

# **“I have a free telephone so I don’t bother to send SMS, I call:” The gendered use of SMS among adults in intact and divorced families<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Language and the strategic use of language is a part of our ritual interaction with the world. We use words, intonation etc. and we select media, in order to manage focused encounters. The paper traces how interviewees discussed the use of either voice mobile telephony or SMS to carry out everyday interactions. Indeed much of this paper will involve a discussion of choosing or being forced to choose one media over another in order to achieve our goals. Thus, while we speak of “setting the agenda” as a way to dominate an interaction, we can speak of “setting the media” in the same sense. The material for this analysis comes from a series of 25 interviews with families in the Oslo area. Interviewees included both intact and divorced families. We were also interested in examining the situation of families with younger and older children to examine the degree that mobile communication facilitated coordination. Among the separated families in five cases we were able to interview both of the partners. The paper concludes by noting that social interaction is played out through a particular media and the way that it is played out through the mutual willingness to accept one another’s guises and stratagems is being developed and elaborated. The introduction of SMS onto the scene gives us the chance to see the process afresh. The mediation form has not acquired the patina of being an entrenched form of interaction and so the elaboration and nuance of the strategies is similarly new. We are in the privileged position to see the management of focused social encounters with fresh eyes. We can watch how simple every day activities are being managed in a slightly different way and how the rules surrounding the interaction are being freshly minted.

## **1 Introduction**

Broadly speaking, this paper deals with the management of focused social encounters. In this case, I want to consider mediated social encounters wherein the form of mediation plays into the development of the encounter. Specifically, I will examine the gendered use of voice mobile telephony and the use of the text based short message system (SMS).

In other writing I have discussed the issue of focused ritual social encounters (Ling 2004c). My central premise is that we seek to carry out activities and in doing so we rely on collectively developed and understood strategies to maintain the social order within the encounter. The activities can be as simple as a couple coordinating who will pick up the children at day-

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<sup>1</sup> To be published as:

Ling, R. forthcoming. ““I have a free telephone so I don't bother to send SMS, I call:” The gendered use of SMS among adults in intact and divorced families.” in *Qualitative analysis of mobile communication*, edited by Joachim Höflich. Universität Erfurt.

care, who will shop for food, or simply with whom we can have a chat. These activities, however, may be laden with many difficult issues. The decision as to who will pick up the children at day care can, in the case of divorced families, imply adjustments to painstakingly negotiated agreements. These seemingly simple interactions can also play into deeply felt emotional issues. The mutually recognized strategies are not only tools used to facilitate social interaction; they are also ritual interactions through which the broader social world is reified and renewed.

Social encounters are played out through the use of a repertoire of ritual and institutional devices and they balance between discord and order. The forms for interaction that can be more or less elaborated but generally the more tightly bound the group the greater the elaboration of and nuance of the strategies.

In focused social encounters there is a common willingness to use various strategies in order to come through the encounter and in order to achieve our goals. In addition, there is the recognition that others involved in the encounter also use some of the same, or perhaps different strategies in order to carry out their portion of the interaction and in order to achieve their goals – that may indeed be different from our own. Thus a willingness to use strategies, facades, manners, rituals, poses, *savoir-faire*, etc. and a recognition of others use of these same devices is basic common core of focused encounters.

In addition to the broader sense that we achieve our own goals and that others involved in the encounter are about achieving theirs, it is important to recognize that there are differences in the ability to do this. That is, there are power differences involved in social encounters.

Language and the strategic use of language is a part of our repertoire of strategies. We use words, intonation etc. and we select media, in order to manage focused encounters. Indeed much of this paper will involve a discussion of choosing or being forced to choose one media over another in order to achieve our goals. Our management may mean that we wish to confront or to avoid conflict. It may mean that we wish to dominate, or that we wish to avoid domination. Thus, while we speak of “setting the agenda” as a way to dominate an interaction, we can speak of “setting the media” in the same sense. The paper traces how interviewees discussed the use of either voice mobile telephony or SMS to carry out everyday interactions.

Turning to SMS and mobile voice telephony, females and specifically young adult females who make up a portion of the respondents here use SMS more than other groups in Norway. This is particularly true when considering social interaction. Further younger females write longer and more complex SMS messages (Ling 2003; Ling 2004b). This research also indicates that their use of SMS is also more “aligned” than that of men (Tannen 1991) in that includes both instrumental and expressive interactions. When considering SMS and voice mobile interaction from a power perspective, the material presented below suggests that there is a considered advantage for women to use SMS since it is less synchronous and it allows time for strategic thinking. Adult males report using voice mobile telephony more often than other groups. Where women perhaps enjoy an advantage when using SMS, men often have an advantage in verbal interaction (Coates 1986). Thus, as we will see the decision of which medium to use (SMS vs. voice mobile) becomes the locus of a type of miniature power interaction.

The material for this analysis comes from a round of 25 interviews with families in the Oslo area. Interviewees included both intact and divorced families. We were also interested in examining the situation of families with younger and older children to examine the degree that mobile communication facilitated coordination. Among the separated families in five cases we were able to interview both of the partners.

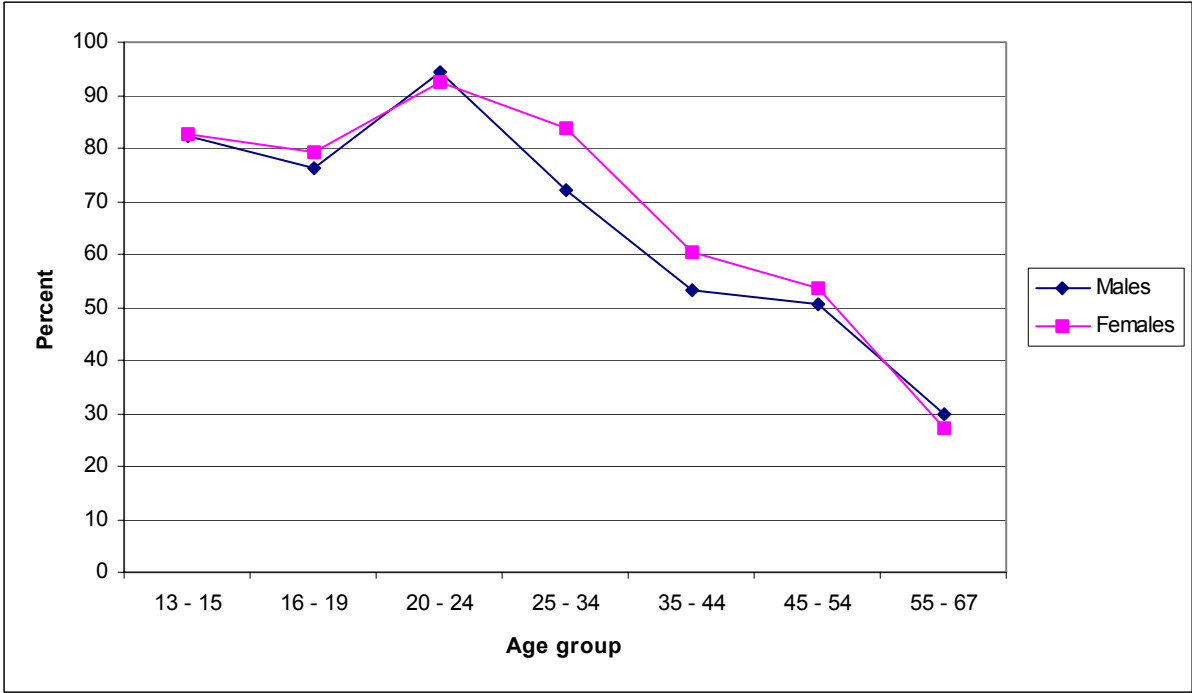
As a preparation for the interviews, the interviewees were asked to fill in a log covering all of their mobile telephone use (both voice calls and SMS) as well as the trips they took during the day previous to the interview. The broader goal of the project is to examine the interaction between transport and mobile communication for various constellations of families. This paper focuses on gendered mobile communication somewhat to the exclusion of the transportation angle.

## 2 The use of SMS in Norway

According to material from the Norwegian Post and Telecom Authority, mobile telephone users in Norway sent 82 SMS messages per month; 68 were interpersonal messages, 13 had to do with various services (ring sounds etc.) and 1 was an MMS. According to data collected by Telenor, SMS users – not just mobile telephone users – sent about 130 messages per month.

When considering ownership of a mobile telephone, about 92% of Norwegians over 13 years of age own a mobile telephone. Another 4% have access to a commonly owned household telephone. Only about 4% of Norwegians over 13 do not have any access to a mobile telephone. When looking at who are the most active users, it is clear that teens and young adults are most active. They are the most likely to send SMS on a daily basis and they send the highest means number of messages. Looking at the daily activity, one sees that more than 90% of the 20 – 24 year old users report sending SMS on a daily basis. This is nearly double the number sent by those in their parents’ generation. Approximately half of those in the 45 – 54 year age group send SMS on a daily basis (see figure 1).

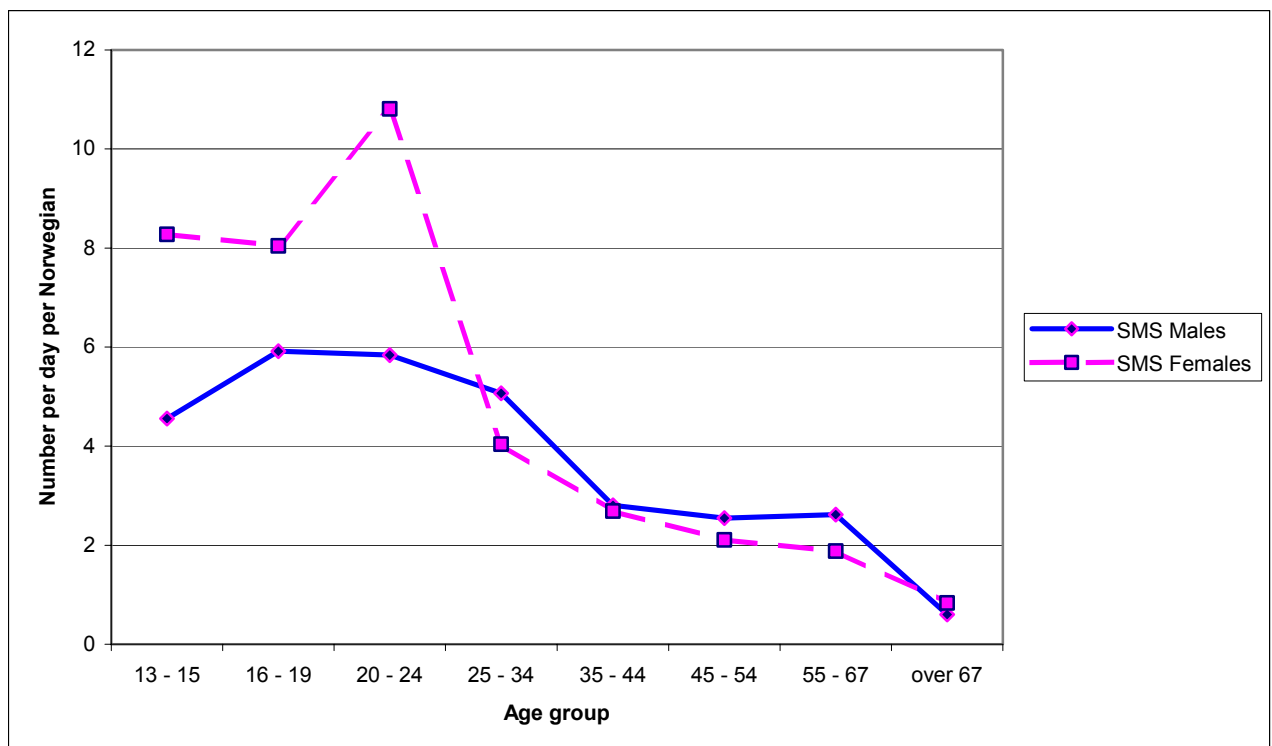
Another dimension of use among the mature adult group is those women are more prone to send SMS. For many age groups higher percentages of women than men reported sending daily SMS. In some cases, the difference could be as much as 10% in favor of the women. These statistics fit well with the qualitative information that is examined below. There is the sense in the comments of the informants that the culture of SMS is seated among women to a greater degree than men.



**Figure 1 Percent of Norwegians who send SMS on a daily basis, by age and gender, June 2004 (Source: Telenor)**

It is the teen and the young adult users who report the highest mean number of messages. Young adult women report sending more than 10 messages per day. By comparison, the group upon which this paper focuses sends about two a day. Interestingly, there are no general statistical differences reported by gender for the adult users of SMS.

In general, while women in some age groups send more SMS messages than men, these differences are not significant in any statistical sense. There are clearly symmetry issues at play, i.e. SMS is not only a women's form of communication, but women contact men and vice versa. As I will examine below, there are differences in the level of motivation for this interaction as well as differences in the purposes for contacting persons of the opposite sex. This said, the data does show that women in the 20 – 24 year age group report sending more personal SMS messages than men on a daily basis (11 vs. 4.4 messages respectively). This is a significant difference.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 2 The mean number of SMS messages per day for Norwegian users by age and gender, June 2004 (Source: Telenor)**

Somewhat surprisingly, men prefer mobile voice interaction. Using data gathered in Norway in 2004, men in all the adult age groups reported that they made significantly more mobile calls than similarly aged women.<sup>3</sup> For example, men aged 35 – 44 made a mean of three calls per day while women in the same age group made about 1.4. In the 45 – 54 age group, men report making 2.5 calls per day while women reported 0,9. Looking at the time spent on the phone, however, women between the age of 20 and 54 generally averaged 20 minutes per day on the landline phone, however, they only reported using about 10 minutes per day on the

<sup>2</sup>  $f(1,57) = 5.979$ , sig. = 0.018.

<sup>3</sup> The f statistic for those aged 25 - 34 is  $f(1,161) = 5.543$ , sig. = 0.021. For those aged 35 – 44 voice it is  $f(1,173) = 16.696$ , sig. < 0.001. For those aged 45 - 54 it is  $f(1,152) = 18.458$ , sig. < 0.001 and for those aged 55 - 67 the statistic is  $f(1,146) = 10,820$ , sig. = 0.001.

mobile phone in these age groups. Men reported about 10 minutes per day on the mobile and ten minutes per day on the landline phone.<sup>4</sup>

To summarize, mature adult women are more prone to use SMS, but once one is a user, there are no real differences in the mean number of messages that one generates. These are issues that will be examined below where the data indicates that there is a broader skepticism towards SMS among men than women in these age groups.

### **3 The gendered use of language**

Men and women approach the use of mobile communication differently. The material considered below indicates that women, and to a lesser degree men, use SMS to assist in various instrumental tasks. The material also shows that women use SMS for expressive tasks and that while men use SMS in some situations, there is a preference for voice interaction. Beyond this, the material seems to indicate that there are gender based strategies for the use of SMS.

The mobile telephone along with its ability to send short messages (SMS) draws on three linguistic areas. These include verbal, textual interaction and the arising field of computer mediated communication.

#### **3.2 Spoken and written language**

When considering face-to-face spoken interaction, the research indicates that there are various skills and strategies that are gendered, and the news is often less flattering for men than for women. It has been found, for example, that women often are able to strategically introduce topics of conversation (Fishman 1978; Treichler and Kramarae 1983) use rhetorical and factual questions to maintain conversation and indicate interest. Research also shows that women are adroit at employing critique and interpretation (Treichler and Kramarae 1983) and at adjusting the tempo of conversation (Sattel 1976). Women confirm their participation in a conversation and are more likely to express interest through the manipulation of pauses and interjected linguistic grounding devices (Clark and Brennan 1991; Clark and E.W. 1981; Clark and Marshall 1981; Duncan 1972; Johnstone et al. 1995; Kendon 1967; Sattel 1976). Finally, women use talk to establish standards and integrate the group (Gluckman 1963; Imray and Middleton 1983; Jones 1980, 194; Rakow 1992; Tannen 1991). Women use various forms of etiquette and courtesy to strategically facilitate interaction (Coates 1986). At the same time, men use various devices such as interruptions and injections to dominate interaction (Coates 1986).

As with spoken language, gender has been an area of focus when examining written language. A distinction is made in the degree to which the text is intended to facilitate social integration or to impart information, the former being often associated with women and the latter with men. Women also adhere to normative standards more than men when writing (Baron forthcoming).

Berber has suggested that one is able to see gendered differences in written language when considering dimensions such as involved vs. informational writing, impersonal vs. personal style and the use of narrative vs. non-narrative writing (Biber and Finegan 1997). Argamon et al. have applied Biber's concepts by developing sets of linguistic features that one generally finds in the writing of males and females (2003). In their work, the researchers have devel-

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<sup>4</sup> The implication here is that men make many short – and often mobile based – calls where women make fewer calls and speak longer, particularly on the landline telephone.

oped algorithms for identifying the gendering of text through the examination of various features. Among other things, they rely on the distinction between Biber's involved and informational forms of interaction. They find, for example that women's writing of letters is more "involved" when compared to similar writing of men. By way of an explanation, Cheshire outlines how women use mastery of language to assert and negotiate power – often from a relatively powerless position – in groups, gangs and communities of practice (2002; see also Coates 1986; Tannen 1991).

There are very few studies that look at the gendered interaction in the light of spoken and written communication. Text based interaction results in shorter and more streamlined interaction and decision making (Condon and Cech 1996).

### **3.3 Gender and electronically mediated language**

When looking beyond face-to-face and traditional written interaction to language that is electronically mediated, there are several variations to consider. On the one hand, there are those forms of mediation that are "one to many" (Internet based chat groups) and those that are one-to-a few others (inter office memos qua e-mail) and one-to-one (SMS, e-mail and instant messaging (IM)). There are textual (SMS, e-mail) vs. spoken (landline and mobile voice) forms of interaction. When thinking of text production, there are mediation forms based on the qwerty keyboard (usually e-mail, chat, blogs and IM) those based on the traditional telephonic keypad (usually SMS) and those that have some other text entry form (Palm, virtual keypads and even voice recognition).

The confounding thing is that all these categories are in flux. The most thoroughly entrenched text based form of electronically mediated interaction, namely e-mail can be sent from the most thoroughly entrenched voice related device, namely the telephone in its mobile incarnation. Writing is being mutated into alternative forms when we think of, for example, text production on the Palm and other similar devices. In addition, speech recognition programs are, in some cases, eliminating the boundary between spoken and written language. Coming to the focus of this paper, with SMS we see that text production is thriving on a platform designed for other purposes.

In spite of all the cards being thrown into the air, as it were, one is still able to see that there is gendering in the various electronically based mediation forms (Herring 2003; Rakow 1988; Rakow 1992). With telephonically mediated speech, there are clear gender differences with regards to the length of telephone conversations, i.e. women talk longer than men on the landline telephone (Claisse and Rowe 1987; Ling 1998; Moyal 1992).<sup>5</sup> It has been found, for example, that it is the gender of the person receiving the call that is influential with regards the length of the conversation, at least in the world of landline telephone calls (Smoreda and Licoppe 2000).

Men were often early adopters of both e-mail (Baron 1998; Baron 2000; Baron 2001; see also Herring 1996; Yates 1996) and mobile telephony (Ling 2000). However, when adopted by women, the style of use often showed a more empathetic turn. In the case of chats, MUDs

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<sup>5</sup> While this seems to play on the traditional stereotype, it is also women who often have the responsibility for the organization of remote care giving (calling the sick uncle or checking in on elderly parents) and for organizing various social events such as children's birthday parties etc. (Ling 1998). These facilitate interaction and they are often used in women's networking that is, in some cases down graded and described as loose talk or gossip. Nonetheless, it can be seen as an indication of social integration as it is a part of the establishment of the standards of behavior (Gluckman 1963; Imray and Middleton 1983; Jones 1980, 194; Rakow 1992; Tannen 1991).

and MOOS, Herring found that women are often more “aligned” and supportive than their male counterparts (2003). Gefen and Straub have shown that women perceive e-mail as having higher “social presence” (1997).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, new forms of interaction have come onto the scene. In many respects, their adoption has also included the adoption of traditional gendering. However, the new technologies have also allowed renegotiation of interaction forms. The mobile telephone has engendered new forms of coordination (Ling 2004b). Chats, MOOS etc, have lead to new ways of insulting one another (Herring 2003). Instant messaging is allowing new forms of social interaction (Baron forthcoming). Of particular relevance for the analysis here, Baron has also found that IM conversations carried out by males are more similar to descriptions of speech while female IM interactions are mostly closely related to writing (2005).

Much of the analysis described above examines gendered behavior via a single form of mediated interaction. The question that is perhaps more central here is when confronted with two alternative forms of interaction that are mediated via the same device (SMS and voice mobile interaction), which is chosen and for what purposes. In the material that follows I will look into the gendered choice of interaction form.

#### **4 SMS as a “Women’s” medium**

The material here indicates that women and men have a different relationship to mobile communication. While this finding has also been seen in other areas of mobile communication (Ling 2003; Ling 2004b; Rakow and Navarro 1993) the material here points to the gendered use of short messaging (SMS) or “texting” via the mobile telephone.

In the following citation one sees what might broadly be called a female usage pattern. As the reader will see, SMS is well integrated into her life. The woman – a 28 year-old divorced woman whom I will call Kristin – uses SMS in both instrumental and expressive ways. In addition, one can also read various types of power dimensions in her selection of when to use text messages and when she will call.

The material here is a transcript Kristin reading a log of her telephonic interactions during a day in her life to the interviewer. On this particular day, one of her children had been sick and thus Kristin needed to rearrange a series of meetings, arrange for the transportation of her other child to day care, and make an appointment at the doctor’s office.

1 Ok, first I got an SMS from my mother earlier today. She wanted to know how my youngest was doing because she had been sick last night.

2 And so I sent a message (SMS) back and answered that (ha ha)

3 And so, so I sent a message (SMS) to a friend of mine, we were actually going to meet, to say that I couldn’t come [to a planned meeting].

4 And so at 8 o’clock I called because I needed to have an appointment at the doctor’s but there were so many people that were sick right now so, yeah, so that it was nothing, it sounded like a normal cold, ehh.

5 And so I got a message (SMS) a little past 8 [from her mother] and she said that she could drive my oldest child to day care.

6 And so I got a message (SMS) from a friend of mind, ehh, it was me who sent the first one and she said that we could meet another day.

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<sup>6</sup> They did not, however, find differences in use. One can speculate that the complexity of PC use may be an issue here. The mobile telephone is a simpler technology and thus the technology does not come in the way of interaction to the same degree as with PC mediated interaction.

7 And so. . . I sent a message (SMS) to my mother to confirm that she could drive the oldest one to day care.

8 And so at 8:30 I got a message (SMS) from my mother that said that she would pick up the oldest child when she came.

9 So at 9 o'clock I got a call from the children's father, he wondered how it was going.

10 And so at 9:30 I called the day care to say that Lina would be a little late

11 At 10 past 10 I sent a message (SMS) to my father's wife to ask if she could pick up Lina and buy a couple of things for us.

12 And so at 11:30 I got a call from he[her father's wife] and she said that she could do that.

13 Ahh, and a quarter to one I got a message (SMS) from a friend who wondered if we could meet sometime and I answered that at about 1:20.

14 At 1:40 I called to day care again to say that she [Lina] would be picked up by my father's wife.

15 And at eight past 5 I sent a message (SMS) to a friend, just a cosy greeting.

16 And at 13 past 5 I got a message (SMS) from her.

17 Ahh at 25 past five I called the children's father again, no, we called him because the kids missed him.

18 At twenty past six we got a call from the father again because he wondered if he could loan our car (Divorced woman aged 28 with two daughters aged 5 and 1) with 17

The sequence points to several interesting features of media choice. First, Kristin generally used SMS for contacting other women. There was only one case where there was not mutual use of SMS between women, that being the interaction with her father's wife (lines 11 and 12). In this case, Kristin had opened the interaction by sending an SMS, but the older woman – Kristin's father's partner – had responded by calling. This may point to some of the inter-generational issues with SMS that will be examined below. However, when looking at communication among same aged women, (and also Kristin's interaction with her own mother) SMS was the medium of choice. This included both the more instrumental communications such as arranging for transport of the older child to day-care and the rebooking of the meeting with a friend, and the expressive uses as seen in her "cosy greeting" to a friend (line 15).

Another dimension here is that SMS was not used for interaction with institutions (the day-care center (lines 10 and 14) or the doctor's office (line 4)). Clearly, the interaction with the doctor's office would be difficult via SMS since that implies sending the message from the mobile system to the landline system. While this is technically possible, it is not a well-recognized application. The other issue here, however, is that SMS is not seen as a legitimate way to interact with these more formal groups. In the case of the day-care center, one can imagine that the more informal form for interaction with the personnel there might allow an opening for SMS interaction. However, in both cases, Kristin is contacting not just an individual, but also an institution. This is, of course a whole cluster of persons who need to have their own internal routines for dealing with patients or day-care children. A doctor's appointment means that the individual has to be entered into the system, given a time for the appointment, perhaps billing or compensation information has to be processed etc. In this way, one is not calling to an individual, but to a position in a formalized institution. It may be that it is always "Betty" or "Frank" who makes the appointments and takes the billing information. However, should one of them be out for the day, an alternative person will have to

fill in here. Thus, the person-to-person nature of SMS goes, to some degree, against the grain when interacting with institutions.<sup>x</sup>

The final point here is that all the interactions with men were based on voice telephony (lines 9, 12, 17 and 18). It is slightly misleading to state this since men regularly use SMS. However, in the diary reported by the woman here, her only contact with men was her ex-husband. There were several calls – both incoming and outgoing – involving the ex. In each case they were voice-based calls. Some of this may have been because he wished to interact with the children and thus, text based interaction was not possible. Nonetheless, even when he called to borrow the car it was voice based.

Another woman, Berit, a 28-year-old divorcee with a two-year-old daughter, had somewhat similar use of the mobile telephone. Unlike the previous example, this woman had only a mobile telephone. In reading through her traffic diary one sees that there are a wide range of expressive and instrumental messages sent via SMS.

[At] 13:06 I got a SMS from a girl friend who just wanted to remind me of a birthday, she lives in Brummundal.

At 13:18 I sent a message [to her] and thanked her for the message.

At 13:20 I sent a message to the son of this friend and wished him a happy birthday, he has his own mobile and is 20 years old.

At 13:21 I got a SMS from my girl friend who wanted to wish me a good day.

At 13:21 I got a message from 1985 (a game) but I hadn't won anything.

14:19 I a text message from the boy who had the birthday, the said thanks for the greeting.

At 20:10 Linda (her daughter) and I sent a SMS from home to the Donald Duck competition and then five minutes later I got an answer that they had gotten our message and they wished us good luck in the competition.

At 21:38 I sent an SMS to my mother. . . and asked her if she could help me sew a cape.

At 21:42 I got an answer on this that she could try even though it might be difficult.

At 21:42 I sent an answer and said thanks a lot. (Divorced woman aged 28 with a 2year old child)

Her use of the texting shows that it is a channel through which she conducts various types of errands. These range from different types of expressive activities (being reminded of and expressing best wishes on the occasion of a birthday) interpersonal instrumental activities (planning with her mother to sew a cape) and various types of commercial entertainment interactions (different types of lotteries and children's competitions). Her use of SMS may have had an economic motivation in that she had one of the lowest incomes of all the informants in the study. However, it seems that she was quite accomplished in the use of the medium.

#### **4.1 SMS and the life cycle**

While Kristin and Berit reported generally using SMS in their communications, other women reported using a combination of both SMS and voice.

Kari: I know that is swap driving the kids to music school one time a week. The woman I swap with, she always sends an SMS that says "Is it you today?"

Interviewer: Do you answer via SMS?

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<sup>7</sup> Clearly a mobile telephone may be attached to a function just as it is attached to an individual. An ambulance, for example, may have its unique telephone. Indeed cordless telephones are often used in these situations and mobile telephony may also nudge its way in. However, the cost-effectiveness of landline telephony augurs against this, at least for the moment.

Kari: Yeah, or I call if there is anything else. If there is anything else we will talk about so you follow use with a call. (Divorced woman (34) with two children aged 8 and 11)

Kari is somewhat older than the previous either Kristin or Berit. Indeed age seems to be a major issue in relation to the use of SMS. As the reader can see in tables 1 and 2, SMS use declines with age. Until recently, SMS in Norway has been largely the domain of teens and in particular teen girls and young adult females (Ling 2004a).

It is these groups that have been among the first adopters of the medium and, as is evidenced by these comments, they are carrying it with them as they move into more adult roles. The transition from teen to more adult user has also seen the transition from perhaps less serious to more adult uses of the medium. Kristin – the woman who described rearranging her day when her child was sick – was aware of the shift in from more innocent to increasingly instrumental uses.

[When I was younger] I used a lot of SMS for sort of cozy "teddy bear" messages. I don't do that too much any more. Now it is to either send a message or send a kind of "hi how are you doing" [message]. Then I send an SMS and I don't call. If it is somebody who I have not called for a long time and I just want to hear how it is going, it is like that. There are not so many silly messages anymore. . . . but I still send a lot of messages, you know, practical things. (Divorced woman aged 28 with two daughters aged 5 and 1)

Kristin notes how she has dropped certain types of interactions, but still holds onto social network maintenance. The sense that there were immature and mature uses of the technology come through in her comments. Some mothers saw it generally as a teen medium that was more connected to status rights than to the real need for communication. Kristin describes what Ito calls "lightweight" interaction via SMS (2004). That is, Kristin uses SMS to check in on other members of her social network with quick and relatively non-engaging types of interaction. The point for Kristin was to manage the social network in the face of an increasingly complex everyday life with the demands of being a single mother and all that that includes.

Other women spoke of the distinction between the teen and the adult use of SMS. In the case of Kari, however, there was a more distanced relationship. It is possible to speculate that this is perhaps because it was not a medium that she used as a teen and thus is viewing the technology from the other side of a generational divide.

I am actually not so enamored of SMS. They are. They like it a lot, teens that are a little older than the 11 year old. It is probably status to get a lot of messages and to send a lot of messages, to have friends. I see teens and those up into their 20's that are very interested [in SMS]. If there are no messages for awhile they say "Oh, I don't have any friends, nobody is sending messages to me!" (Kari - divorced woman (34) with two children aged 8 and 11).

Kari's comments suggest that for her SMS is only a teen thing or that it is not a serious use of mobile communication. She seems to be expressing a type of familial ideology wherein SMS is not used in that family. However for Kari, SMS is not a neutral issue but rather, it is further characterized as an unserious media. Thus, among the informants who did not experience SMS as teens there is often a reserved relationship to the medium. If we look at the use of SMS by elderly persons there is yet another position. This can be seen in Astrid's (38) comments regarding her mother.

Interviewer: Do the children's grandparents have a mobile telephone?

Astrid: Yeah, my mother

Interviewer: Do you send her e-mail or SMS?

Astrid: I tried but it didn't go so well.

Interviewer: It went poorly?

Astrid: She couldn't manage to read it.

Interviewer: She didn't send an SMS back?

Astrid: No (Divorced and remarried family (Astrid (38) married with five children aged 8 thru 15).

The material here indicates that if one has had experience in using SMS as a teen or young adult, that the medium is carried with them as they move into adulthood. The informants indicate that the form and content of the messages seemingly becomes more serious and less playful. They did, however, report using it for both instrumental and expressive forms of interaction. For those who have first experienced (and even learned to use) SMS as adults there is a different estimation. This group seemingly has a more reserved stance towards the medium and is less quick to see it as a daily form of interaction. Finally, there are those who ostensibly refuse to learn the system. For this group, SMS does not have a role in their daily lives. The material in figures one and two also support this situation. While there is some use among older users, the locus of SMS use is clearly among teens and young adults.

## 4.2 Social networking and the instrumental use of SMS

A thread that has gone through several of the comments is that SMS was a "lightweight" way to maintain a circle of circle of friends (Ito 2004). One woman, Tina, noted that she used SMS in this way; that is as a medium through which she could send a quick greeting to persons who are somewhat more distant in her social network.

Short messages are good with SMS and like cozy [things], a nice little message to . . . a lot of times you know when you begin to get older you have a circle of friends or you have some that you see quite a lot and they you have a lot of acquaintances you know. And if you want to keep up contact all the time you have to talk on the phone all the time just to show that "Ok I am thinking of you." So instead you just send a nice greeting and yeah. . . And it is good because you don't always have the energy to sit on the telephone and chat so SMS is very nice (Tina (38) divorced with a 5 and a 10 year old child).

On the one hand these comments might come across as slightly chilling in that one "maintains" their circle of friends through the use of a restricted channel. At the same time, Tina's comments point to a situation in which she holds her friendships open via intermittent messages, and then perhaps has a stronger basis for interaction on those occasions that she actually meets her friends and acquaintances face to face. Thus, the assertion is not that the interaction is only mediated or only face-to-face, but that the technology allows for something in the middle. Tina describes using the technology to maintain contact. Her comments imply that there is at least some acceptance of the technology in her social group. That is, SMS is seen as a legitimate way to interact in certain situations by certain groups.

Another woman, Kari, shows a slightly more instrumental relationship to SMS when she notes that it is best used for coordination where calling is used in other situations.

[The difference between calling and sending an SMS is that] if you call you should have something new to say or something that is more important to communicate. SMS is more like if you have agreed on something beforehand and you ask if it is ok or what time or things like that. I don't like to key in the whole discussion with SMS. I don't like it so much (Kari (34) divorced with two children aged 8 and 11).

The use of several different channels for more mundane coordination issues is also seen in the comments of Kristin:

[Agreements] can be made via SMS, but if I want somebody else to pick up my daughter, then I call. But if she is going to visit someone after daycare or if we are going to visit someone, that is often agreed upon through SMS

There are changes [in the schedule], yeah, there are changes but . . . it is easiest to send an SMS first but I usually call afterwards. When there are . . . if there are things that come up and it is hectic,

then you send a text message and then I call later. Like today we were actually going to visit someone after daycare and then I had to first send an SMS and then I called afterwards. Otherwise it can be. . . If there are changes in appointments, if we are going to visit someone and we are late, or if the father is going to get them and he is later than we agreed. (Kristin (28) divorced with two daughters aged 5 and 1)

In this case, Kristin discusses the use of mobile for more practical issues. None-the less, she is flexible enough in her approach to use one or the other as the need arises.

SMS is seen as an efficient form of communication. A message can be composed and sent quickly. In addition, it is asynchronous. Thus one can deal with an issue (such as a quick greeting to a friend, or the confirmation of an agreement) and one is not dependent on the fact that the other person is simultaneously available for a conversation, a conversation that necessarily includes various greeting and closing interactions. According to some women, SMS allows one certain efficiency and can also be used strategically. Rita (31) noted this when she said "If you send an SMS, if you are going to send a short message, then it is done in 10 seconds. If you do it via a telephone conversation, then it is usually a lot of talk about other things." SMS affords Rita a streamlined form of communication wherein she can deal with issues quickly and shorn of the need for entangling interaction. It can also be used in order to avoid the need to extended discussion and questioning if the theme is awkward<sup>8</sup> or if one wants to "vent" some anger.<sup>9</sup> In the words of Heidi:

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly the same idea is behind those who are interested in ending a relationship. Interviewees in other projects have noted this. Analysis carried out in Switzerland indicates that as many as 20% of teens have ended a relationship via the mobile telephone (Fleming 2004).

<sup>9</sup> This does not necessarily have to deal with inter-gender relationships. It can also include a way to deal with on-going arguments with, for example tradesmen. This can be seen in the following sequence.

Mete: It is clear that it is easier to send that 'I love you' and things like that [via SMS]. And if they stand there face-to-face they don't say anything. But I have to admit that I don't always want to talk with someone so I can avoid talking, I think that is nice. I mean that! If I am tired and the like, like today, then I can't stand to talk with another person almost. Then it is nice to be able to send a message. I should have sent a message now for example.

Ola: Oh (laughting) to me?

Mete: No

Interviewer: What is the difference?

Ola: No there is no difference.

Mete: You like to talk on the phone.

Ola: Yeah, I can be having a disagreement with someone, like I am now. It is actually pretty funny because our plumber should have been done with the bathroom four months ago. So he writes to me this and that and so I write back that I cant be bothered to talk to you and that I don't trust you. ADIOS! So it is nice to write and SMS and just send it.

Mete: But we would say it to him face to face. Ola is very honest. . . . I don't hide behind an SMS like that like children do I think. They do that. Girls are awful with sending such things. Arguments and gossip (Intact family (Ola (47) Mette (47) with 3 children aged 13 to 19)

This sequence develops the sense that SMS can be used strategically. That is, when the author wants to send a message that is shorn of the additional communication channels (kinesics, haptics etc) and to deliver a clear and simple message that is not necessarily positive, SMS is an effective channel. It is personal, it goes directly to the individual, there is no confusion for whom it is intended, and the receiver is not confused by a perhaps contradictory visual or inflective information of a verbal communication. Thus, the SMS message has a directness that is not found in other media. These characteristics mean that the media can -- and indeed has been misused among teens for bullying or terrorizing each other. In the case noted here, the medium is suggested as a way to deal with a tradesman that has not done his job correctly.

It is easier to use SMS if you want to say something that is a little difficult (kjedelig) because it is a little, you feel a little freer then. It is easier to say it with [written] words than verbally (Heidi (42) divorced with one child aged 15).

Heidi goes on to say that she uses SMS to consciously limit interaction with her ex husband.

No, I don't know what I should answer here actually. In this situation it is really difficult to talk about (laughter). We are not exactly on the same wavelength, to say it that way. Always. We have it like very. . . . he has a difficult time understanding our situation, things that happen with us, with Bente. So there can be confrontations sometimes, you can say. Like when he comes to get Grete, so he waits outside with the car, he does not come in here too often, eh . . . I don't see him too often you know. Sometimes he comes to get Grete before I come home from work. And I think like . . . . Yeah. . . . Call . . . No, I don't like to call him . . . . If there is something that I HAVE to have an answer right then, then I call. (Heidi (42) divorced with one child aged 1)

These women use SMS strategically in order to manage awkward and difficult situations. Their comments indicate that the mobile telephone protects them from potential arguments and other difficulties, particularly when dealing with another person with whom they perhaps have a history of difficulties.

The material from these women indicates that mobile communication and SMS has a certain place in their daily lives. The comments point to its (perhaps somewhat reserved) use for both expressive and instrumental activities. They saw it as an easy way to maintain friendships and their social circle, as a way to deal with coordination and the confirmation of agreements and also as a way to strategically deal with awkward situations.

### 4.3 Contact with males

The use of SMS in awkward situations can, in some ways serve as a transition into the use of the medium by women when interacting with men. A theme that arose through out the interviews with divorced women was the various dimensions of interacting with men via the mobile telephone. Women noted that men often prefer to call as opposed to send messages.

In several cases the divorced women indicated that there was a different estimation of how one should use SMS. The material seems to indicate that there is a tendency for women to use texting and men to respond by calling. In the words of Margit: "I [use] SMS and my ex-husband calls." She goes on to say that:

[I usually contact my ex] with SMS if he does not call. I don't call him very often. It is only if there is a really special message, then I call. He often calls back instead of answering with SMS. (Margit (38) divorced with a 16 and a 6-year-old child).

Another divorcee also indicated approximately the same thing.

Interviewer: How do you contact your ex?

Berit: I send an SMS and he calls me back if he has a lot to say (laugh) (Berit (28) divorced with a 2year old child).

The comments of the women give one the sense that a preference for vocal interaction is particularly strong among the men. While there is an acceptance for texting in certain situations, it is seen as a less desirable form of interaction. Tina notes this:

You know earlier, when we were together, then we didn't use SMS that much but that is because he thinks that it is really dumb. "Oh so dumb" you know. "These messages." But now he has a phone that is a little alright and so it is fun. Before, there was not much SMS and then there was . . . no, there was a little more. In spite of the fact that we almost don't have any SMS contact, it has started to come . . . (Tina (38) divorced with a 5 and a 10-year-old child)

Margit, who we have already met, sees this gendered approach to mobile telephony not only in the case of her ex-husband, but also in the case of her 16-year-old son.

Margit: It is different from child to child. Some talk and are open. My oldest [boy] is very brief "Yeah, good, ok, fine." It is always "ok." [My daughter] likes to give a lot of details, so it is very individual. I have very good contact with her over the telephone. But with him it is one-letter words and not more than he has to even though he likes to talk otherwise he sees the telephone as a way to send messages. There is no chatting like us girls and friends do. We take up the broad themes. Men use SMS differently than us women (Margit (38) divorced with a 16 and a 6-year-old child).

In some cases the preference for texting among women was that it allowed them to avoid difficult conversational situations. Margit noted a strategic motivation in her choice SMS when interacting with her ex. This was based on the fact that because of his job, he had a difficult time concentrating himself. Thus, SMS meant that Margit could, in effect send the entire message in a single bit.

The reason that I like to use SMS with [my ex-husband] is that he works as a stock agent in a trading company so there is so much that happens and so much noise and we are always interrupted if we talk. "Wait a second, just hold the phone for two seconds." There is not any sense in anything. I get the answer I need when I send an SMS because then you are short and concise. . . . (Margit (38) living with a 16 and a 6-year-old child).

This comment indicates how SMS fits into the small openings that one has during the day. By contrast, a verbal interaction is more of a time commitment since there are a whole set of expectations surrounding the interaction. By contrast, the SMS is a lighter form of interaction.

In another case SMS provides the women, Berit, with another type of strategic advantage. In this case SMS affords her a type of efficiency in interaction since her ex-husband is an excessive talker.

I prefer to send an SMS and I can tell you why (laughter). Because he never stops talking. If I call him, then all my pre-paid minutes go up in smoke because he says a lot of dumb things that are not very interesting for me. I prefer sending an SMS. . . . It is like. . . SMS is more like. . . Ahh do you want to go to the movies this weekend? Yeah, which film is showing? Short clear messages if you want to maintain contact with friends. Then it is like you call and talk about everyday things and chitchat a bit like that (laughter). You don't do that with SMS (Berit (28) divorced with a 2 year old child).

Interestingly we can see the asymmetry of interests by examining the comments of her ex-husband, and his estimation of SMS.

Knut: It takes a longer time to write [than to talk], I am not too satisfied in SMS because I fumble so much with it. I have never been so good with that so I call as a rule. I think it is a lot easier.

Interviewer: What is difficult with SMS?

Knut: Yeah, I . . . for the most part it is to say things simply. I am a bungler so it is better to call (laugh). . . Face to face, eye contact is actually, that is actually the best.

Interviewer: Why is that that?

Knut: I get more out of it (Knut (38) divorced, 2 year old child)

As we have come to understand, Knut actually likes to talk on the phone since it is more direct and, according to Berit, it allows him a broader canvas upon which he can act. However, in some situations the use of SMS can be better since it is somehow more efficient. He goes on to say, "Mothers are a lot better than me to send SMS and if I am going to answer then I call back." In the case of Berit and Knut, we see that Berit makes strategic use of SMS as a way to manage interaction and avoid an over commitment of time to Knut's need to talk.

## 5 Male (strained) attitudes towards SMS

While adult men and women send about the same number of SMS messages, the qualitative material indicates that there are gendered attitudes and uses of SMS. SMS suffered in comparison to mobile voice telephony from the perspective of the adult men in the sample. SMS was seen as being difficult to use, less authentic and less accepted. While the material suggests that SMS has a place in the lives of the female interviewees, men often had a more distanced relationship to texting. At the most basic level, there were comments as to the difficulty of entering text.

I think that there is something with SMS . . . I can't really do it. It is such short things (The man in a couple (Bjørn 40, married with two children aged 10 and 13)

SMS takes too long (Kjetil (45), married with two small children both under three years of age)

I generally call, I don't use much SMS. It is not so easy (laughter). I haven't understood it (laughter). I can't get my fingers to do it (laughter) (Tron (36) married with two boys aged 9 and 6)

There is also the idea that given other alternatives, that SMS is a second-class form of interaction. In addition, if there were readily available alternatives, men expressed a preference for voice communication.

"I have a free telephone so I don't bother to send SMS, I call." (Robert (33), married with two children 9 and 5).

Others set the use of SMS into a broader ideological framework. John, for example provides us with a broad condemnation of SMS. He notes that while it perhaps a place in society, it is only suitable for petty interactions.

I think that it is a bad form of communication. If it is an SMS it must be because that it is a completely inconsequential thing where you don't need verbal communication. (John (38) divorced with non-residential children).

The men noted that they "don't bother"; that there is "something with SMS," and the sense that SMS was "a bad form of communication." These comments, coming from widely separate interviews, point to a sense that men see SMS in a poor light.

Looking at the issue of efficiency of communication, there is a direct contraction between the women's and the men's perception of SMS. As the reader will recall, women often note that SMS is seen as a quick way to send a message and to deal with a situation. While women often saw SMS as an efficient form of interaction, men pointed to exactly the opposite notion, namely that voice interaction is quicker. A Per, 37-year-old divorced man said:

You get things solved right there and then [with voice telephony]. Send an SMS and so then it is quickly very "ping – pong." A lot of back and forth. Another thing is that I am often in the car and I have a "hands-free" and so it is good to deal with that kind of thing . . .

The same sense comes through in the comments of – supported in this case by his wife Toril.

Interviewer: . . . Are there differences in communication that are face-to-face and those that are over the telephone as verses those that take place on e-mail or SMS. Is there a quantum difference with talking.

Bjørn Yeah. If I have to begin to clarify something, and I feel that I need more than two sentences, then I call. It is not effective, but if I sit here and think how I have to write this here, then I call.

Toril: I think the same if it is difficult to write in an [e-]mail.

Bjørn: That is what I was thinking now, mail. When it comes to SMS, I don't think that it is too useful yet. It has to be easier to write quickly. Even though it is better now. I am perhaps a little behind here.

Toril: I think that it is nice to hear the voice of the person I am talking to. It depends on what it is naturally.

Bjørn: For short messages [SMS] is ok but if you need to talk about something, then I don't send a message. . . (A couple (man 40 woman 44) with two children aged 10 and 13).

Thus, men and women seem to disagree as to the efficiency of SMS. In the material reported above women like the use SMS since "it is done in 10 seconds" and there is no need for the entangling socializing. In addition, it allows them a type of lightweight form of interaction through which they can maintain their social network. By contrast, there is a tendency among men to see it as awkward, ungainly and inefficient and thus they express a preference for synchronous voice interaction that seems more direct and is a richer form of interaction.

## 5.1 Authenticity via SMS

Ironically, Toril's comments in the previous citation foreshadow another issue that is most commonly cited by men, namely that SMS affords less authentic interaction than voice. There was the sense that SMS did not allow the same insight into the other's gestures and body language. Clearly in face-to-face communication there are a much broader range of inter-gestural and inter-proximal forms of communication. There are various forms of gesture, kinesics, proxemics, vocalics, appearance, haptics (touch), chronemics, and manipulation of artifacts associated with communication (Archer and Akert 1977; Burgoon 1985; Cherulink and al. 1978; Ekman and Friesen 1969; Felipe and Sommer 1966; Greenbaum and Rosenfeld 1978; Hall 1973; LaFrance and Mayo 1978; Leffler et al. 1982; Taylor 2003; Watson and Graves 1966). Indeed it is through our nods, winks, glances, fiddling with props and grounding utterances that we indicate that we are engaged in the conversation, that we are interested – or not so interested – in the comments of our interlocutors etc. Many of these cues are stripped away when it comes to telephonic communication (Duncan 1972; Martin 1991, 95 - 97; Rutter 1987, 105 - 126; Saks et al. 1974). Instead there is a type of verbal gesturing that helps maintain the flow of the conversation. There was a sense among many of the men – and some women – in the interviews that this was even more strained with SMS

Informants felt that SMS was too restricted a channel. In several cases, the informants noted that, for example, there was no eye-contact associated with the use of SMS. We have already heard this refrain from Knut above. Morten is also quick to cite this element.

Interviewer: Is there a difference with regards to communication that is face-to-face or via the telephone versus e-mail or SMS

Morten: Eye contact. (Morten (39) remarried with and five children from age 1 to 15)

Morten's simple response points to the sense that SMS can be seen as a relatively sparse type of interaction and that things such as eye contact and various types of body language are only a part of the communication process. This is also the case with telephony, but in the case of traditional verbal telephone communication the cues of intonation, pauses and other extra-lingual cues are available for interpretation. Another man, Thomas, elaborates on this when he says:

. . . All the nuances are gone in SMS. It can be a little caustic if you send a little [message] like "Why haven't you remembered. . ." such that you don't get the nuances in intonation. (Thomas (45) divorced father with two children aged 17 and 13).

He describes how in some situations it is necessary to call and to let the other person hear the extra-lingual elements, the nuances of intonation etc. He notes that SMS is a more restricted channel and that one is not able to communicate nuances when using text messages.

## 5.2 The Ideology of voice interaction

Beyond the functional issues of text entry, the material provided by the men suggests that the use of SMS can point to deeper ills. The comments of Kjetil outline how SMS is a second-class form of interaction, particularly when interacting in the private sphere.

When I start to send SMS to my wife instead of talking with her, then it has gone too far I think (Kjetil (45) married with two small children both under three years of age).

Kjetil's comments here seem to indicate a personal preference seemingly based on an individual evaluation of SMS and its role in his life. However, the material also indicates that males' distanced relationship to SMS arises from collective behavior. Media selection is not only the preference of individuals, but there is also a shared sense among men that SMS is not an appropriate way for men to communicate. The comments of Bjørn point to this:

I drive a lot back and forth. Yesterday there were few telephone calls in relation to what there can be. I am a tradesman, and I drive a lot from job to job. I talk a lot with the other workers. I only talk. I almost never send an SMS. (Bjørn (45) married with two children aged 10 and 13))

There is almost the sense that "real guys don't use SMS" in his comments. He "only talks" with other workers and does not send text messages. It is not an individually based decision, but rather his aversion to SMS is at least partially based on the common ethic of other colleagues. His use decisions draw on the broader context of which that he is a part. Bjørn's focus on voice is not just his personal decision, but it is a dimension of his interaction with other colleagues. While one can find stray comments made by women, there was not the same uniformity, directness nor has the moral superstructure developed as it seemingly has with the males.

## 5.3 The power dimensions of voice and SMS

There is a type of power dimension that comes through in the choice of medium (Ling forthcoming; Ling and Yttri 2003). In several situations, male interviewees noted that they, in essence, forced a verbal interaction into what had been a text based interaction.

Interviewer: Are there differences with relation to communication that takes place face-to-face and that which is done via SMS or mobile phone? Do you have any thoughts about that? Things that can be easier to just send an e-mail or an SMS. . . .For example if your daughter sends an SMS, is there a big difference in content rather than if you talk with her?

Kjetil: The messages are shorter. . . . If [my daughter] asks a question face-to-face there can be a little more discussion.

Interviewer: Does she sometimes send an SMS when she wants to avoid an argument?

Kjetil: Then I call her up. We don't just send a message back again. (Kjetil (45) married with two small children both under three years of age)

Here, Kjetil shifts medium if he feels that it is to his advantage in dealing with an arising situation. Rather than dealing with a difficult medium in addition to a potential disagreement with his daughter, he moves from a less to a more synchronous form of communication; that is from text to voice. In other material I have reported that women say SMS "gives me time to think" when interacting with men (Ling 2004b). Where his daughter may feel more comfortable sending SMS since messages can be edited before sending and thoughts prepared more completely, Kjetil may prefer the advantages often afforded men in verbal interaction (Coates 1986). Presumably in voice-based interaction Kjetil can get a better read on the situa-

tion and perhaps can also employ various strategies through which he can dominate the interaction<sup>10</sup>

In this case, Kjetil initiates the verbal call. Thomas took an even more extreme stance in that when confronted with a situation in which he wanted to change media, he sent a text message back to his ex-wife asking her to initiate a call.

Thomas: . . . just the other day that she [his ex] sent me an SMS with a couple of questions and I wrote back that she needed to call me because it was too much to deal with via SMS. (Thomas (45) divorced with two children aged 17 and 13)

In both cases, the men do not accept the format/medium of the interaction and, as a condition for continuing the interaction they oblige their interlocutor over to another medium. In both cases, this prerogative is exercised over women, showing that there may be a gendered dimension to the situation (Coates 1986, 136). Just as one can speak of setting the agenda for a discussion, here we can speak of “setting the medium.” If the Kjetil thinks that his daughter is trying to avoid an issue by simply sending an SMS, then he calls.<sup>11</sup> In the case of the interaction between the Thomas and his ex, he also sets the conditions under which the interaction will take place. There is an asymmetry here in that the one side is trying to limit the discussion while the other is trying to open it up.<sup>12</sup>

These findings seem to underscore the suggestion that existing gendered power relationships are more or less replicated in new media, be it the traditional telephone (Rakow 1988; Rakow 1992; Rakow and Navarro 1993) or the internet (Herring 2003). While the basic power relationships are carried over from the one to the other, however, the material here indicates that the strategies of interaction may be changed and adjusted to meet the new exigencies.

Thus the choice of medium reflects in some ways the assertion of power. It seems, however, that while SMS can be used strategically, its use has found a preliminary institutionalization. The comments here point to the recognition of a nascent status quo as seen in the simple statement of Margit reported above: “I [use] SMS and my ex-husband calls.” On the one hand, women – in particular younger women – accept SMS as a way to interact, to coordinate and for example use SMS to maintain “lightweight” interactions with other extended friendship groups. SMS is also a way to obliquely approach problematic interactions or to contact others with whom contact is difficult either because of “bad blood” between the interlocutors or because of a chaotic communication context.

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<sup>10</sup> Coates describes how men often dominate verbal interaction by using such devices as overlaps and interruptions (Coates 1986)

<sup>11</sup> There may be an economic issue here in that the daughter likely has less income and thus the call will use a larger portion of her disposable income. This would press her in the direction of SMS. Parents, by contrast, have greater ability to pay and thus the call is a smaller portion of their total income.

<sup>12</sup> Another way in which these issues are played out is when one asks assistance of another. Again, there is the need to think through the strategic use of the medium. Turning again to Thomas, we were interested how he arranges for the favor of child care when calling other relatives or friends.

Interviewer: How do you agree on [taking care of the children] when it is not with your ex-wife?

Thomas: It is the telephone, not with SMS. You don't ask a neighbor to help with the kids via SMS. It is like you are asking a favor. You need a minute or two of light chat about things before you take up the actual issue here. It is usual to do it in a way that is closest to an actual conversation (Thomas (45) divorced with two children aged 17 and 13).

Here the shoe is on the other foot as it were. In the case where Thomas needs a favor, he understands the need to use various forms of politeness in the interaction (Coates 1986, 129). In addition there is a strategic aspect to the selection of the medium in that he selects that channel that best allows him to realize his goal. Just as the women note that SMS allows one to avoid entangling socializing, this man plays on the same theme and somewhat consciously uses the socializing as a way to achieve his objective.

The this emerging understanding of SMS can also be seen in the way men often suggest that it forces one to use an awkward form of text entry, that it is an inauthentic form of interaction and that it is inefficient. To draw on the work of Berger and Luckmann, the aversion to SMS has gone beyond a type of thought through functionality, to the state of being a taken for granted form of understanding of the medium as a second class form of communication (Berger and Luckmann 1967). The message to potential interlocutors here is obvious. It is something along the lines of “If you want to communicate with me, call. I don’t respond to text messages.”

## 6 Conclusion

After having gone through this rather specific examination of how men and women use SMS, in particular in the context of familial interaction, it is useful to pull back a bit and see how this medium is either contributing to, or working against social interaction.

In the opening of the paper I looked into how mobile telephony is an area wherein ritual interaction is elaborated. It is a type of focused social encounter that relies on various types of ritual interactions. At a practical level these media to work out mundane issues.

The comments of the interviewees here indicate that we are in the process of working out the specifics of SMS as a form of mediated interaction. In a sense, society is still hammering out the way in which SMS should be used. The material here points to gendered understanding of the media. The use (or non-use) of SMS is also a way in which we play out our participation in the social order. In order to do this we use various types of ritual formulations and phrasings in order to achieve our interactive goals.

As reported above, females and in particular young adult and teen females use SMS more than other groups in Norway, particularly when considering non-job related interactions. Females – and in particular teen females – write longer and more complex SMS messages that are, to use the terms of Tannen are more aligned (Ling 2003; Ling 2004b; Tannen 1991). It is possible to speculate that women prefer SMS in certain situation since it is less synchronous and it allows time for strategic thinking. At the same time, adult males prefer voice mobile telephony, a medium wherein they enjoy certain interactional advantages. Thus, we play on pre-existing forms of interaction that are drawn over into new forms of mediation to achieve our own goals. That is, there are power differences involved in social encounters.

Our use of language and mediation is a part of our repertoire of strategies. We use words, intonation etc. and we select media, in order to manage focused encounters. The material here shows how women use SMS to manage focused encounters across a range of issues while men are perhaps more inclined to see SMS as an awkward form of interaction that has only limited functionality. Thus the ability to “set the media” is, in essence the ability to determine the power relationship in the interaction.

Thus, the way that social interaction is played out through a particular media and the way that it is played out through the mutual willingness to accept one another’s guises and stratagems is being developed and elaborated. The introduction of SMS onto the scene gives us the chance to see the process afresh. The mediation form has not acquired the patina of being an entrenched form of interaction and so the elaboration and nuance of the strategies is similarly new. We are in the privileged position to see the management of focused social encounters with fresh eyes. We can watch how simple every day activities are being managed in a slightly different way and how the rules surrounding the interaction are being freshly minted.

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