

Control, emancipation and status: The mobile telephone in the teen's parental and peer group control relationships¹

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Abstract

In this paper, we look into adolescents' interactions with parents and peers from a power perspective. We find that parental interactions have dimensions of both Weberian power, but also can be seen in ritual forms that follow from the analysis of Goffman and Collins. In addition, peer group interactions have many ritual and symbolic aspects. The introduction of the mobile telephone has changed the way in which these power relations are carried out. The primary data for this analysis comes from interviews with teens. The analysis also includes some broader quantitative analyses based on random samples of Norwegian teens.

1 Introduction

During a recent series of group interviews with teens, we recorded the following sequence:

Kai (15):² . . . You can not call a friend at home at one o'clock in the night you know, that ignites the parents

Moderator: But you say one o'clock at night, I have gone to bed at least two hours before.

Harald (15): But it is a lot better at night when you are under the covers, to talk into your own mobile telephone instead of sitting in the middle of the living room.

Ola (14): I always have my telephone on. I just turn off the sound. It is ok if you get an important call.

The informants described how the exclusive individualized access provided by the mobile telephone was preferred to that of the traditional house telephone as it provided new possibilities for peer group interaction. It describes the teen's radically different way of organizing social interaction when compared to that of their parents' generation. The discipline imposed by a common family telephone – and the accompanying irritation of a parent whose child would receive a call in the middle of the night – has in the last half decade been replaced by a communication technology controlled by the adolescents themselves. Indeed, in a recent sur-

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² In all cases the names and identities of the individuals have been changed in order to protect their identities.

vey of teens made by the authors we found that more than 20% of teens say that they send SMS messages between 24:00 and 06:00 at least once a week.³

Interaction is not limited to a specific location or traditional business hours for today's teens in Norway. As this sequence shows, adolescents have mastered the ability to carry out social interaction in a variety of new and unanticipated settings. Hiding under the covers is not just to read with a flashlight, it is also to send and receive SMS messages that might or might not meet with the approval of one's parents. The same data cited above shows that the mobile telephone is an easily accessible, nearly ubiquitous accessory for contemporary adolescents in Norway. There are realistically no major barriers to owning one. In the words of an 18-year-old informant, "you can get it at the grocery store for 40 bucks."

This new form of social interaction points to a change in the functioning of the family and the way in which adolescents develop and maintain peer group interactions. This paper will examine the ways in which mobile telephony has affected the power relationships between adolescents, their parents on the one hand and their peers on the other. One of the critical issues associated with the teen years is their emancipation from their parents and the adolescents' establishment of their own identity. In many respects the peer group is a type of midwife in this process in that they allow one a context within which they can test out ideas, try out various identities and test the constrictions and possibilities of the adult world.

Turning to the theme of this paper, the concept of emancipation in itself implies power relationships. It assumes the individual's movement from a pre-existing power structure into another status – that may indeed be as repressive as the one that one has just left. Thus, the concept implies that one is moving from one power structure into another. In the case of adolescents, there is not necessarily a simple moment wherein they move from one set of circumstances into another in a dramatic leap, but rather that two or more structures co-exist and that one must negotiate their position within each of these simultaneously. During their teens, however, the adolescent moves from being largely within the sphere of influence defined by their family of orientation to being more oriented towards the peer group. Indeed adolescence is that life period where one's friends are most central (Rubin 1985). It is the tension between these two groups vis-à-vis the adolescent and the adolescent's relationship the power structure within each of these that is the focus of this paper.

2 Background and method

2.1 Sociological dimensions of power

From a sociological perspective, Weber provides the central definition of power. He noted "In general we understand 'power' by the chance of a man [sic.] or number of men to realize their own will in communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action." (1958, 180). He also says that power "is the probability that one actor within a special relationship will be in a position to carry out his [sic.] own will despite the resistance, and regardless of the basis upon which this probability rests" (Weber 1978, 53). The core idea is that there is a differential in the ability to impose one's will. Beyond the basic definition of the concept, Weber further extends the issue by describing three general forms of power. Power can be associated with tradition, a legal-rational structure or charisma.⁴ In the

³ Telenor R&D gathered the data for this analysis in June of 2002. Random selections of more than 2000 Norwegians of all age groups were interviewed.

⁴ While we recognize the importance of charismatic power in the Weberian system, but that is not the focus of this analysis.

Weberian system, one uses various combinations of these devices that one gains, asserts and legitimizes power.

Another dimension to the issue is supplied by the Durkheimian tradition. Specifically, one can look to the discussion of ritual and by the extensions of this approach offered by Collins and Goffman. Durkheim examined ritual in that it helps to develop the “*nomie*” structure or the common sentiment of a society. According to Durkheim, the common glue holding society together is ritual. It is through the collective participation in ritual acts that one identifies themselves with the group.

If the communication established between [individuals] is to become real communion, that is to say a fusion of all particular sentiments into one common sentiment, the signs expressing them must themselves be fused into one single and unique resultant. It is the appearance of this that informs individuals that they are in harmony and makes them conscious of their moral unity. It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in unison (Durkheim 1954, 230)

It is through the participation in rituals – that is shared experiences with a common focus, shared emotions and non-practical actions carried out for symbolic ends – that the web of society is developed and maintained. It is through situations such as this that a group becomes conscious of itself and develops a type of internal solidarity. In addition, the shared nature of the experience provides a bond for the individuals. While it is easy to think of religious celebrations in this context, one can also consider events such as an annual family Christmas party or the studied forms of address, dress and interaction within a peer group. Many of the same elements are present in miniature. Indeed this insight is the contribution of theorists such as Goffman and Berger and Luckmann. Through – in particular Goffman’s – analysis of everyday life one sees the ways in which the management of mundane life takes on ritualized form (Goffman 1967).

While the bonding and the ritualized forms of interaction are a centripetal or afferent force that increases solidarity, there is also a power dimension here. Within this type of social integration, there is an implicit form of hierarchy (Collins 1994). Collins explicitly extends Weber’s notion of power with the more emotionally based bonds outlined in Durkheim. He notes that “the emotional contagion that results from physical co-presence, the focusing of attention on a common object, and the coordination of common actions or gestures” is a central concept (Collins 1974, 56). In this context, Collins points to the work of Goffman and his micro-level analysis of everyday life and notions of emotional solidarity. For Collins, Durkheim and Goffman provide one with the tools with which to examine the Weberian framework. Indeed Collins notes that “Emotional rituals can be used for domination within a group or organization; they are a vehicle by which alliances are formed in the struggle against other groups; and *they can be used to impose a hierarchy of status prestige in which some groups dominate others* by providing an ideal to emulate under inferior conditions” (Collins 1974, 56) (Emphasis added). The common sense of the group also often implies the common recognition of a pecking order. One reading of Goffman suggests that same line of thought. Specifically that in trying to influence situations we manipulate symbols. These manipulations tend to either support or to work against one’s interests (Rogers 1977).

Thus, power as well as influence, prestige and control – all of which imply the ability to impose one’s will – is maintained and developed through ritual activities that both confirm the integrity of the social group while also confirming its hierarchical dimensions. Whereas power has a more raw coercive interpretation, influence seems to imply a common sense of mission . . . so long as things develop in the appropriate direction. Beyond these ritual forms of power and following from Weber, one can also place these power relationships into issues such as tradition or legal-rational structures.

Based on this conception of power/ritual, we now turn to the examination of the adolescent within the family and the peer group. These structures are quite different in the way that they exercise power and influence and the adolescent has a different position in each of these.

2.2 Family, power, control and the socialization of adolescents

Looking now at power, control and the socialization process one is immediately struck that there are some modifications that one must take into account. The first of these is that often the discussion of power is that of the situation between two rather static fronts, i.e. patients and doctors, capital and labor, first world and third world etc. One of the unique issues with regard to youth and their power relationships with parents is that the power relationship changes during the process of maturation. In this respect, there is a difference between a 13 and an 18 year-old person. In contemporary industrialized society, the former is often only approaching the questions and issues arising from the transition into adulthood while the latter is often far into the transition, sometimes to the degree that they have largely completed the emancipation process. While the parents may hold most of the cards, the dealing becomes more even as time goes on (Gecas 1981).

The period is a relatively quick portion of life that is characterized by the desire for freedom on the one hand and the desire to launch one's offspring on a sustainable course on the other. Thus, there is perhaps an extra emphasis on the Weberian notion that the power in this situation needs to be legitimate (Engelstad no date).

Adolescence is a period in one's life where they gain the ballast that they require in order to become an adult. They get insight as to how one finds and maintains a job, the intricacies of sexual interaction, the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior etc. Much of the point in adolescence is to socialize individuals who will in turn wield power themselves. It is a period of transition in the sense that the parents are putting the final touches on their "creation" in the face of the adolescent's confusion and excitement concerning their own maturation. Thus, the power relationship is dynamic, transitory and episodic.

One is left with the image of the child as increasingly wanting to set their own agenda and to make independent autonomous decisions. From the perspective of the parent, there is also the desire to foster this process, but there is also the interest in providing the child with the foundation upon which to build their character, the concern with helping them to avoid the pitfalls of emancipation (drug use, gang participation etc.) and the desire to help them out of tight situations. Thus, while at any particular moment there is an absolute power differential, the situation is dynamic. There is the need to somehow manage changes in that power differential in order to insure that the socialization process is completed and that the child, in turn will have the ballast they need when they in turn must socialize their own children.

In an absolute sense, the adolescent's participation in the family is enmeshed in a traditional and a legal-rational power system. There are well codified laws proscribing the parent's rights and responsibilities as well as sanctions for failing to do so. In addition, there are traditions in society proscribing the roles of both parents and children. The adolescent's position is defined by traditions and by legal considerations, at least until they gain the age of majority. As noted above, however, within this absolute framework, one can also look to the rituals of power and thus move in the direction of Durkheim and Goffman (Collins 1974; Rogers 1977). Familial celebrations such as Mother's day, the reservation of certain parts of the home for parents' i.e. father's chair in the living room and specific times of meeting together, i.e. the family dinner can be read as ritualized interactions that in turn legitimize the broader institutional situation and various power relations. Within the context of the familial power structure, these rituals provide the bond that holds the family together, but further, as developed by

Collins, ritual often has hierarchy as one of its fundamental elements (Collins 1974; Collins 1994).

2.3 The role of peers

Just as the role of parents is transformed during adolescence, the peer group also plays an increasingly central, and necessary role in the emancipation process. In many respects it is the midwife of teen emancipation (Prost 1991). Its influence begins to be felt as the adolescent starts to move away from the family of orientation. Adolescents who use time with friends report a higher sense of self esteem, feeling happier and more powerful than those who spend time alone (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). Given the rapid pace of technical development in society the adolescent cannot specifically rely on parents in order to provide them with the techniques regarding the mastery of a profession or calling.

Friendships among adolescents can be used to test the degree to which various activities are seen as inappropriate, an institution in which various routines and lore, for example that regarding sexuality, can be learned and an area wherein portions of the child's social persona is developed. This socialization is not simply received but rather is, to a certain degree created by the individuals who are acting on more or less event footing. This disjointed situation also applies to the ideological character of the generations. For, example, the 60's radicalism or the 70's disco does not easily translate to the gestalt of the current house scene.⁵

The strength of the peer group is enforced by the age grading of the educational system. This facilitates the learning process since the students are generally at the same level of maturation and development. In addition, it also reinforces the internal social dynamics of the peer group (Aires 1972; Hogan 1985, 2; Rubin 1984, 6). Beyond facilitating the education of adolescents it also provides them with a context in which they are, more or less, free from adult supervision and wherein they can gain experience with the development of independent values and ideas. In addition, the peer group provides the adolescent with a milieu with a fluid status structure and wherein one can attain affirmation (Rubin 1985, 109 - 111). The peer group provides one with the opportunity to develop an independent identity and to practice in the skills of role taking, impression management. The questions of sexual behavior and its boundaries is also at least partially learned in the peer group (Danesi 1994; Gekas 1981 see also: ; Rainwater 1970, 275 - 315). Thus, the adolescent and the peer group are active in shaping their own socialization (Glaser and Strauss 1971, 57 - 88).

The ritual interaction of the adolescent in the peer group has several dimensions that are of interest here. The peer group can provide one with instruction in how to orient oneself in complex "adult" situations with aplomb and reassurance. At the same time, the peer group can demand allegiance from the individual and, perhaps mercilessly, make them aware of their shortcomings. In orienting oneself in relation to the norms and dictates of the peer group the individual exposes themselves to various tests of popularity and to a litany of specifications as to how one should dress, how they should speak, what they should consume and generally how they should maintain their façade. The critical issue here, however is that it is in this context that the individual can also assert their own influence. The adolescent can help to determine which activities are of interest, which things should be consumed and the rituals

⁵ Beyond the functional dimensions of adolescence, this period of life has also moved beyond simply a preparatory stage for adulthood and is a culture onto itself. It is characterized by its own parlance, dress, forms of interaction, ethos and attendant status as a marketing niche (Franzen 2002). Thus, in addition to being a type of apprentice adulthood and a period of emancipation, this life phase more than others is that period that is culturally unique.

proscribing group interaction. In this context, one can see the ritual machinations of power quite transparently.

In addition, the adolescent peer group trades on quickly rising and equally quickly disappearing trends and information (Fine 1981; Lynne 2000). This year's, or even this month's fashion is out next year or next week. This year's argot is gone, seemingly in the next news cycle. The location of this weekend's happening is quickly replaced with another.

Thus, within the peer group, one is confronted with ideas of power or influence that are not so much based not as much on traditional or legal-rational systems as on one's ability to manipulate symbols in the Goffmanian sense. In this case, the knowledge of consumption, argot, dress and the rituals of appropriate interaction are the basis of influence (read: power) within the peer group. In this case, power and influence are more transitory, but at any given time, there is a group or an individual within the peer group that has a greater role in the dictation of style, activities and the general bearing of the group. It is through the application of this transitory codex that one defines one's role in the group. It is here that the Goffmanian notion of the presentation of self and the use of this preening to secure position and influence can be seen (Goffman 1967; Rogers 1977).⁶

2.4 The role of mobile telephony among teens

Up to this point, we have been looking at the situation of adolescents vis-à-vis various notions of power, their relation to their parents and also the dynamics of the peer group. Now we turn to a discussion of the mobile telephone.⁷ The surprisingly fast adoption of this device has changed the dynamics of parental and peer group interaction for the adolescent. By doing this, it has provided one with insight into the interaction within and between these various groups.

Access to the mobile telephone seems to cut in two ways. On the one hand, it can help one to develop social relationships within the peer group. Adolescents' very nearly ubiquitous access to the modern communication technology places them into the role of being a node in a social network, and thus their access to influence in the peer group is quite dynamic. On the other hand, the device can direct attention away from the co-located social interaction within the family and thus dilute the potential for the coalescing of ritual solidarity.

When looking at the empirical situation, we have witnessed a profound transformation in Norwegian adolescents' access to mobile telephony. As late as 1997 very few teens, particularly among the youngest age groups, had access. Mobile telephones were generally seen as being an accessory for yuppies and other *nouveau riche* individuals. The introduction of pre-paid subscriptions and the increasing access to inexpensive handsets changed this. As noted in the introduction, for only a small investment, could (can) purchase a mobile telephone at a grocery store or a local gas station complete with a pre-paid subscription ready for immediate use. These two developments have meant that one no longer need to go through a ponderous process in order to subscribe to a mobile phone provider. Rather it is a casual process that one with a small amount of cash can undertake. Pre-paid subscriptions have reduced parental reservations regarding since they reduce the possibility for teens to roll up a huge telephone.

⁶ Obviously, other theoretical approaches can be used in this context. In particular the Bourdieuan approach that includes the concept of symbolic power is applicable.

⁷ There is a small literature on adolescents and PSTN based telephony, (Aronson; Castelain-Meunier 1997.; Claisse and Rowe 1987; Katz and Aspden 1998; Kellner 1977; Lohan 1997; Pratto and Rodman 1993). However, there is also starting to be a literature on adolescents' use of mobile telephony (Brown, Green and Harper 2002; Katz and Aakhus 2002; Ling 2000; Ling and Yttri 2002; Manceron 1997; Weilenmann and Larsson 2002).

Where in 1997 only a minority of adolescents owned a mobile telephone by 2001 the device was nearly ubiquitous (Ling 2002). In addition, there has been a gender shift. Where in 1997 there were significantly more boys who owned a mobile phone, by 2001 significantly more girls owned one.

Looking at use, Short Message System (SMS), or text messages have provided adolescents with a form of interaction that they have adopted and shaped to their own purposes. While some young adults and adults use this form of communication, it is largely the adolescents that have adopted SMS and turned it into a living form of interaction. The relatively low cost of the system, the draw of creating unique forms of argot and the slightly illicit ability to silently hold contact with one's friends for example during school or in the middle of the night have all contributed to the popularity of the system.

Beyond noting the intensity of use, one can ask to whom the adolescents call and to who do they send messages. Analysis shows that the mobile telephone and "texting" via SMS are quite central when maintaining friendships among adolescents. On a European basis adolescents report contacting friends via SMS at more than three times the rate of those in the broader population.⁸ The same pattern can be seen in Norwegian data. The general finding here is that adolescent friendships are maintained through more channels than familial relationships. When looking at only teens and their friendship patterns there is an intensity of interaction for the girls in the sample that is not as apparent for the boys. Where socializing for adolescent boys seems to take place face-to-face, adolescent girls seem more comfortable to interaction via various telephonic channels.⁹

Thus, the data points to the fact that adolescents use voice mobile telephony and, to an even greater extent texting have been adopted by adolescents during the latter part of the last decade. These forms of intercourse are often used to communicate with friends. They have taken their place as important elements in the lives of teens.

2.5 Method and data

For the bulk of this analysis, we draw on focus group material describing the situation of Norwegian adolescents and their parents. The focus groups were held in 1999.¹⁰ Approximately 40 teens, 20 persons aged 19 to 23 and 20 parents were included in 10 separate sessions. There were four sessions with mixed teen boys and girls, one session with only teen girls and one with only teen boys. Finally, there were two sessions with late teens and two with teen parents. The transcripts from the focus groups were created and analyzed using text analysis software that allowed one to categorize sections of text. Based on this first categorization then material has been reexamined for the themes that are relevant to the current paper.

⁸ This analysis comes from data collected in the Eurescom P903 project (Mante-Meijer and al. 2001)

⁹ Looking further at the adolescents and their local friendship patterns there is an intensity of interaction for the girls that is not as apparent for the boys in the sample. The more friends a boy had resulted in more face-to face meetings ($r = 0,56^{***}$). However, there was a more modest correlation for fixed-telephonic contact ($r = 0,30^{***}$), mobile telephone contact ($r = 0,31$). For the girls in the sample, however, the situation was quite different. The more friends a teen girl had the more one reported face to face meetings ($r = 0,56^{***}$), the more fixed telephone contact ($r = 0,44^{***}$) mobile telephone contact ($r = 0,42^{***}$) and the more SMS contact ($r = 0,49^{***}$). As noted above, the frequency with which one met face to face was only moderately correlated with the telephonic interaction. ($^{***} = \text{sig.} < 0,001$, $^{**} = \text{sig.} < 0,01$, $^{*} = \text{sig.} < 0,05$).

¹⁰ These have been supplemented with other qualitative analyses and quantitative material, most recently in 2002.

3 Parental control, peer group knowledge and the transfer of information in light of the mobile telephone

Up to this point we have examined the sociological dimensions of power, looked into the social context of the adolescents with reference to their peers and their parents and have examined the growth of mobile telephony in the Norwegian context. Now we turn to the examination of the mobile telephone vis-à-vis the family and the peer group. This will provide insight into how the adolescent is simultaneously enmeshed in both a traditional/legal-rational as well as a ritual based power system.

3.1 The mobile telephone and the family

Looking first at the effect of adolescents' mobile telephone use in relation to the family, one finds a type of Faustian dilemma for their parents. On the one hand, it provides access, a metaphorical umbilical cord, between parent and child that is, in turn, cherished and resented by both parties. At the same time, the mobile telephone can be used to strengthen the ties within the peer group, perhaps at the expense of parental ties. This shift in attention can trigger concerns on the part of parents that the adolescents are becoming emancipated before their time while the pace is not rapid enough for the adolescents.

3.1.1 Management of parental interaction

When considering the interaction between parents and children, particularly in the context of broad access to the mobile telephone, several issues arise. Looking first at integrative aspects of the mobile telephone, adolescent informants thought that it was important to be available for one's parents and to let them know where they were.

Oda (18): It is actually important to be available for parents and tell them if you are going to go to a party or to town or something. Things like that, maybe sat about when you are coming home.

Moderator: Is it your parents that call you?

Oda (18): Usually, because I have a pre-paid subscription so I don't bother to call so much since it is so expensive to call you know. So, I have always done it such that if I call and let it ring three times they know that it is me and so they just call me back.

Oda's sense that it was "actually important" to hold her parents informed speaks to her respect for the status of the family. It also underscores the hierarchical dimensions of the relationship between parent and child.¹¹ This is a type of ex-post facto recognition of the institutionalized weight of the institution. The fact that Oda's parents call her, as opposed to her calling her parents is also of note. On the one hand if her parents call too much it can be read by her friends that Oda's parents are being overbearing and intrusive. On the other hand, the fact that Oda does not want to waste scarce calling time on her parents places the onus on the parents to maintain the contact.

¹¹ There may be a type of coordination that goes on, i.e. the parents telling the child that they will be someplace. Thus, there is a line between coordination and control. The ability of the parents to demand information regarding a child's location and activities implies that they have the potential to either demand that they not engage in that particular situation, or to create sanctions against further interaction of that type. This is control. Coordination, however, is the negotiation of when and where the activities of each party can be integrated so that each party can achieve their goals while allowing space for the other to also achieve theirs. As we will see below, this is a shifting issue. Younger teens are likely to be subject to the direct control of their parents, and perhaps displays of raw force, while the interaction with older teens is often more a negotiation of coordination. In the latter case there may be a vestige of legitimacy perhaps in the form of respect in the best of cases.

The more hierarchal and formalized relationship between parent and child is also seen in the way that the device is used. Where parents use the device instrumentally, adolescents use it more expressively (Ling and Yttri 2002). This can be seen in the following sequence.

- Moderator: Is it you that call your parents or do they call you?
Nora (18): They call us.
Moderator: What do they call about?
Rita (18): Where are you, when are you coming home?
Nora (18): Practical things you know.
Moderator: Practical things?
Nora (18): [With] friends it is more like babbling. [With] parents it is more like they call about something
Erika (17): If I should have been home an hour ago then there are 25 calls or something like that. . . . If I have said that I will be home and don't come then it is full chaos on the telephone you know.

While the need for access between parent and child was recognized, it was sometimes seen as a begrudging recognition. As one sees here, the interaction with parents, at least in the eyes of the teens often focuses on practical interaction while there is more informal interaction between the teens themselves. One also sees that parent-child interaction can include implicit disciplinary themes.

- Moderator: Is it important for you to be available for your parents?
Lena (14): It is a little dumb, if you want to do something or other and then they call and say that you have to come home.
Bente (17): You turn off the mobile and say that the battery was dead.
Annika (17): If you at somebody's house and you want to be there a little longer, then they call and say that you have to come home.
Moderator: So it is a little embarrassing if they call you?
Annika (17): No, it is more irritating.

Annika's expression of irritation underscores that the interaction is problematic. In addition, Bente's management of the facts shows how she can leverage the characteristics of the technology in order to favor interaction with peers to the exclusion of her parents. When looking at this in the context of power relationships, one can see that the ability of the parents to demand the attention of the child is not always openly accepted and that the adolescents would prefer interaction in the peer group where their influence holds a broader sway.

Beyond the most obvious strategies to frustrate parent's insight into their lives, the interviewees also outlined other more advanced, technologically based ruses that they could use in order to avoid unwanted parental involvement. The adolescents can put on an "act" and manipulate various symbolic resources in order to misrepresent their situation vis-à-vis their parents. Indeed, these misrepresentations can take on the appearance of clarifications when really they are a type of boundary keeping exercise. This, in turn is a recognition of the way in which power relations are being worked out vis-à-vis the use of the mobile telephone (Goffman 1959; Rogers 1977).

Adolescents also use the technology itself in order to establish generational boundaries.

- Nina (18): There are some telephones that you can do it like [if a call comes] from some numbers it goes right into the voice mail, for example if the parents call then it goes right into the voice mail.
Arne (17): I do that
Moderator: You do that?
Arne (17): Yeah, when I am out in the weekend and things like that, then I do that.
Moderator: Who do you exclude?
Arne (17): The family.

Moderator: Ok. You do that too?
Oda (18): You just don't answer the phone and then say that you didn't hear it or something like that.
Moderator: Have you done that?
Rune (15): Yeah.
Moderator: With who?
Rune (15): It is the family.
Moderator: Ok. Not friends?
Rune (15): No.
Moderator: Have you done that?
Ola (14): Yeah.
Moderator: And it was the family?
Ola (14): Yeah.

These comments describe technical strategies for the management of parental control. They describe the teens extracting themselves, at least temporarily, from the family in favor of their peer group. These were not available earlier. Thus, while the mobile telephone has led to more seamless communication, that is the potential to contact another person regardless of the callers and the callee's location, the device has also provided various ways with which one can sabotage this accessibility when it is inconvenient.¹²

3.1.2 The individualization of mediated communication

The individualization of the mobile telephone streamlines social interaction since one is almost guaranteed to reach a specific individual rather than a random member of a household as with the traditional telephone. Adolescents recognized this. One, for example noted, "It is a little easier to call a mobile [number] that you know that only one person answers."

One effect of this is that there is a lower threshold for interaction. One knows that they are calling directly to an individual and not to a house telephone where they may have to go through the filtering interactions of talking to a parent or another siblings. Thus, it is an interpersonal and not a broadly social interaction. A similar theme arises when discussing the use of an answering machine, a function that is a common part of a mobile telephone subscription.

Rita (18): It is ok when somebody is going to leave a message in the voice mail that they leave a message in my voice mail instead of the family's voice mail. I can call back to the people that call. That is more private.

Erika (17): It is like if I am not at home and if I didn't have a mobile telephone then my parents would have known about all the people that I hang out with. And if they wanted to leave a message for me and I am not at home and they leave it in the family's voice mail then they would have to be quick to think about what they should say. When you have a mobile telephone then you have a private voice mail and a private telephone.

The mobile telephone removes the social interaction of the child from the parents' direct insight. The adolescents control the people with whom they talk, and have more room into which they can share thoughts and messages that might not be acceptable given a broader public. This plays on the peer groups' ethic that their inner communications be shielded from non-members, particularly parents.

The mobile telephone allows adolescents a type of ritual interaction. Through this shared ethic, they can veil things that they would rather not expose to the parent's scrutiny. Thus, the knowledge and the lore of the group becomes part of a clandestine knowledge that has the

¹² On their part, parents can fight back by, for example calling the mobile phones of their child's friends in an attempt to locate the child.

effect of defining the boundary of the group. Loyalty to the group may mean respecting the inner knowledge and protecting it from others.

The physical device also becomes a repository for different types of personal information. The text of SMS messages is often saved and thus the content of one's interaction is recorded there. The terminal provides access to one's voice mail. The names recorded in the name register and one's the "calling history" listing who has been called, when they were called and how long they talked are also recorded in the mobile telephone. Thus, for example, if parents were to gain access to their child's mobile telephone, they would have the ability to gain significant insight into their child's social interaction.

3.1.3 The undermining of family rituals

The final point here is that the mobile telephone provides the teen with a way to be in touch with friends during times that previously were more exclusively the realm of the family. The adolescent is available for mediated messages during vacations, family get togethers, meal times and vacations. At one level, this is not particularly new development. Many other technologies have intervened here and have reformed the ways in which families interact. The television, and traditional telephony are obvious examples.

Nonetheless, this development is, to some degree, a distraction from the common focus of the ritual occasion, be it only a common evening meal or an annual Christmas dinner. The device steals attention away from the shared family experience and thus limits its effect. Thus, the technology can undercut the potential for this type of solidarity and the hierarchical dimensions implied by this form of this social structuring.

The material here points to several dimensions that characterize parent child interactions. These include respect on the part of the child towards the role and status of their parents. Respect, however begrudging, is indeed an indication of a power differential in the Weberian sense. Although the relationship between adolescents and their parents has affective dimensions, the marking of boundaries and the need to respect the wishes and demands of the parents indicates that there is an absolute power differential.

At the same time, adolescents expressed irritation over the possibility for control that the device represented and had a repertoire of devices available with which they could manage their availability. However, the management of availability also demands that they are adroit at maintaining facades. Again, one can read these strategies as evidence of the power differential within the child parent relationship.

3.2 Adolescents and the demands of peer network

Where parents have a traditional and a legal position with reference to their children, peers have another role in the life of the adolescent. As noted above, the peer group is a type of midwife into adulthood for the adolescent. However, the peer group is not simply a supportive group without its own demands. Knowledge of the correct form of presentation of self, the current themes of discussion and the correct argot are, in some respects, prerequisites for group membership (Ling 2001). The peer group can – sometimes mercilessly – make demands that one follow certain nuanced forms in the presentation of self (Fine 1981).

However, as described above, the peer group is described as being more fluid and changing from year to year. In the US, adolescents report changing friendship groups because of shifts in current interests and the desire to avoid various issues that one considers problematic, such as drug or alcohol use. This also means that there is a more polymorphous sense of popularity. If the criteria of one group do not fit the individual then there are always others from

which they can choose. If this is the case, then it may be more difficult to maintain an overview over the symbolic content of interaction while it is, at the same time attaining an even more central in the eyes of the teens.

Analysis has shown that teens are aware of various status related issues concerning the mobile telephone. In the case of Fine's Little League baseball teams, the good players parlayed their baseball skills into dominant social prestige (Fine 1987). In other cases, those that are clever at telling jokes or good at singing will have a quasi-institutionalized claim to a more influential (read powerful) position in the peer group. Putting this into the context of the mobile phone, those who are known to have a large number of names in their name register, who receive a lot of calls or messages or those who have a particularly stylish handset will have influence with reference to the type of covers and the models that obtain in a group at a particular point in time.

3.2.1 The quantification of popularity

The name register in one's mobile telephone is has replaced the filofax as the place where one has contact information. Its loss would mean that one is not able to contact the individual. This function can also serve as a way of quantifying popularity and prestige. That is, the device provides one with an easily comparable metric for gauging one's social esteem.

Moderator: . . . Do you call with a number or have you programmed it in?

Oda (18): I have it in the phone book in the telephone

Moderator: How many names do you have in the [telephone's] phone book?

Nina (18): It's full.

Moderator: Full? On your telephone, how many are there?

Nina (18): 100.

Moderator: 100?

Rune (15): Mine isn't all the way full, I have 80 or so.

Arne (17): I have 100 and some, about 140.

Moderator: How many do you have?

Oda (18): I have 99 or something like that.

Inger (17): With the telephone I have there is only room for 50 or so.

Moderator: So you choose names in the [telephone's] phone book?

Oda (18): It is like I have my telephone with me everywhere. So, I write down the telephone numbers I get. Most of them are friends. Then there is work and home and a mobile telephone for each of them so there are quite a few.

The sequence takes on a type of "mine is bigger than yours" tone. In this way, it shows that having many names in one's name catalogue is a desired state. In this context, it becomes a way to reckon one's currency in their social network. The mobile telephone also provides other opportunities for this type of display. Just as describing the number of names in the name register function, one can describe the number and importance of the messages that one receives.

Erika (17): I have received 7 or 8 text messages from him today and that means that I have answered 7 or 8 messages and it is not like that happens everyday you know. When I come home there are often a ton of text messages laying there but it varies a lot in relation to who you have contact with and which day it is. On a Friday then there are a lot more messages than on a Thursday because people will go out and they want to do something.

The exploitation of these symbols can be an element in one's assertion of their influence within the peer group. Negotiation of influence is, in its most abstract form, a negotiation of power in that the person with influence is able to assert their own will in their interactions. The number of names in the phone and the number of messages or calls one receives are par-

ticularly powerful symbolic devices within the peer group. These elements are used as a confirmation of the individual's success in the process of establishing their own social identity and, as developed above, this is a central issue for the adolescent.

3.2.2 Mobile telephony as a fashion statement

The mobile telephone, as a physical object, is also a way in which one can display their knowledge of current fashion and thus garner status and influence. The device is a type of jewelry that, beyond its functional aspects, communicates to others the owner's competence in the purchase and display.

When asked in the context of a focus group to show their mobile telephones, several of the respondents demurred. Upon further prodding they said that they were somewhat embarrassed by the vintage, size or style of their mobile telephones. Thus, they were conversant with the prevailing fashion and knew that their devices were not parallel with that standard.

According to Goffman, (1967) reading embarrassment allows one to read the situation. He notes that embarrassment is catching one out of character; that is catching one out of the character that they wish to portray. Thus, the informants' embarrassment was an indication of the degree to which the façade they wished to communicate would be threatened were the style of their mobile telephone become known. The need to carry out a type of repair work on their façade undermines their ability to legitimately claim status and influence since, in effect, all can see that they are not as able to control and manipulate symbols as they would let one on to believe.

In this context, a mother reported the following incident that points to the tyranny of fashion when discussing mobile telephones.

Mia: You know, our 13 year old can borrow her father's at work, but she absolutely refuses. That is a museum piece. It is over two years old and one cannot be seen with that. I had both girls on the ferry to Denmark last weekend and I saw that 'can one of you call home and say that we are landing at such and such an time?' 'With that telephone? Are you crazy?' That was impossible.

While one may also discuss fashion in terms of inter peer group status rivalry and boundary keeping. One respondent critiqued the mobile telephone of another via the use of thinly veiled condemnation of an alternative esthetic notion of mobile telephones.

Erika (17): . . . A mobile telephone is an expression of personality actually, because take an example. I hate flowers more than anything else, but she has a cover with flowers you know. That is something that she has chosen but that I wouldn't have. So, the cover shows what type of person you are. It is the same with mobile telephones. I know people that but older models of mobile telephones because they think they are better.

Erika seems to assert that the taste of another respondent is not up to snuff from the perspective of her esthetic. She asserts that the phone (read: taste) of the other girl does not match her own.

This assertion was made with reference to various, relatively stable, notions of fashion. While there are nuances within several general possible patterns of presentation, i.e. preppie, freak, skater etc, the general patterns have a relative stability (Lynne 2000). The mobile telephone is one element in this more general picture that forms a codex of style. It is this codex that forms the foundation of the knowledge/power/influence complex for the adolescents. Its codification is, to a certain degree, determined in the interaction between the adolescents and in their interactions with various commercial and cultural institutions. The success with which one follows this, and interprets its dictates can be translated into positions of relative influence within the local group.

When viewed from the perspective of power relations, the degree to which one successfully interprets the current styles can be translated to the degree of influence that one has within the group. Put into Goffmanian terms, the facility with which one manipulates symbols is an element in their more general ability to foster an impression and thereby lay a claim on influencing others within the peer group. The success or failure of this interpretation can and does hinge on nuanced elements. Details as seemingly inconsequential as the type of shoes one wears, the color of the laces or even the way that they are laced and tied can all be a part of these evaluations. In this respect then it is perhaps not strange that the flowers on another's mobile telephone are deconstructed and use in the viewer's assessment of another. This goes beyond the idea that to have or not have a mobile telephone is important to the notion that how one has a mobile telephone is the key.

It is also clear that different esthetics is characteristic of different groups. The interpretation of these flowers also points to intra-group power relations, i.e. the sense that one's own peer group is more correct or dominate than another's. What is acceptable in one clique is an anathema in another.

The quantification of popularity and the interpretation of the technology in terms of fashion show how the mobile telephone has gone beyond simply being a functional communication technology to being a type of icon in the adolescent's pursuit of their own identity.

4 Discussion: Adolescents and the matrices of power

In this paper, we have examined how teens are involved in two different types of power relationships. On the one hand, there is the relationship to their parents, based on tradition and legal-rational systems of power wherein the parents determine many aspects of their children's situation. By contrast, the adolescent's status within the peer group is more achieved than received. In this situation, the individual's ability to manipulate symbols and develop an individual identity is the avenue through which he or she can gain influence within the group.

It was into this context that the mobile telephone was introduced. It is no longer the community, the home or even the family that is the unit of communication; rather it is the individual person. Thus, the parents can no longer claim monopolistic control, or even oversight over telephone use. The children have simply pulled the rug out from under that assertion.

As seen from the perspective of the parents, the device provides parents with a direct channel to the child, regardless of time or place. Rather than, or perhaps in addition to, coordinating interaction with their children based on mechanical time keeping the mobile telephone allows a new type of real time coordination. At 10:01, the parents can call the child and demand their prescience, rather than sitting in the living room awaiting their return. Seen from a power perspective, this allows the parents a new way to maintain control over their children. In addition, parents are positive to the use of the mobile telephone to the degree that it facilitates family coordination and it can provide the teen with insight into budgeting, particularly if the teen is required to pay for their own telephone calls, and it can proved the teen with a type virtual umbilical cord.

However, in order to gain direct access to their children regardless of time and place, the parent has to accept that the child also has direct access to their peers via the same system. It distinguishes itself from other communication technologies in the life of the adolescent in that it allows for immediacy. It allows the adolescent to orient him or herself in the flux of the social life and in this way to engage in the control of the social situation. The mobile telephone provides a type of counterpoint to the internal structure of the family. The device means that others, i.e. peer members, can reach the adolescent regardless of the family situa-

tion. It allows the adolescent to be in touch with peers during traditional “family” times, i.e. vacation, or family holiday meals. In addition, the mobile telephone individualizes communication.

When viewed vis-à-vis the peer group and their sometimes forced allegiance to the various forms of fashion and presentation, adolescents are often engaged in a type of symbolic power structure. In this case, extremely detailed knowledge of which type of ear-rings to wear, the special way to arrange the cuffs of their pants or the angle of their collar speak to a type of peer based knowledge/power through which, in the most extreme cases, membership in the group is dealt with. In this case, the type of mobile telephone, the way that it is personalized with either ringing sounds, logos, or covers, and as we have seen the number of names in the name catalogue or the frequency with which one receives or “has to” send responses are also a part of this complex of significant signs that are used to participate in the economy of symbolic power.

The mobile telephone provides insight into the ritual interaction that characterizes the peer group. The ability to integrate the group via correct consumption, the pursuit of acceptable goals such as popularity and the protection of the inner knowledge of the group are all descriptions of this. Through proscriptions as to which styles and form of presentation are appropriate peers work out the group’s power relationships (Ling 2001; Lynne 2000). The individual teen can in turn contribute to the definition of these or be bound to them. It is here that the adolescent can enjoy asserting influence and indeed test her or his ability. While children can influence familial decisions, there is not the same access to equal footing as one sees in the peer group.

The mobile telephone has lowered the threshold for telephonic access. It does this in a situation wherein the adolescents are yearning to develop contact with peers and emancipate themselves from their parent’s control. At the same time, parents can see both positive and negative aspects to the device. Thus the style, content, form and power relationship between adolescents and parents on the one hand and adolescents and their peers on the other has taken new forms and has been carried out in ways that were not possible in the recent past. The new technology and its pervasive potential for communication mean that we are only now sorting out the ways that the technology is used, for what purposes and with which consequences.

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