

Flexible coordination in the Nomos: Stress, emotional maintenance and coordination via the mobile telephone in intact families¹

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1 Introduction and method

A central question in sociology was posed by Georg Simmel when he asked “how is society possible” (Simmel 1910-11)? Rephrased to some degree, we can ask, in a society where individualism is a strong element, how is it that we are able to maintain the social (Beck 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1994; Lash 1994)?

The tension between the individual and the collective is as old as sociology (Portes 1998), and has, for example, found a new form in the dialogue around the concept of social capital (Ling 2004d). Following from this thought, there are clearly rituals and institutions that play into the structuring and maintenance of social life. We are members of various social constellations – both formal and informal – that afford us rights in exchange for our observance of the norms and rules (Ling 2004c). Participation in the Thursday night gang means that we have to show up on time and buy a round of beers when it is our turn. In exchange we get to enjoy a few hours of social interaction with old friends. Membership in the local genealogy group means that we have to arrange the meeting on occasion, but we get access to other’s research tips. A visit to the restaurant with a friend means that we have to mind our manners, but we get a good meal and a nice discussion to boot. And so it goes. We participate in various social groups, we fulfill our need for social interaction and we contribute to the ethos of the situation. We use various forms of ritual and institutionalized interactions in our striving to balance between discord and order.

An essential element here is that in our social interaction we rely on collectively developed and understood props in order to maintain social interaction in focused social encounters. In addition, we often act in the context of what Berger and Luckmann call institutions, here defined as those situations characterized by the reciprocal typification of habitualized action (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 54). Indeed, it is our willingness to do exactly this – as well as our recognition that others are up to about the same type of wheeze – that lays at the core of our sociability.

There is an essential reflexivity in being social. We are willing to use various recognized devices in our interaction and in turn, we are willing to allow others the use of the same – or perhaps similar – devices in their interactions with us. Further, the tighter the group is bound, the greater the strategies are elaborated and the greater the nuance one can read out of the strategies and lines that are chosen for interaction. Some social interactions are loose to the extreme wherein we need only the broadest forms of a common parlance (for example showing your passport to the inspector at the airport or giving the person in the tollbooth the coins for the toll). In other situations the interaction is extremely nuanced and intricate. Indeed the subject of this paper – interaction between couples – is one situation where the mere raising of an eyebrow can communicate volumes.

The sum of all these interactions is our ability to orient ourselves in society. Eventually we know how to deal with people at tollbooths and at passport controls. We know how to behave ourselves in restaurants or at local social gatherings. That is we have certain socially constructed ballast with which we can weather various situations.

The material examined here looks into Norwegian parents’ use of mobile communication and transportation in relationship maintenance. The interviews illustrate how the partners construct, live in and maintain what Berger and Kellner call a nomic situation (Berger and Kellner 1964). The interviews give us insight into the active

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nature of the families' lives – particularly those with smaller children – and the effort needed to keep afloat in hectic stream of everyday life. It looks at how couples seemingly develop a stock of routines that can be used to attend to the ongoing needs of the family. These routines have a practical dimension in that they for example help the couple know how and when to shop for food, help the children with lessons, wash the clothes and the like.

Technology, and specifically the automobile and the mobile telephone are brought into this process in various ways. The comments here show that these devices are used to facilitate the tasks of the parents. They are used in order to facilitate everyday life and, in this way to assist in the continuance of this social context. The “second” car in the family is used to deliver the children to various activities while one of the parents uses another to commute to a more or less distant job.² The mobile telephone is used to arrange shopping tours on the fly and to coordinate who will be picking up which child at day-care. The technology is a tool that is used to facilitate the couples' responsibilities. Thus, the technology becomes a medium through which the social order is maintained.

The material examined here is a part of a larger study of transportation and communication in everyday life. The material was gathered as a part of series of 25 interviews carried out in the Oslo area in December of 2003. The interviewees were selected based on their marital/domestic and their parental status. We interviewed the parents of small children aged 4 – 8 years (approximately 50% of the interviews) and also the parents of teens aged 11 – 15 years (again approximately 50% of the interviews). This sample allowed us to examine the issues of familial coordination since the youngest age group is completely dependent on their parents' daily care and attention, the older group is more independent.

When considering marital or domestic status we examined both “intact” and separated families. The “intact” families made up 10 of the interviews; the interviews were done with both the partners. It is this group that is in particular focus here.³ The interviews were designed to examine the interviewees' use of transportation and communication in their daily lives:

- 1) How did the different families use ICT to coordinate daily activities? Which aspects of ICT are important for the different family types?
- 2) What characterizes the coordination of communication in the different family types? Between which persons in the family does coordination take place? How the communication can be characterized? We were particularly interested in the aspects of security/control, emotional interaction, planning/effectiveness in this communication.
- 3) Which media is used for which purpose? What are the advantages and drawbacks of texting in relation to voice or visually based ICT?
- 4) What type of interaction are there between the use of ICT and physical mobility? Which types of daily trips are impacted by the use of ICT? Is it such that some trips are replaced by other communication (telephone, e-mail), are they modified (the trip is changed en route), are there more trips, or is there no real interaction between the use of ICT and daily travel activity?

Aside from three homes, all households had a car. The three households without a car were all single-parent women. In addition, four of the homes in the same category did not have a landline telephone. All of the intact and eight of the distributed families had Internet. Among those without an Internet connection were four women. The resulting interview were taped and transcribed. The transcribed material was examined and using a computer based coding program where it was coded into various thematic areas. The citations used here were translated from Norwegian to English.

² Among the 10 intact families the men commuted a longer distance than the women 29,9 km vs. 20,1 km. Interestingly among the separated interviewees the women commute a slightly longer distance to work than do the men. In this case the women commute 9,1 km vs. the men's 7,7 km. The differences between groups do not appear to be statistically significant in either case.

³ Marital status of the interviewees include both married, cohabitating or, as in one case, a “reconstituted” family. According to Statistics Norway, approximately 15% of adults between the ages of 20 and 79 are cohabitating, 51% are married and 34% are living alone. The data material also included 15 interviews with divorced or “place separated” families that are described in other papers material produced by the project (Hjorthol et al. 2004; Ling 2004a). In five of the both of the partners were interviewed individually. The distributed sample consisted of nine woman and six men.

2 The concept of the nomos

As developed above, the issues describe here look into our ability to participate in social interaction. The description in this paper, particularly in its focus on married couples,⁴ plays on the idea of the nomos. This concept was developed by Berger and Kellner and is seen as the opposite of Durkheim's notion of anomie. Looking first at anomie, in its simplest form it is the absence of norms. Anomie describes a state wherein there is a breakdown of the rules controlling behavior in society. More specifically, Durkheim saw anomie as a situation wherein social norms are confused and unclear, or possibly absent. Thus, individuals are left without a clear sense of how they should behave and interact. He felt that this could contribute the rise of deviance and other problematic forms of behavior such as suicide (Durkheim 1997). In direct contrast to Durkheim's notion, Berger and Kellner posit the idea of nomos as a situation where there is an abundance of norms.

Just as the individual's deprivation of relationship with his [sic.] significant others will plunge him into anomie, so their continued presence will sustain for him that *nomos* by which he can feel at home in the world (Berger and Kellner 1964, 7).

In any group there is a need to objectify the individuals' ideas and meanings such that they become, in a sense, the common property of the group. In the words of Berger and Kellner, these common meanings need to become "massively objective" (Berger and Kellner 1964, 9). The group needs to know that it is, for example not acceptable to smoke in the office, to wear ties on Fridays, to make phone calls during class or to express support for one or another political position. Such considerations become the common ideology of the group. These ideologies are developed and nurtured through various forms of discipline and through their inclusion in the lore of the group. In this way, the sense of the group is defended and the sense of the group is bolstered through the development of a common version of the world. Berger and Kellner note:

Every social relationship requires *objectification*, that is, requires a process by which subjectively experienced meanings become objective to the individual and, in interaction with others, become common property and thereby massively objective (Berger and Kellner 1964, 11). (emphasis in the original)

Nomos reaches one of its most developed forms in the context of the family. Their reasoning is that in modern society each family constitutes a segregated sub-world and in this way the partners, and eventually children, have a strong and relatively un-mediated influence on each other. In this social situation, the familial truisms and rituals take on an importance to the members that is much stronger than with other social constellations.

The family however is a precarious institution. In other social groups there are many members who are available to help support and develop the group ideology and by extension the group identity. In the case of the couple – especially before children arrive on the scene – there are only two persons who carry this responsibility. Because of this the couple is a particularly unstable social construction. While there are general social notions that play into the couple's sense of how to be a couple, they are also the masters of their own common ideology to a much larger degree than in other situations.

The product of both the broader social expectations and the couple's sense of their own situation is what Berger and Kellner call the coupled identity. The coupled identity is the responsibility of the two individuals to a much larger degree in modern society than in traditional society. This is because in a traditional society the couple is often surrounded by a broader extended family that has relatively free access to the couple's private sphere. In many respects this broader social sphere has a say in the nature and content of the coupled identity. By contrast, in contemporary society the private sphere is less accessible, the couple is not embedded in an extensive local society and further, the couple is often more mobile (Sennett 1998). Thus, the coupled identity, and the ideology supporting it, is to a larger degree the creation of the two individuals.⁵

Berger and Kellner use the metaphor of the conversation to describe the marital interaction and the process through which the coupled identity is developed and maintained. While an actual verbal interaction is a large, and perhaps the most important part of nomos building, I would also suggest that common activities and various forms of interpersonal ritual are also a part of the nomos building (Ling 2004c). The result of the couple's interactions is a type of crystallized institution in the spirit of Berger and Luckmann (1967).

⁴ I use married couples out of literary convenience here. Many of the couples in the study were co-habiting. This is a relatively common familial form in Norway. According to Statistics Norway, approximately 40% are born to parents who are co-habiting, but who are not married (SSB 2004).

⁵ When a relationship ends, this structure needs to be dismantled. In many respects it is the opposite process, that is the replacement of an individual identity where a coupled identity was previously in place (Vaughn 1983).

In the marital conversation a world is not only built, but it is also kept in a state of repair and ongoingly refurbished. The subjective reality of this world for the two partners is sustained by the same conversation. The nomic instrumentality of the marriage is concretized over and over again, from bed to breakfast table, as the partners carry on the endless conversation that feeds on nearly all they individually or jointly experience (Berger and Kellner 1964, 13).

They go on to say:

This process has a very important result – namely *a hardening or stabilization of the common objectified reality*. It should be easy to see how this comes about. The objectifications ongoingly performed and internalized by the marriage partners become ever more massively real, as they are confirmed and reconfirmed in the marital conversation. The world that is made up of these objectifications at the same time gains stability (Berger and Kellner 1964, 13). (Emphasis in the original)

The coupled identity is a structure that provides a sense of continuity and stability in an otherwise turbulent life. These characteristics are obvious in the data considered here. To jump ahead slightly to the data, one finds in the comments of a couple I have named Tron and Tina that within the more or less fixed nomos of daily life, there is the need for specific types of coordination.

Interviewer: Do you call your wife often?

Tron (36): We talk at any rate at least once a day, if not two.

Interviewer: And you agree on getting the children and things like that? Or?

Tron: That is fixed if nothing unexpected has happened.

Tina (39): We agree. . . What we are going to have for dinner (laughter). . .

Tron: . . . we agree on that (laughter)

Tina: . . . shopping and . . .

Tron: . . . small things, practical messages like that

Interviewer: What is going to happen and who is going to do what?

Tina: Yeah.

Tron: Otherwise, the taking and getting the children is fixed. We have our fixed days in order to make it function.

Tina: It is always like one will take them and the other will get them. It is like . . . it is rare that one does both on the same day (Couple with a 6 and a 9-year-old child)

The practical work of deciding on the evening's menu and what is needed from the store constitutes a part of the ongoing need to coordinate within the family. As with Tron and Tina, the cycles of job, day-care or school and various evening free time activities all mean that the families are bounded into certain regular daily rounds. These are formulated into a quasi-institutionalized routine of calling each other.

Different things arise that break out of these routines. A child can be sick, the car can break down, one or the other partner might have to work late or travel to a business meeting or they can run out of milk at a critical point when making dinner. There are many large and small threats to the stability of the coupled identity. It is in these situations that the resilience of the institution is brought into play. One can see this in the comments Hans and Marianne, a couple that both work in relatively well paid administrative positions. They talk about how they try to take the needs of the other partner into account when they have to re-work a schedule because of sickness.

Interviewer: Are there things [that mean a change of plans during the day]?

Marianne(36): . . . Not too often.

Hans (40): If there is sickness, with the children for example.

Marianne: Yeah, that can happen but it is not so often that we throw out. . . what we have agreed on. We do that as a rule, it is usually work. We respect each other's work and if something comes up we really try to . . .

Hans: have understanding.

Marianne: Yeah, understanding, right. Beyond that we usually don't, it is not like I jump on every chance to go out with friends or things like that because I already have some things at home that I need to do. That doesn't happen too often.

Interviewer: Is it like that with you also?

Hans: Yeah as a matter of fact, there is not too much spontaneity (Couple with two children under 7 years old)

The partners describe a rather stable, routinized daily life that is rarely disturbed by irregular events. They both work and the children have their regular daily routines. The partners' careers are important and so, as they note, they are careful about making demands on the other. Thus, ad hoc scheduling – be it done over the telephone, e-mail or in another form – is not simply a mechanical process, but indeed it involves interaction between the partners and a willingness to set oneself into the position of their partner. The reader sees this in Hans and Marianne's comments on being understanding toward one another. Their agreement here brings to life Berger and Kellner's notion of a "common objecivated reality."

Beyond the comments of these couples, the sequences are interesting for the staging of their talk. The way that they fill in the words for each other provides insight into their common sense of coupled identity. There is the sense here of a well-oiled interaction between two adults. There is a type of gracious interweaving of interaction. The woman seems to pause slightly when trying to think of a word and the man provides her with an adequate suggestion that she accepts, confirms and uses in their further comments. Two people are talking but only a single sentence is being uttered. While Berger and Kellner speak of the marital conversation in metaphorical terms, one sees it being concretely practiced here. The couple is filling out and embroidering the common version of reality being presented to the interviewer. In doing so, they help each other and collectively present a rounded, if perhaps somewhat selective picture of the coupled identity. This illustrates at a rather specific level, the nomos like aspects of their interaction.

Along the same line is the use of laughter. As we will examine below, beyond the simple functional aspects of familial interaction, the interviews point to the need for expressive interaction as a type of social lubricant within the family. The laughter in the citation from Tron and Tina also helps to carry the discussion here. In a social sense, laughter is used to assist the conversation past difficult shoals (Duncan 1970). The act that deciding on the evening's menu was the cause of such mirth may point to the fact that the couple also chats about other matters during these calls that are ostensibly for the instrumental act of deciding on dinner. In this case, it is difficult to tell if the intention here is to protect the couple's inner life or to, in essence, ask for the indulgence of the interviewer for relating the un-dramatic humdrum of their lives. It may indicate that beyond the simple need to coordinate that the couple shares a type of expressive interaction in these calls. Nonetheless, the fact that both partners use it in telling about their daily phone call(s) indicates that the conversational device is being used in presenting the gloss of the familial situation and again, we see the mechanisms of the coupled identity at play. The work of Berger and Kellner helps us to set a broader context around the discussion of family life and the role of technology, a discussion of which follows.

3 Complex reduced by flexible routinization

3.1 Complex and less complex life phases

A common theme that came out in the interviews with the intact couples was that everyday life is full of various activities and demands. This is particularly true for those with smaller children. While it is clear that single parents also have complex life situations, the demands of life in the intact families also mean that there is a certain amount of stress in daily life.

Toril (44): Everyday life is often quite hectic. Especially in relation to work. It isn't often that I sit and [can not hear] during a weekday. It is really nice to relax and do something else.

Bjørn (40): It is stressful with the social things sometimes. It can be a little "Yikes" Christmas comes and then there is New Years and then it all starts up again. We are doing too much!

Toril: You have to do everything. You have to do everything you can't manage in daily life. (Couple with two small children both under three years of age)

This family with younger children describes the pressure to carry out all the diverse activities that having children involves. The fact that both partners work and must commute (the husband must commute 17 kilometers and the wife commutes 47 kilometers) means that it is even more difficult for this family to make their time budget stretch to cover all the issues that come up.

Another mother of two (one in day care and another in school) described her life as continually having to plan various logistics.

Inga (36): Now we have gone to the other extreme where we feel like we plan all the time. Who is doing what, where you are and who you are (laughter) I was about to say. It is clear that there is a lot more stress and we both work and that means that we are there more than the normal eight hours a day. So it is clear that it has been a big change. The children have started in day-care. They were not in day-care until. . . then they don't go to the same place you know. They don't go to the same day-care so there is a lot more organizing of daily life. First I have to deliver there and then I have to deliver there and then I have to go to work by a certain time and the opposite for the person that gets them you know. Yeah, it is a lot of planning. Food for dinner. Endless planning. An endlessly returning theme you know. Who will make dinner today and what it is going to be and who will go shopping and . . . Yeah! (Mother in an intact family with a 4 and a 6-year-old child)

To be constantly on the run seems to be an aspect of having children, particularly younger children. In the case of older children there is also stress, but it seems that the growing independence of the children provides a buffer. While the parents in the following citation comment on the relative level of activity, they seem to have a more relaxed attitude towards it.

Interviewer: You manage at any rate to make the ends meet?

Kjetil (45): I think that it goes pretty well.

Mona (41): But there is almost never a day when there is not something or other.

Kjetil: If you have teens then . . .

Mona: They are so active

Kjetil: But I would rather drive to practice than drive around looking for them (Couple with three children 5, 14 and 18 years of age).

Their less troubled attitude towards planning family life perhaps reflects the fact that the children in this family are somewhat older, and that the distances the parents commute are shorter. This family had had two major changes. First, the wife has started to work. This has meant the need for greater telephoning to cover all the different aspects of the family's coordination. In addition, they had also purchased a new car that helped to facilitate the interaction in the family such that there were not as many demands for the use of the single car.

3.2 The need for flexibility vis-à-vis work and family

The working situation of some couples adds an element of irregularity to family life. The families also indicated that mobile communication and second cars helped to resolve some of the complexity of everyday life.

In those cases where both partners work regular hours this is less of a problem. However, in those families where one or eventually both of the partners have shift work, planning is more complex. It becomes even more intricate when, for one reason or another, a partner trades shifts with other co-workers. This means that the other members of the household need to re-order responsibilities for, for example, food making, transport of children, the arrangement of affairs etc.

Kjetil (45): With [soccer] practice and things like that it is me. She has night shift quite often so I take her with me and drive to practice.

Interviewer: Is this agreed upon during the day or when you come home?

Kjetil: It is often during the day I have to say. We never know when she is going to work. She trades shifts [with other colleagues] and changes things.

Mona (41): It is often agreed on the day before.

Kjetil: . . . but I have most certainly forgotten it the next day.

Interviewer: Who is it that calls and reminds or asks?

Mona: We girls [sic.] normally have control over everything so I call and remind him about it.

Kjetil: We men we think about so many other things you know. (Couple with three children 5, 14 and 18 years of age).

In this family the wife is a nurse that has various evening and night shifts along with a day job at a medical center. The man is a contactor. In this citation one sees that the daily routines are irregular. However, in this fluid working situation it is the woman who has the role of making sure that her husband receives reminders as to when she will be away working. The fact that the couple has irregular aspects to their daily scheduling along with the more regular issues of training, purchasing food and the like mean that they have developed routines that provide a structure within which their activities can take place. Beyond the more structural changes in schedule based on shift work, there are other exigencies that arise in daily life. These can also result in changes in the way that they organize the mundane activities of the family.

Interviewer: How do you change agreements if something comes up? Do you use SMS, e-mail?

Inger(34): Telephone, mobile. A lot of mobile.

Robert (33): If I find out at 3:30 that I can not come home at 4 then I just call and say that I can not come home to dinner and that I can not get the children. (Intact family with a 9 and a 5-year-old child)

In the cases that there are irregularities in the daily schedule the parents spoke of using e-mail, the traditional telephone and the mobile telephone to re-schedule their affairs. In the case of this family the man describes how they use the telephone to rework their familial responsibilities in the case of new exigencies.

Toril (40): The only [changing of routines] that has happened is there is suddenly tennis practice for the children on Saturdays and not on week days and that they have practice with an hour's break. It is a little impractical. The one is from twelve to one and the other is from one to two, right in the middle of Saturday.

Bjørn (44) That has meant a little more calling. Trading driving with the other parents. There are probably more agreements "Can you get them, can you . . .). I usually use the mobile or the regular telephone when I am home. Otherwise we would have had a huge telephone bill, it would be. You can do things more on the spur of the moment than you could before. The mobile is either a blessing or a curse.

Toril: Yeah, quite often he goes to the store right after work and so he calls and says "is there anything we need?" (Couple with a 10 and a 13-year-old child).

The families described the need to find flexibility within the broader regularities of daily life. Some of the situations were predictable (shift work) while others (sickness) were less so. In these cases, the need to quickly change the staging of life was accomplished with the use of communication between the partners.

3.3 Flexible routinization of activities

The material here points to a full life for the parents as they go through the routinized and the irregular events that make up everyday life. They have full lives and they use various strategies to fulfill their various responsibilities. As we will see below, there are various ways that they develop strategies for dealing with these issues. These strategies include both techniques for dealing with these issues and various technologies for assisting in their execution.

The material from the interviews also points out that the parents in intact families seemingly have a repertoire of routines that they draw upon in order to maintain the family. These routines can be re-arranged on a modular basis and one can step in for the other as the need arises. The routines can be viewed as Burger and Luckmanian institutions in that they are reciprocally developed between the partners (Berger and Luckmann 1967). They are also often imbued with various types of ideological veneers such that the task has to be carried out in a certain manner in order to be seen as being well executed. They are also a part of the stuff of which the relationship is made. There is a consistency in the activities that characterizes the ongoing maintenance of the partners' nomic identity (Berger and Kellner 1964). It is perhaps wrong, however, to say that the tasks must be performed in a fixed order, or that one or the other partner needs to carry out certain portions of the process. Rather, there is flexibility here.⁶

There are rules or understandings that are used as to who does the shopping, who cleans house, who delivers the children to activities such as daycare or after school activities, etc. It seems that there is a basic template that governs these types of activities and helps the couple (and by extension the children and other family members) to come through the day. However, the pattern is never exactly the same. One day, it is one partner who does

⁶ This is not to say that the tasks in the home are equally shared. Many studies have shown that women are often the ones who spend the most time doing housework. In 2000, women in Norway reported using slightly more than three and a half hours as opposed to men who used just over two and a half (SSB 2001).

the shopping and the other cleans up. The following day the first partner does both since there is a parent-teacher meeting at school. And so it goes. The dishes are cleaned and put in the cupboard in about the same way. The children's lunches contain roughly the same elements and they arrive at their scouting meeting at about the same time via about the same route. All the while, the couple is drawing on a common stock of routines in this process.

Trond (36): It is like the first one that comes home makes dinner.

Tina (39): And he washes and cleans up also . . . (laughter).

Trond: The one that does not make food cleans up. . . (laughter).

Tina: Yeah.

Trond: It is a little like that. It manages itself after 14 years. . . (laughter). (Parents of a 6 and a 9-year-old child)

The dinner may be spaghetti or it may be hamburgers. The person doing the shopping may fancy one type of bread as opposed to another. However, these small variations take place within a larger sense of the ongoing sense of the family in that the essential tasks are carried out and the inner ethos of the family is burnished. A mother of two describes her families' "rule based" system for managing the evening activities as well as providing the space for the other partner to deal with the demands of their job.

Marianne(36): The one that gets the children is responsible sort of from when they come home, or from when we come home, with making dinner, with lessons and play and all of that there. And then the others are free to come home when it is convenient. Of the other doesn't come home then the one at home has responsibility for everything. That is how we do it. So the one that take the children in the morning is, in some ways done and the one that gets them has that part (family with a 4 and a 6-year-old child)

The routines are developed and refined over time. They will necessarily change as the family moves from the stage of having newborn children to when the nest is empty (or the partnership ends). However, when interviewing these families who are in intact situations, one is struck with the fact that the routines are in place and that they form the tools with which the family tackles the demands of everyday life.

The routines also involved various uses of technologies. Of special interest here is the role of the automobile and other forms of transport and that of telecommunication. In the process of addressing the various requirements of daily life, the couples discuss how there is a need for effective (that is time effective) and flexible transport and the need for coordination over broader that is afforded by mobile communication.

Kjetil (45): My wife and I talk during the day. It can be that I get stuck and have to be late.

Mona (41): Get stuck in traffic.

Kjetil: Yeah, you know. Suddenly there is a crash on E18, and you wait there a couple of hours.

Mona: It is generally about agreeing who will get the child at day care. They close the door at four thirty (Couple with three children 18, 14 and 5).

In the spirit of Berger and Luckmann there is crystallized habitual nature to the routines that families develop. Informants spoke of the "natural" spheres of responsibility. A lot of the things that need to be agreed upon in a family fall into the sphere of one or the other partner. This habitualized division of tasks is referred to here as a "natural" phenomena, but it is in all likelihood quite embedded in the history of the relationship and in the gendered assumptions of what is done by whom. In the context of this work, in an intact family that is functioning, the division of tasks is only partially discussed. In general it is habitual. Only when it becomes problematic for the one or the other is there the need for discussions.

Klaus (33): . . . we have areas that are naturally hers and naturally mine. Aside from that, we agree in the evening . . . and we are in agreement the next day and longer into the future also. [Agreeing via] telephone, that is not too often.

Ylva (34): . . . no that is not too often . . . That would have to be if there is perhaps something that we have forgotten and then we suddenly remember it right there.

Klaus: You mean tasks? Yeah, washing clothes, cleaning the house and those things, Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, they are completely normal things that you are . . .

Klaus: Yeah, it is like . . .

Ylva: That is agreed on by us. . .

Klaus: Yeah, there is little high technology here. . . .

Interviewer: Do agreements about who is going to do what change during the day?

Ylva: Yeah, that can happen.

Klaus: Yeah, that is like. . . it can change. But there are things that can be delayed and depending on what it is. . .

Interviewer: What are you thinking about?

Klaus: I am thinking about the daily tasks like only to, like to get . . . deliver and get the kids and to feed them and to take care of them. That has to be done. And food in the refrigerator. You have to agree on that if there is something. Generally, if there is an agreement then it is ok and there are not too many changes. That was a little surprising actually, I don't know if I have any examples, but if you have to change then there is always the telephone. (Couple with two children aged 2 and 4)

The comments of Klaus and Ylva are in line with the notion of flexible routinization. They show that the couple has routines, but that they are practiced in a flexible manner. The couple seems to have their "natural" spheres of responsibilities in the home. However, there is also the flexibility to adjust these as various situations arise. The wife here is a flight attendant and commutes 60 km from their home west of Oslo to the airport northeast of town. The man commutes 20 km to his job as an engineer. This family has worked out various ways of shuttling between public transport and their use of the families single automobile.

Interviewer: Are there many telephone calls between you during the day.

Ylva: Actually our commuting is agreed on beforehand. . . If I am going to work, then either I leave so early that I take the bus or whatever, either that or he uses public transport and I come later with the car. If I start later.

Klaus: The only transport we need to agree on is if we should get you on the train. If you don't take the bus and otherwise the telephone. . . .Our telephone calls are more exchange of agreements and other information (Couple with two children aged 2 and 4)

As with the previous family, others also generally made agreements face-to-face and supplemented them by using other media. SMS is an addition to the agreements that are made over the breakfast table. Thus, SMS does not seem to be at the core of the system, but it is a technology that allows the partners flexibility. In other situations – notably among teens and young adults – SMS is probably more central (Ling 2004a; Ling 2004b). In this case, however, it seems to be a useful but secondary media used to modify interaction.

Interviewer: How do you agree on who will do which tasks in the family?

Ola (47): It is like: 'Do you have the time, do I have the time?'

Interviewer: Is it verbal, in the morning?

Ola: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you send SMS to each other?

Ola: Yeah, we send SMS to each other (Father in an intact couple with children, 19, 16 and 13 years-of-age).

These comments indicate that these couples have a repertoire of routines at hand with which to address the different exigencies of life. There are certain basic activities that need to be addressed such as work, childcare, shopping for food and the like. As noted in the citation above, these routinized tasks are agreed upon face-to-face and there is little need for the use of technology. In the words of another 36-year-old father of two "My day is pretty much (laugh) to work, get the kids from school and like that. . ." Even within this matrix of "work, picking up the children, etc." there is the need to plan at a more specific level.

3.4 Shopping as a flexibly routine institution

One can see the particular way that various families develop flexible routines when examining the way that routine food purchases are made. There are many alternative approaches that include, for example one (or perhaps both) doing the purchasing, preparation and cleanup, turn-taking, ad hoc arrangements where the tasks are taken as they arise. Purchasing of food can either be off the cuff trips to the store as the need arises (perhaps including calls on the mobile telephone during the actual shopping) verses the structured development of a shopping list, etc.

In the case of intact families, and in particular those families that have been intact for longer periods of time, the material shows that these tasks are more or less routinized. There is a type of division of labor here. The way they make food has been included in the flexible routinization described above. That is, one partner does something and the other lives with the assumption that the one will be doing it. In spite of this routinization, there is still the need for interaction in the logistics of, for example, food making. If it is the man that makes the lunches, and the woman who shops for food, then the information has to be communicated. The specific coordination often comes through face-to-face conversations. However, mobile telephony was often used as a supplement.

In some cases it can be the person who has the main responsibility for making the food that does the shopping. In these cases, that person has a sense of what is needed and they can act in a relatively independent way.

Trond (36): I am the one [who buys the food] (laugh), because I have the car.

Tina (39): Yeah . . . he has the can and so generally he does it. I can get small things on the way home, but in general it is definitely him that shops.

Interviewer: When do you agree on this?

Trond: We really don't agree on that much. I am self-sufficient (laughter from both). If there is something or other that you want, then you tell me.

Tina: Otherwise we shop together in the weekends

Trond: . . . and then I shop during the week and I am the one that makes the food

Tina: Yeah, he is the chief for making food.

Interviewer: So there are no real telephone calls?

Trond: No. You know there is

Tina: Oh, he has been know to go around in the store with the mobile telephone

Trond: . . . yeah, that has happened

Tina: It happens and I have to tell him what he needs. (laugh) (Couple with a 6 and a 9 year old child)

In this citation it comes out that the man is the one who both purchases the food and also is generally responsible for making food in the family. The interesting thing is that in the process of discussing this, it comes out that they use the mobile telephone while he is in the store to check on certain types of purchases. This is a type of micro-coordination, or perhaps it is also having access to the wife on an "as needed" basis. This allows for more effective interaction since both can be carrying out certain activities and while still coordinating purchases.

In other cases one person usually does the ad hoc shopping while another does the more basic shopping. In the case of the following family there is a type of division of labor where the wife does the daily shopping and the man does the larger shopping trips.

Ylva (34): I have ehh. . . do the daily [shopping], what should I say? For a couple of days. While he is a lot better at the major shopping, so he often makes . . .

Klaus (33): We shop one time a week, usually, and otherwise we make small purchases. But make the big trip on Saturdays, with a list. Otherwise there are small things . . . like, but for dinners. I don't shop on the way home. I have thought about it beforehand and it is available.

Interviewer: Just small things but larger trips are planned?

Klaus: Yeah, it is planned.

Ylva: . . . It is such that, eh, when I am at home, then I have the responsibility for getting things. But he does the same if I am at work or if he thinks it is necessary. (Couple with two children under 4 years of age) 6

In other cases there is an almost unspoken system of assembling the materials that the family needs to make food. This is seen in the following citation that comes from a family with two children and where the responsibility for making food is divided between the partners.

Inger (34): I am the one who actually has the main responsibility for [grocery shopping]. But I am not always here and it is happening all the time, so he must do some of it.

Interviewer: How do you agree on this?

Inger: We don't talk about it. It is just done when there is the need.

Robert (33): It takes care of itself.

Interviewer: How do you know when there is the need?

Robert: . . . [to Inger] Now you can just keep quite. Here is my big point: I am the one that makes all the lunches here. So I am the one that knows that we need lunch meat, and milk and things like that. But she is better with dinners.

Interviewer: . . . but how do the makings for these lunches come into the house?

Robert: If she is going to the store I say: "Get some lunch meat!"

Inger: You say it to each other.

Robert: Or: "Can you go to the store? We need lunch meat and bread." And we know that we buy cheese. . . . We know what we need and we don't need to say it.

Interviewer: The main part of the shopping list is done verbally but is any of it done via the telephone?

Inger: Yeah.

Robert: "Stop by the store when you are driving by." (Couple with two children under 10 years of age)

The comments here point to a rather informal system for shopping. In the case of this family there are the advantages of propinquity, a seemingly mutually supportive relationship, institutionalizes routines, and an economy that does not demand discipline.

There are also situations in which the coordination is quite explicit. In the following case, the family seems to have quite routinized forms of shopping in that they have a list system that seems to be respected by both partners.

Hans (40): Both [of us shop for food]

Interviewer: How do you agree on it?

Marianne (36): Vi write a list during the week, some things we remember and other things are on the list and then we write the list on the day that we really HAVE to shop. It can be on Thursday or Friday or Monday. That is not as important.

Robert: The one of us who has the time goes shopping.

Marianne: Not too often, or maybe pretty often, the one who is not shopping finds out that we need a little of this or that and then we call via the mobile phone and tell the one who is shopping.

Robert: And order home delivery of food (laughter). (Couple with a 4 and a 6-year-old child)

The degree to which the system is integrated into their lives can be seen in the way that they both fill out each other comments in the description of their system. Their routinized system of developing the list, the general agreement that the least encumbered person does the shopping and at the same time the flexibility to add items to the list point to the way that this is a common task. There is clearly a common focus on the maintenance and a well-understood mechanism for the purchase of food.

One sees here the workings of what Berger and Luckmann would call an institution. These various couples have developed reciprocal understandings of how food comes into the home. This process did not simply arise fully formed, but rather it resulted from the various exigencies that the family had to confront. The accessibility to a car, the time to shop, an interest in making food and a willingness to contribute to the welfare of the family are all elements that come into play. With time the couples have developed taken for granted routines for the purchase of food. This often involves various forms of the division of household labor with one partner, for example doing the ad hoc shopping while the other does the more basic shopping.

The point that is of interest to this study is the way that access to various technologies play into the picture. In at least one case, access to a car was seen as the deciding factor as to who should do the largest portion of the shopping. There is certain logic in this since the car allows for a greater range of movement and for larger loads of goods.

The other technology that was name here, namely the mobile telephone, provides flexibility to shopping. Items that should have been included on the shopping list can be added while the shopping is in progress and clarifications can be made by the shopper who, for example is unsure if the recipe calls for cream or for skip milk. Thus, the mobile telephone into this institution in that it allows them a certain flexibility when purchasing food.

The final point here is that the citations here point to a willingness to contribute to the general welfare of the family, something that is not necessarily a part of the picture in divorced families. The comments here point to a set of mechanisms that contribute to the successful maintenance of the household. As these mechanisms fall away through for example divorce or estrangement, the simple task becomes more and more complex and difficult.

4 The second car and the mobile as elements of flexibility

As we have seen, the material indicates that there are different transportation and communication needs for family during the various life phases as well as different uses of technology in the face of these issues. The period when children need to be driven to all activities perhaps gives away to a period when the children are more independent and can manage their own transportation and coordination needs.

The material indicates that there is also a need for the parents to employ various technical fixes during the period when the children are youngest. Second cars are purchased, telephones are used to coordinate and levels of interaction between the couple are complex. This is particularly the case if it is a dual-career couple. In addition to the care of the children, the couple is each pursuing a career and must observe the potentials and constraints implied therein.

In the following sequence, the family is just coming out of the most intense “small child” phase. They live in one of the more remote suburbs of Oslo. The man commutes 17 km while the woman commutes 32 km. The oldest child has started at school and the youngest child is still in day-care and the woman had began working again.⁷

Interviewer: Have there been any changes in the family that have changed the daily routines, for example changing jobs, new home, purchase of a car or children beginning a new school or day-care?

Hans (36): [. . .]You have started to work.

Marianne (40): Yeah, ok, if you go so far back as 6 months ago then that was a big change. To go from being at home to having a full time job.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about that?

Marianne: Yeah, it was a big change so it is clear that we had to organize ourselves in a completely different way in the way that we laid out plans for our days. There was a lot more calling and that type of thing to find out who should do what. But it was not just via the telephone, we talked about it in the evenings. Much more driving around on my part. So we already had two cars, and I was glad for that and we had to plan out routines in a completely different way, but that didn't have anything to do with communication. We had to plan in a much more structured way than when it was just him working. (Couple with two children under 7 years old)

This woman's return to the workforce had meant that there was a need to reorganize and rework everyday patterns. The couple needed to call each other more often to coordinate activities and there was more driving here and there with the children. It seems that access to the second car was an element that facilitated the wife's return to the working world. It provided a type of cushion in the planning of various activities.

One finds some of the same themes in the comments of another family with two children, both of whom were still in day-care at the time of the interview.

William (36): We have bought our second car not too long ago

Interviewer: What were the consequences of that?

Jorid (32): We have more time in the morning for example and . . . it made it easier for me to go food shopping. Before it was on the way home from work and that was difficult. We save a lot of time and I feel that I am more flexible in some ways when I have my own car.

Interviewer: Have there been any changes that have resulted from that?

William: For example you do more like practical things in daily life, you get more time.

⁷ In Norway, there is a universal one-year maternity leave of absence that can be divided between the mother and father. In this case it seems that the family extended this period somewhat using private means to finance the mothers staying at home with the younger child.

Jorid: Yeah, for example so you can make a quick trip to the post office or some other small errand that you need to do it is suddenly much easier.

William: And it means that I do less.

Jorid: Or that he doesn't have to do all these small things on Saturday (Couple with two children under 7 years of age)

As with the previous couple, the use of a second automobile helps them to cover all the tasks that arise in the course of the day. The man commutes 60 km each day and the woman works 4 km from their home. The fact that each has a car provides certain efficiency. The wife reports being able to attend to various geographically distributed tasks that otherwise would have to wait.

5 Maintenance of the emotional balance

Up to this point we have been generally discussing the instrumental activities of the family and the ways in which various technologies play into their completion. Beyond these types of activities, there is also a need to maintain an emotional balance within the family and between the partners. Indeed this is an aspect of the general maintenance of social order.

The stress of everyday life can provide challenges to the emotional balance of the family. This citation came in the context of how stressful daily life can be. The woman, who works full time and who has two "day-care" children, speaks of how the stresses of daily life can have consequences for the maintenance of a relationship.

Toril (44): That about being burnt out and all that. I cannot see that you get status for that.

Bjørn (40): I have worked as a personnel leader for five years. I have seen a lot of that and I have seen it directly. We both work a lot. I wound up with 100 hours of overtime. I like to work such that I have some highs and some lows. I like to have a little pressure, not because it is status, but because that is how it always has been. When I am in between projects, I feel a little empty.

Toril: I don't see that you get status by being busy. I think that more and more people want to have free time and more time for their children. There are many who slide away from each other because they don't have time together.

Bjørn: But I think that it is difficult to come out of a situation with a conscious decision.

Toril: You have responsibilities also. It is difficult to suddenly one day . . .

Bjørn: I hear a lot about people that are pushed into jobs that they actually don't want. (A couple (man 40 woman 44) with two children aged 10 and 13)

In this context, the potential for universal and omnipresent communication can contribute to the stress. One is never really free from telephonic intrusions. However, this very omnipresence of mobile telephones also means that there are various gaps in daily life that can be used just for the maintenance of the emotional balance. The mobile telephone was mentioned as a way to help avoid worrying about other family members who were out and about. It was used to tie together the social network and it was used, in some cases to repair small spats that had arisen between the couple. With reference to the first of these, one woman described how she used the mobile telephone to calm herself when her husband was away.

Marianne (36): We don't use it to check where the other is, generally we know that like only between us even though I called yesterday since I was curious when he hadn't come at the time he said he would. Generally I call if it will be later than he has said or to know where he is, so it is to calm myself because I have trouble sleeping before I know that he is ok, you know. So sometimes I use it as a type of control, just so that you are ok. Then I can sleep. That is the way it is if somebody is out late to in some way say that everything is ok (Mother in an intact family with a 4 and 6-year-old child).

A second theme, one that was surprisingly common, was that the interviewees describe the practice of having what Norwegians call a "hyggeprat" or a good chat. This type of interaction, usually between family members, was seen as a common activity when one was not otherwise occupied with demanding tasks.

Interestingly, these types of conversations were common while driving. This type of use was not only to micro-coordinate the tasks facing the couple, but also to simply have a good chat. Many of the interviewees reported using the car as a type of portable telephone booth wherein they could have an expressive conversation with their partner, or other perhaps another member of their social network. While the dangers of driving and talking on the phone are well documented (Burnes et al. 2002; Cain and Burriss 1999; Recarte and Nunes 2000; Redelmeier and Tibshirani 1997; Strayer and Johnston 2001; Strayer et al. 2003), the impulse to use what was seen as other-

wise unused time for the emotional maintenance of one's social sphere seems to be quite strong. Indeed this concept was discussed in 5 of the 10 intact families as well as several of the divorced or separated interviewees. The context of the chats is in the car when one is driving. It seems to be a way to make use of the time when one is driving since the two seem to happen often at the same time. There were many of the people that reported "hyggeprat" while driving back and forth to work etc. It fits into the idea that sitting in the car is empty time that allows one to engage in other activities. With this open space it is a good time to contact one's partner or other person in the intimate sphere for simple chatting and social interaction. It is an arena in which one can maintain the emotional elements of a relationship. In this way the mobile telephone provides a new communications channel and the opportunity to exploit what Fortunati calls the "folds" of daily life in order to interact with significant others. In the words of one couple:

Toril (44):[. . .] I generally don't call so much in the afternoon. I don't call from the home (landline) telephone in the afternoon. Sometimes I call my Mom or Dad when I am in the car on the way home. That is not everyday but sometimes, on the way home in the car since I am sitting quietly and I have time to think. . . .

Bjørn (40): It is often on the way home that you make calls. . . It is pretty common. That is the only time that you have.

Toril: It isn't every day, but you think of a friend that you haven't talked to. It is strange that you call a friend on the way home from work.

Interviewer: Is it a new trend?

Toril: When you come home there are so many other things that happen. Dinner, homework. To sit down and call friends is a real effort. In addition, I have a half hour commute. You don't call on the way to work, but on the way home, when you know that they have come home. (Intact couple with a 10 and a 13-year-old child).

The telephone, for course, has a long history of facilitating expressive interaction. Teens have flirted, lovers have courted and couples have maintained their relationships over the telephone almost as long as the device has been available (Fischer 1992). In addition, friends have kept up and deepened friendships at least partially mediated via the telephone. However, it seems that the mobile telephone has opened up a new area in which this can take place. To play on Fortunati, it is a new fold in our daily lives that is being used for social interaction. In other work it has come out that the mobile phone has been used in the car to deal with small instrumental tasks such as making dentists appointments and the like (Ling 2004b). The sense that comes out in the comments here is that it is also used for more expressive tasks. The couple describes the use of the time in the car as a type of open space where they can call friends and do some of the work associated with maintenance of their social networks. The time used to commute is seen as an open space during the day.

Robert (33): When you are sitting in the car, with the hands-free in your ear it is easy to chat [with friends].

Interviewer: Do you also call more to friends?

Inger (34) I don't call so much at home. It is more when driving to and from work in the car. Actually a lot in the car. I call my sister, friends, parents.

Interviewer: What do you usually talk about?

Inger: It is about daily life. How we are doing right then and there.

Interviewer: Pleasant conversations?

Inger: Yeah.

Interviewer: The conversation you had with your mother, can you summarize that for me?

Robert: It was a pleasant conversation while I was on my way home. After 13 kilometers we ended the call. It was just 'hello, how are you?' and 'why didn't you take the phone when I called earlier in the week?' (Intact family with a 9 and a 5-year-old child).

Another couple described how the mobile telephone in the car provided the opportunity for a good chat and also to make the time of driving go more quickly.

Interviewer: Do you call to family and friends?

Tron (36): It is usually friends. . . I talk on the telephone on the way home. I talk not only with you (to wife) and not just to make agreements, but just to have a nice talk.

Tina (39): Wasting time!

Tron: Yes... (laugh)

Tina: You have one frined you usually call.

Tron: Yeah, he calls all the time

Tina: He calls on the way home from work. . . and he calls, and he talks and talks all the way from Oslo to Ski (approx 40 km). (laughter) (Intact couple with a 6 and a 9-year-old child)

Beyond simple maintenance of relationships, it seems that the combination of mobile telephony and the private space afforded by a car allow other types of repair work for partners. In the following citation, the couple seems to have had a small disagreement.

Interviewer: Your log book says you had a mobile call in the car in Lommedalen?

Robert (33): I could have written mobile callback . . . I have thought to admit that, Ok!

Inger (34): Oh, you called? Today. You!

Robert: You don't remember that? You have not written it down [in your log book]?

Interviewer: That was at?

Robert: About quarter to 10.

Inger: That is right. It was an apology. Sorry . . . (laugh)

Interviewer: SMS or a conversation?

Robert: I have a free telephone so I don't bother sending SMS, I call

Interviewer: From Lommedalen?

Robert: Yeah.

Inger: . . . Say 'I am sorry.'

Robert: No, I wrote to say 'hi.'

Inger: Also to agree, it was an agreement conversation.

Interviewer: Did it lead to anything?⁸

Inger: No

Robert: Yes, that we were both happy! (Intact family with a 9 and a 5-year-old child).

As the sequence develops the reader sees that the man had used the opportunity of driving in his car to call his partner and to smooth over a disagreement they had had. It is interesting in that it take place in the car and it involves the use of the mobile telephone. The car provides a type of mobile telephone kiosk and the mobile means that he can actually employ the time in a secure private sphere to deal with an issue that is slightly touchy. It would be more difficult to do this at work where others might hear or at a telephone booth that is partially open.

6 Conclusion

This paper started by dealing with the broader question of social organization. Within this broader issue I have focused on the more specific issue of familial interaction. The point of departure here is the idea that the family provides one with a well-crystallized social arena. Particularly after the arrival of children, the family often represents a basic realm in our social orientation.

Indeed the family is often that resource that we draw on when storms seem to be raging in other parts of our lives. It is an area where we experience can draw on both instrumental and expressive reserves. For many people this is the center of the nomos and its dissolution means that we need to strive to reestablish these points of orientation in other ways.

⁸ The specific question was as to whether it led to any new trips, but the woman is willfully misinterpreting the question.

There are norms and rituals associated with the maintenance of the family. The intense and close nature of the family means that these are perhaps more elaborated and internalized than in other social groups. Indeed, they seemingly speak with one voice in some instances.

This is not to say that the coupled identity is inflexible. Indeed there seems to be willingness for flexibility among the interviewees. They report on how they have developed a common understanding of what the familial context will include, and general notion as to how they – or their partner – can fulfill these needs. There are more or less ritualized interactions and ways of dealing with the needs of the family. The partners fill in for each other in a more or less elegant *pas de deux* where the one partner makes dinner or washes up while the other drives the oldest child to a birthday party and will return in order to help the younger child with their home work, or to put away the laundry. Each of them draws on a stock of routines that attend to the ongoing needs of the family. By making the mashed potatoes in just a certain way, or by folding the underwear and placing it in a particular corner of the drawer, the individuals are celebrating the coupled identity in some small way while at the same time they are contributing to its massiveness.

These issues are not new. The things that are new, perhaps, are the technologies that we used in order to support the broader goal of nomos. The citations here describe how the second car is often seen as a way to facilitate the daily chores since it buys time and flexibility. It allows one partner to do small tasks such as shopping and the ferrying of kids in the broader urban landscape while the other commutes to a job that may be on the other side of the city. The mobile telephone is seen as a way to micro-coordinate the interactions between the partners on the fly as various exigencies arise. It allows the partners to know when they should come or where it is most convenient to meet (Ling and Yttri 2002). These technologies assist the couple in their daily activities.⁹ The technology is a tool that affords flexibility in the couple's routines.

The technologies also seemingly give the individuals the space for the expressive maintenance of their lives. The talk on the telephone is not just "what kind of cheese do we need from the grocery store." But it is also allows the individuals to talk about daily life with each other and with their social sphere. The interesting twist here is that the automobile has become today's phone booth, only we don't have to limit our conversations because of another insistent person who needs to make a call.

Thus, we are playing out our interactions through the use of a repertoire of ritual and institutional devices. We balance between discord and order. The interaction that can be more or less elaborated but we rely on collectively developed and understood ritual strategies to maintain the social order within the encounter.

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⁹ This is not to say, of course that they are socially neutral. The car pollutes and the mobile telephone can also "pollute" the public sphere with seemingly inane conversations.

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