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**'So Long as I Take my Mobile': Mobile Phones, Urban Life and Geographies of
Young People's Safety.**

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‘So long as I take my mobile’:

Mobile phones, urban life and geographies of young people’s safety

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Abstract

Mobile phone ownership has spread rapidly among young people in western societies. This paper contributes to an expanding body of literature which is examining the consequences of this phenomenon for urban life. Our focus is the impact of mobile phones on young people’s geographies, particularly their own and their parents’ fears about their safety in public spaces. Quantitative and qualitative findings are presented from two research projects in Gateshead, north east England on crime victimization and leisure injury risk for young people, in which the role of mobile phones in managing and negotiating safety emerged as significant. The paper highlights the different ways in which young people and parents are using mobile phones for this purpose, and asks whether they are best viewed as technologies of surveillance or empowerment. We also raise questions about the efficacy of mobile phones in protecting young people from risk and fear, in particular examining the mobile as a new site of victimization. Throughout, we emphasise the social unevenness of the uses and impacts of new technologies, which is often underplayed in research. We conclude with the suggestion that although they offer some empowerment to young people in their use of public spaces and their negotiation of risk, mobile phones appear to be reshaping rather than reducing moral panics about young people’s presence there.

Introduction: new technologies, urban life and the geographies of risk for young people

The last few years have seen a huge growth in mobile phone ownership in western societies. In Britain, mobiles were owned in 47% of households in 2000/1, and 65% by 2001/2 (Matheson and Babb, 2002; Summerfield and Babb, 2003). Take up has been particularly fast among young people. A survey in 2000 found that 17% of primary school age children and 58% of secondary school age children had their own mobile phone (Office of National Statistics, 2002). A year later a survey of 1,000 11-15 year olds found that 90% had their own phone (Kendall, 2001; Uhlig, 2001).

Mobiles are viewed as highly desirable by many young people (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999), and with accessorisation through changing covers and ring tones, they can be seen as an expression of individuality and taste (Green, forthcoming). Young people are conscious consumers of new mobile technologies as they become available, often preferring text messages which are cheaper than phone calls, and using phones to connect to the internet and to play games (Charlton et al, 2002).

The rapid embedding of mobile phones into young people's cultures raises many questions about how they might alter the social and geographical aspects of everyday life. Some of these questions are being addressed by a wider literature on the relationships between technology and society, one area of which is exploring how mobile phones disrupt and transform social activities and identities (e.g. Brown et al, 2002; Cooper et al, 2004; Katz, 2003; Katz and Aakhus 2002; Koskela 2004).

Suggestions that the digital spaces and networks created by technologies such as the internet, mobile communications, global positioning systems and wireless devices might replace 'real' urban spaces and interactions have largely been superseded by

acceptance that they add new dimensions to everyday life. There is less talk of technologies destroying cultures and spaces, and more considered debate about the new possibilities presented by mobile phones, and how these relate to or disrupt existing structures of power and control (Brown et al 2002; Cooper et al 2004; Graham 2004; Katz and Aspden 1999). For example, Kopomaa (2000) has suggested that, in the city, mobile phones bring new life to public spaces, offering a 'third place' for social interaction outside of home and work. However, there has still been relatively little account taken of children in analyses of the impact of technological change on everyday life (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 2001).

In this paper we contribute to the expanding body of literature on mobile phones by examining their impact on young people's geographies, particularly as regards their own and their parents' concerns about their safety in public spaces. Parents' fears have received much recent attention from academics (e.g. Maguire, 2003; Valentine, 1997), and young people's own fear of danger while in public spaces is increasingly well recognised too (Goodey, 1994; Pain, forthcoming). Some have suggested that these fears are well founded, in view of the risks that young people face from adults, from other young people and from dangerous local environments (Anderson et al, 1994; Brown, 1995; Roberts et al, 1995; Pain, forthcoming). While accidents and physical and emotional abuse are in fact most common within the home, these fears mean that young people are increasingly restricted and supervised outdoors, at some cost to their autonomy, social interaction and health (Hillman et al, 1990; Furedi, 2001; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997). Moreover, public concerns about young people as a risk to others have led to restrictions on young people's spatial movements and activities in public spaces (Aitken, 2001a; Collins and Kearns, 2001; Pain, 2003).

These relationships of young people with public spaces have been widely viewed as signalling a major and unwelcome change in the nature of childhood (Furedi, 2001; Scott et al, 1998; Waiton, 2001). Nonetheless, young people are active in negotiating their spatial mobility with their parents, and in transgressing rules they are set about where they may be, when and with whom (Matthews et al, 1998; Valentine, 1997).

Relatively little attention has been given to the role of mobile phones in the management of young people's safety, or in influencing their movements in time and space more broadly. However, as Jones et al (2003) point out, mobile phones are an inherently spatial technology with important consequences for young people's geographical lives:

Mobile phones offer differing challenges and potential for childhood because of their interactive, flexible, portable, mobile capacities that the other technologies (generally) do not offer. [They offer] more potential for children *to incorporate them into their worlds* rather than offering the more commodified, adult-authored alternative worlds of games technologies or the (almost) inevitably indoor and spatially fixed PC based internet access.

(Jones et al 2003, their emphasis)

Mobile phones have brought surveillance, traditionally associated only with the state and corporate bodies, into the realm of personal relationships, facilitating widespread 'mutual monitoring and accountability' (Green, 2002b). They have opened up new spaces for social interaction; for friends to talk, text and arrange to meet, and for parents and young people to stay in touch (Green 2002a; Jones et al 2003; Kasesniemi

and Rautiainen 2002; Wearing and Foley 2002). It has been suggested that mobile phones have profoundly changed young people's definition of their personal space (Oksman and Turtianinen 2004), allowing more control over the various spaces they move through (Skog 2002) as they 'take with them their entire social community wherever they go' (Oksman and Turtianinen 2004, 332). For Cooper (2002), mobile phones have a key role in reconfiguring public spaces and our thinking about what public spaces are, further blurring distinctions between public/private, close/distant, and work/leisure.

Potentially, then, mobiles may reduce the fears of parents and young people by allowing contact which is not spatially or temporally bounded: they may free parents from having to set deadlines for young people to return home, or young people from having to be accompanied on certain journeys. Mobile phones may expand young people's geographies, allowing them a wider spatial range unsupervised, and thus empower young people in reclaiming public spaces, or contract them as a further means for parents to monitor and control young people's movements. They also open up new possibilities for subverting this surveillance, as young people can decide how much information to give their parents and may not always be where they say they are. Their role in risk avoidance is potentially significant, a point which telecommunications companies have been conscious of in marketing and product development. New technologies are able to monitor young people's movements through space; a microchip tracking device for implanting in children's flesh so that parents know where their child is at all times has recently been piloted (Weale 2002), and parents are also one market in mind for wearable mobile ICTs which will pick up and transmit general and location-specific data as the user moves through different

spaces (Jones et al. 2003). When they incorporate global positioning systems, wearable ICTs allow the movements of the device's user to be mapped. Jones et al. outline the positive potential for young people in terms of enhancing their independent mobility and opportunities for play and education, but also recognise that the devices may aid increased surveillance and control of young people in public spaces.

At the same time, and in contrast, mobile phones are opening up new spaces of risk for young people. In Britain, concerns about young people being targeted by bullies and paedophiles through mobile phones and the technologies associated with them have been given high profile in the media in recent months. Mobile phones provide spaces which are difficult for parents to monitor or supervise. Valentine and Holloway (2001, 2003) emphasise the role of new technologies in increasing 'moral panics' about young people's safety. In their study of young people's use of cyberspace, they explored parents' concerns about their young people's possible exposure to pornography and paedophiles while using the internet. They argue that the issue replicates long-standing dualistic images of young people as 'angels' or 'devils' with regard to risk in public spaces (Valentine 1996). The fears of the parents interviewed centred on young people's vulnerability, but also their high level of technological competence which might allow them to access dangerous materials – so fear is about young people's independence and the corruption of their innocence with knowledge, as well as being about young people's safety from abuse. They emphasise, however, that parents' reactions to these new risks vary greatly, and that young people are able and sophisticated in their management of it (Valentine and Holloway 2003).

However, for us, a key criticism of much existing research is that it does not pay enough attention to material and emotional differences in adoption, upkeep and use of new technologies. These are far from equal: while sometimes presented as ubiquitous in western societies, neither the internet nor mobile phones are accessible, affordable or revolutionary for everyone (Curry 1998; Rice and Katz 2002; Valentine and Holloway 2003). The rapid growth in mobile phone ownership is uneven between income groups in Britain (Summerfield and Babb 2003), though paradoxically theft of mobiles is more common in low income areas (Harrington and Mayhew 2001). Equally, social class and income are central axes affecting the geographical experiences of young people (Matthews et al 2000; Holloway and Valentine 2001) as well as their experiences of risk. Young people living in affluent areas suffer fewer injuries both in the home and in public spaces than those in deprived neighbourhoods (Roberts et al, 1995). Different rates of crime victimization for young people in different social classes are less stark than for adults (Anderson et al 1994), but nonetheless studies also show that those in marginalized, lower income areas are likely to experience greater risks of theft, violence and harassment in public and private spaces (Aitken 2001a; Brown 1995; Loader et al 1998; MacIntyre 2001). Young people in poorer areas also less likely to lead lives which are highly supervised, and to have greater opportunities for outdoor play and exploration (Matthews et al 2000; Skelton 2001; Waiton 2001). This is partly through necessity (e.g. the lack of a household car, less space at home, no private garden, both parents working and less use of paid-for childcare); but also because the overplayed stereotype of young people never being allowed out alone is not as widespread as is sometimes assumed. Recent arguments about young people leading over-protected

lives to an extreme and harmful degree (e.g. Furedi 2001) are, in fact, socially and geographically specific (Pain, forthcoming).

In this paper, we examine the impact of mobile phones in safekeeping amongst boys and girls of different ages and social backgrounds. The paper arises from two research projects which were both carried out in Gateshead in north east England. One examined the experiences of leisure risk of young people aged 11-14, the other the experiences of crime victimization and fear of young people aged 10-16. While they were separate projects, the two topics are closely related and both took a geographical perspective on risk. We had a number of conversations while carrying out the research, about the overlap between fears and risks around leisure and crime and similar findings that were emerging. One of the most noticeable of these was the role of mobile phones in young people's everyday movements and negotiations over safety. We present young people's accounts on this theme from questionnaires, interviews and discussion groups.

Methods

'The crime victimization project' is a study of young people's experiences of victimization and fear of crime commissioned by Victim Support. The research sampled young people across Gateshead who attended nine primary schools, four secondary schools, two exclusion units, and one school for young people with physical disabilities in the more deprived wards of the town. Young people aged 10-11, 11-12 and 15-16 years old were included in the research. First, 10 discussion groups were carried out with 55 young people. The discussion groups were tape recorded, transcribed and subject to qualitative analysis, and the findings informed the

design of a questionnaire survey. This was completed privately and anonymously in class time by 1069 young people. A researcher was present in case of problems, and she read out the questions to the youngest young people. The results were input and analysed on SPSS. Finally, a verification exercise was carried out using participatory diagramming techniques with members of Gateshead Youth Assembly, which is made up of 45 young people of varied ages and social backgrounds. They evaluated the findings and added to them where appropriate. Data from the three methods corroborated the main issues and problems which young people face in the area.

‘The leisure risk project’ is a study of the risks in the leisure time of 11-14 year olds, funded by the Community Fund. The local education authority selected eight schools to participate, which reflected a broad variety of levels of affluence and social deprivation in the borough, though they cannot be said to directly represent or act as a proxy for all of the different levels of affluence and deprivation in the area. Two schools were used to pilot the questionnaire, five schools took part in the main questionnaire survey and one school declined. At the five research schools, all young people aged 11-14 years were surveyed. Teachers who administered the questionnaire survey during class time were given guidelines relating to specific questions that might be found to be problematic by the respondents, and in all but one of the schools, researchers from the project were on hand to assist. The 1974 usable questionnaires received were analysed using SPSS. The young people’s affluence was measured ecologically based on postcode scored linked to Townsend Deprivation Scores¹. Qualitative research was also undertaken with 37 pupils who were selected to present a range of social backgrounds and leisure lifestyles. Research involved using in-depth interviews based around leisure diaries, photographs taken by participants and

discussion groups. These data were analysed using computer software for qualitative analysis (NUD*IST 4).

The neighbourhoods, schools and young people involved in each project have been anonymised. Quotes from interviews and discussion groups are presented here verbatim with [...] indicating where material has been left out and [untl.] where words or phrases were unintelligible.

Findings

In the crime victimization project, young people were not asked directly whether or not they owned a mobile phone, though as Table 1 indicates, the majority did have one. In the leisure risk project, where young people were asked directly, most had one (59.4%) (see Table 2). Significantly more girls (66%) than boys (54%) had mobile phones ($p < 0.001$). Age was of similar significance ($p < 0.001$), with older young people more likely to own a mobile phone than younger ones (67% of 13-14 year olds compared with 53% of 11-12 years olds). In contrast to the suggestion of national surveys, young people from more deprived backgrounds (62%) were more likely to report having a mobile phone ($p = 0.018$) than more affluent young people (56%). This may be connected to different worries about security in different neighbourhoods, and/or different levels of freedom young people have in public space because of variations in access to private transport or in attitudes towards childhood. Skog (2002) reports similar findings in Norway, finding negative correlations between mobile ownership, academic self-esteem and cultural capital.

In the rest of the paper, we present findings on young people's use of mobile phones in relation to their safety in public space under four headings. In the first two sections, we highlight the extent of young people's and parents' use of mobile phones in managing and negotiating fear and safety. The third section raises questions about the efficacy of mobile phones in protecting young people from crime and leisure injury risk.

Mobile phones and the management of young people's safety

In the crime victimization project, reported rates of both victimization and fear were high among boys and girls, and many also reported a high level of precautionary behaviour in response to fear of crime in certain places (Pain, forthcoming). Making sure they had their mobile phone with them was a common strategy for boys (45%), and the most common for girls (61%) (see Table 1). Significantly, for both sexes, this was a more common response than the avoidance of particular public places altogether, which has been the keenest interest of research and public debates on young people's safety to date. The crime questionnaire also asked young people about their parents' actions and advice to try to keep them safe, and 72% of girls and 57% of boys said their parents told them to take their mobile phones with them for this reason (Table 3).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

In interviews and discussion groups on both projects, young people discussed how having a mobile phone made them feel safer in public spaces, primarily as a security device for calling parents when they were feeling worried, or when something happened (see also Ling 2000; Ling and Yttri 2002):

In my street there's this long cut and it's got loads of bushes in, and me cousin he's a drug dealer and I don't like going through the cut, so I phone me mam and tell her to pick us up.

(Girl, aged 11-12, discussion group, leisure risk project)

Q: Does it make you feel safer having your phone with you?

A: Aye

B: Aye

C: Yes definitely

A: Like when Callum fell off his bike, he had scraped all his face and all his arm was cut and I phoned his mother, and it was like a good thing we had it on us cos she was already waiting on top of the bank for him.

[...]

C: It's safe to have it

D: I'm just scared in case it gets pinched

(Boys aged 10-11, discussion group, crime victimization project)

Having a mobile phone in such situations can offer immediate relief, rather than needing to find a public phone box which is working and having to remember numbers. This girl was out on a bicycle ride when she needed help:

We ended up going two miles down the road past all these diversion signs and we got to the end and it said 'road closed', so we had to go two miles back and we were absolutely dead. And we rang me mam and dad and they came with drinks in the car and said follow the car back home. [...] Someone said why did you go there in the first place - well we didn't know. We had to reverse the charges on the phone. Because we didn't have any money.

(Girl, aged 11-12, interview, leisure risk project)

Some young people described carrying a mobile phone primarily because of their parents' fears, rather than their own, in order to reassure their parents and give them additional freedom:

A: Me Mam got mugged well about a few month ago something like that, just stuff like that. She got followed and then she got mugged and everything.

Q: Oh that must have been horrible.

A: She hasn't recovered from it, she won't let me go anywhere unless she knows where I am or if I've got my mobile with us.

(girl aged 11-12, discussion group, crime victimization project)

Having a mobile phone in case of a dangerous situation can remove the concerns some parents have of not being able to watch their child when they are out without an adult, indeed for some parents the mobile phone has no other purpose than safety:

Q: Do you have a mobile phone and does she ring you on that?

A: Yes. But just for emergencies.

(Girl, aged 11-12, interview, leisure risk project)

Parents' and young people's perceptions of the need for a mobile phone often differed. For many young people, their ability to use mobiles to meet up with friends was more important than security (see also Ling and Yttri 2002; Oksman and Turtianinen 2004):

Q: And so are you going to get a mobile so they can keep in touch?

A: That's what me friend say cos your mam and dad can know where you are. But I want one - so people can ring me.

(Boy, aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

Mobile ownership was fairly widespread in our research, but as both projects were carried out in a town where average incomes are well below national averages, significant socio-economic issues of access might have been expected. Statistics on ownership from the leisure risk project actually show that young people from more affluent backgrounds were less likely to have a mobile phone (Table 2). Nonetheless, effective use of mobiles requires resources beyond the point of purchase. Some young

people in the research clearly could not afford to run a phone and did not have one for this reason:

Q: Have you got a mobile phone?

A: No? I can't afford that.

(Girl aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

Many young people who did have a mobile used services where they needed to buy 'top-up' credit periodically. Having sole use of the phone and keeping it working at all times may be difficult. If the phone breaks there is often no easy way to repair or replace it:

Q: And have you got a mobile phone?

A: Yeah. But it's broke at the minute.

(Boy aged 11-12, interview, leisure risk project)

The unequal position of young people in the family may also affect access to mobiles, as the following example demonstrates:

Q: Have you got a mobile phone?

A: Yeah but me dad's taken it away. I got a phone for my birthday but I spilt pop on it so it doesn't work. Me dad took it and fixed it and took it to work but me mam took it off him for her work.

(Boy aged 11-12, interview, leisure risk project)

Moreover, while it can be argued that having a mobile phone empowers young people, those unable to afford phones are at a disadvantage when making arrangements to see friends (Charlton et al, 2002). If a number of friends in the area do not have mobile phones, then it also disadvantages those who do:

A: I've got plenty of money and that but it's hardly anyone being there.

That's what stops us doing things cos they are all out. Like some people haven't got phones and that so its hard to arrange things.

(Boy aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

Other young people discussed the limitations of mobiles in making them safer outdoors; if their phones had been stolen, were out of transmitting area or just switched off. Sometimes these 'problems' were employed as deliberate strategies in explaining to parents why they had failed to get in touch. For others, however, they were the consequence of living in lower income families and neighbourhoods. Either way, the assumption that mobiles are a reliable technology to help keep young people safe is flawed. The protection offered by mobile phones is clearly better for those who can afford to run them.

There were some differences by gender and age in the use of mobile phones to promote safety. In the crime victimization project, older girls in the crime victimization project were more likely than younger girls to say they made sure they had their mobile with them to avoid crime happening (see Table 1), perhaps because they were more likely to have mobiles as well as a wider spatial range. However there seems to be a converse relationship with age for boys, which may be related to a

general decrease in boys' reported fear of crime as they get older, while for older girls fear remains at higher levels. Older girls were also much more likely than younger girls to report that their parents told them to take their mobile with them to keep safe, while it seems that as boys get into their mid-teens, they are more likely to have a mobile but their parents are less likely to instruct them about their safety (Table 3). Girls and young women are more restricted in their use of public spaces, being subject to more parental constraints (Davis and Jones 1996), experiencing more harassment and discomfort when using public spaces, and tending to have few places they regard as 'their own' outside the home (Skelton 2001; Tucker and Matthews 2001). Public space is highly (hetero)sexualised (Namaste 1996), and those viewed as sexually vulnerable as well as those viewed as sexually transgressive sometimes being more likely to experience such discomfort and an implicit threat of assault (Valentine 1993). The role of mobiles in reducing fear and discomfort may therefore be more important for girls and women. This is reinforced by Wearing and Foley's (2002) findings: for the adolescent women they interviewed, having a mobile was not just an important reflector of identity, but offered protection by being seen not to be alone. The ability to chat to friends boosted young women's confidence and provide social comfort, especially in situations where they felt exposed to the male gaze, such as waiting for friends outside a cinema or travelling by train. In this sense mobile phones can transform public spaces into private space, as they make location less important (Holmes 2001, cited in Wearing and Foley 2002; Kopomaa 2000), and may have an emancipatory role in reducing adolescent women's fear in public spaces.

Negotiating risk and risk-taking

Geographers have emphasised young people's agency in transgressing adult rules about whether and where they should be in public spaces (Matthews et al 1998; Valentine 1997). Spaces which are commonly seen to be owned or controlled by adults are often imbued with different meanings by young people; young people's spaces may inhabit or cross-cut the spaces of adults or other young people, and may be imaginary or mobile (McKendrick 1997; Tucker and Matthews 2001; Valentine and Holloway 2001). Mobile phones have provided one such set of spaces, as we have indicated so far. The literature on the consequences of mobile technologies has emphasised that they provide an important new site for identity construction and socialisation, where young people make and develop friendships, exchange gossip and arrange social activities (Green forthcoming; Holroyd 2003; Ling 2000; Wearing and Foley 2002). Equally, mobile phones place young people's relationships with their parents on a new footing (Ling and Yttri 2002, 2003), allowing some young people more negotiating strength about where they are permitted to go, and more possibilities of subverting parents' rules. Mobiles not only allow some young people a greater spatial range, then, they facilitate the unsanctioned exploration of spaces considered unsuitable for them.

Many young people in the crime victimization project said that their parents worried about them and told them not to go to certain areas (Table 3). Having a mobile phone not only seems to allow young people greater freedom, but also to negotiate the rules at any chosen time, sometimes by explaining that contextual circumstances have changed:

Q: And do you have a mobile phone?

A: Yeah

Q: And do they call you up on that?

A: Yeah. Or I'll phone them up and ask for more time.

(Boy aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

B: Yeah I have to be in for 9 p.m. But sometimes if I have to come in later I'll just phone and say I'll be a bit late if I have to take Gemma home. And they are usually OK.

(Girl aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

Where young people carry mobile phones, it also allows parental rules to be more fluid. So that, for instance, the changing weather or shortening light on winter evenings may mean a parent decides that a child is better inside the home than out:

Q: And do your parents have rules about what time you have to be back home?

A: I've got a mobile phone and they ring us.

(Boy aged 11-12, interview, leisure risk project)

In some cases, young people may use their phone to keep a parent up to date with their movements rather than waiting to hear from their parents. This can give extra confidence to young people who might be nervous of going far from home without an adult:

Q: And have you got a mobile phone?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do your parents use it to keep track of you?

A: Well I just phone them if I'm in a different place and tell them where I am. They are probably sick of us phoning them. But I cannot help it.

(Girl aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

As Ling and Yttri (2002, 156) report, young people express 'a certain ambivalence about the potential for one's parents to contact them via the mobile telephone'. Young people in our studies also said that they did not always obey their parents' wishes – 'not allowed and doing is two different things you see' (boy aged 11-12, discussion group, crime victimization project):

Q: What about your Mums and Dads, how do they feel about letting you go to places where crimes might happen to young people, do they let you go or is there anywhere they say you're not going?

A: I don't even tell them what happens where I go so they don't know

B: They'd only keep you in

C: Aha and that cos like say down the Banks

B: They just say 'where you going?'

C: Like we say we don't tell our Mams

B: Like if I want to go to the camp and me Ma says 'oh where you going, you better not be going to a camp' I just say 'oh I'm going to the pit' and like I go to the camp.

A: Aye (?) that's what I say

[...]

B: And normally what happens like nearly all of us have got mobile phones so what we do is we just carry the phone out. Like if me Ma needs us she just phones us and if she says 'where are you' I just say 'oh I'm next to Dean's' but I'm up [...] village somewhere

[...]

B: Aha that's what me Ma says, 'oh it's a good thing for him to have' but then she says, 'oh he'll probably just be telling lies half the time anyway'

(Boys aged 10-11, discussion group, crime victimization project)

There are other ways, too, in which young people can undermine or subvert parents' feelings of security arising from their child having a mobile phone. They may deliberately leave the phone behind when they go out:

Q: Do you have a mobile phone and do they use that to check out where you are?

A: I never take it. Well when I do they ring us.

(Boy aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

I carry me pager but I don't carry me phone a lot cos I just don't take it so she doesn't ring us.

(Boy aged 10-11, discussion group, crime victimization project)

Research elsewhere confirms that mobiles are seen by young people as one way to pacify their parents in struggles over spatial autonomy (Holroyd 2003). Information

about where young people actually are has to be taken at face value by their parents. In Green's (forthcoming) research, young people were sometimes vague or lied outright about their whereabouts. Parents were aware of this, and it became part of a new process of risk negotiation. As both Koskela (2004) and Ling and Yttri (2003) have argued, mobile phones provide new opportunities for people to resist power and gain control.

Studies of children and risk have tended to impose an adult-defined view of what constitutes 'risk', and have been slow to identify that children may ignore or actively court certain dangers. The leisure risk project offers the opportunity to compare mobile phone ownership with young people's deliberate risk-taking behaviour when outdoors. Interestingly, those young people with mobile phones (60%) were more likely (<0.001) to admit taking risks or dares when they were out with their friends than those who did not own mobiles (46%) (see Table 4). The significance of this finding changes little when social background is taken into account: mobile phone owners from both affluent and deprived backgrounds were more likely to report taking risks than non-mobile owners of the same background. Mobile owners are also more likely to report visiting dangerous places than non-owners. Here though, there is a greater difference between affluent mobile owners and non-owners than their deprived counterparts, who hung out there regardless of whether they owned a mobile phone or not. While we suggest that this may be because young people in deprived areas lack safe choices for leisure places, and that they recognise the dangers of their leisure locations (see also Roberts et al 1995), it may also mean that affluent young people feel more secure when they have a mobile phone. They may take more risks or go further afield than they would normally, perhaps because they can evade parental

surveillance more easily with a mobile phone, or because they feel that they can quickly make contact should problems arise.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The data presented so far suggest that mobile phones offer undoubted benefits in helping parents know where young people are, and do appear to reduce fear of crime for some young people. While mobile phones are widely used in the surveillance of young people, ostensibly for their protection, they also empower some young people in offering greater spatial autonomy from adults than they would otherwise have. This conclusion must be tempered with the caveat that in the period since the introduction of mobile phones, moral panics about young people's safety and parents' fears are said to have increased. We now turn to consider further material consequences of mobile phones for young people's safety.

New sites of victimization?

In fact, the degree of protection which mobile phones offer from crime, leisure risks and other outdoor dangers is questionable. First, crime and leisure injury occur in a wide range of places, not just those public spaces where young people are isolated from those they know. In the crime victimization study, experiences of crime were very common and took place in many different locations. Many of the crimes young people reported were committed by people they knew (family members or young people who were acquaintances), and took place in private and semi-private spaces as well as in the public spaces in which parents urge them to carry their mobiles (Pain, forthcoming).

Secondly, mobile phones are themselves significant as new sites of victimization. It has been estimated that theft of mobile phones now makes up over a third of all personal robberies in England and Wales, with half of all mobile-related robberies involving a victim aged under 20 (Simmons 2002). In 2000 and 2001, around 2% of mobile phone owners had a phone stolen each year, while for those aged 16 and under the figure was between 5% and 12% (Harrington and Mayhew 2001). Statistics also show that mobile thefts from teenagers are especially likely to involve robbery from the person, which involves varying degrees of violence. In Britain, this has further fuelled fears about young people's vulnerability to crime in public spaces as well as panics, often racialized, about young people as offenders. Campbell Keagan (2001) note that mobile phones also make young people more at risk from traffic accidents, due to the poorer attention users tend to give to the environment around them. Voice and text messaging by mobile phone have been identified as routes by which paedophiles may contact young people after making initial contact through the internet or email (both of which are can also be accessed from later generations of mobile phones), though it is not clear at present how widespread this is. A recent report to the British government suggested that paedophiles may also take advantage of picture and video messaging available on the latest generation of mobile phones in grooming and abusing young people (O'Connell 2003). Additionally, mobiles are a site of bullying between young people (NCH 2002). Charlton et al (2002) found that a small number (11%) of their respondents had used their phones to send nasty messages, and that 17% reported receiving such messages.

While mobile phones offered greater freedom for the young people in our research, some had been harassed by callers and texters which made them very scared. Mobiles greatly expand the 'tyrannical spaces' in which bullying may take place (Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001). These nuisance calls would not have necessarily have been taken by the child – or have been made – on the home telephone, and may mean that young people are in an environment in which they feel unsafe and where there is no one to talk to about the calls when they happen:

Me sister was getting phone calls saying "I know where you are" and then telling her where she was and that, saying "I know where you are, you're in Claire's house" and she was.

(Girl aged 11-12, discussion group, leisure risk project)

I was at my friend's house and I got this call on me mobile but I didn't recognise the number, and I've got every number in me phone, so if it's a strange number I just hang up and that's what I done. And then they phoned again and me friend had give us her new number and it had got put in me phone, so I answered it and there was this man going "hello who are you?" and I said me name and that, and then he goes "where do you live?". I goes "what do you want to know for?" and he was asking us where I live and how old I was and he wanted to meet us so I hung up and then he kept phoning us and phoning us and saying all this dirty stuff and so I told me mam and me mam phoned him back and she was threatening that if he does it again she was going to phone the police but he didn't phone back. She goes "how did you get her number?" and he goes "well I made a mistake".

(Girl aged 11-12, discussion group, leisure risk project)

My cousin, she was getting loads of funny phone calls saying “do you like Chinese” and that, and she went “yes” and he said “I’m going to blow your brains out and eat them” and she was going to have to change her number, she was really crying cos she was in college and she didn’t know what to do or anything.

(Girl aged 11-12, discussion group, leisure risk project)

That it is now easier to identify callers and trace calls may mean this problem is lessening. As well as having to handle strange calls, young people also face the responsibility of considering and negotiating who their number can be safely given out to. This may, like the use of internet chatrooms, allow individuals who parents might see as unsuitable to chat on a regular basis to young people, to the point where they feel familiar enough to meet:

A: Yes sort of took a risk. I didn't give my phone number over the internet but this man gave me his number and I rang him up and we were chatting and I gave him my number.

Q: Have you spoken to him since?

A: A couple of times.

Q: Whereabouts does he live?

A: He lives up at [untl.]

(Girl aged 13-14, interview, leisure risk project)

Like all of the spaces which young people inhabit, mobile phones have a particular set of risks and vulnerabilities associated with them. The amount of attention these issues have had recently is symptomatic of newly ‘discovered’ risks, and perhaps indicates moral panics which may turn out to be overblown. However, the idea that mobiles may protect young people from crime is flawed, given the spatial diffusion of risk (Pain, forthcoming). Our research lends support to evidence elsewhere that the potential for theft, harassment and bullying is a negative associated with mobile ownership. Mobile phones appear to be reflecting rather than reducing experiences of risk elsewhere.

Conclusions

Mobile phone ownership and use are related to the complex social and political relations which affect young people, and to the reality that their lives are lived out in spaces largely designed and controlled by adults. Although mobile phones offer new autonomous spaces and freedom away from the home, their use is bound up with many factors relating to the social position of young people, including their relationship with their parents or carer; whether they receive pocket money and/or have an income from working outside the home; where they live, whether their friends live close by and whether these friends have a mobile.

Nonetheless, mobile phones are expanding the spaces available to young people at a time when they are subject to growing constraints on the use of public spaces due to adults’ fears. To some extent, they are ameliorating fear of crime and other dangers associated with being outdoors, and helping young people to self-empower in their use of public spaces. However, it is likely that mobiles are fairly limited in protecting

young people from crime or injury out of doors, and at the same time victimization via mobile phones is adding to the range of risks which young people are concerned about. Overall we suggest that mobile phones are reshaping, rather than reducing, parents' concerns and broader moral panics about young people in public spaces. New technologies have a transformative role in urban life; but these transformations involve extension rather than disruption of the socio-spatial relations in question here. Mobiles did not appear to bring fundamental changes to the lives of young people in our research. Rather, they have taken on a role in the existing ties, struggles and surveillance between young people and adults; in the already contradictory nature of young people's relationships with public spaces; and in extending existing patterns of victimization and risk-taking behaviour to the new spaces of mobiles. In the future, rather than new technologies having a widespread role in controlling young people, it seems more likely that they will reinforce the current reality that protection (whether from real or imagined risks) is better for those who can afford it. Either way, the divide between young people who are safe (or smothered by restrictions, depending on interpretation) and those who are at risk (or benefit from more freedom in public spaces) is likely to grow. Young people from more affluent backgrounds are less at risk, but more likely to benefit from systems of protection which intensify that divide.

Of particular importance, then, and quite poorly reflected in much of the literature, is the social unevenness of the use and impact of phones in managing safety. Our studies point to differences by gender, with mobile phones being more important in safety management for girls than boys, especially as they get older. The mobile phone 'allows young people to create and negotiate their gendered and class-based identities' (Skog 2002, 256), and has a role in how they experience and resist risk and

fear. Our research suggests that mobiles aid resilience in the face of risk, enhancing well-being and access to public spaces, but in ways which are still structured along lines of gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity and class.

This brings us to a broader point about prioritising age in consideration of the social and spatial significance of mobile phones (see also Green forthcoming). Despite pointing to differences in spatial experience between young people of different ethnic, gender, class and ability groups, the literature on young people's geographies has tended to enact a fairly uncomplicated prioritisation of age. Just as many different social groups negotiate safety in public spaces in different ways (Pain and Townshend 2002), so issues about mobile phone use are not specific to young people. The intensive marketing of mobile phones, services and accessories at young people, assumptions about young people's uncritical desire to uptake new technologies and, in this context, the expansion of moral panics about young people's safety, all tend to cloud this observation. While the use of mobile phones and their economic and cultural significance certainly appears to be greater among young people at present, there are problems with presenting young people as a singular category, as Green points out. Rather than mobiles having a universal role in a common youth subculture, young people have very different attitudes to them, indeed people of all age groups are likely to use mobiles in many different ways (Green forthcoming). Given that mobile phone ownership is spreading fastest at present within older age groups, examining their geographies of safety and risk negotiation would be an obvious point of departure for future research.

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Tables

Table 1: Do you do any of the following to avoid crimes happening to you?

	Sex/age	10	11	12	15	16	Average (%)
I avoid going to certain places	Male	42	33	27	34	45	35
	Female	53	34	28	41	52	40
I make sure I have my mobile phone with me	Male	48	46	51	41	37	45
	Female	42	58	69	70	74	61

Source: crime victimization project

Table 2: Do you yourself have a mobile phone at present? (%)

	All	Male	Female	11-12	13-14	Deprived	Affluent
Yes	60	54	66	53	67	62	56
No	40	46	35	47	33	38	44
Significance		$\chi^2=24.726$, df=1, p<0.001		$\chi^2=36.017$, df=1, p<0.001		$\chi^2=5.645$, df=1, p=0.018	

Source: leisure risk project

Table 3: Do your parents (or the people who look after you) do any of the following to try and keep you safe?

	Sex/age	10	11	12	15	16	Average
							(%)
They tell you that you can't go to certain places	Male	69	55	41	16	21	43
	Female	73	61	51	38	39	55
They tell you to take your mobile phone with you so they can contact you	Male	57	48	72	60	54	57
	Female	47	71	84	81	87	72

Source: crime victimization project

Table 4: (1) When you are out with your friends or out alone do you every take risks or dares? (2) Can you think of any dangerous places where you spend your spare time or hang out with your friends?

	Take risks	Don't take risks	Don't know if take risks	Visit dangerous places	Don't visit dangerous places	Don't know if visit dangerous places
Own a mobile Phone	54%	35%	11%	46%	38%	16%
Don't own a mobile phone	41%	48%	11%	37%	47%	17%
Significance	$\chi^2=32.576$, df=2, p<0.001			$\chi^2=17.379$, df=2, p<0.001		

Source: leisure risk project