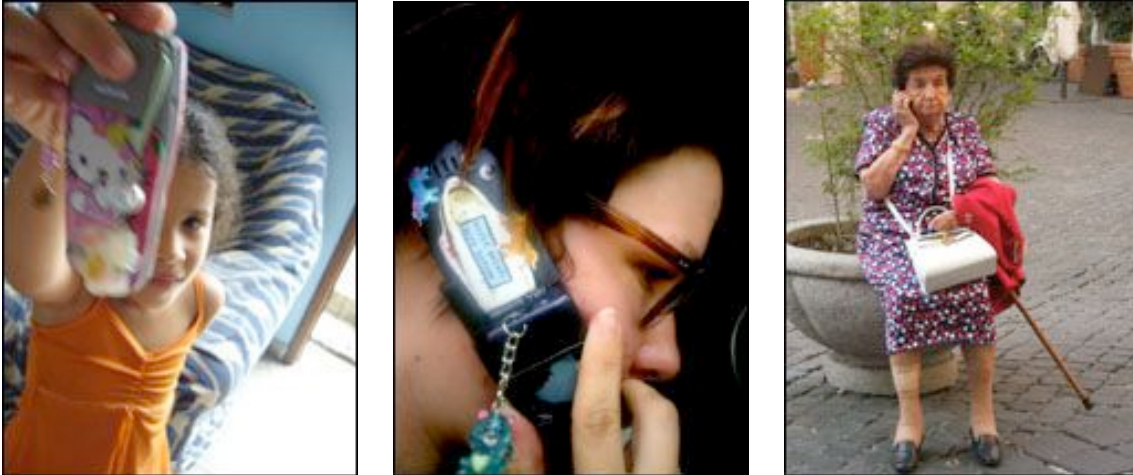


Mobile Space is Women's Space:
Reframing Mobile Phones and
Gender in an Urban Context

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Figures 1, 2, 3. A Brazilian girl shows off her mobile phone. A United States woman customized her mobile. An elderly woman in Rome rests and places a mobile call. (Source: Ken Anderson, Larissa Swindle, Esther Van Nes)

We live and die by the mobile. Most of us are no more than one meter away from our mobile phones at any time. We customize them to suit our personalities, wake to their alarms, express our love and frustration on them, and conduct business through them. The reach of mobile technology is wider than that of the Internet and landline telephony. The functions of a mobile are simple enough to be used by people who can't read. The mobile telephone is enhancing our relationships with our cities and each other. Cultural anthropologist Sadie Plant writes:

Whatever it is called, and wherever it is used, this simple, accessible technology alters the way in which individuals conduct their everyday lives. It has extensive implications for the cultures and societies in which it is used; it changes the nature of communication, and affects identities and relationships. It affects the development of social structures and economic activities, and has considerable bearing on its users' perceptions of themselves and their world.¹

For women, the mobile phone has particular importance for interactions with the city and with our social networks in an urban context. Though fewer women may own mobile phones than men, they universally tend to use the mobile at least as much, if not more, than their male counterparts, according to studies of mobile phone users in Norway, Germany, Russia, Italy,

¹ Sadie Plant, "On the Mobile. The Effect of Mobile Telephones on Social and Individual Life." (*Motorola Report*, 2001), http://www.motorola.com/mot/doc/0/234_MotDoc.pdf, accessed March 31, 2006, 23.

Tanzania and South Africa.² When mobile phones cannot be owned, they may be shared, sometimes amongst an entire village in a developing country.

Mobile technology reinforces urban behavior, rather than replacing it with new interactions. With the proliferation of cyber technology in the 1990s, proponents of urban dissolution suggested that technological infrastructures would replace the need for face-to-face contact.³ People would no longer use their cities: they would get everything they needed through home delivery and telepresence. In reality, this was not the case—if anything, networked technology made it all the more necessary for people to interact with their cities. Writes Anthony Townsend, "Advances in telecommunications and information technology actually increased the need for institutions, people, and districts that can extract meaningful knowledge from the rapidly increasing glut of undifferentiated information."⁴ This trend continues as technology becomes ever more wireless and portable.

Wireless, portable technology reinforces intimate contacts. Rather than the model of a web-based online community or a public weblog, where users post their thoughts to a broad, anonymous audience, the mobile phone bolsters existing relationships. Studies in a variety of countries (Finland, Japan, Norway, the UK) consistently show that people use their mobile phones to communicate with the same two to five people.⁵ This intimacy is the case even though mobile phone users may show 100-150 people in their address books,⁶ say they talk to "buckets

² For specifics on these studies, please see Leopoldina Fortunati and Anna Maria Magnanelli, "Young People and the Mobile Telephone," *Estudios de Juventud* 57, no. 02 (2002): 63 (Italy), Joachim R. Höflich and Patrick Rössler, "More Than Just a Telephone: The Mobile Phone and Use of the Short Message Service (Sms) by German Adolescents: Results of a Pilot Study" *Estudios de Juventud* 57, no. 02 (2002): 80. (Germany), Rich Ling, "Adolescent Girls and Young Adult Men: Two Sub-Cultures of the Mobile Telephone" *Estudios de Juventud* 57, no. 2 (2002): 40. (Norway), Olga Vershinskaya, "Mobile Communication. Use of Mobile Phones as a Social Phenomenon--the Russian Experience," *Estudios de Juventud* 57, no. 02 (2002): 142. (Russia), Diana Coyle, "Overview," in *Africa: The Impact of Mobile Phones. The Vodafone Policy Paper Series* (London, UK: Vodafone, 2003), 47.

³ Anthony Townsend, "Wired/Unwired: The Urban Geography of Digital Networks" (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵ Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda, eds., *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 9.

⁶ Rich Ling and Birgitte Yttri, "Hyper-Coordination Via Mobile Phones in Norway," in *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*, ed. James E. Katz and Mark Aakhus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), .

of friends,"⁷ or engage in ritualized exchanges of mobile numbers (such as with business cards in Japan)⁸.

The sense of place changes when one engages with mobile telephones. In the not-so-distant past, in order to reach a person, one called a home phone number and reached someone from the household. The person on the other end of the phone was tethered to the wall or desk throughout the duration of the call. Barry Wellman calls this type of communication "place to place."⁹ In contrast, the mobile phone changes communication to a place to person paradigm: no matter where you are, *you* individually are reachable; *you* individually may reach someone else. He writes,

Moving around with a mobile phone made me almost completely independent of place. It was I-alone that was reachable wherever I was: at a house, hotel, office, freeway or mall. Place did not matter; person did. The person has become the portal [...] The shift to a personalized, wireless world affords truly personal communities that supply support, sociability, information, and a sense of belonging separately to each individual. It is the individual, and neither the household nor the group, which is the primary unit of connectivity.¹⁰

In other words, in 21st century wireless development, "the network is brought to the user,"¹¹ writes Townsend. For the purposes of this paper, this network will be considered in its social uses and through a gendered lens, with its enhancing possibilities.

Instead of being isolated within offices and homes, connectivity was spreading to streets, parks, coffee shops, and other newly digitally mediated urban public spaces. Instead of bringing the user to the network, for the first time the network was being brought to the user. Suddenly, digital networks could be integrated with the best urban spaces to reinforce their value as venues for face-to-face interaction. Far from bringing about the death of cities, as the urban dissolutionists had envisioned, digital infrastructure actually was enhancing the advantages of dense urban spaces for human interaction.¹²

For women and the city, mobile technology is not a techno-utopian panacea. Cities have been—and often still are—hostile places for women. In the 19th and early 20th century, in most neighborhoods, the presence of a woman on the street without a man indicated the woman was a

⁷ Rich Ling, "'She Calls, [but] It's for Both of Us You Know': The Use of Traditional Fixed and Mobile Telephony for Social Networking among Norwegian Parents," in *R&D Report 33/98* (Kjeller, Norway: Telenor, 1998), 2.

⁸ Michael Barry, "The Uses and Meaning of I-Mode," *Estudios de Juventud* 57, no. 02 (2002): 158.

⁹ Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 2 (2001): 231.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹¹ Townsend, 119.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119-20.

public good or prostitute. The very essence of mobility was denied to women. This denial can and does continue to exist at multiple levels—the barriers to mobility are spelled out in our social structures and our language, as Sarah Jain writes in her article on women, errands and technology:

In feminist thought, both physical mobility and metaphors of mobility have had particular resonance, especially as a way of making concrete the historical and current limitations on women's educational, political, social and economic participation in public and private life. From the suffragettes' ambivalence about the home to women's exclusion from early automobiling to post-colonial work on border crossings, theorists have evoked the desire to transform and transgress space to symbolize the multiple ways in which women are kept in their place and prevented from attaining either geographic or upward mobility.¹³ Indeed, the confusion between social and physical mobility is captured in the still prevalent term 'glass ceiling', which spatializes the ways in which gender 'upward' mobility is limited through social structures. In this feminist sense, the potential for mobility very much defines one's possibilities for self-expression and personal fulfillment.¹⁴

Sarah Jain's statement notwithstanding, mobile technology does indeed present women with possibilities for self-expression and personal fulfillment. Women's urban experiences can be altered optimistically through mobile technology. Just as women use mobile technology differently than men, their mobile experiences in the city are different. If, as Ling suggests, women use these technologies as enabling mechanisms for their social networks¹⁵, then the female mobile experience is not just an individual one, but a networked, social one.

This proves to be the case in several circumstances this paper will examine. Mobile technology can make a woman feel safer in an urban context, by giving the sign she is unapproachable and providing a ready network of intimates through her mobile. It facilitates "approximeeting,"¹⁶ the practice of using the mobile phone to fluidly coordinate meetings and appointments on the fly—with its positive and negative ramifications. And finally, in the case of the developing world, the leapfrogging possibilities of mobile technology mean that women can build their own businesses, which supplement their family incomes to a significant extent.

¹³ Elizabeth Pritchard, "The Way out West: Development and the Rhetoric of Mobility in Postmodernist Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 15, no. 3 (2000).

¹⁴ Sarah S. Lochlann Jain, "Urban Errands: The Means of Mobility," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2, no. 3 (2002): 389.

¹⁵ Ling, "Adolescent Girls and Young Adult Men: Two Sub-Cultures of the Mobile Telephone ": 3.

¹⁶ Plant, 61.

Ultimately, where mobile technology is concerned, mobility may be more feminine than masculine.

Mobile representation: from safety to self-expression

When people first buy mobile phones, whether for themselves or their family members, the primary reason they do so is for safety.¹⁷ This is the basis for all other, more expressive forms of mobile communication.¹⁸ For women, this is particularly the case: without safety on the part of the woman, the mobile phone does not get used for other purposes.

From a spatial perspective, women use a mobile phone to build and convey a sense of safety and security. They do this through positioning of the mobile phone, their personal body



Figure 4. Woman in Tokyo draws knees up to chest as she makes a mobile call. (Source: hesiem.over-blog.com/.)

language, and use of the telephone (real or faked). All of these activities created a sense of uninterruptedness and a means of avoiding unwanted advances and conversation.

Space making happens on a variety of levels with public mobile users: they make secure spaces through their body language. "[M]any people sitting down in public spaces – at café tables, for example, or on park benches—tend to draw their bodies up, take their feet off the ground, or otherwise create a feeling of safety and withdrawal."¹⁹ On a more social level, mobile phone users exchange in unconscious social play with each other and

the positioning of their mobile phones. For instance, if a group of people is sitting together and one party displays a mobile phone, the others are likely to follow suit. If a woman and man sit

¹⁷ Virpi Oksman and Pirjo Rautiainen, "I've Got My Whole Life in My Hand." Mobile Communication in the Everyday Life of Children and Teenagers in Finland," *Estudios de Juventud* 57, no. 2 (2002): 28.; Fortunati and Magnanelli, "Young People and the Mobile Telephone," 74.; Vershinskaya, "Mobile Communication. Use of Mobile Phones as a Social Phenomenon--the Russian Experience," 144.

¹⁸ Ling and Yttri.

¹⁹ Plant, 52.

together, the woman is unlikely to be the only one showing her mobile.²⁰ But even when a woman is alone, she may display her mobile phone as a sort of "do not disturb" sign to whatever potential interlopers there may be. Plant writes:

It was also observed that 60 per cent of lone women had a mobile on show – a far higher percentage than that of lone men (47 per cent), men together, or men with together with women. Many women saw this reflecting their own experience of the mobile as a valuable means of keeping unwanted attentions at bay. A mobile projects an image of self-containment, and can even legitimise solitude: I'm not alone, I'm with my mobile phone.²¹

Having a mobile at hand makes women feel more secure in urban spaces. In the light of a recent assault of an acquaintance, a group of women on a San Francisco-based email list said they called friends on mobile phones when they were alone on the street (sometimes walking down the middle of the street in order to avoid dark spaces), walking to and from the bus stop, or waiting for the tram or bus.²² The combination and layering of mobile technology with movement through the city connotes the woman is not alone—she is in the co-presence²³ of someone else who is not physically present. Plant also discovered similar findings in her observations:

The mobile self... gains a new sense of security: allies and assistants are always on call. Women in several cities said that the mobile made them feel safer, more confident, and in control, and were particularly keen to emphasise the value of the mobile as a phone-shield against unwanted attentions. Several Birmingham entrepreneurs say they use their mobiles as means of deliberately absenting themselves from their present environments and so keeping other people at bay: 'If I arrive at a meeting where I don't know anyone, I play for time and composure by doing things with my mobile.' This sends out other messages to the room as well: it says that one is busy and not to be disturbed, and temporarily extends one's personal space.²⁴

This type of action may no longer prove effective. In London during the summer of 2005, the city began a three-year advertising campaign about theft awareness. One of its focus areas was mobile phone theft, with photographic bus and Tube posters stating, "Showing off your phone is showing off to thieves." Among text-only ads in the series are "Don't play with it in public" and "Some blokes want your number. Others just want your phone." It is interesting to

²⁰ Ibid., 41.

²¹ Ibid., 42.

²² Allison Yates, 2006.

²³ Co-presence is a specific term to social and mobile technology use. It connotes the presence of someone who does not share the same physical space, but is nonetheless present in interaction with the person.

²⁴ Plant, 62.

note that in this advertising campaign (which also dealt with home break-ins and burglaries of music players), there are no men depicted in the mobile phone ads, and that the text-only ads speak directly to women. In one ad, a woman stands on a rainy high street in the afternoon,



Figure 5. UK Home Office advertising campaign on mobile phone theft. Source: UK Home Office.

holding a shopping bag with an arrow that says, "Camera Phone." She looks at the ground, her left hand holding her phone, both body language markers of personal, let-me-be space. In the other ad, two teenage girls talk on the phone. One, looking off to the right, wears a t-shirt with an arrow, announcing, "Look! Camera phones!" The other young woman's face is obscured, as she looks over her left shoulder, perhaps at a shop or flat window.

The Home Office Crime Reduction website in the United Kingdom did not provide crime statistics with its campaign posters. One wonders whether women have been hit with more mobile phone theft. If so, perhaps

the ads are a useful deterrent to idle time mobile phone use. (From personal experience, I admit that the ads had me thinking twice about taking out my mobile as I waited for the Tube.) But if this kind of space making using mobile technology is no longer safe for women in particular, how can women use their mobile phones to engender a sense of security?

In order to address

this question, the production



Figure 6. UK Home Office campaign focused on adolescent girls. Source: UK Home Office.

of space should be considered. If space can be construed as a social product; the practice of this product (its actions) can be understood as a tension between strategy and tactics. These ideas are expressed in the work of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. Lefebvre wrote "(Social) space is a (social) product."²⁵ and continues, "(e)very society [...] produces a space, its

²⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 26.

own space."²⁶ De Certeau distinguishes between strategies and tactics. A strategy "postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats can be managed." A tactic, on the other hand, "is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other [...] It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow."²⁷

The Japanese example of adolescent girls claiming urban space is of particular interest in this setting. Through their tactics of play, colorful dress, and mobile phone usage, they fight the hegemony of older men on subways and in urban space, and in so doing produce space for themselves. They have also pressed the broader Japanese culture to reconsider how it deals with the intrusion of the mobile phone.

Japanese girls, the *keitai*, and urban space

In Japan, the *keitai* (translated as "something you carry with you"²⁸ – a mobile phone particularly used for emailing and sending photos) has been massively adopted: 70% of the entire population carries one.²⁹ According to one study, grade school and adolescent girls were almost twice as likely to carry a *keitai*.³⁰ Of particular interest to producing urban space is the mobile use of the *kogyaru*—street-smart teenage girls—and *oyaji*—older men and fathers.³¹ Kenichi Fujimoto has focused on the dynamic and interplay throughout the 90s, first with the adoption of pagers, and now with the proliferation of the *keitai*. He considers these "territory-generating

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

²⁷ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 37.

²⁸ Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda, eds., *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*, 1.

²⁹ Misa Matsuda, "Discourses of *Keitai* in Japan," in *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*, ed. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 19.

³⁰ Yukiko Miyaki, "*Keitai* Use among Japanese Elementary and Junior High School Students," in *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*, ed. Mizuko Ito, Misa Matsuda, and Daisuke Okabe (2005), 282.

³¹ Kenichi Fujimoto, "The Third-Stage Paradigm: Territory Machines from the Girls' Pager Revolution to Mobile Aesthetics," in *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*, ed. Mizuko Ito, Misa Matsuda, and Daisuke Okabe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 79.

apparatuses,"³² wielded by savvy teen girls with a predilection toward loose socks and munching snacks on the train.³³

The *keitai* offers a tactic in Michel de Certeau's definition, a means of fighting the dominant male culture in Japanese urban space. The *keitai* does not even need to be used: its presence creates its own meaning. Its social and cultural constructions bombastically create *kogyaru* space. Fujimoto writes:



Figure 7: A *kogyaru* in Japan, chatting on her mobile before descending to the subway (Source: The Japan FAQ)

With a *keitai*, a girl can turn any space into her own room and personal paradise (*kekka*), whether that be her favorite café or her own stall in a flea market. The *keitai* is a jamming machine that instantly creates a territory—a personal *keitai* space—around oneself with an invisible, minimal barricade.

Even when signals aren't sent out as voice or text, carrying a 'cute' *keitai* is itself an effective visual anti-*oyaji* signal. But sadly, when an *oyaji* plays with his *keitai* on the train instead of reading a newspaper, the *keitai* turns into an *oyaji keitai*. The same cute *keitai* in the hands of a young attractive man becomes a greasy, phallic object when held by a dirty *oyaji* even though its shape and size remain the same. When an *oyaji* has command of the *keitai*'s vibrating signal, the tremors evoke perverted images. When his *keitai* is a camera phone or a third-generation multimedia phone, he could be taken for a Peeping Tom, an up-the-skirt photographer, or a stalker. It is the dominant public (women, children) who decides whether that anonymous body on the train is an *oyaji*.³⁴

Depending on who and what wields the mobile phone, its meaning changes. Fujimoto allows its meaning to be ascribed not by the father figures or the younger, attractive men, but rather by the women and children. They determine how to interpret the intentions of its holder. This paradise-creating object, in the hands of a young woman, creates impenetrable personal space. But the cute *keitai* transforms a man into a grotesque, perverse, potential threat. This demonstrates the subversiveness of *kawaii* ("cute" in Japanese), the ubiquitous cuteness in Japan that renders nasty messages sweet. When used in the right hands, it serves as a tactic that turns sweet things nasty. In turn, this generates space for the holder of the mobile phone.

³² Ibid., 98.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 97.

Japan's cultural context is particular. Its visual language and rules and conventions surrounding conversation cannot be lightly applied to other contexts. Nonetheless, the *kogyaru* who generate their own territory provide other cues to how women might continue to jam their own urban space. Doing so takes place at the level of the action and tactic, the ways in which someone uses the object. This next section will examine the intersection of time and coordination, social roles, and urban movement through the mobile phone.

Fluid time, approximeeting, favor sharing

Mobile phones have an impact on people and time. They shift the way people plan appointments, from fixed coordination ("I'll meet you at 5") to progressive coordination ("I'll call you when I'm done with work, and we'll determine where to meet at that time"). This continual checking-in has several names. Plant refers to it as "approximeeting,"³⁵ Ling and Yttri call it "micro-coordination,"³⁶ and Michael Kieslinger names it "fluid time."³⁷

Micro-coordination precedes what Ling and Yttri refer to this as "hyper-coordination, [which is] not simply the use of the device to coordinate activities. It involves social and emotional interaction and it includes strictures as to the type of terminal one should use and the way in which they should use it."³⁸ Teenagers, for example, use hyper-coordination as a way to ensure that group norms are followed. Parents and children might use hyper-coordination to express their states of mind and well being when they are on the go. Together, micro- and hyper-coordination form a complex dance of affirmation of social roles in a group (whether family or friends), and organization of events across different communication platforms, such as email, instant messaging, mobile phone, and land line. For women in urban environments, they represent the reality of juggling many quotidian, personal and emotional commitments. The

³⁵ Plant, 61.

³⁶ Ling and Yttri, 5.

³⁷ Michael Kieslinger and Molly Steenson, "Fluid Time: Timing Tools for Social Networks" (paper presented at the O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference, San Diego, CA, 2004), http://conferences.oreillynet.com/presentations/et2004/steenson_molly.pdf, accessed April 1, 2006.

³⁸ Ling and Yttri, 3.

complexities of these interactions can be grouped into five considerations: people and roles, communication tools, event type, location and transportation, and emotional and soft factors.³⁹

In 2004, I conducted an ethnographic study of social roles and fluid timing in a group of San Francisco women.⁴⁰ Ranging in age from 28-32, the women would get together monthly on the full moon for dinner and assorted mischief. The core group was comprised of six single women, but the group expanded to 15 for bigger events. All but one woman was single; most did not have serious boyfriends at the time of the study. Delia served as the group leader.

The planning details of these events revealed much about the group's power dynamics. For example, Anna planned a night of dinner and dancing. The day of the event was rainy and cold. Delia used instant messaging on the computer to individually convince the other women to lobby Anna for a change in venue, closer to Delia's neighborhood. This was not only because of the weather: Anna and Delia had argued recently, and through this interaction, Delia reestablished her dominance.⁴¹ For as much as this might have looked like micro-coordination on the surface, a more intricate dance of hyper-coordination was at play.

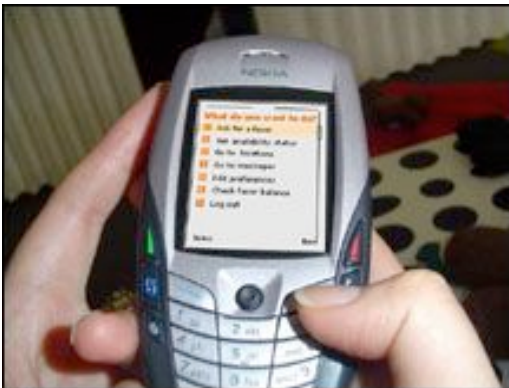


Figure 8-10: Requesting a favor through Favor Link
(Source: Jennifer Bove and Andreea Chelaru)

Institute Ivrea in Ivrea, Italy, designed a system to facilitate the needs of working

Timing and coordination tools can also be applied in other ways. Jennifer Bove and Andreea Chelaru, as students at the Interaction Design



³⁹ Kieslinger and Steenson.

⁴⁰ For the Fluid Time case study, I attended two group events, interviewed five women, asked three women to keep a timing and event planning diary, created individual personas, developed a group persona, and probed two scenarios for minute detail. The results were presented at the 2004 O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference. Michael Kieslinger defined "fluid time."

⁴¹ Kieslinger and Steenson.

mothers. Their interviews and ethnographic research indicated that mothers especially needed something to fill in the gaps of a routine, when something was forgotten or running late. To that end, they designed Favor Link,⁴² a mobile phone service that allows its users to request favors of a trusted network of friends. It is location-aware, meaning it knows where the user and her friends are, and can save place-based bookmarks (e.g., the grocery store does not need to be entered every time). For example, a cooking parent could ask a friend to pick up a forgotten ingredient, if he sees she is near the grocery store.

Favor Link doesn't ask strangers to do favors, but rather people within a web of trust. It works on the notion of social capital, in which individuals and groups in a social unit exchange goodwill as their currency. Tools like Favor Link need to provide transparency and the opportunity to opt out in order for them to be safe for their users. Similar location-aware services, such as Dodgeball and ImaHima, offer both soft (do not broadcast to my ex-boyfriend) and hard (blocking, anti-stalking, removal) measures for users to not broadcast their locations to other users.⁴³ Social capital is a key component of urban, mobile technology projects in the developing world. The last examples of this paper will look at this mechanism as a way to build business and revenue opportunities for women and marginalized people in developing countries.

Social capital and micro-entrepreneurs

Mobile phones are not a panacea. But the mobile does profoundly shift our relationships to space and information and communication possibilities. It reinforces our existing social networks and intimate relationships. In turn, it offers new opportunities for women to actualize and operate within urban space. Most promisingly, mobile technology opens up economic prospects in the developing world, creating new revenue streams for women and marginalized people.

Mobile phones are relatively inexpensive (often, development organizations distribute mobile phones or fund micro-loans), and are functionally simple enough that they do not require

⁴² Jennifer Bove and Andreea Chelaru. *Favor Link*. <http://people.interaction-ivrea.it/a.chelaru/FLconcept.htm>, accessed April 1, 2006.

⁴³ Dan Mellinger, "Privacy's Role in Mobile Social Software for the Urban Community" (paper presented at the Ubicomp 2004, Nottingham, UK, 2004), 46.

literacy. Such mobile technologies have a leapfrogging effect. Rather than following the United States model, where landlines proliferated before mobile adoption began, the country using them essentially skips over landline tele-communications and enters a mobile paradigm.

Africa represents the fastest growing mobile market, with a 1000% increase in mobile subscribers from 1998–2003.⁴⁴ Though mobile penetration is not as high as other regions of the world, the proper consideration might instead be access to a mobile phone.

Such is the case in countries like Uganda,



Figure 11: A Ugandan woman shows off her new villagePhone store. (Source: DOT-COM Alliance)

where 4% of the population owns a mobile phone, but 80% can access one.⁴⁵ Many African



Figure 12: A public phone shop in South Africa. Note its construction (shack or discarded shipping container). (Source: Flickr).

nations see women as the heavier mobile users, both among owners and sharers, as is typically the case in the rest of the world.⁴⁶

The Grameen Foundation supports micro-entrepreneurship

projects in Bangladesh, Botswana, India, South Africa, Thailand, and Uganda. In Uganda, it partnered with a number of micro-finance organizations and Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) Uganda to create MTN villagePhone. With micro-loans, women buy village phone startup kits,

⁴⁴ Coyle, "Overview," 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

which provide a mobile phone, SIM card, prepaid airtime card, business cards, advertising sign showing rates, and a car battery or solar panel connection for electricity.⁴⁷ These become open mobile telecenters where people can come to place a telephone call. Phone clients place calls for a number of purposes: conducting business, communicating with family, participating on radio shows, and checking agriculture prices.⁴⁸

In Chennai, India, the Foundation of Occupational Development (FOOD) started the Inter-City Marketing Network project in April 2001.⁴⁹ A micro-entrepreneurship program, it provided mobile phones to poor artisan women so they could better exchange goods and expand their business networks. The artisans sold their goods locally, but found marketing their wares to a larger audience difficult. Typically, they needed to go through a middleman in order to expand their reach. The women were encouraged to use the values of social capital, fostering relationships to build a customer network. They use mobile phones to organize product distribution and trading sessions. As a result, their profit margins and sales increased, their marketing reached new urban areas. Active members earned a USD \$10–\$40 profit, which represents 10–15% of the total family income and pays for such expenditures as school fees. The mobile phone served as an enabler for social networking, and at that, a profitable one. More than 300 groups now take part in the network.

Mobile space is women's space

... space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through. Moreover they are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ DOT-COMment, "Using Cellular Phones in Uganda for Rural Income Generation and More," http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/newsletter/article.php?article_id=36, accessed March 31, 2006.

⁴⁸ "Villagephone Project in Uganda," in *M-Internet360: Mobile Internet/WiFi business models and technologies* (2004).

⁴⁹ Loyola Joseph, "Inter-City Marketing Network for Women Micro-Entrepreneurs Using Cell Phone: Social Capital Brings Economic Development," http://www.i4donline.net/feb05/intercity_full.asp, accessed March 31, 2006.

⁵⁰ Doreen Massey, "Space, Place and Gender," in *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, ed. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 129.

Just as mobile phone use is gendered, so is the mobile experience in space and place. The mobile phone for women has a different use and set of meanings than the mobile phone for men. Women express themselves through the mobile, coordinate the mundane, exchange favors, and run businesses. In the urban setting, mobile phones provide a means for women to feel safe, perform identity, subvert dominant cultural paradigms, and make a living. Around the globe, women and girls use the mobile phone more heavily than men, even if they don't own their own device. In the developing world, it is women who facilitate the sharing of the mobile.

With women and girls' adoption of mobile technology in numbers greater than that of men, this calls for a reframing. Urban mobile space is not just gendered, but gendered in a female-positive sense. It is a new space for women.

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