimate relationships, lying is not more likely to occur in ICT-based communication than it is to occur in face-to-face communication (Whitty and Joinson, 2009b). Levels of agreement on the acceptability of online behaviour related to emotional and physical interaction with others are very high in intimate relationships, although women tend to be less accepting (Helsper and Whitty, under review).

*Sociability:* studies on sociability show that people who are good interactors in traditional communication contexts tend to transfer this to online environments (Kraut et al, 2002; Wellman et al, 2001). Those with strong relationships are likely to extend these practices to a variety of digital platforms (Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 1998).

*Conflict resolution:* the most recent research on conflict resolution in intimate relationships shows that those with avoidance strategies benefit from the availability of ICT which offers delayed interaction by using it as a tool to discuss and resolve conflicts that they cannot deal with face-to-face (Whitty et al, 2010). This same research shows that people who have 'healthy' conflict resolution patterns do communicate face-to-face as often as through ICT and are likely to have the same strategies online as offline. In other words, they use more tools than other people to discuss problems in the relationship.

*Surveillance*: a relatively new aspect of intimate relationships in relation to ICT is the possibility to find out a lot about other people through their digital footprint. This is clearly understood in professional contexts where employers look at potential job candidates' social networking sites or other information available on the web (Byrneside, 2008; Coutu et al, 2007; Sprague, 2007). Parents have also taken up monitoring their children's internet use through technical means (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008). Googling someone has become standard in most relationships people enter into. In establishing intimate relationships people are likely to use online available information to decide whether or not the person is worth meeting. New research talks about the warranting function that friends' comments, social networking profiles, photos and other online information play in judging whether what someone says or represents about themselves is true and attractive (Walther et al, 2009). In already established relationships twitter feeds, social networking updates (and statuses) and other information online are perused by partners to find out what their other half is up to. This extensive use of technology is not always for constructive purposes within intimate relationships as recent research on spousal surveillance has shown (Dutton et al, forthcoming; Whitty, 2005).

### **Implications of ICT use for intimate relationships within future families**

Frequent and high quality interpersonal communication will likely remain the most important determinant of healthy intimate relationships. Since the future is likely to bring an increasing digitisation of this communication and since a new generation will be socialised with digitised, 24-hour communication, it is important to figure out how digital media can aid the construction of these relationships in the family. Based on the research conducted so far, we can predict that the tools we use to interact with will continue to change, but there is less evidence that the nature and content of relationship communication will change.

There is currently not sufficient evidence that couples who have met through ICT are different in composition than traditional pairs. Since technology use in general is subject to patterns of digital exclusion, the people who do meet their partners online are slightly different from those who meet through traditional channels. We do not know how this will be in the future when the online population looking for relationships starts to represent the general population more. Similarly, research in this field is too young to understand whether in the future individuals who establish an intimate relationship for the first time will resort as much to ICT as those who are currently in the second round of establishing longer-term intimate relationships. Changes in society are likely to push the formation of relationships through technology, making it easier for people to meet and to establish relationships even at later stages in their lives.

The rule still seems to be that offline sociability and intimacy will be extended into the online world and not replaced by it. However, relationships started within a digital environment seem to make people more strategic in thinking about what ideally they would like themselves and their partners to be, which might lead to these interaction patterns filtering through in real life. In families of the future, spouses might rely on information gathered through all kinds of ICT to demand that their partner acts accordingly. For those with needs to communicate but lacking the tools or skills to communicate productively face-to-face, ICT can offer a stepping-stone to better communication. Of course, compulsive use of ICT and easy access to 'straying' opportunities will also be easier and therefore will form a greater threat to rocky relationships. Online behaviour will likely become a more frequent topic of negotiation and conflict within intimate relationships, not only between parents and children such as is currently the case, but also between the adults around which these

families are built. It is important to understand which types of individuals will be more likely to need or resort to ICT to establish healthy family relationships.

## 5. Girl culture and Web 2.0, by Yinhan Wang

### Girl culture

The period of adolescence is a time when girls are increasingly confronted with the question of femininity; and because the meaning of femininity is itself contested and increasingly fluid in contemporary society, it is not surprising that some girls experience conflicts regarding issues of sexuality, body image, self-esteem, future career plans, etc. Girls' identity work thus involves finding a balance amidst the conflicting ideals regarding femininity (Currie et al, 2006). Starting in the 1990s, academic studies turned attention to girls' lives and culture, largely inspired by psychologist Carol Gilligan and feminist researcher Angela McRobbie, who Mazzarella and Pecora (2007) called the 'foremothers' of girlhood studies.

- Carol Gilligan (1982) challenged the dominant male-biased developmental framework, and introduced an alternative perspective on female youth. She asserted that women's development was not, as male researchers often concluded, incomplete or faulty; rather, women were simply more inclined to think in terms of caring and relationships, thus resulting in different judgement from males.
- McRobbie and Garber's (1976) study drew attention to girls' cultural consumption in a time when cultural studies of youth focused on boys. They argued that, rather than contesting for girls' (in)visibility in male subcultures, the important question was to discover how girls form their own distinctive culture. They contended that a girl's bedroom as a private space was a much more important site of meaning-making for the development of female subjectivity than the streets, and it follows why girls are offered different cultural ritualistic possibilities to resist, hence the term 'bedroom culture'. Since McRobbie and Garber, teenage girls' bedrooms have been conceived by various scholars as a place in which they engage in their identity work by experimenting on multiple possible selves (Harris, 2004).

### What are girls up to online?

While the initial scholarship on girl culture and media focused mainly on girls' consumption activities through the analysis of the representation in the cultural artifacts and girls' reception of these contents (Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007), as internet gains prevalence among young people, and gender gaps in terms of access to and use of the internet narrow in almost all European countries (McQuillan and O'Neill, 2009) and the US (Lenhart et al, 2005), more feminist and childhood scholars are paying attention to girls' new role as producer of culture using productive media technologies.

- Surveys conducted in the US (Lenhart et al, 2007) showed that online girls continue to dominate blog writing (35% compared with 20% of online boys) and photo-posting (54% compared with 40% of online boys), a trend continued from 2005. The fact that a higher percentage of girls are engaged in self-authoring contents online further attests to the idea that girls' 'virtual bedroom culture' is on the rise.
- A review of European and US research on gender differences in content creation online concluded that, even though girls and boys show different preferences as to what kind of online content they publish, girls are "equally as vocal and visible" (McQuillan and O'Neill, 2009: 371) as boys.

- With such trend of increasing online visibility of girls, scholars are calling for a reconceptualisation of 'bedroom culture' as a private domestic space, and argue instead that girls are reconfiguring their bedrooms into a production and distribution space in which they create new publics that can better serve their needs and interests (Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, 2004; Kearney, 2007).

It has been argued that teenagers may preoccupy themselves with three important developmental tasks in their online activities: construction of psychosocial identity, exploration of sexuality and establishment of interpersonal relationships (Subrahmanyam et al, 2009). There is a plethora of research on girls' various forms of cultural production with the facilitation of new media technologies, from film-making, zines production, website construction, blog writing, social networking profiles creations, etc (cf. Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007). The following section discusses the online cultural activities that are popular among, but not limited to, girls.

#### *Consumer culture*

Engaging with consumer culture and commercial media can foster girls' self-expression as well as creativity; it also allows them to experiment with various ideas about femininity rather than being passive consumers, as is often feared (Buckingham, 2009).

- Two UK studies found that for some, the media play the role of cultural resources from which they draw elements to think about themselves with and to talk with (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Nayak and Kehily, 2008).
- Internet provides opportunities for girls to search for information in private (Labre and Walsh-Childers, 2003). In particular, girls who mature earlier than peers may use the media as a 'super peer' to learn about sexual information that is otherwise not discussed in peer groups (Brown, 2005).
- Consumer culture and interactive commercial websites may provide the resources and tools for young people to play with aspects of identity and assess media contents; their activities and their agency are nonetheless situated and framed within the larger commodified spaces that both extend and limit the possibilities of their online activities (Willett, 2009).
- An analysis of the website Beimgirl.com showed that despite the commercial website's intention to provide a space dedicated to girls for exploration of puberty information and products, much of the information provided is commercial-laden, and girls are not given an active role in the creation of contents (Mazzarella, 2008).

#### *Private space for constructing and negotiating identity*

The lack of embodiment of online communication allows girls to construct, articulate and negotiate their identities in manners less constrained by their offline bodies. This identity work takes place through content creation on various platforms:

- One qualitative study of a US-based teenage girls' fan site showed how girls actively engage in the construction of feminine identity through appropriating conventional contents, styles and ideologies in their own fan texts, fan art, etc. It is through such textual

productivity that girls create a private space for them to collectively engage in romantic fandom, a practice often dismissed by adult culture (Mazzarella, 2005).

- A study of British teenagers and young adults found that that an online journal offers a private and controlled space where personal reflections take place, identity is worked up and social networks developed and maintained (Hodkinson and Lincoln, 2008). Others have also remarked that teenagers' home pages design exemplify their identity construction analogous to the decoration of bedroom walls (Chandler and Roberts-Young, 1998; Stern, 2002).
- Girls use instant messaging (IM) as an unsupervised space, to carefully manipulate their online presentation of self, and hence improve their social status; to experiment and discuss sensitive topics such as sexuality; and as a diary in which they articulate and reflect on themselves. But IM could be used to exclude girls from peer groups, and hetero-normative discourse still pervades girls' IM conversations with peers, for despite the changes in communication technologies, girls still live under the constraints of dominant culture (Thiel, 2005).
- A Swedish study showed how Swedish young women aged 15-19 use photographic self-presentation on the largest Swedish internet community to explore and negotiate femininity through playing with style and looks, showing sexual desirability through exposure of body while at the same time being careful to not reveal 'too much' (Elm, 2009).
- Another UK study of girls aged 14-16 also showed that the hypersexualised presentation of women's bodies on the commercial social networking site Bebo constitutes a 'pornified' environment within which girls felt imperative to present themselves online in sexually assertive, and somewhat hypersexualised ways, while navigating the more traditional ideals of modest females in their offline experience (Ringrose, forthcoming).

### *Social relations*

One of the developmental tasks of teenagers is forming and managing their social identities and social relations, as it is through engaging with the public that they could socialise into society. Online social networking sites (SNS) are popular platforms that serve this purpose.

- In general, activities on SNS involve managing one's profiles, friends' network and comments page. They provide teenagers with opportunities to practice impression management and to delineate different social networks depending on their various definitions of public/private, all of which essential for the navigation through complex social worlds (Lange, 2007; boyd, 2008).
- One British study suggested that SNS offer a supportive environment in which younger teens exercise 'digital agency' (p. 55) over identity play, and more importantly, the establishment and maintenance of relationships with peers (Clarke, 2009).
- Creating a profile page is a social endeavour that involves deliberating over performance of one's social identity, from polished to improvised performance. Producing such texts offers a spectrum of 'textual possibilities' (p.88) that allows for children to position themselves in the social in a myriad of ways (Dowdall, 2009).



- A Dutch quantitative survey of teenagers aged 10-17 found that online identity experiments (defined as pretending to be someone else online) is positively related to teenagers communicating with a wide range of people; it therefore increases the opportunities to practise their social skills and improve their social competence (Valkenburg and Peter, 2008).
- Another Norwegian ethnographic study looked at how children aged 11-12 use brands and branded resources to help build their self-presentation on an SNS. Children either collect the resources or elaborate on them; the former requires less work and appears trendier, while the latter requires more creativity but does not necessarily appear as appealing. Since children's main purpose of using SNS is to strengthen their position in the friends' network, children tend to use the more attractive branded resources to competitively present themselves; this social competition thus sustains uniformity and discourages individuality, resulting in social inclusion and exclusion (Skaar, 2009).

### *Exploration of body and sexuality*

Girls and young people alike also look to the internet for exploration and learning about body and sexuality issues, a practice oftentimes innocuous but sometimes eyebrow-raising.

- Girls use websites such as US-based gURL.com as a site where they cultivate sexual identities through verbal expressions of sex-related topics in this all-female website. The website functions as a community-space that allows girls to ask, seek and discuss a wide variety of topics that they are otherwise too shy to ask offline. However, hetero-normative discourse is still present, and girls remind one another about meeting the societal expectations of what constitutes proper and normative femininity (Grisso and Weiss, 2005).
- Girls also use the internet to try out different ways to visually present themselves, in the form of homepages (Stern, 2002), avatar (Thomas, 2007) and photographs (Siibak, 2007).
- Although it has been argued that girls more open display sexuality online than offline (for example sexualised body presentation), a study of photos of girls aged 15-19 on the largest Swedish internet community found that girls' photos more often focus on faces than on bodies, and incidents of provocative (defined as showing 'too much' skin) photos are rare. The differences in findings may be due to the nature of the hosting website, as well as the target audience (Elm, 2009).

However, the exploration of body and sexuality sometimes crosses the boundary and becomes risky when teens have a poor understanding of its consequences. An issue that receives increasing concern is that of 'sexting', defined by Lenhart (2009) as 'the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images by minor teens' (2009: 3).

- According to Lenhart's survey of a nationally representative sample of teens aged 12-17, 4% of teens with mobile phones have 'sexted', while 15% of teens with mobile phones have received such photos. Older teens and those who pay their own mobile bills are among the more likely to 'sext'.
- A UK Beatbullying (2009) survey shows that 38% of teens aged 11-18 have received 'sexts' texts or emails; a UK South West Grid for Learning (2009) survey finds that for teens aged

11-18 surveyed, around 40% have friends who have sexted; 27% said that sexting happens regularly or all the time.

- It is not known whether girls 'pose and send' more often than boys.
- Sexting could not only lead to lifetime damage of relationships and career prospects, it could also constitute child pornography offend. This has led to the launch of a 'Safe Sexting, No Such Thing' campaign in Australia (New South Wales Government, 2009), and similar awareness-raising initiatives are being taken in the US and UK.

### *The broader debate*

Many feminists see girls' active participation in media production as empowering and liberating. Kearney (2007) presents an optimistic account of 'girls' media production and exchange of media texts, arguing that such practices signal their development of a public that suits girls' interest.

However, it should be noted that productive activities are by no means equivalent to resistance or subversion, and articulating female subjectivity is only the first step toward empowerment. As several above-mentioned studies illustrate, quite contrary to the feminist expectation about the progressive potential of the internet, girls are in fact still engaging in and sometimes helping to maintain an environment that reinforces the dominant hetero-normative culture. Indeed, girls' online agency ought not be essentialised, as their online activities take place within larger commercial contexts that both offer opportunities and place structural constraints on their agency at the same time.

### **Future research**

As scholarly attention on girls' online culture grows, this body of knowledge could be enriched and expanded in many ways.

- While the earlier scholarship tended to focus on girls' cultural consumption, more research is needed on girls' cultural production online. In particular, the scope of research should extend beyond: (i) popular and commercial cultural activities, to study girls' other aspects of lifeworld such as political, education and economic (Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007); (ii) the spectacular (that is, the savvy or the victim) and examine the mundane and everyday experiences; and (iii) white, heterosexual middle-class girls to address the experiences of girls of other 'races', sexual orientation and class (Merskin, 2005).
- Considering contemporary girls' culture is intricately linked to consumer culture, rather than simply dismissing the mixture of girls' agency and commercialism, researchers should see how contemporary 'lived feminism' operates in its own terms without attempting to compare it with previous waves of feminist politics (Banet-Weiser, 2004). This means we need a method of inquiry that interrogates what makes girls' voice possible/impossible (Currie, 2008); it also means that in the presentation of research findings, researchers need to 'take girls' identity seriously' (Gotz, 2008) by respecting their own accounts, and avoid selectively citing only cases that fit the 'feminist agenda'.
- Studies of girls' online culture should seek to increase its visibility so parents, educators and policy makers could have deepened and balanced understandings of girls' online

engagement. Paradoxically, this also points to a need for more inquiry into boys' online culture, so neither groups' culture would be cast as normal or marginal (Stern, 2008).

### **Policy-related concerns**

- Online cultural activities offer opportunities for educators to guide students to learn about the complexity and construction of meanings of online contents, the political economy of commercial host sites such as SNS, etc, all of which apt materials for media literacy education (Willett, 2009).
- Stakeholders should develop both analytical and regulating strategies toward addressing the increasing visible sexual exploration of children (Durham, 2008). The 'sexting' practice, in particular, raises legal issues as to what constitutes child pornography and what legal actions should be taken, if at all, toward child offenders.
- The panic about the increasing visibility of the risky online activities of girls and teenagers in general should be redirected from the internet medium toward the real causes of concern, as the internet mostly only uncovers the risks young people take and face offline (boyd and Marwick, 2009). Putting the blame on the internet only obfuscates the issue and diverts attention from where action is needed.

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on examining the substantial bibliography maintained by the author at [www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/whosWho/LeslieHaddon/MobileRefs.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/whosWho/LeslieHaddon/MobileRefs.htm), accessed 7/12/10. As reported in Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone (2009), the level and importance of 'active' interaction with the television screen has been considered important in a study of Flemish viewers where the relationship between perceptions of the world (in particular, perceptions of crime and violence in society) among Flemish television viewers and among video-game players was analysed (van Mierlo and van der Bulck, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Since the issue of how parents mediate children's mobile phone use, and what children think about this is a sensitive issue, this research generally involves separate interviews with parents and/or children.

<sup>3</sup> While Norway may be atypical in some ways within Europe, we have comprehensive data for this country. Hence, we must allow for the fact that the overall adoption rate is higher for all ages than in many other European countries, and adoption by pre-teens probably started earlier (if the situation is analogous to the internet; Hasebrink et al, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> This study, taking into account children's use of the phone for purposes other than communications, focused on 11- to 16-year-olds.

<sup>5</sup> But children and young people are not homogeneous in this respect. French research showed how teenagers have various degrees of orientation to peers versus family, and hence spend different amounts of time out of the home (Martin and de Singly, 2000). Gender differences also exist, with girls often being under more parental surveillance than boys (summarised in Green and Haddon, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> To put this into longer-term historical perspective, this was a concern parents had when the telephone first appeared, with concerns about who children might talk to on the home phone when the parents were not around (Marvin, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/sip/projects/centres/practices/info\\_campaign/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/projects/centres/practices/info_campaign/index_en.htm), accessed 11/01/10. The COST Action IS0801 has brought together the European experts to develop research in this field.

<sup>8</sup> This code is the European Framework for Safer Internet Use by Younger Teenagers and Children, see [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/sip/self\\_reg/phones/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/self_reg/phones/index_en.htm), accessed 11/01/10. The mobile internet was the theme of a workshop at the Ministerial Conference on Safer Internet for Children: Fighting together against illegal content and conduct online, 20 April, 2009, Prague.

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament Council Commission (2007).

<sup>10</sup> <http://nui.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>

<sup>11</sup> Many people did not answer the question on disability in the Eurobarometer.

<sup>12</sup> [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/information\\_society/l14012\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/information_society/l14012_en.htm)

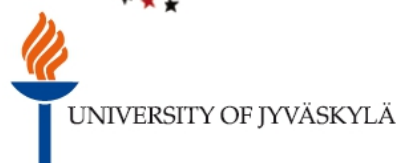
<sup>13</sup> [www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/project.cfm?id=47](http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/project.cfm?id=47)



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