

Chapter X Digital Inclusion and Public Space: The Effect of Mobile Phones on Intergenerational Awareness and Connection

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Introduction

This chapter uses the ‘mobilities’ lens to explore generational differences in terms of behaviour and attitudes surrounding mobile phone use in everyday public spaces. The mobile phone is a ready accomplice to all forms of contemporary mobility from the everyday and mundane activities within a given neighbourhood through to the global travels of the ‘kinetic elite’ (Graham, 2002). As a communication device it provides a source of perpetual contact with significant others that enables the ongoing maintenance of emotional connections whilst on the move, attenuating feelings of physical and virtual proximity. Urry (2007) has suggested that an underlying motive for contemporary mobilities is the deep-seated human need for physical proximity with our significant others, within what others have described as an ‘ontology of connection’ (Bissell, 2013). In short, our desire to be close to others drives our need to travel.

Understanding the mobile phone’s relationship to intergenerational mobilities provides a view into the underlying dynamics of connection which motivate travel and define the interactional mores of co-presence travelling to and within everyday public spaces. In particular this chapter focuses on the ways that different generations negotiate and prioritise their physical versus virtual co-presences whilst travelling through public city centre spaces examining the effect of mobile phones on experiences of intergenerational awareness and connection in these spaces. The study uses participant observation to draw out patterns of embodied techno-social behaviour in relation to different generations’ use of such technologies and then explores the underlying issues further with interviews, highlighting points of possible conflict and misunderstanding between generations. Implications are drawn in relation to the prioritising of physical versus virtual proximity, ongoing community cohesion, the design of future interactive public spaces and the need for a digitally inclusive approach to such spaces which will accommodate all generations.

Background

The pervasiveness of the mobile phone is now hard to ignore. On the basis of mobile subscriptions it is estimated that 96% of the world’s population now have access to a mobile phone (ITU, 2014). From its inception it has had a profound effect on social conduct in public spaces with many viewing its appearance as an annoying transgression of pre-existing social norms particularly in enclosed spaces like restaurants, cafes, libraries and airports (Wei and Leung, 1999) as well as on public transport (Monk et al, 2004) but also as a general attitude towards their use in all public spaces (Ling, Haddon and Klamer 2001). The acceptability of mobile phone conversations in the midst of ongoing communal activities still remains a contested social norm (Gant and Kiesler, 2001) and something

which exists across cultures (Campbell, 2007). The increasing use of mobile phones in public spaces has led to a pervasive form of 'inattentive blindness' (Hyman et al, 2010) in which mobile phone users prioritise virtual proximity, becoming less aware of their immediate situation and ignoring immediate social signals from others, events and even physical objects (Nasar and Troyer, 2012).

Gergen (2002) has argued that what makes the public use of mobile phones so problematic for others is the division of conscious attention that they require, forcing a schism between the public norms of social conduct in the immediate vicinity and the private norms required to communicate with distant others or to interact with the mediating device. He has used the term 'absent presence' to describe the way in which users of mobile phones become physically present but socially absent. The growing popularity of the Smartphone in recent years has introduced further opportunities for absent presence by integrating the functionality of previous devices and allowing mobile connections to existing Internet resources. Smartphones provide more potential for distraction by integrating the music and game playing abilities of earlier devices. When used in this way they can accentuate the need for users' privacy by cutting them off from social contact completely, creating 'telecocoon' (Habuchi, 2005). In addition Smartphones have increased the social potential of the mobile phone by extending the reach of social networking sites and social media which had previously been bound to the home or work place. In a recent UK survey 54% of the population were found to own a Smartphone with 59% of them using them to maintain their connections to Social Networking Sites (Ofcom, 2012).

Beyond identifying the basic disruptive character of the mobile phone we understand very little about how the demands of physical versus virtual co-presence are negotiated in public spaces through the enactment of social norms and indeed where the fault lines of social misunderstanding might appear. Given the asymmetrical nature of mobile phone uptake across the generations (OfCom, 2012) we might expect this to be an intergenerational issue as well as a social one. In this paper it is generational differences that are considered in terms of the social practices that surround mobile phone use. There is also an exploration of the possible repercussions that these may have for intergenerational awareness and community cohesion.

The adoption and acceptance of the social practices surrounding mobile phones is clearly something that varies from person to person. A number of factors are likely to affect this acceptance including previous experiences with similar technologies, the expectations and demands of social context and pertinent socio-demographic variables such as age, education and socioeconomic status (Rogers, 2005). In this study we explore the specific effects of age on the acceptance of mobile phone norms such as absent presence and consider how these play out in relation to younger and older generations.

Younger people will tend to be early adopters of new technologies and accompanying social practices (Rogers, 2005; Venkatesh, 2014). This has certainly been the case with the mobile phone and more recently the Smartphone (Pheeraphuttharangkoon et al, 2014). In the UK 97.5% of young adults (16 to 34 year olds) now own a mobile phone whilst only 67.5% of those over 65 do¹. When we compare Smartphone ownership the difference is even starker with about 80% of young adults owning one but only 7% of those over 65² (Ofcom, 2012). Still these figures only provide a picture of intergenerational differences in terms of ownership of the physical devices. When we consider the attitudes that accompany mobile phone ownership and use generational differences start to become apparent. 79% of the 16-24 age group consider their mobile phone to be their main point of contact with others (Ofcom, 2011). Studies across Europe have shown that teenagers and young adults are highly dependent on their mobile phones and emotionally attached to them, prioritising virtual proximity when amongst strangers, keeping their phones at hand constantly and frequently using them in public spaces (Vincent, 2005). In contrast only 12% of those aged 65-74 consider the mobile phone as their main route to social contact and only 5% of those over 75 (Ofcom, 2011). Studies exploring older people's attitudes towards mobile phones suggest that they see them as very different kinds of devices to their younger counterparts and tend *not* to prioritise virtual proximity except in emergencies and even then only to access immediate physical support. Their mobile phones are

¹ This can be broken down further with 80% of 65-74 year olds and 55% of over 75s owning a mobile phone.

² This can be broken down further with 12% of 65-74 year olds and only 2% of over 75s owning a Smartphone.

principally employed as devices for ensuring safety and security on specific journeys outside of the home (Hassan and Nassir, 2008; Kubik, 2009; Kurniawan, 2009) and as such are generally not used for extended conversations or even turned on when not in use (Kubik, 2009).

One would suspect that these quite distinct interpretations of purpose and proximity demands would be mirrored in terms of differing social norms between the youngest and oldest generations and their expectations of what constituted appropriate mobile phone use in public spaces. So far there is little research to verify whether these differences exist, whether they are age or generation related and if so how they are reconciled (or not) between generations. One study by Turner et al (2008) has shown that increasing age does correlate with negative attitudes towards public use of mobile phones in places where freedom of movement is curtailed such as the work place, bars, restaurants and on public transport. However this study was limited in that it used questionnaires to assess age differences and had a very restricted, student-based sample with ages ranging only from 17 to 43 years.

It has been argued that local communities are increasingly individualised (Lash, 2002) with their members often leading parallel lives where they do not meet one another (Cantle, 2004). One particular feature of such communities is that everyday meetings between the oldest and youngest generations within a community are now rare (Williams and Nussbaum, 2001; Vanderbeck, 2007). In this study the influence of generational stances on mobile phone use as a mediator of intergenerational contact and awareness is considered.

Methodology

In order to understand the intergenerational dynamics of mobile phone use this research used an ethnographic approach with a view to explaining each generation's techno-social practices in relation to mobile devices 'from the inside'. Investigations employed participant observations and semi-structured interviews in public spaces in the city of Brighton in the South of England. Observations were carried out by the author in a number of different public spaces (see locations below) with the author taking field notes whilst travelling into the city centre on public transport and whilst sitting in public spaces within the city. Observations were used to identify broad generational patterns of mobile device behaviour in terms of accompanying body language, use of personal space and other behaviours relating to face to face interaction. Observations lasted for 21 hours overall taking place from 19th June 2012 to 10th July 2012 involving approximately 120-150 people. Subsequent interviews were conducted by the author in location 1 where a stall was set up in the middle of the walkway. Potential interviewees were invited to take part using a small banner with the words: "what do you think about using mobile phones in public spaces?". Participants were self-selecting and interviews were conducted in situ. They were recorded with a digital sound recorder with permission being gained to use the interview data at a later date. 21 people were interviewed all of whom were Brighton residents. Their ages ranged from 25 to 76 but willing participants were predominantly young adults and the elderly (mostly students and retired people). This sampling bias reflected the time of day that the interviews took place (early in the afternoon on a working day). However it did give an opportunity to compare the attitudes of older and younger generations and consider the different ways that they approach the sharing of this public space. Distinct generations were identified in line with Erikson's life stages (Erikson, 1963) with the following broad categories: children (under 13); adolescence (13-18); young adulthood (18-35); adulthood (35-65) and old age (65+).

The Locations

Previous research has highlighted the significance of specific public locations in determining social norms for public mobile phone use (Turner et al, 2008). With this in mind four different locations (see fig.1) were used as the basis for initial observations. Clockwise from top left: a) a paved walkway and sitting area adjacent to a well frequented local landmark (the Royal Pavilion); b) a bus travelling through the centre of the city; c) a train travelling into the centre of the city and d) a communal space and sitting area outside the public library in the centre of the city. The interviews were conducted in

the first of these locations as this was the busiest and provided the best opportunity to engage participants for later interviews.

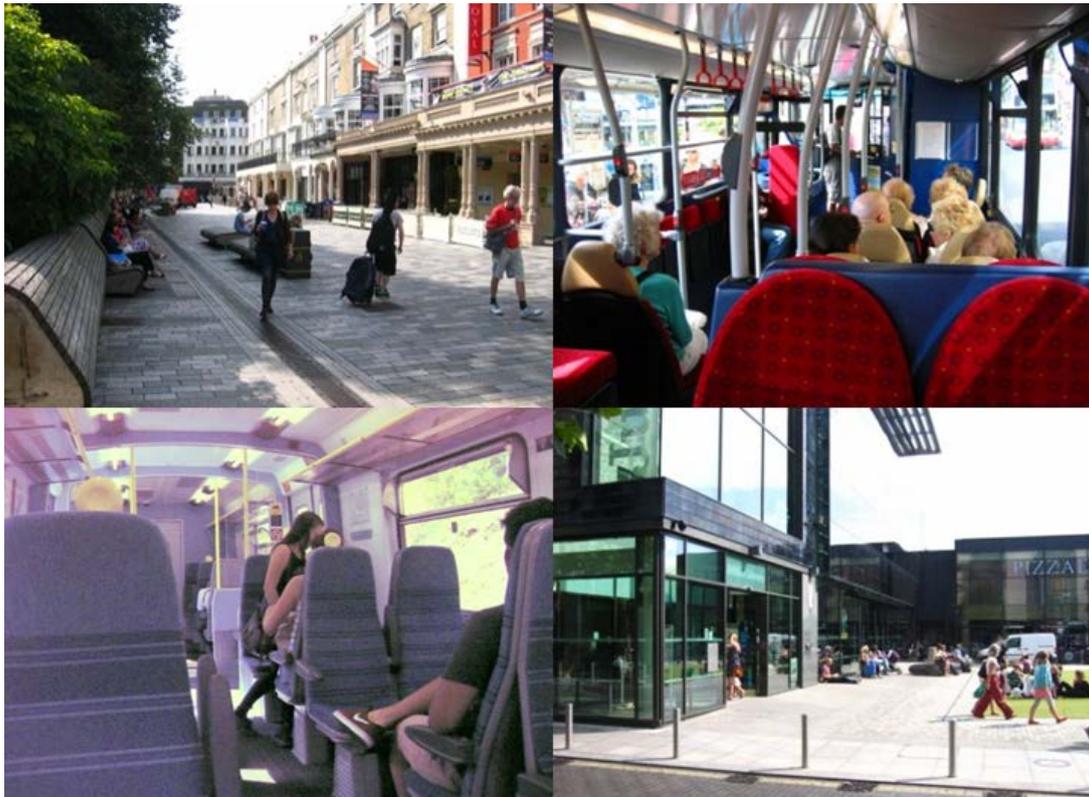


Figure 1

Each venue provided users of mobile devices with particular attentional dilemmas derived from the physical and social nature of each context. For instance sitting on a bus or train (locations 2 and 3) provided a physical environment which was conducive to physically interacting with the device but where the social demands of co-present others were more of an issue (e.g. being overheard because of physical proximity). In contrast the pedestrian areas (in locations 1 and 4) provided sufficient space for social constraints to be less of an issue but where the constant movement of others complicated physical interaction with the device. In these locations there was a constant dividing of attention between navigating the space whilst walking (or cycling) and using the interface of the mobile phone. Here the concern is with identifying generational differences in terms of their expectations for co-present interaction (physical versus virtual) as expressed through different mobile phone behaviours and expected norms of public mobile phone use in each location. From a mobilities perspective this shows how mobile phones and their inherent forms of connection come to shape the journeys (and the interactional quality of these journeys) for different generations as their intersecting trajectories converge in these particular public spaces.

Generational Behaviours

The observations made it possible to identify mobile phone behaviours that were typical of each generation. Here the distinctive features of each generation are described.

Across the Ages: Degrees of Multitasking

Members of all generations were seen using mobile phones in public places at some time during the observations but it was most prevalent amongst adolescence and young adults. A clear difference in terms of generational use was in each generation's ability to interweave their use of mobile devices with other on-going (and off-device) activities. In locations where adolescents and young adults were

walking (or cycling) through the city they would continue to do so whilst texting or talking on their mobile phones, showing a high degree of divided attention and a propensity to multitask. In contrast older users (i.e. those in old age) in these same locations were more likely to stop everything else they were doing in order to use their mobile phones particularly if texting. Adults (i.e. those between 35 and 65) showed varying degrees of multitasking ability when using their phones often walking slower or sitting down when using their phones.

Adolescents (13-18): The Seamless Social Network

Gatherings of teenagers in public places were often accompanied by simultaneous use of mobile phones, iPods and/or portable gaming consoles. This was observed with college students (aged 15-17) travelling on the train (in location 3) and in the centre of the city (in location 4). In these gatherings they would sit or stand in a circle with each individual seemingly focussing their attention on their individual screens. Whilst this might appear to be an isolating activity in terms of removing direct eye contact from one another in other ways the sense of a social meeting was maintained. Whilst their visual attention may have been occupied their auditory attention remained available to one another with conversations continuing despite ongoing and simultaneous texting or updating of social networks. At times they would share their online activities with one another creating conversations that incorporated (absent) others via their recent text and photo postings to social networking sites. This resulted in what might be called a 'seamless social network' in which online social activities were integrated into immediate person to person (rather than face to face) gatherings and vice versa.

Young Adults (18-35): Phone as Companion and the Public/Private Bubble

Groups of young adults in public did not engage in the seamless social networks of their younger counterparts but tended to exclude those present from their conversations by removing eye contact and orienting their bodies away from any congregation whilst talking on their mobile phones. Mobile phone conversations were not curtailed because of this exclusivity but were accepted by the rest of the group without complaint creating a public/private bubble. For those receiving calls there was variation in the prioritisation of mobile phone voice calls over immediate face to face interactions. Different levels of discretion were used and this would dictate how much they lowered their voice, avoided eye contact and/or withdrew from the centre of the congregation whilst talking on their phone. Text messaging was less common amongst this group when they were out with others in a public space. Young adults were the most visible users of mobile phones in public places. A distinctive aspect of their presence in these places was that they were often seen alone. In these instances the mobile phone was carried in hand and displayed as a symbol of social status implying continual social availability and connection, i.e. they were not really 'alone'. In such a way the mobile phone appeared to act as a constant companion for many solitary young adults.

When alone it was common for this age group to talk for extended periods of time whilst engaged in simultaneous activities that coincidentally involved other people who were present in the local vicinity. For instance in location 1 it was not uncommon to see young adults walk the entire length of the walkway (about 200 metres) talking or texting on their mobile phone. This meant looking up occasionally from the phone but otherwise ignoring all passers-by and opportunities for immediate social contact. Those prioritising mobile phone contact over all else would carry out extended conversations at high volume with no acknowledgement of the public context around them.

Adults (35-65): Efficiency in between Moments

Mature adults were observed using their mobile phones at moments in-between activities or places. Mobile phone activity (whether texting or talking) occurred at particular thresholds just prior to entering buildings such as upon leaving the library or entering a convenience store (both in location 4). This group were more likely than other age groups to be seen talking on their phone when alone. Phone use occurred during times that would have otherwise been taken up with 'mindless' activity such as walking and which made efficient use of available thinking time.

Old Aged (65 +): Discreet Use

For the most part older people's use of mobile phones was either non-existent or hidden from public view. Out of all the older people observed only three of them were seen using their mobile phones in public. On each of these occasions their use of the technology was what one would call 'discreet'. They would stop whatever else they were doing, take their phone out of a bag or pocket, use it for a distinct purpose and then return it. This appeared to be driven by a need to attend to a single task at a time but was compounded by difficulty in seeing the mobile phone when moving. Some older adults would put on glasses or adjust them in order to read and operate the phone. Those phone conversations that were observed were short and to the point.

Generational Attitudes

Whilst observations provided a view of different generation's behaviours in relation to mobile phones, interviews exposed the underlying attitudes that underpinned these behaviours and coloured interpretations of others' behaviour.

All of those interviewed owned a mobile phone irrespective of age but there were clear differences in terms of justifying ownership and use. For younger adults, there was an assumed necessity in owning a mobile phone. It provided a conduit to social realities that were unquestionably important in sustaining social identity and personal equilibrium in everyday life, wherever they were. The phone itself had to be turned on and close at hand either in a pocket or more likely in the hand. They had to be socially available through the phone at all times. As one interviewee explained the significance of his phone,

'I think it's to be in contact, just that simple, I think that's about it' p6

Perpetual contact (Katz and Aakhus, 2002) provided more than just the possibility of social contact however. As observations suggested the mobile phone acted as a 'constant companion', assuaging feelings of social anxiety when strangers were present (i.e. in public spaces).

'It's a little comfort blanket...a comfort brick of technology. It makes you feel safe your phone.'
p9

The phone was used as a mental companion when interaction with friends was not possible or the individual was alone in a public place where strangers were present such as waiting at a bus stop or sitting on a train. Activities engaged in included 'non-interactive' social activities like perusing Facebook posts and text messages as well as more individual activities like playing games, creating lists and using the phone as a notebook

In line with previous studies these younger adults were highly dependent on their mobile phones (Vincent, 2005) experiencing frustration and panic when unable to connect to 'the network' (either mobile phone network or the Internet) for some reason.

'the panic you get if you leave your phone somewhere and you don't have it on you. I keep it in my hand so I get all my notifications' p9

In contrast older mobile phone users were not keen to be constantly connected and preferred to keep their mobile phones turned off unless they were expecting or making a call. Their comments fitted well with observations of 'discreet use'. In line with earlier research (e.g. Kubik, 2009) they justified owning a mobile phone in terms of it being an emergency resource that they could use should the need arise. As one interviewee put it,

'It's in my bag now but coz I always take it with me coz you never know when you might need it but really mobiles are for emergencies' p1

However these older people's use of mobile phones had developed beyond emergency use. One major use for mobile phones was as a logistical tool which enabled meetings with friends and family.

why I have one [a mobile phone] is because... sometimes, I meet a friend in Worthing – he drives and there may be a problem so if we both have our mobile phones with us if there's a difficulty we can text each other...sorry I'm held up in traffic or whatever p2

Despite developing some of their own uses for mobile phones there were still obstacles to more extensive use. These included age-related constraints on use such as difficulty reading the screen and hearing incoming calls (particularly in crowded places); an unwillingness to fund greater mobile phone use, a general distrust in technology and an overriding preference for direct face to face interaction given the choice.

Interestingly the younger adults expressed a preference for interacting via text-based forms of communication saying that, 'texting is cheap well its free, it's easy communication' p3 and another that it was about 'maintaining a connection in an effortless manner' p6. Some found that face to face interaction with people they did not know, whilst waiting for a for a bus or in a shop was an odd thing to do and actually made them feel quite uncomfortable.

Differences over social norms

There was a lack of observable disagreement between these generations when it came to their public use of mobile phones. This seemed to suggest some tolerance over one another's behaviour. However the interviews with our older participants (and one of our younger interviewees) revealed that they were ill at ease with certain aspects of mobile phone use and (at the same time) felt largely powerless to express any opinion about this. Older people were particularly troubled by the now common practice of younger people conducting their private and trivial conversations in public spaces. As one interviewee said in relation to overhearing other people's phone conversations,

'So everybody knows they're going out to Al Forno's [a local restaurant] tonight. I mean I wouldn't like everybody to know my business' p1

The discomfort increased when they were stuck in confined public spaces with a mobile phone user. Here there was no way of escaping the act of listening but they felt that there should be a greater respect for one another's personal privacy. Examples given of such locations included trains, buses and libraries,

'I do think mainly when you're on the bus or the train...the library, it's not like the old library – silence please - you get human voices and other people shouting on the phone. I do think it's annoying' p2

and even public toilets,

'I've noticed that you'll go in the toilets somewhere and someone will be speaking and he's on the mobile phone. I think – you're not concentrating on what you're doing yourself and it's an insult to the person you're speaking to' p2

Most of the young people interviewed did not see other people's use of mobile phones in public spaces as problematic, nor did they see it as a generational issue. As one interviewee explained,

'I think a lot of people are very civil though I mean when they talk on the phone they're very, they are quiet. I mean personally it doesn't bother me coz they don't talk in an obnoxious manner so it's really OK.' p6

Similarly their own pervasive use of the phone was not seen as problematic. Indeed it was even seen as an achievement by some of our interviewees,

'I walk down the street facebooking on the phone, I'll be reading my emails, texting, calling, facetimeing, everything... So yeah, nothing really stops me...whilst speaking to people, facebooking, whatever, yeah. I use it in the toilet. Basically my phone goes everywhere with me - in the shower' p9

There was only one younger person (all be it at the older end of the spectrum) who acknowledged that his own and other people's phone conversations might impinge upon other people's need for privacy and he was keen to point out that those younger than him did not behave in the same way,

if somebody calls me up on a train that I haven't spoken to for a long time I'd say have a very brief chat with them and would want to continue that chat with them at home or somewhere more private. I think as people get younger and younger below me that sense of privacy and disclosure and time and place is so much less of an issue to them, they're quite oblivious to it. p5

On the face of it most of the younger people who were interviewed did seem to be happily departing from the expected social etiquette in public spaces. However there were times when even their own behaviour was deemed to have gone too far in terms of ignoring the immediate social expectations of their peers:

'about 5 of us all had our phones out and we were all scrolling through stuff. We've even been sat in the same room and been talking on WhatsApp! Whilst we were all in the same room' p9

In certain situations the extreme nature of these mutual absent presences became untenable and they were forced to interact directly with one another. This was most often the case when taking part in a shared activity like going to the cinema, going out for dinner at a restaurant and nightclubbing.

Discussion

Clearly the social norms around the public use of mobile phones are changing and indeed have already changed as a result of the pervasiveness of the mobile phone and the arrival of the Internet on these devices. This study shows that there are important differences between younger and older generations when it comes to their expectations for public use of mobile phones and the attitudes that underpin their everyday use of these technologies. These differences can act to negate generational awareness and interaction with them effectively being absent to one another even though they are travelling through the same everyday public spaces. There is a generational shift towards 'the network' and prioritising virtual co-presence as the source of social reality and this has serious implications for local community cohesion within neighbourhoods such as those studied here.

Mobile phones are central to younger people's sense of involvement in life and during this study they were constantly on show and in use with them continuing to use them in almost all public spaces. The phone served as a social entity in itself providing companionship even when not being used for social interaction. For the older people in this study the phone remained a discreet tool with much less significance in maintaining social involvement. Observing all generations together suggests that whilst there are differences in terms of how each generation appropriates the mobile phone there is an increasing dependence on mobile connectivity for younger generations to sustain their social lives.

Perhaps more importantly this study has shown that the meaning of what constitutes shared everyday public space is shifting from one (expected by the older generation) which is based on immediate physical co-presence as a source of social interaction and community involvement to one (expected by younger generations) which prioritises 'the network' and virtual co-presence as the primary source of interaction and affiliation. Whilst there does appear to be a great degree of tolerance when it comes to accepting these different generational perspectives it is clear that different generations are now inhabiting distinct social spaces even when they are travelling through the same physical locations or neighbourhoods.

Generational attitudes towards the meaning of shared public space have clearly diverged and by inhabiting different social realities they remain invisible to one another. As previous research has shown (Wei and Leung, 1999) this divergence is experienced most extremely in confined public spaces such as on public transport and within public facilities such as toilets and libraries. Within these spaces there are real difficulties in resolving these different perspectives and of providing a bridge between disparate generations. So far our ability to resolve these differences in attitude and behaviour are poorly developed. For some older people it appears as if younger people have lost their sense of correct behaviour entirely and that they themselves are becoming further isolated from modern life. At the same time it seems that younger people are becoming fearful of face to face contact with strangers and would rather retreat into the relative safety and 'ease' of their mobile/Internet connections. Interestingly the interviews also highlight that younger mobile phone users do continue to have rules of social decorum but these only surface when they are face to face with their mobile (virtual) contacts. This suggests that younger people are indeed operating through an 'ontology of connection' (Bissell, 2013) where the drive for physical proximity with mobile (virtual) contacts prevails. Meanwhile older people appear to be operating through what has been called an 'ontology of exposure' (Bissell, 2013) in which they remain open and receptive to their 'near-dwellers' whilst travelling through their neighbourhood. In mobility terms it is therefore interesting to note that whilst different generations are making similar journeys through everyday public space, even engaging in similar daily routines, they are making themselves available to quite distinct social realities – one physical and the immediate and the other virtual and mobile with a promise of future physical closeness.

Public spaces within cities are set to become increasingly digitised as part of moves to create 'Smart Cities' within Europe (Caragliu et al, 2011). Here public space will be further augmented by mobile/wireless connectivity (UK Government, 2013) and interactive technologies. It is likely that public spaces of the future will enlist mobile phones as conduits for establishing an awareness of city dynamics and for user-based interaction and community involvement (e.g. Ballagas et al, 2006). Understanding these generational differences is important if we are to engage all members of a given community equally in such future cities. Those spaces which harness the ubiquity of mobile phones for public interactivity will have to accommodate these different uses and expectations in relation to mobile phone use if they are to be truly inclusive spaces.

Conclusions

Through participant observation and interviews this study has shown how attitudes and behaviours surrounding mobile phone use in public space are diverging across generational lines. The journeys of younger people take place to a backdrop of perpetual virtual connection and co-presence whilst older people's journeys remain open to the possibility of immediate physical co-present interaction. Whilst there is a general tolerance of public mobile use there are points of misunderstanding and potential conflict between generations particularly in confined public spaces where there is less freedom of movement or expression. In such situations it is difficult to express or share a contrary opinion and it seems that we have yet to develop any social or technological means of addressing this form of social disturbance in a reasonable and equitable manner. These generational dynamics have implications for ongoing local community cohesion and we should be exploring ways of connecting generations and providing opportunities for each generation to voice these differences. Public notices are sometimes used on public transport in the UK to limit mobile phone use. However the older people in this study suggested that these were ineffective. Given that younger generations are now living their lives

through a virtual social world this is perhaps unsurprising – they are no longer paying attention to the social signals of the physical world so this will not work. There needs to be a means of developing a social awareness that can bridge between the physical and virtual worlds and which will reconnect everyday travels with the serendipity of meeting others (of all ages). This could be done technologically through either context-aware mobile phones or through mobile phone-aware public spaces, i.e. where quiet, mobile-free spaces were embedded into the fabric of public buildings and public transport. Alternatively social etiquette around mobile phone use may change over time and allow a more open dialogue to take place about where and when their use is appropriate. This would encourage greater understanding between different generations but also it seems between members of the same generation. Such considerations should be central to the future design of interactive public spaces arising through Smart City initiatives if we are to maintain a digitally inclusive approach to such spaces which will accommodate all generations.

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