

Trust, cohesion and social networks: The case of quasi-illicit photos in a teen peer group¹

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Introduction

One of the key issues in modern society is the fate of the social group in the face of technologies that seem to encourage individuation. Indeed this has been a general focus of sociological analysis since the time of the industrial revolution. The contemporary study of mediation technology fits into this mold. On the one hand, there is the sense that the processes of modernity are tearing at the social fabric but there is also the sense that various forms of technology are providing us access to one another in unprecedented ways. Looking at the example of the internet there is, on the one hand, the sense that it is a force that provides for new forms of social interaction² and at the same time there are those who suggest that it has a negative effect on social cohesion.³

Looking at the process of sociation, according to Robert Putnam, the social capital of society – particularly in the US which is the focus of his analysis – is under siege.⁴ The combined effect of the television, suburbanization and the passing of the pre-war generation, which was particularly adept at the formation of social groups, has led to a general reduction in social capital. McPherson and his colleagues have examined changes in the number of persons with whom we feel emotionally near during the period 1985 to 2004.⁵ Their general finding is that in the US the number of close friends and family has dropped from a mean of 2.94 to 2.08 during this period.

Both Putnam and McPherson et al document a fraying of the social fabric. The question then becomes how the fabric is being maintained or perhaps even enhanced. Looking specifically at technological developments, the adoption and the use of the mobile phone has been seen as a contribution to the cohesion of the intimate sphere.⁶ More specifically, the mobile telephone is a stage upon which (or through which as the case may be) we are able to perform various types of social rituals. Following from Durkheim, Goffman, Collins and Carey⁷ it is the rituals of everyday life that provides the group with the common sense of group identity. In this paper I will examine the way that a group of teen boys work out the use photography in the process of maintaining the cohesion of their group.

¹ Ling, R. (2008). Trust, cohesion and social networks: The case of quasi-illicit photos in a teen peer group. Paper presented at the Budapest conference on Mobile Communications, Budapest, Hungary.

² Katz, J. E., Rice, R. E., & Aspden, P. (2001). The internet, 1995 - 2000 Access, civil involvement, and social interaction. *American behavioral scientist*, 45(3), 405-419. and Shirky, C. (2008). *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York: Penguin Press.

³ Kraut, R., Patterson, M. L., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukopadhyay, T., & Scherlis, W. (1998). Internet paradox: A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well being? *American psychologist*, 53(9), 1017-1031. and Nie, N. H., Hillygus, S., & Erbring, L. (2002). Internet Use, Interpersonal Relations and Sociability: A Time Diary Study. In B. Wellman & C. Haythornthwaite (Eds.), *The internet in everyday life*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁴ Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Touchstone.

⁵ McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Brashears, M. E. (2006). Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades. *American Sociological Review*, 71, 353 - 375.

⁶ Ling, R. (2008). *New Tech, New Ties: How mobile communication is reshaping social cohesion*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁷ To my embarrassment, In my book *New Tech, New Ties*, I did not include the work of Carey on communication and ritual. This was due only to the fact that I come from a sociological tradition and not communications. His work is to be commended. Thanks to Laura Forlano for pointing this out. Durkheim, E. (1955). *The elementary forms of religious life* (K. E. Fields, Trans.). Glencoe, IL: The free press. Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon. Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Carey, J. W. (1988). *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*: Unwin Hyman.

Trust and secrets as components of social cohesion

According to Fine and Holyfield, internal group cohesion in voluntary groups is based on trust among the members and on their willingness to protect the secrets and the lore of the group.⁸ Social cohesion is a group process that helps to regulate social life. It arises out of the need for solidarity while pursuing common aims. It also arises out of a sense that the common aims of the group are dangerous. In the case of Fine and Holyfield, there was an actual physical danger in the groups that they studied.⁹ In the case examined here the common aim of the group was, in its broadest sense, the process of emancipation and the establishment of the individuals as adult members of society.¹⁰ More particularly, the focus of the group was the pursuit of snowboarding and the social life associated with that. Trusting one another would likely include being able to rely on one another regarding agreements and also, relying on them to use the appropriate levels of discretion when discussing the social activities of the group (that is the secrets)

The ability to enjoy an activity is enhanced if it is done in the context of doing it with others. In addition to the mastery of the activity – or activities – at hand, there is the sense of belongingness that arises from the group that can also magnify the pleasure of the common activities. This belongingness can also result in the sense that the individuals see themselves as being characterized by the activity.

The cohesion of the group is dependent on the fact that the members trust one another and most particularly that they can trust one another to protect the inner knowledge of the group.¹¹ Both trust and secrecy are ambiguous concepts. According to Simmel, trust and the similar concept of confidence occupy a position between knowledge and ignorance. The ability to trust another person means that we have knowledge as to the character of the individual but that we do not specifically know how they will behave in a given situation.¹² This confidence or trust arises out of the interactions of the group. In many ways it is the crystallization of the group ethic, that is, the agreement on the way that the group will handle different emergent issues. The possession of specialized internal knowledge from the group objectifies the group's identity. It facilitates the interaction of the group and helps them to pursue their goals, however ill defined than may be (partying, snowboarding, etc.) As noted by Fine and Holyfield, "Trust is a fundamental anchoring dimension of cohesion".¹³

Obviously it is not possible for the group members to have the ability to understand and map out the appropriate way of dealing with unforeseen issues. In this case, the internal confidence in other group members needs to be dynamic enough to provide guidance in these situations. In addition there are often interactions within the group as to what is "ok" and what is not "ok." These may include discussions regarding theoretical situations, they might include the review of happenings in other groups or they might be examination of issues within the group itself. For example, another group of teens might have been caught drinking. The ensuing discussion with the group itself helps the members to outline the situation and to develop a common ethic. These discussions are basically the establishment of a rule set albeit not a specific codification of behavior. These discussions help the individual members to understand how to react to future emergent situations. They also contribute to the general trust within the group in that the theme at hand is a part of their common perspective. Based on these types of interactions, as new issues arise, the group members may be able to trust one another that these locally developed ethics will not be ignored.

Secrecy is the other general dimension discussed by Fine and Holyfield. A well functioning group will have its internal knowledge that is guarded from others. To become a trusted member of the group the individual is given access to this internal knowledge. Thus, there is a type of paradox associated with group secrets. On the one hand secrets by definition are bounded knowledge.

⁸ Fine, G. A., & Holyfield, L. (1996). Secrecy, trust, and dangerous leisure: Generating group cohesion in voluntary organizations. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59(1), 22-38.

⁹ They examined the social processes of mushroom gathering groups.

¹⁰ Ling, R. (2008). Mobile communication and teen emancipation. In G. Goggin & L. Hjorth (Eds.), *Mobile Technologies: From Telecommunications to Media*. New York: Routledge.

¹¹ Fine, G. A., & Holyfield, L. (1996). Secrecy, trust, and dangerous leisure: Generating group cohesion in voluntary organizations. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59(1), 22-38. Page 25.

¹² Simmel, G. (1950). *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, edited by Kurt Wolff. *Glencoe, Ill.: Free*.

¹³ Fine, G. A., & Holyfield, L. (1996). Secrecy, trust, and dangerous leisure: Generating group cohesion in voluntary organizations. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59(1), 22-38. Page 26

On the other hand, this information gains its currency by occasionally being shared. Exposing the secrets in some cases builds the cohesion of the community. At the same time, the more general knowledge of the guarded information erodes its power as a secret. Managing the tension between these two positions is a part of the collective work of the group. In the case of some groups, such as the mushroom collecting groups studied by Fine and Holyfield, the internal knowledge had to do with the appropriate types of mushrooms to eat and also the locations of collection areas.

Community is built not only by the occasional spread of information, but also by keeping it. This secrecy depends on the assumption that over time, all members will have secrets which they will keep. . . .¹⁴

Thus there are two tensions at work when thinking about the cohesion of a group. The one is the degree to which other members can be trusted to handle emergent situations in a way that is consistent with the ethic of the group. This is based on knowledge of past interactions, but also there is a lack of knowledge regarding the specifics of the particular instance at hand. The other tension is the role of secrecy in guarding the lore of the group. In general this is only accessible to some persons. At the same time, if it is never drawn upon it becomes dead knowledge. In order to be an active part of the group, it needs to be drawn upon in certain instances and with certain people. The cohesion of the group involves the balancing between these different poles. Between having confidence in the other's decisions, but also having to discuss which decisions were good or bad.

In the context of this discussion, the emergence of electronically mediated communication (EMC) and the potentials of digitalization try even the best intentions. The ability to spread digital images or ill thought out words on the internet means that traditional issues of privacy and secrecy of the inner group difficult to guard. In addition, they provide the group with new possibilities for the display of their inner life.

While trust and secrecy are the broader framework upon which the functioning of the group are built, there are continually emergent situations that require the individuals to make decisions as to how they should act. These include whether the specific act is in character with the general functioning of the group. Would, for example, a particular act threaten the internal workings of the group? Would it be an affront to the self-image of a person to whom we wish to retain as a friend?

As we will see below, these questions are particularly touchy in the case of humor, as is often the case within the group. Humor can be the confirmation of group cohesion. This is particularly the case when all persons involved agree as to the drift of the joke or wheeze. Humor has the function of rejuvenating the social bonds. A joke or a funny story shared among friends is a collective event wherein all the people involved share in the same symbolic universe.¹⁵ At the same time, humor involves playing along the line of what is acceptable and what is not. If the humor goes too far over the line it becomes vulgar. Instead of being a light hearted attempt to develop cohesion, it becomes a blunder. Rather than being an instance that one and all can reflect back on with bemusement, it can spin out of control and become a failed ritual.¹⁶ The racist, sexist or unduly vicious rejoinder can place a wedge between individuals. The sense that one is being laughed at rather than being laughed with can cause distance rather than closeness.

It is possible to posit that decisions as to the nature of trust and secrets in the small group are also decisions as to what constitutes the group's local ethics. This notion of ethics is different from global ethics that apply across groups. They are derived in the interaction between the members of the group. They also define the boundaries of the group. They are decisions as to which type of behavior is acceptable. They are not codified rules, rather they are principles that can be applied to emergent situations. They are the things that people "ought" to do if they want to remain in good standing with the rest of the group.

¹⁴ Fine, G. A., & Holyfield, L. (1996). Secrecy, trust, and dangerous leisure: Generating group cohesion in voluntary organizations. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59(1), 22-38. Page 30.

¹⁵ Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 65 and Duncan, H. D. (1970). *Communication and the social order*. London: Oxford. Pages 257 – 258.

¹⁶ Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Photographs as a ritual form

Photography is a ritual form. We photograph various social events as a way to document the cohesion of the group.¹⁷ Bourdieu describes, for example, the wedding photograph as a way to establish a record of the group's cohesion.¹⁸ Generally when such a photograph is taken the group in the frame is given warning of the timing of the photograph and the individuals adopt a façade that is deemed appropriate to the setting. There are rituals associated with the staging of a photograph that are designed to maximize the possibility of a good shot. The subjects will, for example, adjust their hair, face the camera and strike a pose. Perhaps they raise their glass and hold the pose until the photograph has been taken.

A photograph is the staging of a cohesion display. This in turn becomes a document of the groups' unity and in a Durkheimian sense it becomes a totem, that is an object that has the potential to reawake memories of group status at that time.¹⁹ Travel photos, photos of the child's soccer team, photos of former lovers, the grandparents at the child's birthday party or photos of moving into a new home also serve a similar purpose.²⁰

The photograph as a document is a double-edged sword. While it can remind us of the good time enjoyed by everybody at the party, it can also capture us awkwardly arrayed, our hair askance and our expression unguarded. It can capture exactly that moment that we turn away from the camera to exchange comments with another person, or it can capture the moment when the bride's bouquet is in front of our face.

In addition to staged photographs, there are also candid or action photographs. Rather than assembling individuals in a particular location determined by the backdrop, angle of the sun etc, these are taken as the situation arises. The photographer may simply wander through the group and capture images of the party goers mingling. The proud father may stand on the sidelines and photograph his son or daughter on the soccer field in action. Regardless of their provenance, the photo captures the status of a moment. As with the "staged" photo, for those involved the photo can be serve to remind them as to their thoughts and feelings at that time.

The increasing access of photography equipment also means that we are able to take pictures of emergent situations. The camera is available to take photos of the family gathering or the teen drinking party. These photos can capture and record the inner processes of the group. This in addition to the potential to spread the material via the internet mean that photos have a potentially public dimension that was not the case in the recent past.

Photographs that document the inner life of a group are an area where both trust, and the secrets of the group become precarious. The process of taking a photo is a group ritual and as with other rituals it is the source of group cohesion.²¹ There is a mutually recognized focus on a process of taking the photo and this often engenders a common mood. There are barriers to those who are not a part of the group and the interaction creates a common recognition of shared status. In the case of "gag" photos or even more glamorous ones there can even be liminal aspects of the process in that striking a pose or doing something odd constitutes a minor transgression against norms.²² All of these dimensions can result in an increased sense of social cohesion within the group. In addition there are power dimensions associated with the process – who decides the motif, the timing of the photo and the way in which it is distributed, etc. Finally, there can be failed photo based rituals, that is those in which the process results in lower group cohesion because of disagreements as to the way that photo was taken or the way that it was shared afterwards.

¹⁷ Prøitz, L. (2007). "Everybody has a family tree – and this is mine:" Writing your own narrative. A study of family photography from the family album to MMS. In *The mobile phone turn*. Oslo: University of Oslo.

¹⁸ Bourdieu, P. (1990). *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. Stanford Univ Pr. See also: Adrian, B. (2008). Geographies of Style: Taiwan's Bridal Photography Empire. *Visual Anthropology*, 19(1), 73 – 85; Lewis, C. (1998). Working the ritual: professional wedding photography and the American middle class. (study of the affect of professional wedding photography on the American middle-class wedding). *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, v22(n1), p72(21); Strano, M. M. (2006). Ritualized Transmission of Social Norms Through Wedding Photography. *Communication Theory*, 16(1), 31-46.

¹⁹ Prøitz, L. (2007). "Everybody has a family tree – and this is mine:" Writing your own narrative. A study of family photography from the family album to MMS. In *The mobile phone turn*. Oslo: University of Oslo.

²⁰ Garlick, S. (2002). Revealing the unseen: Tourism, art and photography. *Cultural Studies*, 16(2), 289 - 305.

²¹ Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²² Ling, R. (2008). *New Tech, New Ties: How mobile communication is reshaping social cohesion*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Photography and digital mediation

The taking and sharing of pictures has changed with our increased access to picture recording devices and increased access to communication technology. Most new mobile phones have a camera function, which has made it easier to photograph and share pictures from everyday life with friends and family. In addition, web services like Flickr and Facebook support a community model and make it possible to share pictures with friends as well as a broader audience of peripheral friends and strangers.

As of February 2008, 73% of all the telephones in use in the Telenor net in Norway had a camera. Adjusting this for the persons in Norway who did not have a mobile telephone (about 7% of the total population), this means in rough terms that about seven in ten of the persons in Norway had a camera phone. While use of the telephone network to transmit the photos was somewhat limited, the mobile phones qua cameras were used to take photos on a relatively regular basis. Of 1000 randomly selected Norwegians over the age of 12, 36.2% reported that they used their mobile phones to take a photo at least weekly. The age distribution shows that younger persons are more active in taking photos than older persons. For those under 26 years of age, more than 70% said that they took photos using their mobile phone at least on a weekly basis. By way of contrast more than 80% of those over age 67 (retirement age), reported never doing this (see figure 1).

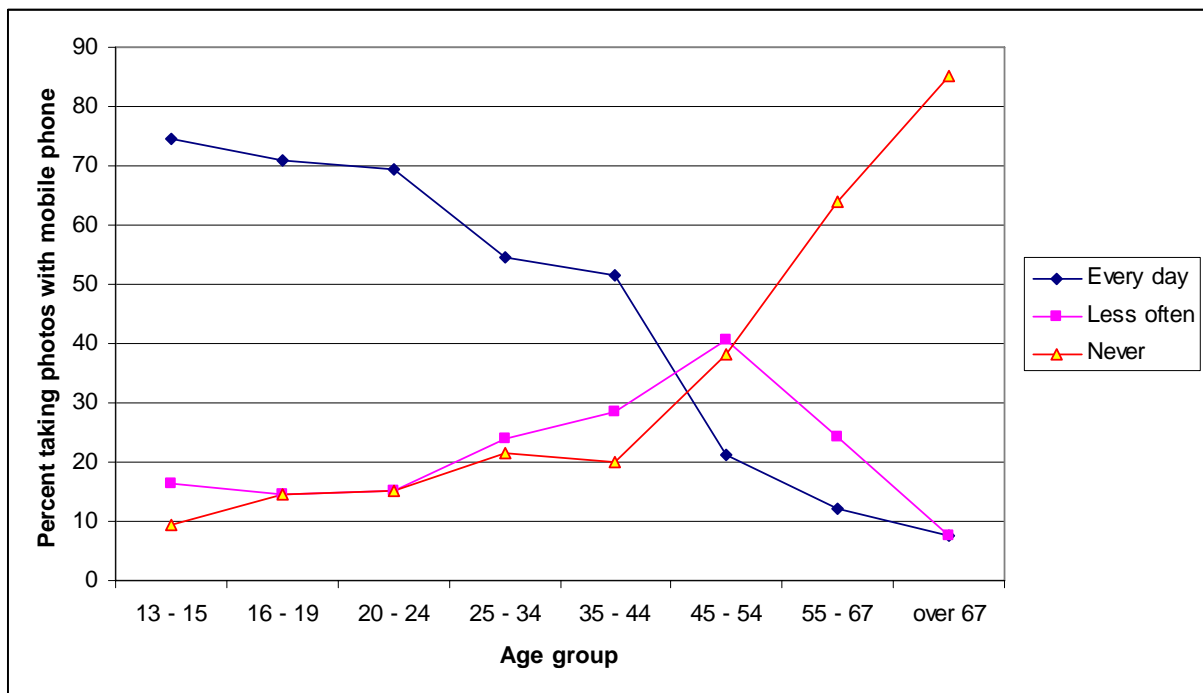


Figure 1 Percent of persons in Norway who use their mobile phone to take (but not necessarily send) photos, 2006

At the same time that camera phones have become common we have also seen the rise of photo sharing opportunities in the form of internet sites. So called social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Picasa and Flickr all provide the ability to share photos. Once loaded onto these sites the photos become available either to the general public or to a variously defined groups of individuals. If there is open access, then conceivably anybody with access to the internet can download the photos. In many cases, however, the potential audience for the photos is only those who are accredited as friends or “buddies.”

Material from the national media survey shows that it is teen girls who are the most frequent users of these social networking sites. Approximately a third of teen girls and 30% of young adult women reported using these sites on a

daily basis.²³ Teen and young adult males were less apt to use social networking. Only approximately 20% of these groups reported using it on a daily basis. Use falls quickly among those in their late 30's. With rare exceptions, fewer than five percent of those over 40 reported using social network sites.

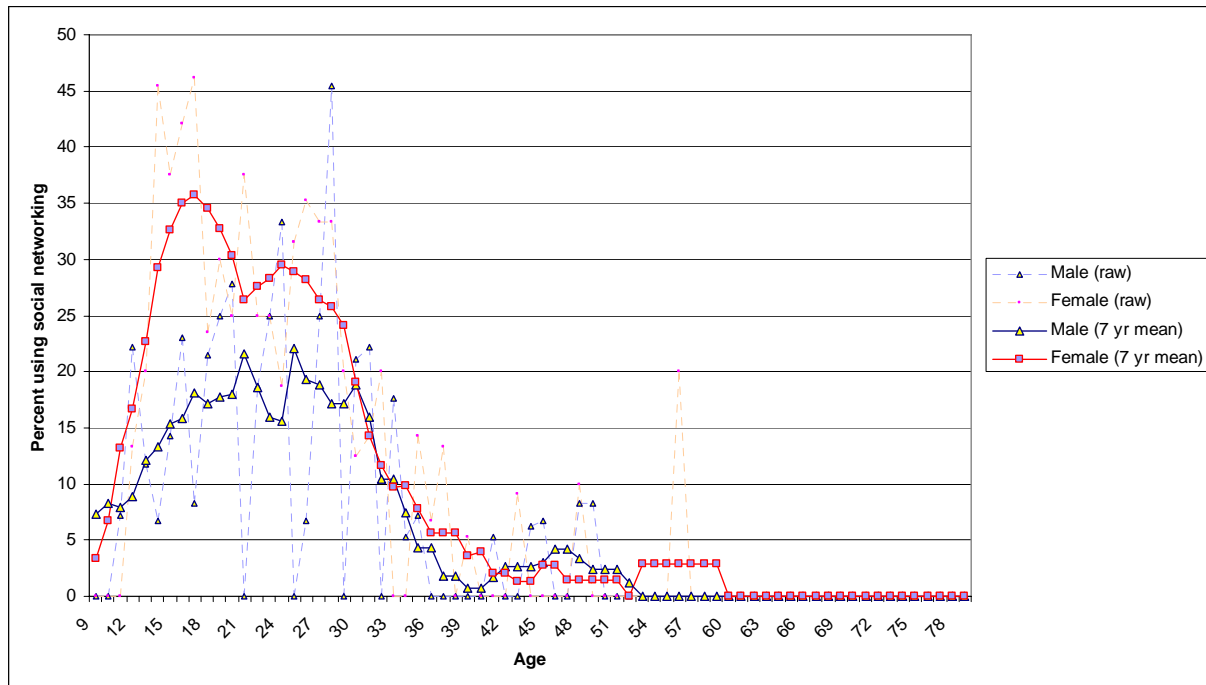


Figure 2 The use of social networking sites on a daily basis, Norway 2007

According to material from the PEW organization in the US, of those who load material onto social networking sites just under 40% restrict access to their photos “most of the time.” Another 38% do it some of the time and the remaining 21% never do this. Adults are more lax than teens in this case.²⁴ The fact that teens are more restrictive stands to reason since it is likely that their activities would be seen as more risky (and risqué) to parents and other persons in authority positions.

Method

In order to gain insight into the functioning of teen groups and, among other things, their use of photography we organized a series of group interviews with teen informants. Often social research is carried out to understand the way that individuals feel or think about various issues. The unit of research in this case is the individual. Indeed, when thinking of questionnaire based research or of focus groups, it is the individual who is most often considered the unit of analysis.²⁵

Since this work examines the social networks of the teens, young adults and families – including their use of so-called mediated communities (My Space, Facebook, etc) – it was not the individual who was the unit of analysis, but rather the group. This posed somewhat special problems both in terms of the recruitment and when conducting the group interviews (more on this second issue below). When recruiting persons for the study we first selected the general categories of groups to be included. These included younger teens (one group of males and another group of

²³ The material comes from the national media use survey carried out by Statistics Norway in cooperation with Telenor. The sample is a random sample of 1777 persons. The data was collected in four waves, one in each quarter of the year. The material on social networking was only gathered in September and December.

²⁴ Lenhart, A., Madden, M., Macgill, A. R., & Smith, A. (2007). *Teens and Social Media*. Washington, D.C.: Pew internet and American life project.

²⁵ Kruegar, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

females) young adults (again one of each gender) and families.²⁶ Using these criteria, individuals in each of these categories were contacted and asked if they would be willing to participate.²⁷ In addition to their personal participation, these “access point” individuals were also asked to help recruit four or five of those persons they considered to be their best friends.²⁸ In each case, we were able to recruit a group of four to six individuals who were willing to be interviewed regarding their communication interactions with their friends and to participate in a focus group. This analysis will focus on the group of older teen males who were all high school students. They attended different high schools but they had all been neighbors during the earlier part of their education and they were all part of a skiing/snowboarding milieu. Indeed, this group was the most uniform in their choice of clothing style.

Diary data collection

The focus of this study was to understand the way that teens use different forms of mediated interaction within the context of their peer groups. We were interested in gathering the stream of communications between the various group members over several days of interaction. It is this information that can be used to reconstitute the social networks of the groups and allow for the calculation of centrality in the context of the group.

The options for gathering the data included a retrospective questionnaire, a traditional paper based diary²⁹ or some type of automatic logging program.³⁰ None of these approaches was practical. When thinking about retrospective questionnaires there is the problem of participant recall. It is possible to limit the period recalled to, for example, the previous day. However, when thinking about the ability to recall contacts that may have been somewhat minor and incidental, it can be difficult to summon up these details even when the time lag between the event and the questioning is moderately short.³¹ A second approach is the use of paper diaries, i.e. a notebook or a sheet of paper carried by the participants to note their activities as they take place. Indeed, Hjorthol et al., Ling and Baron as well as Grinter and Eldridge have used the paper diary approach in their study of mobile communication.³² Paper based diaries have the advantage of being more fine grained in their analysis. Paper based diaries allow the respondents to note their activities and behaviors as they happen. The disadvantage with this approach is that it is intrusive and requires a large degree of commitment on the part of the respondents. Indeed the burden of having to fill out the diary can bias the number and type of respondents who choose to participate in a study. If the data entry is too cumbersome, the respondents might simply fill in their “best guess” at the end of the day or immediately before handing in their diary. Thus, there is the issue of recall as with the retrospective forms of data collection noted above.

A modification of paper based diaries is the Experience Sampling Model developed by Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues.³³ In essence it employed mediated technology (in the case of the early work it was pagers) in order to

²⁶ The young adult male group was actually somewhat younger than the female group, indeed they were still in high school. In many ways, they were more tightly tied into teen culture than into what might be considered the culture of young adulthood. For example, they were not regular wage earners, nor did they live in their own apartments. Nonetheless, they approached the data collection and group interview in a serious manner and provided insightful information. In addition, two families were recruited. The results from this analysis are reported elsewhere.

²⁷ As an inducement, the individuals were paid for their participation with a gift certificate of Kr 500.

²⁸ In the case of the families this approach was obviously altered.

²⁹ Palen, L., & Salzman, M. (2002, November 16–20, 2002). *Voice-mail diary studies for naturalistic data capture under mobile conditions*. Paper presented at the CSCW'02, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³⁰ Raento, M., Oulasvirta, A., Petit, R., & Toivonen, H. (2005). ContextPhone: a prototyping platform for context-aware mobile applications. *Pervasive Computing, IEEE*, 4(2), 51–59.

³¹ Freeman, A. (1993). *God in us: A case for Christian humanism*. London: SCM Press

³² Hjorthol, R., Jakobsen, M. H., Ling, R., & Nordbakke, S. (2007). Det mobile hverdagsliv: Kommunikasjon og koordinering i moderne barnefamilier. In M. Lüders, L. Prøitz & T. Rasmussen (Eds.), *Personlige medier. Livet mellom skjermene (2007)*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk; Ling, R., & Baron, N. (2007). The Mechanics of Text Messaging and Instant Messaging Among American College Students. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 26(3), 291–298; Grinter, R., & Eldridge, M. (2001). *y do tngrs luv 2 txt msg?* Paper presented at the Proceedings of the seventh European conference on computer supported cooperative work ECSCW '01, Dordrecht, Netherlands.

³³ Csikszentmihalyi, M., Larson, R., & Prescott, S. (1977). The ecology of adolescent activity and experience. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 6(3), 281–294; Larson, R., Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Graef, R. (1980). Mood variability and psychosocial adjustment of adolescents. , 9(6), 469–490. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 9(6), 469–490.

elicit information of informants as they moved about their daily routines. In the early use of this method, a signal was sent to the informants that prompted them to fill out an entry in a diary at different points of the day. The approach was used to understand the daily flux of teens' activities and their mental state.

Palen and Salzman have employed an alternative form of electronic diary where they ask participants at various times to call into a voice mail system in order to gather the information. They found that this approach was less time intensive for the respondents since they did not have to stop their activity and manually record incidents. This was particularly important when the informants were mobile.³⁴

A final approach is to use some form of technology logging to capture the different communication situations where a particular type of mediation is used. For example, Diminescu et al. and his colleagues have used this in their investigation of geographic mobility and mobile communication.³⁵ This provides the researcher with a rich and exact overview of the individual's use of a particular technology. In some cases, it can even provide details with regard to who has been contacted and through which mode (voice telephony vs. SMS, for example). A drawback with this approach is that it does not allow for multi-modal forms of data collection. While it can provide information on, for example IM traffic, a completely separate apparatus would have to be used to gather co-present interaction or mobile telephony. Thus, a global form of data collection can become quite cumbersome.

A hybrid approach was used in this study. The individuals who were recruited were asked if they would be willing to receive three telephone calls every day from the data collection group, one at midday, a second in the late afternoon/early evening and a third in later in the evening. The data collection period lasted for three days from Thursday to Saturday to include interaction on the weekend.

In each call, the individual was asked to report on interaction with each of the other group members through various forms of mediation (face-to-face, mobile voice telephony, SMS, IM, etc.). In addition, they were asked about any other contacts they had had in the previous time span. This form of data collection when examined for the whole group resulted in a universal diary of interactions within the group. In addition, it provided an ego-based mapping of the individuals' contacts with those who were outside the group.³⁶ The relatively short recall time combined with the mobile phone based collection of data eliminated some of the problems with other forms of data collection. Indeed, Hoppe et al. have found that telephone based "diary" studies result in better reporting and in cleaner data that did the more traditional paper diaries.³⁷ By way of critique, the three-day data collection period was somewhat short in terms of the total amount of data that was collected. In some cases, the interactions were rather sparse. However, issues of cost and issues of respondent willingness limited the time span of the data collection.

After the data collection period, the material was analyzed for broad trends and the group was called in to a group interview. During the interview, they were asked about their interaction with one another and with other persons outside the immediate group. They were asked about the internal dynamics of their peer group and the types of activities and exchanges in which they participated. Given the form of recruiting, the focus groups had a particular dynamic. It is often the case in focus groups that the informants do not know one another. It is the job of the moderator to help the individuals feel comfortable speaking in front of others with whom they are not familiar. This is done by using a more extensive round of introductions and directing questions to individuals, etc. In the case examined here, there was a different situation. The informants were all familiar with one another and it became the job of the moderator to operate within the context of the group's code of practice. Where with normal groups of informants there are only the most basic forms of social contact between them, in this case there was a massive history shared by the informants. The moderator and those analyzing the material were left, however, to work out these internal group dynamics.

³⁴ Palen, L., & Salzman, M. (2002, November 16–20, 2002). Voice-mail diary studies for naturalistic data capture under mobile conditions. Paper presented at the CSCW'02, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³⁵ Diminescu, D. C. L., Smoreda, Z., & Ziemlicki, C. (forthcoming). Tailing untethered mobile users: A joint study of urban mobilities and communication practices by combining ethnography and cell-based mobile phone-supported localization journals. *Mobile communications research series, 1*.

³⁶ Wasserman, S., & Faust, K. (1994). *Social network analysis: Methods and applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

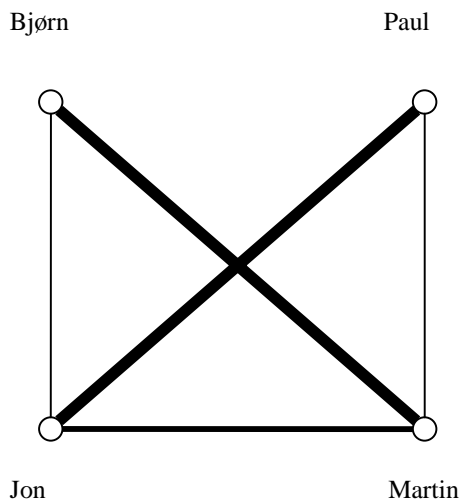
³⁷ Hoppe, M. J., Gillmore, M. R., Valadez, D. L., Civic, D., Hartway, J., & Morrison, D. M. (2000). The Relative Costs and Benefits of Telephone Interviews Versus Self-Administered Diaries for Daily Data Collection. *Eval Rev, 24*(1), 102-116.

The material from the series of “diary calls” was entered into a set of spreadsheets and summed. It was hoped that there would be enough material to allow examination of both the topography of copresent and mediated forms of interaction separately. The material indicated, however, that there was not a long enough time-period in order to accommodate a separate analysis and so the contact events were simply summed across all forms of interaction, both mediated and copresent.³⁸ This material was then used to calculate the centrality of each individual within the group. In addition, the material on contacts with persons outside the group was tabulated and examined. We examined the total number of external contacts and the overlap of contacts between core group members. The material from the focus groups was transcribed and examined for themes that arose from the interaction.

The teen males

The group of individuals considered here was a middle-class “snowboarding” group. They appeared to be a well integrated group that had adopted a similar style of dress and a reported having a lot of common activities. The four boys grew up in the same neighborhood and they had spent a large part of their adolescence together in primary and middle school. At the high school level they had chosen to attend different schools but in spite of this they continued to meet when snowboarding and when socializing. The four individual were as follows:³⁹

- Paul was moderately central in the group (based on the traffic collected in the diary analysis) and he also reported a moderate number of external social contacts.



- Jon had the highest centrality in the group by a small margin. Along with Martin he was less social externally than Bjørn (who was the highest). He had perhaps taken the role of an internal leader. He and Martin were the least verbal in the focus group when looking at the relative number of utterances.
- Bjørn was the least central in the diary analysis and the he was also the most active with external social contacts. He was also the most vocal in the group interview. This is an interesting paradox namely that the most central persons were also the least verbal in the focus groups and the least central were the most verbal.
- Martin primarily identified himself as a skier while the others were snowboarders. In spite of this he was moderately central among the four

who participated in the group interview and he had only a moderate number of external social contacts. He was the least verbal of the four individuals in the group interview.

In addition to snowboarding, the unity of the group was seen in their common projects (the construction of a graduation *Russebus*⁴⁰) and in their unified style of clothing (hip-hop). All were wearing American style “letter” jackets in addition to baseball caps in one of several orientations on their heads.⁴¹

³⁸ It is clear that comparing a text message to a face-to-face chat is, to some degree, comparing apples to oranges. The text message is limited to 160 characters while the co-located interaction can take place over a longer period of time and can involve much more involved forms of interaction. However, when thinking about the calculation of centrality in a social network, it can be claimed, with only slight damage to the truth, that they are both expressions of the group’s dynamics.

³⁹ The names of all informants have been changed.

⁴⁰ A city bus remodeled for a celebration of high school graduation, often involving a very large stereo system. It serves as a type of mobile party location both for the group owning the particular bus and larger gatherings during the last weeks of their final year in school. This type of project is common for many teens in the Oslo area and there are organized festivals for the people who have refurbished their own bus. Indeed the *Russebus* activity is a type of last hurrah as an adolescent before going off into the more adult world of serious studying and perhaps the beginnings of a career. See Beccaria, F., & Sande, A. (2003). Drinking

The interview material shows that they indeed were members of a group that had gone so far as to develop a quasi-formal group that included the development of various icons and objects of display.

Interviewer: . . . What do you have on your [mobile phone] display?

Jon: I have Air Squadron, snowboarding group that we three⁴² are a part of.

Bjørn: We three are solo, We snowboard.

Interviewer: On the slopes a lot?

Paul: We had over 100 skiing days this year, so in the winter we are together almost every day.

Snowboarding is the common thread in the group and it is the milieu in which the teens work out different dimensions of their identities.⁴³ The analysis of the material in the communication diaries for this group shows that in spite of attending different schools this group relied mostly on face-to-face interaction. This was the most normal form of contact with SMS being a weak second place.

Unlike some of the other groups, this was a “loose” group where not all members were directly connected. Indeed Bjørn and Paul had not been in direct contact during the data collection period. There was no strongly established central person in the group. By a slight margin, Jon was the most central member of the group, at least based on the analysis of the inter-group diary material.⁴⁴ Bjørn was slightly less central, but this was only a matter of degree, particularly when compared to the other groups examined in this project.

This group reported a large number of same sexed contacts. The material shows that more than two thirds of their contacts were with males and only 15% were with females. The remaining contacts were with family members. In addition, while Bjørn was a little more reserved in his contacts than were the others, the group was about even in the number and the frequency of contacts with others outside the core group.

Approximately one fourth of all the external contacts were common friends. That is, there were relatively few unique external contacts. Several of the individuals in this group had been in contact with the same “external” individuals. This is likely due to the fact that the snowboard milieu to which they belonged included quite a few more members than just these four informants. Even though the contact net within the group was somewhat loose, it is fair to say that the group operates in a well integrated milieu. There was a lot of coordination with regard to which ski area they would visit and how they would organize the social events associated with weekend snowboarding trips.

Photography and group cohesion

Photos were shared among all interviewees through use of the mobile phone and online social networking sites such as Flickr and Face book. Indeed one of the striking findings from the group interviews is the degree to which this is an important activity. The sharing of pictures had an important role in maintaining bonds and relationship ties. However, since photography produces the documentation of group activities that might not meet the approval of those outside the group – such as parents – the production and sharing of photos presented the teens with the need to work out who they could trust and which photos/situations were best withheld from the broader public.

Games and Rite of Life Projects: A Social Comparison of the Meaning and Functions of Young People's Use of Alcohol during the Rite of Passage to Adulthood in Italy and Norway. *Young*, 11(2), 99.

⁴¹ In this case they approximated the sense of demeanor discussed by Goffman. See: Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon.

⁴² These teens had adopted a truncated form of address. The fourth person was a member of a skiing

⁴³ Anderson, K. L. (1999). Snowboarding: The Construction of Gender in an Emerging Sport. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23(1), 55; Heino, R. (2000). What is so punk about snowboarding. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24(1), 176-191.

⁴⁴ The material in the diaries was used to calculate the egen value centrality for each of the group members. This centrality was in the context of internal communication within the group.

MMS as a poor alternative

In the comments of the young males, as well as those of the other groups, the idea of sharing photos taken on the mobile phone and distributed on the net was a common practice. Using the mobile phone to send a photo via MMS⁴⁵ was not often a viable alternative.

Interviewer: Why don't you use MMS?

Paul: Difficult, and costs a lot.

Martin: There are so many other places that you can exchange pictures. Have the PC so you can show pictures on MSN or Facebook, it is because of that.

For the teens MMS was only used in special or in urgent situations.

Interviewer: So it's not that important to use the mobile phone for exchanging pictures?

Martin: It has to be special situations, like something fun happening, someone driving off the road or something...

Taking up the theme of immediacy, in its favor, sharing of pictures via MMS makes it possible to get and give immediate feedback or to bridge greater distances. Looking at material from other group interviews, the use of MMS is used in situations where there is a need for immediacy. This is evident in discussions with divorced parents and their children, for example. They see MMS as a way of maintaining contact between the absent parent and the child who note sending photos to one another when saying their good night:

Aina (8): At night, when telling my mom good night...then I sometimes send pictures.⁴⁶

Sometimes, for example, MMS is used for status updates when there is physical distance. A girl in the teen female group noted:

Katja: I bought a phone with a two mega pixel camera, and that's quite ok for a mobile phone. I thought that I would use it for taking and sending pictures, but I haven't done it that much. It's more during the summer, when you're far away from friends on vacation, sending messages like "here I am"

This also points to the idea that the exchange of MMS is here a way of feeling closer to family members. The material from the interviews considered in this study indicates that older informants are more positive to the use of MMS. Part of this is that price is not as big an issue for this group. In one of the family groups, the parents use MMS for practical purposes. Photographing and sending pictures with the mobile phone can be a way to communicate and make decisions immediately for this family:

Jarl: We use MMS for practical things as well. We have bought furniture and stuff. If I see a closet or a coach...we have the discussion there and then, so it's actually quite useful

Marit: yesterday I got a freezer, the day before that I got tiles...

The immediacy and mobility of the mobile phone, makes MMS a positive asset for this family. The ability to share photos via MMS in various situations illustrates the point that photos can contribute to the cohesion of the group. As seen in the comments here MMS can be used in those situations that were more urgent, where one partner needed feedback regarding purchasing situations, to brag about holidays or to simply hold contact between parent and child. In other work we have seen how this system of sharing photos helps in the flow of information among working groups and how it also contributes to the group's sense of common identification.⁴⁷ This is not to say that MMS is

⁴⁵ Multi-media messaging service. This is the standard used on mobile phones that allows the sending and receiving of multimedia message, including photos and also sound.

⁴⁶ Hjorthol, R., Jakobsen, M. H., Ling, R., & Nordbakke, S. (2007). Det mobile hverdagsliv: Kommunikasjon og koordinering i moderne barnefamilier. In M. Lüders, L. Prøitz & T. Rasmussen (Eds.), *Personlige medier. Livet mellom skjermene* (2007). Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

⁴⁷ Ling, R., Julsrud, T., & Yttri, B. (2005). Nascent communication genres within SMS and MMS. In R. Harper, A. Taylor & L. Palen (Eds.), *The Inside Text: Social perspectives on SMS in the mobile age* (pp. pp. 75 - 100). London: Kluwer; Ling, R., & Julsrud, T. (2005). Grounded genres in multimedia messaging. In K. Nyiri (Ed.), *A sense of place: The global and the local in mobile communication* (pp. 329 - 338). Vienna: Passagen Verlag.

accepted as a normal form of interaction among the teen males who are the focus of the study here. As noted the pricing of the service is a significant barrier to general use, particularly when inexpensive alternatives are available.

Photo sharing for the teen males

For the teen boys, access to a variety of convenient (read: free) net-based services meant that this was the preferred way to share pictures.

Martin: There are a lot of other places [as opposed to MMS] to exchange pictures. We have computers, so one can show pictures on MSN⁴⁸ or Facebook, and that's some of the reason [that MMS is not used].

Several of the informants used Facebook and MSN as a way to share pictures with their friends. By doing this they were able to update others as to their activities and they could also surf through the sites of their friends to find out what they had been doing.

Håken: On Facebook you look at pictures, if something has happened during the weekend.

On these sites there are usually profile pictures of the site owners as well as albums with private pictures. The site serves as a type of repository of the individual's activities. By surfing through the sites of their friends, others can get an update as to what the person has been doing. The person who is surfing can also leave comments in their friends' sites. One can "tag" oneself and other people on the pictures.⁴⁹ In addition, there is the possibility to add comments to the pictures and write status updates to the profile pictures. However, the tagging of pictures possibly draws unwanted attention to the individual.

Interviewer: Is it a rush to check if someone has been on your site/profile?

Martin: It can be, there are also pictures you remove the tag on so it doesn't show on the profile.

Bjørn: There are pictures you don't want anyone else to see, where you might not be looking so good.

Interviewer: Can you delete the picture?

Bjørn: No you can't, but you can remove the tag

Being tagged can both be a positive and a negative thing. On one hand, being "tagged" provides a way to see where you quantifiable sense of popularity, a symbol of belonging to a group of friends and a method of identity development.⁵⁰ On the other hand, not all pictures are flattering. Indeed, some pictures are seen as damaging to the impression the teen wants to give off. As noted by Bjørn, one can remove a "tag" pointing to a picture of them in another person's Facebook site, but they can not remove the photo. In a form of impression management, removing the tag on a picture, there will not be a link to the person's own site and thus they can limit the number of people who see the photo.⁵¹

The ethics of picture sharing

Given the quasi public nature of these sites, there were discussions among the interviewees as to which photos were acceptable to display. In working through the process of deciding on these boundaries, the teens were, in effect, developing a local ethic. The material from the teen males shows that there was a sense of "anything goes" among group members. However there was also a sense that the same rules did not apply to non-members.

Interviewer: . . . You don't have any rules?

⁴⁸ Microsoft Network. This is an instant messaging site that is the *de facto* standard in Norway.

⁴⁹ A tag is a simple message that one can attach to a photo, or a portion of a photo in your own or in another person's album. Upon posting a photo the person who posts it might tag all the people who appear in the photo. This provides a link to the sites of these other people. Thus, if a photo of a friend, John, appears in a third persons site, the photo of the John can be tagged. This tag then becomes a type of indexing then allows others to more easily find photos of John across different peoples' sites. Thus it is a way of tracing people as they appear in different people's sites.

⁵⁰ Prøitz, L. (2007). "Everybody has a family tree – and this is mine:" Writing your own narrative. A study of family photography from the family album to MMS. In *The mobile phone turn*. Oslo: University of Oslo.

⁵¹ Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Jon: I think that we are a little worse than the others. Not any real rules.

Paul: Grab the chance when it is there, to say it like that.

Interviewer: No rules?

Paul: Some things you only show to your friends.

One situation where the delicacy of displaying photos becomes a theme is photos of drinking parties. As might be expected, drinking is a dimension of the teens lives and it represents a way in which they mark their transition from childhood to adulthood.⁵² While in the process of learning the social limits for drinking the teens may go beyond the boundaries. Their friends, who may also be in similar straits, have access to photography equipment – as well as the lowered sense in inhibition. This means that it is easier to document and broadcast the state of affairs. This situation means that the teens have to work out the rules for these situations. The event can produce a type of interaction that enhances the cohesion of the group – perhaps when they have the proper distance from which to see the humor.

The local ethic of the group come into play. There can be questions as to where the boundary between jovial photos and the documentation of anti-social behavior is found. This is seen in the exchange between Paul and Bjørn.

Paul: [Facebook] is used mostly for posting photos. If we, for example have been at the same party, he has taken pictures, and we are interested to see them, then he can post them there. Then we can all see them, all of us (laughter).

Bjørn: [they are laughing because] there was a little too much alcohol and I fell asleep and there were a lot of people with marking pens (Indicates markings on his face). I woke up with ... the photos [of my face] spread around. I would have sent out the photos if I caught a big one like they did.

Paul's laughter indicates that there is more to his statements than the simple documentation of a party. The laughter prompts Bjørn to relate an incident association with a particular party where he had become the butt of the other's merrymaking. The coloring on his face and also the broadcasting of the resulting photos was a potentially problematic issue. It seems that the group had worked through the potential implications (parents seeing the photos, etc.). This event was seen as a part of the "carpe diem" ethic of the group. We see the application of the "anything goes." The situation in which Bjørn was caught out has become a part of the group's lore and thus it is a link in the group's social cohesion. While it could have potentially been seen as degradedating, he is able to describe the situation with a smile. In addition, he also notifies the others with his comments that they will also have to observe the same ethic should they find themselves in a similar situation.

Marking the group boundary is also seen in the discussion of posting photos. An embarrassing photo of group member it might be posted and laughed at. However, if the photo was of a person who was not a member of the group, it would be treated differently.

Interviewer: Would you, for example [post an embarrassing photo] of a girl?

Bjørn: That is mean (Det er slemt)

Martin: We are not evil

Bjørn: If a girl sent a nice message [and you send it further with the intention of mocking her] that is bad.

Jon: We are only mean towards one another

Bjørn: If Jon had sent a message to the wrong place then we would be sure to send the message many places. Our hobby is to almost to ridicule one another (å drite hverandre ut) so we are a little worse than others.

The teens comments show that the impulse to ridicule is limited to only those who are in the group itself. Ridicule along with documenting it with various electronic artifacts – photos, messages, etc – is a part of the interaction form within the group. However, they realize that it is not correct to mock people who are not a part of the circle of friends. These practices are guided by existing norms within the group. Within these social networks there are rules regarding which types of photos can be shared. The interviewees expressed certain sensitivity to posting photos that

⁵² Beccaria, F., & Sande, A. (2003). Drinking Games and Rite of Life Projects: A Social Comparison of the Meaning and Functions of Young People's Use of Alcohol during the Rite of Passage to Adulthood in Italy and Norway. *Young, 11*(2), 99.

were too far out of line. Within a group of friends these rules can be bent. In the older teen male group the informants claimed to take advantage of the opportunity to humiliate one another.

Thus, there is a *carpe diem* ethic within the group, but this does not necessarily apply to others. There is a tension here between acting in a mean spirited way, and being able to ridicule one another. The fact that others who view the sites of these teens are not a part of the same discussion may mean that they interpret the photos in the context of their own notions of ethical behavior. They do however have some sense as to what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior in spite of the fact that it is not necessarily codified information.

Bjørn: It's not exactly rules, but you know what kind of picture you don't publish on Facebook.

Or as the older teen females explained there are certain rules:

Astrid: You don't send very private stuff.

Vilde: You don't talk behind the backs of your friends.

The individual transcends these rules at the risk of inclusion in the group and at the risk of lowering the sense of group cohesion.

Conclusion

In sum, photos and the sharing of photos is an area of rich interaction among the interviewees. The almost universal access to cameras in the form of camera phones means that snapshots of different situations have become a common part of interaction. The posting and sharing of these photos is a way that the group works out its integration and it is an arena in which the appropriateness of the photos and their meaning for the broader group interaction is central. The displaying and sharing of pictures online is one way to demonstrate friends' intimacy and bonds with one another. The teens often managed access to the photos so that only trusted persons are allowed access. The sharing of photos is also a way that the social networking sites helps to tie the individuals together into a coherent group. Thus, it is not only the visual information in the pictures that is of interest.⁵³

Taking this one step further, the act of having to work through the ethics of photo taking/sharing means that the individuals need to engage in some form of collective reflection. In the case here, the "*carpe diem* ethic" is applied to those within the group. It means that they need to consider where the boundary of trust is to be found. It also means that they need to rely on the others to guard the secrets of the group. They need to rely on the others to withhold information (and possibly photos, etc) of those instances when the sense of ethics had been violated, at least in the eyes of those who are not in the group.

The photo discussed by the teens here contained references to activities that, were they know by persons of authority, might be judged in a negative light. Still they were not so clearly over the line that they were anti-social. There was a sense that the contents of the photo was in line with the sense of the group. It treated the individual in the photo with that combination of inclusion and dignity – albeit dignity in a strained sense of the word. At the end of the day, the group was laughing together at the situation and their various roles. They were not laughing at Bjørn who had perhaps drunk too much and in the process become the canvas for others' ersatz artistic impulses. Turning back to the ideas of Fine, the situation played on the trust of the group. There have likely been other situations and other photographic themes that would not stand the same test.

The teens also spoke of protecting the secrecy of the group. By limiting the access to certain areas of the online profile and by removing tags and by discriminating between the photos that are posted the teens are making decision as to who has access to the documentation of the group. In some cases they might grant access to only the chosen few. They might open up access to one and all and, in some cases, they might limit access to only certain occasions when they have complete control over the audience. Referring to the discussion above, the decisions governing who can view the photos is also a decision regarding who can be trusted to observe the implicit local ethic of the group. It is a decision as to who can be trusted with the group secrets.

⁵³ If the photo is seen as crossing an ethical boundary it might indeed be seen as a failed ritual in the sense of Collins. If this is the case then the interaction frays the social cohesion of the group. Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

However, the danger was more associated with the risk to reputation that might arise from the general knowledge of their lifestyle. The participation in an adolescent culture of drinking and carousing is also socially dangerous in the sense that one's reputation is set into danger if the lifestyle is too fully known. By the same token, their group membership is also in danger if they do not accept others carousing to some degree. Finally, the use of photos to document the various activities of the group include the transgression of certain social boundaries. Thus, there is also the potential of being seen in an inappropriate light by those outside the community.

The photograph could have been of a particularly sublime moment in the history of the group. The time that they were able to camp together on a nice summer evening and perhaps reflect on how nice it was to have friends etc. In this case the photograph becomes a point of reference to a positive collective experience. In the end we can see that the photograph can function as an internal joke and in this it is a group ritual. It is a type of totem that refers back to a mutually recognized event that was characterized with a common mood for the members of the group. It is a document of their shared status and it has certain liminal aspects that can further engrain the meaning of the photo in the thoughts of the group members.