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Consuming Talk: Youth Culture and the Mobile Phone

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*Summary of Contents*¹

The growth in mobile phone use over the past decade and the commensurate advent of mobile phone culture can be seen as interrelated with contemporary youth culture. This thesis addresses how young people make use of the mobile phone in their everyday lives, and how these practices demonstrate forms of cultural creativity and agency. Youth culture is identified then as a culture of consumption, through which young people can express and enact their own preferences and values. In response to imposed forms of social organisation and control, youth cultural practices, such as the use of the mobile phone, provide a means through which young people actively participate in the construction of their own everyday experiences. While youth culture is a site of corporate-driven commodification, it is also an arena in which young people themselves are active and participatory. For example, through their use of the mobile phone, young people manage and negotiate increased forms of autonomy from, in particular, parental monitoring and control. Equally, the mobile phone allows young people to perform and maintain peer group associations, through which forms of solidarity, identification and differentiation are created. Through this active use of commodities young people create vibrant forms of cultural life. However, rather than offering direct forms of resistance against their social position, I argue that these cultural practices are a means through which young people are ‘resilient’ within this context. These practices provide a way through which young people express agency within, rather than against, particular sets of social and cultural contexts.

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Introduction

The mobile phone is a definitive feature of contemporary society. It is a communications device, an aesthetic object and an icon of culture. It has become central to a wide range of activities, transforming family and friendships, work and leisure, the media and communication. The mobile phone is then, arguably, the cultural symbol of the late modern period, the archetype for an age of accelerated and sweeping social and cultural change, while also a means through which traditional forms of life are assembled and reassembled. While the mobile phone is a global phenomenon, Ireland has embraced it with particular exuberance. Figures published by the Irish telecommunications regulator ComReg indicate that the level of mobile phone penetration, which measures the adoption of mobile services based on the number of active SIM cards per 100 of the population, is currently at 117.1% (ComReg, 2009: 46), while the Central Statistics Office reports that its most recent Household Survey reveals that 84% of households have at least one mobile phone (CSO, 2007: 12).

The vigour of this mobile phone culture stands in stark contrast to only a generation ago when the telephone was sparsely evident amongst the Irish populace. Anecdotes abound about how, as recently as the 1980s, communities built around villages or streets had one telephone through which they communicated. For example, Betteridge (1997) documents the arrival of the telephone on Whiddy Island, situated off the coast of Co. Cork in Southern Ireland, and the gradual movement from a single 'community telephone' in the 1940s to a slow subsequent rise in household use. By contrast, in the last decade, the accelerated pace of technological change has contributed to a much

swifter uptake of the mobile phone in Ireland, to the point where only a small number are without one. The initial impetus for this research then lies in the observation that in a brief span of time the mobile phone moved from the preserve of the few to an essential for the majority.

It invites consideration of a number of fundamental issues and concerns within contemporary social thought. I argue here that its use both establishes its own unique sets of cultural practices and resides within broader forms of social and culture life. In particular, I locate my analysis within the context of contemporary youth culture, asserting that the mobile phone provides a significant site for the expression and enactment of young people's everyday cultural practices. In the context of the mobile phone's ubiquity in Western societies, young people can be characterised as 'digital natives', a group for whom this object is neither exotic nor strange but a natural part of their everyday world. The precipitous growth in mobile phone usage since the late 1990s means that it has been transformed from novelty to necessity, and is an icon of contemporary youth culture. This status is demonstrated in the pilot episode of Channel 4's youth drama *Skins*, launched in 2004 and celebrated for its frank, accurate and perceptive depiction of young people's lives, where the main characters are introduced through a sequence of conversational vignettes, which involve a series of rapid mobile phone exchanges. Beyond being a purely visual or aesthetic flourish this technique is shorthand for demonstrating how the show's makers are familiar with this characteristic feature of youth culture.

For young people then, the mobile phone carries significant social and cultural meaning. This thesis is concerned then with exploring the role of the mobile phone within youth

culture, and the ways in which they construct and understand this meaning. In particular, this research focuses on young people in their mid-teens, a group, which while pursuing increased independence, remain tied to distinct forms of institutional control (e.g. family, school, etc.). Their use of the mobile phone intersects with a number of significant features of youth culture, including family relationships, peer culture, and issues of self and group identities. In this context, I suggest that while the use of the mobile phone both creates new social and cultural practices, it is also immersed in longstanding and traditional forms of social action. More broadly, I argue that the example of the mobile phone allows for an analysis of how young people, who quite often occupy a marginal position in society, can enact forms of power and agency through their cultural practices. As a cultural object, a commodity, the mobile phone provides an example of how young people engage with and exist within consumer culture. I contend that the range of cultural practices that constellate around the mobile phone demonstrates that young people's cultural consumption is an arena in which they are actively involved in the construction of their everyday lives.

The key question this thesis addresses then is how do the ways in which young people make use of the mobile phone demonstrate forms of cultural creativity and agency? While young people very often occupy a marginal social and economic position, I address, using the example of the mobile phone, how practices of cultural consumption provide a way for them to actively participate in the construction of their own everyday experiences. This research is situated within significant contemporary debates around youth culture and consumption. While I privilege the capacity of young people to be active and engaged as consumers, it is important to consider to what extent this cultural

consumption provides young people with a sense of cultural power and how can this be situated in the context of the experience of youth. Importantly, I address these questions through engaging young people themselves and gaining their own insights and opinions and understandings about their mobile phone use. In this way then, this research privileges the ‘voice’ of participants, paying particular attention to how the uses, meanings and values young people ascribe to the mobile phone and their own use of it.

In Chapter 1, I examine existing literature on the mobile phone, which has emerged within the social sciences. In spite of Ireland’s high levels of adoption and use, researchers here have registered little interest in exploring mobile phone culture in Irish society. I suggest then that this thesis, in addressing this lack, marks an important contribution to knowledge. However, while the Irish context remains under researched, there has been a growing range of research emerging elsewhere. In particular, research interest has been prominent in the UK and Europe, the United States, and sections of Asia, specifically Japan. This work focuses on a wide range of issues, including national and international contexts, public and private space, coordination, and social interaction. Younger users of the mobile phone are a strong focus within this research. A variety of issues have assumed importance in this context, including family relationships, peer culture, and self-identity. While I draw on a number of these ideas in the context of my research, I also suggest the need for a more thorough examination of the mobile phone as a cultural object and commodity, rather than as just a piece of technology. This shift allows for a more extensive analysis of young people’s use

mobile phone corresponds to particular sets of cultural practices and their location within a broader cultural field.

This broader cultural field relates specifically to what I argue are the overlapping contexts of youth culture and consumer culture. This relationship between youth culture and consumption is a complex and ambiguous one. While youth as both an idea and a lived experience is defined and controlled by forms of consumption and commodification, young people make use of commodities in ways that are active and creative. In his discussion of ‘coolhunting’, a marketing practice of seeking out fresh new trends, Malcolm Gladwell (2000) highlights how companies and corporations use this approach to attempt to tap into, and exploit, the cultural innovations of young people. This coolhunt can be seen as a form of manipulation (see Quart, 2003), and, as Gladwell (2000) indicates, the consumption of forms of otherness, with coolhunting often focusing on appropriating the styles of urban subcultures – witness the selling of hip-hop culture to white suburbia.

However, at the same time this practice demonstrates a significant shift in the relationships between consumers and the market. Schor and Holt (2000: xix – xxi) suggest that coolhunting shows how the locus of ‘cultural authority’ has become much harder to define in clear terms. While previously marketers wielded this ‘cultural authority’, the increasing sophistication of consumers means they are less easily guided and controlled. The example of coolhunting demonstrates a movement away from a top-down model of cultural production towards a greater role for consumers in the creation of cultural meaning and the exercising of cultural power. The extent to which this cultural power can be translated into social or economic power, however, appears

limited. In this way, the market retains significant power in the circulation of commodities. This relates then to what Miles (1998: 5) refers to as the 'consuming paradox' stating: 'in terms of our individual experience consumerism appears to have a fascinating, arguably fulfilling, personal appeal and yet simultaneously plays some form of an ideological role in actually controlling the character of everyday life'.

Paterson (2004) suggests that this 'consuming paradox' is nowhere more evident than in the context of youth culture. In Chapter 2, I outline how contemporary youth culture is significantly shaped and characterised by forms of cultural consumption. Accordingly, I examine a number of theoretical perspectives that address youth cultural formations and practices. While the limits of functionalism have been well-established, it was important in identifying, during the 1940s and 1950s, the contours of a newly emergent youth culture, and, in particular, the significance of peer groups in young people's lives. However, I give greater attention to developments within subcultural and post-subcultural theory, and specifically the role attributed to consumption within these frameworks. In the influential volume *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), Clarke et al assert that the concept of youth is 'unthinkable', arguing that the terms 'youth' and 'youth culture' obscure an understanding of deeper social inequalities and are terms of market manipulation and exploitation. Alternatively they apply the concept of subculture, with a specific focus on forms of social stratification. Subcultural theorists propose that particular cultural groupings are a means of resistance against class-based subordination; albeit one that offers little opportunity for deep or lasting social and political change.

However, while, as Devlin (2006) rightly asserts, subcultural theory made a significant contribution to the establishment of youth studies within sociology, this concept is beset with a number of limitations. Specifically, the bifurcation of supposed subcultural authenticity from a commodified mainstream draws too neatly the lines of distinction between youth groups and consumer culture. A number of critiques suggest the need to address the symbiotic relationship between youth culture and the market (see Clarke, 1981; Carter, 1984). Following this, I emphasise how youth cultural practices are not external to 'mainstream' consumer culture, but that these spheres are overlapping and mutually constitutive. More recently approaches loosely gathered under the heading of post-subcultural theory extend this critique to assert the potentially positive role of cultural consumption for young people. Emerging in the context of dance music culture, this set of theories stresses the growing fluidity and freedom of youth cultural practices. This is evident in youth cultural studies use of concepts such as neo-tribe, as developed by Maffesoli (1996), and lifestyle to highlight the shift away from structurally determined subcultural groups.

Correspondingly, I develop this argument in Chapter 3, in which I discuss broader theories of consumer culture. Using a tripartite schema initially outlined by Featherstone (1991), and subsequently adopted by Warde (2002), I examine the Marxist-inflected 'production of consumption' approach; the 'modes of consumption' approach, which emphasises the role of consumption in organising and defining social classification; and the notion of 'dreams, images, and pleasures', which relates to the creative potential evident in consumer practice. Rather than aligning with one perspective over the others or reconciling their differences I argue that each contain

points of relevance for understanding the consumer. While I privilege the idea of consumption as a site for the expression of cultural power and agency, I also account for the negotiated and complex nature of consumer behaviour, and the role of production in shaping cultural practices and meanings. The ambiguities and contradictions that permeate cultural consumption are drawn out in subsequent chapters in relation to young people's use of the mobile phone.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the methodological approach used in this research and the methods employed in the process of data collection. Particular attention is given to the issues relating to carrying out research with young people, including ethics. I outline the steps taken to ensure that participants were both treated with respect and clearly informed of their own rights in relation to the research. This involved the gaining of informed consent as an accompaniment to parental consent. Through this process of informed consent participants were given information about the nature of the research before agreeing to take part. Equally, I argue that an important methodological focus in this research is fostering a reflexive approach to the collection and analysis of the data. This involves a continual awareness of my own role as a researcher and this exerts significant influence throughout the research process. I also outline the practical considerations of the methods used, survey research and focus groups. The survey method was employed to provide important background detail, which was considered necessary given the lack of attention to the topic within Ireland. The key data, however, is derived from the focus groups. Through this qualitative approach I accessed important insights from young people themselves. The overall emphasis in this research is on eliciting and preserving the 'voice' of young people by giving them a

discursive space in which they can express their own views and opinions on mobile phone culture. Focus groups are a particularly useful way of generating fresh insights, particular on a topic in which the participants are eager to share their thoughts and ideas. In considering this data and what it reveals about young people's use of the mobile phone and their cultural practices more generally I explore a number of themes and issues. These include family life, peer culture, and the ways in which young people exercise cultural power. In Chapter 5, I focus on young people's use of the mobile phone in negotiating their social position, particularly with respect to parental authority and control. Young people are keen to take control over their own lives, and this is demonstrated by participants' use of the mobile phone. Both the survey and focus group data shows how young people make use of the mobile phone to create an independent space for themselves free from forms of parental monitoring. However, while young people have a desire for independence, the data also reveals that participants welcome the ability to keep in contact with their parents. In this way, the use of the mobile phone is incorporated into traditional forms of family life. This reveals elements of continuity and change within family life. The use of the mobile phone facilitates new modes of interaction amongst family members, while also contributing to the retention of characteristic aspects of family relationships

As I argue in Chapter 2, peer culture forms a central focus of young people's lives. In Chapter 6, I adopt Maffesoli's (1996) concept of neo-tribes to describe the role of the mobile phone within young people's construction and management of their peer group formations. The concept of neo-tribes is used to describe how young people make use of the mobile phone in constructing and engaging with their peer groups. In particular,

I highlight three aspects of neo-tribal formations: first, the fluidity and immediacy of these groups and the resolution of individual identity into multiple personas; second, the ritual processes that mark forms of identification and difference; third, the role of sociality and sociability in these groupings. Its usefulness lies in the way it assists in demonstrating in how young people occupy multiple peer groups that are often loosely formed and built around an ‘affirmative *puissance* that... confirms the ‘(ever)-renewed game of solidarity and reciprocity’’ (Maffesoli, 1996: 72). The mobile phone is a means then through which young people manage and maintain a range of peer associations, allow for the creation of ties built around emotional and sociable rather than rational, ends-orientated associations. The limit, however, of neo-tribes as an analytical device is that it is insensitive to the continuing role of ascriptive forms of identity, and the persistence of structural inequalities that shape youth. In particular, addressing youth culture as an example of neo-tribal formations needs to be situated in the context of power relationships, and the often marginal and limited levels of power which young people possess.

In the context of consumer capitalism, young people are engaged in continual struggle to express their own power and agency. Issues relating to these practices of cultural consumption are drawn out in Chapter 7. I analyse the extent to which young people’s cultural practices allow them to exercise forms of cultural power. I argue that while young people possess a degree of cultural power, which means that they play a significant role in the construction of the mobile phones social and cultural meaning, their ability to convert this cultural power into forms of social and political power is limited. In this context, I problematise the notion of ‘resistance’, arguing that the use of

this concept tends to overstate the level and type of power that is evident in young people's practices of consumption. While young people exert what Fiske (1987) refers to as semiotic power, this does not mean they have the ability, or indeed willingness, to translate this into organised political praxis. However, in the chapter, I acknowledge and elaborate on the ways in which young people's use of the mobile phone represents their creative involvement in everyday life. Rather than being merely passive consumers, young people make use of commodities towards often singular and unique ends. Young people display levels of agency and choice which constitute, in Willis' (1990) terms, acts of 'cultural survival'. In this context, I assert that youth culture is 'resilient' within top-down corporate culture, rather than resistance against it.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I consider the key findings of this research and outline their theoretical significance. I argue that this thesis makes a considerable contribution to the understanding of a number of important areas of sociological thought. This analysis of the role of the mobile phone in young people's lives offers a way of understanding more fully their lived experiences. This includes their negotiation of their role within the family and the construction and maintenance of peer groups. Equally, the example of the mobile phone allows for a more general consideration of the relationship between youth culture and practices of consumption. I assert that within the context of social, cultural and economic constraints, young people make use of commodities that reflects their own cultural preferences. Young people's role as consumers needs to be understood as characterised by contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies. Their use of the mobile phone demonstrates an active participation within everyday life,

while also providing an example of the continuing way in which youth culture is subject to forms of commodification.

Chapter 1: Understanding Mobile Phone Culture

1.1 Introduction

Research on the mobile phone has been less prominent within the social sciences compared with the attention given to other new technological forms, such as computing and the internet. This lack is especially pronounced in the Irish context. Nevertheless, there is a growing and robust literature emerging internationally. A number of edited collections have cast the net wide in exploring issues such as communication, coordination, public and private space, and national and international contexts (e.g. Katz, 2007; Hamill and Lasen, 2005; Ling and Pedersen, 2005; Katz and Aakhus, 2002; Brown and Green, 2001). Elsewhere, Ling (2004) and Katz (2006) provide broad reflections on the ‘social consequences’ of mobile phone use. Their respective discussions incorporate an examination of safety, interaction, public performance, and coordination. In particular, adolescence and youth emerge as a prominent focus within mobile phone studies, unsurprising given this group’s high levels of mobile phone use. Attention is paid to how it influences young people’s peer group interaction, interpersonal relationships, emotional life, identity and presentation of self, and family and domestic life (see, for example, Castells et al, 2007; Ito, 2005; Green, 2003; Kasesniemi and Rautiainen, 2002; Ling and Yttri, 2002; Weilenmann and Larson, 2002).

This literature then reflects the degree to which the mobile phone has become a staple in contemporary life, particularly for young people. Much of this existing research emphasises the technical design and particular social applications of the mobile phone,

while here I wish to consider more closely how its use can be situated within broader cultural processes. This is not to suggest that these operate as discrete categories, much of the research in this area, voiced in terms of communication studies and socio-technical approaches, provides valuable insight into the way users make use of the mobile phone in their everyday lives (see Haddon, 2004; Katz, 2003). While these frameworks have played a vital role in developing the field of mobile phone research, here I wish to explicitly emphasise the mobile phone as ‘a cultural artefact’ (Goggin, 2006; Kavoori and Arcenaux, 2006). In this context, Goggin (2006: 205) suggests that what is required is ‘to reclaim the sense of rich wonder and importance of the ways that people do make meaning in their everyday lives, and to make sense of how cell phone culture fits into the broad cultural field and its relation to the social’.

In this chapter, I examine aspects of mobile phone research, specifically as it relates to the experience of youth, and argue for positioning culture as a key focus in the analysis of this relationship. I begin by examining a number of the prevailing approaches which have informed much of the current sociological study of mobile phone culture, including the social shaping of technology approach, domestication studies and the circuit of culture approach. These approaches gesture toward issues of cultural consumption, which will become a key focus of the theoretical ideas developed in chapters two and three, and place an important emphasis on the importance of examining how users make use of the mobile phone in everyday life. It is important to address these ideas here as part of mapping the existing terrain of mobile phone research. The remainder of the chapter moves from these broader theoretical concerns to discuss specific issues within the mobile phone literature, including, importantly

within the context of this study, the role of the mobile phone in family life and youth peer culture.

1.2 Approaches to Mobile Phone Culture

In making sense of the mobile phone, research has often examined it as a technological device, with particular functions and applications that have impacted on social life. However, as Myerson (2001: 7) argues, ‘the mobilisation of the phone isn’t really a technological process – it’s cultural. The problem isn’t to invent a machine, but to get us all to adopt it, to feel we need it’. In this context, what is required is an understanding of the mobile phone as a cultural object, rather than as purely a piece of technology, and a consideration of the central role it plays in everyday life. This emphasis invites us to consider both the emergence of mobile phone culture and its relationship to more general cultural processes. As Goggin (2006: 3) observes:

We need to grasp and debate the place of cell phones and mobile technologies in our larger cultural settings, interpreting what they signify, what people are doing with and around these devices, and what the implications of all this are for understanding culture at the most general level

This section discusses some of the key theoretical perspectives that have informed mobile phone research, and addresses the complex social and cultural practices that inform the uses and meanings of the mobile phone in contemporary life. The study of technology has witnessed a growing emphasis on the role of users in influencing the social application of technology (see Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2006). I argue here for a further shift towards emphasising the mobile less as a technological device and more as a cultural object or commodity.

1.2.1 The Social Shaping of Technology

Early studies of incipient media and technology culture often pursued a determinist line of argument, whereby changes in social life are seen as being determined by technical developments. While this approach recognises how technology can effect social change, determinist readings of the relationship between technology and social change tend to be overly simplistic. Such readings offer a cause-and-effect analysis of the relationship between technology and society, which obscures and overlooks the role of other factors that hasten social change. Indeed, as Cockburn (1992: 32-4) observes, there has been such a shift in emphasis within sociological studies of technology that it is no longer necessary to provide arguments against ‘technological determinism’. Accordingly, a new set of paradigms have emerged that provide more sophisticated analytical precepts. In contrast with technological determinism, contemporary studies of technology, culture and society take greater account of how technical developments are not purely an autonomous force of change, but rather they reflect the social and cultural context of their use.

Prominent in this context are studies that emphasise how technology is ‘socially shaped’ (see Kline and Pinch, 1999; MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999, Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 1987). This work focuses on the range of social actors, for example engineers, marketers, consumers, etc., who are actively involved in the social shaping of scientific and technical systems. The merits of such an approach, MacKenzie and Wajcman (1999: xvi) argue, lie in its exposure of specific and important details, namely ‘in the particular ways technology is socially shaped; in the light these throw on the nature of both ‘society’ and ‘technology’; in the particular outcomes that result; and in

the opportunities for action to improve those outcomes'. Pinch and Bijker (1984), in their study of bicycle design, outline the social construction of technology approach (SCOT) and elaborate, in more complex terms, upon this relationship between technology and society. They stress that scientific and technical knowledge has an 'interpretive flexibility', by which it is open to multiple interpretations. This interpretive flexibility then refers to how different 'relevant social groups' can construct different meanings and interpretations of a technology. Pinch and Bijker (1984) argue then that technology develops, not in line with an identifiable and coherent logic, but in relation to a diverse range of factors.

Kline and Pinch (1999) highlight two significant weaknesses within this initial conceptualisation. First, as SCOT research tends to concentrate on the design stage of technology, there has been a tendency to inscribe the notion of 'closure' too rigidly, which implies that technical systems reach an end point in terms of their development, what is termed a 'black box'. This formulation tends to be insensitive to the idea of technological development as often in a constant state of flux. Second, is the relative inattention of SCOT researchers to the power relationships that inform technological developments. This, as Kline and Pinch (1999) acknowledge, relates to 'the reciprocal relationship between artefacts and social groups', and the need means that to address not purely how social groups shape technology, but also how those groups are themselves reconstituted in the process.

Shoring up these shortcomings has been a central focus of actor-network theory (ANT), most often associated with the work of Bruno Latour (2005) and John Law (1987). Actor-network theory sees technology not as a 'black box' but as a relatively unstable

and unfinished process, refusing the idea that technology achieves a definitive and stable closure. Equally, it rejects both the notion inherent in technological determinism, that technology exercises an inexorable affect on society, as well as the inverse postulation that society determines technology. Technology and society are then viewed as neither static nor absolute. In this regard it is steadfastly anti-essentialist, seeing technology not as a given, but as existing within a network of objects, actors, institutions and relationships. Thus, social relations are not independent of technology, but the two are interlinked.

As with the social construction of technology tradition, actor-network theory views the 'success' or 'failure' of a technology as contingent on multiple factors. However, these factors are not merely a list of existent or absent forces, such as 'capital' or 'innovative zeal', but involve the active support of a technology within society. Actor-network theory's most significant, and most controversial, contribution to not just the sociology of science and technology but social theory generally has been to dispose of the bifurcation of human and machine. It suggests that both society and technology are the same insofar as they are both entities that are produced by networks. This approach has been criticised for insufficiently clarifying what it means in its usage of the term agency and how it is exercised by non-human 'actors'. However, actor-network theorists' use of often dense language disguises the basic point the theory is suggesting, that people and things are defined with respect to their relationships to other people and things.

In general, the social shaping of technology approach alerts us to the idea that the character and meaning of a technology is contested and transformed through complex practices and processes. The way technology is shaped is neither inevitable nor

predetermined, and its meaning is often subject to ongoing negotiation and renegotiation. As Mackay (1997: 268) observes, 'technology, in this view is seen as being shaped by culture, rather than culture shaped by technology'. However, this is not to suggest that technology has no 'effects', the 'constraining capacity of the physical', according to Mackay (1997: 269), still determines the materiality of a technology. Equally, the manner of its production will often impute specific and, at times, immutable characteristics to a technology. This idea of 'social shaping' conceptualises the relationship between technology and society as complex, mutually constitutive, and often in a state of flux.

In line with this general theoretical movement, Harper (2001) notes that the 'social shaping' approach is an assumption rather than a finding of much of the research into the mobile phone. Nyiri (2005: 168) also stresses that 'the proliferation of mobile phones dramatically underscores the thesis of the social construction of technology'. He proposes that the hesitancy in the development of the mobile phone, despite it being technically viable since the 1940s, is because necessary social conditions were as yet unrealised. In this context, Nyiri (2005) views the mobile phone as characteristic of postmodern society – with postmodernity here referring to 'the radical decentralization and fragmentation of social communication, resulting in the casting aside of hierarchical structures, centralized control, and linear logic' (Nyiri, 2005: 168). Nyiri (2005) argues that the mobile phone both responds to and reinforces these changes. In this way, new technology, such as the mobile phone, is seen as reflective of particular social and cultural contexts (see also Townsend, 2002). More generally, Nyiri (2005) is

gesturing towards the broader sets of cultural relationships and processes that constellate around the mobile phone.

1.2.2 The Domestication of the Mobile Phone

The social shaping of technology approach highlights the complex relationship between technology and society. Emphasising how technology and society are mutually constitutive draws attention to social and cultural processes that shape technical developments and social change. A related concept that has informed mobile phone studies is ‘domestication’ (see Ling, 2004; Haddon, 2004), derived from work within the anthropology of material culture (see, for example, Miller, 1987; Kopytoff, 1986). Initially developed by Silverstone et al (1992), domestication studies focus more specifically on users and the context of use rather than development and design, suggesting that looking at technology in this way opens up the possibility to examine how we consume technologies, but also how technologies may also ‘consume’ us. Silverstone and Hirsch (1992: 3-4) point towards a ‘politics of technology’, which they understand as ‘subject to the passage of time, and vulnerable to the capacity of local and domestic cultures to spoil or redefine the political and cultural inscriptions’. Technology then has the potential to be a liberating force in everyday life, but it also helps sustain relations of power and domination. They characterise technology as both material and symbolic, and subject to processes of negotiation and change, which they situate in the context of consumption. For Silverstone and Hirsch (1992: 4) consumption is ‘a transformative and transcendent process of the appropriation and conversion of meaning’, and suggest that the meaning of a technology is dynamic

rather than fixed, and emerges from a complex interaction of 'actions and objects, politics and cultures'.

Silverstone et al (1992) focus specifically on how technologies interact with the domestic sphere. Defining the household as a moral economy, which encompasses 'both an economy of meanings and a meaningful economy', Silverstone et al (1992: 18) argue that 'the household is a *moral* economy because the economic activities of its members within the household and in the wider world of work, leisure and shopping are defined and informed by a set of cognitions, evaluations and aesthetics, which are themselves defined and informed by the histories, biographies and politics of the household and its members'. This then recomposes their analytical focus away from a political economic perspective towards an approach that privileges the ways in which particular cultural commodities are used within the domestic context. Silverstone et al (1992) argue that a household's moral economy is constituted through a transactional system of commodity and media relations. They term this process 'domestication', suggesting it forms around four 'non-discrete' stages: appropriation; objectification; incorporation; and conversion. Subsequent work (for example, Silverstone and Haddon, 1996) has added 'imagination' as a prelude in this process. This 'domestication' approach then, which has informed a number of studies of the mobile phone, conceives that, while technology has initial meaning invested in it through design, advertising, marketing, etc. households and individuals subsequently endow them with their own particular signification.

Haddon (2007) argues that the domestication approach highlights how individuals and groups 'consume' technology. This emphasis on consumption alerts us to the ways in

which particular cultural preferences and resources inform the ways in which a technology, such as the mobile phone, is used. The approach, however, is problematic as the domestication process appears to involve a rigid, sequential series of phases. Katz and Sugiyama (2005), for example, are critical of what they perceive as the approach's logical clarity and its focus on functional use and utility over the more embedded aesthetic and symbolically expressive dimensions of the mobile phone. However, Ling (2004: 31) argues that the process is much more flexible than might initially be assumed. He contends that, while its initial focus was on the home, mobile phone studies show how the concept can be expanded to address uses beyond the domestic sphere. Ropke (2003), for example, uses a derivation of the domestication process in her analysis of the 'consumption dynamics' of the mobile phone. She is more explicit, however, in outlining how the process includes 'feedback loops', suggesting that stages can be intertwined and experienced simultaneously. Ropke (2003) is also keen to stress how the concepts of domestication and consumption dynamics underscore a considerable range of ideas: from an object's production and marketing; the adoption and diffusion of items; the family as a site of negotiation; the conduct of everyday life; and how domestication can feed into long-term structural and cultural change.

1.2.3 Culture, Consumption and the Mobile Phone

The virtue of domestication approaches lie in its placing consumption at the heart of its analysis. In this way, it offers a way of looking at how an object such as the mobile phone is subsumed into the everyday life of individuals or groups within particular

social and cultural context. However, what it points towards needs to be substantiated by more specific theoretical orientations that explore the relationship of the mobile phone to deeper cultural processes that frame practice of consumption. In considering the range and repertoire of practices that relate to the mobile phone, Haddon (2005: 19) proposes 'broadening our viewpoint to ask what the object of analysis is when studying communication, and what this could include'. For Goggin (2006), this 'broadening' of perspective should allow for the positioning of 'culture' as a key analytical concept. He argues that a range of mobile phone practices can be understood as cultural practices, 'associated as they are with matters of articulation, expression, identity and meaning' (Goggin, 2006: 39). In this context, Goggin (2006) addresses this 'cell phone culture' through the lens of the circuit of culture approach, as developed by du Gay et al (1997). Both Mackay (1997) and Goggin (2006) suggest that the social shaping approach is, in certain respects, consonant with the 'circuit of culture'. In particular, the emphasis on the interactive and simultaneous processes of production and consumption constitutes common ground between these theoretical perspectives.

Focusing on the example of the Sony Walkman, du Gay et al (1997) see culture, not as a reflection of other social and economic processes, but as a key constituting force of the social world. In line with recent developments within cultural studies generally, du Gay et al (1997) question the notion that the production of a cultural artefact is the chief determinant of meaning. Following this, Mackay (1997: 263) states that: 'The effects of technology, however, are not determined by its production, its physical form or its capability. Rather than being built into the technology, these depend on how they are consumed, and this consumption takes place *in context*'. Du Gay et al (1997) deem the

Sony Walkman 'a typical cultural artefact and medium of modern culture', suggesting that it is both part of the wider cultural realm and has a distinct 'culture' of its own. It embodies sets of social practices that connect with particularities of our culture, through its association with particular groups and places and in the immersion of its social identity and image into the lingua franca of popular culture. Du Gay et al (1997: 11) view the image or idea of the Walkman then as 'a sort of metaphor which stands for or represents a distinctively late-modern, technological culture or way of life'.

This position proposes that the study of a cultural text or artefact should be carried out through the examination of five related processes: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. Du Gay et al (1997: 3) argue that, when looked at together, these five aspects form 'a sort of circuit...through which any analysis of a cultural text or artefact must pass if it is to be adequately studied'. The circuit of culture approach then is concerned with the relationship between modes of production and modes of consumption. This invites a reading of technologies as 'texts', which views them as being both encoded, through their design and representation, and decoded, through forms of cultural consumption. They demonstrate the contested and negotiated course of its cultural consumption, highlighting the multiform and variable character of this process.

Goggin (2006) adapts the 'circuit of culture' approach in his study of the mobile phone, asserting that it is an inherently cultural object. It can be understood then, Goggin (2006) suggests, in much the same way as du Gay et al (1997) understand the Walkman; that is, it is not only part of our culture but possessed of a distinctive culture of its own. Goggin (2006: 8) argues it is a 'metonym' or a 'short-hand' for the larger culture. In

particular, he discusses how we might more readily begin to talk about ‘mobile media’ and how this intersects with a range of issues that animate contemporary society. Following du Gay et al (1997), Goggin (2006) addresses this incipient ‘cell phone culture’ with reference to the various points on the ‘circuit of culture’. In doing so, Goggin (2006) highlights the complex processes involved in the construction of cultural meaning, and how these meanings are part of wider aspects of contemporary culture.

While Goggin’s (2006) work is important in privileging the cultural arena as a key site of analysis, the circuit of culture approach is not unproblematic. Fine (2003: 105) argues that the points on the ‘circuit’ are somewhat arbitrarily assigned and should not be seen as discrete ‘nodes’. He continues, suggesting that the circuit of culture is ‘little more than metaphor’ as ‘in reality there is no genuine, certainly not exclusive, structured movement of culture in the way represented’ (Fine, 2003: 106). Fine (2003: 106) contends then that there is much greater movement and flexibility between the ‘various participating moments’ that inform what he terms more broadly the ‘circuit of commodities’ and asserts that there is ‘a weakness in taking the cultural as starting point for confronting the economy’. For Fine (2003), the structures and imperatives of capitalist society cannot be ignored in addressing commodities and consumption. While Fine’s (2003) critique is both relevant and important, the issue at stake is not necessarily about overlooking or discounting the economic but situating an analysis in the, not unrelated, context of culture.

Certainly, the various approaches that inform mobile phone studies then are not without limitations. Nevertheless, they are important in gesturing towards relevant themes and

issues characteristic of mobile phone culture. Reflecting aspects of this work this research emphasises the nature and role of cultural consumption within everyday life, with particular reference to young people and youth culture. However, as I develop in chapters two and three this work focuses more specifically and explicitly on a further set of approaches drawn from a broad range of ideas within youth cultural theory and theories of cultural consumption. I explore not just how young people's use of the mobile phone contributes to the emergence of a particular mobile phone culture, but the ways in which these cultural practices form part of the wider impulses of youth culture. In particular, I examine to what extent young people's cultural agency is demonstrated through these forms of cultural consumption.

1.3 Mediating the Quotidian

Young people's use of the mobile phone can be situated within the ordinary and habitual elements of everyday life. Its use is often for the purposes of managing and coordinating everyday routines and schedules. In the context of family life, the mobile phone has come to play a significant role within the existing dynamic of struggle and control between parents and young people. While it potentially gives young people a greater amount of personal freedom, the mobile phone also exposes them to the prospect of increased and intensified parental monitoring and surveillance. It can be a means through which parents aim to maintain some knowledge and control over the activities of their children, while equally allowing young people themselves a greater amount of private communication. However, the mobile phone can provide young people with a means to elude parental surveillance and carry out social activities

independent of parental control and supervision. Pain et al (2005: 815) summarise the contradictions of this conflict, writing:

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.

1.3.1 Accessibility, Safety and 'Micro-Coordination'

Young people's acquisition of the mobile phone is often contingent on parental discretion. Palen, Salzman and Youngs (2000) argue that as parents incorporate the mobile phone into their own daily lives they recognise the utility of providing their children with one. In particular, parental concerns about young people's safety hastened this process. As Campbell (2006) observes, the parental discourse around the mobile phone is primarily bound to issues of safety and security. The accessibility it affords provides parents with a reassuring link to young people, which means they can be reached in case of an emergency. However, these issues are not exclusively the concern of parents. As Pain et al (2005: 819) argue, young people also refer to issues of safety and security when discussing their use of the mobile phone. For young people, the mobile phone provides immediate and instant contact and gives them enhanced feelings of safety in public spaces. It means they can contact their parents, if they are worried or if something happens, without having to find a public phone and recall numbers. However, Pain et al (2005) also suggest that the mobile phone may also add

to the risks that young people are concerned with in that it potentially makes one a target of crime. Ultimately, they highlight that issues of safety are more prominent for parents than young people themselves, arguing that often young people see the mobile phone as a means of reassuring and placating their parents, while giving them additional freedom in their own lives – what Castells et al (2007) refer to as the ‘management of autonomy vis a vis security’ (see also Pain et al 2005: 820).

This capacity of the mobile phone for maintaining continuing forms of connectivity also facilitates what Ling and Yttri (2002) refer to as ‘micro-coordination’. This refers to functional and instrumental activity such as organising, scheduling and arranging. Ling and Yttri (2002) specify three different types of micro-coordination: first, basic logistics, which refers to the redirection of trips already underway or the accessing of particular points of information while in transit, for example, one partner reminding another to pick something up on the way home; second, the “softening” of time, for example, calling ahead to let someone know that you’ll be late; and third, making “progressively exact” arrangements, through which, rather than setting the time and place for a particular rendezvous, arrangements are treated with a degree of flexibility wherein various parties will continually be in contact to confirm location and time while on the move. Micro-coordination refers then to the organisation and management of basic habitual activities, with the mobile phone allowing for such coordination to be carried out with greater speed and ease.

Ling (2004) highlights further the advantages and limitations of this ‘mobile-based coordination’. In positive terms, it facilitates flexibility and immediacy in people’s interaction, allowing for greater negotiation in terms of schedules. Ling (2004: 77) also

suggests that it permits swifter forms of social organisation that overcome cumbersome centralised systems. However, he also specifies limits to the mobile phone as a means of coordination, including ‘the number of people who can be coordinated, the need for large institutions to synchronize broad activities independent of personal need, and the relative fragility of mobile telephone systems’ (Ling, 2004: 77). Nevertheless, ‘micro-coordination’, between both family members and friends, is one of the most prominent uses of the mobile phone in young people’s everyday lives.

Ling and Yttri (2002) suggest that micro-coordination is especially important amongst families with children, in that it allows for both security and flexibility in the management of daily routines. They highlight how the mobile phone provides parents with a means to fulfil aspects of their traditional role in providing a sense of security and arranging and maintaining schedules. For example, Rakow and Navarro (1993: 144) coin the term ‘remote-mothering’ to describe the ways in which the mobile phone allows women to ‘manage creatively their responsibilities for home and children’. While this implies notions of care-giving, Ling and Yttri (2002: 145) highlight that, more usually, in this context ‘the mobile telephone is used not to exchange emotional content, rather to make concrete arrangements and deal with practical issues’.

At the same time, young people themselves are also aware of the usefulness of the mobile phone for the purposes of micro-coordination. Ling and Yttri (2002: 156) detail how young people recognise the convenience of the mobile phone in organising and arranging things like transport and curfews with their parents. Similarly, Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002: 172) highlight how the character of young people’s communication with family members is primarily focused on practical and logistical

issues, in contrast to the more emotive content of their peer group interactions. Nevertheless, forms of micro-coordination are also evident amongst youth peer groups (see, for example, Green, 2003; Ling and Yttri, 2002). Ling and Yttri (2002: 157-8) indicate that a good proportion of peer group interaction amongst young people is concerned with the micro-coordination of activities, for finding out what's happening and for the organisation of social life. The mobile phone is valued both as a private line for these interactions and its provision of a more efficient means for young people to coordinate their activities.

Elsewhere, Ling (2004) observes that the use of the mobile phone means that these arrangements are carried out in an increasingly ad hoc manner. Micro-coordination within young people's peer groups is characterised by increasing fluidity and less dictated to by the strictures of time than those of older generations. For most young people, arrangements are made with an in-built and assumed flexibility; on a given night, young people may choose to make loose arrangements, often for multiple activities, and progressively alter their plans as events progress (see also Geser, 2005). Ling (2004: 80) asserts that these new forms of coordination supplement rather than supplant time-based scheduling. He argues that the mobile phone can make coordination 'more organic... [and] in some situations we may be able to forget about time and indulge in interaction that is more spontaneous' (Ling, 2004: 80).

While, within these processes of micro-coordination, the expressive component is often not explicitly manifest, this use of the mobile phone is indicative of emotional bonds within families and between friends. Both Rakow and Navarro (1993) and Ling and Yttri (2002) provide a number of instances of mobile phone use by parents, which,

while dealing with ‘practical issues’, implies an emotional attachment between family members. The use of the mobile phone in this regard is part of a repertoire of behaviour that maintains emotional ties and allows for easier contact between family members through which they can organise various aspects of their daily routines. Ling (2005), in discussing the role of the mobile phone in aspects of communication and coordination within families, suggests that it has become rooted in the quotidian interactions that help maintain family life. He adopts Berger and Kellner’s idea of ‘nomos’, a concept they contrast with Durkheim’s idea of ‘anomie’: ‘Just as the individual’s deprivation of relationship with his [sic] significant others will plunge him into anomie, so their continued presence will sustain for him that *nomos* by which he can feel at home in the world’ (Berger and Kellner, 1964: 7, quoted in Ling, 2005: 63). Ling (2005) suggests that the mobile phone assists in supporting the development of this ‘nomos’, which provides social integration within family contexts. Pointing to how family life has become more demanding in terms of increasing commitments within both work and domestic spheres, Ling (2005) argues that the mobile phone gives a greater level of flexibility in daily routines, reflecting aspects of micro-coordination discussed earlier. He also notes the way in which the mobile phone provides a means to maintain an ‘emotional balance’ within families and between partners. Aside from the instrumental organisation of routines, Ling (2005: 82) describes how in relation to family life mobile phones ‘give individuals the space for the expressive maintenance of their lives... It also allows the individuals to talk about daily life with each other and with members of their social sphere’. De Gournay (2002: 198) observes a similar shift in relation to the evolution of mobile phone use amongst family members; alongside its

original application for emergencies and coordination she posits that ‘today the mobile phone is used for routine communicating, mainly with spouses or other family members, just to “keep in touch”’.

1.3.2 Surveillance, Monitoring and Control

While the mobile phone contributes positively to the development of family relationships, it can also act as a means of parental control. The telephone has traditionally been a site of struggle between parents and young people. As Gillard, Wale and Bow (1998) observe, while the fixed-line telephone plays a positive role in young people’s social interaction and the coordination of activities (see also Keller, 1977; Aaronson, 1971), it also allows parents to closely monitor and regulate their children’s interactions. These tensions are also evident within mobile phone culture. While the accessibility provided by the mobile phone can contribute to greater personal freedom, it can also expose young people to increased forms of parental surveillance and monitoring. As Pain et al (2005: 826) comment: ‘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’.

Through their use of the mobile phone, parents can potentially maintain high levels of watchfulness and control over young people’s activities. Green (2002) suggests that the Foucauldian paradigm of monitoring and control is enhanced through contemporary information and communication technologies. For example, the proliferation of CCTV in public spaces and the use of centralised electronic databases are emblematic of how surveillance power is exercised not just by the state but also increasingly by

commercial institutions. Green (2002) argues that the mobile phone brings forms of surveillance, usually associated with state or corporate organisations, into people's inter-personal relationships, giving rise to 'mutual monitoring and accountability' between individuals.

In particular, Green (2002) emphasises the role of the mobile phone in these new types of surveillance, focusing on the increased amount of monitoring within interpersonal relationships. She examines how young people are subject to both parent and peer monitoring and institutional supervision (e.g. in school), highlighting two forms of 'mobile monitoring'. First is parents' monitoring of young people's whereabouts and activities. While issues of safety and security are often cited as key reasons for a young person to acquire a mobile phone, the mobile phone can also potentially be a means through which young people are subjected to enhanced forms of parental surveillance. As Green (2003: 212) suggests, issues around surveillance/monitoring often overlap with issues of safety/security. Parent's claim that the mobile phone means they can contact or be contacted for providing a lift home etc., are often viewed by young people as an excuse by parents to check up on them.

The second form of monitoring identified by Green (2002) relates to how the mobile phone is the focus of parental and school/institutional monitoring. As Green (2002) notes, parents often keep a watchful eye on both young people's type and level of mobile phone use; for example, in terms of their frequency of use, who they call, etc. Equally, school authorities impose and maintain rules around mobile phone use within the school. Financial expenditure and cost is also often a strong focus of monitoring by parents. As noted above, for the majority of teenagers, their mobile phone, at least their

first one, was purchased for them by their parents. Equally, it is usual for parents to contribute toward the cost of use, although research also suggests that as they grow older, young people assume some of the financial burden of owning a mobile phone. While the majority of young people then are dependent to some degree on their parents for money, this is often supplemented through other forms of minimal income, for example, from part-time work (see Snioch, 2003). As Ling (2004) observes, it is teenagers who report spending the largest proportion of their disposable income on mobile phone use. Given the common characterisation of young people as financially irresponsible, concerns on the part of parents are often based on the potential for them to run up excessive mobile phone bills. These worries have been eased somewhat by the introduction of prepaid, or 'pay-as-you-go', subscriptions, through which it is easier to monitor and control expenditure.

Nevertheless, issues around the financial cost of mobile phone use remain very much to the fore within the context of parent-child relationships. Snioch (2003: 25) notes that parents often take an active role in observing and managing young people's mobile phone expenditure. She identifies how parents view young people's ownership of a mobile phone as providing an important lesson in 'money management and responsibility'. Similarly, Harper and Hamill (2005) suggest that negotiations within the family around young people's financial responsibilities serve to prime young people to be aware of how the cost of mobile phone use relates to the general costs of both the individual and the family. For example, if they choose to buy credit or a new mobile phone this will limit their spending options in other areas – what economists refer to as 'opportunity cost'. Equally, Harper (2005) notes that parents are keen for young people

to learn how irresponsible management of finances impacts not just on their own personal finances but on the household economy generally. He argues that parents often relate young people's attitudes to the cost of their mobile phone use to their general financial behaviour. Harper (2005) highlights how one father he spoke with was keen to stress to his children the need for greater awareness of general costs, using the example of a high phone bill to make his point.

While parents perceive that young people's expenditure requires careful monitoring, evidence also indicates that young people themselves are sensitive to the expense involved in owning and using a mobile phone. In particular, young people are especially aware of its impact on their own finances. Ling and Yttri (2002: 150-1) argue that the marginal economic status of teenagers means that an oft cited complaint regarding the mobile phone is its expense. Financial considerations become more pronounced as young people begin to fund, either in part or in full, their mobile phone use. Ling and Yttri (2002) suggest that this has been a contributory factor in the growth of texting amongst younger users as they seek cheaper alternatives to calling (see also Grinter and Eldridge, 2001). Ling (2004: 118) notes that in taking on economic responsibility for mobile phone use young people gain 'adult points', as this is linked to the ability to manage one's finances and is indicative of young people acquiring aspects of adult responsibility. More generally then, this can be seen as way in which young people take greater control over the management of their own everyday lives.

1.3.3 The Negotiation of Boundaries

While the mobile phone operates as a means through which individuals may be regulated and monitored, Green (2002) also identifies how young people make use of the mobile phone in resisting these forms of surveillance and control. The notion of resistance is well-established within youth cultural studies (see Raby, 2005). Subcultural theorists explore how the cultural practices of young working-class males express forms of resistance to the dominant order. More recently, this focus on a class-based cultural praxis has been surpassed by a broader application of the term 'resistance'. In this context, all manner of cultural activities have been characterised as practices of resistance. Sharpe et al (2000) register a note of disquiet at this tendency, suggesting it effectively renders the term meaningless. Nevertheless, Raby (2005: 151) argues that defining resistance too narrowly as a subordinate group's direct, collective action against a dominant group omits other forms of subversion and resistance. She contends then that the term is important in identifying forms of oppositional practice, and invites a consideration of it in relation to issues of power and agency.

In this context, the use of the mobile phone can be seen as a site for the emergence of young people's 'resistance' to various forms of power and domination. Geser (2005: 24) argues that the mobile phone has a potentially 'regressive' and 'subversive' impact 'because they empower informal micro-social networks to communicate much more efficiently beyond any institutional control'. He suggests that the mobile phone encourages a process of 'disintermediation', which he explains as occurring when 'the mediating contribution of supra-individual institutions is no longer required for

realizing and coordinating informal interactions, because such interactions can be initiated and maintained by direct interpersonal communication' (Geser, 2005: 32).

Geser (2005) details four aspects of disintermediation: first, the mobile phone increases the level of contact within intimate personal relationships; second, the mobile phone diminishes the role of time-based scheduling and coordination, which gives way to 'spontaneous, unpredictable patterns of social life'; third, he contends that mobile phones will encourage the attenuation of centralised institutional control or system boundaries, which the fixed-line telephone encouraged, by creating direct lines of communication between individuals rather than particular organisations, positions, or spaces; and fourthly, mobile phones create 'pervasive roles' by blurring the boundaries between dimensions of public/private, work/home, work/leisure, etc. In sum, Geser (2005: 33) concludes that the mobile phone sustains 'informal, non-institutional social spheres', which makes it particularly attractive for marginal groups within society, including adolescents, who are not fully integrated into stable work roles or formal institutions. Both Geser (2005) and Gordon (2006) highlight how the mobile phone can promote collective networks of interaction outside of formalised organisational structures, for example within terrorist organisations. Equally, the mobile phone, it is argued, supports the empowerment of the public sphere. Goggin (2006) examines its role within blogging culture, for what he terms 'moblogging' (see also Doring and Gundolf, 2005), while Rheingold (2002) discusses the evolution of 'flash mobs'. Elsewhere, the mobile phone has also been linked to the development of informal grass roots political action; for example, the overthrow, in 2000, of President Estrada in the

Philippines, as well as more general forms of anti-globalisation action and protest (see Rheingold, 2002; Plant, 2002; Klein, 2000).

In general, however, young people's use of the mobile phone is usually less explicitly politically focused. The forms of 'resistance' young mobile phone users engage in can be seen as micro-political gestures, which conform more readily to the everyday practices of cultural consumption that Duncombe (2002) defines as 'a politics that doesn't look like a politics' or what de Certeau characterises as tactical raids and manoeuvres within the 'grid of discipline'. With the introduction of the mobile phone, Ito (2005: 138) argues, young people are given the opportunity to circumvent aspects of parental control, commenting that 'with the mobile phone, the spatial boundaries of the home become highly porous to discretionary communication'. In this context, young people develop what Green (2002) terms 'parent management strategies' to countermand parental monitoring, regulation and surveillance. She documents how young people will often be economical with the truth when contacted about where they are and/or what they are doing. Similarly, Ling and Yttri (2002: 156-7) note that young people will often not answer calls from parents when they are out with their friends, usually making the excuse that they didn't hear it ring or that their battery died. As Campbell (2006) contends, these practices are resistant insofar as they constitute minor evasions from the authority of the family. Green (2002) also suggests that young people resist forms of institutional control within the school setting by using the mobile phone in, for example, the classroom itself through 'discreet' forms of interaction, such as texting, or semi-private spaces within the school (e.g. toilets, locker-rooms). As Green (2002) observes, the character of the mobile phone itself offers a means of

resisting monitoring by teachers; for example, it is easily concealed under a desk (see also Ito, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Ling, 2004).

Both Green (2002) and Ito (2005) argue that these practices of ‘resistance’ do not necessarily dissolve or break up particular social institutions or social relations. For Ito (2005), the mobile phone enables communication that crosses prior social boundaries, in particular those of the home and school, albeit without necessarily eroding the ‘integrity of existing places or social identities’. Thus, while the mobile phone facilitates young people having increased freedom within their everyday lives, the institutional arrangements in which they are placed (i.e. family, school, etc.) remain relatively stable. In this way, the use of the mobile phone is incorporated into and normalised within the particular contexts in which it is found. These acts constitute what Taylor (2005) terms ‘localized acts of subversion’. Rather than being subversive in the broad political sense, are forms of ‘locally assembled resistance against an established set of social structures or “rules”’ (Taylor, 2005: 163). Young people’s consumption of the mobile phone then is not necessarily a site of explicitly resistant behaviour, but, more generally, can be as indicative of the particular preferences and values of youth culture.

While it is important to examine the ways in which young people can become actively empowered in their everyday lives, Green (2002 & 2003) stresses that issues of institutional monitoring and young people’s resistance to it need to be viewed as contextual. Green (2002) contends that the mobile phone can create a culture of ‘mutual co-dependence, trust and accountability in everyday life’ between parents and young people. This means that young people are given a greater amount of freedom by

parents in return for being available and accountable for their activities. Green (2002) then points to how, rather than being indicative of antagonism, such processes reflect the emergence of mutual accountability and trust within parent-child relations. For example, Green (2003: 212-3) shows that parents are well aware of young people's 'parent-management strategies', without necessarily having any clear solutions to them, and also recognise this behaviour as a normal part of family life. However, she suggests that parents are generally trusting of their children and are satisfied with the fact that they can be contacted in the event of something serious happening.

The use of the mobile phone then contributes to the expansion of young people's 'geographies' (Pain et al 2005: 815). Williams and Williams (2005) suggest then that the mobile phone has become a tool for young people to negotiate their spatial and temporal boundaries. They assert that families in contemporary society feature a growing use of forms of parent-child negotiation, which replaces more traditional forms of authoritative parenting; and detail how the mobile phone has a significant effect on the allowable boundaries of young people's activities. There is, Williams and Williams (2005) argue, a shared appreciation and understanding between parents and young people of negotiating these boundaries. For parents, the mobile phone allays fears around potential dangers or trouble their children may find themselves in, while young people, in general, adhere to the boundaries they negotiate with their parents, as they are aware that the mobile allows them an increasing freedom of movement. Similarly, Ling and Yttri (2002: 156) argue that the mobile phone encourages parents to give young people greater space and independence, while Nafus and Tracey (2002: 212) refer to it as a 'digital leash', whereby young people are able to use the slack provided

by parents to ‘establish public personhoods’. Ultimately, Williams and Williams (2005) contend that, while the mobile phone gives young people increased leverage in negotiations with their parents around issues such as curfews, parents still wield authority and control through being able to ‘invade’ their children’s space. Thus, they conclude, ‘mobile phones facilitate the extension of children’s boundaries while simultaneously stretching the authority of the parents across time-space’ (Williams and Williams, 2005: 34).

1.4 Mediating the Self

The mobile phone holds significant symbolic value for young people, which reinforces individual and group identities. Young people’s use mobile phone allows for the expression of individuality alongside forms of peer identification. This is primarily facilitated through the expressive dimensions of mobile phone use, both in terms of its role in emotional interaction and the manner of its use and display. In discussing micro-coordination, Ling and Yttri (2002) identify the related concept of hyper-coordination. This, they argue, encompasses forms of instrumental communication with the addition of two further elements: first, the use of the mobile phone for emotional and social purposes; and second, its role in forms of self-presentation, encompassing the type of mobile phone one has, appropriate modes of use, how it is displayed, etc. Ling and Yttri (2002) argue that, in particular, teenagers’ use of the mobile phone is emblematic of hyper-coordination, in that their use transcends purely instrumental coordination to encompass a broader range of emotional and social forms of interaction.

Vincent (2005a: 118) asserts that ‘although few people think about their mobile phone in emotional terms they do appear to be using it to achieve emotional goals and most use emotional language categories to explain their mobile usage’. Vincent (2005a, 2005b) identifies a range of emotional responses to the mobile phone, these include: panic, often induced by the absence of the mobile phone; strangeness, often the response of mobile phone users to non-users; ‘being cool’, indicative of being in touch with mobile phone culture; irrational behaviour, often exhibited through people’s inability to control their behaviour (e.g. using a mobile phone while driving); thrill, derived from the intimate connections that can be made via the mobile phone; and anxiety, created by the contradiction between ‘not knowing and wanting to know about others versus too much knowledge’. Vincent (2005b: 99) contends that this emotional attachment to the mobile phone is not based necessarily on the material object itself but rather on the forms of contact and connectivity it allows for. Expanding on this argument, she highlights two reasons for this emotional attachment. First, she suggests that the mobile phone is ‘an icon of the user – an articulation of who they are’, in that it holds information of contacts and memories in the form of messages, pictures, etc. This, according to Vincent (2005a: 119-20), is conditioned by the second reason, which posits that it is the fact that the mobile phone provides this contact with others that leads to an emotional attachment with the device.

1.4.1 The Enactment and Signification of Peer Culture

Peer culture is a central preoccupation of young people’s lives. In discussing both the fixed-line telephone and mobile phone, Gillard, Wale and Bow (1998) suggest they

'become an extension of peer group relations and close friendships... the combination of a private space at home and intimate talk with friends may mean that friends become more influential in their emotional development and well being'. Within young people's peer groups, inclusion in processes of micro-coordination reflects one's involvement in peer culture. Use of the mobile phone is indicative of being connected and being in touch, it is a mechanism through which social solidarities are enacted and performed. As Green (2003: 207-8) suggests, in relation to the mobile phones' 'social value', it confers upon young people participation in peer group culture; having the 'right' names, giving and receiving calls and messages, the type of phone one has, etc. are all parts of this performance (see also Ling and Yttri, 2002). Similarly, Green (2003: 203) highlights the importance of the mobile phone as a medium for expressive forms of communication, noting that for young people 'the mobile phone was seen primarily as a communicative device that was often talked about in positive and emotional terms as "connection" with (peer) others'. Vincent (2005b: 98) also suggests that the use of the mobile phone is about 'social connectivity', arguing that 'it is the emotional content of these communications that is the driver behind the extraordinary relationship that many people have with their mobiles'.

Through the mobile phone the bonds of friendship are maintained within everyday life. It is indicative of being connected and in touch, and is a way through which social solidarities are enacted and performed. In this context, the mobile phone is, as Vincent (2005a: 117) observes, a 'conduit for emotional attachment'. She argues, however, that these forms of emotional attachment do not exist within all forms of communication, suggesting that this attachment is more likely to emerge in response to person-to-person

communication services rather than in information-to-person services. In illustrating this point, Vincent (2005a: 119) asserts that this can help explain the success of SMS (text messaging), which facilitates interpersonal contact, and the failure of the WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) facility of mobile phones, which provides information based services. However, the arrival of 3G mobile phones, with internet capability, provides a potentially lucrative revenue stream for commercial interests. In particular, this convergence of media technologies allows young people to access social networking websites, such as MySpace and Bebo, via their mobile phones. While these social networking sites have grown in popularity amongst young people (see boyd, 2007), cost remains a potentially prohibitive factor, with the mobile phone retaining primacy for maintaining young people's friendships.

In this context, Vincent (2005b: 98) comments that mobile phone use involves 'people calling people they know rather than making new contacts'. Geser (2005: 29-30) expands on this point, highlighting that the mobile phone supports the 'deepening' of established relationships, rather than opening up opportunities for new ones to form. In this context, Reid and Reid (2005: 113) describe what they term the 'social ecology' of texting arguing that 'texters seem to establish and maintain social contacts within one or a few fairly well-defined and close knit groups of textmates, forming "text circles"'. Within these 'circles' there is a near constant stream of texts going back and forth between participants. Reid and Reid (2005) suggest then that texting doesn't appear as a starting point in the establishment of close friendships. Instead texting is used between existing friends as a means to supplement other forms of communication, with

the text's distinctive character proving appealing even between friends who meet regularly face-to-face.

Rather than being meaningless gestures, Ling and Yttri (2002) argue that young people's use of the mobile phone for peer group interaction is prominently characterised by a strong emotional and expressive resonance. They contend that this use of the mobile phone, especially via text messaging, constitutes the 'confirmation of a relationship'. Beneath the overt content of the message lies a 'meta-content', which indicates that 'the receiver is in the thoughts of the sender and when they next meet they will be able to base a certain portion of their further interaction on the exchange of messages' (Ling and Yttri, 2002: 158). Ling and Yttri (2002: 159) continue, arguing that one's inclusion and involvement in peer group culture is signified by the amount of texts one sends and receives, and the number of contacts they have saved on their phones. They argue that these are an 'objectification of popularity' and act as measurements of one's 'social currency', 'like receiving a lot of SMS messages or a lot of messages on their answering machine, a full name register demonstrates one's social popularity' (Ling and Yttri, 2002: 161).

In this context, the mobile phone has also become an important medium for flirting. Young people can often feel more comfortable using text messages when attempting to establish contact with a potential boyfriend and girlfriend. Texting allows young people to transmit thoughts, which are often private and personal, more confidentially than they could in person or via calling. Messages can be carefully composed through re-reading, editing, and even consulting with others (see, for example, Ling, 2004; Weilenmann and Larsson, 2002), allowing for careful consideration of what one will

say, giving one space to create more composed and assured forms of interaction. As Ling (2004: 151-2) suggests, text messages are ‘asynchronous’ in that ‘the sender does not need to engage the complete attention of the receiver in order to communicate [and] the sender can compose, edit, and send a message’. This creates what Ling (2004: 151) terms a ‘quasi-mediated’ form of building romantic relationships, in that it combines face-to-face interaction with technologically mediated communication. This process is usually initiated by a face-to-face meeting, for example in school, at a party, etc., which involves the exchange of mobile numbers. The relationship is then developed through the exchange of messages in the period that follows. The nature of texting means that young people can avoid the awkwardness of a telephone conversation or a face-to-face meeting.

Ling (2004: 151) also argues that, while the mobile phone is more individualised than the traditional fixed-line telephone, in that it is associated with a particular individual rather than a location, it also supports forms of collective behaviour. In this context, Weilenmann and Larsson (2002) identify ‘the collaborative use of the mobile phone’, whereby young people will share both the mobile phone itself and its content. This includes the collective reading and composing of texts. For example, Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002: 181-2) document how young people will read and show messages to one another. They also identify what they term an ‘SMS consultant’, pointing out that, particularly among girls, texts are often composed by a number of people and can take time for the formulation of a satisfying message. Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002) suggest that within the context of young people’s peer relationships this sharing can indicate trust and operate as a means to build and maintain the relationship.

A further practice, highlighted by Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002), is ‘message collecting culture’, whereby young people retain messages that are personally significant or important on their phone. They argue that ‘these may be messages from the initiation of the current romantic relationship, anniversaries related to it, or messages to do with a significant friendship’ (Kasesniemi and Rautiainen, 2002: 178). They also suggest that this practice is more developed amongst girls than boys, with girls affording the collecting and keeping of messages of greater relational importance. Finally, they discuss the circulation of chain messages. They detail that these chain messages usually mimic earlier forms of chain letters, usually comprising short poems, song lyrics, jokes or wishes. Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002: 180) argue that such messages fulfil a traditional role within youth culture; the messages explore taboo subjects and reflect stories and jokes that previously were dispersed within the oral culture of the schoolyard. While they suggest that the tenor of these chain messages signals a break with childhood, through the use of sexual humour and the mocking of childhood preoccupations, Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002: 180) also point out that chain messages are most popular amongst 13-15 year olds, with older teens claiming to be bored with them.

1.4.2 Old Habits in New Ways

In as much as the use of the mobile phone reorders and reconfigures social arrangements, through, for example, what Geser (2005) refers to as ‘disintermediation’ or the more flexible management of time and space, its use also mediates persistent forms of social life. While the role of the mobile phone in youth peer culture is in

many respects transformative, it is also indicative of the coalition of new media and traditional social forms; reflecting Raymond Williams' assertion that 'a main characteristic of our society is a willed coexistence of very new technology and very old social forms' (quoted in Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992: 1). In this way, the mobile phone is a medium for more longstanding cultural practices. As Ling (2004: 147) suggests, texting 'is used to fill up the odd free moments of the day'. For young people, the mobile phone is a way to make use of the idle moments in everyday life, giving them a space to chat, joke and interact with their friends irrespective of location. These practices can be seen as corresponding to the enduring social forms that which help create, maintain and sustain social life.

While Taylor and Harper (2001) argue that the concept of gift exchange has been largely overlooked in discussions of media and technology, a number of authors discuss young people's use of the mobile phone in this context (see Johnsen, 2003; Ling and Yttri, 2002). The importance of 'gifting' as a means through which social relations are created and maintained has been traced in both modern and pre-modern societies. The most notable work on gift exchange is anthropologist Marcel Mauss' study of the Trombriand Islanders. Mauss (1997) outlines three aspects of gift giving: the obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate. In this context, Mauss discusses the 'potlatch' as the system of gift exchange, which often occurs in the context of festivals or ceremonies (e.g. marriages, deaths, etc.), and argues that for this system to operate successfully these three obligations, to give, to receive and to reciprocate, must be fulfilled. The exchange of gifts in this context is intimately related to the prestige of an individual and to reciprocate or repay a gift often encouraged exorbitant and elaborate

forms of consumption, or forms of sacrificial destruction. The phenomenon of gifting is, for Mauss, a form of symbolic communication that binds the giver and receiver together; it is a relationship in which obligations are created toward the purpose of producing group solidarity. As Brown, quoted in Mauss (1997: 18), observes ‘the goal is above all a moral one, the object being to foster friendly feelings between the two persons in question, and if the exercise failed to do so, everything had failed’.

Mauss (1997), in describing the ‘vaygu’a’ exchanged by the inhabitants of the Trombriand Islands, noted that the gift ‘each one has its name, a personal history, and even a tale attached to it’ (Mauss, 1997: 24). Similarly, Berking (1999: 9) argues that the gift ‘organises memories, makes feelings concrete, and sets up relationship signals’. Johnsen (2003: 166) asserts that a similar system operates within young people’s sending and receiving of text messages. The text message can be read as a form of gift exchange, as the giver of a text is offering something that often transcends the specific content of the message and binds them to the receiver within this system of exchange – a modern day ‘potlatch’ in Mauss’ terms – and indicates friendship and solidarity between individuals. In words that have a consonance with young people’s relationship to texting, Berking (1999: 5) observes: ‘they [gifts] are in a sense feelings and also, temporally speaking, memories to be grasped and held because they are structurally associated with particular histories and bound up with particular individuals’.

Taylor and Harper (2001) suggest that young people use text messages, as well as call-credit and the mobile phone itself, as forms of ‘gifts’, which act as confirmations of a social bond. As Johnsen (2003: 166) argues: ‘the use of the metaphor of the gift in an analysis of the text-message is based on the knowledge of how the gift works towards

sustaining social relationships in a society'. Taylor and Harper (2001) highlight that young people save messages they consider 'valuable' or special, whether a romantic message from a boyfriend and girlfriend, or a personal interaction with a close friend. In this way, the text is a visible representation of a relationship that can be saved, reread and shared with others. It is invested with meaning by both the sender and the receiver. As Taylor and Harper (2001) argue, it is through the process of ritual exchange that the text message acquires meaning. This meaning is formed within the particular character of the message, the style of its composition, the time and place it's sent and received and the relationship that exists between the two parties. Through the exchange of text messages there is a sharing of thoughts and experiences; it is a means of offering oneself to others and maintaining the bonds of friendship. Like the act of giving a gift, the exchange of text messages is an act of friendship, a visible marker of solidarity between individuals and part of the process in which social relationships are confirmed and sustained.

While much of the content that passes back and forth via text may seem largely inconsequential in terms of content, it is the act of sending the message, of offering the gift, which helps sustain the relationship. As Johnsen (2003: 167) notes, while the messages themselves often have little intrinsic value, they constitute a type of 'social glue'. For example, the jokes and stories shared between friends are valued not necessarily for their content but for the act of exchange itself. In elaborating on this point, Taylor and Harper (2001) highlight the example of the goodnight message as a common and important ritual among adolescent couples. They argue that this 'normal mundane encounter is made special through the observation of ceremony... the text

message comes to mean more than merely an exchange of words, but becomes an offering of commitment to the relationship' (Taylor and Harper, 2001).

At the heart of this process is the obligation to reciprocate, failure to do is, in Mauss' terms, 'tantamount to declaring war'. Through this reciprocal exchange the parties are bound together in an unspoken and implicit social contract. If the reciprocal process of exchange breaks down the giver can construe this as a rejection of friendship on the part of the receiver. The lack of reciprocity can often be based on the receiver viewing the text as an 'unwanted gift' in that it may arrive at an awkward moment or from someone they don't want to talk to¹. Taylor and Harper (2001) argue that the recipient who fails to reciprocate is placed in a position of inferiority until a sufficient act of gratitude is provided, finding themselves cut off from future interaction until an acceptable offering is made. Conversely, the giver who does not receive can often feel inferior; as George Bernard Shaw once remarked: 'Silence is the most perfect expression of scorn'. The lack of a reciprocal response then can make people feel unwanted and alone. Taylor and Harper (2001) illustrate that respondents registered feelings of isolation if they are not receiving text messages, for example one declared: '...there are days when my phone does not beep at all. I'm like 'ok nobody likes me. NOBODY knows me!'''. Similarly, Johnsen (2003) suggests that failure to reciprocate places a strain on the relationship with the connection broken or at least temporarily suspended. The use of the mobile phone then plays a significant role in fostering peer solidarity amongst young people. As Fox (2001) observes, the mobile phone creates a space for the re-emergence and establishment of forms of community and communality:

¹ An alternative example of 'unwanted gifts is provided by Snowden (2006), who, in her discussion of texting, highlights the use of texts as 'gifts' for negative purposes, citing acts of bullying and harassment.

In the fast-paced modern world, we had become severely restricted in both the quantity and quality of communication with our social network. Mobile gossip restores our sense of connection and community, and provides an antidote to the pressures and alienation of modern life.

In this context, Johnsen (2003) details how the mobile phone has become a medium for ‘small talk’, pejoratively referred to as ‘gossip’ or more positively affirmed as ‘chat’. He suggests that ‘chat’, although often ‘contentless’, is meaningful in that it builds ‘social networks’. This form of communication is, he suggests, an essential part of young people’s daily communication. Johnsen (2003: 166) concludes that the mobile phone provides young people with a means to contact and sustain their peer associations:

It becomes an invaluable element in social interaction, and in communication, which is commonly known as meaningless chat, can accordingly not be brushed aside as unnecessary. On the contrary, we need to understand it as one of the most important reasons for the immense growth of mobile phone use.

As Campbell (2006) indicates, the youth discourse around the mobile phone is, in part, characterised by an emphasis on sociability. The use of the mobile phone can then be fruitfully examined as a contemporary articulation of Simmel’s conceptualisation of ‘sociability’ – ‘the play form of association’. Simmel (1997 [1911]) speaks of an ‘impulse to sociability in man’ suggesting that it is interaction for its own sake and an end in itself. He locates sociability beyond the particular content of groups organised around specific needs and interests suggesting that in sociable interaction the emphasis is on the group, and personal whims and concerns are rendered secondary to the interdependence of the individuals involved in its maintenance. Simmel argues that sociability exists for itself, and is not oriented towards the achievement of concrete

goals, instead ‘associations are accompanied by a feeling for, by a satisfaction in, the very fact that one is associated with others and the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others’. The emphasis then is on the group, personal whims and concerns are seconded to the interdependence of the individuals involved in its maintenance.

Sociability gives great emphasis to the role of ‘good form’ in bringing meaning and stability to associations. Good form is the unifying force that underlines and gives positive impetus to sociability, as Simmel (1997: 121) observes ‘‘good form’ is mutual self-definition, interaction of the elements, through which a unity is made’. Through this ‘good form’ there emerges what Simmel (1997: 121) refers to as the ‘pure form of sociability’: ‘the free playing, interacting interdependence of individuals’. To show good form is to participate in sociability and to the production and reproduction of the group; alternatively, ‘bad form’ can be said to be exhibited through an unwillingness to engage in sociability.

The traditional form of sociability described by Simmel is based around face-to-face interaction and exists in the gathering of friends in the local pub, coffee shop, etc. More recently the mobile phone has been adopted as a medium of sociability, whereby it substitutes, or more commonly works in tandem with face-to-face interaction. Kopomaa (2000) uses Oldenburg’s idea of a ‘third place’ to describe the mobile phone in this context. Adjacent to yet beyond work and home Oldenburg (1989) rendered this ‘third place’ as physical spaces such as cafés, markets, and other meeting places. Kopomaa (2000) extends the concept to incorporate the mobile phone, suggesting that it constitutes a meeting place where people spend time; yet at the same time it is a ‘non-

place,' a virtual space without distinct spatial boundaries. Within this space interaction is extended beyond its traditional boundaries, after separation at the end of the school day or after a night out young people use the mobile phone as a medium of sociability. In the context of mobile phone use, 'good form' is demonstrated through making calls and sending text messages, through fulfilling the obligation to give and reciprocate. This represents one's engagement in sociable interaction. The empty exchanges between friends or the sweet nothings that pass between lovers have a high social value; the use of the mobile phone for chat, gossip, jokes, etc. are the basis of sociability. Young people's peer group interaction tends to more playful, incorporating abbreviations, slang, jokes etc. with the messages often not bound to any specific goal other than the refreshment of contact between parties and the mutual satisfaction in sociability. In this regard, the text message allows for the dissolution of end-oriented interaction and the creation of interaction for its own sake, as Plant (2002) observes in relation to the text message: 'It is a unique way of saying something without saying too much'. Forms of gift exchange and sociability also emerge in the context of young people's use of the mobile camera phone. As Reviere (2005) argues, the use of mobile camera phones is a way of 'being-together'. She contends that it facilitates 'collective communities', which are built around 'exchanging content that is intimate, fun and has no rational or intentional purpose, but is, rather, sensation-oriented' (Reviere, 2005: 184).

1.4.3 Symbolic Value, Identities and Representations

In their discussion of ‘hyper-coordination’, Ling and Yttri (2002), alongside its role in expressive communication, isolate the part the mobile phone plays in young people’s self-presentation; defining this as ‘the type of mobile telephone that is appropriate, the way in which it is carried on the body and the places in which it is used’ (2002: 140). Ling (2004: 103) also suggests that younger users have a clear conception of what is the ‘correct’ type of mobile phone they should have. The mobile phone then constitutes an item of style that is used in the construction of self and group identities. For example, Alexander (2000) equates the mobile phone as a fashion item akin to clothing, suggesting that, amongst teenagers, the type of mobile phone one has and the way it is worn are important considerations. He identifies the symbolic value of the mobile phone, arguing that ‘the mobile design carries some myths along with it that speak about the owner of the device. These myths are socially constructed and could represent many ideas that go beyond beauty and further impact the construction of self-identity in the teen’ (Alexander, 2000: 3-4). Similarly, Green (2003) suggests that alongside its economic and social value, the mobile phone also has a cultural value, by which status and distinction is expressed in having a stylish mobile. She notes that this influence of fashion tends to be more pronounced amongst teenagers and younger users, with, by contrast, older users more interested in the mobile phone’s functional qualities. Green (2003: 205) indicates that young people are keenly aware of the aesthetic quality of the mobile phone, and how having the ‘right’ mobile phone is an important way of accruing ‘street cred’ and fitting in. Equally, she observes that young people often

frame their discussion of style with reference to advertising images, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of different makes, models and features.

Katz and Sugiyama (2005) also discuss the role of the mobile phone as a fashion accessory and a status symbol. They continue, noting that, for young people in particular, the mobile phone is an extension and representation of their personality. In this way, young people's use of the mobile phone also contributes to their identity and sense of self. For example, Ling (2004) characterises the mobile phone as a 'maturation symbol', in that its use allows young people to develop aspects of their adult identity. This is realised in relation to sense of freedom, independence, and responsibility that young people equate with having the mobile phone. Equally, as discussed above, the mobile phone signifies young people's participation in peer culture, showing that they are accessible and popular, and facilitating a deepening of these relationships. The mobile phone needs to be examined and understood then not purely in terms of its functional capacity but in terms of its deeper symbolic character. The use of the mobile phone then is a significant site for the expression and enactment of forms of cultural meaning.

In this context, Katz and Sugiyama (2005) specify what they term the 'co-creation' of its public meaning. They seek to make a 'precise connection between an industrial ethos (marketing a futuristic status symbol) and the popular reception and co-creation of a communication technology' (Katz and Sugiyama, 2005: 79). In this way, they trace how the meanings associated with the mobile phone are created through the interactions of multiple actors. The image and representation of the mobile phone is the result of the confluence of designers, marketers, and users. As Katz and Sugiyama

(2005: 72) suggest: 'there is a reciprocal process of negotiating meanings between an industry that is seeking to frame the technology and the public that responds to, adopts, and modifies further the technology'. Similarly, in his application of the 'circuit of culture' approach to the mobile phone, Goggin (2006: 14) highlights the 'inescapable articulations among spheres that jointly bring an artefact to life'.

The production of this cultural meaning then is subject to the interventions of various groups. As young people adopt and use the mobile phone in greater numbers, their influence is ever greater in the construction of the cultural meanings and values that constellate around the mobile phone. The marketing and advertising of the mobile phone has become increasingly weighted towards appealing to this growing youth market. As Campbell (2006) observes, the media discourse of the mobile phone emphasises image and independence, which intersects with the youth discourse of sociability and self-determination. In examining contemporary mobile phone advertisements, Campbell (2006: 195) identifies how they are 'picking up on what adolescents today want: style, friendships and individuality'. Alongside earlier conceptions of the mobile phone as functional and practical, popular representations now position it as an icon of fun and freedom. In comparing advertisements for mobile phones from the United States, Israel, and South Korea, Robbins and Turner (2002: 91) found that, despite stark cultural and language differences, they share an emphasis on 'speediness, flexibility and social connectivity'.

Lasen (2005) draws distinct parallels between the history and development of the fixed-line telephone² and that of the mobile phone, suggesting that for both their early image

² For extensive analyses of the fixed-line telephone's history, development and use see Fischer (1992) and Pool (ed.)(1977)

positioned them as functional tools for organising work and business, before finding a mass market based on applications within social life. In particular, Lasen (2005) equates perceptions of young peoples' use of the mobile phone with early understandings of women's use of the fixed-line telephone; namely, as frivolous idle chatter. However, over time the uses of both the fixed-line and mobile telephone by these respective groups have come to shape the way in which they are viewed. In particular, the expressive use of the mobile phone as a means of social contact and sociability has become associated with young people, as has been the case with women's use of the fixed-line telephone. Kopomaa (2000: 32-4) takes the 1970s as the starting point for the development of mobile phone culture³. He divides the spread of the mobile phones into three stages: firstly, the 'class markets' phase (1975-1990), in which the mobile phone was an expensive luxury associated with the image of 'yuppie' lifestyle. Following this is the 'mass market' period (1990-1995), characterised by the mobile phone becoming more readily, and cheaply, available to the general public. Finally, the 'diversified mass market' phase, beginning in 1995, is ongoing and can be seen as a time in which the mobile phone began to be taken up by a variety of different groups and become subject to an ever-increasing number of new designs and accessories.

Goggin (2006: 41) observes that 'the roles of image-creation, advertising, and design have been fundamental in the production of cell phone culture'. The growing importance of the mobile phone as a medium of social connectivity means advertising campaigns have begun to shift their emphasis away from work and business and

³ For an overview of the technological development of the mobile phone see Agar, 2003; Steinbock, 2005

towards interpersonal communication and notions of ‘playfulness’ (Lasen, 2005: 40, 51-2). Goggin (2006) isolates two case studies, Finnish handset manufacturer Nokia and the UK-based network provider Vodafone, to demonstrate how the cultural production of the mobile phone increasingly places an emphasis on representation and image. Highlighting the importance of design values and brand identities within this process, he illustrates how the mobile phone has become more than merely a communications technology, but is increasingly associated with particular images and lifestyles. Equally, Goggin (2006) addresses how the production, design and marketing of the mobile phone have become increasingly sensitive to the consumer.

Finnish multinational Nokia⁴ is perhaps the best known manufacturer of mobile phone handsets. The company’s combination of aesthetic considerations and usability has led them to the top of the marketplace. Redhead (2004: 112) observes that Nokia stole a march on its competitors over the course of the 1990s by dint of the fact that they displayed a far greater awareness of the ‘consumerist realities’ of mobile phone design, while other companies were hampered by an engineering focus that privileged function ahead of form. Lindholm, Keinonen and Kiljander (2003) document how Nokia attempted to meet the challenge of selling mobile phones that would appeal to a diverse range of cultural groups. Rather than developing a potentially endless cycle of mobile phones for particular groups or markets, there was a conscious effort to use specific aspects of design as a way of offering a product with cross appeal. They also identify how issues familiar within social science research on the mobile (e.g. use, consumption, social shaping, etc.) gained increased currency for developers and designers, who were

⁴ For a full account of Nokia’s history and activities see Steinbock, 2005; and Lindholm, Keinonen and Kiljander, 2003

keen to generate something akin to a stabilised conception of the user. This growing engagement with users can be viewed as contributory factor to the relatively large proportion of mobile phone research carried out within various telecommunications groups. Companies such as Nokia display an understanding of the necessity to appeal to a broad spectrum of people and have been dedicated to accessing forms of knowledge that can assist in this goal.

Steinbock (2001: 271-2) highlights how Nokia has drawn inspiration from Sony and identifies its corporate ethic, the 'Nokia Way', has led to it becoming innovators in the area of mobile phone design. As Steinbock (2001: 157) observes: 'Many of the standard features that are now considered generic were originally developed by Nokia, including large graphics displays, signal and battery indicators, coloured covers, and ringing tones'. Nokia were amongst the first to recognise the shift away from the business market to broader commercial markets. The industry has followed Nokia's lead, with both handset manufacturers and network operators displaying an increasing interest in notions of lifestyle and fashion. Nokia have assumed a position as not just technical innovators but leaders in fashion and style. Goggin (2006) suggests that the introduction of the 2100 model in 1994 was a 'pivotal moment' in the consumer diffusion of the mobile phone. The subsequent arrival of the 8860 model caused *Vogue* to gush unreservedly that Nokia had made 'wireless technology a fashion statement', describing the phone as 'a little Le Corbusier, a little Matrix' (quoted in Goggin, 2006: 46). This marks the diversification of the market, from the earlier one-size-fits-all model to a growing preoccupation with creating devices that have specific and unique functions that will appeal to particular groups and individuals (Redhead, 2004: 103).

More generally, Katz and Sugiyama (2005) witness the aesthetic impulses of modernism and futurism in mobile phone design, suggesting that through both design and marketing the mobile phone has been presented to the public as ‘modern’, ‘cutting-edge’ and ‘futuristic’. They detail how mobile phone companies have sought to situate their products within contexts that would present them as of ‘high status’ and ‘socially desirable’, suggesting that there has been an explicit effort on the part of mobile phone companies to frame their products as ‘a high-fashion item’ with an emphasis on ‘stylish design, elite status and fashion’ (Katz and Sugiyama, 2005: 69). Even a cursory glance at contemporary advertising for various mobile phone operators demonstrates how advertisers create an image of the mobile phone as vibrant, dynamic, and modern. In light of the growth of image-consciousness within the marketing of the mobile phone, it is little surprise that both handset manufacturers and network operators have cultivated strong associative relationships with various cultural forms, such as sponsorship of sports and musical events, product placement in television and film, etc. (see Goggin, 2006). Katz and Sugiyama (2005) also identify how companies have used product placement in various films and television shows companies in order to foster a more prominent public image for the mobile phone.

However, as Lasen (2005: 36) states: ‘An important lesson from the history of the landline telephone is the power of users to impose their own purposes and competence, and how neglected and marginal users find successful uses, unknown or dismissed before by the experts’. Similarly, Fortunati (2005: 154) argues that ‘the mobile phone is an excellent concrete example of how users change the behaviour patterns that are inscribed inside a technological device’. Perhaps the most prominent example of this

‘user power’ is the evolution of the text message as a medium of communication. The unexpected uptake and use of the short messaging service (SMS), or more commonly ‘texting’, has been well-established (see, for example, Goggin, 2006; Agar, 2003; Kasesniemi and Rautiainen, 2002). Initially conceived by developers as little more than a side-product with minimal value, texting was seen as too awkward to be commercially developed. Indeed, the service was initially free until the sudden upsurge into usage prompted the imposition of a charge. The growth of texting as a key means of communication and the inability of developers and marketers to anticipate its success demonstrates both the unpredictable course of commodities and the role of consumers in creating new meanings and uses for the mobile phone.

Further to this, Katz and Sugiyama (2005) identify what they term the ‘user enhancement’ of the mobile phone; that is, the post purchase ‘personalisation’ of the mobile phone. They suggest that this can involve the colouring of the phone or adorning it with stickers or pictures (see also Fortunati, 2005; Green, 2003; Oksman and Rautiainen, 2003). Other forms might be the use of different logos, covers, screen images, or ringtones. Snowden (2005: 114) suggests that the growth of the market for ringtones is, like texting, an example of the innovation of users. She highlights how the mobile phone industry, as with texting, lacked an initial interest in this particular application, but that users valued them as indicators of their individuality and personality. Snowden (2005) notes that the success of texting and ringtones has led to a growing appreciation of the potential revenue that can be accrued: ‘Applications such as ring tones and screen logos, with either audible or visual characteristics that set them apart, have been especially important and has led to other applications that are now

being exploited, including mobile marketing delivered by SMS'.⁵ These examples demonstrate both the consumers role in shaping mobile phone culture and the industry's acumen at taking advantage of commercial opportunities, as Katz and Sugiyama (2005: 78) observe these practices emerge 'both by the well-calculated strategies of the industry and by the creative mind of consumers'.

While it is clear that a great deal of effort, time and money are invested in constructing a public image for the mobile phone, Oksman and Rautiainen (2003) suggest that for younger users the role of the mobile phone as a fashion accessory and status symbol is diminishing as it becomes more of a natural part of everyday life. Ling and Yttri (2002: 164) suggest a thin line exists between being fashionable and being ostentatious: 'there is a fine balance to be struck. One must be savvy in terms of the appropriate models and styles... one needs to know the appropriate way to carry the device... [and] the line beyond which expensive devices are seen as conspicuous display'. In this context, Green (2003) identifies how some young people are critical of the fashion aspects of mobile phone use, taking an explicit position against such practices.

For Oksman and Rautiainen (2003: 300) then, teenage users are more often quite pragmatic in relation to issues such as cost and value, noting that 'they [teenagers] emphasize the functional value, the quality, and durability of the mobile device and strive to minimize their bills'. Subsequently, they state that young people value the mobile phone for the role it plays in the construction and maintenance of their social lives, what they term an 'expressive-affective relationship'. However, they do acknowledge that style is still a consideration suggesting that there has been a shift

⁵ For a business oriented discussion of this phenomenon see Haig (2002) and Lindgren, Jedbratt and Svensson (2002)

from a focus on the style of the device itself to ancillary aspects, such as ringtones and logos.

Fortunati (2003: 54) notes 'more consequential than the mobile's outward appearance, which at a minimum must be acceptable aesthetically, is its place within the aesthetic of communication'. Here Fortunati (2003) refers to the 'aesthetic of communication' as the ways in which the mobile phone is used to manage interpersonal relationships. It is then the ways in which the mobile phone is used, rather than its material character that shapes people's perception of it. The mobile phone has come to embody more general aspects of youth culture; such as the role of peer groups, and the desire for autonomy, freedom and independence. The symbolic value of the mobile phone relates increasingly to the types of emotional connections it facilitates and cultural imperatives it represents, rather than its position as a fashion accessory.

1.5 Conclusion

While mobile phone research has grown in the last number of years, there is still a relative neglect of the area within the social sciences. A number of reasons contribute to this lack. As Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002) note, the familiarity and perceived ordinariness of the mobile phone, and the telephone generally, invites little consideration of its place in contemporary life. Equally, the mobile phone is often viewed as frivolous, unnecessary and an indulgence beyond academic interest (see Goggin, 2006). Nevertheless, as the preceding discussion indicates mobile phone culture is the subject of a range of important, relevant debates within contemporary sociological thought. It is the very ordinariness of the mobile phone that makes it such

an extraordinary site of research. Within a short time, it has passed almost unnoticed from novelty to necessity, wherein not having one is viewed as oddly suspicious. In its role in the habitual, even mundane, aspects of life the mobile phone is both a significant part of contemporary society and an important realm of considered sociological attention.

As this chapter outlines, existing mobile phone research has been informed by a range of valuable theoretical perspectives, principally the social shaping of technology approach, domestication studies, and the circuit of culture approach. The use of these approaches has been important in focusing research on the ways in which the mobile phone is made use of in particular contexts. Equally, this existing work offers certain ideas that complement my own, for example an interest in delineating the social context and meaning of mobile phone use. However, rather than replicating the domestication or circuit of culture approaches, the theoretical foundations of my research, as explored in the following chapters, are based on work within the sociology of consumption, cultural studies and youth studies. Thus, my approach, while sharing research interests with much of the existing work within mobile phone studies, offers a model rooted explicitly in forms of cultural analysis derived, in particular, from debates within the sociology of youth culture and consumption.

As discussed, a good deal of existing research emphasises young people's use of the mobile phone. The role of the mobile phone in young people's lives relates to significant examples of their everyday experiences. It intersects with their relationship with parents, peers and aspects of their self and group identities. While its use affords young people an increased sense of freedom and maturity, the mobile phone is also a

means through which they remain involved with and dependent on parents and family. The mobile phone also has a strong symbolic value through which young people express both their own sense of self and their role within peer culture. In particular, this research is interested in exploring these issues in the context of contemporary youth culture. Youth cultural research emphasises the central role of forms of consumption within young people's everyday lives, through which their marginality is often opposed and resisted through various cultural practices. Within subcultural theory, this is afforded an explicitly political dimension, with particular reference to forms of structural inequality and difference. More recently, youth cultural research has tended to focus on what are perceived as the ordinary moments of creativity within everyday life, at best micro-political gestures, that young people are engaged in. The question then is how can we situate young people's use of the mobile phone within these wider debates around consumption, culture, agency, power?

Chapter 2: Understanding Youth Culture

2.1 Introduction

Youth cultural research is distinguished by a focus on how young people's creativity and their sense of solidarity are expressed in their cultural practices and formations. In particular, youth culture is linked with the development of consumer culture. The emergence of youth culture during the latter half of the twentieth century was primarily composed around conspicuous consumption and the pursuit of leisure activities – rock 'n' roll records, clothes, films, magazines, etc. (see, for example, Osgerby, 2004; Miles, 2002; Stainton Rogers, 1997). In *The Teenage Consumer* (1959), Abrams documented this emerging youth culture, accentuating the idea of youth not as delinquent or problematic but as an increasingly important consumer group. More recently, Miles (2002) observes how the association between youth and consumption continues to intensify, with cultural consumption forming a central animating force of young people's everyday lives. This relationship is visible in young people's appropriation of the mobile phone, through which a range of cultural practices are expressed and enacted.

In particular, I stress how this relationship between youth and consumption is marked by ambiguities, inconsistencies and contradictions. As Hall and Whannel (1998 [1964]: 63) suggest: 'Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured: it is an area of self-expression for the young and a lush grazing pasture for the commercial providers'. The purpose of this chapter then is to explore ways of looking at this relationship, to expose and articulate a position that accents the ways in

which young people navigate and negotiate the terrain of their everyday lives. Specifically, I examine how young people are active and creative social agents, who have a significant role in shaping and constructing their own lived culture. In short, I propose that while young people's everyday lives are significantly structured, ordered and controlled, we can discern how young people exert their own cultural preferences and power within their practices of cultural consumption.

This research emphasises how this is demonstrated through young people's use of the mobile phone. As outlined in Chapter 1, research on the mobile phone contains a strong emphasis on younger users. As Castells et al (2007: 127) observe: 'there is youth culture that finds in mobile communication an adequate form of expression and reinforcement'. This 'expression and reinforcement' is found in a range of activities, including its role in peer culture, sociability, autonomy, etc. However, within mobile phone research generally, explicit attention to the concept of youth culture in this context has been underdeveloped, and, in particular, the relationship this has to practices of consumption and issues of cultural power and agency. In this discussion of youth cultural research then an emphasis is placed on establishing an understanding of how young people's cultural practices, such as the use of the mobile phone, provide a meaningful and significant site for the enactment of this cultural power and agency.

2.2 Youth Culture and Functionalism

Sociological interest in youth has a rich and diverse history. The Chicago Schools' study of deviance incorporated a related interest in issues of juvenile delinquency. Equally, Mannheim's discussion of 'generations' explored the possibility of social

groups being distinguished by age by arguing that specific age groups based upon a 'common location' in the social and historical processes could share common dispositions. However, the first significant sociological discussion of 'youth culture' was developed within the rubric of functionalism. This position combined the general tenets of functionalist theory with developmental psychology; viewing youth as serving important functions for both young people and society, provided that young people successfully pass through a series of developmental stages. While ultimately the limits of functionalist theories of youth are those of functionalist theories generally, it proved important in highlighting emerging features of youth culture. In particular, functionalist writers emphasise the importance of leisure activities and peer groups to young people, and highlight how youth culture is characterised by its own sets of internal codes and practices.

2.2.1 The Emergence of Youth Culture

Savage (2007) declares 1945 as year zero in the 'creation of youth', a point in history where the identification of the 'Teenager' coincided with the United States' victory in World War II. For Savage (2007), this marks the beginning of a conception of youth culture, one inextricably linked to leisure and consumption, which has been successfully exported as part of the global dominance of the United States. While in Europe the growing focus on youth had become politicised by the growth of radical nationalism increasingly evident across the continent (see Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998: 62-8), youth in the United States was the subject of a different social project – the entrenchment of industrial capitalism. As Savage (2007: 92) observes: 'Just as the

young of northern Europe were being programmed to fight... the youth of America were to play their full part within the business ideal’.

In the United States, from the early part of the twentieth century, policies were developed to curb instances of juvenile delinquency and to extend education to all young people. Concurrently, the newly emerging mass media found a ready-made market amongst the growing adolescent population, who proved grist to the mill of the incipient consumer society. It was Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley that helped shape this new youth culture, as American society proved adept at producing not just productive and efficient workers but also willing and happy consumers. These developments culminated in the Allies military victory in World War II, which was twinned with America’s cultural victory; and, as Savage (2007) concludes, ‘it was the Americans who were emerging as the true victors, as their culture and their mass consumption economy began to sweep through Europe’. As Savage (2007: 465) observes: ‘The post-war spread of American values would be spearheaded by the idea of the Teenager. This new type was the ultimate psychic match for the times: living in the now, pleasure-seeking, product hungry, embodying the new global society where social inclusion was to be granted through purchasing power’.

However, Savage (2007) argues that to merely presume that youth culture was born at this time ignores its gestation – what he terms the ‘pre-history of the Teenager’, in which the contours of the now familiar configuration of youth can be discerned. Beginning in the late nineteenth century he isolates a series of social, cultural and political moments that highlight the various attempts to define the stage of youth, suggesting that in this period ‘there were many conflicting attempts to envisage and

define the status of youth – whether through concerted efforts to regiment adolescents using national policies, or through artistic, prophetic visions that reflected the wish of the young to live by their own rules’ (Savage, 2007: xiii). Savage (2007) is not alone in identifying these historical foundations of youth. In his influential study, Musgrove (1964) points to the concurrent developments of the adolescent and industrial society. More recently, Hendrick (1990) argues that early conceptions of youth were focused on the working-class as part of Victorian concerns around the problems of urbanisation and boy labour. Similarly, Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998) suggest that the idea of youth as a distinct entity can be equated with the development of modernity.

The social changes wrought during modernity, namely industrialisation and urbanisation, created a more conspicuous and unregulated mass of young people, which in turn raised concerns regarding social order and control. These disruptions led to greater state involvement in young people’s lives, which focused on issues of education, employment and crime. In particular, the introduction of mass education, the tightening up of employment laws and regulations, and the development of a distinct legal definition of youth served to bind young people to specific state structures (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998: 59-62). As Wyn and White (1997) observe, youth is a ‘relational concept’, which is defined in relation to particular social, historical and cultural factors rather than as a specific age category or biological stage.

Musgrove (1964: 2) suggests that the accommodation of youth within the social structure was eased by the parallel development of a ‘psychology of adolescence which helped create what it describes’. The most notable figure in this regard was G. Stanley Hall, whose two-volume *Adolescence* (1904) was the first significant academic study of

the new concept of youth. Savage (2007) casts Hall as both a visionary and a reactionary who offered the first systematic definition of youth, while at the same time seeking to help control what he saw as a volatile condition. Hall (1904) viewed adolescence as a stage of development punctuated by moments of emotional ‘storm and stress’ brought on by the transition to adulthood. It is, for Hall (1904), a period where individuals are removed from the comfortable safe haven of childhood and are faced with biological and social upheavals that require careful navigation. In this regard, this work reflects a recurrent theme within many discourses of youth, namely the idea of youth as a problem that requires adult monitoring and control. Hall (1904) highlighted the often perilous state of young people’s lives, however, he was also progressive in calling for the accommodation of the needs of adolescents into particular social institutions, suggesting that ‘for the complete apprenticeship to life youth needs repose, leisure, art, legends, romance, idealisation, and in a word humanism’ (Hall, 1904, quoted in Savage, 2007: 72). Hall’s work helped establish the psychology of adolescence and proved influential in the subsequent developments within functionalist accounts of youth culture.

2.2.2 *‘Swell Guys’ & ‘Glamour Girls’*

The application of the functionalist perspective to the study of youth culture was initially outlined by Talcott Parsons (1942 and 1963). Parsons’ work in this area, although constituting only two short essays, was influential in setting the agenda for subsequent functionalist readings of youth culture. Parsons (1942) suggests that the ‘phenomena of “youth culture”’ can be contrasted with the orientations of the adult

world, with youth culture emerging as a product of the tensions between adults and young people. Writing in the 1940s he argued that the emerging patterns of the new youth culture represented a distinct shift for young people from the process of growing up experienced by their parents' generation. In general, he identified youth culture as marked by 'irresponsibility', a desire to have a good time and a loose antagonism towards adults. Parson's analysis is populated by what in hindsight can be seen as standard archetypes of the youth of the period – a world of 'swell guys' and 'glamour girls'. In contrast to the adult world of educational and occupational success, youth culture is seen as privileging sport as the main avenue of achievement, particularly amongst young males. Equally, the importance of physical attractiveness is emphasised as a crucial element in maintaining one's peer group status.

These shifts represent a significant break with previous experience and as such present a challenge to successful retention and functioning of the social structure secured in traditional sex roles. Parsons (1942) identifies the idealisation of youth culture by adults as both representative of the strain and insecurity within adult life and also the longing for what they wished their own youth had been. He suggests that amidst these patterns of behaviour related to pleasure and freedom, youth is also a time of substantial strain and insecurity brought on by the disengagement from the comfortable existence of childhood and the taking on of adult roles and responsibilities.

2.2.3 Youth in a Class of its Own

While Parsons' work set the tone, perhaps the most detailed analysis of youth from within the functionalist school was provided by Eisenstadt (1956), who argues that

youth is of particular importance to society in that it is the time in which an individual is prepared for adulthood. Before attaining adult status children must be 'socialised' into the norms and values of society; they must learn social codes and rules of behaviour and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to perform as adults. While 'primitive' societies displayed little significant shift in terms of status and values between childhood and adulthood, Eisenstadt (1956) claims that in modern industrial societies there is a marked 'structural gap' between the family in which an individual is raised and the social and economic system in which they are eventually placed. As the family increasingly assumes emotional functions and becomes decoupled from its economic role, new institutions are required to help facilitate socialisation and manage the process whereby individuals move from the family to the wider social system.

Eisenstadt (1956) stresses two important elements of this process. First, young people have a 'marginal' status within society – they are usually either in some form of formal education or employed in unskilled labour and are not yet fully integrated into the economic structure. Equally, they are not yet fully incorporated into the social structure in that while they have emerged from one family they have not yet formed another and much of their free time is still regulated and controlled by adult authorities. Second, the 'new institutions' that have emerged to manage this transition, including formal education as well as more implicit forms of education such as youth services and the mass media, help renew the structures of society and prepare young people for their adult roles by inculcating the norms and values of wider society. While the purpose of these institutions is to shape the lives of young people, they are controlled by adults, giving young people little power within the context of this system. This shared

experience of subordination creates a climate in which youth culture emerges as a site in which young people assert their own sense of power. Eisenstadt (1956) argues then that youth culture is the result of young people's efforts to wrest back control in their own lives and develop an independent identity. He suggests that the family becomes an inadequate sphere for the development of identity and the attainment of full maturity: 'In the youth groups the adolescent seeks some framework for the development and crystallization of his identity, for the attainment of personal autonomy, and for his effective transition into the adult world' (Eisenstadt, 1956: 32).

The importance of youth culture lies, therefore, in its codes of conduct and style which are under the control of the young people themselves and are formed through peer group interaction. Youth culture functions as a means through which to ease the anxiety and insecurity that characterises the transition from childhood to adulthood. Eisenstadt (1956) emphasises that it is not the fact that some young people become 'deviant', but that most 'deviant' young people become 'normal' adults. Although generations of young people may exhibit behaviour that rebels against and deviates from the norms and values of their elders, contemporary industrial society succeeds in socialising each generation, keeping society 'functioning'. In this context, peer group relationships are attributed a great level of importance. Rather than providing or imposing a specific set of norms or values they offer a set of relationships that aid in lessening the psychological tension of adolescence.

The central role of peer groups in young people's identity formation is also identified by Coleman (1961). He suggests that as full-time education replaces full-time employment as their main activity, adolescents are cut off from adult society and

isolated within the educational system. In this context, they develop idiosyncratic elements of communication with their peers that differentiates them from adult society – constituting a ‘class’ of their own. This distinct youth culture is characterised by three key elements, which set it apart from adult culture: a focus on pleasure over education; peer popularity based on being ‘cool’; and an opposing value system to parents. Coleman (1961) suggests that the problems young people encountered represented a passing phase before integration into the wider social system. Peer groups were seen as a means, rather than an obstruction, through which this integration could be achieved, and which could be harnessed for the positive goals of education. Functionalist accounts of youth culture reflect a number of ‘common sense’ perceptions about young people, an influence that remains evident within much youth social policy (Lalor, de Róiste & Devlin, 2007: 45). Functionalist interpretations of youth culture then can be seen as general and descriptive in character, but somewhat lacking in depth and complexity. Youth is understood largely in terms of its perceived homogenous character; with narratives of gender, race and class largely excluded. Equally, functionalist readings propose a series of specific stages through which young people progress in the transition to adulthood; however, recent youth transitions research shows that this process is more fluid than these accounts would claim. In the sections that follow I look more closely at the subsequent theorisation of youth culture which has emerged. In particular, I examine how practices of cultural consumption have come to form an increasingly prominent aspect of young people’s experiences and how this may be understood.

2.3 Youth Culture, Cultural Studies and Subcultural Theory

Subcultural theory of youth emerged during the 1970s as a reaction to the prevailing view that the post-war consumer boom was eroding existing class distinctions within society. Subcultural theorists confronted and contested this suggestion, by arguing that it is more important to consider how wider social inequalities are represented and reproduced within youth culture. The most prominent work within this tradition was developed within the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), alternatively designated as the 'Birmingham School'. This work focuses on the emergence of youth subcultures based around leisure activities and consumption and the link between subcultural practices and class relations. However, approaching the study of youth from a class perspective was not of itself a novel development. For example, Hollingshead (1949) had previously argued that young people's social status and behaviour was chiefly determined by their class position. Equally, Sheila Allen (1968) contended that within capitalist society different class positions, more than age, was a determinant of one's social experience. Graham Murdock (1975) also questions what he terms the 'myth of classlessness', which promoted the idea that the generation gap had replaced social class as the main cleavage in British society. In ideas that would be echoed in the work of the Birmingham School, Murdock (1975) argues that young people's leisure and consumption practices could be more readily understood as efforts to deal with the contradictions of their class position (see also Mungham and Pearson, 1976).

2.3.1 The Emergence of Subcultural Theory

While subcultural theory formalised a new line of inquiry into youth culture it did not spring box-fresh from the minds of Birmingham School scholars, but bore the imprint of an array of divergent theoretical traditions. In the first instance, the direct origins of the concept of 'subculture' can be traced back to the 1920's and 1930's and the Chicago School's studies of juvenile delinquency and deviant behaviour. A number of models were developed that attempted to explain deviance as structured by social constraints rather than individual psychology and the ways in which particular subcultures 'normalized' forms of deviant behaviour; for example, Merton's (1957) discussion of 'means and goals' and Becker's (1963) 'labelling' theory. In particular, British subcultural theorists shared an interest in the relationship between subcultures and society, and how deviant behaviour is linked to subcultural values, which can then be understood as contextually 'normal'.

However, while the Chicago School's influential work on deviance provided the specific idiomatic context for the concept of 'subculture', the key theoretical lineage of British subcultural theory can be seen as the strands of intellectual work commonly gathered under the banner 'British Cultural Studies'. Of particular importance was culturalism, emergent from the 1950's, and also the influence of the writings of European Marxist and structuralist thinkers of the 1960's and 1970's (see Turner, 2003). At the heart of 'culturalism' is a more expansive 'social definition' of culture. Storey (2001: 44-5) observes that this approach developed a tripartite understanding of culture. First, the 'anthropological' position that presents culture as describing a particular way of life; second, that culture embodies meanings and values; and third, that the

understanding of these meanings and values within a particular way of life, a particular culture, is the purpose of cultural analysis. According to Hall (1986[1981]: 39), 'culturalism' constitutes a significant line of thought that moves beyond that which preceded it: '...it conceptualizes culture as interwoven with all social practices; and those practices, in turn, as a common form of human activity: sensuous human praxis, the activity through which men and women make history'. However, as Hall (1981) notes, this strand of British cultural studies would have been impoverished were it not for the subsequent influence of 'structuralism'. Hall (1981) specifically highlights the writing of Gramsci, Althusser and Levi-Strauss, and the identification of 'ideology' as a key concept in understanding cultural relations and interactions. The institutionalisation of cultural studies within the CCCS brought the 'two paradigms' of culturalism and structuralism together in an often contradictory relationship, and opened up a dialogue with 'western Marxism'.

Phil Cohen's (1972) essay 'Subcultural Conflict and Working Class Community', produced from within the CCCS, had a decisive influence on the subsequent development of subcultural theory (see Gelder, 1997). Cohen (1972) shares the Chicago School's preoccupation with community and the local, and sees subcultures as symptomatic of the decline of working-class communities. He argues that subcultural groups, such as skinheads, represent an effort to recover a semblance of traditional community values that had become eroded during post-war redevelopment in Britain. Through the appropriation of a particular 'look' and the acquisition of 'territory' they are seeking to recover elements of the parent culture that have disappeared in the wake of suburban growth and resolve this crisis of class – what he termed 'the magical

recovery of community'. Subcultures, for Cohen (1972), represent an expression of difference from parents but also the desire to maintain parental identification. They are, therefore, conservative by nature in that they are recreating an imagined prelapsarian vision of working-class community. Equally, the location of subcultural identity within leisure rather than work is emblematic of how those in subcultures are seen to have 'no future', offering no long-term site of resistance against forms of structural inequality. This theme of ultimately hollow empowerment would be a familiar thread running through the Birmingham School's output.

2.3.2 Resistance Through Rituals

The seminal volume *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) remains the most prominent statement of the subcultural theory of youth. The collection gathers together a range of research focusing on the relationship between class conflict and youth subcultures. Referencing a variety of examples, its authors identify youth subcultures, such as punks, teddy boys, mods and skinheads, as both expressions of rebellion and indicative of the reproduction of dominant class and power relations. Its introduction, written by John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, sounds the theoretical keynote of subcultural theory. As with earlier accounts of youth, Clarke et al (1976) point to how the marked social changes in the aftermath of the Second World War, such as the extension of higher education, increased affluence, the growth of mass communication and mass culture, the increase in consumption and the emergence of leisure industries specifically targeted at young people, were interrelated with how youth culture was interpreted and understood. However, Clarke et al (1976) offer a challenge to the

contention that this new post-war youth were a classless entity. They suggest instead that, while the emergence of a style-based youth culture marked young people's increased consumer power, it also represented the persistence of class divisions within society.

In this context, Clarke et al (1976) assert that 'youth as a concept is unthinkable'. They claim the terms 'youth' and 'youth culture' are part of the lexicon of common-sense that identifies youth almost solely in terms of market manipulation and exploitation. They continue, suggesting that these terms render things more rather than less obscure: '...what it disguises and represses – differences between different strata of youth, the class-basis of youth cultures, the relation of 'Youth Culture' to the parent culture and the dominant culture, etc. – is more significant than what it reveals' (Clarke, et al, 1976: 15). Deconstructing the concept of youth culture as having 'little or no explanatory power', they reject it in favour of the narrower, but more complex, structural concept of subculture; adopting the latter term to explore the 'dialectic between youth and the youth market industry', that is, how youth groups are both incorporated by the market but also how they themselves appropriate elements provided by the market for the construction of their own subcultural forms (Clarke et al, 1976: 15-16). Clarke et al (1976: 47) observe that youth subcultures involve:

A set of shared social rituals which underpin their collective identity and define them as a 'group' instead of a mere collection of individuals. They adopt and adapt material objects – goods and possessions – and reorganise them into distinctive 'styles' which express the collectivity of their being-as-a-group

Subcultures are theorised as attempts to collectively resolve particular groups' marginal and subordinate position within the social structure. They are forms of resistance to dominant cultural norms and efforts to win space for the expression of their subcultural

identities. This winning of space is viewed both literally as the reclamation of 'cultural space in the neighbourhood and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the street corner' (Clarke et al, 1976: 45), and symbolically as part of young people's responses to the particular set of ideological problems they are faced with. Subcultural practices then are viewed as axiomatic of resistance to a way of life structured by forces of authority, and as a means for young people to make sense of their marginality and reconcile the contradictions they are offered by parents, the media, the state, etc.

This conceptualisation of youth resistance draws explicitly from the work of Gramsci, and, in particular, his discussion of hegemony and how class relations within capitalism are based on a continual hegemonic struggle. For Gramsci, within late capitalist societies, the power of the bourgeoisie is won by consent rather than domination. He highlighted a shift from economic to ideological control, and the increased role of cultural institutions (e.g. the media, the family, education) in organising and reproducing these power relations. Gramsci asserted that consent is maintained through processes of negotiation and regulation carried out within civil society. It was this model of resistance, struggle and ideological control that fortified subcultural analyses of youth.

These patterns of youth subcultural resistance are drawn out in *Resistance Through Rituals* through a series of case studies. Clarke (1976a) explores the skinhead subculture and, following Cohen (1972), suggests that they symbolize 'an attempt to re-create through the 'mob' the traditional working class community as a submission for the real decline of the latter' (Clarke, 1976a: 99). Jefferson discusses teddy boys' style

in the context of young working class males increased affluence; suggesting that this allowed them to buy into a middle-class image by adopting the Edwardian suits of the 1950s, which were originally associated with the middle-class. Jefferson (1976: 86) argues that the teddy boys' mode of dress has a 'symbolic meaning [that] becomes explicable as both expression of their *social reality* (basically outsiders and forced to live by their wits) and their *social 'aspirations'* (basically an attempt to gain high, albeit grudging status for an ability to live smartly, hedonistically and by their wits in an urban setting)'. Hebdige (1976: 91) juxtaposes the mundane working day of the mod with his pleasure-seeking nights, suggesting: 'the mod was determined to compensate for his relatively low position in the daytime status-stakes over which he had no control, by exercising complete dominion over his estate – his appearance and choice of leisure pursuits'. However, ultimately these responses are symbolic and transient, with Clarke et al (1976: 47) noting that 'there is no 'subcultural solution' to working-class youth unemployment, educational disadvantage, compulsory miseducation, dead-end jobs, the routinisation and specialisation of labour, low pay and the loss of skills. Subcultural strategies cannot match, meet or answer the structuring dimensions emerging in this period for the class as a whole'.

2.3.3 Subcultural Theory in Practice

Two authors who embody many of the preoccupations of the subcultural approach generally, as well as many of its shortcomings, are Paul Willis and Dick Hebdige. Both have been seen, in at times different ways, as especially influential in carrying forward the theoretical framework initiated in *Resistance through Rituals*. Willis' (1977)

Learning to Labour examines the way in which class differences are reproduced within the institutional context of the school, pressing home the idea of subcultural resistance as ultimately offering no solution to working-class marginalisation. In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* Hebdige (1979) explores the relationship between class, ethnicity and subcultural style. In particular, he examines issues of cultural authenticity and the relationship between subcultures and the dominant culture.

In terms of his methodological approach, Willis (1977) provides the most sophisticated and extensive study within the early CCCS research of youth subcultures. Situated in a West Midlands comprehensive, Willis focuses on 12 working-class students, whom he calls the 'lads'. Using participant observation, informal interviews, diaries and focus group discussions, as well as interviews with teachers, parents and career officers, he immersed himself in the school and the locality. Willis (1977) argues that the 'lads' form a 'counter-school subcultural grouping', which opposes the norms and values expressed within the school. Displaying little interest in school work, the lads prefer instead to flout school rules and 'have a laff (sic)'. Willis (1977) also highlights how the 'lads' are keen to adopt aspects of the wider male, working-class culture through drinking, smoking and the expression of strong sexist and racist attitudes. This behaviour creates distinction and empowerment amongst the lads, who view themselves as superior to the more compliant and conformist pupils – the 'ear 'oles'.

While offering temporary escape from their subordinate position, the lads' behaviour contains within it the seeds of self-damnation in that it prepares them for ultimately assuming subordinate roles in unskilled labour. Willis (1977) suggests that the responses developed by the 'lads' against the dominant school order reflect deeply

embedded characteristics of working-class culture. In particular, an emphasis on the importance of the male peer group over individual achievement and a privileging of manual work over academic work. In this way, Willis (1977) argues that such resistance offers no escape from their class position; with the lads being suitably prepared for taking up unskilled jobs, with the power relations of the factory mirroring those of the school. Willis' (1977) assertion then is that the role of the working-class in manual labour is reproduced through alienation from school culture and socialization within the peer group, an argument that has subsequently been revisited by Corrigan (1979). More recently, Lynch and Lodge (2002) examine the persistence of class differences and inequalities within the Irish education system, in ways that reflect many of Willis' (1977) earlier concerns.

For Willis (1977), this paradox of resistance turning back on itself is rooted in complex ideological processes formed within wider society, the education system and working-class culture itself. He contends that this is not primarily related to the practices of the schools but to wider structural and cultural factors that are played out there. In this way, the ideology of working-class culture leads the lads to view educational achievement as futile and as offering no escape from their social position. Willis (1977) concludes that this process of 'self-induction' into the labour force represents one way in which working-class culture is reproduced and is emblematic of how it is constrained and regulated by state institutions in the pursuit of reproducing the 'social totality'.

Hebdige (1979) identifies how immigration patterns in Britain since the 1950s, which had previously been seen as rupturing class structures, created a closer cultural relationship between black and white youths. Hebdige (1979) views this as crucial in

the development of subcultural styles; for example, both skinhead culture and elements of punk drew heavily from the West Indian musical traditions of ska and reggae. Hebdige (1979) is primarily interested then in issues of style and the interpretation of how various youth subcultures use dress, music, etc. to produce particular sets of meanings. In this context, he offers what is principally a semiotic reading of subcultures. His underlying preoccupation is with exploring the ways in which practices of cultural consumption framed the formation and experience of subcultures. He characterises youth subcultures as being ‘concerned first and foremost with consumption’ (Hebdige, 1979: 94-5), and argues that: ‘[I]t is basically the way in which commodities are used in subculture which marks the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations’ (Hebdige, 1979: 103).

In line with earlier subcultural studies, Hebdige (1979) suggests a ‘homology’ between aspects of a subculture’s style (e.g. dress, music, etc.) and its general behaviour and attitudes. The function of homological analysis is to establish the relationship between the consumption patterns of a subculture and its cultural meaning; that is, how the structure and content of texts and practices reveal ‘the structure, style, typical concerns, attitudes and feelings of the social group’. In *Profane Culture* (1978), Willis charts his encounters with two particular subcultural groups, motorcycle boys and hippies, and used the concept of homology to investigate the relationship between musical taste and other facets of the groups’ lifestyles. For example, Willis (1978) found that popular music from the 1950’s had a central role in the culture of the motorcycle boys, suggesting a homology between this musical form and the attitudes of the subculture based around the expression of distinctiveness, authenticity, aggressive masculinity and

movement. In general, Willis (1978) argues that this form of homological analysis allows for a more complex understanding of cultural relationships, which pushes past the 'one-way determination' of meaning. As Willis (1978) argues, this association between group values and cultural objects is mutually constitutive.

However, Middleton (1990) criticises Willis (1978) for exaggerating the extent of these homological relationships and for drawing too tight a boundary around youth groups and ignoring their relationship to other youth cultures, parent cultures and the dominant culture (see also Martin, 2004). In spite of this, Middleton (1990: 10) homology has use in a 'qualified sense' as 'it seems likely that some signifying structures are more *easily* articulated to the interests of one group than are some others; similarly, that they are more easily articulated to the interests of one group than those of another'. Willis (1990) retains the terms in his later work, while Kahn-Harris (2004) identifies a homology between extreme metal music and the concerns and circumstances of the genre's fans. Similarly, I argue that there is a discernable homological connection between youth groups and the mobile phone, as it reflects certain 'typical concerns, attitudes and feelings' of young people.

Like Willis (1978), Hebdige (1979) views youth subcultures as forming around homologies between styles, music and values. He argues that punk circa 1977 offered a chaotic appropriation of styles and symbols of previous subcultures and eras. Hebdige (1979) suggests that this use of commodities was expressed through a process of 'bricolage', whereby subcultures appropriate commercially produced goods to serve their own distinct purposes. Initially used by Levi-Strauss, and adopted by Clarke (1976b) in examining subcultural styles, bricolage represents a process of adaptation

whereby items are used in ways not initially intended, displacing them from their normal or usual context. For example, teddy boys wearing Saville Row suits and punks using bin liners and safety pins to construct a distinctive style and fashion. Hebdige (1979) argues that this reordering of commodities produces oppositional meanings, which represent a form of 'refusal' of the dominant order.

However, Hebdige (1979: 94) suggests that, despite such acts of 'refusal', youth subcultures are vulnerable to commodification through 'the conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form)'. He argues then that they progress from being original and oppositional to being incorporated and ideologically neutralized by their commercial marketing within the mainstream culture industries. Thus, as Hebdige (1979: 96) describes: 'Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must end by establishing new set of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones'. The difficulty with this conclusion is the somewhat overstated lines of difference drawn between 'authentic' subcultures and an 'inauthentic' mainstream. More recently youth cultural research has envisaged the relationship between youth culture and the marketplace as much more complex and intertwined, with the divisions between production and consumption becoming much less discrete.

2.3.4 Critiques of Subcultural Theory

While some theorists have sought to resolve the difficulties with youth subcultural theory from within, others have suggested the dissolution of subcultural analysis in favour of alternative approaches. The most immediate critique of subcultural theory

was issued by McRobbie and Garber (1976), whose chapter in *Resistance through Rituals* brought the approach's failure to include domestic relations and its masculine bias under scrutiny. They highlight the 'invisibility' of girls within subcultural analysis:

The absence of girls from the whole of the literature in this area is quite striking... Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings in general... When they *do* appear, it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women with which we are now so familiar... or they are fleetingly and marginally presented

(McRobbie & Garber, 1976: 209)

For example, McRobbie and Garber (1976: 209-210) observe how Willis (1978), in his study of motor-bike boys, refers to girls almost exclusively in terms of how they are viewed by male respondents. In subsequent work, McRobbie (1991) criticises Willis (1979) for his reluctance, in *Learning to Labour*, to attend to the often explicit misogyny and aggressive masculinity that he encountered amongst those he interviewed and observed, failing to engage critically with their attitudes and actions.

McRobbie and Garber (1976) note that this exclusion of girls' from early subcultural accounts can be linked to researchers' neglect of the role of family and domestic relations in young people's lives. They suggest that the inability of subcultural theorists to include a discussion of home or family excludes a significant portion of the experience of youth. McRobbie and Garber (1976) identify these areas as prominent sites of cultural activity, particularly amongst teenage girls. Situating their analysis within the domestic sphere, McRobbie and Garber (1976) argue that teenage girls do not coalesce within distinct subcultural formations as a means of resisting dominant cultural norms in the same ways as teenage boys. They contend that girls' negotiate space in different ways and through different forms of 'ritual' behaviour that are in response to their sexual subordination. For example, occupying groups based around a

‘teenybopper’ or ‘bedroom’ culture, built around a shared obsession with pop idols and girls’ magazines like *Jackie* and *Just Seventeen* (see also McRobbie, 1991). In this context, teenage girls have space to create meaningful sites of resistance against their sexual subordination. However, McRobbie and Garber (1976) also characterise much of girls’ subcultural practices as ‘highly manufactured’ and ‘totally packaged’, suggesting that ‘the small, structured and highly manufactured space that is available for ten to fifteen year old girls to create a personal and autonomous area seems to be offered only on the understanding that these strategies also symbolise a future general subordination – as well as a present one’ (McRobbie and Garber, 1976: 221).

While much of McRobbie’s subsequent work involves a critical interrogation of the ‘classic’ subcultural accounts of the late 1970’s, she did not necessarily deem the enterprise as without merit. On the contrary, her work consistently exhibits a belief in the importance of structures of inequality, such as class and gender, as well as the potentially subversive character of subcultural practices. She acknowledges the importance of much subcultural research, in particular the work of Willis and Hebdige, and the influence it has on her own work. However, while disinclined to completely shed older ideas, McRobbie can be seen as progressively more flexible in her attitude toward popular youth culture, locating active empowerment in practices that might previously been dismissed as passive conformity – for example dance as liberation, shopping as creative, etc.

Erica Carter (1984) develops a number of these points in a cutting critique of masculine-biased youth research. In particular, she rejects subcultural theory as

‘standing on the sidelines of commercial youth culture’ and calls for a closer inspection of the relationship between the market and youth culture. Carter (1984: 198) argues:

...we must shift the terms of the youth culture debate, looking first at the dominant forms of a supposedly conformist culture of consumerism (as well as its everyday subversions). One route into this project is the examination of teenage lifestyles: of their assemblage on the production line of commodities for the teenage market, and their deconstruction, appropriation, subversion and reassemblage by teenage girls themselves

This reading of structures previously considered repressive as opportunities for creative agency underscores the fresh emphasis on practices of consumption within youth cultural research, which has been vigorously pursued in the more recent period. This marks a movement away from subcultural analyses tendency to examine youth groups selectively and which potentially reads into them researchers’ own pre-existing political understandings of subversion and conformity.

A further, and related, criticism of the CCCS’ youth research is its reading of subcultures as exclusively working-class phenomena, which accords them a position of ‘authenticity’. However, this equation of patterns of youth consumption with working-class resistance is, according to Muggleton (2000), a contention based largely on speculation rather than fact. As Frith (1984: 45-6) suggests, there exists a gap between the CCCS’ accounts of youth subcultures and the on-the-ground realities felt and experienced by members of different subcultures. Interestingly, Clarke et al (1976: 16) allude to this potential criticism writing: ‘subcultures are important... [but] they may be less significant than what young people do most of the time’; however, they do little to follow through on this acknowledgement, retaining a very specific and somewhat restricted definition of youth subcultural activity.

Frith (1984: 57), in a related point, highlights how subcultural accounts tend to reflect mass media interest in spectacular forms of behaviour, which excludes 'the subtler ways in which young people resist and seek to change their situation'. He continues arguing that 'youth culture must be explained, then, not by reference to leisure itself, but to young people's position in work and family, to the 'reality' from which leisure is, on occasion, an escape' (Frith, 1984: 58). In this way, young people's cultural practices cannot be disconnected from the ordinary contexts of their everyday experiences. More recently, Kahn-Harris (2004) discusses the 'mundanity' within youth culture. In examining the extreme metal scene, he identifies how participants locate their experiences with reference to the ordinary contexts of family life and peer group connections. As Miles (1995: 35) argues, CCCS research tends to 'concentrate on symbolic aspects of subcultural consumption at the expense of the actual *meanings* that young consumers have for the goods they consume'. In effect, this approach romanticises subcultural practices and groups as embodying forms of working-class resistance against their social plight by reading into them meanings that may not necessarily be there, and ignores the mundane nature of young people's lived experiences – such as family life.

More specifically, Laing (1985) criticises Hebdige's suggestion that punk coheres to a specific ideological impetus consistent with working-class resistance. Laing counters that punk is above all a musical genre, suggesting that the disruptive character of punk is musicological rather than political. He emphasises then the specific distinctiveness of one's relationship to punk music as opposed to the ideological nature of punk in general. Laing (1985) stresses how punk was polysemic, producing ambiguous

responses depending on the context in which it was placed. The subversion of musical form within punk, while at times antagonistic towards standard politics, did little to directly alter structures of power. Equally, Laing (1985) finds fault with the contention that punk rock musicians existed side-by-side with unemployed working-class youth; instead he identifies punk rock groups as professionals situated economically apart from those who constituted their fan base. While punk produced much of its music 'independently' and retained some level of creative control, those who found success often proved susceptible to the entreaties of the major record companies – in Hebdige's terms 'the mainstream'.

Gary Clarke (1981) also contests Hebdige's reading of punk as indicative of 'working-class creativity', alternatively suggesting that punk music and culture developed initially amongst an art-school, avant-garde milieu. Specifically, Clarke (1981) is critical of youth subcultural theorists' celebration of the extraordinary over the ordinary, suggesting it establishes a false division between spectacular subcultures, as avatars of style, and an undifferentiated, and presumably unstylish, 'general public'. Clarke is unconvinced then by Hebdige's suggestion that subcultures exist outside of the mainstream, and that this position grants them qualities of authenticity and originality not found in the products and fashions of mass culture. In contrast, Clarke (1981) offers a more nuanced reading that generates an understanding of how subcultures and mass culture interact. He refutes subculturalists' view of the 'incorporation' of particular styles into the 'mainstream' as an end point, suggesting that youth cultural research 'should take the breakthrough of a style as its starting point'. In this context, Clarke (1981) calls for a critical engagement with 'the activities of all youths to locate

continuities and discontinuities in culture and social relations and to discover the meaning these activities have for the youth themselves'. Clarke's essay then is significant as a call for a more robust theoretical and empirical investigation into young people's cultural consumption. It is this emphasis on exploring the meaning that cultural practices have for young people themselves that we examine in the next section, as well as informing the methodological approach pursued within this research.

2.4 Youth, Consumer Culture & 'Post-Subcultural Theory'

During the 1980s, issues of subcultural formation were marginalised in favour of a growing interest in policy-oriented research within youth studies, with particular reference to education and employment. However, the interest in 'spectacular' subcultures was revived in the late 1980s by the attention afforded the 'acid house' phenomenon of the period. Fuelled by tabloid speculation it became the subject of an old-fashioned moral panic. The confluence of mild hedonism, illicit warehouse parties and raves, and the use of illegal drugs shrouded the culture in an alluring mystique that harkened back to the pre-1980's subcultures. The official censure that followed in 1989-90 in the form of police raids and political interventions only heightened the phenomenon's profile (see, for example, Reynolds, 1999; Redhead, 1993). Similarly, it can be argued that the recent growth of digital media, including the mobile phone, has meant that cultural activity and involvement has become highly complex and increasingly pluralised.

Carrington and Wilson (2004) posit that the emergence of dance music and culture redefined the nature of subcultural organization and participation and promoted various

reconfigurations of the analysis of youth culture. It was in this cultural context that 'post-subcultural theory' emerged. Introduced by Redhead (1990), the term can be loosely applied to a range of analytical approaches that emerged as a reaction to both the problems identified with 'traditional' youth subcultural theory and to offer a means of understanding the increasingly amorphous nature of youth culture and youth style. The identification of more fluid expressions of style, musical taste and identity, and the apparent solubility of class, gender and ethnic differences in youth cultural formations caused a reappraisal of old theoretical models. Amidst the relative harmony and euphoria of the rave scene and club culture, traditional structural divisions were seen as dissolving an immersion in the collective experience of the dance floor.

Blackman (2005), however, criticises aspects of post-subcultural theory, which he terms postmodern subcultural theory, and in particular the work of Redhead. Blackman (2005: 10) argues that this approach:

Is individualistic, superficial and lacks critical reflection, because empirical reality supports the view that youth culture is more socially complex, group orientated, diversified and meaningful than Redhead allows. The new emphasis on the individual and pleasure fails to give young people rights, agency or critically recognize the structures and institutions that seek to impose marginal status on the young

While aspects of Blackman's (2005) critique are valid, it subsumes a range of ideas under the banner of postmodern subcultural theory, which obscures the range and diversity evident within contemporary youth cultural research. As I argue, there is an emerging body of theoretical and empirical research, which successfully demonstrates the socially complex nature of youth culture.

Blackman (2005), however, ignores how a large amount of recent work has privileged aspects of youth culture he argues are being overlooked (e.g. its social complexity, group orientation, etc.). Here I explore some of the key debates within recent youth cultural research, paying specific attention to issues raised in critiques of subculture theory discussed earlier. My starting point in this regard is the later work of Paul Willis (1990), which emphasises young peoples' creative use of commodities. I then address fresh perspectives that seek to reorient our understanding of young people's relationship with the 'mainstream' or dominant culture and to provide new conceptualisations of youth groups beyond that offered by CCCS researchers. Finally, I examine the use of the concepts of 'neo-tribes', originally introduced by Maffesoli (1996), and 'lifestyle' to analyse contemporary youth cultural groupings.

2.4.1 Youth Culture, 'Symbolic Creativity' & 'Grounded Aesthetics'

In *Common Culture* (1990), Willis explores how young people use the products of the culture industries to creatively shape their everyday experiences. In this way, Willis (1990) can be seen as moving away from looking at youth cultural practices as reflecting the embedded structures of the social group to examining the ways in which the social group's cohesion is constructed through these practices. At the same time, a line of continuity can be drawn with Willis' earlier work in that he retains an emphasis on the agency of individuals in creating the symbolic worlds they inhabit, while retaining a sensitivity to the importance of social location – what Stuart Hall terms one's 'conditions of existence'.

Willis (1990) opens with a strong repudiation of public arts policies in both the guise of the Arts Council, which has attempted to circulate 'high art' amongst the masses, as well as the 'community arts' movement. He characterises everyday life as a realm in which young people are already creative without the interventions of the established arts tradition; juxtaposing the elitist 'arts establishment' with 'a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, everyday activity and expression'. Willis (1990) is equally dismissive of what he calls 'armchair semiotics', which seeks to locate 'art equivalents' within popular texts. His concern lies then with culture as an actively lived practice rather than as an inactive object: '[T]he point for us is to try to understand the dynamic, precarious, virtual uses of symbols in common culture, not understanding the everyday through popular representation but understanding popular representation through and in the everyday' (Willis, 1990: 6). He contends that young people deploy commodities to creative ends above and beyond their meaning within the circulation of capital; arguing that for young people this is a question of 'cultural survival'. Willis (1990) suggests that within the context of late modernity youth is increasingly a period of economic dependence, uncertainty, marginality and powerlessness, and asserts that the traditional moorings of stable identity are increasingly irrelevant. Within this vacuum he proposes that meaningful symbolic work and creativity are ways to both retain traditionally based identities and build new alternative ones.

Willis' (1990) argument is illuminated through his discussion of two key concepts: 'symbolic creativity' and 'grounded aesthetics'. Symbolic creativity is part of the symbolic work through which identities – individual and collective – are produced and

reproduced. The everyday is the site of this necessary symbolic work, which is essential for maintaining the daily production and reproduction of human life. The resources for this symbolic work, he argues, are the leisure and commercial commodities derived from the culture industries. However, Willis (1990) disagrees with the overly pessimistic view of capitalism, which disarms the individual from finding meaning in the goods they consume and leaves them lost in a sea of depthless signs and symbols. Alternatively, Willis (1990) proposes that consumption is not simply the site of manipulation and deception but the location of active and emancipating practices. Within this schema it is open to the widest range of possibilities, though it may constrain it also enables and while it describes the dominant it also allows for the subordinate.

While the term ‘symbolic creativity’ operates as an abstraction, it is given a solid realization through ‘grounded aesthetics’ – ‘the yeast of common culture’. Grounded aesthetics gives voice to acts of consumption; whereby consumers are seen not merely as subserviently acquiring commodities but actively constructing meaning through use: ‘[T]his is the creative element in a process whereby meanings are attributed to symbols and practices and where symbols and practices are selected, reselected, highlighted and recomposed to resonate further appropriated and particularized meanings’ (Willis, 1990: 21). In this way, young people, in the course of their everyday lives, create rich and vibrant symbolic worlds that provide a sense of identity and togetherness. In contrast to traditional critiques of mass culture, Willis argues that such worlds can be created through the appropriation and use of mass-produced commodities. He draws on a wide range of research topics to sustain his argument, expounding on the ways in which

young people's participation with and in television, video, technology, pop music, fashion, drinking, fighting, etc. are arenas in which they are actively involved in 'symbolic creativity'. In this way, Willis (1990: 21) prioritises the experiential context of young people's consumption over singular attention to cultural commodities or the market:

People bring living identities to commerce and the consumption of cultural commodities as well as being formed there. They bring experiences, feelings, social position and social memberships to their encounter with commerce. Hence they bring a necessary creative symbolic pressure, not only to make sense of cultural commodities, but partly through them also to make sense of contradiction and structure as they experience them in school, college, production, neighbourhood, and as members of certain genders, races, classes and ages.

For example, in terms of young people as viewers of television and listeners to popular music they are shown to display a depth of knowledge and to be discriminating in terms of their tastes and practices. Willis (1990) contrasts how these issues are understood by those involved and how they are framed within tabloid journalism; arguing that the evidence of the former shows that such practices are not as mindless or prevalent as has been suggested by the latter. He claims then that young people's cultural activities are not reducible to simple idioms, but embody a sort of dramatic performance that confronts everyday banality. In this way, Willis (1990) emphasises that the everyday is suffused with the potential for 'art' and creativity, suggesting that this potential is realised most effectively in young people's practices of consumption.

However, Simon Frith argues that in subsuming all social practice into culture and casting them as creativity, Willis gives little thought to distinctions based on the 'textual' quality of cultural goods. In the book's afterword, Willis (1990) replies to Frith by restating his hypothesis that the meanings and values of cultural commodities

are not inscribed in them but are created through use, and, as such, must be understood within the context of social practice. The aesthetic judgements of academics are seconded to the significance of cultural products within the everyday life of 'ordinary' young people. In making this response Willis revisits the arguments he made in *Profane Culture* with regards to homology, stating that texts and artefacts must be relevant to those who use them: 'There must be some kind of *homology* between the symbolic resources and meanings of the text and the values, focal concerns, meanings and preoccupations of the receivers' (1990: 154).

Willis also attends to the prospective criticism from the 'orthodox Gramscian perspective', which sees popular culture as the locus of hegemonic struggle between the 'popular classes' and the 'power bloc'. Willis is uninterested in this macro-level approach, favouring a more microscopic focus; emphasising how cultural meanings and practices evolve from how commodities are used in the everyday rather than from the system that produces them. Willis' work then proposes a shift away from youth subcultural theory's preoccupation with a negative mainstream, and alternatively suggests how mass culture provides a range of symbolic resources from which young people construct their own 'common culture'. Willis' (1990) focus on how everyday lived experiences shape cultural meaning is important in highlighting the ordinariness of practices of cultural consumption. This is an especially important consideration in relation to young people's use of the mobile phone. Immersed in the prosaic minutiae of young people's everyday lives, the use of the mobile phone demonstrates the often dynamic and creative capacity of youth. This description of a more complex and potentially more positive relationship between the mainstream and youth culture found

in Willis' (1990) work has been further elaborated upon by both Thornton (1995) and Gilbert and Pearson (1999), to whom I now turn.

2.4.2 Swimming in the Mainstream

As noted earlier, youth subcultural theory has been criticised for its positioning of youth subcultures as operating in opposition to the mainstream or dominant culture. Alternatively, a growing focus, evident, for example, in Willis (1990), has been on how the interaction of young peoples' cultural practices with the 'mainstream' is much more complex than the model laid out within the work of the CCCS. Both Thornton (1995) and Gilbert and Pearson (1999) voice these criticisms and offer alternative models of understanding the relationship between youth culture and 'mainstream' commercial culture. Crucial to these discussions is the focus on how young people are immersed in a complex relationship with consumption, through which they actively interpret and create their own sets of cultural experiences.

While she retains the term 'subculture', Thornton (1995) contends that the term, as developed within the cultural studies tradition of the CCCS, is 'empirically unworkable'. Thornton (1995) disagrees with the location of subcultures as outside of and in opposition to mainstream media, suggesting instead that the media and the culture industry are part of how subcultures are formed and validated. In particular, she attempts to resolve the question of subcultural authenticity by looking at how particular cultural formations are represented in the media. She employs the term 'subculture' then in reference to 'taste cultures' that are characterised by the media as subcultural or by their participants as the 'underground'. Thornton (1995) suggests that these 'taste

cultures' are brought together by elements of micro-media (e.g. flyers, free listings, etc.) and subsequently made over as 'subcultures' in positive terms by niche media (e.g. the music and style press) and often pejoratively as 'movements' by the mass media (e.g. the tabloid press and other mainstream news outlets).

Thornton (1995) positions her work within the Chicago School tradition of subcultural analysis, viewing their focus on empirical concerns over detailed theorising as more apt to her particular concerns and ideas. She directly invokes the spirit of the Chicago School by looking at the way in which distinctions are created and maintained between 'cool' and 'hip' youth and their representations within the mainstream. Her concerns then lie not with subversive or resistant subcultures, or dominant ideologies, but with internal subcultural ideologies. That is, seeing how subcultures, dance cultures in particular, are inflected with systems of beliefs that reflect internal cultural agendas. In this regard she coins the term 'subcultural capital'; appropriated from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984).

Thornton (1995) identifies Bourdieu's (1984) writing, which explores the links between taste and social structures, as especially prescient in developing an understanding of the values and hierarchies within the cultural field. Bourdieu (1984) developed the ideas of 'cultural capital' and 'economic capital' as central elements in a system of distinction in which cultural and social hierarchies are conflated, and people's tastes are interpreted as indicative of social class and status. Thornton (1995) sees this framework as moving beyond rigid models of the social structure and employing a more complex multi-dimensional understanding, which allows him to develop a third category – social capital – which is understood as connections or who you know that give status. In this

model, Bourdieu (1984) identifies an elaborate spectrum of 'capital' (e.g. intellectual, artistic, academic, etc.) within the realm of institutionalised cultural capital.

In the landscape of youth culture, Thornton (1995: 11) reads 'hipness' as a form of subcultural capital, which, she suggests, '...confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. In many ways it affects the standing of the young like its adult equivalent'. Subcultural capital, for Thornton (1995), is objectified in things such as fashionable haircuts and a discerning record collection. While the embodiment of subcultural capital resides in being 'in the know'; for example, an awareness of the latest idioms of slang or the performance of the newest dance styles. In contrast to Bourdieu, Thornton (1995) suggests, that subcultural capital is not as connected to class as cultural capital. However, this is not to imply that class is irrelevant but that subcultural capital within the context of youth subcultures obscures class based cleavages prevalent in the wider social structure. For Thornton (1995), subcultural distinctions can be more readily seen as divided by age and gender, and are reliant on the 'fantasy of classlessness' that often affords youth an escape from, and even an inversion of, traditional class-based differences.

The most critical point of divergence Thornton (1995) identifies between her and Bourdieu is the place assigned the media in cultivating and spreading subcultural and cultural capital. In Bourdieu's work television and radio are largely absent, with the media (i.e. films, newspapers, etc.) consigned to the role of symbolic goods and markers of distinction. However, for Thornton (1995: 13), the media, within the economy of subcultural capital, play a pivotal part in the way cultural knowledge is defined and distributed. Indeed she goes so far as to suggest that the media constitutes

the ‘...primary governing factor in the circulation of subcultural capital’ and argues that any fully developed understanding of the distinctions of youth culture cannot exclude an analysis of their media consumption and representation. However, Blackman (2005: 7) observes that while Thornton (1995) presents her work as amending the CCCS’ elitist position, it is beset with a similar problem: ‘Subcultural capital is used by Thornton to describe the distance between true subculturalists and the mainstream in a negative sense; those without subcultural capital are thus inferior and lack taste’. While such a criticism is valid, Thornton’s work is instructive insofar as it identifies the complex relationships between young people’s cultural practices and mainstream culture, and points towards the ways in which the internal codes and practices associated within youth culture are produced by young people themselves. For example, in relation to their mobile phone use young people adopt specific cultural gestures, which act as forms of identification and differentiation.

Gilbert and Pearson (1999) share Thornton’s view that subcultural theory has become an increasingly irrelevant and redundant mode of analysis, stating: ‘By the late 1980’s subculture had become history – its resonance among those who valued the authenticities of the past made it a useful marketing tool’ (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999: 26). They suggest that subcultural constructions represent a ‘seductive rhetorical fantasy’ that invokes ‘familiar myths of identity’ considering instead that Thornton’s critique of British subcultural theory rightly identifies the symbiosis between subcultural groups and the mainstream media. For example, Gilbert and Pearson (1999) argue that subcultures such as punk or acid house would not have had the impact they had were it not for their attentive relationships with the media.

However, Gilbert and Pearson (1999) also anticipate Blackman's (1995) critique of Thornton, arguing that her work retains the 'naiveté and insupportability of the rigid distinction between 'underground' and 'mainstream' cultures. Additionally, they observe that Thornton, by implying that particular cultural groups, regardless of whether they consider themselves or are seen as radical, are merely engaged in the accumulation of subcultural capital, renders all cultural practices as equally, and mistakenly, apolitical. Furthermore, they point to how Thornton's argument is bereft of any discussion of the social and cultural contexts of subcultures and abandons the distinction between the 'oppositional', the 'alternative' and the 'hegemonic'. In contrast, Gilbert and Pearson (1999) propose a model that eschews Thornton's refusal to read cultural practices as in any way political. At the same time, they are keen to avoid a return to an unsophisticated Marxist-inspired analysis rooted in uncovering whether a cultural practice is truly radical and the extent of its opposition to capitalism. By contrast, the model Gilbert and Pearson (1999) suggest is derived from the post-Marxist political theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. This framework, Gilbert and Pearson (1999) argue, allows for a more thorough account of the power relations at play within cultural practices and formations acknowledging, as Thornton does, that there is no unified 'mainstream', no single dominating discourse against which subcultures can be seen as in opposition to.

Gilbert and Pearson (1999) abandon of the concept of 'incorporation', as found, for example, in Hebdige (1979). They argue that there is no one dominant formation that consumes smaller cultural formations, rather cultural relations work along the lines of, what Laclau and Mouffe, call 'articulation' – '...any practice establishing a relation

among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (Laclau and Mouffe quoted in Gilbert and Pearson, 1999: 160). For Gilbert and Pearson (1999), the usefulness of the concept of articulation is that it allows discussions of cultural relations to move beyond simplistic debates about how formations oppose, determine and incorporate each other. It creates a more complex picture of cultural relations by pushing beyond metaphors of winning and losing; pointing to how cultural formations negotiate with each other to often ambivalent ends. Such a discussion is concerned with the extent to which these cultural formations are successful or not in carving out new spaces rather than how they resist or oppose dominant capitalist culture. In the context of their own work on dance culture, Gilbert and Pearson (1999: 160) suggest that such a framework transforms the mode of analysis by changing the character of the questions asked:

it is not a simple question of dance culture being 'for' or 'against' the dominant culture, but of how far its articulations with other discourses and cultures (dominant or otherwise) result in *democratizations* of the cultural field, how far they successfully break down existing concentrations of power, and how far they fail to do so.

Their work crucially identifies how cultural practices are located in a broad cultural field, which includes wider processes of consumption, production, etc. and provide a way of understanding the interactions that take place and the relationships that are formed within the arena of culture. Gilbert and Pearson (1999) conceive of youth culture then as both shaped by and shaping of particular cultural relationships. This shift towards understanding youth not as determined by consumption but involving much more complex and negotiable cultural practices is also evident in recent discussions of youth consumer lifestyles.

2.4.3 *Neo-Tribes, Sociality and Sociability*

Michel Maffesoli's (1996) discussion of neo-tribes reflects, in part, more general assertions pronounced within the spheres of contemporary social and cultural theory; specifically, the focus on the dissolution of traditional and stable forms of identity. At the same time, however, he offers a distinctive diagnosis of this process. Maffesoli (1996) identifies how two central features of modernity, the political and the individual, have become 'saturated', leading to the loosening of formerly unified and stable forms of identity. He discerns a movement from the *polis*, the political order, to the *thiase*, the realm of identification, suggesting that 'the former favour individuals and rational, contractual associations, the latter places the emphasis on the affective, feeling dimension' (Maffesoli, 1996: 72). He contends then that postmodern society is undergoing a process of 'disindividuation', in which the self, rather than being the subject of individualisation, is drawn into collective expressions and forms of behaviour. This shift is typified by the emergence of neo-tribes, through which the postmodern subject seeks an emotional connection with others.

Contrasting neo-tribes with the 'masses', Maffesoli (1996: 75) argues that the former are characterised by an internal diversity and flexibility 'whose sole *raison d'être* is a preoccupation with the collective present'. These neo-tribes then are 'without the rigidity of the forms of organisation with which we are familiar, it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form' (Maffesoli, 1996: 98). They converge around members' feelings and interests rather than their adherence to a specific set of beliefs, values or rational, contractual arrangements. Neo-tribes then offer collective

identification amongst participants, rather than individual identity. They are characterised by a sense of ‘being-together’, which generates a ‘puissance’ or ‘affective warmth’ within the group. This puissance is defined in translation as the ‘inherent energy and vital force of the people’, which lies in contrast to *pouvoir*, or power, and in particular, forms of institutional and elite power (Maffesoli, 1996: 1).

Maffesoli (1996: 10) dispenses with the concept of ‘individual’ in favour of ‘persona’, with the latter ‘a changeable mask which blends into a variety of scenes and situations whose only value resides in the fact that they are played out by the many’. The emphasis is not on the individual’s function within formal, contractual groups, but on one’s role within different neo-tribal formations. Neo-tribes then are inscribed with the ‘logic of identification’, through which groups come together and are sustained. In this context, Maffesoli (1996: 10) describes what he terms ‘postmodern sociality’, with an ‘accent on what unites, rather than what separates’. He emphasises the growth in prominence of forms of social organisation and interaction that sit in contradistinction to modernist conceptions of social life. Asserting that while modernity is characterised by an instrumental rationality that shapes the social, Maffesoli (1996: 11) contends that in postmodernity ‘a rationalised social [is] to be replaced by an empathetic ‘sociality’, which is expressed by a succession of ambiances, feelings and emotions’. This neo-tribal sociality refers to ways of ‘being together’, which can be traced back in time but which are emerging in new ways. In contrast with alienated forms of social existence, sociality inscribes neo-tribes with ‘an affirmative *puissance* that... confirms the ‘(ever)-renewed game of solidarity and reciprocity’’ (Maffesoli, 1996: 72).

In a reflection that recalls Simmel's discussion of sociability, Maffesoli (1996: 75) emphasises that neo-tribes 'may have a goal, may have finality, but this is not essential; what is important is the energy expended on constituting the group *as such*'. These groupings are affectual and tactile, emerging most powerfully in the context of the festival, where tribes assume 'an orgiastic... or dionysiac tendency' (Maffesoli, 1996: 75). However, Maffesoli (1996: 25) also witness neo-tribes as manifest in the seemingly banal and ordinary acts of daily life: 'Having a few drinks; chatting with friends; the anodyne conversations punctuating everyday life enable an exteriorization of the self and thus create the specific aura which binds us together within tribalism'. As Evans (1997: 227) observes, for Maffesoli 'sociality is all those social phenomena which are in opposition to alienating, atomising, rationalised, 'disenchanted' modernity'. In this way, Maffesoli's writing establishes the contours of a postmodern sociology to address postmodern conditions. However, this does not imply a straightforward opposition or schism between modernity and postmodernity. Maffesoli (1996) identifies an affirmative puissance, or postmodern sociality, which exists amidst the alienated disenchantment of social life in modernity. He suggests, however, that this puissance has gone unrecognised and unacknowledged in contemporary sociology: 'We have dwelled so often on the dehumanization and the disenchantment with the modern world and the solitude it induces that we are no longer capable of seeing the networks of solidarity that exist within' (Maffesoli, 1996: 72). His work then represents not merely a critique of modernity, but of much of modern sociology. In addressing Maffesoli's work, Evans (1997) argues that, while it is 'stimulating and original', it should not be read in an uncritical manner. In particular, he suggests that it

is 'ultimately problematical in terms of offering up a new paradigm or research programme which other sociologists could follow' (Evans, 1997: 239). With respect to *The Time of the Tribes*, Paterson (1997), while acknowledging its importance, suggests that, in stressing the 'saturation of the political', Maffesoli largely overlooks the engaged political potential of neo-tribes. Equally, Paterson (1997) contends that he naively fails to address the 'murky' and 'distasteful' possibilities of neo-tribes, found, for example, in ethnic nationalism and fascistic exploitation. Nevertheless, as Hitchcock (1997: 615) observes, despite its lack of strong empirical evidence, Maffesoli (1996) offers an 'adventurous and stimulating discussion'.

Accordingly, the concept of neo-tribes elicits debate within contemporary social theory, particularly in discussions of consumer identities. Bauman (1992) suggests that Maffesoli's conceptualisation of neo-tribes as animated by conditional and transitory membership can be contrasted with anthropological notions of tribes, which are defined by ascriptive forms of membership. As Bauman (1992: 136) observes, neo-tribes are formed around 'the multitude individual acts of *self-identification*'. Following Maffesoli then, Bauman sees the power of neo-tribes as being symbolic and transient. Bauman (1992: 137) is somewhat circumspect, however, about this inherent state of instability, noting that: 'The efforts of self-construction generate them; the inevitable inconclusiveness and frustration of such efforts leads to their dismantling and replacement'.

Both Shields (1992a & 1992b) and Hetherington (1992 & 1998) adopt the concept in their analyses of consumer identities – an aspect that Maffesoli also alludes to in his own work. Shields (1992b: 108) stresses how neo-tribes are 'marked by their

orientation around rituals of inclusion and exclusion, membership and rites of passage rather than legalistic codes of conduct and membership'. He suggests then that tribal identification demonstrates the often temporary character of collective association, with individuals, or personas, moving within and between groups. Neither individual nor group identity is sustained as a permanent and durable proposition; alternatively collective forms emerge and disperse depending on the interactions of those involved. These groupings are animated by the 'impulse of sociality', which for Shields (1992b: 108) is 'grounded in the sociability of everyday life, [and] becomes the basis on which new affectual communities constitute themselves'. Such groups are less rigid than traditional forms of community, with Shields (1992a: 15), unlike Bauman, identifying similarities with the traditional, anthropological usage of 'tribe', through 'the elevation of symbolic practices of the moment... rituals of initiation and renewal... and a conservative closure against outsiders'.

Hetherington (1992: 92-3) also refers to the dissolution of stable and coherent forms of association, noting that the emergence of 'tribalism' relates to 'the deregulation through modernization and individualization of the modern forms of identity based on class occupation, locality and gender... and the recomposition into 'tribal' identities and forms of association'. Hetherington (1992: 93) argues that tribes do not constitute a new form of community; but suggests that the term 'Bund' (see also Shields, 1996), derived from Schmalenbach, is more compatible with tribes in describing 'an intense form of affectual solidarity, that is inherently unstable and liable to break down very rapidly unless it is consciously maintained through the symbolically mediated interactions of its members'. In subsequent work, Hetherington (1998: 49) refers to

neo-tribes as 'communities of feeling'. Marked by intentionality, they are response to the ruptures evident in postmodern society. They provide members a feeling of belonging, an emotional and empathetic association with others.

Within youth cultural studies, 'neo-tribes' has been used in contrast with the structural concept of subculture, with the former viewed as more in tune with the perceived fragmentation of contemporary youth cultural activity. The emphasis then is on contrasting the fixity of subculture with the fluidity of neo-tribes. Bennett (1999) argues that the concept of subculture erroneously creates a 'hermeneutic seal' around youth cultural groups. This problem is exacerbated by the media's use of the term, through which subculture is rendered as little more than 'a convenient 'catch-all' used to describe a range of disparate collective practices whose only obvious relationship is that they involve all young people' (Bennett, 1999: 605). Alternatively, Bennett (1999: 614), drawing on both Shields and Hetherington, proposes that 'neo-tribes' better captures the relationships between contemporary youth, music and fashion, suggesting that it 'allows for the shifting nature of young people's musical and stylistic preferences and the essential fluidity of youth cultural groups'.

For Bennett (1999) then, the musical and style sensibilities of young people involved in dance music culture represent instances of neo-tribal sociality, and are one of the many arenas in which neo-tribes coalesce. While Maffesoli identifies the 'time of the tribes' ascending after the 1970s, Bennett (1999) aligns the emergence of 'neo-tribal sensibilities' with the growth of mass consumerism in the aftermath of the Second World War. He suggests that intensification of neo-tribal forms in the latter stages of the twentieth century 'has rather more to do with the sheer range of consumer choices

which now exist than with the onset of a postmodernist age and attendant postmodern sensibilities' (Bennett, 1999: 607). In this context, Bennett identifies the concept of 'lifestyle' as a related concept within youth cultural research; an issue that is addressed below.

Malbon (1999: 26) similarly applies the concept of neo-tribes to dance-music culture. He identifies what he terms the 'tactile...forms of communality' evident within the dance club. Malbon (1999: 26), however, criticizes Maffesoli for his failure to provide an empirical basis to his work and argues that his thesis, while useful for understanding the way in which contemporary youth associations are established and carried out, fails to fully provide for an understanding of what he calls 'the demanding practical and stylistic requirements and components that many of these communities demand, and through which many of them are constituted'.

Sweetman (2004) concentrates more generally on how a range of contemporary youth experiences and groupings are characterised by forms of neo-tribal sociality. He argues that examining the role of neo-tribal sociality within youth culture exposes the 'affectual' and 'experiential' aspects of young people's social and cultural practices. In this way, Sweetman (2004) contends that this emphasis draws attention to the emotional content of youth groups, and also illustrates what it is that young people do in everyday life – the ordinary and the habitual aspects often neglected within youth cultural studies. However, Sweetman (2004) argues that while the notion of the neo-tribe holds some purchase on the condition of contemporary youth, it is insensitive to the continuing permanence of collective associations that bear a close resemblance to those identified within the work of early subcultural theorists. He locates his work

within an analysis of the tattooed body suggesting that it represents an enduring mark of difference and subcultural allegiance, which conflicts with the ideas of fluidity and impermanence evident in the concept of neo-tribe.

While the application of Maffesoli's ideas around neo-tribes raises salient issues within youth culture, these discussions are not unproblematic. In particular, this work has tended to be overly preoccupied with using the concept of neo-tribe to highlight the apparent limitations of subcultural theory. However, this work often mimics the subcultural fascination with the visual and the spectacular over the ordinary and the mundane – an emphasis evident across much of what is designated 'post-subcultural theory'. What is required, within youth cultural research, is a sustained focus on the everyday practices of interaction and sociality in which young people are engaged.

Further to this, as Hesmondhalgh (2005: 24) argues, Bennett (1999) overstates the dichotomy between subcultural fixity and neo-tribal fluidity, offering 'too polarised a presentation of the alternatives'. Hesmondhalgh (2005) identifies this as an overly straightforward dualism, and rightly emphasises how youth subcultural theory is far more diverse and heterogeneous than this allows for. For example, the work of both Paul Willis (1978) and Dick Hebdige (1979) detail young people's creative use of commodities in ways that resemble practices Bennett (1999) ascribes to neo-tribes. It is important, therefore, not to lose sight of the gains made by subcultural theory, and to address not so much the ways in which neo-tribes act as an opposing counterpoint to this perspective but how the term occupies a more complex relationship to the concept of subculture.

Blackman (2005: 12) also contests the perceived incompatibility of subculture and neo-tribes, observing that ‘postmodern subcultural writing seems to downplay the collective nature of subcultural practice identified by Maffesoli because their postmodern critique of the CCCS wants to give priority to the individual’. Blackman (2005) continues, highlighting the insolubility of theories of individualism and consumer choice, particularly the concept of lifestyle, with reference to Maffesoli’s explicit suggestion that neo-tribes are resistant to forms of narcissistic individualism. Hesmondhalgh (2005) similarly argues that the conflation of neo-tribes and lifestyles within youth cultural theory proclaims an ‘uncritical view of consumerism’, which ignores, or at least underplays, the constraints that restrict young people’s everyday cultural practices. Sweetman (2004: 79) also attempts to reconcile neo-tribal sociality with theories of reflexive identity; suggesting that ‘subcultural’ involvement ‘can provide individuals with a sense of belonging and identification *as well as* a sense of individual identity and style’. In exploring how youth culture involves both the establishment of individual identity and broader forms of group identification, Sweetman (2004) contends that, in spite of their apparent differences, theories of reflexive identity can complement the discussion of neo-tribal sociality. While these positions appear at odds with one another, Evans (1997: 239) argues that the ‘opposition between “individualism” and “neo-tribalism” is not as stark... as might be thought... “neo-tribalism” depends upon a highly individualised society where people are released from the chains of tradition and are therefore in a position... to choose between the “life-style” alternatives offered up to them’. Similarly, Bauman (1992) notes that tribes are not ‘unambiguously anti-individualistic’; rather they are intimately connected to the way individual identities are

constructed by offering guidance and validation for lifestyle choices. In this context, Sweetman (2004: 89) suggests youth culture is indicative of ‘*both* a reflexive process of identity-construction *and* of a resurgent sensuality or neo-tribal sociality’.

Hetherington (1992: 85) refers to this relationship between de-individualisation and individualisation as a ‘seemingly ambiguous aspect of modern society’. He suggests that de-individualised and affective forms of sociation have emerged via related processes of individualisation and the rise of less structurally ascribed forms of lifestyle. He continues by arguing that this constellation of issues can be collected in a discussion of lifestyle consumption and its relationship to the symbolic production of particular lifestyles. The concept of lifestyle, in the context of late modernity, shares with neo-tribal sociality a focus on flexible, transitory and ephemeral forms of association and identification.

The risk here is of subsuming categories of analysis into one another and losing what is respectively distinct and unique about them. The importance of neo-tribes is in its usefulness in highlighting the forms of solidarity and sociality that exist within everyday life. It also opens up a space in which to address young people’s ordinary, everyday experiences and practices. The emphasis within neo-tribalism on sociality, sociability and affective warmth allows for an understanding of the emotional connections and communality that characterise young people’s social lives. The limits of this approach lie in its neglect of the persistence of ascriptive forms of identity and wider aspects of structural inequality. Also, Maffesoli (1996) is generally insensitive to the ways in which neo-tribal formations, in promoting and offering forms of inclusion and identification, also exhibit forms of exclusion and differentiation.

2.4.4 Youth Consumer Lifestyles

The interest in the concept of 'lifestyle' has been renewed within recent theories of consumer society (for example Featherstone, 1990; Chaney, 1996), which are considered more fully in the next chapter. In this section, I examine the use of the term in the specific context of youth cultural research. Blackman (2005) criticises Bennett's deployment of the term lifestyle in place of subculture, arguing that it over-emphasises individualised forms of consumption and obscures various processes of youth marginality (see also Hesmondalgh, 2005: 25). However, it can be suggested that this reading is not a wholly accurate reflection of research into youth lifestyles. For example, Bennett (1999: 607) states that 'this is not to suggest that 'lifestyle' abandons any consideration of structural issues; rather, 'lifestyle' allows for the fact that consumerism offers the individual new ways of negotiating such issues'.

Blackman (2005) and Hesmondalgh (2005), however, remain critical of Bennett (1999) in particular and post-subcultural theory in general. Both cast Bennett (1999) as assuming an uncritical celebration of consumer practices. However, Bennett (2005: 255) subsequently responds by stating 'my intention was not to 'celebrate' consumerism, but rather to situate it as a motor-force in late modern society and a key resource for individuals in the construction of social identities and forming of social relations with others'. While Bennett (2005) acknowledges that structural inequalities can shape young peoples' lived experiences, he argues that they do not act as 'dead weights' on young people. He suggests that Blackman (2005) and Hesmondalgh (2005) underestimate the 'agency of youth in creatively resisting the circumstances of their everyday lives'. Bennett (2005: 256) also argues that Blackman and

Hesmondalgh conceive of consumption in narrow terms as involving 'little more than the purchasing of material goods'. Alternatively, Bennett points out that consumption entails a range of activities that extend beyond monetary exchange and may not demand a high level of disposable income. In spite of the shortcomings Blackman and Hesmondalgh identify within post-subcultural debates, Bennett (2005: 258) suggests that such debates will 'run on indefinitely' as in the absence of concerted funding 'it will be difficult to ascertain the true sociological validity of terms such as neo-tribe, lifestyle and post-subculture for our understanding of contemporary youth culture and its associated leisure practices'.

However, as Hesmondalgh (2005) points out, Bennett (1999) neither elaborates on what the structural issues he refers to might be nor how exactly they are negotiated via consumption. Alternatively, Hesmondalgh (2005) suggests that Fornas (1995) provides a 'more satisfying account of youth and identity'. Fornas (1995) reflects the 'cultural turn' in social theory, in arguing that contemporary society is characterised by an increasing emphasis on aesthetics and culture. While Fornas (1995), like Bennett, acknowledges that young people's increased spending power and their access to commodities is important, he points out that it is equally necessary to address the demands placed on young people, by school, work, family etc., as creating the need for forms of escape and freedom. It could be argued that these issues, explicit in Fornas' writing, are acknowledged by Bennett and others in discussions of contemporary youth culture.

Elsewhere, both Reimer (1995) and Miles (1995 & 2002) have adopted the term 'lifestyle' to address how cultural identity and group formations are played out amongst

young people. While 'lifestyle' is often associated with a focus on individual identity, it can be seen as compatible with neo-tribal sociality in that both share a focus on fluid and temporary social and cultural connections. Furthermore, Reimer (1995) outlines how the term lifestyle encompasses individual action and its relationship to group formations. He argues that lifestyles are 'the specific pattern of everyday activities that characterizes an individual. Each individual's lifestyle is unique: it is not identical to anyone else's. But at the same time, lifestyles orient themselves towards the common and the social. We choose lifestyles in relation to other people' (Reimer, 1995: 124). The concept of lifestyle then is used to express how individuals are resolved within collective forms of association. As Reimer (1995: 125) elaborates 'Analyses of lifestyles should therefore often address similarities and differences between *groups* of individuals rather than towards similarities and differences between individuals'.

Miles (1995 & 2002) retains a focus on how structural issues can affect young peoples' lifestyle choices. He suggests that Willis (1990) tends to overstate the level of agency young consumers. Miles (2002) argues that although Willis acknowledges the possible structural limits of his analysis, he makes little explicit effort to engage with how this could affect their practices of consumption in real terms. Alternatively, Miles proposes that a more considered approach to the experience of youth consumption can overcome these problems. While he acknowledges the salience of Willis' suggestion about the positive role of consumer activity in the lives of young people, Miles contends that consumption patterns are equally indicative of the pressures under which young people live. While youth generally are targeted as a particular niche market, there exists, for Miles (2002), evidence to suggest that young people are often marginalised within the

context of consumer culture. He argues that class retains a very influential part in young people's access to the arena of consumption. While young people demonstrate a considerable degree of agency in their consumption practices and choices they are equally susceptible to the voice of peer pressure in their consumer activity. Miles is keen to stress that young people's patterns of consumption are complex and contradictory and informed by a wider array of factors than perhaps Willis is inclined to acknowledge.

Similarly, Fiona Stewart (1992) traces the concurrent development of the concept of the teenager alongside the post-war consumer boom and argues that the emergence of the 'youth culture industry' was based on the creation and exploitation of the teenager. While she acknowledges that the range of choice available to young consumers is now vast, she argues that a large proportion of young people are marginalised and excluded from engaging freely in consumer practice. This latter point is aggravated by the increasing prevalence of the mass media, which involves a constant stream of images of what young people desire but cannot attain. It can be suggested then that while consumer practices can provide a potential site of everyday creativity, the weight of consumer culture upon young people can be a considerable stress point in and of itself.

2.5 Conclusion

The expansion of consumer capitalism then has had a considerable role in the ways in which youth is socially constructed and understood. Youth culture can be said to be chiefly defined by practices of cultural consumption. While the limitations of youth subcultural theory have been well established, the identification by CCCS researchers

of young people's cultural consumption as a significant site of action set an important agenda within youth cultural research. However, the tendency to read these acts as being, in Thornton's (1996) terms, 'proto-artistic' or 'proto-political' overstates their level of resistance towards institutional power. The relationship between youth culture and consumption is more complex than this model allows for. Young people's role as consumers is much less about forms of confrontation with dominant social and cultural groups and more about the negotiation of cultural power in everyday life. As Gilbert and Pearson (1999) argue, youth cultural analysis needs to address not forms of opposition and incorporation but 'democratizations of the cultural field'.

While I argue young people's consumer practices can be said to lack direct or explicit political power, they constitute, as Willis (1990) argues, forms of 'cultural survival'. In particular, post-subcultural approaches to youth have been concerned with exploring how young people's practices of consumption provide a space in which they are active and creative participants in the construction of their everyday lives. While acknowledging the continuing role of structural constraints, discussions of consumer lifestyle emphasise the ways in which consumer practices are expressions of self and collective identities. Rather than conforming to organised subcultures with clearly defined stylistic preferences, young people are seen as able to move within and between groups with greater ease. In this context then, Maffesoli's (1996) conceptualisation of 'neo-tribes', has been adopted to explore how youth groups are focused on non-instrumental, non-rational forms of communality and solidarity. Young people's peer formations are seen then as composed less around particular ends, and more around the act of being together as an end in itself.

A continuing limitation of much youth cultural research, however, is the emphasis on spectacular forms of consumption, and, in particular, the focus on cultures of music. By contrast, I argue that youth cultural practice cannot be decoupled from what Kahn-Harris (2004) refers to as the 'mundanity' of young people's everyday experiences. In examining mobile phone use, I privilege an analysis of young people's cultural consumption as often ordinary in character. For example, their use of the mobile phone is often immersed in the minutiae of daily life – family, peers, etc. However, within the context of the ordinary there can be discerned extraordinary forms of cultural creativity. The seemingly prosaic character of mobile phone use exposes the dynamism of youth culture. Rather than being merely passive recipients of a top-down commodity culture, young people are actively involved in the creation of cultural meaning. This characterisation of the consumption as a site of important and meaningful 'symbolic work' and cultural power is developed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Understanding the Consumer

3.1 Introduction

Over the last number of decades, contemporary social theory has given increasing weight to the role of consumption in modern society. Bauman (2005), for example, argues that consumption has become the activity in which all individuals in late-modern, second-modern or post-modern society are primarily occupied. While in the industrial period of modernity, one's role as a producer was one's primary function, in 'modernity mark two' one must be a consumer before anything else; as Bauman notes: 'it is the aesthetics of consumption that now rules where the work ethic once ruled' (2005: 32). The contemporary labour market is governed by the watchword 'flexibility', with the possibility of creating a durable permanent identity through a specific career or vocation no longer available, or perhaps even attractive, to the majority of individuals in society. The search for personal validation and definition resides increasingly then in the individual's role as a consumer over and above that of a producer.

This is not to suggest that the aesthetic of consumption provides the stability and permanence voided by the waning work ethic. On the contrary, this aesthetic of consumption is ruled as much by flexibility as the labour market. Just as the ability to change and diversify quickly is a vital characteristic of the modern employee, so too must it be the distinguishing trait of the modern consumer. New fashions and trends enter the public consciousness only to be swiftly swept aside by the new flavours of the month – witness the 'glossy' press' fascination with what's hot/what's not lists and the speed with which one becomes the other. As Campbell (1992) observes, consumption

is characterised by the constant pursuit of the new. This flux represents the instability of self-identity, or 'identities' in the plural, as Bauman (2005) suggests, reflecting the ephemeral character of consumer goods that they are often built around; they are suffused with an impermanence that can be liberating and confusing, freeing and constraining.

At the heart then of any analysis of the consumer lies the confluence of contradictory tendencies. The consumer is seen as the arbiter of their own identity through the choices they make in the marketplace, yet at the same time their desires and preferences are characterised as controlled and manipulated in a variety of ways. For example, Slater (1993: 33) argues that descriptions of the consumer are often polarised around the contradictory images of 'cultural dupes' and 'heroes of modernity'. Steven Miles (1998: 5) terms this 'the consuming paradox', writing: 'in terms of our individual experience consumerism appears to have a fascinating, arguably fulfilling, personal appeal and yet simultaneously plays some form of an ideological role in actually controlling the character of everyday life'.

In the interests of applying some order to this debate, this chapter follows a schematic divide initially proposed by Featherstone (1991), and subsequently adopted by Warde (2002), which identifies three key approaches within the sociology of consumer culture. These perspectives are the neo-Marxist production of consumption approach; modes of consumption, which privileges the role of consumption in defining and organising social classification – Pierre Bourdieu being a key reference; and the more nebulous interpolation of 'dreams, images and pleasures', which focuses on the creative potential of consumer behaviour found in work stretching from Walter Benjamin and George

Bataille, and, as I argue, through to more recent affirmations of consumer agency, for example de Certeau (1984) and Fiske (1989a & 1989b). These three perspectives, while constituted differently, do not represent mutually exclusive entities. They operate together as key interlocutors in debates around understanding the consumer. This multiplicity of views betrays the complex set of social relations that define consumer practices. The aim here is not to offer reconciliation between these positions but to draw some points of relevance that can be applied to understanding the figure of the consumer.

3.2 Producing the Consumer: The Public Wants What the Public Gets

In writer/director George A. Romero's classic horror film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), a small band of survivors take refuge from zombies in a secluded mall; as the zombies clamour to gain entry one of the group asks 'What are they doing? Why do they come here?' to which another replies 'Some kind of instinct. Memory of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives'. The approximation of the consumer found in the production of consumption approach, as outlined by Featherstone (1991), is, in many respects, consonant with Romero's image of mindless zombies being drawn to the glittering mall. This approach is concerned with both exposing the imbalance of power within consumer culture that favours capitalist producers and placing an emphasis on the relentless logic of the commodity in shaping cultural production and reproduction. For Featherstone (1991: 14) this view is most evident amongst a clutch of 'twentieth century neo-Marxists', stretching from the work of Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) and Lefebvre through to the writings of Baudrillard and Jameson.

While the critiques espoused by these theorists are distinctively constituted, Featherstone (1991: 14) suggests that their work is embroidered with a shared motif, which emphasises that the expansion of capitalist production should be viewed ‘as producing greater opportunities for controlled and manipulated consumption’.

3.2.1 Commodity Fetishism

While Marx’s writing is generally understood as having a greater focus on production there is little doubt that his analysis of the incipient capitalist society of the 19th century made an indelible impression on later theoretical considerations of consumer culture. In *Capital*, Marx discussed the nature of commodities and, in particular, the idea of commodity fetishism. He drew a distinction between a commodity’s use-value, that is, the use or function of an object, and its more complex exchange-value, which sees the commodity as the product of monetary exchange in the open market. This process of commodification identified by Marx is allied to his discussion of alienation. He suggests that workers are ‘alienated’ from what they produce in that they have no claim to ownership over it or its exchange. Equally, production itself becomes an alien activity through which workers derive no intrinsic satisfaction; they do not produce objects for themselves but are in the employ of another only as means to an end (i.e. earning a wage). In capitalist systems, workers suffer a loss of meaning and the potential for self-realization. They are deprived of their creative power and agency and their revolutionary capacity. In this context, the consumption of commodities replaces production as the means through which individuals’ needs and desires are ‘satisfied’.

While he defines the commodity in basic terms as ‘an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind’, Marx (1974: 43-44) furthers this by highlighting the complexities of commodities, stating that ‘[A]t first glance, a commodity seems a commonplace sort of thing, one easily understood. Analysis shows that it is a very queer thing indeed, full of metaphysical subtleties and theological whimsies’. As commodities become valued in terms of their exchange-value rather than their use-value they assume a magical property. Marx (1974: 44) terms this ‘commodity fetishism’, whereby value is treated as residing in an object itself, rather than in the labour that went into its production: ‘the mystery of the commodity form is simply this, that it mirrors for men the social character of their own labour, mirrors it as an objective character attaching to the labour products themselves, mirrors it as socio-natural property of these things’.

3.2.2 The Commodification of Everyday Life

With the expansion of capitalist production over the course of the twentieth century, a number of theorists identify how the characteristic features of production – commodity logic and instrumental rationality – infiltrate the spheres of consumption and culture. The view of this hastening ‘consumer culture’ has been coloured with an often explicitly Marxist hue. For example, Featherstone (1991) highlights how Luckács’s reification theory, a synthesis of Marx and Weber – was heavily influential on the writing of Lefebvre, Adorno and Horkheimer, and Marcuse. In this context, the emphasis has shifted from the focus on labour, evident in Marx’s work, to account for the increasing dominance of consumption in everyday life.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1947), who coined the term 'culture industry' to describe the procedures and products of mass culture, assert that the cultural sphere has been colonised by capitalism. They viewed popular culture as sterile and predictable, arguing that it serves to inculcate subtle, yet persistent and pernicious, mechanisms of social control. In particular, they reference the mass-produced cultural products, such as popular music and Hollywood films, that they encountered in the United States, as engendering passivity and 'dull conformity' in their audience and eroding the positive influences and impulses of high culture. Although, while the Frankfurt School generally, and Adorno and Horkheimer in particular, are often characterised as intractably pessimistic, Adorno's (1991[1969]) later work on hobbies and free time, for example, demonstrates a belief in the possibility of escaping from the shackles of popular distraction. Nevertheless, this assertion remains allied to his critique of popular culture.

As with the Frankfurt School, Lefebvre saw everyday life as guided by the logic of the commodity and marching to the beat of capital. For Lefebvre, capitalism breeds a total alienation that encroaches into every aspect of lived experience. The will for change is weakened by the lack of sufficient consciousness amongst the dominated sections of society in the face of the ideological control of the dominant class. Lefebvre's writing displays a greater fidelity to orthodox Marxist thought than the Frankfurt School. He places Marx's discussion of alienation at the heart of a political project that sought not merely to redress economic imbalance but to reorder everyday life into a site of meaningful human consciousness and action through a process of 'disalienation'.

Lefebvre (1947) identifies 'la fete' (the festival or carnival, especially vivid during the Middle Ages) as the archetype of a transformed world and a counterpoint to the locked groove of alienation that resonates within everyday life in capitalist society. He argues that individuals pursue various forms of leisure activity as a means of temporary flight from the degradation of work and the tedium of daily life. However, Lefebvre (1947) suggests that leisure in modern society has come under the rule of the commodity, representing a passive, controlled activity. At the same time, he asserts that leisure must also be recognised as a practice that contains a 'spontaneous critique' of the dullness of daily existence. This is indicative of the persistence of the festival; suppressed but not eliminated by modernity, its rebirth would signal the re-emergence of play within everyday life and a triumph over alienation.

However, the passing of time dulled the once optimistic tone of Lefebvre's writing. In his later work, he appears more keenly aware of the difficulty of enacting social transformation, particularly in the context of waning working-class militancy and the seemingly inexorable domination of consumer capitalism (Gardiner, 2000: 86). In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1984[1968]) Lefebvre argues that the growing abundance of consumer goods since the 1950s means the economy must stimulate new desires and forms of want in order to secure continued expansion. Neo-capitalism presents itself as without alternative, pushing forth toward greater efficiency and progress, retaining its legitimacy by being able to provide for the needs and wants of individuals. This assertion is consonant with Marcuse's (1968) idea of the 'one-dimensional man', through which he suggested that capitalism, via the machinations of the 'culture industry', advances an 'ideology of consumerism' that manipulates and

dominates people by producing and promoting artificial or false needs. In this way, individuals are unable to identify any alternative mode of living or any possibility for change, with even traditional opposition (i.e. the working-class) co-opted by consumer desire.

In this context, Lefebvre (1984) identified a 'new poverty', the impoverishment of human existence, as the surfeit of consumption and manufactured leisure evacuates genuine and authentic free and unstructured time from everyday life. In what he evocatively terms the 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption', commodified forms provide no space for active participation. Everyday life has become cordoned off into manageable subsystems; it survives, but in debased form: 'In the modern world everyday life has ceased to be a 'subject' rich in potential subjectivity; it had become an 'object' of social organisation' (1984: 59). Thus emerges, for Lefebvre (1984: 147), a 'terrorist society', in which:

terror is diffuse, violence is always latent, pressure is exerted from all sides on its members, who can only avoid it and shift its weight by a superhuman effort... the 'system' (in so far as it can be called a 'system') has a hold on every member separately and submits every member to the whole, that is, to a strategy, a hidden end, objectives unknown to all but those in power, and that no one questions.

Nevertheless, Lefebvre still believed in the emergence of a 'permanent cultural revolution', as the system unintentionally stimulates authentic desires that cannot be satisfied by commodities. For Lefebvre (1984: 36-7):

[T]he revolution of the future will put an end to the quotidian... its specific objective will be to annihilate everyday life; and the period of transition will also take on a new meaning, oppose everyday life and reorganize it until it is as good as new, its spurious rationality and authority unmasked and the antithesis between the quotidian and the basis of society.

The tumult witnessed in Paris in May 1968 offered a glimpse of this undercurrent of playful celebration coming to the surface. The events caught Lefebvre by surprise. Prior to this he had derided the Situationists' belief that revolution was imminent, witheringly querying: 'Do they really imagine that one fine day or one decisive evening people will look at each other and say, 'Enough! We're fed up with work and boredom! Let's put an end to them!' and that they will then proceed to the eternal Festival and the creation of situations?' (Lefebvre, quoted in Plant, 1992: 96). Within six months he got the most unexpected answer. However, for Lefebvre the breach was all too quick to mend, and served to demonstrate the recuperative powers of the 'system', rather than the possibility of radical social change.

3.2.3 The Spectacle and the Summer of '68

From its inception in the late 1950's, the Situationist International (SI) immersed itself in various forms of radical activism, which culminated with the paroxysm of revolt that gripped Paris in May 1968. In the preceding period, the group's position was signalled in the journal *Internationale Situationniste*, which, Plant (1992: 4) notes, remained consistently committed to the 'transformation of everyday life from a realm of bland consumption to free creation'. In short, the SI can be seen as attempting to answer Lefebvre's call for a 'critique of everyday life'. A number of its members had encountered Lefebvre at the University of Nanterre, and through him had been exposed to the radical propositions of Dada and Surrealism. Like these forebears, the SI was committed to realising an 'authentic existence' that frees social relations from the

commodity-form and liberates society from the alienation endemic in consumer capitalism (Gardiner, 2000: 103, 106).

Two texts, both published in 1967, go some way toward capturing and distilling the essence of the SI's main ideas and arguments: Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Venegiem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Debord's work is usually perceived as the theoretical keynote of the SI. It sutures together ideas borrowed and plagiarised from Hegel, Marx and Lukacs amidst concise epigrams detailing the character of the 'spectacle'. By contrast, Vaneigem's writing can be viewed as a more poetic and allegorical piece of propaganda when compared with Debord's greater adherence to a theoretical interrogation of modern capitalism. Nevertheless, there are thematic similarities between the two texts, with both animated by the desire to expose the manifestations of power and domination witnessed in late capitalism. Both Debord and Vaneigem point to how consumption has superseded production as the engine of capitalism. Owing to its centrality to the reproduction of capitalism, consumption is heavily controlled and regulated; most obviously, this is performed via an increasingly visual mass media, which replaces authentic experience with representations.

In its most rudimentary form then, the term 'spectacle' is often used to describe the increased influence of the media within society. The growth of visual media, in particular television, is seen as altering the way in which we perceive reality. These networks provide the medium for the spectacle, which privileges the visual, and work with mechanisms of domination that control leisure and consumption. Just as Marx had sensed within early capitalism a change from 'being to having', Debord, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, remarks upon what he saw as the change from 'having

to appearing' (Debord, 1994: 17)¹. Central to his discussion is the concept of the 'spectacle'. For Debord the spectacle is a form of ideological control – it is 'ideology in material form' – and he suggests that life in late capitalism 'presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles' (1994: 1). Emerging as the commodity exerts complete domination over social relations '[T]he spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life' (Debord, 1994: 42).

But Debord identified the spectacle not merely in the context of the growing media culture, but as encompassing the entire spectrum of institutional and technical systems of late capitalism, which exert control over society. He suggests the distinction between the real and the spectacle has become almost impossible to discern to the extent that the spectacle becomes taken as the real: 'In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood' (Debord, 1994: 9). In this guise of truth, the spectacle demands and receives passive acceptance. Real human needs are rendered subordinate to the false needs that emerge as the commodity reaches its apotheosis in the form of the spectacle.

Like Debord, Vaneigem (2006) characterises social relations as ruled by the logic of commodity exchange. 'In our time' writes Vaneigem (2006: 80) '[the] model of a human relationship is the exchange of x pounds and y pence for n grams of meat... exchange pollutes all our relationships, feelings and thoughts'. Following Lefebvre, Vaneigem (2006) identified the immanence of a radical subjectivity that would arise in opposition to the spectacle. However, he noted that this radical subject was kept inert as everyday life in the society of the spectacle is 'neutralised', in particular by the

¹ Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* constitutes a series of numbered entries. The reference given here and throughout is that of the entry number rather than the page number.

power of consumerism. Operating as a subtle form of social control, consumerism is viewed as an unquestioned part of human consciousness that infiltrates and shapes everyday practice subduing its creative possibilities.

Vaneigem (2006) contends that the specialisation of social roles and the rampant culture of individualism in modern society have fostered an ethos of 'survivalism', which curtails and suppresses the possibility of social revolution. In this way, everyday life is reduced to the crudest form of existence; a basic survival that fulfils the needs of the system of consumption while at the same time debasing humanity. In lieu of authentic human experience, people inhabit particular unconscious roles chosen from the 'range of dominant stereotypes'. This, for Vaneigem (2006), is the 'consumption of power', which fits people into a hierarchy, organising and categorising their behaviour and interactions. In this way, everyday life is diminished and stripped of its creativity and spontaneity. Vaneigem (2006: 133) cites the example of the '35-year-old man' and the regimented and perfunctory way he moves through his day:

Each morning he starts his car, drives to the office, pushes papers, has lunch in town, plays pool, pushes more papers, leaves work, has a couple of drinks, goes home, greets his wife, kisses his children, eats his steak in front of the TV, goes to bed, makes love and falls asleep.

The ultimate role is that of consumer, a role in which erotic desire and creative energy are sublimated into forms of controlled consumption, but, as Vaneigem (2006: 139) observes, 'from the spectacular point of view the reduction of man to consumer is an enrichment: the more things he has, the more roles he plays, the more he is'. Categorised according to the objects they accumulate, people learn to see themselves in the ersatz face of happiness that looms large in the advertisements that saturate everyday life. Drifting in a haze of fabricated desires, people consume appearances at

the cost of self-realisation. As the primary function of individuals as producers is supplanted by their role as consumers, alienated production, as identified by Marx, is replaced by alienated consumption.

Despite the obvious pessimism of its position, the SI retained a belief in the tangible residue of a mass consciousness that could seep through to the surface and expose within the spectacle the continuing deprivation and suffering experienced across society. However, rather than offering a specific counter ideology, the SI utilised various guerrilla tactics against the spectacle, with the intention of awakening in individuals a realisation of the binding force of alienation to which they have become inured. These tactics, which they termed 'détournement', sought to disrupt the effective functioning of the spectacle. While no direct English translation exists, its meaning sits, according to Plant (1992), between 'diversion' and 'subversion'. Drawing from dada and Surrealism, détournement involved taking items produced within the spectacle – photos, advertisements, films, etc. – and altering their intended meaning by placing them in a different context or alongside other incongruous images or text. However, more than merely an aesthetic technique reserved for artists and poets, for the Situationists, détournement is a spontaneous and creative activity was a revolutionary impulse shared by all. These acts of subversion were not created by the SI; they merely gave them a name. They exist in, as Vaneigem (quoted in Gardiner, 1999: 122) observes: 'seething unsatisfied desires, daydreams in search of foothold in reality, feelings at once confused and luminously clear, ideas and gestures presaging nameless upheavals'.

However, the Situationists were also keenly aware of the spectacle's power of 'recuperation'; its ability to assimilate dissent and opposition and transform them into

commodities. Reducing creativity to the form of commodity, the spectacle neuters opposition by bringing it under its control: 'dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material' (Debord, 1994: 38). But while the spectacle seeks to channel revolutionary urges into regulated forms of consumption, it can never fully suppress the will to engage in free and spontaneous creativity. As with Lefebvre, the Situationists theorised that the consumer system is replete with empty promises, and is unable to satisfy the desires it cultivates.

This friction between the spectacle and lived experience demonstrates how the creativity in everyday life is never fully recuperated or reified. *Détournement* is the means to bring about a 'reversal of perspective' that 'turns knowledge into praxis, hope into freedom, and mediation into a passion for immediacy. It enshrines the victory of a system of human relationships grounded in three indivisible principles: participation, communication and self-realisation' (Vaneigem, 2006: 188). *Détournement* then, in giving a name to the plurality of acts that help negate the spectacle, was at the core of the situationist project of positively and radically transforming everyday life. For the Situationists, the revolution would be *détournement* writ large, 'a gigantic turning around of the social world' (Plant, 1992: 89).

The influence of the Situationists has been varied and they were themselves ambivalent about their role. The group disbanded in the early 1970s, amidst internecine struggles over its position, with Debord stating his disgust with what he termed his 'revolting celebrity'. For Greil Marcus (1994), the first wave of punk circa 1977, and in particular the Sex Pistols, carried forward the Situationist spirit of revolt. More recently, Kalle

Lasn (1999) has made explicit reference to Situationist ideas in the development of the idea of 'culture jamming'. Transfusing the revolutionary impulses of the movement, Lasn presents 'culture jamming' as an alternative to the dehumanising function of consumer society carried out through acts of 'subvertising', 'de-marketing', and 'un-cooling'. Practices that seek to pursue ethical, anti-capitalist aims through the appropriation of the tools of popular and consumer culture. However, Heath and Potter (2005) are critical of the extent to which 'culture jamming' provides an alternative politics that challenges systems of power, contending that it represents the continuing transformation of 'counter-culture' into consumer culture.

3.2.4 This is the Postmodern World

Plant (1992) draws parallels between the suggestions found within various Situationist texts and ideas presented subsequently in postmodern theory. For example, she draws a line of continuity between the concept of the spectacle and the later notion of hyperreality, as developed by Baudrillard. Indeed Baudrillard emerged from the radical environment fostered in France during the 1960s and, like Debord, was a student of Lefebvre. However, while the ideology critiques formulated in the writings of Debord and Vaneigem, as well as Lefebvre, retain the hopes of untangling mass consciousness from its induced passivity, Baudrillard's reflections extend their ideas to an ultimately dystopian conclusion - arguing that civilization has entered a stage of pure simulation. In his discussion of the postmodern, Baudrillard exchanges the orthodox Marxist concern with economic and class analysis, evinced in his early writing, in favour of a

focus on the media, the institution most accordant with his ideas². Utilising semiology, he argues that consumption involves the active manipulation of signs. He points to how the emergence of sign-value marks a shift in the nature of Western society from one that is based on the production of things to one based on the production of images and information. In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981), Baudrillard expresses this as the movement from a metallurgic society, one that manipulates matter, to a semiurgic society, one that manipulates signs.

However, for Baudrillard the postmodern is not merely a culture of signs, but the culture of the simulacrum, a copy without an original – it is a world of simulations and hyperreality. As the simulation colonises reality, the world becomes one of hyperreality – where it becomes impossible to separate reality and simulation. The distinction between the two is obliterated as they collapse into each other and there emerges an endless parade of self-referential representations that are no longer tethered to historical specifics but refer only to themselves. This does not necessarily suggest that people no longer possess the ability to tell apart fiction from reality but that the difference between the two has become less significant. As the media become more pervasive, the representations presented therein are the primary source through which people come to try and make sense of ‘reality’. Baudrillard suggests that these representations infiltrate every conceivable area of lived experience. Individuals experience everyday reality through simulations and representations, which constitute a series of decontextualised fragments (see, for example, Baudrillard, 1988).

Unlike, for example, Debord, Baudrillard identifies no point at which individuals can construct an alternative or subversive politics. Society is now awash with a surfeit of

² For a detailed discussion of this critical shift see Kellner (1989)

signs that creates a cultural system, which while appearing to offer everything, denies human subjectivity by determining individual needs and desires. This is the 'depthless culture' of postmodernity identified by Jameson (1984), who suggests, with explicitly Marxist fervour, that 'late or multinational capitalism' represents 'the purest form of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas' (1984: 78) and argues that in this period postmodernism supplants realism and modernism as the cultural dominant. Postmodern culture is, for Jameson (1984: 85), commercial culture that 'does more than merely replicate the logic of late capitalism; it reinforces and intensifies it'. Jameson explains the effects of this change through the concepts of pastiche, nostalgia and schizophrenia. For Jameson, postmodernism replaces the subversive power of parody with the empty gestures of pastiche, whose subversions are meaningless. Offering no liberation from or challenge to the norm, they have no relationship to politics or history and are fully absorbed by the logic of capitalism.

Jameson characterises the 'nostalgia film' as emblematic of this process, in which the 'random cannibalization' of the past sees history becoming an arena from which styles are liberally plundered and rarely understood. He argues that the nostalgia film sets about capturing the past, what he terms the 'lost object of desire', which, he suggests, for Americans is the 1950's. For Jameson, such films operate as particular techniques for viewing history, which do not provide a recreation of the 'real' past but are deferential to the cultural myths and stereotypes in which the past has become seeped. This inability to provide adequate historical contexts to supposed historical recreations is described by Jameson as a form of cultural 'schizophrenia'.

In a reaction to, and against, the chaos of postmodern pastiche and schizophrenia, Jameson (1984: 92) calls for the renewal of the pedagogical function of art: '[A]n aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'. Jameson (1984) seeks then to connect cultural texts to their historical contexts and sees criticism as a means to map the cultural realm and provide an important contribution to the creation of political action. His work is, however, somewhat ambivalent in this regard as he seems unwilling to fully acknowledge postmodernism, in the guise he identifies, as carrying with it any truly liberating capacity. His wish for a restoration of the teaching function of art sees him slip into Frankfurt School pessimism whereby the masses are passive receptors of dominant ideology and it is the critic who will provide them with the necessary maps to engage in political resistance.

3.3 Classifying the Consumer: You Are What You Buy

The second perspective identified by Featherstone (1991) – 'modes of consumption' – privileges the role of consumption in defining and organising social classification. In introducing this approach, Featherstone (1991: 16) compares it to the production of consumption perspective, discussed above, writing: 'If it is possible to claim the operation of a 'capital logic' deriving from production, it may also be possible to claim a 'consumption logic' which points to the socially structured ways in which goods are used to demarcate social relationships'. Featherstone (1991) highlights the work of Douglas and Isherwood (1981) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in exploring how commodities act as communicators in demonstrating and demarcating social difference.

These ideas can be traced to earlier sociological traditions; in particular, the work of Veblen and Simmel exposes how variations in lifestyle shapes consumption practices, classifies social position and defines social relationships. While this work has, in general, emphasised class-based social differences, consumption can also be a means of differentiation and identification amongst young people. From subcultural theory to recent discussion of youth consumer lifestyles, there has been an emphasis on the role of consumption in framing youth identities.

3.3.1 Emulation and Imitation

Campbell (1987 and 1992) argues that situating the work of Veblen and Simmel alongside one another gives us the outline of what he terms ‘the popular Veblen-Simmel model of consumption’. This model supposes a number of elements as underpinning practices of consumption. First, consumption is an other-directed activity; second, the pursuit and maintenance of status is a key facet of consumer practice; third, imitation and emulation are central motives underpinning consumption; and fourth, there is a continual cycle of fashion as those at the top of the social order must continually adopt new and novel commodities to preserve their superiority.

Veblen (1904) suggested that the differences between social classes are differences in wealth visible in ostentatious expenditure and display. Examining the consumption practices of the nouveaux riche in late nineteenth century New England, he argued that this newly wealthy leisure class sought to emulate the European upper-classes through their consumption practices, in particular their choice of food and dress. Veblen identified this demonstration of wealth and status as taking on two forms: conspicuous

consumption, the purchase and display of expensive commodities; and conspicuous leisure, leading a life that is distanced from everyday work and marked by leisure and travel. These consumption practices were part of the process of social emulation, which gave rise to the regenerative character of consumption as this emulation required money to keep pace with the constant stream of novelty. Consumer behaviour is, therefore, predicated on the emulation of the upper classes by the middle and lower classes. In turn, the upper classes are equally keen to distance themselves through their patterns of consumption and leisure from those 'below' them in the social strata hence a continuing top-down flow of new goods.

Campbell (1992), in his discussion of Veblen and Simmel, argues that the ideas of the latter can provide the missing dynamic within the work of the former. While Veblen sees the distinction between classes as differences in wealth, which is materially realised through the ostentatious display of consumption habits, Simmel, alternatively, suggests that fashion distinguishes classes and groups from each other and that consumption habits are practices of imitation rather than emulation. For Simmel, fashion and consumption is not the source of status, as Veblen appears to suggest, but is the way in which a person's status is expressed.

As Veblen had previously suggested, and Bourdieu would subsequently follow, Simmel (1997[1905]: 189) asserts that fashion 'is a product of class division'. In the face of imitation by the lower social groups, higher social groups must constantly generate new fashions to differentiate themselves and preserve their social status. However, Simmel extends Veblen's top-down model of consumption behaviour and considers fashion as both imitation and differentiation – or as he termed them 'generalisation' and

‘specialisation’. These divergent attitudes form the inherently paradoxical nature of fashion. Fashion’s mercurial and evanescent character is borne of the tension between social norms and individual ideals. The desire to stand out and apart as a fashionable individual is intertwined with the psychological need to be accepted within the social group. Rather than being a dualist interpretation, Simmel suggests the simultaneous aspects of individual expression and declarations of group membership. This dialectic is intensified within the metropolitan environment, in which the cycle of consumption is accelerated. In this context, one is continually exposed to the new and ‘vital’ ephemera of consumption through which individuals are connected to those in their circle (e.g. class) and by the same token differentiated from others. Simmel identifies a particular character of person, whom he terms ‘the man of culture’, as being attracted to ‘foreignness’ or novelty to the ‘exceptional, bizarre or conspicuous’ as an end in itself and not merely as a mechanism of social distance.

While the Veblen-Simmel model of consumption alerts us to the role of commodities as markers of social difference, Campbell (1987) argues that it is problematic if we try to apply it in practice. For example, the model would appear to assume that the social hierarchy is clearly organised and understood within society, with those at the ‘bottom’ striving to be like those at the ‘top’. What this ignores is that what is desirable and reputable may well be contested by different groups in different contexts. A related point is that this linear model does not account for the possibility that, as Campbell (1987) observes, contemporary society is populated with multiple elite groups meaning that there isn’t one particular grouping to emulate (or imitate).

3.3.2 Taste and Distinction

Douglas and Isherwood (1996[1981]), while acknowledging the idea inherent in the arguments of Veblen and Simmel that consumption can often act as a means of exclusion, reject the idea that emulation and competition are the driving forces of consumption. Instead, they view consumption as a marker of social relationships, arguing that it is a form of expression ‘making visible and stable the categories of culture’ (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: 38). In this way, commodities are a ‘live information system’, which act as communicators and demarcate social difference: ‘consumption uses goods to make firm and visible a particular set of judgements in the fluid processes of classifying persons and events’ (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: 41).

Douglas and Isherwood (1996) suggest that, in modern societies, unlike traditional ones, the correlation between patterns of consumption and taste become less clearly associated with class position. Instead they propose that social stratification can be mapped in relation to the dominant types of goods consumed. In this regard, they identify three sets of goods: first, a staple set that relates to the primary production sector (e.g. food); second, a technology set that relates to the secondary production sector (e.g. travel); and, third, an information set, which relates to tertiary production (e.g. education, the arts, etc.). They state that the poor in society only have access to the staple set, whereas to access other sets, and especially the information set, requires not just greater income but also a higher level of social and cultural capital in order to sustain the ‘correct’ consumption practices. Consequently, they argue that those who consume large amounts of information goods wield control over areas, such as education, that can restrict access to those goods. In this way, particular groups can

secure greater advantage in terms of education and employment, which serves to reproduce social difference in society. What Douglas and Isherwood's (1996) work demonstrates is how practices of consumption can be viewed as criteria for producing and reproducing social difference, a point that has been subsequently developed in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu (1984: 6) reflects upon the relationship between cultural preferences and social classification, a relationship he captures with the phrase 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier'. For Bourdieu (1984), practices of consumption do not just reflect and make visible social differences, but are the way in which these differences are produced and reproduced. He argues then that social distinction is derived from differences in taste preferences and consumer choices. While Bourdieu (1984) sees social groups as using commodities as a means to carve out their own cultural space, he suggests that cultural practices are indelibly marked by one's class experiences, or more specifically, what he refers to as the 'habitus', and operate within structures he refers to as the 'field'.

The habitus refers to the 'mental and cognitive structures' through which people construct and order their social worlds, that is, how cultural practices become habitual and taken-for-granted. It is a structure that operates at an unconscious level, in particular within bodily practices and dispositions – including, for example, the way we walk, the way we talk, our taste in food, etc. While the habitus is seen as the subjective embodiment of objective structures, it is an internal constraint rather than a determinant of social action. By incorporating a greater emphasis on culture as a factor in shaping one's taste and distinction, Bourdieu (1984) extends the understanding of consumption

as predicated on more than just an economically determined class position. The habitus then, while significantly shaped by social class, is not necessarily reducible to it.

Bourdieu (1984) suggests that each social class is characterised by a specific set of consumption practices that indicate membership of that particular group. These groups share a particular collection of social and cultural tastes that relate to the types of capital – social, cultural and economic – group members possess. People carry with them specific arrangements of social and cultural practices that shape their perception of the world and their patterns of consumption. While Bourdieu (1984) gives preference to class as the marker around which particular tastes and lifestyles are cleaved, it is possible to argue that groups formed around commonalities of age, gender, etc. can also often mitigate the emergence of common forms and practices of consumption. For example, Thornton's (1996) work on 'subcultural capital' modifies Bourdieu's (1984) model to address forms of social difference within youth culture – where listening to the right music, wearing the right clothes, and having the right mobile phone can all serve as markers of distinction for young people.

Bourdieu (1984) locates this struggle for social distinction as operating within the 'cultural field', wherein power is derived through the accumulation of certain types of capital: economic; cultural; social; and symbolic. Those who possess more of these forms of capital wield control over the means of production, and consequently those with a dearth of social, cultural and economic capital defer to others in matters of taste and distinction. In this context, Bourdieu (1984) identifies an unconscious acceptance of the class system and by implication a continual reproduction of particular habitus within society. While he acknowledges the possibility for groups and individuals to

subvert their position within the social hierarchy, he points to the existence of a dominant power elite, who exert control over the means of distinction through acts of 'symbolic violence'. Bourdieu (1984) cites education as an example of the way in which power and class relations are reproduced. He argues that the education system is a site of symbolic violence, whereby those in power impose themselves on the rest of society.

Bourdieu (1984) highlights the role of 'new cultural intermediaries' in shaping and legitimating acts of consumption, a point stressed by Featherstone (1991). Bourdieu (1984) argues that these 'new cultural intermediaries' are those involved in the growing range of industries of cultural production, such as advertising, design, marketing, etc. whose expertise, as Featherstone (1991: 19) notes, is based on their 'knowledge of new goods, their social and cultural value, and how to use them appropriately'. Gaining these positions requires high levels of cultural and social capital, which Bourdieu (1984) suggests are more often than not accessed through possessing high levels of economic capital. For Bourdieu (1984), the organisation and manipulation of cultural and social capital ultimately reflect the structures of economic capital. Consequently, the control of social and cultural capital allows for the construction of social and cultural hierarchies that validate and mask economic domination.

More recently, the expansion of media culture and the ephemeral ebb and flow of commodities has led to a questioning of structural models of consumption and identity. It has been suggested that the idea of fixed status groups reflected in patterns of taste and consumption have become increasingly difficult to sustain in the context of social analysis. As Featherstone (1991: 83) observes: 'We are moving towards a society

without fixed status groups in which the adoption of styles of life (manifest in choice of clothes, leisure activities, consumer goods, bodily disposition) which are fixed to specific groups have been surpassed'. This idea of the fluid expression of identities is especially manifest in discussions of consumer lifestyles.

3.3.3 The Consumer Lifestyle

Featherstone (1991) notes how 'lifestyle' is a term that is in vogue, pushing past its earlier sociological meaning. Bourdieu's revival of the term came after a period in which it was in the margins of sociological thought. Subsequently, there has emerged a more expansive use of the concept of lifestyle that eschews the determining rigidity of class structures in favour of an understanding of identity and consumption as more fluid and less defined by the parameters of social class. As Featherstone (1991: 83) suggests, 'it connotes individuality, self-expression, and a stylistic self-consciousness'. In an argument reminiscent of Jameson (1984), Featherstone relates this shift to a number of emergent tendencies within consumer culture: first, the erasure of the distinction between high and popular culture; second, the aestheticisation of everyday life; and third, the replacement of the artistic avant-garde with the new petit-bourgeoisie as the main 'cultural intermediaries'. For Featherstone, these first two points are interrelated as the aestheticisation of everyday life has the effect of removing the boundary between high and popular culture. This process is evident in the positioning of everyday objects as works of art, found in, for example, dada and surrealism in the 1920s and 1930s through to the emergence of Pop Art in the 1960s. More recently, it has emerged in the transfusion of art into the production of consumer images and texts, for example in

advertising, design, cinema, etc. This impulse has also been recognised in the design and promotion of the mobile phone, with Katz and Sugiyama (2005), for example, identifying the role of the aesthetics of modernism and futurism in this context (see also Goggin, 2006; Redhead, 2004).

He identifies three ways in which one can speak about the aestheticisation of everyday life. First, it can be seen in the artistic developments of the early twentieth century, such as dada and surrealist movements, whose practitioners sought to dissolve the division between art and everyday life. Second, there is the artistic and intellectual project of transforming life into a work of art, evident in modernist art and literature, which cultivated an artistic culture that privileged a life of aesthetic consumption and an aspiration to make life aesthetically pleasing. Third, there are the intensifying streams of signs and images that flood the senses of everyday experience. Featherstone stresses how these impulses have informed the subsequent development of mass consumption with its analogous desires for new thrills and sensations and the pursuit of distinguishing lifestyles.

Featherstone's description of the aestheticisation of everyday life is part of a wider set of changes, which have at various times been conceived as post, late, high, or reflexive modernity. Featherstone observes that the features of this process are not singular to postmodernism but can also be found in the urban landscapes of the nineteenth-century invoked by Baudelaire, Benjamin and Simmel. Similarly, Marshall Berman (1999[1982]) in exploring the experiences of modernization and the aesthetic of modernism in art, literature and architecture points to what he calls the post-modern mystique. He registers disquiet at postmodernist's wilful dismissal of the impulses of

modernism as lapsed, instead insisting that the characteristic features of postmodernism retain considerable affinity with modernism's valorisation of knowledge and progress. Indeed, beyond aesthetic considerations, Berman's description of the experience of living in modernity is surprisingly consonant with what has been attributed to postmodernity: 'to experience social and personal life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air' (1999 [1982]: 345).

While this line of continuity can be drawn, it can be suggested that these features of modernity have become increasingly intensified and more pervasive. Whether or not this represents an 'epochal shift', as some theorists of postmodernity maintain, is open to debate. Various writers alternatively view postmodernity as an embryonic development within modernity. For example, Giddens acknowledges that while change has occurred, rather than representing the move into postmodernity, he argues that contemporary society is experiencing a period of 'late' or 'reflexive' modernity. Similarly, Bauman is reticent about ascribing recent social change with a seismic shift in the trajectory of modern life, noting: 'Postmodernity may be conceived of as modernity conscious of its true nature – modernity for itself' (1992: 187). As Berman similarly suggests, what has commonly been called postmodernity may be more readily characterised as a more complex and developed phase of modernity.

This is reflected in Jameson's assertion that the perceived transition from modernity to postmodernity can be more readily allied to a shift from industrial capitalism to late capitalism. Equally, he argues that there has been a 'prodigious expansion of culture

throughout the social realm' (Jameson, 1984: 87), a point subsequently picked up by a number of theorists. For Chaney (1994) this 'cultural turn', hastened by the amplification of sign culture and the growth of consumption, finds material purchase in the intensifying circulation of consumer goods. The idea of the cultural turn resonates in recent reflections on consumer society, which afford primacy to the idea of identity as fluid and temporal rather than fixed and permanent, as negotiated rather than given. Individuals are seen as acting in a more reflexive manner, by which commodities are imbued with personal meaning that help to shape individual identities. The diminishing power of dominant discourses and the collapse of stable meaning identified by theorists of postmodernity, seen as the death of the subject by Baudrillard, has elicited an alternative understanding of consumer practices as part of the individual's ongoing restorative project to actively find meaning through the appropriation of images and objects and the cultivation of particular lifestyles.

For example, Giddens (1991) argues that society has entered a 'post-traditional order' where social identity becomes a 'reflexive project continuously worked on and reflected'. This project of the self is carried out through the adoption of particular lifestyles, as Giddens (1991: 5) observes: 'because of the "openness" of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of actions and the diversity of "authorities", lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity'. In this way, individuals create their self-identity through the construction of particular biographies and narratives of the self.

Giddens' treatment of the term lifestyle, therefore, extends beyond a discussion of the types of leisure activities and consumer practices that people engage in. Rather he

views lifestyles as existential projects. Individuals are involved in creating a sense of 'ontological security', by which they have a greater level of certainty and control over themselves and their lives. In the context of this 'post-traditional order', he suggests that the politics of class have waned and been replaced by a 'life politics'. Giddens makes a distinction between traditional forms of emancipatory politics and these new life politics. He defines emancipatory politics as: 'a generic outlook concerned above all with liberating individuals and groups from constraints which adversely affect their life chances', contrasting this with life politics writing: 'Life politics does not primarily concern the conditions which liberate us in order to make choices: it is a politics of choice. While emancipatory politics is a politics of life chances, life politics is a politics of lifestyle'. In this context, life politics relate to questions of self-identity and self-actualisation, rather than wider traditional forms of identification and classification. Like Giddens, Chaney (1996) posits that the concept of lifestyle demonstrates the decreasing importance of traditional forms of structural difference such as class, gender and race, and more readily expresses the reflexivity evident in consumer practices. In particular, he contests Bourdieu's use of the term lifestyle as underpinned by an intuitive expression of class-based identity. For Chaney (1996), Bourdieu's model reflects a structurally determined formulation that fails to take account of the reflexive character of contemporary patterns of consumption. In pursuing this argument, he draws out a distinction between his conceptualisation of 'lifestyles' and what he terms 'ways of life'.

Chaney (1996: 97) conceptualises of lifestyles as 'displays of consumer competence'. This 'competence' is demonstrated within ongoing creative projects the purpose of

which is to complete the self. By contrast, ways of life are ‘associated with a more or less stable community displayed in features such as shared norms, rituals, patterns of social order and probably a distinctive dialect or speech community’ (Chaney, 1996: 92). Ways of life then can be seen as derived from socio-cultural forms like gender, ethnicity, age, etc. However, rather than suggesting they are disappearing Chaney argues how they are interwoven with new patterns of choice that help shape particular lifestyles. While he suggests that identity is shaped by particular and localised contexts – what he terms ‘sites and strategies’ – Chaney argues that it is formed through reflexive practices rather than determined by structural factors. He situates the local as a point of reference rather than a determinant of the way in which one’s lifestyle is constructed and controlled.

Chaney (1996) recognises, however, that these lifestyle projects are never completely decoupled from forces of stratification and difference. He allows for the potential criticism of overemphasising the role of creativity in lifestyle choices, which may in fact be restricted to a small fraction of society. He highlights ‘an enormous growth in the size and range of institutional significance of a social stratum of experts or intellectuals’ (Chaney, 1996: 96) as a key feature of modern life. As suggested by the work of Bourdieu, these experts and intellectuals are more likely to control and have access to the means of ‘consumer discrimination’. However, Chaney (1996: 97) responds to this position by asserting that ‘the opportunities for creative innovation in remaking lives are not determined solely by economic resources’.

Featherstone (1991), similarly, highlights the expansion of new cultural intermediaries within the middle class, who have replaced the artistic avant-garde as arbiters of taste

and style. He acknowledges the salience of Bourdieu's discussion of what he terms the 'new petit bourgeoisie' as the providers of goods and services, but suggests that rather than promoting one particular style they foster a wider interest in the notion of style itself: 'the new middle class... do not seek to promote a single lifestyle, but rather to cater for and expand the range of styles and lifestyles available to audiences and consumers' (Featherstone, 1991: 26). In this context, this reshaped concept of lifestyle is more readily associated with Featherstone's discussion of 'dreams, images, and pleasures'. However, this does not mean that we should view forms of cultural production as a benign enterprise. Without wishing to exclude attention to the ways in which production shapes consumption, the question I turn to address now is how do consumers themselves engage with this plurality of consumption styles and practices that are available to them?

3.4 From Automaton to Autonomous or: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Consumer

In discussing the modes of consumption perspective, Featherstone (1991) suggests that the extension of consumer culture has made the process of classification identified by, for example Bourdieu, much more difficult to interpret and sustain. Arguing that processes of cultural classification have become less distinct, Featherstone (1991: 20) notes: 'It may be that there are different modes of identity, and habitus formation and deformation emerging which make the significance of taste and lifestyle choice more blurred'. Equally, in relation to the production of consumption approach, Featherstone (1991: 15) suggests that it 'has difficulty in addressing the actual practices and

experiences of consumption'. This approach focuses on the images and texts of consumer culture and their perceived effects, without, Featherstone (1991: 63) argues, sufficiently examining the social relationships that mediate this process. This omission has meant a neglect of the actual cultural practices that individuals engage in within everyday life.

In this context, Featherstone identifies a third approach, 'dreams, images and pleasures', which reflects the plurality of lifestyle choices available and engages more affirmatively with practices of consumption and the role of the consumer. As he suggests: 'capitalism also produces... images and sites of consumption which endorse the pleasure of excess. Those images and sites also favour the blurring of the boundary between art and everyday life' (Featherstone, 1991: 22). In highlighting the creative potential of mass culture, Featherstone draws attention to a diverse array of issues, amongst them the notion of excess and waste derived from Bataille; Bakhtin's discussion of the carnivalesque; and the dream worlds of Benjamin's arcades and department stores.

Featherstone's (1991) work anticipates many of the subsequent theoretical preoccupations that have emerged over the course of the 1990's and beyond. For example, Warde (2002) observes that in the period since Featherstone (1991) set out his account of consumer culture there has been a retreat from the first two perspectives discussed above and an increased engagement with this third approach. In particular, Warde (2002: 10) asserts that: 'the concern with understanding the cultural aspects of consumption, images, signs and symbols... has continued, but with increasing emphasis on notions of personal identity rather than collective practice'. Warde (2002)

identifies a growth of writing characterised by the perceived ‘human potentiality of mass and post-Fordist consumption’. He argues that theorists have offered a variety of interpretations that are anchored in an optimistic assessment of consumer behaviour: consumption represents meaningful work; encourages an aesthetic attitude; stimulates social rebellion; is entertaining, enjoyable, pleasurable and intellectually interesting; supports socially meaningful practices; and fulfils needs (Warde, 2002: 13-17).

3.4.1 Dreams, Images and Pleasures

In discussing the ‘dreams, images and pleasures’ of consumer culture, Featherstone (1991) suggests an analysis of the ways in which aspects of the pre-industrial carnivalesque tradition persist in contemporary society. While Lefebvre held the carnival and ‘la fete’ as being as yet unrealised within contemporary capitalism, Featherstone (1991) detects how its spirit escapes into cultural consumption within everyday life. He argues that this tradition is transfused into media images (cinema, advertising, etc.); particular sites of consumption (theme parks, shopping centres, etc.); and even acts of conspicuous consumption by states and corporations. This change of emphasis refocuses attention to the ways in which the experience of consumer culture may be one of pleasure rather than manipulation. As I argue in Chapter 2, this shift is also evident in youth cultural research, wherein young people’s practices of cultural consumption are viewed as ways in which they express and enact forms of power and agency.

As Featherstone (1991: 22) notes, in contrast to the pessimism of the ‘production of culture approach’, it is important to recognise how popular culture has traditionally

been the locus of ‘transgression, protest, the carnivalesque and liminal excesses’. He draws on the concept of the carnivalesque, as developed by Bakhtin, to indicate the temporary reversal of the official order. Featherstone (1991: 23), for example, invokes the image of the fair as an example of ‘spectacular imagery, bizarre juxtapositions, confusions of boundaries and an immersion in a *melée* of strange sounds, motions, images, people, animals and things’. A number of theorists have similarly identified the ‘carnivalesque’ within contemporary popular culture. For example, Docker (1994) suggests that its exuberance and excess are evident across a range of films, literature, music, etc., while Fiske (1989a) compares the joys of the carnival with the pleasures derived from watching professional wrestling.

Featherstone (1991) also connects this spirit of the carnival, in displaced form, within sites of ‘ordered disorder’, such as department stores and theme parks. For example, he cites Walter Benjamin’s equation of the new department stores and arcades in nineteenth century Paris to the summoning up of ‘dream worlds’. With their fantastic displays of commodities, department stores become the centre of a newly aestheticised urban landscape. For Benjamin, the infusion of industrial processes into the realm of art positions culture as increasingly important within everyday life. The subsequent growth of the mass media has served to intensify these tendencies. As Featherstone (1991) notes, one can detect the unacknowledged leakage of Benjamin’s ideas into theories of postmodernity found in the work of Baudrillard and Jameson; between them there is a shared recognition of the increasing role of culture in society and the proliferation of signs and images saturating the fabric of existence.

Benjamin's work is usually presented as a counterpoint to the pessimism of his Frankfurt School colleagues, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, as it focuses on the liberating potential of consumer activities. However, as Featherstone (1991: 24) notes, in relation to Benjamin, 'this does not represent the eclipse of controls', but rather mechanisms of discipline make it possible to exist in this atmosphere. Featherstone (1991: 24) continues, observing that: '[one] requires the capacity to manage swings between intense involvement and more distanced aesthetic detachment'. These comments mirror Simmel's (1903) discussion of the 'blasé attitude', which he suggests is a mental precondition for surviving life in the city, honed in response to the complex stimuli that one confronts there.

It remains, however, that Benjamin (1999) views creativity as being cut loose from the world of art and permeating within the consumption of mass-produced objects. He argues that through its role in religious ceremony the work of art was previously integrated into the prevailing order, where it assumed a particular 'aura' of authority and uniqueness. This 'aura' associated with art remained through the Renaissance period and the secularisation of art, and was linked to the idea of art as providing a unique perspective on the human condition. The growth of capitalism and the concurrent commodification of culture – 'the age of mechanical reproduction' – caused, in Benjamin's (1999) terms, the aura of the work of art to wither. Through technical procedures, such as photography and sound film, the 'unique existence' of the work of art is replaced by a 'plurality of copies' whereby it is removed from the realm of tradition. However, rather than being a negative development, Benjamin embraces the potential for this democratisation of culture. While it has lost its aura, art is now

available to a wider audience. The exhibition value of art allows more people to take part in its reception and allows for popular culture to act as a liberating rather than repressive force. The increasing centrality of popular culture and cultural consumption within everyday life has significant implications for the construction and interpretation of social identities.

3.4.2 The Invention in Everyday Life

Featherstone's discussion of the 'dreams, images and pleasures' of consumer culture, and the related developments in theories of consumer lifestyle, invites us to consider more closely the empowering and liberating capacity of consumption within everyday life. In this context, the work of Michel De Certeau is instructive. He challenges the view of everyday life as purely alienating, pointing instead to the human facility for invention and creativity witnessed in actual lived experiences. In contrast then with Lefebvre, who was concerned with inventing a concept of everyday life, de Certeau explores the 'invention' that everyday life reveals (Schilling, 2003). This focus on resistance and agency rather than systems of power and control makes de Certeau's work unique amongst contemporary French postmodern and poststructuralist thought. It is, therefore, perhaps of little surprise that his work found a more sympathetic and receptive audience in the context of Anglo-American cultural studies.

De Certeau was present in Paris in May 1968 and referred to the events as 'a shattering'. In spite of the brevity of the revolt and the swiftness of the restoration of 'order', he was galvanised by the exposure of a new culture, an 'other order', hidden beneath the discipline and control of modernity (Ward, 2000: 4-5). These concerns reached fruition

with the two volume *The Practice of Everyday Life*, where de Certeau moved away from dealing with explicitly ‘revolutionary’ possibilities of cultural practices, to focus on another ‘cultural climate’ – that of the subtle acts of creativity that make up everyday life. De Certeau, along with his colleagues, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, sought to expose the richness of seemingly mundane and unconscious acts, such as cooking, walking, reading, etc., which form part of this ‘other order’ that flows beneath the ossified structures of dominant power. These practices are presented as ‘resistant’ without being oppositional; they are part of the residue of everyday life, which emerge within but cannot be contained by the dominant social order. De Certeau’s work then provides a counterpoint to the pessimism found in the work of, for example, Lefebvre and the Situationists.

De Certeau (1984: xi) views the book as ‘part of a continuing investigation of the ways in which users – commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules – operate’. Rather than specifying particular groups or individuals, he instead articulates practices and the logic that underpins them: ‘the question at hand concerns modes of operations or schemata of action, and not directly the subjects (or persons) who are their authors or vehicles’. De Certeau (1984) then collapses the subject under the heading of ‘everyman’ (‘chacun’), delineated as users rather than the pejorative euphemism ‘consumers’, as the latter term falsely casts individuals as ‘passive’ and ‘docile’. Buchanan (2000) suggests that this assertion of an operational logic of culture allows de Certeau (1984) to convey apparently inconsequential practices (e.g. cooking, walking, etc.) as the focus of critical consideration. De Certeau (1984) begins by proposing the extension and combination of two types of study, representations and

modes of behaviour, to examine 'usage': 'For example, the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behaviour) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer "makes" or "does" during this time and with these images'. He argues that the same form of analysis can be related to an array of everyday practices, for example the use of space, items bought in the supermarket, stories in magazines and newspapers, etc. For de Certeau (1984), this making is a 'poiesis', a secondary production called consumption. It is hidden as it exists within areas already defined and occupied by large systems of production (television, urban development, etc.) and so there is no place in which this other production can be indicated. This invisibility means that it does not reveal itself through products of its own 'but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order' (de Certeau, 1984: xiii). In this way, 'users make (bricolent) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules' (de Certeau, 1984: xiii-xiv).

In particular, de Certeau (1984) frames his argument with explicit reference to Foucault's discussion of power, resistance and discipline. Acknowledging Foucault's significant contribution to exposing how power operates within day-to-day life, de Certeau is nevertheless critical of Foucault's characterization of society as a disciplinary society that encourages self-regulation through 'micro-technologies' of power. De Certeau takes issue with the notion of power being so ubiquitous as to restrict forms of opposition emerging; insisting instead that routines of everyday cultural practices are repositories of the 'hidden poetics' of everyday life. In de

Certeau's terms, Foucault's discussion of power 'privileges the productive apparatus (which produces the "discipline")' (de Certeau, 1984: xiv) over the productions (consumption) of those it purportedly disciplines. These 'productions' are repressed by the apparatuses of discipline, but for de Certeau this does not mean that they are eliminated. Foucault's argument that discipline has infiltrated every aspect of everyday life is offset by de Certeau, who suggests that everyday life is not reducible to a rigid set of disciplinary regimes. De Certeau is concerned then with exploring a dimension neglected by Foucault, not patterns of resistance, which Foucault already hypothesizes, but the subtle actions of escape and evasion that honeycomb the landscape of everyday life – how the practices of everyday life can 'escape without leaving...the dominant social order' (de Certeau, 1984: xiii).

This orientation is given weight by the distinction he draws between the concepts of tactics and strategies. Although Buchanan (2000) argues against the reduction of de Certeau's ideas to specific concepts, it is difficult to deny that his discussion of tactics and strategies forms a central element in his writing (see Buchanan, 1995: 86-107; Ahearne, 1995: 157-189). De Certeau conceptualises these terms as contradictory rather than as confrontational; viewing them as non-oppositional binary terms. They fold back on one another, providing each with the essence that defines them (Highmore, 2006, 154-5; Buchanan, 2000: 86). De Certeau (1984: 35-6) defines a strategy in the following way:

I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serves as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the

country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed.

The crucial point is that a strategy is a function of place, and it requires a certain manner of strategic thinking to produce a place – it is composed around a formal character of particular operations, the logic that undergrids and guides them. In contrast, de Certeau (1984: 37) characterises a tactic as divested of place-centredness:

A tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus... It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the propriety powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.

In short, de Certeau's (1984: 25) 'chacun' (or 'everyman') uses temporally based tactics against the strategies of their place-centred 'oppressors' - it is the tactics of the weak that are used to evade the strategies of the strong. Perhaps the most manifest account of this tactical action provided by de Certeau is 'la perruque': '...the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer'. He cites examples which include 'a matter as simple as a secretary's writing a love letter on "company time" or as complex as a cabinetmaker's "borrowing" a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room' (de Certeau, 1984: 25). Tactics then can be seen as the reclamation and diversion of time away from their ordered and controlled routine towards freer, creative and undirected impulses. Tactics can thus be seen as the inventive use of possibilities within strategic contexts. A key point then is that tactics do not operate outside of a strategy, they are the 'other' inside; that which escapes without leaving.

A useful point of comparison is the work of Antonio Gramsci, who also conceived of the cultural terrain as a site of struggle. Gramsci similarly employed metaphors of war in exploring how culture and power are negotiated and contested. In particular, his discussion of a 'war of position' and a 'war of movement' concerned the ways in which the working classes could not only resist but usurp hegemonic power. Gramsci argued that the exertion of hegemonic power was a negotiated process between dominant and subordinate groups. While this includes space for both resistance and incorporation, Gramsci suggested whatever concessions were granted by the dominant order they would never allow room for the economic basis of class power to be challenged. In order for this to be achieved the hegemony of the working class must be expanded over time – Gramsci termed this building up of a new 'historic bloc' a 'war of position'. This would give way to a 'war of movement': a full frontal attack that would overthrow capitalism (Forgacs, 2000: 223; Simon, 1991: 29). While Gramsci's work is more explicitly political in offering an understanding of how significant forms of social change can be brought about, de Certeau's (1984) interest resides less in fostering social and political change and more in the smaller struggles that take place in everyday life.

De Certeau's (1984) often explicit use of metaphors of war, while allowing for vibrantly elaborating on the experience of everyday life, can also then be somewhat misleading. The conflictual relationship it implies sits in contradistinction to the arguments that he presents. Unlike Gramsci, de Certeau (1984) is less concerned with radical political action. For example, he lattices his work not with instances of explicitly revolutionary practices but with illustrations of ordinary everyday actions

such as talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc. and observes how these seemingly prosaic actions constitute tactical manoeuvres. It is worth reminding ourselves that de Certeau (1984: xiv) is not interested in uncovering how power is deposited but rather ‘how an entire society resists being reduced [to]...the grid of “discipline” [that] is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive’. While different forms and logics are at work within strategies and tactics, rather than directly confrontational, they can be seen as at times discordant impulses that interact to produce friction in everyday life.

This practice of creative appropriation re-imagines commodities as something removed from their predetermined uses. For de Certeau (1984: xvii) ‘the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lends a political dimension to everyday practices’. However, this ‘subversion’ of intended use and by implication structures of power takes place in less visible and non-confrontational ways (Gardiner, 2000: 168-172). These practices are evident in young people’s use of the mobile phone, such as the ‘parent-management strategies’ identified by Green (2002) through which young people subvert forms of parental monitoring (see also Ling and Yttri, 2002). Equally, Green (2002) identifies similar practices in the school setting, where young people evade control and make use of the mobile phone in the classroom (see also Taylor, 2005; Ito, 2005; and Ling, 2004). These, Taylor (2005) argues, are ‘localised acts of subversion’ rather than resistance in an explicitly political sense. They serve to provide young people with a sense of freedom and autonomy, without directly challenging or eroding the integrity of these institutional controls.

3.4.3 Consumption as Production

Echoes of both Gramsci and de Certeau resonate strongly within contemporary cultural studies. As noted in Chapter 2, from the late 1960s British Cultural Studies sought to examine the ways in which cultural practices produced and reproduced social and class boundaries. Equally, this tradition extended its scope to analyse how the use of commodities in everyday life can resist, oppose and alter dominant cultural meanings. Popular culture is viewed then as contingent and open to multiple interpretations within different contexts and by different groups. For example, the identification by John Fiske (1989a & 1989b) of the ways in which consumers make use of cultural commodities such as television shows, fashion, pop music, etc.; ‘subverting’ them to construct their own meanings.

Fiske remains the most oft-cited, and indeed oft-criticised, theorists of the liberating capacity of consumption and popular culture. Asserting the power of the consumer, Fiske (1989a) suggests that notions of the culture industry as ideologically dominant are undermined when we consider that producers display a limited ability to predict what will prove successful in the marketplace. For example, he notes that ‘between 80 and 90 per cent of new products fail despite extensive advertising... many films fail to recover even their promotional costs at the box office’ (Fiske, 1989a: 31). Confronting the pessimism of neo-Marxist readings of consumer culture, Fiske (1989a) also questions the idea of ‘a mass culture imposed upon a powerless and passive people by a culture industry whose interests were in direct opposition to theirs’. Refusing the characterisation of consumers as ‘cultural dupes’, Fiske contends that through acts of consumption individuals can resist structures of power. Drawing from de Certeau,

Fiske characterises a range of consumer activities (e.g. watching television, fashion, etc.) as ‘tactical raids’ within the realm of capitalism. He argues that consumers are engaged in what Umberto Eco (1986) terms ‘semiotic guerrilla warfare’, by which they make use of commodities to serve their own ends, albeit without necessarily eroding the political and economic power of the system.

Elsewhere, Fiske (1987) contends that commodities operate within two economies: financial and cultural. He argues that the financial economy is about exchange value and monetary interests, whereas the cultural economy relates to ‘meanings, pleasures and identities’ (Fiske, 1987: 311), that is, the appropriation and use of commodities. While most consumers will have limited power in the financial economy, Fiske (1987: 313) suggests ‘the power of audiences-as-producers in the cultural economy is considerable’. This, he argues, is because meanings do not ‘circulate’ in the cultural economy as wealth does in the financial economy. Meanings are more intangible and far less easy to possess and control. As Fiske (1987: 313) notes, ‘[M]eanings and pleasures circulate within it [the cultural economy] without any real distinction between producers and consumers’.

He isolates two forms of power enacted in contemporary society: semiotic and social. The former is related to the use of commodities and popular culture in the generation of ‘meanings, pleasures and social identities’, while the latter is committed to transforming the socio-economic system. For Fiske (1987:316) then, popular culture is more often about semiotic rather than social power, suggesting it is caught up in ‘the struggle between homogenisation and difference, or between consensus and conflict’. While he argues that the financial economy, read the culture industry, promotes

incorporation and homogenisation, he contends that these forces are ‘always met by resistances of heterogeneity’, to which the cultural economy, read the consumer, is more hospitable (Fiske, 1989a: 8). In this way, the dominant or ‘preferred’ meanings of the producer are challenged and reworked by consumers. This then is a variant of Willis’ (1990) argument that popular culture is produced through active forms of cultural consumption. Similar process of user-driven forms of cultural practice can be identified in relation to the mobile phone (see, for example, Fortunati, 2005; Lasen 2005).

Fiske (1989a & 1989b) casts his net wide in search of examples, but the most notable illustration of this process is found in his discussion of denim jeans, and his view that the practice of wearing torn or worn jeans is a tiny gesture of rebellion: ‘[I]t is a refusal of commodification and an assertion of one’s right to make one’s own culture out of the resources provided by the commodity system’ (Fiske 1989a: 15). He refers to this ‘excorporation’, which he defines as ‘the process by which the subordinate make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system’ (Fiske, 1989a: 15). Elaborating his argument, he deploys the term ‘tearing’ as a metaphor for acts of cultural appropriation. Using the example of Judy Garland, he cites the way her image has been reworked from the all-American girl-next-door to a heroine of the gay community. He argues that this process of ‘excorporation’ is evident across of range of cultural texts, television shows to shopping malls to Madonna.

This argument is rooted in broader assertions found within cultural theory around the ability of consumers to make use of cultural texts that are unique and often far removed from the intended meanings of their producers. This is evident in the rich tradition of

studies on the active audience and fan cultures (see Brooker and Jermyn, 2003). Morley (1992), for example, draws on the work of Stuart Hall to suggest that cultural texts are 'encoded' with meanings, which are then 'decoded' in different ways by audiences. Similarly, both Bacon-Smith (2003) and Jenkins (2003) focus on *Star Trek* fans to argue that fan cultures provide both emotional support and social solidarity for their participants. This is achieved through the active creation of meaning by fans, who read the show in ways that reflects their own concerns and circumstances. The growing use of information and communication technologies contributes to this conflation of consumption and production, with discussions of new digital media contending that the boundaries between authors and audience have become increasingly porous. Practices such as blogging or maintaining MySpace or Facebook pages involve the production of content by users (Coté and Pybus, 2007; Jenkins, 2006), similarly, mobile phone use often involves the creation of text, images and 'moblogs'. In this way then, practices of cultural consumption can be seen as active and participatory rather than passive and disengaged.

However, criticisms of Fiske have often focused on his reading of consumer practices as political and on what is perceived as his unequivocal celebration of consumer behaviour. McGuigan (1992: 85) accuses Fiske's work as being 'indicative of the critical decline of British Cultural Studies'. In general, McGuigan suggests that cultural studies is in a 'paradigm crisis', citing 'an uncritical populist drift in the study of popular culture' as its root cause. This 'drift' emerges from cultural studies' promotion of consumers' interpretation of cultural texts over the economic and historical contexts of a text's production. For McGuigan (1992), Fiske's work is

emblematic of how neo-Gramscian hegemony theory has given way to an uncritical valorisation of consumer power and popular culture; what McGuigan (1992: 171) terms ‘new revisionism’:

That ordinary people use the symbolic resources available to them under present conditions for meaningful activity is both manifest and endlessly elaborated upon by new revisionism... Economic exploitation, racism, gender and sexual oppression, to name but a few, exist, but the exploited, estranged and oppressed cope, and, furthermore, if such writers as John Fiske and Paul Willis are to be believed, they cope very well indeed, making valid sense of the world and obtaining grateful pleasure from what they receive. Apparently, there is so much action in the micro-politics of everyday life that the Utopian promises of a better future, which were once so enticing for critics of popular culture, have lost all credibility.

However, these criticisms can be viewed as somewhat misleading as Fiske’s work does not disavow forms of inequality and exploitation. Indeed, Fiske is explicit in his recognition of structures of power and domination. He is critical not just of positions which ‘emphasize so strongly the forces of domination as to make it appear impossible for a genuine popular culture to exist at all’ but also of modes of analysis that have ‘celebrated popular culture without situating it in a model of power’ (Fiske, 1989a: 19).

Fiske (1989a: 20-21) articulates his approach further, stating:

[it] sees popular culture as a site of struggle, but, while accepting the power of the forces of dominance, it focuses upon the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, are evaded or are resisted. Instead of tracing exclusively the processes of incorporation, it investigates rather that popular vitality and creativity that makes incorporation a necessity. Instead of concentrating on the omnipresent, insidious practices of the dominant ideology, it attempts to understand the everyday resistances and evasions that make that ideology work so hard and insistently to maintain itself and its values. This approach sees popular culture as potentially, and often actually, progressive (though not radical), and it is essentially optimistic, for it finds in the vigour and vitality of the people evidence of both the possibility of social change and the motivation to drive it.

Certainly this helps demonstrate, as Schor and Holt (2000) observe, that Fiske's arguments have a greater degree of subtlety than his critics often acknowledge. Reflecting de Certeau (1984), Fiske (1989a) underscores how the everyday practices of consumers are minor moments of relief rather than direct challenges to structures of power. He acknowledges that the culture industry is alert and aware to the point where it is able to incorporate acts of resistance. Returning to the example of jeans, Fiske (1989a) details how in response to consumer practice producers started to produce pre-torn and pre-worn or faded jeans. In this context then it must be questioned what sort of political or even cultural power is being enacted through these acts of 'excorporation'. However, he suggests: 'Popular culture is progressive, not revolutionary' (Fiske, 1989a: 153). He continues, arguing that the political component of popular culture, while always potential, is not always activated, with the links between politics and the popular are, for Fiske (1989a: 157), 'diffuse, deferred, and not necessary entailed at all'. In many respects then, the activities Fiske highlights can be characterised less as forms of explicitly politicised resistance and more as escapes or evasions; and perhaps his major fault is to characterise them as 'resistance', a term that implies a level of active political action.

In this regard, McGuigan (1992: 295) raises a crucial objection, stating that Fiske's analysis 'focused so narrowly as it is on the micro-politics of consumption and the local victories and defeats of everyday life, provides little space for transformative struggle of any kind'. This criticism applies not just to Fiske, but to a tradition in cultural studies stretching from de Certeau through to more recent work in audience studies and fan culture. In this context, John Clarke (2000) suggests that imagining the consumer

as a 'guerrilla' as opposed to a 'dupe' has the effect of overestimating the political force of these acts of resistance. He argues that 'while this approach correctly gets rid of the pessimism of seeing subordinate groups as 'cultural dupes', the alternative vision of guerrilla armies of cultural activists seems excessively celebratory' (Clarke, 2000: 293). As Storey (1999: 170) notes, with reference to Fiske, the problem is not necessarily with the theory being employed but with the practice, through which there is an overemphasis on the cultural economy over the financial economy.

In order to redress this shortcoming, McGuigan prescribes a revival of political economy within cultural studies, arguing that 'the separation of contemporary cultural studies from the political economy of culture has been one of the most disabling features of the field of study... severely undermining the explanatory, and, in effect, critical capacities of cultural studies' (McGuigan, 1992: 40-41). He suggests then that cultural studies has overstated the power of consumers, and underplayed the role of production in shaping patterns of consumption. As Golding and Murdock (1991: 15) state, the political economy perspective 'sets out to show how different ways of financing and organising cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to them'. Like McGuigan, Golding and Murdock (1991) identify Fiske and Paul Willis as romanticising practices of consumption without adequately addressing the ideological domination of the culture industries, with the latter, they claim, being the prime focus of cultural studies. Storey (2001: 185), however, contends that political economy 'seems to involve little more than detailing access to, and availability of, cultural texts and practices', while remaining insensitive to the meanings and uses of these texts and

practices. He concedes that political economy's critique highlights the need to retain a focus on, what Stuart Hall terms, 'the conditions of existence' of cultural practices. However, this is something, he argues, it doesn't in fact achieve itself. Alternatively Storey (2001), following Angela McRobbie, suggests that neo-Gramscian hegemony theory allows for a cultural analysis that can address the relationship between production and consumption.

Building on Gramsci's idea of the 'terrain of culture' as a place where ideological struggle takes place, Stuart Hall (1981) observes that popular culture will very often define itself in opposition to the 'power bloc'. Rather than class-against-class, Hall suggests (1981: 238) that '[P]opular culture... is organized around the contradiction: the popular forces versus the power bloc'. In this way, neo-Gramscian cultural analysis suggests that popular culture is produced by individuals and groups through their active consumption of cultural commodities, what Hall terms 'production in use'. This, however, does not mean it dispenses with a discussion of the power of the culture industries; for example, Hall (1981: 228) asserts that the study of popular culture begins with 'the double movement of *containment* and *resistance*, which is always inevitably inside it'.

As Storey (2001: 106) observes: 'hegemony theory allows us to think of popular culture as a negotiated mix of intentions and counter intentions; both from 'above' and from 'below', both 'commercial' and 'authentic'; a shifting balance of forces between resistance and incorporation'. The process of articulation discussed earlier is crucial to this analysis, allowing for the identification of cultural texts and practices to be the locus of multiple 'readings' and interpretations. The neo-Gramscian perspective asserts

the people make culture ('production in use') from the array of commodities produced by the culture industries. A similar point is made by de Certeau, who suggests that commodities are first imposed upon people, and only then can they be transformed. Neo-Gramscian theory allows for an understanding of the ways in which consumption can be active, without denying the determining factors of production. In this way, we are returned to Miles' notion of 'the consuming paradox', whereby consumption is seen as a confluence of contradictions and ambiguities. It would be unwise then to assert that everyday consumer practice constitutes anything approaching revolutionary praxis. I argue instead that processes of consumption constitute, in Paul Willis' (1990) terms, a matter of 'cultural survival' – a means of existing in the world, which does not necessarily offer the means to change it. As Duncombe (2002: 82) observes, cultural practices need to be understood as of complex and contradictory tendencies: 'throughout the day each of us thinks and acts through a culture which reflects and reinforces a dominant way of seeing and being in the world, or we think and act in ways which challenge and undermine this culture'.

3.5 Conclusion

Central to this analysis of the consumer then is the necessity to account for the myriad of factors that shape their cultural experiences and practices. My intention here is not to necessarily privilege one position or argument over another, but to account for how different perspectives can provide different pieces of the puzzle. Nevertheless, the emphasis here, as in the previous chapter, has been to examine practices of consumption, or, more specifically, the place of the consumer within consumer culture,

and, in particular, explore how this can be a site of creativity and cultural power. In this way, I have more readily expanded upon how consumer practices may be read as expressions of agency, and the extent and limits of such expressions. The ways in which consumers make use of commodities and 'produce' culture, both within constraints and as a means for the potential refusal of these constraints, is the defining concern of this chapter, and indeed this thesis as a whole. Similarly, considering young people as consumers, the discussion of youth cultural research in Chapter 2 emphasises how young people's consumption constitute acts of expressive and symbolic importance. I situate the use of the mobile phone within these discussions of cultural consumption, and argue that adopting this approach can enhance our understanding of young people's cultural experiences.

The role of consumption can equally be seen as a way through which individual and collective identities are realised and enacted. Bourdieu (1984), for example, outlines how practices of cultural consumption act as a means of social classification and distinction. While Bourdieu (1984) privileges the role of class, or the habitus, in shaping consumption, recent reflections on consumer culture argue that lifestyle choices are increasingly less defined or determined by the structures of social class. In this context, lifestyle is conceptualised as involving more fluid and liberated expressions of individual and collective identity. A crucial point to be made is that consumption provides a means through which forms of identification and differentiation are made visible. In the context of this research, I suggest that young people's use of the mobile phone serves as a way through which they express and enact forms of self and group identities.

Ultimately, in privileging the idea of cultural consumption as active, I caution against an uncritical use of the term 'resistance', which is fraught with problematic notions of political action and the refusal of ideological control. However, this does not signal a return to forms of Frankfurt School pessimism or neo-Marxist critiques, which, while raising important arguments about the structures of capitalism, renders the consumer as little more than a passive figure, unknowing and unaware of the conditions in which they exist. Rather, I argue, cultural consumption is less about political resistance, and more about the resilience of social groups within systems of control and dominance, and their various reactions and adaptations within them. In this way then, I assert that within the context of contemporary consumer culture, there exists space for individuals and groups to pursue and realise significant forms of cultural agency and creativity.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

4.1 Introduction

The process of carrying out social research requires both an appreciation of the methodological ideas that shape it and an understanding of the method(s) of data collection that are used. These facets of social research are in conference throughout the research process. The particular methodological approach adopted within a piece of research establishes a set of philosophical and theoretical principles that shape how the researcher views the social world. It therefore exercises considerable influence upon the character of the research undertaken; including, the type of research question being investigated, the methods used, and the analysis of data. The selection of particular research method(s) is equally significant. The researcher must consider what method(s) are used, the rationale for their use, and their ability to apply them successfully in the field.

The specific research process followed in this study maintains a dialogue between both the methodological issues involved and the hands-on practicalities of carrying out the research in the field. With respect to methodology, a particular emphasis is placed on considerations specific to carrying out research with young people; for example, the key issues of power, ethics, and consent. In the data collection stage, a multi-method approach was used, incorporating both quantitative (survey – see Appendix I) and qualitative methods (focus groups). The use of this multi-method approach holds a number of significant benefits for the research undertaken. For example, it broadens

the type of data collected and can potentially improve the validity of the results and findings. However, before addressing the methods used in the collection of the data I examine a number of different research paradigms within the social sciences, and outline the methodological position of this research.

4.2 Philosophies and Paradigms of Social Research

In social research, the ways in which the social world is understood and interpreted is filtered through different philosophical or paradigmatic approaches. These paradigms reflect distinct ways of viewing the world, and establish particular methodological principles that shape the research process. They can be broadly defined in terms of their ontological and epistemological positions. Ontology refers to theories about the nature of existence, and within social research relates to how we perceive and understand the character of society. Ontological claims are predicated on a particular epistemological stance. Epistemology relates to theories of knowledge, or how we come to have particular knowledge about the external world. May (2001: 22) summarises how ontology and epistemology relate to social research, stating: ‘they refer to the ways in which we perceive and know our social world and the theories concerning what ‘exists’’. While these paradigms do not necessarily determine the nature of the research process, they have a significant role in shaping a researcher’s claims to knowledge and their understanding of how meaning is constructed.

A number of competing paradigms can be identified as having, at one time or another, considerable power within social research. However, an inherent difficulty in broaching a discussion of research paradigms is that their perceived boundaries are

often not clearly prescribed. Research textbooks display a marked lack of consensus in identifying particular research paradigms (see Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 191). Here I examine the shift from the positivist/postpositivist traditions to the more recent development of newer paradigmatic approaches, specifically interpretivism and social constructivism. While these paradigms are important, slavish adherence to the view of one position as superior to any other can be constraining rather than enabling to the research process. Recently then research has become increasingly marked by an intermingling of methodological approaches, with the role of the researcher being a more pronounced concern within research methodology and practice.

4.2.1 Positivism & Post-Positivism

The positivist tradition is usually associated with a school of thought derived from the natural sciences (e.g. physics, biology, etc.), which suggests that there is an objective reality separate from those observing it. In essence then, positivist approaches apply scientific principles to the social world, maintaining that there are universal laws of human behaviour, which can be discerned through objective and unbiased investigation. Through this objective detachment from particular social phenomena, research is said to be able to identify these laws and use them to explain and predict human action. In this way, positivism offers a cause and effect understanding of the social world, in which individuals react to their environment in clear and observable ways (see, for example, May, 2001: 9-11; Schutt, 2006: 40). However, positivist claims for the existence of knowable ‘universal laws’, which govern the social world, have been strongly challenged within the social sciences. Equally, a considerable limit to

positivist approaches is the supposition that research can be conducted in an objective and unbiased manner.

Postpositivist approaches share with positivism the belief in an objective reality, but crucially suggest that this reality is complex and the way it is understood is subject to the biases of those studying it (Schutt, 2006: 40). Creswell (2003: 7) states that postpositivism 'refers to the thinking after positivism, challenging the traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge and recognizing that we cannot be "positive" about our claims of knowledge when studying the behavior (sic) and actions of humans'. He continues by outlining the key assumptions of this approach, including that knowledge is conjectural and absolute truth can never be found; research is about making and refining claims based on the evidence collected; through research true statements can be developed, which explain causal relationships; and being objective in methods and analysis is of crucial importance (Creswell, 2003: 7-8).

4.2.2 Interpretivism and Constructivism

Since the 1970s, social research has witnessed a significant paradigmatic shift, signalled by a retreat from the claims for objectivity evidenced within positivist/postpositivist research traditions. Two fresh approaches advanced in this period, which give greater attention to the role of the researcher, are the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms. Interpretivism suggests that 'social reality is socially constructed and that the goal of social scientists is to understand what meanings people give to reality, not to determine how reality works apart from these interpretations' (Schutt, 2006: 43). The interpretivist philosophy departs from the positivist assertion of

an objective reality and by contrast stresses how researchers create a view and understanding of reality that is derived from their own preferences and their interactions with others. As Rosman and Rallis (2003: 46) observe: 'Interpretive research typically tries to understand the social world as it is... from the perspective of individual experience, hence an interest in subjective worldviews'.

Schutt (2006: 44) suggests that constructivism develops the interpretivist position 'by emphasizing the importance of exploring how different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs'. In this context, the researcher is interested in exploring multiple interpretations of social phenomena and actions. Creswell (2003) elaborates on this further by suggesting that the variety and complexity of social meaning and experience mean that researchers focus specifically on participants' own subjective views and meanings of the social world. Equally, constructivists acknowledge the contextual basis of these meanings, and are aware of how particular social, historical and cultural settings shape both the participants' responses and how the researcher will interpret them.

4.2.3 The Decline of 'Methodological Purity'

Debates around competing paradigms and perspectives within social research were especially pronounced through the 1980s and 1990s; what Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) dub the 'paradigm wars' (see also, Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). However, a note of caution can be offered against placing too strong an emphasis on the pursuit of 'methodological purity'. While researchers will often explicitly position their orientation to research within a particular paradigm or philosophy, in recent times

methodological approaches have become much more flexible. As Rallis and Rossman (2003: 491) note: '[T]he past two decades have witnessed an increasing frustration with methodological purism and its attendant claims that a particular methodological choice is superior to others'. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (2005: 191-2) assert that distinctions between methodological positions are increasingly less discrete and subject to 'interbreeding': '[M]ethodology is inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines... and particular perspectives'.

This shift has been especially evident within mixed methods approaches. It is in this context that we can identify the emergence of new forms of 'pragmatism' (see Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Pragmatic philosophies, Creswell (2003: 11-2) observes, are notable for 'focusing attention on the research problem in social science research and then using pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge about the problem'. In this way, pragmatic approaches to social research focus on using the most applicable method(s) and methodologies to suit particular research problems. Creswell (2003: 12) notes that, particularly within mixed methods research, 'pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as to different forms of data collection and analysis'. With regards to the research design for this study, the methods were selected in relation to their specific value in generating specific and important types of data. The survey data provides necessary detail of trends in young people's use of the mobile phone, while the focus groups develop these themes through the active discussions and opinions of young people themselves.

Beyond the adoption of a specific paradigmatic position the guiding principle within and throughout this research process was to access and respect the distinctive 'voice' of

the participants involved. The aim is not to offer an unequivocal reading of the role of the mobile phone within contemporary youth culture, but to examine the particular social and culture meanings young people have in relation to their own use of the mobile phone. More generally, I am interested in showing how young people create meaning and understanding in their social worlds. This, I argue, is made possible through a direct engagement with young people themselves; encouraging them to give voice to their experiences and opinions. For this reason, close attention needs to be given to my role as a researcher in this process.

4.2.4 Subjectivity and Reflexivity

What should be apparent from the preceding discussion is that social research is significantly driven and shaped by the dispositions and preferences of the researcher, and can, therefore, not be considered a value-neutral enterprise. The researcher's own subjective understanding of the social world exerts a considerable influence over all aspects of the research process, including the selection of a research question and sub-questions; sampling of participants; methods of data collection; and the analysis of the data collected. Rather than aligning this research with a specific paradigmatic orientation, I am more interested in examining how recent methodological discussions have evolved to incorporate a fuller discussion of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. As outlined above, the shift towards interpretivist/constructivist paradigms has been marked by an emphasis on how the subjective worldviews of both the researcher and participants exert significant influence

throughout the research process. In particular, this relates to issues of subjectivity and reflexivity.

From setting a research agenda through analysing data, researchers need to be aware of the particular participants they will be engaged in research with and their relationship to them. This requires researchers to adopt a 'reflexive' position toward their own role in the research being undertaken. Researchers must then situate themselves within the social world, and actively account for how this impinges on the nature and character of the research. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 15) conclude: 'There is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it. Put simply a relationship always exists between the researcher and those being researched'.

This research is explicitly focused on young people and as such needs to understand how their relationship to the mobile phone and the meanings they ascribe to this relationship is potentially quite different from other groups and settings. Investigations into the role of the mobile phone in, for example, the workplace or amongst the elderly create a whole new, and potentially very different, set of research issues. In this way, attention must be given to the particular context of young people's lives and how this shapes their worldview and behaviour. Equally, the researcher's own relationship to the issues being studied and the participants involved needs to be addressed. While my own experience and understanding of youth influences the nature of research questions and ideas, there needs to be a clear recognition of alternatives in the way youth culture is patterned.

This awareness assists in accessing the 'emic' perspective, the insiders' view and voice (Rossman and Rallis, 2003: 48). However, as Rossman and Rallis (2003: 48-9)

elaborate, researchers can never fully represent the subjective experience of participants, as their interpretations are filtered through their own worldview, the 'etic' perspective: '[W]hat they write is interpretations (their own) of participants' understandings of their worlds (the participants' interpretations)'. Rather than trying to remove this subjective standpoint, research should show an awareness of how it shapes the research process. In this research, the approach adopted relates to specific theoretical interests around issues such as youth culture and cultural consumption. It is therefore possible to situate this research within and identify its differences from other studies in the area. The focus in this research then implies particular preferences and interests on the part of the researcher, which steer the research in certain directions. The imputing of a personal position within the research process should not, however, be perceived as having a corrupting influence but should be acknowledged as playing a significant role throughout. In pursuing a reflexive approach in this research I worked to combine an appreciation of my own understanding and interpretation of the issues involved, while retaining an awareness of how the participants are also actively engaged in the process of constructing knowledge and meaning about their social worlds. In the next section, I address issues specific to the practice of research with young people, focusing primarily on the role of young people as active research participants.

4.3 Researching Young People

Researching youth and young people raises significant methodological issues at the level of both theory and practice. France (2004: 175) observes that: 'Doing social research with this age group [under the age of 18] is full of methodological and ethical

tensions that need to be overcome if we are to gain a greater understanding of their lives, attitudes and actions'. Similarly, Lewis (2004: 1) highlights a range of critical issues, which can emerge during the research process, including 'ethics, consent, the legal system, power relations, methodology and the dissemination process'. Recently, there has been a growing emphasis on giving young people a greater say and more active role within research. This shift has had significant consequences for both how we think about carrying out research and the practical application of these ideas in the field.

4.3.1 Young People as Active Research Participants

A crucial context that shapes the research process is how we perceive and conceptualise young people. Kellett, Robinson and Burr (2004) argue that different conceptualisations of childhood and youth exert significant influence over the way research is carried out and used. Christensen and Prout (2002: 480) identify four approaches that have been adopted within social research relating to childhood and youth: the child as object; the child as subject; the child as social actor; and the child as participant/co-researcher (see also Robinson and Kellett, 2004: 85-7). France (2004: 177) notes that up until the 1980s 'the dominant paradigm of social research treated young people (and children) as objects of study and something for academics to theorise about'. However, Christensen and Prout (2002) identify a growing understanding of children and young people as autonomous social actors, who offer valuable contributions to the research process.

France (2004: 177-9) isolates three major developments that have hastened this shift. First, there has been a growing appreciation and awareness of children and young people as social actors. In particular, the 'new sociology of childhood' (see James and Prout, 1997) emphasises how any understanding of childhood must recognise the role of children themselves in providing a critical insight into their own experiences. While France (2004: 178-9) observes that there has not been a corresponding development within youth studies, the methodological issues identified within childhood studies are often appropriated by researchers of youth issues. As France (2004) rightly points out, however, this is potentially problematic as the 'youth experience' can be viewed as often quite distinct from childhood. Nevertheless, the arguments of James and Prout (1997), pointing to children as significant social actors, are important in fostering a research environment that recognises both children and young people as competent and knowledgeable research participants.

The second development, identified by France (2004), relates to legislative change. In particular, he highlights the introduction of measures that stress the value and legitimacy of the voice of children and young people. For example, the adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law formally established children's rights. Finally, France (2004: 178) points to how, within the UK, policy developments since the election of 'New Labour' in 1997 have played a role in the character and content of research with children and young people, suggesting that they 'have opened doors towards an approach that wants to hear what children and young people have to say'. Correspondingly, legislative changes and policy initiatives in Ireland, during the same period, have included the establishment of the National Children's Office in 2000,

which became The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2005; the appointment of an Ombudsman for Children in 2004; and the creation of a youth parliament, Dáil na nÓg.

A revealing aspect, which animates these changes, is the shift in emphasis from research *on/about* children and young people to doing research *with* children and young people. Fraser (2004) argues that, if research relating to childhood and youth issues is to be of benefit, researchers need to involve children and young people more directly within the research process. This position reorients the weight of power relations within research theory and practice by acknowledging that children and young people are active, capable and knowledgeable participants. In practical terms, this increased incorporation of children and young people's own 'voice' in the research process can serve to enhance both the reliability and validity of research. As Alderson (2004: 100) argues: 'The advantages of children having greater control over producing and analysing data are that they may enjoy the research process far more... and that the findings may more accurately report children's own views and experiences'. Identifying children and young people as active research participants helps develop and sustain a deeper and more accurate impression of particular issues and problems of relevance to young people themselves. The selection of the focus group method in the second phase of this research was done with the explicit intention of accessing in thorough detail young people's own views and understandings about the role of the mobile phone in their everyday lives. This approach then was designed around the broader research impulse to carry out research *with* young people, and to therefore encourage and elicit the subjective voice of the participants involved.

4.3.2 Ethical Issues: Competence and Consent

This promotion of a research agenda that privileges an understanding of young people as active rather than passive has a number of implications for research practice. As Robinson and Kellett (2004: 87) note: '[T]he transition from viewing children as objects to viewing them as social actors is not simply a matter of ideological reflection, it has a real impact on the conduct of research practice – on the initial choice of topic, the nature of design, and type of methodology'. A significant issue relates to the power relations that emerge throughout the research process. While, as discussed earlier, recent theories of childhood and youth stress the agency of young people, there remains considerable tension between this position and research issues related to the law, ethics, competence and consent.

While what is legal and what is considered ethical may often overlap, the two are not necessarily the same. Masson (2004: 43) observes that the law, rather than specifying best practice, sets the minimum acceptable standard in dealing with children and young people, with ethical standards setting higher and often more stringent responsibilities upon researchers. However, the law does work to enshrine the rights of children and young people, while also providing safeguards for their safety and well-being. In this context, legal frameworks provide a basis for researchers to adopt an ethical approach that respects those involved in research and affords them the opportunity to exercise their rights as individuals.

A variety of ethical issues have been identified in relation to carrying out research with young people. In general, researchers need to ensure a safe and secure environment for participants, while providing space for their active participation in the research process.

A number of general ethical guidelines can be identified as part of 'best practice' in helping to both guarantee the propriety of the research undertaken and safeguard the participants involved. Steps include transparency of the purpose and aims of the research, gaining informed consent from participants, and the adoption of a respectful attitude towards participants. Alderson (2004: 108) accentuates the importance of 'respect' throughout the research process, which includes treating participants as competent, knowledgeable and able to speak for themselves; respecting their privacy and confidentiality rights; and avoiding causing or placing children or young people in potentially harmful situations.

Alderson (2004: 106) also highlights how the issue of access and consent in research with young people 'raises hard, often unresolved questions'. Often, carrying out research with young people under the age of 18 requires parental consent or official authorisation from specific adult 'gatekeepers' (e.g. teachers). However, the issue of who should be in a position to provide consent for participation in research remains an open debate. As Masson (2004) points out, the law preserves young people's right to make decisions about their own lives, and as such means that young people, who are deemed suitably mature, can determine on their own whether they wish to participate in research or not. This, of course, raises the issue of how to determine maturity and competence, something that is usually done by adults (see France, 2004: 181ff). Perhaps more significantly, the tendency to focus exclusively on gaining parental consent can mean a transfer of control away from young people into the hands of adult authority. This emphasis on meeting the ethical requirement of gaining parental consent, while an important and crucial step in the research process, can defer or

distract attention away from gaining 'informed consent' from those actually participating in the research. As France (2004: 180) suggests: 'Requiring parental consent can also be seen as a denial of young people's right to be heard or to make decisions for themselves'. The negotiation of informed consent from research participants should then, I suggest, be placed in a position of prominence alongside the requirement for parental consent.

With respect to informed consent, Masson (2004: 50) submits that 'research should always explain fully the purpose, process and intended outcomes of research and seek consent on that basis'. Young people should be provided with sufficient information upon which to base a decision about whether or not they wish to participate. France (2004: 183-4) argues that this aspect of research is an intrinsic part of giving young people a participatory role in the research process. In practical terms, he outlines that the information provided should be 'accessible and readable', and should explain the aims and objectives of the research, detail what rights participants have and indicate that they have the right to withdraw at any point. Kellett and Ding (2004: 170) suggest that informed consent should also include the provision for 'informed dissent', whereby individuals are given the explicit option to opt out of the research. The practice of gaining informed consent from young people themselves provides them with necessary information and support, which serves to both respect their rights as active participants in the research process and help protect them from potential harm and distress. As France (2004: 184) concludes 'It is not appropriate for us to assume that once we have passive consent from others or access as a result of negotiation we should not give this detailed attention'.

4.3.3 Putting Principles into Practice

While familiarity with the array of methodological issues discussed can prime us prior to entering the field, research will often need to be flexible in order to be successfully implemented in practice. It can be suggested that often the practice of research cannot be fully resolved with the ideals of methodological theory, and part of the research process involves negotiating within various situations and with various actors in the field in the implementation of a particular piece of research. For example, as France (2004: 182) notes, with regards to ethical practice and access, different institutions and individual gatekeepers may have different sets of guidelines for researchers. In this context, research needs to be adaptable to particular situations and settings, and meet requirements as they arise in the field.

In undertaking this research, schools were identified as being the most practical source for accessing participants. Educational settings have emerged as one of the most prominent point of access for researchers wishing to research childhood and youth related issues. Schools provide a formal and official setting through which to access children and young people; a particularly pertinent consideration for researchers, given the current heightened sense of fear around child safety. Equally, schools can give researchers access to large numbers of potential participants with relative speed and ease. However, while the use of schools to access participants is practical and efficient, as Robinson and Kellett (2004: 91) observe, ‘school is a context where the adult-child power imbalance is particularly acute’. They argue then that the school is an environment where the status of children and young people as social actors and active citizens remains relatively impoverished. The negotiation of access, consent and

participation is often mediated by adult gatekeepers within the school, which effectively creates a distance between the researcher and potential participants; meaning that young people can potentially be ‘captive subjects’ of research. One way of lessening this is the provision, discussed earlier, of ‘informed consent’ from participants.

In carrying out this research, initial contact was made with the schools to assess their interest in participation. Following this, much of the organisation of groups and participants was carried out by specific teachers, usually a transition year co-ordinator. I took steps to ensure that participants were well-informed of the aims and purpose of the study, and their right to not participate if they so wished. The schools were provided with details of the study, which the participants were informed about before completing the survey and/or participating in the focus groups. Prior to administering the survey, I re-iterated the nature of the study and stressed to the participants that they were free to abstain at any point if they did not wish to be involved. With respect to carrying out the subsequent focus groups, a similar process was followed, with the research being based in the same locations. Prior to carrying out these focus groups, a summary of the survey findings was circulated to schools along with a letter requesting access to carry out focus groups with transition year students (see Appendix II). Once again the selection of participants was largely left to the schools, and, in particular, the transition year coordinator. While this could potentially lead to teachers selecting specific students and excluding others, as the transition year groups encountered were small, all those students available on the relevant day were given the choice to participate or not. In this instance, parental consent was gained (see consent form in

Appendix III), and again, prior to carrying out the focus groups, participants were informed about the nature of the research and their rights with regards participation.

4.4 A Mixed-Methods Approach to Data Collection

Traditionally, researchers have tended to view qualitative and quantitative approaches as operating in separate spheres. These apparently discrete realms are often described as housing quite distinct, and even antagonistic, positions regarding research methodology and practice; what Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) term the ‘incompatibility thesis’. However, over the last couple of decades there has been a growing recognition that qualitative and quantitative methods can be used together within social research. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003: 14-15) suggest three specific merits to the combination of different research methods: first, such an approach can answer research questions that other methodologies cannot; second, it can provide better and stronger inferences; and third, it provides the opportunity to present a greater diversity of views. Creswell (2003) also identifies a number of considerations that have motivated the growing interest and adoption of mixed methods research within the social sciences. The key prompt in this regard has been the desire by researchers to ‘triangulate’ data sources. Triangulation was initially conceived as a means to improve validity in social research by providing two different measures of the same variable (Flick, 2006: 390), but it has been expanded as a means through which a more thorough and robust data source can be mobilised. In providing a wider range of data, this process can then arguably give researchers a fuller picture of particular social phenomena.

A further reason for combining research methods, identified by Creswell (2003: 15-6), that is of interest here, is how ‘the results from one method can help develop or inform the other method’. The adoption of what Creswell terms a ‘sequential’ procedure involves building on the findings from one method through the use of a further method. In this research, initial use of a quantitative method (survey) was followed by a qualitative method (focus groups). The purpose of this two-phase, sequential method was to begin by collecting statistical, quantitative results from a sample of young people and then carrying out focus groups to explore the relevant issues in more detail. The survey was designed to gather data that provided a general overview of young people’s use of the mobile phone. The subsequent focus groups were carried out to develop more deeply these ideas. In the focus groups, participants were invited to discuss a range of themes and ideas that inform and characterise their relationship to the mobile phone. Participants for both surveys and focus groups were drawn from 6 schools in the Dublin/North Kildare area (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 – Breakdown of Schools that Participated in the Research

Name of School	Type of School	Participated in Questionnaires	Participated in Focus Groups
School 1	Mixed, fee-paying	Yes	Yes
School 2	Mixed, free-scheme secondary school	Yes	Yes
School 3	Mixed, free-scheme secondary school	Yes	Yes
School 4	Female, free-scheme secondary school	Yes	Yes
School 5	Mixed, fee-paying	Yes	Yes
School 6	Male, free-scheme secondary school	Yes	Yes

Lynch and Lodge (2002) draw a distinction between fee-paying schools and free scheme secondary schools. The latter includes four different types of schools: secondary schools, vocational/community colleges, community schools and comprehensive schools. As Table 4.1 indicates this study drew participants from two fee paying schools and four free scheme secondary schools, which included a mix of secondary and vocational/community colleges.

While sampling exclusively from the Dublin/North Kildare region was done partly for the practical reasons of saving time and expense, the variations in the area between urban, suburban and rural are such that it provides a good level of diversity amongst the participants. Equally, the selection of participating schools was done with considerations of accessing participants based across a range of varied geographical locations, student sex composition and social categorisation.

Further to this, in my initial contact with schools I requested to administer a survey to first year and transition year students. One reason for selecting these groups was that these years are generally viewed as non-exam years and less academically intense. I anticipated then that both parents and schools would be more willing to allow these students time off to participate. Equally, this was done initially to also allow for the inclusion of students from a broad age range. However, as the study progressed my interest became more focused on older teenagers. The reason for this was that I am particularly interested in analysing the role of the mobile phone within a group that had become accustomed to it in their everyday lives. For this reason, the focus groups were carried out with transition students, along with one fifth year group.

In total 493 students filled the questionnaire, comprising 280 males and 212 females¹. However, while the schools were sampled to allow for a relatively even split in terms of sex composition of the focus groups, there were a far larger proportion of female participants with 39 female participants, as opposed to 17 males (see Table 4.2). There are two main reasons that account for this difference: first, the tapes from the focus groups in the all male school did not record properly and had to be discarded; and second, even in the mixed schools there was a higher proportion of females in the transition year classes. However, despite this the groups provided sufficiently detailed discussions upon which to build a significant analysis of the role of the mobile phone in the everyday lives of young people.

Table 4.2 – Rates of Participation in Survey and Focus Groups

Name of School	Survey Returns	Focus Group Codes & Participant Numbers
School 1	184 respondents	Group 1: 3 Male, 1 Female Group 2: 2 Male, 2 Female
School 2	90 respondents	Group 3: 2 Male, 3 Female Group 4: 2 Male, 2 Female Group 5: 2 Male, 3 Female
School 3	87 respondents	Group 6: 2 Male, 4 Female Group 7: 0 Male, 5 Female
School 4	25 respondents	Group 8: 6 Female Group 9: 7 Female
School 5	53 respondents	Group 10: 2 Male, 4 Female Group 11: 2 Male, 3 Female
School 6	54 respondents	Group 12 and Group 13: All Males – groups did not record properly, had to be discarded

¹ There was one missing value in this category

4.4.1 Survey Research

Survey research divides opinion amongst social researchers. One of the main criticisms voiced against it is its association with the positivist tradition. However, as May (2001: 91) suggests, this is a 'clear oversimplification'. Survey research, rather than signalling a retreat into positivism, is adaptable to a variety of contexts and approaches. In particular, using survey as part of a mixed method approach, I argue that it provides a solid foundation of data which is more fully developed via focus groups. At a practical level, the survey is valued as a research method for its versatility, efficiency and generalisability (Schutt, 2006: 234-5). Accordingly, the use of the survey method in the first phase of this research was done in order to access a wide range of initial information from a relatively broad sample of young people. While a good deal of research on young people's use of the mobile phone has been undertaken elsewhere, in Ireland this issue has suffered from a relative lack of empirical investigation. The purpose of the survey then was to provide a context and a basis from which to build a fuller understanding of the role of the mobile phone in contemporary youth culture. Rather than drawing conclusions solely from the survey, the findings were elaborated upon via focus group discussions in the second phase of the research.

While survey research is an efficient and productive means of gathering data, this does not mean that the approach is more straightforward or simpler to carry out than qualitative methods. Schutt (2006: 280) comments that a popular misconception is that, in relation to designing and administering of surveys, 'no particular training or systematic procedures are required'. On the contrary, discussions of the survey method are consistently explicit about the need for researchers to adopt a rigorous and thorough

approach in relation to survey design, administration and analysis (see, for example, Simmons, 2001; Denscombe, 1998). These issues are paramount in successfully utilising the survey method and are dealt with in turn.

4.4.1.2 Survey Design

Survey design requires an amount of what May (2001: 96) terms ‘preliminary work’, which initially involves developing a familiarity with the research area and identifying an appropriate population and sample. Knowledge of the topic under scrutiny allows the researcher to identify important and relevant areas around which to develop survey questions. Prior to designing the survey used in this research, a significant amount of time was spent exploring and assessing the existing literature in mobile phone studies, a discussion of which is developed in Chapter 1. From this, a number of themes were selected as meriting inclusion in the survey, including reasons for adoption of the mobile phone; use in domestic relationships; use within peer relationships; and its role as a fashion item/status symbol.

The development of specific questions is one of the most important aspects of survey design. This involves ‘operationalising’ ideas or hypotheses into specific ‘measures’; creating questions that can be answered, categorized and quantified (May, 2001: 91). Simmons (2001: 86) suggests that ‘[T]he success of a survey will depend on the questions that are asked, the way in which they are phrased, and the order in which they are placed’. These aspects require careful attention by the researcher in order for the survey to provide useful data. An aim of survey design is the removal of bias so that the results produced are valid, reliable and replicable. A key element in ensuring this is

the 'standardisation' of how the survey is designed, administered and analysed. Specifically, participants must be asked the questions, in the same sequence and in a similar manner. In this way, as May (2001: 92) argues: 'if a difference of opinion is expressed in reply to those questions, the resulting variations can be attributed to a 'true' difference of opinion, rather than as a result of how the question was asked or the context of the interview'.

Due consideration was given to a number of issues when developing the questions used in this research. Attention was paid to constructing questions that were both relevant and understandable by the participants involved, and that they had sufficient knowledge to answer the questions. Crucial to this was constructing questions that were clear and unambiguous. This meant avoiding the use of 'leading questions' – those displaying a particular bias that means they are potentially more likely to invite agreement. Another consideration was to avoid using 'double-barrelled questions' or double negatives, which may lead to confusion for both those filling out the survey and for the researcher analysing it. Finally, questions with multiple response choices were categorised and pre-coded using a Likert scale (see Simmons, 2001: 94-7; Schutt, 2006: 237-245). Before formally administering the survey to the sample groups, it was piloted to a small subsample of young people. Piloting the survey allowed for an assessment of how well it worked and whether there were any problems that required correcting. The pilot group completed the survey and was also asked for any comments or criticisms they had in relation to its wording and design. Following comments from this subsample some small revisions were made with regards to the wording and order of particular questions.

4.4.1.3 Administering the Survey

After making the corrections to the survey based on the feedback from the pilot group, it was then ready to be completed by the full sample. One of the key aims of survey research generally is to gain the opinions of a particular set of respondents (i.e. the sample), and attempt to generalise to the population as a whole. Sampling then is a crucial element in the design and administration of a survey. Preferably, researchers seek to gather a representative sample, where the characteristics of the sample will be the same as those of the population as a whole. In principle, in random or probability sampling each element in the population has an equal chance of being selected. The advantage of this is that it reduces systematic bias in the sampling process, which gives greater confidence in the generalisability of the results. However, within the scope and scale of this research probability sampling was not deemed a feasible approach. In this instance then non-probability sampling was used. While non-probability sampling can potentially limit the researchers' ability to generalise to the population as a whole, this was weighted against the practical considerations of time and cost. Equally, the survey results do not constitute the sole source of data in this research; with the use of focus groups in the second-phase of data collection expanding in greater depth and detail upon the initial survey findings.

Within this research, an effort was made to sample a group that would reflect certain characteristics of the population being researched (i.e. 'young people'). Purposive sampling was, therefore, used to access groups that had certain characteristics. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 66, quoted in Schutt: 156) suggest that, in purposive sampling, informants should be 'knowledgeable about the cultural arena or situation or experience

being studied'; 'willing to talk'; 'represent the range of points of view'. While this method of sampling does not necessarily provide a representative sample, it can be used to sample particular groups and individuals with specific and desirable features. As noted earlier, the sampling was done through schools rather than by individual; with particular schools being selected to provide a range of respondents' across different parameters, such as geographical location and gender.

As Denscombe (2003: 22) observes, survey research is often predicated on assembling as large a sample as possible. This argument rests on the assumption that the more instances or elements that are included the less bias there will be. In this way, it is argued, researchers can be more confident in the 'representativeness' of their sample. However, survey research can often be overly focused on accessing as large a sample as possible, without sufficient attention to a well-distributed sample. As May (2001: 93) succinctly observes, with regards to sampling, size should not automatically be the most important concern: 'A large, poor quality sample, which does not reflect the population characteristics, will be less accurate than a smaller one that does'. Sampling can also be restricted by practical considerations, such as time and financial resources. Denscombe (2003: 24) notes that, in survey research, samples do not necessarily need to be in the thousands, but can be as low as 30 to 250 cases. As indicated earlier, in this research there were 493 survey respondents across 6 schools. This sample, I argue, is sufficient to extrapolate a number of preliminary themes and ideas, which reflect back upon existing research and lay important groundwork for the subsequent focus group discussions. While the survey data did not provide the level of detail initially

anticipated, it remains important in terms of scene-setting, particularly given the paucity of similar research in Ireland.

The organisation and administration of surveys can be carried out in a variety of different ways. These include mailed/self-administered; telephone; in-person; group-administered; or electronic. In this research, a group-administered survey format was used in the first phase of data collection. By using schools in the sampling process this research was able to access relatively large groups of participants to complete the survey at a particular time. A potential risk of this approach, as discussed earlier, is that participants may feel pressurised or compelled to be involved in the research. To lessen the potential effects of this factor, before administering the survey it was made clear to participants that they were free not to complete the survey if they so wished. Equally, in the administration of the survey every effort was made to replicate the conditions from school to school. A standard introductory statement was given describing the purpose of the study, reassuring participants about confidentiality, and emphasising how the survey was not a test. The surveys were administered in the school during a designated class time, with both the researcher and a teacher present. One class period, roughly 40-45 minutes, was allotted for the completion of the survey. Both first and transition year students were surveyed; some groups were done in a class by class basis, while two of the schools assembled the particular years participating in a study/assembly hall. A key advantage of this approach was that ensured a relatively high response rate, as the surveys were administered and collected in a single session.

After the surveys were completed they were inputted into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in preparation for analysis. A large proportion of questions were

precoded for inputting. Once this was done, the dataset was analysed, taking account of consistencies and differences in the responses. The emphasis at this stage was not necessarily on establishing clear sets of findings but with providing some initial detail from which to develop the focus groups. Prior to carrying out the focus groups, participating schools were provided with a short report outlining the survey results. This was done to give schools an overview of the research and establish a positive and open relationship. This contributed to being able to return to the schools to carry out focus groups.

4.4.2 Focus Groups

The term focus group has been applied to a variety of approaches to data collection. This can be attributed to the use of focus groups in a number of distinct settings and contexts, which includes various academic disciplines as well as marketing and political research; organisational research and development; community development and participatory research; health services research and social sciences research. While its original use was more common within broadcasting, marketing and public relations, the focus group method has become an increasingly prominent method within social research. In this research, I carried out 13 focus groups across six schools, with details of participation outlined in Table 4.2. Here I describe the research process in carrying out this method and examine what is particular about focus groups as a method of data collection, which made them conducive to this research.

4.4.2.1 Defining Focus Groups

Barbour (2007: 2) notes that: ‘the inherent flexibility of focus groups and their potential for use in a myriad of research settings has, inevitably, given rise to considerable confusion, with attempts at clarification often resulting in overly prescriptive advice’. In terms of definitions then, a distinction can be drawn between a group interview, a focus group interview, and a focus group discussion. A group interview involves asking the same question, or list of questions, to each group participant in turn. In this context, the approach can be said to be the application of a one-to-one interview format within a group. A focus group interview can be understood as an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. This approach often has a specific set of questions and is interested in exploring the shared ideas or views of the group with respect to the issues identified by the researcher. Finally, focus group discussions differ from the first two approaches outlined above in that they privilege the internal generation of ideas within the group. In this regard, they tend to be less structured than group interviews allowing for a greater degree of group input into the trajectory of the discussion.

While there are a range of approaches that have been collected under the banner term ‘focus group’, Kitzinger and Barbour (1999: 20) offer a broad definition of the term that captures the key feature of the approach: ‘Any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction’. It is this latter point that is crucial to understanding what is distinctive about the focus group. Actively encouraging group interaction ensures that participants talk amongst and between themselves rather than just with the researcher,

or 'moderator'. In this way, focus groups provide a space in which participants are involved in developing research ideas and findings. A key emphasis in this research then was creating a discursive space for participants, in which their views and opinions could be generated and aired.

Beyond the practical issue of saving time and money in interviewing a group of people at the same time, this group dynamic and discussion that focus groups achieve offers a unique form and content to the data collected. As Flick (2006: 191) notes: 'Unlike the group interview, the group discussion stimulates a discussion and uses its dynamic of developing conversation in the discussion as the central source of knowledge'. In this context, it has been suggested that, unlike surveys or interviews, focus group discussions are closer to the way in which opinions and meanings are produced, expressed, and exchanged in everyday life. Internal discussions can corroborate or challenge views and meanings from other members of the group. The group then becomes a potentially more appropriate tool for understanding how social meaning is constructed and negotiated, as well as for reconstructing individual opinions.

Focus group discussions were selected for this research in order to build on extant issues identified within the relevant literature and the survey results, as well as engage the active participation of young people themselves in developing research ideas. In particular, the focus group was used as it privileges the interaction *between* participants. In this way, it was felt that this method was most consonant with giving young people a fully active role in developing research ideas and accessing in more detail the authentic and subjective worldview of the participants. It allows for the creation of a more

equitable discursive space, in which participants can claim greater control over how the content of the focus group discussion and how it evolves.

4.4.2.2 Design and Preparation

As with any research method, focus groups involve considered preparation in order to yield useful and interesting data. Issues that need to be addressed include sampling and selection of participants, arranging and organising the groups, and to carry out the discussions. The sampling process used in selecting participants for the focus groups replicated the approach outlined earlier in relation to the first-phase of the research. The same schools were contacted with requests to carry out focus groups with transition year students. An outline of the research and a summary report of the survey results were included with the request for access. These schools again expressed a willingness to participate, and passed on the relevant details to their transition year classes. With respect to the ethical considerations, the students who wished to participate were also required to obtain parental consent. However, one of the difficulties in this selection process was that the organisation of the groups was done through the respective transition year coordinators, who acted as intermediaries with the students. In this instance, it is possible that the students involved may have felt compelled or that it was a requirement to participate. Prior to carrying out the focus groups it was reiterated to the participants that their involvement was voluntary. Assurances were also given to guarantee that all data would remain confidential, and no individual or school would be identified in any work related to the research.

In general, both the number of groups and their participants will depend on the research question, as well as issues of time and money. The literature recommends that working with strangers is usually more appropriate than a group of friends/colleagues, as in the latter certain ideas may be taken-for-granted and remain unmentioned. It is also suggested that starting with heterogeneous groups of varied backgrounds before moving to more homogenous ones is the more desirable course. However, these are not hard and fast rules, and the researcher will need to make decisions specific to their own needs and preferences. Ultimately, the selection of participants will usually depend on the preferences of the researcher and the nature of their research. The groups used in this study cohere to a specific age range, in this instance between 15-18 years of age, but can be said to be diverse in relation to a number of factors. As noted earlier, in the sampling process an effort was made to select schools and participants that would offer some degree of differentiation based on geographical location, gender and socio-economic background. Equally, within and across the groups, participants voiced a variety of thoughts and ideas demonstrating both differences and commonalities of opinion that helped positively develop the focus group discussions.

Debate also continues about the optimum number of participants in a focus group. It is generally indicated to use a range of between six to ten participants, to ensure that a good discussion can be generated without losing its focus. However, as Cronin (2003: 170) notes, a smaller group, comprising four or five participants can be useful 'for more in-depth discussion of participants' stories'. The researcher then can modify or set group numbers depending on their own particular preferences and objectives. The overall goal is to include everyone in the interaction, so to have too few would mean a

limited discussion, while too many can mean the group can be difficult to organise and keep focused. In the focus groups conducted as part of this research, group size ranged between four and seven participants. The reason for keeping numbers at the lower end of the scale was to allow everyone to have a chance to talk and to make management of the group, and subsequent transcribing, less complicated.

A further issue relates to the number of groups that should be carried out. As a general rule, researchers seek to 'exhaust' the range of responses; that is come to a point where in any further groups no new information is emerging. Thirteen focus groups across six schools were used in this research; however, two groups, Groups 12 and 13, from one school were subsequently discounted owing to inaudible recording making it impossible to transcribe. Nonetheless, the 11 remaining focus groups provide a suitably robust source of data from which my analysis is developed; revealing a number of interesting patterns within and across the different groups and between the groups and the survey. The data provides a range and diversity of opinions, but also point toward particular shared preferences and meanings amongst young people in relation to their use of the mobile phone.

The most time-consuming aspect of the process was arranging a time suitable to visit the different schools and carry out the focus groups. However, once a suitable time was agreed, accessing participants proved straightforward. A further consideration was the venues used for the focus groups, which, in this instance, the researcher had no control over. Cronin (2003: 171-2) suggests that '[T]he venue should be one where people feel comfortable enough to sit and talk for a couple of hours...[and] which is familiar to the members of the focus group, thus aiding attendance and participation'. The focus

groups carried out as part of this research were done on-site in various schools. In this way, the setting was such that they could feel comfortable within familiar surroundings. Class rooms or student meeting rooms were assigned for the focus groups, and overall they provided suitable venues. Participants were able to interact comfortably with one another and with the moderator, and the discussion was easily observable and recordable. The recording of the groups were done using a mini-disc recorder, which were then transcribed for analysis. However, in two of the schools, the venues proved problematic for different reasons. In one school the venue provided for one focus group had benches rather than tables and chairs, which led to an uncomfortable seating arrangement. Another school, owing to lack of space, had a full class assembled in a class room. The class was split for the focus groups, but those not participating in one group remained in the room. This somewhat awkward arrangement was compounded by the teacher remaining in the class. While the students engaged in a good discussion, on reflection it was felt that the group was somewhat stilted and lacked the easier flow of the other groups that were carried out.

4.4.2.3 Carrying Out Focus Groups

While practical issues such as the space used, recording equipment, etc. are important, they should not be allowed to distract the researcher's attention away from dedicating time to preparing how the focus group discussion will be carried out. For example, Barbour (2007: 76) suggests that, in relation to having quality recording equipment, it 'cannot compensate for bad research design or moderating that is not sensitive to the nuances of the discussion'. A key consideration then in running focus groups is what

should be the role of the moderator/researcher? This incorporates and extends across a range of issues related to research design, carrying out the research, and the analysis of the data. Our focus here is on the practical role of the moderator within the focus group itself. The moderator needs to be attentive to evolution of the group, as decisions on data collection are made within the specific focus group situation. A crucial issue is to know when to offer input and when to hold back. As Flick (2006: 196) observes, this can be a difficult balancing act: 'researchers have to accommodate the developing dynamics of the group and, at the same time, to steer the discussion in order to integrate all the participants'. The role of the moderator then is to support the internal dynamic of the group. The moderator should ideally create a space in which participants can use their own initiative in generating and sustaining discussion and interaction. In this way, the moderator may adopt different roles within the group depending on particular groups.

Flick (2006: 193) identifies three forms of focus group 'moderation'. First is formal direction, which is limited to control of the agenda of the speakers and to fixing the beginning, course, and end of the discussion. Second is topical steering, which additionally comprises the introduction of new questions and steering the discussion towards a deepening and extension of specific topics and parts. Third, steering the dynamics of the interaction ranges from reflating the discussion to using provocative questions, polarising a slow discussion, or accommodating relations of dominance by purposively addressing members remaining reserved or aloof during the discussion. In general, the manner in which questions and issues are raised will depend on how the dynamic of the group develops. In practice, therefore, the researcher may adopt more

than one form of moderation within the focus group setting. Another possible method is the use of text/images to start/stimulate discussion.

In the focus groups conducted as part of this research, a variety of different approaches to moderation were adopted. While at times groups gelled together with ease, allowing for a comfortable discursive flow, at other time groups required different forms of interjection to stimulate discussion. Prior consideration was given to the specific themes and topics for discussion, which were derived from the existing literature in the area, as well as the results of the survey research. At the same time, discussions were conducted in a flexible manner that gave scope for participants to identify and highlight ideas that they felt were of importance to them. Overall, however, the groups encountered in this research were able to both develop ideas extant within the survey results as well as introduce salient issues and thoughts derived from their own experiences. This ease of interaction was considerably enhanced by the topic of the mobile phone, with which young people have a particularly enthusiastic interest.

Cronin (2003: 172-4), following Merton et al (1956), outlines four criteria required for successfully conducting focus group discussions: range, specificity, depth, and personal context. 'Range' relates to the inclusion of the maximum amount of relevant issues in the focus group discussion. While the researcher will have a good idea of the major points to be covered, we also need to be sensitive to participants raising new topics of interest and relevance. 'Specificity' relates to encouraging participants to locating their points in their own lived experiences. This can provide a clearer indication of how particular attitudes and beliefs are formed and add to the overall 'depth' of the discussion. Finally, the researcher needs to account for participants' 'personal context',

that is their particular social role or social position. Cronin (2003: 173) concludes that 'Attention to such issues enables us to gain a better insight into the social construction of people's attitudes and beliefs'.

An important element in this regard is establishing informality. The moderator should work to create a relaxed climate, which can facilitate group members contributing openly with their experiences and opinions. However, it is imperative not to let the group just drift into chatter that has little relevance for, or relationship to, the research. In starting the group it is necessary to establish a rapport with participants and to set them at ease. Within 'real/natural' groups, where participants know one another and may have an interest in the topic, this is potentially more straightforward. In 'artificial' groups, the first step is usually to introduce members to one another. Within this introduction it is advisable to get the members to introduce themselves so as to get names and voice recognition on tape.

As participants in the focus groups conducted as part of this research already knew each other, the discussions opened with me introducing myself to the group. Following this, I briefly explained the formal procedure of the focus group, outlining what the expectations for the participants and the group were. An effort was made to maintain a degree of informality in order to make participants feel comfortable and encourage discussion. In terms of my role as moderator, I was able to adapt to deal with various issues that emerged within the group and their interaction. This involved decisions being made within the context of specific groups; for example, when to intervene in the discussion or when to let discussions between participants develop. Overall, given that

the issue being discussed had both a topicality and relevance for the participants, they were willing and eager to engage in the group discussions.

The advantages of focus groups as a method can also, however, be a source of problems. Having multiple participants can make transcribing focus groups far more time-consuming and difficult than individual interviews; particularly in terms of identifying who said what, and also discerning what is being said, as participants will often talk over one another. However, the transcription process is a useful way of familiarising oneself with the data and getting a good initial sense of the nature and quality of the data collected. An effort was made to transcribe the focus groups in as short a time as possible after they were conducted. In this way, memory can help fill in possible blanks, and also in doing transcriptions between groups the researcher can identify possible problems in terms of format, questioning, etc that can be rectified in subsequent groups.

In terms of analysis, Flick (2006: 198-9) notes two modes of analysis in dealing with focus group data, which relate to the points of reference to be compared. First, you can take single participants' statements and compare across groups. This can often be problematic as groups will have developed differently and corresponding statements may not be identifiable. A second option is to take each group as a unit and compare with one another. This allows the researcher to focus on the topics mentioned, the variety of attitudes in relation to them, the stages of the discussion, and what resulted from these discussions. In analysing the focus group data collected as part of this research, I started by examining the recurring issues within the discussions, looking at both consistencies and differences within and between groups. Initially, I used themes

emerging from the survey responses, but then broadened the scope to include new ideas generated by the various groups. This data was then analysed in the context of the empirical and theoretical issues discussed in the preceding chapters. This analysis of these findings is developed in the subsequent three chapters.

4.5 Conclusion

As I argue in Chapter 2, a significant limitation of much youth subcultural research is its inability to engage with young people directly. The key emphasis in this research then is on accessing the authentic voice of young people themselves. In building arguments and making assertions about youth culture and the mobile phone it is important to draw on the experiences of young people themselves. The methodological considerations were particularly focused on reflexivity, subjectivity and issues related to carrying out research with young people. This included maintaining ethical standards and allowing for informed participation by both schools and students. In this chapter, I also discuss the methods used in the data collection. The use of focus groups allows for the researcher to obtain accounts and insights of how young people themselves understand their own use of the mobile phone. This qualitative data is supplemented by survey data, which provides necessary context for the research question. This mixed methods approach also improves the validity and reliability of the data. Finally, in subsequent chapters the data is analysed in relation to a broad range of theoretical ideas.

Chapter 5: Between Dependence and Independence – The Mobile Phone and the Management of Adolescent Autonomy

5.1 Introduction

Conceptualisations of ‘youth’ in modern society often view it as a problematic period of ‘storm and stress’ positioned between the dependence of childhood and the independence of adulthood. Resolutions to the perceived ‘problem of youth’ are often sought through providing ways of managing and controlling this liminal status. Over the course of the last century, youth has been increasingly defined in relation to forms of institutional control (e.g. the state, education, family, etc.), which operate to organise and classify the image and idea of youth and young people in society. Within these structures of authority, young people themselves can be characterised as having a marginal position in terms of actual formal power. In this context, youth culture is often a means through which young people assert their own sense of agency and autonomy, with cultural consumption being a key site where this is played out. Both subcultural and post-subcultural accounts of youth address the ways in which young people’s lives are significantly defined by their use of an array of cultural commodities and practices. These provide a means through which young people both escape from and relate to the institutional and structural context of their everyday lives. This cultural activity can be situated within ordinary, habitual contexts, wherein young people negotiate with structures of authority as part of their pursuit of greater autonomy and freedom.

One such context is family life, where issues of power and control are not fixed, but open to challenges and negotiation. This tension between experiences of dependence and independence marks a formative part of young people's lives, which shapes how they make sense of and construct social and cultural meaning. The use of the mobile phone illustrates a number of these characteristic aspects of adolescence and youth – a time of strain between the retention of parentally imposed boundaries and young people's own desire for autonomy. The mobile phone provides parents the assurance that they can contact their child, or are contactable by them, while for young people it can afford them greater autonomy and a greater sense of personal space and freedom.

As Pain et al (2005: 815) summarise:

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.

Issues of power and control between parents and young people are played out through the use of the mobile phone. However, rather than viewing this relationship as explicitly antagonistic, the use of the mobile phone within family life reveals how young people negotiate their social position and status with their parents. While young people's use of the mobile phone is often a way in which they assert their sense of agency and self-determination, these practices expose the ways in which young people

remain in an ambiguous position between dependence and independence. As one focus group participant observes:

Lara¹: Like your parents can still contact you so they're happy; and you're happy 'cause you can go off and you know that your parents aren't going to be worried, and you're not going to get in trouble for going off so I think it kinda helps that way... between like being totally dependent and still being independent... (Group 7)

5.2 Youth Culture and Family Life

The well rehearsed criticisms that subcultural theory's preoccupation with the visual and the spectacular over the ordinary and the mundane denies an understanding of what Simon Frith (1984: 57) characterises as 'the subtler ways in which young people resist and seek to change their situation'. These 'subtler ways' includes how young people negotiate their social position with respect to parents and the family. Youth and adolescence are framed as times of growing self-determination, while still being prior to the full entrenchment of adult responsibilities. Youth culture is often viewed as a context in which individuals forge an identity that is distinct from the family, and focused on the pursuit of freedom and independence. However, despite this, the family remains a key site for the articulation of young people's social role and their negotiation of control, responsibility and freedom. As I argue in Chapter 3, a significant omission within much youth cultural research relates to the lack of discussion of family relationships and domestic life. For example, McRobbie and Garber (1976) identify how the masculine bias within early subcultural accounts of youth led to a neglect of the centrality of the family and the domestic in young people's

¹ The names of all participants in this research have been changed.

lives. Countering this, they assert that the domestic sphere forms a significant site of cultural activity, particularly for teenage girls.

Youth cultural practices then need to be addressed with reference to their relationship to family life and parental authority, and the various sites of leisure, home, work, school, etc. that shape young people's everyday experiences. As Frith (1984: 58) argues 'youth culture must be explained, then, not by reference to leisure itself, but to young people's position in work and family, to the 'reality' from which leisure is, on occasion, an escape'. In this way, domestic and family relations form a central part of the 'reality' of young people's lives, and their cultural practices cannot be understood as distinct or removed from this context. There remains, however, a neglect of these significant aspects of young people's everyday experiences. Despite this acknowledgement, studies of youth culture often fail to adequately address 'what young people do most of the time'. Youth culture does not exist as separate or apart from other elements of the social world. While both subcultural, and to some extent post-subcultural approaches, often treat youth cultural practices as forms of political resistance against young people's social position and status, the example of the mobile phone demonstrates how young people's cultural practices can be seen as more subtle and temporary forms of escape and evasion from authority and control. These acts are interwoven with the fabric of everyday life providing more delicate, complex and ambiguous means of 'resistance' for young people. While 'post-subcultural' theories attempt to shoulder past the perceived limitations of their subculturalist predecessors, this work also displays a marked emphasis upon vivid and dramatic forms of cultural practice – in particular, the spectacle of dance and club cultures. In this context, there remains a

continuing and considerable neglect within contemporary youth cultural research upon the ways in which young people's cultural practices intersect with the ordinary and the habitual.

For example, in his work on the extreme metal scene, Kahn-Harris (2004) counters the idea that generational conflict is a characteristic feature of subcultural 'scenes'. Alternatively, he demonstrates that amongst members of the extreme metal scene, there is a strong sense of connection and attachment to family members. In this way, even the most spectacular forms of youth cultural practice cannot be separated from their relationship to the ordinary and the everyday, or what Kahn-Harris (2004) terms 'mundanity'. This notion of the mundane is crucial in developing a full understanding of young people's lives. As Kahn-Harris (2004) suggests, young people's cultural practices can be viewed as forms of escape from the experience of mundanity rather than a resistance against it. Cultural practices are formed within and with reference to, rather than external to, this 'mundanity'. Youth culture then cannot be located only in the spectacular and the extraordinary, but needs to be understood in terms of its relationship to ordinary, habitual features of everyday life. Understanding the use of the mobile phone as a cultural practice needs to address how it is involved in domestic and family life, and, in particular, in mediating parent-child relationships. This emphasis allows for a consideration of how young people's use of the mobile phone is part of the way in which young people perform particular social roles and assume an increased sense of autonomy and sovereignty.

As discussed earlier, mobile phone research gives considerable attention to young people. This includes the issue of family relationships, with an emphasis on the

integration of new communication technology into characteristic aspects of domestic life. This work examines how the mobile phone can both sustain communication between family members, while also potentially challenging and disrupting structures of authority and control. In particular, mobile phone research has been especially interested in the formation and enactment of adolescent identities. While new technologies are often seen as fostering increased individualism, atomisation and isolation, the mobile phone, as a technology of sociability, may potentially be a medium for greater social interaction and cohesion. For example, with respect to family life, Ling (2006) suggests the concept of 'nomos' to examine the role of the mobile phone in family life. He derives the terms from the work of Berger and Kellner, who contrast it with Durkheim's discussion of anomie, stating: 'Just as the individual's deprivation of relationship with his [sic] significant others will plunge him into anomie, so their continued presence will sustain for him that *nomos* by which he can feel at home in the world' (Berger and Kellner, 1964: 7, quoted in Ling, 2006: 63). Ling (2006) argues that the mobile phone contributes to the development of this *nomos* within family life, which helps provide social integration and emotional balance to families (see also de Gournay, 2002). In general, the use of the mobile phone is situated within characteristic forms of family life, while at the same time it alters these forms and creates new modes of social behaviour and action.

5.3 The Acquisition of the Mobile Phone

While it is a point that scarcely needs to be made, in Ireland the mobile phone is, especially amongst young people, largely ubiquitous. Amongst the first and transition

year students surveyed as part of this research, the results show that the overwhelming majority of respondents (477, 96.8%) own a mobile phone, with no difference in the level of uptake for male and female respondents. This reflects findings in research elsewhere (Campbell, 2006; Skog, 2002), and, as Campbell (2006) also notes, this deviates from the common perception of males as the major users of new technology. Similarly, within the focus group discussions, carried out with transition and fifth year students, all participants owned a mobile phone. This comes as little surprise, given that official statistics reveal that the Irish mobile phone market has reached 'saturation point', with there now being more than one mobile phone per person in the country. Importantly, both the survey and the focus group data demonstrate that there was a strong preference amongst young people for acquiring a mobile phone. In the survey, 90.9% (448) of respondents indicate that they initially wanted one. In the focus groups there emerged a similar tendency, with participants revealing strong initial aspirations to have a mobile phone. The data also shows that young people's acquisition of a mobile phone was driven both by parents and by young people themselves and, at this initial stage, these groups often had differing and divergent reasons for wanting one. The data demonstrates that parents acquire a mobile phone for children for the purposes of accessibility, which increases their sense of security. Alternatively, while young people value the mobile phone for allowing continued contact with parents, their main reason for wanting one relates to being up-to-date and keeping touch with their friends. As Campbell (2006) asserts, the parental discourse is concerned with danger and safety, while the youth discourse emphasises self-determination and sociability.

5.3.1 Parent-Led Acquisition

Both the survey and focus group data show that it was most common for young people to acquire their first mobile phone during 6th class of primary school or 1st year of their secondary education, usually when they were around 12 or 13 years of age. In the Irish Republic, this transition from primary to secondary education constitutes something of a contemporary rite of passage. This phase marks a point where young people are traditionally viewed as exiting childhood and entering into a more mature phase in their lives – their adolescence. At this time young people begin to engage in social activities that take them away from the immediate surroundings of the home and spend a greater amount of time within their peer groups (Lalor, De Róiste and Devlin, 2007). The acquisition of the mobile phone can be understood as reflecting this increase in social activity beyond the home.

While the young people who participated in this research reveal a personal wish to get a mobile phone, for most their initial acquisition was contingent on their parents. The survey data shows that for the majority of respondents, 335 (72%), their first mobile phone was bought for them by their parents, while only 103 (22.9%) state that they paid for it themselves. The remainder, 55 (5.1%), received one as a gift or from a relative who had upgraded, or from parents passing on an old phone. In the focus group discussions, a number of participants acknowledge that their first mobile phone was an old phone of their parents, which was then handed down to them. These findings demonstrate young people's reliance on parents/relatives for their initial acquisition of the mobile phone. In buying their child a mobile phone, parents are recognising young

people's increasing self-determination, while also providing themselves with a means of staying in contact with their child as their use of public space expands.

For parents then, it would appear that the issue of young people's safety is a key motivating factor in their wanting them to have a mobile phone (see also, for example, Campbell, 2006; Pain et al, 2005; Ling, 2004). The mobile phone helps to ensure parental peace of mind, by providing a means of staying in contact with young people. It can also be a way to retain some degree of control and watchfulness over young people's activities. In the survey, of those for whom their mobile phone was bought for them, 69% (259) indicated that the primary motivating factor for this were issues of safety and security. Specifically, parents' value the mobile phone as a means to, as one focus group participant observes, 'to keep in contact', and more specifically as he elaborates:

David: So they'd know where you are when you're out instead of going out looking for you they can just ring and tell you to come home (Group 1)

This comment reflects a number of ways in which the mobile phone is used in parent-child relationships: first, as a means of ensuring safety; second, as a tool for 'micro-coordination'; and third, as a way to monitor and control young people's activities. In this way, the mobile phone is an intrinsic part of the way in which parent-child relationships are managed and negotiated in contemporary life – this issue is addressed more fully in the next section. In general, parents' initially identified the utility of the mobile phone for maintaining contact with children. As Palen, Salzman and Youngs (2000) note, parents are often keen for their child to have a mobile phone because of their own prior experience of its usefulness within the context of their own lives. In the

focus group discussions, participants signalled their awareness of these parental concerns:

Damian: Yeah, your parents definitely want you to have the phone [but] they wouldn't be a great influence in you having to have a phone, but they want you to have a phone so it's more safe like, you just need it (Group 1)

At the same time this comment also suggests that these parental concerns were not of primary importance in shaping young people's own wish to acquire a mobile phone. Nevertheless, the issue of parents wishing to maintain contact recurred prominently within the focus group discussions. For example, one participant, Jane, comments that her parents got her a mobile phone when she entered secondary school 'to keep in touch so they can reach you' (Group 11). Another participant similarly observes that his parents wanted to be able to keep in touch with him as he travelled to and from school:

Alan: Ah it's the whole like school's pretty far from home thing like... it's a long way if something happens in between that they want to be able to know what's happening you know (Group 10)

Despite this being the dominant position, it also emerges in the focus groups that not all parents were initially keen to get their child a mobile phone. A small number of participants indicate that they had to 'pester' their parents in order to get one, as one participant recalls in rather comically:

John: I remember constantly begging my parents to the point of insanity, begging them for a phone like "c'mon everyone has one" – I was a right little bollocks, so yeah that's what I remember, it was agony not having one, but it's just saying you have one, it's nothing... (Group 1)

This comment also highlights the divergent attitudes of parents and young people, with young people themselves wanting a mobile phone because 'everyone has one'. In this

regard, it is an important way in which participation in peer culture is both realised and symbolised. Overall, however, the data suggests that parents are willing, and often eager, for children to have their own mobile phone. This is primarily because it provides a means of accessibility with their children, which potentially enhances feelings of safety and control. Equally, the use of the mobile phone within parent-child interaction can facilitate the more efficient organisation of daily routines. However, while these issues are now valued by both parents and young people, it can be concluded that young people's own initial motivations for acquiring a mobile phone were quite distinct from those of their parents.

5.3.2 Peer-Led Acquisition

In contrast with parental concerns, for young people themselves their initial acquisition of the mobile phone was encouraged by two especially prominent and interrelated factors: first, the wish to keep in contact with friends; and second, that the mobile phone was perceived by young people as 'the thing to have'. As the mobile phone became increasingly popular it became desired both as a means to both stay in touch with one's peers and to keep up with this new trend. The mobile phone, therefore, became a symbolic representation of peer group involvement and a means through which these relationships were mediated; as one participant, Rachel, puts it, 'it was like the thing to have' (Group 7).

In this way, the mobile phone had, even prior to acquisition, high levels of cultural significance for young people. It connotes notions of status and acceptance within their peer group. The focus group discussions show that, as the mobile phone achieved

greater popularity amongst their friends, young people became increasingly anxious to have one in order to not be left out of the prevailing currents of their peer culture:

Interviewer: So, why did you want one initially?

Alan: 'Cause everyone else had one

Rebecca: Yeah, 'cause everyone else had one

Alan: And if you didn't have one you felt like the only one – to be perfectly honest (Group 11)

This feeling of 'being left out' corresponds to a general need to fit in and gain acceptance within youth culture. While young people's initial desire for the mobile phone was rooted in this need to fit in with their peers, perceptions of it have subsequently been supplemented by more specific and well-rehearsed understanding of its use within their everyday lives. As the following comment indicates, the mobile phone has moved swiftly from being a novelty to being a necessity:

David: When I first got one it was just like 'cause it was the thing to get, but I didn't know what it was about but now, yeah, I couldn't live without it (Group 1)

While, initially then, the meaning of the mobile phone for young people was somewhat nebulous, it has, through use, assumed greater significance for them. Their use of the mobile phone corresponds to a range of issues and concerns that permeate through their everyday experiences. In the remainder of this chapter I focus on how the mobile phone is indicative of how young people manage their liminal position in society, with specific reference to parent-child relationships.

5.4 Mediating Parent-Child Relationships: The Paradox of Accessibility

After the initial period of acquisition, the mobile phone has become normalised within domestic life, becoming an increasingly prominent means through which family

relationships are organised and maintained. The mobile phone's provision of accessibility creates new opportunities for communication between parents and young people. Its use can be seen as a way through which issues of power and control are mediated, managed and negotiated. This emphasis is reflected within the focus group discussions where participants identify how the mobile phone is used to create and maintain connections between themselves and their parents:

Paul: My parents always ask do I have my phone with me when I'm going out... 'Cause they can't get through to you or anything like that... At least if you have a mobile like and you say you're gonna be home at such a time, but if you're not they can see where you are (Group 6)

This accessibility is marked by a paradox in that it both potentially provides parents with greater ease of access to young people and, concurrently, facilitates increased personal freedom for young people themselves. Young people's use of the mobile phone then can draw them into continuing forms of dependence on parents, while, at the same time, increasing their sense of independence. This dependence is manifest in the role of the mobile phone in relation to issues of safety and as a tool of micro-coordination. More insidiously perhaps, the mobile phone is also a medium for parental surveillance and monitoring. In this context, it can be a way in which parents can gain greater control over young people's activities. However, at the same, the mobile phone can foster greater levels of trust and responsibility within parent-child relationships. Parents may often be content with the knowledge that they are contactable when required or in the case of an emergency, which can give young people greater freedom. Equally, young people can make use of the mobile phone to avoid or subvert parental attempts at monitoring and controlling them.

The use of the mobile phone then can contribute to what Pain et al (2005: 815) refer to as the expansion of young people's 'geographies'. Similarly, Ling and Yttri (2002: 156) argue that the mobile phone encourages parents to give young people greater space and independence, while Nafus and Tracey (2002: 212) refer to it as a 'digital leash' whereby young people are able to use the slack provided to 'establish public personhoods'. In this way, the use of the mobile phone by young people contributes to both sustained forms of dependence on parents, as well as an increased sense of independence, autonomy and self-determination.

As Campbell (2006) argues, these divergent discourses around mobile phone use 'intersect' creating an intricate set of social and cultural processes. Rather than showing that young people and parents use the mobile phone solely in competing ways, the data suggests a more nuanced and complex situation. For example, while issues of safety are usually perceived as parental concerns, young people also demonstrate an awareness and understanding of these issues. Similarly, young people welcome the accessibility afforded by the mobile phone, in providing them with a link to their parents. At the same time, they are wary of how the mobile phone can potentially allow parents' to monitor their activities, and demonstrate the ability to subvert and resist this form of control.

5.4.1 Fear, Risk and Safety

In contemporary society, debates in relation to young people are often focused on the apparent prevalence of risk and danger to which they are susceptible. New technology is often a lightning rod for these fears. While the internet has been the predominant

focus of recent public anxiety around young people's security, the mobile phone has also been the subject of concerns. Often these debates serve to characterise young people as in need of increased forms of supervision and control. Although not wishing to deny the existence of potential threats, the data presented here suggests that young people are conscious of the risks that they may encounter and, in particular, shows that they are aware of how the mobile phone can potentially both limit and enhance their personal safety. This challenges the usual dualist understanding of mobile phone culture, through which parents are seen to emphasise risk and security, while young people are interested in it as a technology of freedom and sociability.

As discussed earlier, issues of safety and security were key factors in young people's acquisition of a mobile phone. For parents, the mobile phone is viewed as a means of providing greater accessibility and enhancing feelings of safety. It provides peace of mind, in that it represents a continued link with young people as they start to explore a social life away from the immediate surroundings of the home. It is indicative then of parental fears and insecurities about young people's safety and their perceived vulnerability. In the focus group discussions, participants reveal that they are conscious of the prominence of this issue for their parents:

Alan: Like it's my parents, it's more of a security issue for my parents. Like knowing where I am, if I have a mobile phone on me all the time they have it in their brain that they can get hold of me (Group 11)

Accordingly, participants also highlight how parents' are keen for them to have their mobile phone when they are away from home. This provision of accessibility helps assuage parental fears around young people's use of public space, allowing them to check up on young people if and when they need to. However, parents' desire for this

form of accessibility and contact is not necessarily a major source of conflict between them and young people, but can be seen as part of the way in which these relationships are managed:

Interviewer: So would your parents say if you were going out to bring your phone with you?

Elaine: They wouldn't need to I'd just have it anyway (Group 6)

In this way, the mobile phone has quickly become an established and ordinary part of young people's everyday life. Equally, while, as Pain et al (2005) note, issues of safety appear more prominently in the minds of parents, the data suggests that they are also of concern for young people. The survey data shows that 44.6% (200) of respondents cite 'safety/security' as a reason for initially wanting the mobile phone. More significantly, 67.1% (331) indicate that having the mobile phone helps them to 'feel safe'. This latter figure suggests that the mobile phone has an important supportive role in preserving young people's own peace of mind. Similarly, the focus groups also provide an indication that participants value the role of the mobile phone for helping them maintain contact with parents, which can provide a greater feeling of safety:

Jennifer: If you're out at least your parents know where you are and everything 'cause you have your mobile and you're able to tell them where you are like but if you hadn't got a mobile you could be anywhere like and they wouldn't know where you were like and I suppose it's kinda safer like (Group 6)

In the focus groups, the emphasis on safety appears more pronounced amongst female participants, who are more likely to indicate that having the mobile phone enhance their sense of personal security. This reflects Campbell's (2006) suggestion that issues of safety appear more prominently in relation to women and girls, both in terms of how they are perceived by others and themselves. For example, as one female participant

observes, in the case of an emergency, the mobile phone provides a welcome link to parents:

Jane: If something happened like you could just easily ring your parents (Group 10)

This sense of safety then is primarily associated with the connection to parents provided by the mobile phone, which provides young people with a greater sense of security and well-being. The mobile phone is valued then for facilitating interaction with parents for the purposes of accessibility and safety, and to circumvent problems or difficulties that they encounter:

Amy: If you got into trouble you can just ring someone (Group 3)

In this context, it's also indicative of how young people remain dependent on their parents and are more than happy to call on them if and when it suits. While this suggests a continuing reliance on parents, at the same time, participants also highlight other ways of dealing with potential or perceived threatening situations. One such precautionary measure involves using the mobile phone when walking alone, particularly at night, to call upon, or give the pretence of calling upon, an absent other:

Amy: You know, if I'm walking home at night and like there's somebody behind me scaring me like, I just kinda ring one of my friends on the phone and be like "yeah, yeah I'm walking home now" (Group 3)

In the focus group discussions, this practice emerged as a common aspect of girls' repertoire of behaviour in relation to their public use of the mobile phone, which gives them an added feeling of safety in certain circumstances. This 'presence', even of an absent other, helps alleviate their fear and is seen as particularly useful when out alone

at night, when they may feel most at risk. Particularly, female participants assert how this will deter possible threats:

Rachel: Because they know you're talking to someone and they'd be like it just feels like they'd go away because we're on the phone they're not going to attack you or anything (Group 7)

In this way, issues of safety are not just the concern of parents, with young people also conscious of the potential threats to their personal security, as well as the role of the mobile phone in relation to them. However, reflecting Pain et al's (2005) suggestion that the mobile phone may increase risks for young people, other participants appear more circumspect about its role in providing safety. Specifically, a number of participants comment that the mobile phone can make one a target for 'muggers'. For example, the following exchange emerged while discussing this 'walk-and-talk' method favoured by some participants as a safety mechanism:

Miriam: I suppose I would but at the same time...

Paul: I'd rather not take out my phone

Miriam: Yeah they might...

Paul [interrupting]: Because it just gives them a target to go for

Miriam: Exactly

Jennifer: No but I prefer to take it out 'cause then they think that you're on the phone to someone that knows where you are and if you just say "oh yeah I'm blah blah blah..."

Elaine: Yeah, no I'd agree... 'Cause I suppose they wouldn't exactly take the phone off you if you're using the phone; well they might but they'd be less likely to because then the person on the other end of the line would be able to hear you kina giving out or whatever

Paul: Yeah, but that tells them that you have your phone on then like and that gives them more of a reason to take it 'cause it's much harder when the phone is off (Group 6)

The focus group discussions reveal often diverging opinions in relation to the use of the mobile phone as a means of ensuring personal safety. Here the male participant

articulates the view that the mobile phone can increase risks to personal security. Correspondingly, throughout the focus groups males appear less likely to consider the phone as a means of providing any significant degree of safety. For example, another male participant made the following observation:

John: You can get mugged then. I think it's a bit less safe if anything... I think it's a bit of a liability 'cause sometimes if you're walking across someone they can say have you got the time and they're waiting for you to take out your phone to check the time so they'd 'hop' you, but no I don't think it's safe at all like... I nearly got hopped for my phone (Group 2)

For some participants then, having the mobile phone can raise your level of risk by making one a target for attack. The fears around young people's use of public space, which are more often expressed by adults, are shared by a number of the focus group participants, who contend that the mobile phone can compromise as well as increase one's personal safety. Participants provide anecdotal, second-hand accounts of mobile phones being robbed. However, although it can be argued that the mobile phone is an oft stolen item, as one participant suggests, one is as likely to be mugged for cash or other items:

Elaine: I mean as well as that if even you didn't have the mobile phone you'd still be as likely to be mugged or whatever by someone thinking you had a mobile phone or it'd be like if it wasn't your mobile phone they were looking for it'd just be something else anyway, so it's handier to have the mobile phone than not to have it I think... (Group 6)

There is awareness then amongst young people of the possible threats to their safety, but the focus group discussions also demonstrate the more positive affirmations about the safety dimensions of mobile phone use. In relation to their use of the mobile phone in public, participants acknowledge that it is usually contingent on where they are.

While they demonstrate its use to deter attack and defuse threatening situations, participants also highlight how if they were in ‘town’ (i.e. the city centre) or other built up areas they would be far less likely to take out and use their mobile phone for fear of it being ‘snatched’ from them:

Naomi: If you were in a situation where you’re walking late at night you’d always have your phone with you... or if you needed a lift

Samantha: Or if you go into a shop, I take out me phone if someone is following me...

Naomi: [But] like I don’t move me phone around, if I’m in the middle of town [Dublin] like I don’t just take out me phone

Cathleen: If I’m going to town I put the string on me phone so I can wrap it around me wrist

Samantha: That’s the way I used to have my phone

Naomi: That’s what I hate when you’re on the phone walking through town, I hate that like when you’re walking through the streets and you have your phone (Group 8)

Similarly, another participant acknowledged that while the mobile phone does make her feel safe, she is cautious about using it in public:

Miriam: Sometimes if you’re at the bus stop say in town and stuff like that you’d be kinda wary of sorta taking it out in public and stuff (Group 6)

The allusion here is to the sense of insecurity that is felt by young people in using the phone in public for fear of it being robbed, but also to the understanding of the possible dangers that arrive in tandem with their increased personal freedom. The alertness exhibited by these participants belies the perception of children and young people as ‘easy targets’ for crime or unaware of potential dangers. Similarly, another participant indicates this awareness more pointedly, stating:

Rachel: Well if I was in town... you wouldn’t in town, you wouldn’t take out your phone you wouldn’t be that stupid to take out your phone and go ‘oh look

everyone I have a phone', 'cause basically you're asking to be targeted... (Group 7)

Overall, notions of safety appear consistently then within the focus group discussions. Although this issue is arguably more important for parents, young people appear aware of potentially threatening situations. The mobile phone expands young people's social space, while acting as a safeguard that assuages parents' fears and also provides young people themselves with an electronic 'safety valve'. Young people are reassured by having the ability to keep in contact with their parent, which means that they can contact them in the case of an emergency. This potentially contributes to a sense of general well-being amongst both parents and children. Ultimately, the mobile phone has an important role in contributing to young people's sense of safety and security, and in alleviating some of the risks associated with their use of public spaces.

5.4.2 The Micro-Coordination of Family Life

While the mobile phone can be said to provide a sense of personal well-being for young people and temper parental fears for their safety, use of the mobile phone between parents and young people also readily conforms to aspects of 'micro-coordination'. The 'emergencies' young people refer to in the focus group discussions often overlap with more mundane, logistical concerns and are commonly intertwined with ordinary, habitual practices of organisation. For example, the mobile phone provides young people with a means of contacting parents if they miss a train or a bus, or have no way of getting home, allowing them to make new arrangements as well as assure their parents that they're safe:

Gary: If you're stranded somewhere like you can just ring and someone can pick you up... It's safer that way

Ursula: Yeah, when you want a lift or something (Group 10)

The data shows that the mobile phone has a prominent role in managing and coordinating everyday activities and schedules within the family. This aspect of its use is not exclusively the concern of parents, with both the survey responses and focus group discussions revealing that young people also place a high value on the use of the mobile phone in this context. In particular, the mobile phone allows for these processes to be carried out with greater speed and ease. The survey data indicates that amongst young people the capacity of the mobile phone for co-ordinating and managing daily routines is viewed positively. The majority of respondents, 92.1% (454), agreed that the mobile phone is useful for organising daily family activities, while 71.2% (351) of respondents agreed that the mobile phone is useful for coordinating family social activities (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: The Mobile Phone and the Micro-Coordination of Family Life

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Useful for organising daily family activities	91.2% (454)	4.1% (20)	2.5% (12)
Useful for coordinating family social activities	71.2% (351)	11.8% (58)	15% (74)

These figures indicate that survey respondents view the mobile phone as important for logistical coordination between family members. Equally, the next chapter discusses how the mobile phone is also used by young people for the purposes of micro-coordination with friends. This positive association suggests that, in the context of

daily routines at least, the mobile phone helps sustain and affirm parent-child relationships. Rather than isolating people, the mobile phone can contribute to forms of family communication and cohesion. This is borne out in the focus group discussions, where participants indicate that the organisation of their everyday schedules is increasingly mediated by the mobile phone:

Grace: Like everything you do you organise it over the phone. You know like to organise everything you use your phone; even if it's to meet in the morning before school you use your phone (Group 9)

The mobile phone then mediates the multiple habitual interactions that punctuate the day, and is a regular part of the organisation of family routines and activities. The examples provided by the focus group participants correspond to the forms of micro-coordination identified by Ling and Yttri (2002). A common example of basic logistics cited by focus group participants is of contacting parents to arrange lifts to and from school. Equally, the mobile phone allows for both the 'softening' of time and making progressively exact arrangements through the creation of instantaneous connections. This facilitates the exchange of information with greater speed and ease, that permits new forms of organisation between family members – for example, as one participant observes:

Amy: Yeah, if they forgot what you wanted in the Chinese (laughing) like they'd ring you on the phone from the Chinese and be like "whatcha want?" (Group 3)

In this regard, the mobile phone is often a medium for mundane, and even trivial, forms of interaction. Nevertheless, such practices are ways in which family connections are managed and maintained, and suggest how the mobile phone has quickly become a taken-for-granted part of family life. The mobile phone then has both been integrated

into characteristic forms of domestic life, while also transforming the way in which such practices are undertaken and carried out:

Joe: Once someone gets used to having the phone and they don't have it for like a day or two they realise how the hell did I ever get around how did they survive without it before; I think my parents and myself have noticed this, even if you forget your phone when you go to school you just realise God what, how I even, what was life like before (Group 4)

In contrast with the common perception of adolescence as a time of recalcitrance towards parents, the data shows that young people make use of the mobile phone to maintain connections and interact with other family members. Research indicates how the use of the mobile phone in parent-child interaction is focused primarily concerned with practical issues (see, for example, Kasesniemi and Rautiainen, 2002; Ling and Yttri, 2002). However, while these practices are often marked by an explicitly functional character, they are also inscribed with a deeper emotional resonance that indicates the closeness between family members. The use of the mobile phone in managing and organising practical, everyday routines can be seen as part of the way in which bonds between parents and young people are created and sustained – the ‘nomos’ described by Ling (2004).

In highlighting the role of mobile phone in intra-family communication, the centrality of the family in young people's everyday life is established. While youth cultural research has tended to privilege discussions of practices external to or apart from domestic relations, it is important to acknowledge how this setting remains, throughout adolescence, a key site in which young people's social and cultural identities are formed and performed. Young people's cultural consumption then is often concerned with ordinary, mundane aspects of everyday life, which can be a significant site in

which their cultural power is enacted. Through the use of the mobile phone they are able to negotiate their social role and assert forms of self-determination. In particular, young people's use of the mobile phone is indicative of their wider desire for and pursuit of greater independence and autonomy within their everyday lives.

5.4.3 Surveillance, Monitoring and Control

While young people's use of the mobile phone can contribute positively to their own sense of autonomy and independence, Williams and Williams (2005) also contend that parents' still hold power over young people as the mobile phone allows them to 'invade' their space. The use of the mobile phone in domestic life for both the purposes of safety and micro-coordination can also then be read as part of parental efforts to maintain watchfulness and control over young people's activities. The accessibility afforded by the mobile phone gives scope for greater parental monitoring and observation of young people's activities, and this capacity for surveillance offers parents a means of exerting control over young people. Green (2002) suggests that the mobile phone is part of a more general shift, whereby forms of surveillance, usually associated with state or corporate organisations, are becoming increasingly part of interpersonal relationships. She identifies two forms of monitoring that take place in relation to the use of the mobile phone. First is the use of the mobile phone by parents to keep track of their children, which can often be related to both issues of safety and coordination; and the second is linked to the type and level of use of the mobile phone by young people, which can be subject to control and censure within the family, as well as in public locations such as the school. While Green (2002) points to this growth in

potential surveillance, she argues that, in the context of parent-child relationships, the use of the mobile phone can foster a ‘culture of mutual co-dependence, trust and accountability in everyday life’.

In contrast with the perception of it as a means of monitoring and control, the survey data reveals that almost three-quarters of respondents, 74% (365), believe that the mobile phone allows them more freedom to organise their lives. While, conversely, only one-third, 33.3% (164), agree with the statement that ‘the mobile phone gives parents’ greater opportunity to observe/control your activities’ (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: The Mobile Phone in Parent-Child Relationships

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Allows you more freedom to organise your life	74% (365)	15% (74)	9.3% (46)
Gives parents greater opportunity to observe & control your activities	33.3% (164)	48.1% (237)	17.2% (85)

These figures suggest that young people view the mobile phone as a way of enhancing rather than constraining their personal freedom. Equally, it indicates how parent-child relationships do not appear to be characterised by excessive or explicit efforts by parents to use the mobile phone to monitor and control young people.

The focus group discussions reveal further the nature of these practices and the ways in which young people deal with parental use of the mobile phone to keep track of them. Issues of surveillance may often overlap with more benign forms of coordination; for example, parents may call their child to find out when they are coming home or if they need a lift. This practice can also be said to correspond to the issues of safety discussed

earlier. For example, one participant indicates that her parents will call to tell her to come home but also to monitor and check up on her:

Naomi: And she's [mother] saying get home and you're like... like if she tells me to go home I'll just say like I'll be home in a bit and she's "right then don't be ages" and try and find out who I'm with like and then like if I don't come home she'll ring me again (Group 8)

Such interruptions are usually perceived as an annoyance to be tolerated, and, in general, young people have well developed mechanisms for coping with these forms of parental intrusion. In as much as it exposes young people to greater parental surveillance, the mobile phone also provides young people with a way of eluding and evading their parents' 'gaze' (see, for example, Green, 2002; Ito, 2005). Participants display a marked ability to evade and subvert this process of monitoring, through, for example, the adoption of what Green terms 'parent-management strategies'. In this way, young people's use of the mobile phone is a way through which they resist forms of parental authority and control. Through these practices they are able to avoid or circumvent the potential intrusion by parents into their social lives. One straightforward approach that young people adopt is to just not answer the phone when parents' call:

Interviewer: Would you answer the phone when your parents ring?

Jennifer: Sometimes (laughs)

Miriam: Yeah I have a habit of kinda not doing that sometimes (laughs)

Paul: Most of the time yeah... if you couldn't be bothered talking, like if you're in the middle of a football game and your phone rings you just let it go... if you're having a kick around and your bag's at the goalpost or something you just don't bother going over...

Miriam: Or if you're coming home from a disco and you might be 'otherwise engaged' if you know what I mean (laughing) (Group 6)

However, as one participant noted that if her parents did try and contact her and she didn't answer this could be a source of friction:

Amy: Yeah if you forgot to turn it on or something like, or if you had no coverage they'd be like "why didn't you have your phone on?"

Irene: Or if you leave it on silent

Amy: Yeah (Group 3)

Usually in this instance, young people tell their parents that their battery died or they didn't hear their phone ring. However, parents will often ring back if a child doesn't answer. With this in mind young people will often answer but as one respondent, Eve, commented 'you'd be a little economical with the truth' (Group 5). This emerged in the focus group discussions as a fairly common 'parent management strategy' with young people frequently being judicious in terms of revealing where they are and what they're doing:

Alan: Like if you're in [town] or if you're in like the back arse of nowhere and you're supposed to be down the road you'd be just like 'yeah I'm just down the road I'll be home in ten minutes', but it might take you half an hour to get home (Group 11)

This comment also reveals how young people use the mobile phone to gain greater flexibility with regards their social boundaries. This is more usually a transparent process, whereby young people negotiate with their parents over issues such as curfews. For example, rather than having a set time to be home at, young people are able to use the mobile phone to continually barter with parents over these boundaries. In this way, young people use the mobile phone to manage their movements, activities and autonomy. It is also a way in which they manage their position within the family. Their use of the mobile phone allows young people to actively discuss their social

boundaries with their parents. As Williams and Williams (2005) suggest, this opens up the possibility for parent-child relationships to be characterised less by traditional forms of authoritative parenting and more by negotiation and flexibility. In practical terms then, this allows for more malleable schedules, which can continually be reordered and rearranged:

Rachel: You need some way of communicating with them like if you need a lift home or anything like that, whereas if you like if you have an arranged time with your parents and you don't wanna go home at that time you have to go home 'cause they're after driving all the way in to collect you (Group 7)

As Williams and Williams (2005) note, the role of the mobile phone within family life allows for a more equitable and even process of mediation and negotiation to emerge between parents and young people:

Elaine: 'Cause it means you don't have to be coming home really early or whatever
Jennifer: Yeah, you can ring them [parents] and say can I stay out a bit longer
Elaine: And you can ring them and say 'I'm gonna be late' or whatever and then they know where you are (Group 6)

Similarly, these patterns of interaction conform to what Green (2002) characterises as a 'culture of mutual co-dependence, trust and accountability in everyday life'. In this way, the use of the mobile phone means that young people are given a greater amount of freedom by parents in return for being available and accountable for their activities. A number of participants appear to have built up a level of trust with their parents to the extent that their parents' will rarely call them when they're out. Instead, they will let their parents know where they're going and this is satisfactory:

Amy: No, my parents would know what I'd be at... They've no reason to ring me when I'm out 'cause I tell 'em where I'm going. So, I dunno, I'm just really free, I come and go as I please (Group 3)

Alternatively, as another participant notes, even when parents do call, these intrusions do not represent too great a problem:

John: Not really, sure they haven't a clue anyway what's going on so they're alright (Group 1)

In general, the data reveals that parents do not excessively use the mobile phone for the purposes of monitoring and surveillance. The relationships that have developed between parents and young people correspond to the types of accountability and co-dependence identified by Green (2002). The mobile phone helps mediate young people's social position and sustain their communication with parents. Even when parents do attempt to monitor young people's activities, young people appear adept at eluding this forms of control. By contributing to their expanded use of time and space, for young people the mobile phone connotes notions of freedom, autonomy and maturity.

At the same time, the data does contain examples of the second aspect of 'mobile monitoring' identified by Green (2002); that is, the control of young people's level and type of use. In particular, she suggests that young people's use of the mobile phone in the home and in school can be subject to monitoring and regulation. Parents will often attempt to impose specific guidelines for young people's use of the mobile phone. In this way, the use of the mobile phone can be seen as a challenge to the order of particular social institutions in which it is placed. Within the context of the home, young people can often be subject to both formal and informal censure around their use

of the mobile phone. In the focus group discussions, participants identify how using the mobile phone at home can be an irritant for parents:

Diane: My mom hates it if we're sitting in the sitting room and she hears the clicking of my buttons and we're trying to watch TV or something (Group 10)

In particular, parents oppose the use of the mobile phone in what might be classified as 'communal family spaces' within the home, such as the sitting/living room and kitchen. The use of the mobile phone in these spaces is viewed as intruding on the domestic sphere and disrupting the activities of the family. Use in the home, especially in 'common space' such as the living room or at the dinner table, is often perceived as 'antisocial' and a cause for intervention by parents:

Jennifer: Your parents would be giving out to you 'turn that off' like

Miriam: When you're sitting at the dinner table

Jennifer: Yeah

Elaine: Yeah, 'really antisocial' and stuff like that

Ciarán: Watching TV in the living room and the phone goes off there's a big fuss

Jennifer: And the clicking, they hate the clicking (Group 6)

The dinner table appears, within the focus group discussions, as a prominent setting in which mobile phone use causes friction between parents and young people. The deference young people give to absent others, which is implied in the use of the mobile phone, is viewed negatively by parents. As one participant notes, her parents have a very specific rule in this regard:

Rachel: Oh I'm not allowed bring my phone to dinner (Group 7)

Similarly, the following point is also made in the focus group discussions:

John: The parents might go mad at me like if I'm sitting at home during dinner and the phone starts ringing. That's kinda annoying, but sure I should have it on

silent or something, turn it off at dinner or something anyway, but that's just effort (Group 2)

One reason that such behaviour is viewed as anti-social is because young people are seen to be giving more time to their friends than their own family. Young people make use of the phone to keep in contact with their friends, and this can be said to represent a way in which the area of the home is colonised from the outside. Indeed, as one participant, Lisa, comments 'I think if you don't have your phone and you're at home I think you'd probably talk to your family a bit more then' (Group 2).

5.5 Youth Culture and the Mobile Phone: A Homological Relationship?

In their everyday lives, young people's cultural practices emphasise a desire for freedom, independence and autonomy. These desires are reflected in the ways in which they make use of the mobile phone. As Campbell (2006) identifies, the youth cultural discourse around the mobile phone privileges issues of 'self-determination and sociability'. In this context, a relationship between these characteristic impulses of youth culture and young people's use of the mobile phone can be identified. Recognising this relationship allows for an analysis and awareness of how young people make use of the mobile phone in ways that reflects their particular preferences and values. The mobile phone then can be understood by reference to the subjective uses that are made of it, through which the broader concerns of users are made visible. While not wishing to characterise youth as a homogenous, undifferentiated mass, it can be suggested with broad strokes that there are general, common concerns and issues that animate young people's cultural values and practices. These can be said to relate to issues such as freedom, maturity, and autonomy.

In this context, a 'homology' between these characteristic impulses of youth culture and young people's use of the mobile phone can be identified. As Willis (1978: 191) suggests, a homological analysis of the relationship between youth groups and cultural objects and practices is 'concerned with how far, in their structure and content, particular items parallel and reflect the structure, style, typical concerns, attitudes and feelings of the social group'. He applies the concept of homology in addressing the relationship between the values of particular groups, motorcycle boys and hippies, and the music they listen to, rock 'n' roll and prog rock. Willis (1978) argues, for example, the popular music of the 1950's, particular rock 'n' roll 45s, was a crucial element in the culture of the motorcycle boys, and indicates a homology between this musical form and the attitudes of the group based around the expression of distinctiveness, authenticity, aggressive masculinity and movement. Similarly, Hebdige (1978) indicates a homology within punk groups, which reflects their internal organisation and order. He identifies how 'the objects chosen were, either intrinsically or in their adapted forms, homologous with the focal concerns, activities, group structure and collective self-image of the subculture' (Hebdige, 1978: 114).

Middleton (1990: 161) argues, however, that Willis' work tends toward an exaggeration of the homogeneity and coherence of both the social groups and the music, and overstates the 'purity' of subcultural formations. Middleton (1990) continues by stating that the 'relative neglect of the subcultures' relationships with their parent cultures, with the dominant culture and with other youth cultures, and the stress on internal coherence leads to a circularity of argument'. Martin (2004: 32) similarly suggests that the drawing of homologies between sets of cultural practices and underlying group

values ‘exhibits all the failings of ‘structural’ sociology more generally with its toolkit of collective concepts and its presupposition that social groups can be defined unambiguously as entities’.

Nevertheless, Middleton (1990: 10) suggests retaining the concept in a ‘qualified sense’ as it has some usefulness in that ‘it seems likely that some signifying structures are more *easily* articulated to the interests of one group than are some others; similarly, that they are more easily articulated to the interests of one group than those of another’. Equally, elements of homology can be discerned amidst contemporary youth cultural research. Kahn-Harris (2004: 109) suggests that there are implicit assumptions of homology in analyses of extreme metal music that identify the relationship between the genre and wider social contexts, circumstances and changes.

Willis (1978) asserts that identifying homologues permits an analysis of cultural practice that moves beyond the ‘one-way determination’ of meaning. For Willis (1978) then, the associated meanings between group values and cultural object works in both directions – with particular values influencing choice of objects and vice versa. Latterly, Willis (1990: 154), in discussing the role of ‘symbolic creativity’ and ‘grounded aesthetics’ in processes of meaning-making by young people, suggests also that ‘symbolic resources should represent *homologically* some of the elements of the necessary symbolic work of the receivers already in train: they must be ‘passable’, relevant’. In this way, there must be a fit between particular cultural commodities and practices and the underlying order of groups. As Willis (1990: 154) observes: ‘there must be some kind of *homology* between the symbolic resources and meanings of the text and the values, focal concerns, meanings and preoccupations of the receivers’. In

short then, applying the concept of homology contributes to the understanding of how the use of cultural commodities, such as the mobile phone, can reflect the values and ideals of particular user groups. While not wishing to characterise youth as a homogenous, undifferentiated mass, it can be suggested with broad strokes that there are general, common concerns and issues that animate young people's cultural values and practices. These can be said to relate to issues such as freedom, maturity, and autonomy.

5.5.1 Freedom and Maturity

Thus far, I have focused on the ways in which the mobile phone is used between parents and young people, arguing that it plays an important role in sustaining a sense of closeness between family members. In this way, it can serve to maintain young people's reliance on their parents, as well as allowing parents a greater level of control over young people. However, while it has a potential capacity for the enactment of parental surveillance, this aspect of mobile phone use is less pronounced than its role in issues of safety, security and micro-coordination. Young people's use of the mobile phone then is indicative of a continuing dependence on parents, but, perhaps more tellingly, it also provides a space in which they can assert and negotiate a greater sense of autonomy and freedom.

This desire for self-determination forms a central preoccupation of young people's lives; an underlying sensibility that is reflected in their use of the mobile phone. Its use is indicative of young people's growing perception of their own maturity, and corresponds to their self-definition of themselves as autonomous and independent.

Accordingly, in the focus group discussions, participants articulate that their entrance into secondary school constitutes a shift away from the dependence of childhood toward a greater independence. For the participants, this movement is explicitly understood with reference to the mobile phone, and is framed in terms of their own sense of increasing maturity:

Anne: I think it's more important when you're like going into secondary school and you start and you're not with your parents; your parents don't bring you everywhere or organise everything. That's why I don't think little kids should have them [a mobile phone] 'cause like their parents do everything for them anyway so...

Suzanne [interrupting]: They still depend on their parents, like when we go into secondary school... In secondary school like you're more, you're kinda, you depend on yourself more than you depend on your parents. And you need, like the phone is kind of a necessity in a way, like if you need a lift that's kinda really important 'cause there's no phone booths around here anyways (laughs). And little like children in primary school I think it's just stupid because only two of them in the class have them and they're just texting the other and they probably don't even like each other, they probably hate each other or something (laughter). But, ah, it's just they don't... I don't know why they need them I really don't understand why. I think it's... I don't know how their parents let them, their parents don't let them off and go hop on the bus like into town, and they're like eight you know anyways like so I don't know why they need one in the first place...

Anne: Yeah, 'cause like their parents know where they are all the time anyway (Group 7)

This exchange highlights a number of frequent and significant assumptions made by participants within the different focus groups discussions. Participants repeatedly identify that entering second-level constitutes an important point of transition. They see themselves as acquiring a greater sovereignty over their lives, and as no longer being dependent on their parents in the way younger children are perceived to be. The use of the mobile phone then can be said to both facilitate this autonomy as well as being emblematic and representative of this deeper process associated with adolescence and youth. The mobile phone facilitates young people's freedom by satisfying the

desire for control of both parents and young people, in that it gives parents the assured feeling that they can contact their children, or are contactable by them, in the case of an emergency, while for young people the mobile phone affords them a greater autonomy in their daily lives and a greater sense of personal space and freedom. Young people then are content to trade this availability for the increased independence that the mobile phone gives them:

Siobhan: Well, it's personal freedom 'cause you can go out and your parents are not asking you where you're going 'cause they know they can get in contact with you anyway (Group 5)

At the same time, young people's use of the mobile phone also represents the broader processes of independence; corresponding then to this organising principle of youth culture. In this way, young people do not merely assume a sense of maturity because of the mobile phone, but their use of the mobile phone reflects their more general pursuit of freedom and maturity in everyday life. The mobile phone then is a symbolic fit with the wider issues and concerns evident in the everyday life of young people. For example, in practical terms, young people associate the mobile phone with the general sense of independence they associate with their age:

Sarah: When you were younger you did less stuff, so you didn't need a phone (Group 1)

In this context, Ling (1999) argues that the mobile phone is a 'maturation symbol', in that it allows young people to develop aspects of their adult identity. He suggests that it gives young people greater freedom to engage in interpersonal communication and social activities. Through their use of the mobile phone young people can begin to develop a sense of personhood and self-identity that departs from the dependence of

childhood. Participants elaborate in detail on how the mobile phone is indicative of the achievement of maturity. As preceding comments indicate, young people equate their use of mobile phone with their increased sense of autonomy. In this context, they were eager to distance themselves from younger 'children', for whom it is suggested that the mobile phone is neither necessary nor appropriate:

Interviewer: Do you think it's bad that young kids have phones?

Sarah: I think it's weird

Interviewer: But you would've gotten them when you were young

Sarah: No we got them when we were in 5th or 6th class

Simon: My sister's in 2nd class [and has a mobile phone]

Sarah: You see I think that's really strange (Group 1)

In this exchange then, participants draw a clear and distinct line of difference between themselves and younger children, which they associate with the use of the mobile phone. The following exchange goes further, suggesting that on one level the mobile phone is not for children, not just because they have no functional need for it, but also because it is in conflict with the supposed innocence and simplicity of childhood:

Interviewer: So why is 9 too young [to have a mobile phone]?

Jane: 'Cause they need to enjoy their childhood [laughter]... It'd kinda like make them not mature but I dunno they might like...

Catherine [interrupting]: No, no it does in a way it's kinda like having it they'd just have conversations... Yeah and they should just be running around the place or something (laughs)

Interviewer: Do you see it as a sign of maturity?

Jane: Well I think that they might if they were young when they got a phone they might mature too young and then not enjoy it [their childhood]

Patricia: 'Cause you don't really think of little kids having mobile phones

Interviewer: But you were 'little kids' when you had mobile phones?

Jane: People have them now when they're 6, 7, 8 now

Catherine: Yeah, I think that's so stupid

Jane: I don't think the security reason is a good reason for them to have them, I think it's stupid...

Interviewer: So is it useful for a young kid to have it?

Catherine: No

Jane: No, that's the thing – why would a young kind like need it?

Patricia: You don't even go that far with your friends... They can have them but...

Jane [interrupting]: When they get older around ten or something and they go down the road with their friends or around the estate it'd be good for their parents to be able to contact them (Group 10)

The participants in this discussion suggest that the mobile phone is indicative of 'growing up' but to get one too soon is to grow up too fast. This issue of growing up was pursued later in the conversation, wherein it emerged that upon reflection participants identify the mobile phone as indicative of a greater level of maturity and responsibility:

Interviewer: Do you think your getting the mobile phone then was a part of growing up?

Jane: Like then it was just something I got but if you look back now it made you more mature

Catherine: Yeah

Interviewer: In what way?

Jane: Well it's not that it made you. I dunno, it's just that it made you feel more responsible like for yourself

Catherine: Yeah, I think it gave you that like well now I have a mobile phone that makes me sort of more responsible and therefore more sort of mature (Group 10)

Participants' understanding of the mobile phone is one that conforms to a self-image of being autonomous and mature. In this way, the mobile phone reflects participants own sense of themselves as independent individuals, in contrast to the dependence of childhood. This difference is developed further in the following discussion following from the starting point of the appropriate age to get a mobile phone should be:

Interviewer: You all got them when you were 12 so why...?

Jennifer: She's 10!

Interviewer: It's not that big a difference; is it? Why did you need them when you were 12?

Jennifer: 'Cause when we were 12 we were...

Elaine [interrupting]: Going into secondary school you need them a lot more

Jennifer [continues]: ...and we were going out with our friends like [Paul: Yeah...] and we'd be going out without our parents like we'd be going to the cinema and stuff

Paul: Yeah, when you start going out without your parents it's handy because you can tell them when to collect you and what times dinner at or anything like that

Jennifer: Yeah and like you'd be going a lot more places on your own

Paul: It makes your parents feel a lot safer (Group 6)

In spite then of participants repeated suggestions that they are independent, and, as the participant Suzanne suggests, that in secondary school 'you depend on yourself more than you depend on your parents', in pointing to the necessity of the mobile phone for arranging lifts, participants indicate a continuing level of dependence on parents. The mobile phone facilitates young people's freedom by providing a link to parents to coordinate schedules (e.g. dinner times) and giving parents a greater sense of security. While there is an identifiable symbolic connection between the general values and preferences of young people and their use of the mobile phone, young people's own predilections cannot be disconnected from those of their parents. Young people's sense of freedom and self-determination is contingent upon and balanced by their continued connection with parents.

5.5.2 (Self)-Reliance and Responsibility

In his discussion of the mobile phone as a 'maturation symbol', Ling (1999) contends that the increased financial responsibility that accompanies mobile phone ownership is an important part of this process (see also Snioch, 2003; Harper and Hamill, 2005; Harper, 2005). For young people, the mobile phone is something they are personally in charge of and accountable for. It is, then, a means through which they assume aspects of adult responsibility. Ling continues by suggesting that young people assume forms

of adult responsibility through having a mobile phone, by maintaining it, managing its financial aspect, using it responsibly, etc. Similarly, Snioch (2003) argues that parents see the mobile phone as giving young people an appreciation of issues of 'money management and responsibility'. Equally, Harper (2005) also notes how parents use the example of the mobile phone to impress upon young people the importance of prudent fiscal behaviour.

Within the focus group discussions the financial implications of mobile phone use emerge as a prominent issue amongst young people. Participants showed a clear awareness of how the mobile phone involves a continued monetary investment on the part of users. As Ling (2004) suggests, young people's exhibition of financial responsibility is a means through which they earn trust from parents and is viewed by young people themselves as indicative of their own increased maturity. This was reflected by participants in the focus groups, who articulated how they feel that having a mobile phone is consistent with their perception of themselves as more mature and responsible:

Patricia: 'Cause you had one kinda important expensive thing that you had to be responsible for and not lose like

Catherine: Yeah, take care of it and pay for it you know (Group 10)

Nevertheless, as Willis (1990) suggests, most young people have a marginal economic status, remaining financially dependent upon parents in some form, at least until they exit formal education and enter the workforce. Accordingly, although a number of focus group participants specify that they contribute toward their use of the mobile phone, the majority indicate that they receive some form of assistance from their parents. It would appear then that parents' assume some degree of the financial burden

in relation to the purchase and use of their child's mobile phone. For example, as was established earlier, for most of the young people who took part in this research their first mobile phone was bought for them by their parents. As they grow older, teenagers may often contribute in part or in full towards both the purchase of a new mobile phone and the payment for its use. However, parents will still often pay some portion of these costs.

The major cost in this regard is for the use of the mobile phone. For the majority of respondents, 444 (90.1%) the form of payment is by the prepaid (i.e. ready to go, etc) method, with only 33 (6.7%) having a bill pay mobile phone. Through the pre-paid mobile phone service, they purchase credit with which to make calls and texts. One perceived advantage of this method is that allows for closer management of how much money one spends on mobile phone usage. In terms of levels of expenditure, there is evidence to support Ling's (2004) assertion that young people spend a significant amount of their disposable income on mobile phone costs. The survey data shows that of the respondents who answered the question relating to expenditure (n = 464) 51.7% (240) spend €1-€5 per week; 153 (33%) spend €6-€10 per week; 52 (11.2%) spend €11-€20 per week; the remaining 19 (4.1%) spend €25 or more per week. While, for the majority of survey respondents, their expenditure can be seen as low, comments made in the focus groups indicate that the actual level of expenditure may be greater than the survey suggests, with participants generally indicating a higher level of expenditure in the focus group discussions. A related point is that this reported level of expenditure does not necessarily provide an accurate reflection of levels of use, with young people availing of the range of offers available from mobile phone network providers, which

give them various combinations of free calls and/or texts. In this context, young people demonstrate a degree of financial competence and responsibility.

Throughout the focus group discussions, participants register a strong awareness of the financial implications of mobile phone use, particularly around the issue of pre-paid credit. As Harper and Hamill (2005) argue, in learning to manage money young people gain an understanding of how expenditure in one area has a knock-on effect on other prospective purchases. For example, one focus group participant recounted the following:

John: It's annoying 'cause you have no money to spend on anything else, you can't like just... Like if you're saving up to buy something you couldn't be putting an extra tenner onto it every week and you're taking away from it and you can end up buying more credit during the week if you accidentally spend it all. I bought credit on Sunday night, a tenner, and it was gone by yesterday [Tuesday] so I had to buy another fiver yesterday 'cause I needed to have it like. I don't know why, I probably don't need to have it I just wanted to have it there like (Group 2)

Participants' comments also imply the perception that their own financial 'good sense' sits in contrast to younger mobile phone users. While they perceive themselves as being responsible and prudent, younger children are viewed as wasteful and irresponsible. In particular, participants highlight how 'kids' squander their money on ringtones:

Elaine: Little kids are all into the ringtones you'd be sitting on the bus and they'd playing them

Jennifer: The little ten year old that I know has a phone but none of her friends do, well a couple of her friends have one, but she like got loads of credit with it and she spent it all on getting all these ringtones and everything and half of them didn't even fit in her phone... (Group 6)

At the same time, the general cost of telephone use, both mobile and fixed-line, can be a source of conflict between parents and children. A number of participants indicate how they would make use of the house phone when at home and often run up high bills that their parents' have to pay. In this way, they avoid wasting their own credit:

Noreen: Yeah you can't like, you're ringing on the house phone like and the bill is sky high and then you know you won't do that on your phone kind of – you'll just do it on your parents' phone (laughs)

Suzanne: So if you're at home and you're friend said 'oh can you ring me now' I wouldn't ring off my own phone I'd ring off the house phone (laughter)

Interviewer: Would your parents go mad at you for using the house phone?

Rachel: Yeah they did, our bill was like €300 last month 'cause I made a couple of calls that lasted about 4 hours (Group 7)

In this context, young people's sense of financial responsibility does not always extend beyond their own personal circumstances. Equally, while young people accentuate the idea of having to financially support their use of the mobile phone, a number of participants indicated that they would rely on their parents for money for credit. As one participant observes, he can exploit parental fears around issues of safety by suggesting that he needs to get credit in case he needs to contact his parents:

David: It depends usually just give you money during the week, but you can just hint that oh I've got no credit so I won't be able to ring you... (Group 1)

While young people then remain dependent on parents financially, participants view having the mobile phone as indicative of responsibility and maturity. For young people, the mobile allows them to adopt forms of adult behaviour, such as the management of money, which sits alongside their increased sense of independence:

Paul: Like apart from being able to go out on your own then it's your first real bit of independence like from your family because you had to look after it yourself,

and sorta fund it yourself you know, like sorta on your own, your first view of what the real world is like... (Group 6)

5.5.3 The Mobile Phone as a Private Space

In his song 'Teenage Heaven', from 1958, Eddie Cochran compiles a list of wishes, which includes 'a room with my own private phone'. Such popular representations are emblematic of the consistent desire within youth culture for private and personal space, and, more specifically, a private means of communication. This need is realised in relation to both physical spaces, such as bedrooms, and, increasingly, virtual spaces, such as the mobile phone. In her work on 'bedroom culture', McRobbie (1991, see also McRobbie and Garber, 1976) describes the bedroom as a private space in which young people, specifically teenage girls, experiment and develop their social and cultural identity. The bedroom constitutes a bounded space within the home, which provides young people with a personal area for themselves, away from the prying eyes and ears of parents and other siblings.

Similarly, the mobile phone can be said to provide young people with a private and personal space for communication. In a more recent piece on bedroom culture, Lincoln (2004: 97) explores the confluence of the physical space of the bedroom and the virtual space of the mobile phone. She argues that young people's private spaces are increasingly 'enhanced through technologies... [making it] a fluid and dynamic cultural domain'. As a virtual space, the mobile phone is distinctive in that it is a young person's personal area, and, as with the bedroom, parents are usually prohibited from this space. As Ito (2005) suggests, the mobile phone represents a private means of communication for young people, which allows them greater space and freedom. For

young people, the mobile phone is their own, and constitutes a direct line of communication with friends that is free from interference:

Jane: 'Cause it actually is like one of the only personal things, like private things you kinda have in your house and you feel like your house phone's for everyone, the TV for everyone... At least with your phone you can just interact with people by yourself without your parents nosing in (Group 10)

The use of the mobile phone then illustrates how young people pursue greater independence and privacy; as Campbell (2006) argues, its use has 'radicalized' the potential for independence from parental control. As discussed earlier, the mobile phone contributes to increased flexibility in young people's use of time and space. In the focus group discussions, participants reveal how having the mobile phone allows them to negotiate with their parents for greater personal freedom. In this context, young people make use of the mobile phone to construct a private space in their everyday lives. While the telephone has traditionally been used by young people for independently conducting their social lives (see for example Willard, Gale and Bow), today young people retreat from using the fixed-line telephone in favour of the mobile phone. For young people, the fixed-line telephone is seen as 'out-moded' and is considered negatively as it exposes them to eavesdropping and monitoring by family members (Ito, 2005; Ling and Yttri, 2002). In the focus group discussions, participants observe how the 'house phone' lacks privacy, allowing others to listen in on their conversations:

Amy: You don't want people ringing your house phone, your parents don't know who you're talking to and all, it's just better. And also if you have two landlines you know somebody could come and pick up the phone and listen to you but when you have your own mobile nobody can come in and like annoy you or anything

Brian: Then parents won't know your business like

Amy: Yeah, you don't want people to know what you're talking about (Group 3)

Young people then like to preserve a sense of secrecy around their interactions. This sense of privacy is important for young people, who wish to be free to communicate without others, particularly parents, overhearing and monitoring them. In this way the mobile phone is used to preserve the private, personal interactions that take place amongst and between young people. This construction of a private space is, in itself, what is important for young people. Most of the time this privacy preserves fairly ordinary chat and gossip that flows between friends. However, as the following exchange indicates, parents' are often curious about whom young people are talking to and texting:

Ashley: My ma's very nosey, she's like 'oh, who's ringing you? Who's ringing you?' She always wants to know... I hide my phone from my ma
Claire: Yeah my ma's very nosey as well... 'Who's that, who's texting you?'
Ashley: I just turn my phone on silent all the time now... I switch off me phone every night now 'cause me ma looks through my phone (Group 8)

Young people are keen then to maintain privacy in their personal lives. Accordingly, they treat their mobile phone as private, and guard its contents. In this context, participants indicate that they would carefully monitor who had access to their phone, usual prohibiting parents and often their friends:

Alan: Yeah it's a very private thing, I let nobody touch my phone I leave nobody read my messages
Rebecca: I hate it when someone goes through my phone
Gary: I'd let my friends but if my parents did I mean I'd flip out... I wouldn't mind my friends reading my messages but I'd mind my parents or my family
Alan: No anyone it's such a personal thing
Rebecca: I wouldn't mind my mum but I'd hate my friends even (Group 11)

While it can be suggested that much of young people's interactions are innocuous sociable exchanges, they use the mobile phone to enhance their sense of personal privacy and engender a sense of independence from parents:

Rachel: 'Cause like there's some stuff you don't want to discuss in front of your parents (Group 7)

However, it can be suggested that even if parents were privy to young people's conversations its content would remain opaque; as de Zengotida (2005) observes, the idioms of youth often remain largely impenetrable and incomprehensible to the ears of parents. Nevertheless, it is the perception of privacy that young people gain from using the mobile phone that is most prized:

Rachel: Like you're free because you can text your friends and you won't be on the house phone whereas if you're on the house phone they could listen to what you're saying so that way you feel kinda freer... (Group 7)

The nature of the mobile phone means it can be used in multiple locations, so while it can help preserve personal privacy maintaining this can often require tact on the part of young people. For example, one participant recalls the difficulty of trying to maintain one's privacy:

John: I hate answering it when you're sitting in the car going somewhere with your mam or something and your friend's ringing... It's like your friends saying 'John, where were you last night' and I'd be like 'am yeah I'm in the car I'll tell you later' and then my mother goes mad [puts on affected voice] 'where were you?'... They find out though if you send a text off their phone and they look at the sent messages; oh that's got me in so much trouble at least twice – my parents are so annoying (Group 2)

For young people then, the mobile phone is part of the way in which they construct a sense of personhood independent of parental authority and control. This issue of

privacy relates to young people's wider desire for autonomy in their everyday lives. Themes of freedom, autonomy and privacy overlap with young people's desire to construct a social life independent of forms of control. In particular, this independent social life focuses on peer group culture. In the next chapter, I develop the role of the mobile phone in young people's peer groups with specific reference to Maffesoli's (1996) concept of neo-tribes, arguing that these groups are composed around emotional bonds and sociable interaction.

5.6 Conclusion

Young people's experiences are often situated amidst ordinary aspects of their everyday experiences. In this context, I argue that family life forms a key site of young people's cultural activity. Youth cultural research displays a tendency to neglect family relationships and focus on young people's pursuits outside of the domestic arena. The sets of cultural practices young people engage in are not necessarily separable from the domestic sphere. Family life, and crucially parental influence, forms a significant force in shaping young people's everyday experiences. While youth is often perceived as a period when young people assert their independence and maturity, it is also a time that is heavily structured and organised by adult forms of authority. In this context, young people's social status is often ill-defined and unstable. The simultaneous and contradictory features of dependence and independence influence how young people both perceive themselves and are perceived by others. This position of being 'in-between' creates a gap in which young people manage and negotiate their liminal social status. The ways in which young people make use of the mobile phone demonstrates

aspects of this process. Within the context of family life, and particularly within parent-child relationships, the use of the mobile phone reveals how, during their teenage years, young people both retain ties to their parents and also assert their own sense of independence from parental control.

The data reveals how parents play a central role in young people's acquisition of the mobile phone. In particular, for the majority of participants, their first mobile phone was bought for them by their parents. For parents, the mobile phone is viewed as a means to enhance their child's safety and security. This is especially the case with the onset of adolescence, when young people begin to assume greater independence. However, for young people, peer-related considerations appear more important in their desire to have a mobile phone. It is recognised as a means of staying in touch with friends and a way of demonstrating one's status within peer culture.

In the context of parent-child relationships then, the use of the mobile phone touches upon a number of important debates. In positive terms, the accessibility provided by the mobile phone allows for an increased sense of security and offers a means for coordinating everyday routines and schedules. Importantly, both parents and young people recognise the utility of the mobile phone in relation to security and coordination. In this context, the use of the mobile phone contributes to the maintenance of family bonds, what Ling (2006) refers to as the 'nomos'. The mobile phone can also give parents to opportunity to control and observe young people's activities, with security concerns often seen by young people as way for parents to maintain surveillance. However, participants indicate ways in which they deflect these attempts through what Green (2003) refers to as parent-management strategies. Rather than this relationship

being one of antagonism, the use of the mobile phone reveals how parents and young people negotiate around issues such as curfews and the use of public space.

In line with the general impulses of youth culture, the use of the mobile phone by young people is primarily focused on pursuing forms of freedom, maturity and privacy.

I argue that, in this context, there is a homological relationship between the mobile phone and youth. The mobile phone in that allows for privacy and autonomy of communication and action reflects the typical concerns and attitudes of youth culture.

For participants then, the mobile phone is a symbol of greater independence and responsibility. This is evident in that it allows young people increased use of public space outside the home and also in relation to the economic aspects of mobile phone use. Crucially for participants, the mobile phone provides a private space in which to interact with their peers. As I develop in Chapter 6, the mobile phone plays a central role within this youth peer culture.

Chapter 6: Thumb Tribes – The Mobile Phone and Youth Peer Culture

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argue that young people's use of the mobile phone is part of the way in which they manage their liminal status in society, specifically with respect to domestic relationships. Through their use of the mobile phone, young people negotiate their social position and attempt to carve out an autonomous space within their everyday lives. While, in the context of these domestic relationships, the mobile phone can enhance parental control and monitoring, it can also provide young people with a feeling of maturity, responsibility and independence. A key way in which young people express this independence and autonomy is through the intensification of peer group interaction and culture. This context forms the primary focus of young people's social and cultural experience. The mobile phone plays a pivotal role in mediating these relationships, through its use as a means of sociable interaction and in the creation of emotional ties between and amongst young people.

In this chapter, I argue that young people use the mobile phone in both the symbolic expression and material enactment of friendship and peer solidarity. As Gillard, Wale and Bow (1998) observe, the telephone has historically been significant within youth culture as 'an extension of peer group relations and close friendships'. More recently, research on the mobile phone has similarly emphasised how new communication technologies play an important social role in young people's lives. For example, Green (2007: 207) elaborates on what she terms the 'social value' of the mobile phone,

suggesting that young people use the mobile phone ‘to constitute and accomplish social solidarities and differences, both among themselves, and between themselves and other social groups’. She highlights two specific aspects to this process: first, the use of the mobile phone for the establishment of social connection, access and availability; and second, its use in the performance of identity and difference, both between friends, but also in relation to adults.

Green’s emphasis on teenager’s use of the mobile phone for the purposes of social solidarity and self-identity corresponds with more general arguments within youth cultural theory. During adolescence, young people’s peer groups assume an increased role within their social and cultural life, as friendship networks displace family ties as the central focus of self-identification. Across a range of theoretical perspectives on youth culture, the importance of peer group interaction and solidarity remains a sustained focus of interest. However, while youth subcultural theory tends to read youth groups as adhering to specific and discrete codes of style and behaviour, more recently, the emphasis has been on how youth cultural groups are less explicitly bounded and organised. Equally, recent discussions of young people’s social and cultural activities have read such practices as less ardently political than as allowed for by earlier subcultural theorists. Approaches loosely gathered under the heading ‘post-subcultural theory’ have been more interested in generating an understanding of how peer group culture can provide both forms of identity and style as well as a more general sense of emotional belonging for young people. Rather than viewing youth ‘subcultures’ as symptomatic of class-based identities and politics, contemporary youth cultural research privileges how within youth cultural groups these traditional forms of

identity may be dissolved. Thornton (1995), for example, argues that youth culture, and club cultures in particular, 'house *ad hoc* communities with fluid boundaries'. These readings of youth culture as characterised by a potential multiplicity of group associations is, I argue, consistent with subsequent applications of Maffesoli's concept of neo-tribes to the study of youth.

6.2 Neo-Tribes, Youth Culture & the Mobile Phone

As discussed, challenges to youth subcultural theory have been drawn along a number of fault lines. Redhead's bold assertion that subcultures only ever existed in the minds of subcultural theorists disputes the notion that youth subcultures are manifestations of keenly political class differences. This 'declassification' of youth culture has had considerable traction within youth studies since the late 1980s, particularly with reference to young people's practices of cultural consumption. This line of thought can be situated within broader declarations, specifically within theories of consumer practices, about the increasingly complex and ambiguous alignment between consumption, leisure and social status. The experience of youth culture then has been valorised as a site wherein explicit markers of class position have become increasingly ill-defined and less explicitly significant for young people themselves. This, however, does not necessarily infer a disavowal of class, or other forms of social difference and inequality, as acting upon young people. As Thornton (1995) observes, with reference to dance music cultures, youth groupings are reliant on the 'fantasy of classlessness', which provides young people with a transient escape from, and potential inversion of, rigid class boundaries.

Recent developments in youth cultural research then have been underpinned by the idea that within the context of cultural consumption class has become increasingly silent. Youth peer cultures are seen as forming around looser and more fragmented consumer and leisure practices. Cultural consumption as a focus for youth peer groups has become an arena in which the structural constraints of class are often temporarily obscured; with the class-based groupings identified by subcultural theorists giving way to more fragmented and depoliticised groupings. It can be suggested, however, that these formations may well retain some semblance of being located in a specific class, primarily as a result of these groups being often organised around a geographical location (McCulloch, Stewart and Lovegreen, 2006). Nevertheless, the explicit role of class within general processes of self-identity, consumption and leisure has, it is argued, become a less distinctive factor for young people. It is in this context of looser ties of association and interaction that Maffesoli's discussion of neo-tribes can prove useful. The concept of neo-tribes, I argue, can be used then to map the relationship between young people's use of the mobile phone and the development of their peer cultures. Maffesoli's (1996) discussion of neo-tribal sociality can be said to reflect more general assertions pronounced within the spheres of contemporary social and cultural theory; specifically, the focus on the dissolution of traditional and stable forms of identity. For Maffesoli, fixed forms of identity, such as class, are being supplanted by more fluid forms of identification, which constellate around temporary and loose arrangements and groupings. Offering emotional connectivity and 'affective warmth', neo-tribes are worked on and sustained through new modes of sociality, which emerge in relation to members' feelings and emotions rather than around rigidly defined sets of beliefs.

Maffesoli argues that the individual is resolved within these collective associations. He suggests that identity no longer endures in singular form, with individuals instead able to adopt different 'personas' within a variety of settings.

Shields (1992a & 1992b) similarly stresses the temporary and fluid character of neo-tribal formations, arguing that they are constituted through everyday sociability. He also identifies the ritualistic character of neo-tribes, which use symbolic practices to mark inclusion and exclusion from the group. For Shields, these groupings are defined and bounded by informal practices of inclusion and exclusion rather than fixed codes of conduct. Hetherington (1992) suggests that neo-tribes do not offer a replacement of traditional forms of community, in that their goal is not to provide coherent or long-term self-identity. He argues instead that neo-tribes are 'inherently unstable and liable to break down very rapidly unless... consciously maintained through the symbolically mediated interactions of its members' (Hetherington, 1992: 92-3).

As discussed earlier, Maffesoli's (1996) exploration of neo-tribal sociality has previously been adopted as a framework for examining contemporary youth culture. In contrast with youth subcultural groupings, which are seen as formed around a unified and consistent set of sensibilities and preferences, the concept of neo-tribes has been seen as more in tune with the fragmentation of contemporary youth cultural activity. Rather than being composed around specific class-oriented notions of style or community or as explicitly bounded formations, as subcultural theory suggests, youth peer groups are seen as increasingly pluralised and amorphous. They can be defined by the act of 'being together' in the moment rather than by particular sets of subcultural practices or politics. The use of neo-tribes within youth studies is part of the wider

rejection of subcultural theory's assertion that youth cultural groupings represent coherent forms of political resistance. Under the banner of post-subcultural theory, research has been focused on demonstrating that youth cultural formations and practices are less responsive to class differences and relatable to more generalised and fluid patterns of leisure and consumption.

Bennett's (1999) work is indicative of this trend. He uses the concept of neo-tribes to analyse young people's musical tastes and stylistic preferences, suggesting that it captures the shifting relationships between contemporary youth, music and fashion. He argues that in contemporary life 'consumers characteristically choose songs and instrumental pieces which appeal to them with the effect that the stylistic boundaries existing between the latter become rather less important than the meaning which the chosen body of music as a whole assumes for the listener' (Bennett, 1999: 610). In this regard, Bennett's work is somewhat narrowly focused on a very definite aspect of social life. What I am interested in analysing here is how young people are involved in a range of groupings and interactions, which reflect less upon specific forms of 'subcultural' practices and more upon their desire for sociability and belonging.

More generally then, Sweetman (2004) suggests how the concept of neo-tribe can be used to render more clearly a range of young people's social and cultural activities. In particular, he notes that examining the role of neo-tribal sociality within youth culture exposes the 'affectual' and 'experiential' aspects of young people's social groups. In this way, Sweetman contends that the concept can help to examine the emotional content of youth cultural groups, as well as illustrating what it is that young people actually do in their everyday lives. While Bennett (1999) retains a tight focus on

specific cultural practices (i.e. musical taste), Sweetman casts the net wider in exploring how contemporary youth experiences and formations can be understood in relation to neo-tribal sociality.

The application of the concept of neo-tribes to the analysis of youth culture is not unproblematic (see Blackman, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2005). In particular, it does not attend to the persistence of ascriptive forms of identity and deeper forms of structural difference and inequality. Nevertheless, the term is useful in highlighting the forms of solidarity and association that characterise contemporary life. Equally, it allows for a discussion of everyday forms of sociality, sociability and communality that exist in young people's lives. In the following sections, I highlight three dimensions of the concept of neo-tribes, which I argue can be used to analyse young people's use of the mobile phone. First, neo-tribes are characterised by a fluidity and immediacy of social connectivity and are animated by the refinement of individual identity into multiple personas; second, such groupings are inscribed with particular rituals and processes of identification and difference, which serve as markers of inclusion and exclusion within and between groups; and third, these groupings are nourished and held together by everyday forms of sociality and sociability.

6.3 Personal Mobility

As discussed earlier, one of the limits of subcultural theory is its neglect of the broader spectrum of young people's everyday experiences, that is, what they do most of the time. The focus of CCCS researchers on visually spectacular cultural groups excluded the ordinary and everyday interactions and groupings in which young people are

involved. The concept of neo-tribes then allows us to replace the idea of youth culture as composed of distinct, static groupings, and focus on the looser forms that unite and disperse around more fluid processes of identification. Young people can be seen as occupying different roles within a plurality of social groups. There exists within these formations an emphasis on the creation of an emotional connection that is constituted 'in the moment' and often beyond specific values, preferences or styles that they may share. The use of the mobile phone facilitates this fluidity and immediacy by allowing young people to interact and gather together with greater spontaneity and urgency. This tendency is evident, I argue, across three particular aspects of mobile phone use: first, its use in the coordination of social life; second, the evolution of temporary and loose forms of collective association built around the nature of mobile phone communication; and third, the use of the mobile phone to manage multiple 'personas' in everyday life.

6.3.1 Micro-Coordination within Peer Groups

Young people's use of the mobile phone in the coordination of peer group activity allows them to be organised and enacted in an increasingly fluid and spontaneous manner. As discussed earlier, Ling and Yttri (2002) refer to this use of the mobile phone in the arrangement of schedules as 'micro-coordination'. They describe three specific forms of micro-coordination: first, basic logistics, which is the changing of trips already underway or the accessing of particular points of information while on the move; second, the "softening" of time, which refers to the use of the mobile phone to make time more flexible, for example, calling to say you'll be late; and third, making

“progressively exact” arrangements, in which arrangements are treated loosely, allowing the parties involved to continually be in contact to confirm location and time while in transit. Micro-coordination relates then to the ways in which the use of the mobile phone can make previously fixed notions of space and time more plastic.

In the previous chapter, this concept was discussed with reference to domestic relationships, and specifically how the mobile phone is used to organise the day-to-day schedules of family life. As suggested, young people recognise the utility of the mobile phone in managing these routines; for example, in arranging lifts from parents. Equally, the mobile phone is also used for micro-coordination within young people’s peer group interactions (see, for example, Ling, 2004; Green, 2007). Young people’s use of the mobile phone arranges youth groups in ways that reflect the fluid and transitory qualities identified by Maffesoli in relation to neo-tribal forms. As Ling and Yttri (2002) suggest, the use of the mobile phone gives increased flexibility to the coordination of peer group activities, with young people arranging their leisure time in a less structured and more ad hoc fashion than previous generations. This flexible relationship to time and scheduling reflects the tendency for young people’s peer groups to be conceived around often temporary and less bounded associations.

The data collected in this research demonstrate that young people view the mobile phone as an important element in organising everyday activities and provide a number of specific examples of these processes of micro-coordination. The survey responses show that 88% (434) of respondents agree that the mobile phone ‘helps coordinate social activities’, while 83.8% (413) of respondents agree that having a mobile phone they ‘can always find out what’s happening’ with their friends (see Table 6.1). This

indicates that for the majority of respondents the mobile phone plays a positive role in the coordination and management of their social lives. Equally, respondents indicate that it allows them to access information from peers with greater ease. At a basic level then, the mobile phone assumes a strong instrumental role in young people's daily lives. This management of these everyday schedules can be understood as a prominent means through which peer relationships are developed and maintained.

Table 6.1 The Coordination of Social Activities

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Missing/not applicable
helps coordinate social activities	434 (88%)	21 (4.3%)	29 (5.9%)	9 (1.8%)
can always find out what's happening	413 (83.8%)	55 (11.2%)	17 (3.4%)	8 (1.6%)

The issue of micro-coordination is further developed in the focus groups, where participants accentuate the role of the mobile phone in organising their social lives. In general, the views of the focus group participants reflect the survey responses in identifying how their use of the mobile phone allows for peer group coordination to take place with greater freedom and efficiency. Having the mobile phone means that young people can stay in contact with friends at all times and creates a situation in which looser forms of scheduling and arrangements can emerge. In terms of 'basic logistics', the mobile phone gives young people an increased sense of mobility, which allows for a relaxing of the previously static boundaries of time and space that shape the nature of communication. As one focus group participant observed:

Alan: It's a means of communication... It's a means of getting hold of people whenever you want, wherever you want (Group 11)

The mobile phone then becomes vital as a means of both accessing and providing information about people's whereabouts and activities while on-the-move. It allows for young people to be increasingly flexible in relation to their movement and activities, giving young people a greater sense of personal space and freedom. Specifically, this contributes to young people detaching themselves from the particular spatial configuration of the home, in that the mobile phone provides connectivity between specific individuals rather than between specific places. In this way, it reinforces young people's self-perception as autonomous and independent social actors, who can exist as external to their home and family. Their use of the mobile phone in this context draws young people closer within their social setting while creating an increased sense of personal space and liberty:

Elaine: You can always let your friends know where you are, it's easier to go around the place or whatever (Group 6)

This use of the mobile phone in demarcating a 'self' that is distinct from the domestic sphere means that young people have come to rely on the mobile phone as the primary node of social interaction with their peers. Conversely, participants identify how not having the mobile phone would make it difficult for them to keep in contact with one another, indicating how the role of the mobile phone in the context of the peer group has become a taken-for-granted part of everyday life:

Grace: Say if I wanted to go out and I rang their house phone and they weren't in I have no other way of getting through to them (Group 9)

In this way, the mobile phone is a central 'space' through which peer group interaction is managed and performed. This use of the mobile phone has become normalised

within youth cultural activity, and provides a key site of interaction and solidarity. Young people have become reliant upon the mobile phone for the negotiation of daily life, alongside, as I demonstrate below, the creation and maintenance of emotional ties. Not that these two aspects should be deemed mutually exclusive. As I argue below, the role of the mobile phone for the purposes of ‘micro-coordination’ can be read as indicative of group membership and emotional connectivity.

The focus groups also provide examples of the other aspects of micro-coordination outlined by Ling and Yttri (2002): the ‘softening of time’ and the making of ‘progressively exact’ arrangements. Participants exhibit a loose relationship to notions of time-based scheduling, with plans laid open to continual adjustments and reorientation. The mobile phone means that young people are increasingly freed from having to make exact arrangements, with activities often unfolding in a more organic fashion. In this way, young people’s peer activities are potentially decoupled from rigidity and routine. The patterns of young people’s social life are made more malleable and soluble through their use of the mobile phone:

Alan: It’s just people want to do something with their Friday or Saturday night. They want to go somewhere so they give someone else a ring... [and] instead of everybody meeting up at a certain place at a certain time, and people having to wait behind for other people, you know the kind of usual crap that people do, you can just all get out like whenever you want (Group 11)

This comment indicates the liberating role that the mobile phone plays in young people’s lives. It enhances young people’s sense of freedom by letting them avoid ‘the kind of usual crap that people do’. Rather than having to make specific arrangements based around a particular time and place, there is greater give in young people’s plans. In this way, young people do not place a premium, in the way previous generations

might have, upon clearly defined arrangements and schedules. However, rather than this being perceived as a source of stress or difficulty, the young people encountered in this research, as the above quote suggests, conceive of it in positive terms. As another focus group participant succinctly observes, the use of the mobile phone in this way makes organising one's social life 'easier':

Peter: It just makes it easier if you're going out or something... You can set rough arrangements and then ring them (Group 4)

This use of the mobile phone for the creation of loosely coordinated social ties adheres to aspects of the neo-tribe that Maffesoli speaks of. Rather than constructing consistent, hermetic groupings, the use of the mobile phone helps create shifting, permeable associations. It helps sustain notions of fluidity and the 'collective present' that define neo-tribal groupings, and means young people are not bound together into clearly defined schedules, but instead are able to embrace social connectivity in a more freeform manner. The use of the mobile phone cultivates youth cultural activities in which the parameters of engagement are less clearly organised around fixed notions of identity; rather, there is an ebb and flow of interaction where groupings will come together and disperse with increasing informality. It lends peer groups then a sense of immediacy, allowing them to emerge in-the-moment. For example, a focus group participant supplied the following case in point, which indicates how the use of the mobile phone can prompt informal groupings to gather at a moment's notice:

Alan: Like if you're in town and you see someone in an elevator going down or something, you know what I mean? Like the glass elevators in the Ilac Centre... You can just ring them and say "Stop" (Group 11)

In this context, the interaction between individuals is constructed in a direct and instantaneous manner. As I discuss below, these associations are grounded in the arena of sociability, wherein the focus is on interaction for its own sake rather than for the actualisation of particular or prescribed ends. The mobile phone then is used more by young people to engage in interactions that are stripped of specific ends-oriented content rather than in the creation of clearly defined and bounded groups.

6.3.2 Unbounded Communication

Technology generally, and the mobile phone in particular, has altered the way in which interaction is carried out; leading to it being increasingly decoupled from fixed spatial and temporal constraints allowing immediate and continual forms of social contact to emerge. Katz and Aakhus (2002) observe that the mobile phone contributes to a culture of ‘perpetual contact’, evident not just in the coordination of social life discussed above, but also in more general forms of interaction that take place between and amongst people. This breaks down barriers to communication by allowing people to potentially interact with one another regardless of where and at what time they are located. As discussed, the use of the mobile phone by young people means that the organisation of peer group activity can occur in more informal and unplanned patterns. It also facilitates the creation of loosely organised and diffusely constituted and distributed groups, as young people make use of the mobile phone to move within and between these groups.

This use of the mobile phone facilitates the emphasis, evident within neo-tribes, on being together in-the-moment. It allows young people to manage and negotiate

involvement in different groups at different points and times. While the mobile phone is primarily used within close-knit groupings, young people also use it as a means of maintaining other, more diffuse, social contacts. Forms of connection can emerge across previously discrete areas of life, with physical separation not necessarily acting as a restrictive force on young people's interaction. This continual connection via the mobile phone is a performance of the affective ties between individuals and groups; such forms, while appearing trivial, are inscribed with vitality and indicate the propinquity of the parties involved.

This is evident in young people's use of the mobile phone for interaction with close friends, a point that will be returned to later. However, a number of the focus group participants also highlighted the use of the mobile phone in keeping in touch with people they may not be able to meet 'face-to-face'. This can be in the context of short-term distance, such as holidays, or more long-term situations, such as when a person moves to a different area. For example, as one participant observes, the mobile phone allows her to keep in contact with friends when she's on holiday:

Amy: Say if you're on your mid-term break and you haven't seen them you can text them like. Like say if you were away somewhere, like down the country, you can stay in touch with them like (Group 3)

Conversely, this participant subsequently comments how the mobile phone also allows her to keep in contact with friends she has made away from her local area. This means she can maintain a connection with a geographically disperse network of friends:

Amy: Yeah, I'd say that like if you have friends far away, like I have friends in the Gaeltacht and I text them the whole time, just to keep in touch like... (Group 3)

An analogous example of this process is found in other participants' use of the mobile phone for retaining ties with friends who live in different places. One participant commented on the fact that he had moved to a new area after primary school but the mobile phone allowed him to keep in contact with his friends despite rarely seeing them in person:

John: Like if you haven't seen your friends since primary school. I still talk to my friends from primary school that I haven't seen in a few years just 'cause of the phone, and I'd never if I didn't have it I wouldn't speak to them ever (Group 2)

Similarly, another participant also observed how the mobile phone allows her to retain a connection with distant friends, facilitating her negotiation of involvement with a range of different peer groups:

Rachel: I moved school like so I can keep in contact with my friends from my other school through texts like 'cause I don't really see them so (Group 7)

These examples suggest that young people are not exclusively members of a uniform peer group, but may be occupied in a number of different peer associations with varying levels of involvement. Rather than necessarily ascribing themselves to a rigidly and coherently organised 'subculture', young people will move within and between a diverse set of peer groups. A common factor to these different forms of relationships is that they are predicated on an existing 'in-person' friendship. The mobile phone does not appear to be a forum where new friendships can emerge independent of some form of face-to-face interaction. While these examples are focused on the 'uniting' of geographically separate individuals, these relationships contain some in-person component. The use of the mobile phone by young people then appears more prominently as a means to supplement relationships with people they see

regularly in-person. Nevertheless, its use does create a space for emotional bonds to be retained between and amongst groups that may be physically separate. In this way, it facilitates forms of connectivity to emerge, without necessarily requiring a deep commitment to the group.

In the context of these peer interactions, the focus group discussions reveal that, in general, participants find text messages a far more conducive form of communication than voice calls. As discussed earlier, Grinter and Eldridge (1999) suggest that key reasons for the growth of texting amongst young people is that it's cheaper, quicker and easier. Correspondingly, a number of focus group participants noted that texting can be done in tandem with other tasks and is generally easier than calling. As Ling (2004) suggests, the use of the text message cuts away the usual etiquette and empty pleasantries involved in making a telephone call and allows one to get to the point or to offer a quick, sometimes perfunctory, comment:

Jane: It's easier to just write it than to say it on the phone... you can just, it's easier to say things just writing it

Catherine: It saves you the hassle of sort of having to get into a conversation, it's just a quick way of being able to get through to somebody (Group 10)

In this way, texting allows young people to drop in and out of conversations as they wish; enabling a continuing dialogue stretched out beyond the time frame of traditional face-to-face interactions or even telephone calls. For example, one participant, Paul, commented 'it seems to make the conversations last longer' (Group 6). An emotional connection can potentially be maintained with greater ease and simplicity. However, people's emotional investment can vary as the conversation may go back and forth at intervals over a period of time or they can be engaged in multiple activities while texting:

Joe: It's handier... 'Cause you're not calling, you can do it while you're watching telly, you can take your time, you don't have to concentrate as much (Group 4)

In this context, the text has become the medium par excellence through which loosely formed but no less intense or important emotional attachments are built and sustained. The mobile phone is used by young people then to engage and interact with their peers, as part of a repertoire of techniques that sustains vital and vibrant relationships. In a moment, I elaborate further on the ritual character of mobile phone use, and texting in particular, and argue that it is a way in which aspects of group identification are indicated and performed.

6.3.3 Mediating the Persona

In his discussion of neo-tribes, Maffesoli (1996) argues that the notion of an enduring and coherent sense of identity is not sustainable in contemporary life. Instead, he proposes the term 'persona' as a replacement for 'the individual'. This persona, Maffesoli (1996: 10) contends, is 'a changeable mask which blends into a variety of scenes and situations whose only value resides in the fact that they are played out by the many'. In this context, one is free to move amongst and between a range of social groups and settings, adjusting to them as you go. As Maffesoli (1996: 76) observes, being a member of neo-tribes is 'less a question of belonging to a gang, a family or community, than of switching from one group to another'. For Maffesoli then, the neo-tribe is understood in the plural, with people often occupying roles within multiple groupings. The 'individual' then inhabits different persona depending on the social setting they are in. While this focus potentially excludes reflections on how structurally embedded social differences and inequalities manifest themselves within youth culture,

my interest here lies less with exploring particular structures of inequality and more with examining how general forms of leisure and consumption are key sites through which young people make sense and meaning of their social worlds.

The concept of the 'persona' is useful in capturing the plurality of environments in which young people live. In their everyday lives, young people encounter an array of social situations and contexts; including the family, school, peer groups, etc. within and between which they move. Rather than engaging with these settings in a uniform way, young people adopt particular dispositions, or 'personas', in dealing with them. This aspect of the youth experience is largely absent from youth subcultural theory, whose focus on specific sites of experience offered little by way of analysis into how the identity of individuals and groups would vary within other contexts, such as the home. Equally, as noted, subcultural theory is primarily interested in the spectacular over the ordinary, and issues of class-based resistance. By contrast, I am interested in revealing the subtler processes through which young people and youth culture are resilient in the face of authority, control, and marginalisation.

The use of the mobile phone provides a prominent means through which young people present and play out particular personas. The way in which young people make use of the mobile phone then is distinguished according to who they are dealing with, where they are, etc. For example, earlier we highlighted the role of the mobile phone in domestic and family relationships, suggesting that young people use the mobile phone in negotiating their position within the family. In particular, young people's communication with parents is primarily based on specific issues of coordination and safety. In this way, the tone and type of interaction this involves will stand in

distinction to peer group interaction. Equally, in different contexts the nature of peer interaction will vary, depending upon the character of the relationship between the individuals involved.

Within peer group interaction then young people will often adopt different personas depending on the situation. The text message, in particular, has emerged as a means through which young people manage aspects of their identity and give attention to the self-image they present in everyday communication. Young people use the text message to manage and regulate the level of emotional commitment they give to particular social relationships, as well as the performance of a particular persona. Mobile phone communication permits the perpetuation of contact within and between a variety of social groups and settings, allowing young people to negotiate their position within them. Earlier, for example, we saw how young people use the mobile phone to retain ties with geographically dispersed groups, which may involve a different manner of interaction than that found between their closer friends.

This mediation of the persona appears as especially evident within the often difficult and awkward context of communicating with a potential boyfriend or girlfriend. Text messaging allows young people to take time over what they will say, and in this way it gives them an opportunity to consider the sort of self-image they want to present. The growth of text messaging as a familiar medium of communication amongst young people has established what Ling (2004: 151) characterises as a 'quasi-mediated' form of building relationships, and particularly in initiating romantic relationships. By this, Ling (2004: 151) argues that numbers are acquired in an initial face-to-face meeting, with the relationship developing via the exchange of messages over the following

period. These relationships then incorporate both direct face-to-face communication and mediated interaction via the mobile phone.

In this way, the mobile phone can be said to help build positive social relationships amongst young people. Also it allows them to more tightly manage and control the image, or persona, they wish to project. In this context, young people appear to view texting as being an often easier way to communicate with someone, particularly if previous contact has been limited. As the following participant comments, it's a way into a conversation that allows you to take the initial tentative steps of communication:

Peter: If you hadn't talked to them before... you know it just breaks the ice
(Group 4)

The text message, particularly, allows young people the opportunity to circumvent the often embarrassing and awkward moments involved in making contact with someone you're attracted to. In the focus groups, young people profess that if they are flirting and chatting with someone they are much more comfortable using text messages as opposed to calling or talking face-to-face; for example:

Jane: It's probably easier to write it
Catherine: Like you can say a lot more, it's weird but you can say a lot more in texts than you could in...
Patricia [finishing the sentence]: Talking to them face-to-face
Jane: Yeah, or even on the phone
Catherine: Yeah
Interviewer: Why?
Jane: It's just 'cause you don't get their reaction, you can't hear their reaction then (Group 10)

In this way, the use of the mobile phone gives a degree of social distance to young people. This, according to participants, gives them greater control over the type of self-image or 'persona' they are able to present. The characteristic anxiety and

embarrassment are circumvented, or at least lessened, through this mediated interaction. While research suggests a perception that the use of the telephone for leisure and sociability is more pronounced amongst female users (see, for example, Fischer, 1991), in this research this aspect of mobile phone use is not just identified by girls, with boys also commenting on its usefulness with regards flirting:

Damian: You can say more in a text than you could to the person... you wouldn't want to really, some of the stuff you'd say in a text you'd be too nervous to say in a phone call (Group 1)

Using the text message to communicate in this way means young people have time to carefully compose and edit what they wish to say. Whereas in face-to-face conversations or even in regular phone calls one can be 'put on the spot', the text gives one leave to construct a particular image or, as one participant, Alan, noted, a different 'persona' (Group 11), as well as alleviating the constraints of shyness. When communicating via text message participants perceived the potential for embarrassment as being greatly reduced:

Gary: It's very useful 'cause like you can say more things without having to hear the person's reaction... 'Cause you're not actually talking to them (Group 11)

Similarly, the following exchange neatly summarises a number of the considerations young people have in relation to texting:

Miriam: If you're shy or whatever it's so much easier to send a text

Paul: It saves all the red faces

Catherine: You have time to think what you're gonna say

Paul (laughing): Yeah you can work out what you're gonna say, you're not on the spot or anything

Elaine: Whereas if you're just in conversation with someone face-to-face you come away and you're like "Oh why didn't I say that or why didn't I say that?" Whereas in a text message you have time to think about it or whatever (Group 6)

In this way, the text message can facilitate more controlled forms of interaction, and allows young people to manage interaction more closely. In contrast to the spontaneous character of peer group activity outlined above, the mobile phone is also used in attempting to carefully construct conversations. The previous exchange continued by exploring an aspect of text culture identified by Weilenmann and Larsson (2002) – the collaborative use of the mobile phone. Participants discuss how young people will often share their phone, in terms of both the physical device itself and its contents. In particular, they detail how young people will collaborate on the composition of text messages. In the focus groups, it emerges that this practice is recognised as commonplace behaviour amongst young people, as they will often seek advice from peers on the appropriate content of a text message, with a number of participants highlighting that this was typical:

Interviewer: Would you get your friends to help you with messages?

Miriam: Oh yeah all the time

Elaine: Yeah

Paul: Not really (laughs)

Catherine: Some of them, I wouldn't trust some of them though (laughter) (Group 6)

While, as these comments suggest, it is girls who most often profess to this behaviour, it is not necessarily uncommon for younger males to engage in similar practices. As one male participant notes:

Gary: It depends. If you were with your friends at the time; like you wouldn't go and get them to help you, but if they're there while you're texting someone, yeah (Group 11)

However, at the same time, some participants were more protective of their mobile phone, wishing to maintain a degree of privacy around its contents:

Alan: Yeah, it's a very private thing, I let nobody touch my phone I leave nobody read my messages

Rebecca: I hate to think of someone going through my phone... It kind of annoys me if people say can I see your phone I just go "no"

Alan: And then they have the cheek to go like, what's the word?

Rebecca: Go looking at it anyway?

Alan: No, no, no, no, no, to take offence to it like... (Group 11)

While in this context, the mobile phone allows for the control and management of one's persona, the advent of the camera phone has also contributed to a converse use of the mobile phone as a mechanism of flirting, through which young people engage in often more revealing behaviour. As one participant comments:

Lisa: Just say you don't know what someone looked like. There's a girl in my dorm and she didn't know someone and she took a picture of herself and sent it to them (Group 2)

What might appear a somewhat benign practice has taken on a more problematic air, with reports suggesting that the sending of explicit photographs, 'sexting', has become increasingly commonplace (Barbieri, 2009; Davis, 2009). Issues of bullying and coercion are prominent aspects of debates around this practice. While the data here is less suggestive of the circulation of explicit or offensive material, the camera phone is cited as part of young people's flirting repertoire:

Lauren: Say if right, a perfect example, say if you've a picture of a fella and none of your friends saw him they can say 'ah give us your photo' and 'he's hot, look at him – what d'you think? (Group 9)

Ultimately, these practices are part of the ritual and symbolic behaviour encountered in young people's use of the mobile phone. They provide a way through which forms of social identification are formed and enacted. While aspects of flirting reveals gendered forms of interaction, the data more prominently shows how young people's use of the

mobile phone exposes more general patterns of ritual and symbolic practices within youth culture. In the next section, I elaborate on this point and develop an understanding of how the use of the mobile phone can be read as a way in which forms of group identification and difference are manifested.

6.4 Ritual Practice and Symbolic Behaviour

To suggest that the boundaries of neo-tribes are often temporary and porous is not to suggest that they do not have any discernable boundaries at all. As Shields (1992) observes, neo-tribes are marked by informal rituals of inclusion, exclusion and membership. The bracketed contours of these groupings are evident then in the symbolic gestures of its members. These practices replenish and renew neo-tribal formations and act as a means of differentiation and association between and amongst groups. The mobile phone acts as a medium through which this neo-tribal identification is established; with young people's use of the mobile phone animated by sets of ritual and symbolic practices that operate in defining and organising their social and cultural groupings. Specifically, young people's use of the mobile phone coheres to involvement in group activities and interaction by signifying inclusion and status; providing young people with, as Ling (2004) notes, a form of 'social currency'. More generally, these practices correspond, in part, to Thornton's (1995) notion of 'subcultural capital', whereby group identification is inscribed in particular forms of knowledge and action.

A number of symbolic practices have previously been identified in relation to this process. Ling and Yttri (2002), for example, suggest that sending and receiving

messages represents the 'objectification of popularity'. They also argue that, for young mobile phone users, popularity is reflected in the amount of numbers they have in their phone, which acts as a means through which social status is quantified. Similarly, in her discussion of the 'social value' of the mobile phone, Green (2007) emphasises how young people develop symbolic practices to establish forms of peer solidarity. Use of the mobile phone then represents young people's participation in, and connection with, their peer groups, and acts as a means for the performance of identification and differentiation.

Specifically, Green (2007: 207-8) indicates that this performance evolves in relation to the use of the mobile phone in self-presentation; for example, in the number of calls and text messages one gives and receives; having the 'right' names in your phone book; the number of people in your address book; the saving and sharing of particular messages; and the 'appropriate' use of the mobile phone. The use of the mobile phone in this way acts as a means to establish and demarcate group identification amongst young people, while also providing a marker of differentiation from other groups, such as adults and younger children. The issue of generational or age based forms of difference emerged most prominently throughout the data; in particular, when contrasted with matters of gender or class. This is not to detract from the salience of gender and class in shaping young people's lives, but merely that are less consciously articulated and evident in the everyday use of the mobile phone.

6.4.1 The Logic of Identification and Differentiation

The way in which the mobile phone is used by young people then acts as a means of identification and differentiation. Rather than framing a particular self-identity, young people's use of the mobile phone can establish a sense of group identification, through which relationships are defined and oriented. Modes of behaviour that constellate around the mobile phone reflect general tendencies amongst peers, and operate to distinguish group relationships. One example, which emerges in the focus group discussions, relates to the appropriate and proper type of behaviour in relation to the use of the mobile phone. Participants highlight how 'others' will often use the mobile phone in 'inappropriate' and 'improper' ways, and identify this behaviour as an indicator of difference between themselves and a generalised 'other' – usually, younger children and parents.

As discussed in the previous chapter, young people associate their own use of the mobile phone with aspects of maturity and responsibility; this position incorporates a sense of differentiation from younger children. Participants in the focus groups identify how younger children have no need for the mobile phone, as they have not acquired a sufficient degree of independence, autonomy, and maturity. This lack is manifest in the apparently trivial and wasteful behaviour of younger mobile phone users; for example, the purchasing of ringtones. In the focus groups younger children's use of the mobile phone is framed as immature, in terms of both their financial wastefulness and their public conduct. Participants were eager then to distance themselves from this type of behaviour, and by implication present themselves as being responsible and 'grown up'. In this way, particular activities can be isolated as suggestive of group identification

and difference. This example of 'inappropriate' public conduct was further elaborated upon by another participant:

John: Do you ever sit on the bus and there's some *idiot* kid at the back saying 'Oh, this is a whopper, listen to this one', and they'll play about twenty ringtones and everyone on the bus is kinda like this [indicates frustrated look] and at the end of it they're going 'ah, what's going on?!' (Group 2)

Participants identify themselves then as having grown out of this form of behaviour, and thereby implicitly signal how they perceive their own use of the mobile phone as being different, and, indeed, superior. In this way, the mobile phone is totemic, in that the way it is used in signifying a particular social position and status, which distinguishes participants from younger children. While, in the focus groups, participants identify themselves as being previously disposed to similar behaviour, they now position themselves as having grown out of it:

Suzanne: When I first got my phone and I was ordering tones I sent a pretty good bill up ordering the tones off whatever tone company it was. I didn't realise they charge like €3 a minute and it takes about five minutes and I got about ten tones so it added up... (Group 7)

In as much as focus group participants attempted to distance themselves from the behaviour of younger children, comments also indicate how the use of the mobile phone provides ways in which they differentiate themselves from older users, specifically parents. Parents are viewed by some participants as being technologically illiterate or incompetent. Comments by the focus group participants suggest that they perceive their parents as being out of step with certain aspects of mobile phone culture. A prominent example of this sense of difference is in the context of texting. For most participants, texting is predominantly a means of communicating with friends, with

most indicating that they would only very rarely use text messages to communicate with parents:

Rachel: It's kinda like you text your friends, but you don't, you're not gonna go texting your parents... (Group 7)

Such comments reflect popular conceptions that situate the culture of texting as symbolically associated with young people. Research indicates that the growth of texting as a medium of communication is largely based on younger users' adoption of the format. Texting is something that young people have made their own and they, therefore, view it as 'their' means of communicating with one another rather than with parents. Correspondingly, participants' offered further reasons why they don't text their parents, namely because their parents are either too slow or don't know how to text:

Interviewer: Why would you choose to ring your parents and not text them?

Elaine: 'Cause they'd be really bad at texting back

Jennifer: They don't know how to use it (laughing)

Elaine: Yeah (laughs)

Paul: Parents don't know how to use it, to text or even how to answer on the phone

Elaine: It'd take them too long to text

Denise: They're way too slow at doing it

Interviewer: So your parents don't know how to text?

Paul: No

Elaine: Well they'd know now, but they're still a bit slow about it

Miriam: Yeah

Paul: My parents still don't know how to text (Group 6)

Whether or not it is the case that parents don't actually know how to text is not necessarily the point, amongst participants the perception is that parents are not equipped with the same sets of skills as they are. Young people's relationship to and use of the mobile phone represents a self-defined index of difference to older users. In

this way, participants appear to appropriate popular conceptions of the mobile phone as aligned with the impulses of youth culture: fun, freedom, etc. By contrast, participants view adult use of the mobile phone as related to more serious tasks. In particular, for work and business purposes:

John: My dad uses it more for work

Heather: Yeah, my dad would be the same...

Lisa: Yeah, well my dad is like a businessman so he uses his phone all the time
(Group 2)

In this way, participants appear to view the use of the mobile phone as corresponding to specific types of activities for different groups. For example, adults use of the mobile phone is usually seen as based around more instrumental purposes (e.g. work), whereas young people's own use is viewed as being primarily focused on interaction with friends. The ways in which the mobile phone is used then is seen as indicative of the social and cultural preferences of particular groups and individuals; with young people characterising their own use markedly distinct from that of other groups.

In relation to this, it can be suggested that within the context of peer group interaction young people have established specific codes and a character to texting that often remains indiscernible to adults. This includes specific types of use, as well as particular linguistic inflections in the form of abbreviations, acronyms and slang – i.e. 'textspeak' or what Plant (2002) refers to as 'textperanto'. For example, as one respondent wryly commented:

Gary: I don't text my parents 'cause they don't understand what I'm saying'
(Group 11)

This comment indicates how the linguistic idioms of youth can often remain opaque to adults. This establishment of particular modes of behaviour, including specific language, creates boundaries between youth culture and adults. In this way, young people assume certain ways of acting as a means of identification with their peers and differentiation from other groups. Equally, as I will demonstrate later, there exist particular forms of etiquette within peer group interaction. In particular, I suggest that young people's use of the mobile phone in communicating with friends is regulated by knowledge of what is deemed acceptable behaviour. As I argue below, a number of participants commented on how the 'overuse' of the mobile phone can be a source of problems and friction.

6.4.2 The Expression of Popularity

The mobile phone also has a performative and ritual function through which young people become immersed in expressive and affective social groupings. Young people's use of the mobile phone then indicates their place within peer culture. Earlier I argued that the mobile phone plays an important role in organising these groupings by allowing for fluid and temporary activities to emerge in daily life; here I assert that the use of the mobile phone also connotes the emotionally significant bonds that these groupings are built around. The use of the mobile phone in young people's communicative practices is part of the way in which involvement in peer culture is signified. As discussed, research indicates that the use of the mobile phone is characterised by a range of symbolic practices that confers upon the user a sense of inclusion and status.

One example of this, highlighted in previous research, is the number of contacts in one's phonebook. Both Ling and Yttri (2002) and Green (2007) suggest that this acts a marker of popularity and indicates inclusion and popularity. However, the young people encountered in this research do not necessarily quantify their behaviour in this manner. In the focus group discussions, participants state that they do not consider it important to have a large number of contacts in their phone book. Nonetheless, in general, these discussions reveal that most of the participants have a fairly extensive list of contacts, which usually number in excess of 100. More significantly, the focus group discussions expose how the 'objectification of popularity' appears most prominently within the exchange of calls and text messages. The reciprocity this implies is part of the way in which peer group solidarity is articulated and maintained, providing a way through which young people identify being involved in meaningful relationships with their peers. I return later to looking at how young people use the mobile phone to constitute emotional ties with their peers, particularly with reference to the concepts of sociability and gift exchange.

While I argue that the exchange of calls and text messages provides affirmation of one's social involvement, the survey respondents do not appear consciously preoccupied with receiving a lot of calls/texts, with only 98 respondents (19.9%) agreeing that this is of importance. However, while the survey respondents do not explicitly place a high premium on sending or receiving calls and texts, the survey data, as noted earlier, also shows that the reported level of mobile phone use amongst respondents is relatively high. This, as I argued above, would suggest that the use of the mobile phone plays an important role within young people's daily lives. And the

lack of explicit prominence of this in the survey results can be understood as indicative of how ordinary and expected mobile phone interaction is for young people.

Equally, it emerges within the focus groups that to make and receive calls, or to send and receive texts, is an important part of the way in which participation in peer culture is expressed and signified. Focus group participants are more explicit in indicating that they do place an importance on receiving texts and calls during the day, as the following exchange suggests:

Interviewer: How would you feel if you went through the day and you didn't get any texts or calls?

Heather: I'd feel sad

Lisa: And "oh no!"

Heather: Yeah (Group 2)

Similarly, another participant, Elaine, commented that if you didn't get any calls or messages during the day 'You'd feel like a bit of a loner' (Group 6). In this way, the use of the mobile phone amongst young people coheres with levels of emotional involvement in peer culture. These comments reflect young people's sense of emotional attachment to their mobile phone, a point I will return to, with such feelings relatable to the way in which mobile phone interaction validates one's position in the peer group. As one participant indicates, the receipt of calls and texts provide a sense of inclusion in peer culture as it shows that someone is thinking of you:

Lauren: If I had my phone and nobody rang or if I left it at home all day and I have no missed calls there'd be some arguments going on... 'Cause that means nobody's thinking about me (Group 9)

This suggests that mobile phone communication is indicative of being in someone's thoughts. The exchange of calls and texts gives affirmation of one's social life. Young people make use of the mobile phone then in the performance of the bonds of

friendship. Ling and Yttri (2002) refer to this as the 'meta-content' of mobile phone communication. Beyond the specific content of the interaction there exists the implicit indication of an emotional connection between people and an affirmation of their place within the social group. In this way, the use of the mobile phone provides a 'confirmation of the relationship' between peers. It is not necessarily what people are saying but that they are saying anything at all, which is of importance. This 'meta-content' underscores the affective bonds within peer groupings by providing young people with a visible marker of social connectivity and involvement. This aspect of the mobile phone lends this form of communication a special resonance in young people's lives:

Naomi: I love that when you turn on your phone in the morning and you get a message, I think that's deadly (Group 8)

In this context, the use of the mobile phone provides explicit indication of acceptance and popularity amongst peers:

Paul: You feel pretty happy when someone texts you like, someone's looking to talk to you
Miriam: Yeah, 'cause when you get a text message you know somebody else is kinda thinking about you at that moment and stuff (Group6)

However, while Ling and Yttri (2002) tend to separate micro-coordination from more expressive forms of interaction, I would argue that the use of the mobile phone in an organisational capacity also carries an expressive component. While often functional with respect to explicit content, the use of the mobile phone for the purposes of micro-coordination can also be seen as possessing a 'meta-content'. Young people's use of the mobile phone in the coordination and management of social activities immerses them in the social group, generating an affective association amongst peers. On this

level, the mobile phone becomes increasingly important for staying connected with friends, allowing one to keep up with where people are and what's happening:

Evelyn: It's just the fact that you can be able to be in touch, for people to be able to contact you and you can contact them. You don't know what's going on around the place if you don't have a mobile (Group 4)

More specifically, the use of the mobile phone can mean inclusion in activities that occur suddenly and spontaneously, lending habitual forms of micro-coordination a deeper emotion-based component. One's inclusion in these interactions is suggestive of one's place within the peer group; one is in demand and involved in the important 'stuff' of everyday life. As the following exchange illustrates, this is an important aspect of young people's daily lives:

Amy: What if I'm missing something?

Naomi: What if somebody rings you and it's really, really important

Claire: Like your friends could be going to the shop without you and that's very important (Group 8)

The mobile phone is used then by young people to carry out ordinary daily routines of meeting up and hanging out. Aspects of young peoples' sociality are mediated and constructed through mobile phone interaction. In this way, the mobile phone is indicative of newly emerging groupings consonant with Maffesoli's discussion of neo-tribes; they are fluid, ephemeral and built around an 'affectual nebula'. Perhaps more tellingly the mobile phone is used by young people in what at first glance may appear as trivial and inconsequential exchanges but which are inscribed with an emotional substance beyond the content of the communication; thus being-together, as an end in itself, is an animating force within neo-tribes. This sense of emotional attachment and

solidarity that emerges in relation to the use of the mobile phone will be considered further in the next section.

6.5 Sociality, Sociability and Peer Group Solidarity

Framing youth peer groups as neo-tribes allows us to view them as animated less by particular style-based subcultural practices and preferences, and more by the creation and maintenance of emotional connections. These bonds are composed around, in Maffesoli's terms, an 'affective warmth', which derives from the feeling and experience of 'being together'. Earlier, I suggested that the mobile phone is used by young people to manage and organise their peer group activities with increasing fluidity. I also argue that young people's use of the mobile phone is a site of symbolic meaning; in that the forms of interaction facilitated by the mobile phone confer upon young people peer group status and affiliation. Equally, the mobile phone is used to strengthen and deepen young people's peer relationships. In particular, I argue here that the mobile phone is used by young people as a medium of sociability.

A central feature of the mobile phone's symbolic meaning is the emotional relationship young people have with it. This relationship is characterised both by the emotional attachment young people exhibit towards it and the emotional connections it enables. As Vincent (2005a: 118) observes, 'although few people think about their mobile phone in emotional terms they do appear to be using it to achieve emotional goals and most use emotional language categories to explain their mobile usage'. These two aspects can be seen as, in part at least, related; with young people's emotional attachment to their mobile phone linked to its facilitation of 'emotional goals'. In the

following sections, I examine these two aspects of mobile phone culture, and suggest that this emotional relationship is indicative of how young people use the mobile phone in the performance of emotional solidarity with their peers.

6.5.1 Emotional Attachment and the Mobile Phone

Earlier, I discussed the ‘meta-content’ of mobile phone interaction; suggesting that young people’s use of the mobile phone is part of the way in which affective ties are performed and sustained. Correspondingly, young people exhibit a strong emotional attachment to their mobile phone, which is based on the increasingly prominent role it plays within the context of their peer cultures. This emotional attachment is evident in a number of contexts, including young people’s characterisation of the mobile phone as an ‘extension’ of themselves, and the specific emotional responses that it can elicit; such as the anxiety that can often be created by not having their mobile phone with them or not receiving calls or texts.

This emotional attachment can be partly linked to young people’s perception of the mobile phone as a necessity in their everyday lives. In the focus groups, participants appear unable, or unwilling, to conceive of living without it. These discussions reveal how the mobile phone has become a habitual, taken-for-granted part of young people’s daily experience. It has become such a typical part of contemporary society, that we rarely recognise how the use of the mobile phone pervades the basic elements of daily life. The mundane and ordinary character of the mobile phone means that the strong attachment young people have to it can exist unconsciously. As one participant suggests:

Suzanne: I think it's more important to us though than we think it is...you know, we don't realise how fond of it we are (Group 7)

Certainly, this is not to propose that such an attachment is exclusive to young people, but, for many of the participants in this research, the mobile phone has been a consistent and long-term part of their lives. In this context, the mobile phone is perceived by young people less as a novelty and more as a necessity. While the commonplace nature of the mobile phone means that its use may often go uncommented upon, the focus groups provided a space in which participants were able to vocalise more explicitly aspects of this emotional relationship. In thinking through these issues in the focus groups, the young people involved indicated that their mobile phone was something that they couldn't do without, or indeed wouldn't want to be without. As one participant succinctly summarises:

Rebecca: You could live without it but you don't want to live without it (Group 11)

The current generation of teenagers can be said to have grown up with the mobile phone, and, therefore, they view it as a natural part of their lives. In this context, the more young people that have and use the mobile phone the more they come to perceive it as normal and ordinary:

Rachel: It's a part of like life now you know, it's kinda got brilliant the way TV was and all that stuff you just... everyone has one so you're just kinda used to it (Group 7)

In this context, young people place a great amount of emphasis on the role the mobile phone plays in their everyday lives. Concurrent with its role in negotiating domestic relations, discussed in the previous chapter, the mobile phone is a key mediator of a

range of youth cultural activities, and in particular peer group interaction. As suggested above, the use of the mobile phone is a means through which peer group affiliation is expressed and maintained. In this way, the mobile phone has become central for young people in their daily interactions with peers. It provides a medium through which emotional connections are played out, by allowing for people to keep in contact constantly:

Interviewer: How does it [mobile phone] affect your relationship with friends?

Sarah: It improves it 'cause then you can talk to them the whole time (Group 1)

In this context, young people form a significant attachment to their mobile phone, and, in particular, the sorts of communication it allows them to achieve. This can often be an important way through which young people deal with various issues that are on their minds:

Lisa: 'Cause if you're in a bad mood and like you just wanted to check with someone and say you're pissed off (Group 2)

Participants' then spoke of the role of the mobile phone in sustaining friendships in largely positive terms:

Interviewer: Why do you think you couldn't do without it?

Anne: 'Cause you get so used to it and you can contact people if you're bored or whatever

Emer: You just get dependent on it... (Group 5)

This attachment was often formed around metaphors of the physical body, through which participants situated the mobile phone as a part of themselves. This reflects arguments made by Fortunati (2003), who suggests that in contemporary society technology is becoming increasingly integrated with the human body. This process,

she suggests, is evident in the role of machines and technology in a number of areas, for example, medicine, labour, entertainment, communication, etc. A number of the participants in this research described the mobile phone as a physical extension of their bodies:

Lisa: It's like missing a limb (Group 2)

Or similarly, another participant made the following comparison:

Aishling: It's like your right hand, well mine is anyway (Group 4)

This level of attachment is, in some respects, indicative of a heavy reliance on the mobile phone. As Vincent (2005a & 2005b) argues, the growing prominence of the mobile phone in people's lives means its use can elicit a range of emotional responses, such as panic, anxiety and thrill. Young people can often feel a sense of panic when they don't have their phone with them. The increasing emphasis on the mobile phone as a means to confirm one's acceptance within their peer group means that being without it can raise anxiety amongst young people. For example, 45% (222) of survey respondents indicated that they feel "uncomfortable" without their mobile phone. While the survey reveals that female respondents are more likely to agree (58.5%) than males (35%), in the focus groups participants' emotional relationship with their mobile phone both comes through more strongly and appears less 'gendered' than the survey suggests:

Gary: I forgot my phone on Saturday when I went out and it was really annoying, like I couldn't talk to anyone and it was just annoying... (Group 11)

Other participants also indicate other ways in which this attachment manifests itself:

Miriam: I don't go anywhere without my mobile and I can't sleep like unless my phone is under my pillow...

Elaine: Yeah when you don't have it, it feels like you're missing a part of you or something...

Miriam: Even when I'm sitting downstairs watching television my phone's up in my room I'm kinda thinking I wonder if I got a text message or something (Group 6)

As Vincent argues, this attachment to the mobile phone is not necessarily related to the material or physical characteristics of the device itself, but to the idea that it allows for the deepening of emotional connection with friends. The connection young people feel to the mobile phone then can be linked to how it confers upon them a sense of participation in peer culture. It relates then to the type of interactions and connections it allows them to achieve. In this way, when separated from their mobile phone, young people can feel uncomfortable as they feel they are detached from their peer groups:

Interviewer: Would not having one, would that affect people?

Elaine: It'd be terrible

Paul: You wouldn't be able to talk to people as much

Jennifer: You wouldn't be able to keep as close contact with people like (Group 6)

The role of the mobile phone in enabling peer group interaction gives space for the expression of youth cultural formations to be shaped and performed. During adolescence the mobile phone becomes increasingly prominent as a forum in which peer group affiliations are created and managed. This produces a growing dependence on the mobile phone amongst young people, which while acknowledged by respondents, would appear to foster certain addictive forms of behaviour. For example, a third of the survey respondents, 324 (66.7%), agreed that they regularly check their phone for calls/texts. In this regard, the focus group participants exhibit a strong attachment to their mobile phone. Stressing this point, one participant notes:

Amy: ...I'm always looking at it seeing who's texting me and my ma will be looking at me and I'm like that... and she says that I'm like, not on it for a while I like start going mad and she'll be like "you're suffering from withdrawal symptoms" (Group 3)

This motif of 'addiction' emerged in a number of the focus group discussions; with some participants explicitly acknowledging how the mobile phone has an addictive quality and identifying that it can create feelings of anxiety:

David: You're always afraid that you'll miss something, you'll feel like someone's calling you, like you mightn't even get a text but you'll be thinking what if she texted me and I don't know about it and she expected me to get it she might just go see somebody else it does your head in (Group 1)

This comment indicates how the mobile phone is one of the primary means through which young people stay up-to-date and in touch with what's happening. Increasingly, their everyday experiences are mediated through the mobile phone and, for young people, it this becomes an indispensable part of their everyday lives. To be without is to be cut adrift from the general acts of sociability that unite peer groupings:

Jane: You're missing something of your everyday
Catherine: You don't know if you're missing something but you think you are
Patricia: Yeah, like all the gossip (Group 10)

The meaning then that the mobile phone has for young people themselves then is, crucially, a consequence of its role in their peer group interactions. The mobile phone is a means through which one's role within peer formations are made visible and stable. In the next section, I extend this point by emphasising the role of the mobile phone in reinvigorating traditional social forms; specifically practices of sociability and gift exchange.

6.5.2 The Mobile Phone, Sociability and Gift Exchange

As noted above, the emotional attachment that young people exhibit toward their mobile phone can be related to its use in peer group interactions. In particular, I argue that young people make use of the mobile phone in making emotional connections amongst their friends. Here I extend this point to suggest that the concept of 'sociability' can provide a useful basis for discussing this aspect of young people's mobile phone use. In particular, I examine how sociability as a key element within the context of neo-tribal formations is carried out via the mobile phone. Concurrently, I suggest that the nature of sociability corresponds, in part, to the ritual practice of gift exchange, through which group solidarity is established.

Sociability can be seen as a constituting force and an animating feature of neo-tribes. Maffesoli (1996: 25) highlights how tribal groupings are formed in the ordinary interactions of everyday life: 'Having a few drinks; chatting with friends; the anodyne conversations punctuating everyday life enable an exteriorization of the self and thus create the specific aura which binds us together within tribalism'. Similarly, Shields (1992: 108) highlights an 'impulse to sociability' within neo-tribes, suggesting that they are 'grounded in the sociability of everyday life, [which] becomes the basis on which new affectual communities constitute themselves'.

Further to this, I argue that there are identifiable lines of continuity between Maffesoli's description of neo-tribal sociality and Simmel's discussion of sociability. Simmel (1997: 121) conceives of sociability as 'the play form of association'; writing that within sociable interaction 'above and beyond their special content, all the associations are accompanied by a feeling for, by a satisfaction in, the very fact that one is

associated with others and that the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others'. This emphasis on the 'feeling of the worth of association' supersedes any objective content or aims of the parties involved. In this way, sociability is interaction that exists for itself, and is not oriented towards the achievement of concrete goals. Sociability derives its quality then from the personalities involved, with a stress placed on the role of 'good form' in bringing meaning to associations. Good form is the unifying force that gives a positive impetus to sociability; it is 'mutual self-definition, interaction of the elements, through which a unity is made' (Simmel, 1997: 121). Through this good form there emerges what Simmel (1997: 121) terms the 'pure form of sociability': 'the free playing, interacting interdependence of individuals'. A crucial point is that sociability is not an escape or flight from reality but a way in which reality is experienced with greater freeness and lightness. In this way, sociable interaction immerses one in the quotidian, which is at once both ordinary and extraordinary.

Within contemporary youth culture, the mobile phone has become of paramount importance as a medium of sociability. It permits the transmission of sociable interaction between and amongst young people, allowing for a steady flow of communication to emerge. While we have already discussed the instrumental use of the mobile phone in the coordination of everyday activities, young people's interaction is often stripped of specific goals and oriented toward interaction for its own sake. The mobile phone then carries the traditional desire for sociability, evident within youth peer groups, through a new medium.

The survey findings show that 89.5% of respondents agree with the statement that the mobile phone ‘helps you gossip and chat’; while, similarly, 73% of respondents agree that the mobile phone ‘helps relieve boredom and pass the time’. This is reflected in the focus group discussions, in which participants indicated that a key motivation behind their use of the mobile phone is the wish to just simply chat and to relieve boredom:

Interviewer: What kinds of things would you text about?

Catherine: ‘How’s it going?’, just seeing what’s up

Interviewer: Is it important to have that medium of chat?

Diane: It’s just like if you’re bored you can just text somebody and see what they’re doing, then just kind of involve someone and keep talking about stuff, that’s all... (Group 10)

The mobile phone can be seen then as a conduit for, what Simmel refers to as, ‘that most extensive instrument of all human common life, conversation’. It is through this sociable conversation that individuals find satisfaction. Within this ‘social game’ participants are equal; and the pleasure gained is derived from the activity itself rather than what gains or advantages might result from it. In this way, sociability shares with neo-tribal sociality a concern with the immediate collective present. Earlier, this notion of immediacy was discussed with reference to issues of ad hoc coordination of activities and events; here we locate it within the sociable interactions in which young people involve themselves. At the same time, sociability is divested of explicit or specific purpose; what is desired is interaction for its own sake. Young people make use of the mobile phone for sociability that is concerned with, in Simmel’s terms, ‘no ulterior end, no content, and no result outside itself’.

Through its immersion in the apparently prosaic character of daily life, sociability is often dismissed as trivial and insignificant; as Simmel (1997: 121) observes:

‘Rationalism, finding no content there, seeks to do away with sociability as empty idleness’. While it is often cast as an unproductive aspect of society, sociability is a way in which society is brought together: ‘only the sociable is a ‘society’ without qualifying adjective, because it alone presents the pure, abstract play of form, all the specific contents of one-sided and qualified societies being dissolved away’ (Simmel, 1997: 122). In this context, the idleness commonly associated with sociability can be positively read as society in repose or ticking over. Rather than escaping the social, sociability is the realisation of the social in pure form. As one focus group participant observed:

Elaine: I mean it’s real life! I mean instead of listening to the radio or watching the telly or whatever you’re actually communicating with other people (Group 6)

In this way, through their use of the mobile phone young people, rather than finding themselves isolated, are drawn positively into confluence with others. A similar point was made in another of the focus groups, where a participant noted that her other efforts to alleviate boredom proved in vain so she usually turned to texting someone:

Rachel: Even if I try to not make myself bored by like reading or watching tv, but eventually you just get bored of everything and you’re like ‘Oh God!’ so you just text someone (Group 7)

In this way, the mobile phone encourages and facilitates traditional forms of communal behaviour amongst young people to emerge in new ways. The mobile phone is used then to both represent and realise a live peer culture amongst young people. It facilitates forms of sociability, by allowing for interaction that is stripped of intrinsic content to permeate young people’s peer group formations. In this way, young people’s use of the mobile phone often privileges and emphasises interaction for its own sake.

Returning to an earlier related point, mobile phone interaction can similarly be positively read as a form of gift exchange, which, as with sociability, fosters social cohesion and solidarity between participants. The culture of reciprocity and exchange evident within young people's use of the mobile phone has been previously equated with the concept of 'gifting' (see Taylor and Harper, 2001; Ling and Yttri, 2002; Johnsen, 2003). More generally, as discussed, the concept has been explored in the context of modern and pre-modern societies by Mauss (1997) and Berking (1999), with particular reference to the role of gift exchange in building social solidarity and cohesion. Mauss highlights the three characteristic features of gift exchange as: the obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate.

While research exploring the connections between gifting and the mobile phone privilege discussions of texting, Taylor and Harper (2001) extend their focus to incorporate how call-credit and mobile phones themselves can be used as 'gifts'. This latter point reflects Weilenmann & Larsson's (2002) discussion of what they term the 'collaborative use of the mobile phone'. Equally, points of similarity between forms of gift exchange and sociability can be discerned; specifically, the emphasis on building social cohesion and solidarity. Text messages, in particular, operate as a visible representation of a relationship, which can be saved, reread and shared with others. Like gifts, mobile phone exchanges assume social value from their role within specific ritual processes of giving and receiving. As Berking (1999: 9) suggests, the gift 'organises memories, makes feelings concrete, and sets up relationship signals'.

Earlier I elaborated on this role of text messages as markers of peer group involvement and identification. Equally, picture messages have assumed a similar role in drawing

people together through ritual practices of sociability and gift exchange. The use of the mobile phone for taking pictures emerges within the focus groups as a social practice that unites peer groups through forms of ritual exchange and interaction:

John: Yeah, when I was at a concert there, Velvet Revolver, and my friends were all taking pictures and videos and all and I had nothing. They were all watching them afterwards, which was class but I just wanted to take some pictures and stuff... (Group 2)

In this way, young people use the camera function of their mobile phone to capture particular moments and activities. These pictures act then as confirmations of their relationship with friends by, as one participant puts it, preserving 'memories' between them:

Jane: To take pictures

Lauren: Yeah, memories like

Jane: You know because you're not gonna carry a camera with you everywhere – but now you got a phone to take a picture

...

Lauren: Like you need to take pictures, spur of the moment pictures, you know that kinda way... Like if something funny happens, like something always happens with me and her together like that's why we need our phones (Group 9)

The use of their camera phone then corresponds to forms of sociability in that it is used to mediate everyday forms of behaviour and interaction. The emphasis is on 'fun', or good form, rather than explicit goals or content. As other participants commented:

Interviewer: What do you take pictures of?

Patricia: Your friends

Diane: Something funny that happens

Jane: Just fun things

Catherine: Friends and when you're out

Interviewer: Would you send them to people?

Patricia: Yeah

Catherine: Or just keep them

Diane: Put them on your screensaver

Richard: Show them to people

Catherine: You know it's just like photos (Group 10)

As these comments indicate, the use of the camera phone can also be read as a form of gift exchange, with participants indicating their sharing of pictures with one another.

As another participant observes:

Amy: If I was at a concert and then I'd take pictures and send it to someone... at home I take pictures of stupid things and send them to people for no reason (Group 3)

The 'reason', I suggest, lies in deeper forms of peer interaction and sociability, which creates closer ties; encouraging friendship and solidarity between and amongst young people. This behaviour is part of the wider forms of social practice and interaction that young people engage in within everyday life. It constitutes a form of social life that, I suggest, corresponds to acts of both sociability and gift exchange. As one focus group participant noted:

Damian: If you see something interesting, or of your friends, and you can show them the following morning (Group 1)

While young people's peer interactions then can be viewed as acts of gift exchange through the processes of giving and receiving mediated by the mobile phone, the role of reciprocity in these practices appears to have a more flexible and negotiable character. While acts of giving/receiving are an intrinsic element in this social practice, the nature of mobile phone communication means that the requirement for reciprocity, as the following exchange illustrates, can be interpreted in different ways:

John: Yeah, when you text someone and they don't write back you're kinda like...

Lisa [interjecting]: You think they're pissed off

John: Yeah, well no, at first I was like "Ah, yeah whatever"...

Heather: They mightn't have credit...

John: No credit, not bothered, whatever. And then like if they keep not doing it you think: "here I didn't do anything, like what's wrong?"

Lisa: Yeah

John: It develops into kinda like a fight nearly, I just, I didn't do anything wrong why aren't you talking to me? That kinda way... (Group 2)

While reciprocity within young people's mobile phone interactions is desirable, there is an awareness of how it is not necessarily always possible. People may be busy or have no credit, which are viewed as acceptable reasons for failing to reply. However, as the above exchange indicates, a sustained lack of reciprocity can be a potential source of discord in a relationship. Similarly, the following exchange highlights participants' attitudes towards this aspect of mobile phone culture:

Interviewer: Ok, what if you text someone and they don't respond?

Catherine: Well they might be busy

Diane: Text somebody else (laughs)

Patricia: Yeah

Interviewer: So it wouldn't bother you?

Jane: No, you might be disappointed if you wanted them to text back... [but] you get over it

Catherine: Yeah, but if it's not important get over it (laughing)

Diane: They're might be hassle the next day; you'd say "Why didn't you text me back last night?" (Group 10)

While these comments suggest that lack of communication can lead to disputes and friction, in the next section I demonstrate that one of the main source of tension that emerges in relation to young people's use of the mobile phone is from its overuse.

6.5.3 Communication Breakdown

For young people then, the mobile phone provides a means through which sociable interaction and emotional connections are carried out and maintained. While thus far we have emphasised the positive role it plays in this context, the use of the mobile phone can also be seen to have a potentially negative impact within peer group

interaction. In as much as it can imbue relationships with solidarity the mobile phone can also be a source of rupture and tension amongst young people. As one participant noted, on the one hand the mobile phone is useful as a medium of communication, but on the other hand it can sometimes be intrusive and unwelcome:

Alan: You can keep in contact... it's just so much easier... you can just ring them and say 'How are you?'... Then again, when your phone goes off it's so annoying sometimes 'cause it just keeps on going off sometimes (Group 11)

This aspect of the mobile phone was identified across a number of the focus groups. Participants' observe that the exhaustion of the mobile phone as a medium of sociability can overplay the form, rendering it burdensome rather than pleasurable. The appropriate use of the mobile phone corresponds to particular forms of knowledge that marks out a form of inclusion in peer culture; with one's acceptance often being predicated on maintaining acceptable forms of behaviour. There is a delicate balance then to be struck within sociable interaction in order to avoid it lapsing from something to be enjoyed to something that is endured. As one participant suggests:

Rachel: You can text them more often, you can keep in contact but sometimes you can like overtext someone and they can be like in a really thick mood or whatever. And where if you're on the phone like you could hear the mood but when you're texting you really can't – unless they start cursing (laughs) (Group 7)

In this way, the mobile phone can be seen as a site of 'bad form', in contrast to Simmel's definition of 'good form'. Overuse of the mobile phone in this way can be the source of disapproval amongst young people. A number of the focus group participants isolated this behaviour as being especially annoying. For example, one focus group discussion featured the following exchange:

Ciara: It gets on your nerves as well

Lauren: Yeah, because they're texting you all the time

Karen: Yeah what are you doing? Would you just leave me alone (Group 9)

Returning to an earlier point, the potential emphasis on reciprocity can further exacerbate this tension. Similarly, another participant, in discussing the negative aspects of the mobile phone, declares:

Anne: Yeah, 'cause they can bug you all the time, ring you and text you constantly... it gets annoying (Group 5)

In this context, the mobile phone can be a potential source of stress for young people, which can place strain on peer group solidarity and cohesion. The mobile phone can then intensify communication beyond an acceptable point. As one participant observed, the phone is always ringing when you're busy:

John: Like it's just people are ringing you at work or you're doing something or during your dinner, even if it's at home and someone keeps ringing you or texting you and you're just 'go away please'... (Group 2)

Correspondingly, a number of participants commented on the need for respite from this constant interaction; with another participant noting that sometimes it can be a relief not to have one:

Andrew: Then again when your phone goes off it's so annoying sometimes 'cause it just keeps on going off sometimes, and when you don't have a phone it's like "aah" [contented sigh], it's like a break... (Group 11)

In particular, participants in the focus group discussions highlight how receiving calls or texts from people you don't really know is especially irritating. For example, one participant observes that:

Sarah: I think that's really annoying when people think I don't know when they never talk to you face-to-face and then they send you a message and you're like why? So yeah that way really annoying (Group 1)

In this way, the mobile phone appears to be used more to supplement relationships that include some form of face-to-face interaction, rather than being the sole arena in which peer associations are constructed. The mobile phone then does not appear as a site in which friendships can be created exclusively, but acts a medium to maintain ties of friendship. Mobile phone communication exists as part of a range of ways in which friendships are carried out. Rather than replacing more traditional forms of interaction, the mobile is used in tandem to supplement young people's peer relationships.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on addressing the role of the mobile phone within young people's peer culture. For young people, peer relationships form a central and crucial element of everyday life. Accordingly, their use of the mobile phone is primarily directed towards interaction with friends. While the mobile phone represents a new medium of communication, in the context of young people's peer interaction, the echo of traditional social forms is discernible. In particular, I argue that the concept of 'neo-tribes' provides a useful way of illustrating the ways in which the mobile phone is used by young people in everyday interaction with their friends. I emphasise three specific aspects of the notion of neo-tribes as being especially pertinent in this regard: first, neo-tribes are marked by a fluidity and immediacy of social connectivity and are characterised by the adoption of multiple personas; second, such groupings house particular rituals and processes of identification and difference, which serve to indicate inclusion and exclusion within and between groups; and third, these groupings are illuminated by everyday forms of sociality and sociability.

As a conceptual frame, the concept of neo-tribes highlights forms of everyday sociality and solidarity that exists within youth culture. Young people's use of the mobile phone is indicative of forms of neo-tribal sociality within contemporary youth culture. It sustains emotional bonds between young people and allows for shifting, permeable associations to emerge. The potential limits to this approach lie in its neglect of the persistence of ascribed forms of identity and wider forms of structural inequality. While I have, following Maffesoli, accented what unites rather than what separates, it is important to be aware of how forms of social difference can emerge and be identified within young people's peer groups. However, in this research, I am primarily interested in how the mobile phone provides a symbolic resource for the expression and enactment of sociable interaction and peer solidarities.

In this chapter then, I examine the ways in which the use of the mobile phone provides a means through which young people move within and between different peer groupings. These groups are often loosely organised formations, which emerge and withdraw around more fluid forms of association. The use of the mobile phone allows young people to manage their participation in these groups, which facilitates the emergence of multiple 'personae'. Rather than young people having a singular identity, they adopt different personae within differing contexts. Taking the example of the mobile phone, the way young people use it will differ in relation to interactions with different groups and individuals. The way then that young people communicate with parents differs markedly from their peer interactions. In this way, while young people may express a particular subcultural affiliation, they are immersed in a range of other groups that provide important emotional and sociable contact and support.

Although the various groups, or neo-tribes, that young people occupy are defined by fluidity and flexibility, they retain discernible boundaries. Neo-tribes are bracketed by particular practices of identification and differentiation that serve to render more visible the social status and role of participants. Young people make use of the mobile phone in these processes of identification. The manner and character of their use allows young people to both identify with peers and differentiate themselves from other groups. For example, texting as a social practice is more commonly viewed by participants as a medium for peer interaction rather than for contacting parents. Equally, young people associate the mobile phone with a sense of maturity that differentiates them from younger children.

Finally, I argue, that the mobile phone is used by young people to accomplish social solidarities within their peer groups. Maffesoli (1996) identifies the emergence of a postmodern sociality, which he sees as an animating feature of neo-tribes. This sociality relates to the convergence of neo-tribes around ambiances and feelings rather than specific sets of beliefs or rational, contractual arrangements. This conforms to ways of 'being-together' that creates a 'puissance' and 'affective warmth' amongst and between members. In this context the mobile phone is a medium of sociability, through which young people's peer groupings are enlivened and invigorated. The concept of neo-tribes then is useful in identifying and describing particular aspects of young people's everyday experience. While it lacks attention to the ways in which these experiences remain ordered and controlled by structures of power, it is proposed as a way of understanding forms of social life that counter the alienation and disenchantment of rationalised modernity. Rather than seeing it as a totality then, I

argue the concept of neo-tribes is best understood is a tendency with contemporary social life. It offers a means to understand and analysis ways in which affective social bonds persist within modern rational societies. As Maffesoli (1996: 72) argues: 'We have dwelled so often on the dehumanization and the disenchantment with the modern world and the solitude it induces that we are no longer capable of seeing the networks of solidarity that exist within'.

Chapter 7: The Cultural Consumption of the Mobile Phone

7.1 Introduction

As I argue in Chapter 2, it has primarily been the guiding hand of consumer culture that has drawn the contours of contemporary youth culture. As Savage (2007: 465) observes, the new image of youth that emerged in the aftermath of World War II, incarnate in the figure of the ‘teenager’, ‘was the ultimate psychic match for the times: living in the now, pleasure seeking, product hungry, embodying the new global society, where social inclusion was to be granted through purchasing power’. Subsequent decades have witnessed the ever closer alignment of youth and consumption, with contemporary youth culture existing hand in glove with consumer culture. Accordingly, youth culture and consumer culture have been closely interrelated in sociological discourse; with theoretical positions regarding youth culture being increasingly informed by more general approaches to the study of consumer society. What has been lacking is a synthesis of these approaches within the context of mobile phone research. While youth has been a theme of much of this research, this has not been located within broader considerations of youth culture and consumption.

Young people’s role as consumers is viewed in ambiguous, and often uncertain, terms. On the one hand, consumption is seen a site of manipulation, exploitation and control, while on the other hand young people’s practices of cultural consumption are argued to be a key locus for the formation of individual and collective identities. I argue that young people’s use of the mobile phone is indicative of these contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies that characterise practices of cultural consumption.

While undoubtedly the growth of the mobile phone market is part of broader forces of commodification that shapes youth culture, young people's use of the mobile phone also needs to be understood as an important part of how they exercise their cultural power and adopt an active role in everyday life. I consider particularly that how young people make use of the mobile phone involves sets of cultural practices that allow for them to enact and express forms of agency and creativity. In previous chapters, this is drawn out in relation to how young people make use of the mobile phone to actively negotiate their autonomy within structures of social organisation and control (i.e. the family), and to actively create their peer cultures. Here, this argument is developed with reference to contemporary theories of consumer culture, and, in particular, consider how cultural agency is realised through practices of consumption.

Firstly, I address the cultural production of the mobile phone, with particular reference to the role of producers and consumers in this process. I argue that both play an important part in the construction of the cultural meaning of the mobile phone, and suggest the need to consider this relationship between production and consumption as more subtle than the traditional dichotomy of resistance/incorporation allows for. Young people's cultural consumption needs to be understood not as apart from or in opposition to a 'mainstream' culture, but as shaped by and shaping of the broader cultural field. Subsequently, I address the ways in which consumption provides young people with a means of being creative in their everyday lives. Through the concept of lifestyle I examine the role of the mobile phone in the construction of self and group identities, with particular reference to the active role young people play in these processes. From here, I turn to examine how young people's cultural practices are

instances of what de Certeau characterises as ‘tactics’. Specifically, I highlight the example of school life as an arena in which young people make use of the mobile phone to counter their position of relative powerlessness, but also draw on examples previously considered in this research. Finally, however, I submit that viewing young people’s cultural practices as ‘resistance’ can often overstate the level of power this affords them. By contrast, I argue that their use of the mobile phone is an example of how young people’s cultural power is a form of ‘resilience’ within the context of forms of social and cultural controls.

7.2 Youth, Consumption and the Mobile Phone

Privileging consumption in the analysis of young people’s use of the mobile phone means a closer consideration of how they make use of it in their everyday lives, and how this relates to broader cultural processes that inform their experiences. As argued earlier, a good deal of mobile phone research stresses the complex and contested ways in which social and cultural meanings are constructed and interpreted. In different contexts and to different individuals and groups, the mobile phone is subject to a range of uses and meanings. Both the social shaping of technology and domestication approaches account for the different actors that frame the production and use of the mobile phone. However, as Goggin (2006) observes, much of this work does not directly address the mobile phone as a commodity or, in particular, a cultural object. Situating the mobile phone in the context of consumer culture allows for an analysis of its cultural and symbolic meaning. In particular, I frame young people’s mobile phone use as an exemplar of their cultural consumption, and a means to broach a fuller

understanding of the relationship between youth culture and consumer culture. While youth is a prominent theme in mobile phone research, its use has been largely neglected in youth cultural research. In characterising youth culture as a culture of consumption, in which young people's everyday lives are defined through practices of cultural consumption, I address not just the use of the mobile phone, how such practices relate to the expression of young people's cultural power and agency.

The expansion of consumer culture has brought areas of life previously insulated from commodification under the rule of capital, and makes being a consumer an individual's primary role. Reflecting this, the role of consumption has become a key focus of recent sociological debate. Social theory views this consumer culture in ambiguous terms – what Miles (2005) terms the 'consuming paradox'. For a number of critical theorists, the expansion of capitalism has transformed everyday life into a realm of sterile, manipulated, controlled consumption, wherein all social practice becomes mediated and defined through some form of commodity exchange. By contrast, recent reflections on consumption have emphasised consumer culture as a site of pleasure, wherein individuals can assert their agency and creativity, and develop forms of self and collective identities (see Warde, 2002; Featherstone, 1991).

The characterisation of consumption as ideological control is the leitmotif of a lengthy and varied tradition of Marxist thought; from the Frankfurt School's identification of the passivity and 'dull conformity' induced by the culture industry to the characterisations of postmodernity as a 'depthless culture' by, for example, Baudrillard (1988) and Jameson (1984). In this context, capitalism is seen as instituting manufactured and controlled forms of leisure and consumption, which allow no space

for genuine and authentic subjectivity to take root. While these readings of consumer culture are usually characterised as relentlessly pessimistic, Marxist thought is often punctuated with exclamations proclaiming the possibility of change. For example, Lefebvre viewed his work as part of a political project that sought to remake everyday life as a site of meaningful human consciousness. Equally, the Situationists, amidst a trenchant critique of capitalism, were firm in their belief in the liberation of everyday life from the deadening grip of the spectacle.

More recently, theories of consumer culture have been more affirmative about forms of cultural consumption. Discussions of the concept of 'lifestyle', for example, emphasise the fluid nature of cultural identities and how the investment of personal meaning in commodities contributes positively to the construction of self and group identities. Patterns of consumption are seen, not necessarily as reflecting stable social categories, but as a means through which individuals and groups construct more fluid and malleable forms of identification and difference in everyday life. Disenchained from the structural determination of class and habitus, consumers are perceived as active rather than passive. In this context, cultural consumption is seen then as pleasurable and meaningful, and as Featherstone (1991) observes a site of 'dreams, images and pleasures'. Rather than viewing consumption as an arena of conformity and control, this approach emphasises the potentially liberating and empowering capacity of cultural practices. This tension within theories of consumer culture is characterised by Miles (1998: 5) as 'the consuming paradox': 'in terms of our individual experience consumerism appears to have a fascinating, arguably fulfilling, personal appeal and yet simultaneously plays some form of an ideological role in actually controlling the

character of everyday life'. Consumers then are perceived, in Paterson's (2006) terms, as being both 'savvy' and 'suckers'; or, as Slater (1993: 33) observes, simultaneously as 'cultural dupes' and the 'heroes of modernity'.

Recent trends in youth cultural research reflect the shifts evident in theories of consumer culture, emphasising the agency found within young people's cultural consumption. For Paterson (2006: 160), youth culture provides the most vivid example of the contradictions within consumer culture: 'Youth culture means dwelling at the edge of competing tendencies... the consuming paradox is never so keenly exemplified as in the complexities and contradictions of youth consumption'. Young people exist then in the interstices between forms of agency and control, freedom and manipulation, that consumer culture allows for – or what Hall and Whannel (1994 [1968]) refer to as 'the authentic and the manufactured'. This alignment within sociological thought between youth and consumption can be traced back at least as far back as the work of CCCS researchers. While the deficiencies of subcultural theory have been well rehearsed, its engagement with a youth culture based on practices of consumption established an important strand of youth cultural research.

Nevertheless, critiques highlight its neglect of ordinary, everyday practices of consumption. As Thornton (1995) observes, the emphasis on issues of class and resistance means subcultural theory perceives youth subcultures as 'proto-political' and 'proto-artistic', which has the effect of falsely romanticising these groupings (see also Clarke, 1981). There is a gap then between the assertions of subcultural theorists and the realities of young people's everyday lives. As Miles (1995) notes, subcultural theory 'concentrates on symbolic aspects of subcultural consumption at the expense of

the actual meanings that young consumers have for the goods they consume'. Equally, Clarke (1981) suggests that the relationship between youth and consumption is much more complex than the authentic versus mainstream dichotomy proposed by subcultural theorists. In contrast, he calls for an analysis of 'the activities of all youths to locate the continuities and discontinuities in culture and social relations and to discover the meaning these activities have for young people themselves' (Clarke, 1981).

Through the development of post-subcultural theory, this critique has hardened into a more distinctive position of its own. Spurred by the emergence of dance music culture from the late 1980s, this general approach has largely dispensed with subcultural theory's focus on class in favour of exploring the meaning consumer practices have for young people themselves. In particular, post-subcultural theory is marked by an emphasis on what are seen as the less structurally determined configurations of youth lifestyles and the complex processes that mark young people's consumer practices. Crucially then, youth research has moved towards examining the ways in which young people are both actively involved in the creation of cultural meaning and how their cultural practices are part of the way they negotiate their social circumstances. As I argue in the previous chapters, young people make use of the mobile phone to assert their own power, agency and autonomy in everyday life. However, rather than reading these as forms of resistance against, I argue that they form part of the way in which youth culture is enacted and expressed without offering a direct or politicised subversion of particular social controls. In this chapter then, I problematise the concept of 'resistance', and alternatively suggest that youth cultural consumption is not

performed in opposition to forms of social organisation that shape young people's lives but is a form of 'resilience' within it.

7.3 The Production of Mobile Phone Culture

Understanding the mobile phone as a cultural object and a commodity invites consideration of its cultural production. As argued earlier, this cultural production is a complex and negotiated process, which involves a range of actors and issues. For example, in discussing the 'circuit of culture', du Gay et al (1997) suggest five processes that shape the development of a cultural object – representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. This approach is useful insofar as it highlights the interaction between modes of production and modes of consumption in shaping cultural practices and meaning. These practices and meanings are not merely inscribed in an object by producers, but are actively constructed through what Katz and Sugiyama (2005: 78) refer to, in relation to the mobile phone, as both 'the well-calculated strategies of the industry and by the creative mind of consumers'. The production of mobile phone culture then needs to be considered both in terms of its 'production from above' by producers, marketers, etc. and its 'production from below' by consumers.

Equally, within recent cultural theory there has been an emphasis on the lessening of the distinction between production and consumption, between authors and audiences. While I initially address these as separate contexts, this bifurcation is for the purposes of analysis rather than assertion of a clear distinction between these processes. In considering the role of both producers and consumers in shaping cultural production,

and argue that these processes are not separate and disconnected but are simultaneous and interrelated. The cultural uses and meanings associated with the mobile phone emerge through the interaction between a range of actors, with both producers and consumers playing a significant part in defining mobile phone culture. More generally, the example of the mobile phone demonstrates the complex relationship between youth culture and consumer culture. While analyses of this debate have frequently viewed consumption polarised as either a site of manipulation or conversely freedom, I argue that young people's role as consumers is marked by a simultaneous tension between these positions. I contend, therefore, it is not simply a matter of a struggle between forces of resistance and incorporation, but a situation where youth culture and consumption have become increasingly interrelated and interdependent.

7.3.1 Production from Above: A Political Economy of the Mobile Phone

While recent work on consumption tends to privilege discussions of cultural agency, this should not lead to the assumption of production as being a benign force. As Fine (2003) argues, in addressing practices of consumption the imperatives and structures of capitalism cannot be ignored. In this context, McGuigan (1992) criticises what he refers to as the 'cultural populism' evident in contemporary cultural studies. He suggests that placing an emphasis on notions of consumer agency disarms critical analysis by ignoring the economic and historical contexts of production. In order to remedy this, McGuigan (1992: 40) calls for a reengagement with political economy, suggesting that 'the separation of contemporary cultural studies from the political economy of culture has been one of the most disabling features of the field of study'.

This political economy of culture seeks to demonstrate how the manner of their production has significant impact on the uses and meanings of commodities and cultural texts. In this way, it establishes a form of analysis that views production as the main determinant of consumer and cultural practices.

While Storey (2001: 85) argues that political economy often ‘seems to involve little more than detailing access to, and availability of, cultural texts and practices’, this approach can also provide a more sophisticated analysis of cultural processes than this allows for. In particular, political economic analyses of culture and consumption are often indebted to Marxist arguments about the determining logic of production – an approach Featherstone (1991) refers to as ‘modes of production’. As discussed, Marxist reproaches of capitalism are founded on the recognition that it transforms social and cultural life into forms of commodity exchange. Whether in the guise of the culture industry or the spectacle, consumer capitalism is seen as inculcating passivity and restricting subjectivity. Commodities are seen then as defining and limiting the potential for human agency and subjective action. In this context, cultural processes are seen as resulting from the character of capitalist production. The significance of production needs, therefore, to be considered in relation to the development of mobile phone culture.

The production of the mobile phone as a mass-produced commodity is a relatively recent occurrence. As Brown (2001: 7-10) notes, the history of the mobile phone is distinguished by protracted periods of non-development. The first commercial systems were developed in the 1940s, but it took another 30 years before the mobile phone would begin to access the mass market. Indeed, as Kopomaa (2002) observes, it wasn’t

until the 1990s that it became widely available and used. In commercial terms, this lag between development and use can be attributed, in part, to the constraints of technology and the preferences shown by research and development to other technology, such as video-phones. While Nyiri (2005) suggests that the mobile phone flourished amidst the social and cultural conditions of postmodernity, more prosaic, yet no less significant, reasons for the buoyancy of the mobile phone market include the development and commercialisation of the GSM network standard along with reduction in the size, weight and, crucially, the price of mobile phone handsets. Given these developments in its production, by the mid-1990s mobile phones were widely available, mass-produced commodities that were both affordable and portable enough to fit in a pocket. In relation to this development of the mobile phone, producers have considerable power in shaping the trajectory of what can be designated as mobile phone culture.

At the most basic level, the mobile phone is a commodity, produced for profit. In this context then, the mobile phone draws everyday life into deepening forms of capital exchange. Its dominant role within contemporary youth culture reflects both the continued role of consumption in young people's lives and the way in which these experiences are increasingly subject to forms of commodification. In essence, the mobile phone transforms everyday communication into a product that is bought and sold; for example, young people place great emphasis on having 'credit' for their phone:

Niamh: I hate it when I don't have any credit... 'Cause it's a bit of a pain when you don't have any credit... (Group 3)

Although, I argue for an understanding of young people's use of the mobile phone as a site of cultural agency, it also exposes how their cultural practices can become monetised by commercial interests. For example, while Lasen (2005) highlights how

young people's use of the mobile phone was initially considered frivolous and unimportant, both handset manufacturers and network operators quickly came to recognise the potential of this target group. In this context, young people's cultural practices are subject to commercial interests. For example, imposing a tariff on texting, the growth of the ringtone market, the use of text comments and voting on television, the use of the mobile phone to access the internet all draw young people into more controlled and organised forms of consumption, and allows commercial interest to mine a rich seam of revenue.

Equally, this identification, from the late 1990s, of the youth market as a significant consumer demographic has led to a reconfiguration of the mobile phone's image. From its initial elite and work-related status, commercial representations of the mobile phone are now more readily expressed in terms of youth-related notions of fun and freedom. As Campbell (2006: 195) observes, current mobile phone advertising is keen to tap into young people's desire for 'style, friendships and individuality'. The mobile phone has been made over as an icon of contemporary youth culture. Marketing then has been increasingly reliant on aligning the mobile phone with youth-oriented events and activities, and prominent personalities; including, for example, sponsorship of sporting and music events, and celebrity endorsements.

The emphasis on style and representation means that, as Goggin (2006: 41) notes, 'the roles of image-creation, advertising, and design have been fundamental in the production of cell phone culture'. The mobile phone is emblematic then of what Featherstone (1991) refers to as the 'aestheticisation of everyday life'. For Featherstone (1991), this process stretches from the modernist impulse to collapse the

distinction between art and everyday life to the intensity of signs and images witnessed in postmodern culture. This transfusion of art into commodity production is evident in the way in which aesthetic principles have acquired a key role in the production of mobile phone culture. For example, Katz and Sugiyama (2005) characterise the mobile phone as a 'high-fashion item', and argue that the artistic precepts of modernism and futurism are evident in mobile phone design. More specifically, Goggin (2006) highlights the example of the Nokia 2100 and 8860 models as indicative of the privileging of design in mobile phone production (see also, Redhead, 2004).

In this context, the mobile phone is often valued and valorised as much for its fashionableness as its functionality. This emphasis on design very often appeals to young people's sensibilities, with a number of focus group participants highlighting the role of the mobile phone as a fashion item:

Jennifer: Yeah sometimes it can be a fashion thing

Paul: Some of them are a fashion thing yeah

Jennifer: You can get lovely covers and everything and that's cute (Group 6)

Similarly, a number of focus group participants register their desire to have an 'up-to-date' mobile phone, with an emphasis on its particular style. For example, one participant comments on her wish for new mobile phone, even though her existing one still works:

Naomi: I'm getting a new phone for Easter... my ma says to me 'it's a grand phone, it works', but I want a new one, I want a 'flippy' one now (Group 8)

This desire for the new, the novel, is a key characteristic of consumer culture (see Campbell, 1992), with consumption being sustained through the constant replenishing of these wants. In relation to the mobile phone, producers have proved adept at both

creating and plugging into these desires through advertising and marketing. Importantly, the mobile phone has also been the subject of both the addition of new designs and applications and its integration with other forms of technology and media.

This continual enhancement has proven attractive for young consumers:

Paul: After a while you just wanted a new phone... You just get a bit bored of your old phone...

Miriam: Especially when everyone else has kinda the newer models that do more things kinda than yours, say like multimedia messages and stuff like that...
(Group 6)

In this context, the mobile phone is a means of assuming status amongst one's peers, an issue that is addressed in more detail below. It also displays how young people are often keen to update to the newest model of mobile phone. In discussing this wish to have the 'latest' mobile phone, the example of the camera phone appears especially prominent amongst focus group participants:

Samantha: Yeah, 'cause you need the latest phone

Claire: ...Like you need the latest phone, like camera phones... When all my friends, you know, had camera phones and I just had that little silver flip up, remember? So I was like 'Oh, I want a camera phone', 'cause they were all like taking pictures of everybody you know all together and all that, if there was a party or something (Group 8)

Again this comment reflects how young people's practices of consumption are often peer-led; however, the example of the camera phone also demonstrates how a particular need is created by mobile phone manufacturers. As one participant observes in relation to the camera phone:

Grace: You don't need it; you just want it (Group 9)

This comment raises the issue of the extent to which practices of consumption are based on manufactured wants and desires as opposed to actual material needs. The

emphasis on having the newest item on the market is a defining characteristic of consumer culture. This in essence is the triumph of capitalism, to create a system in which the desire for commodities outstrips any acknowledgement of its functional utility; in which exchange value supersedes use-value. While participants recognise the ways in which these wants do not necessarily reflect specific needs, there is a sense of such desires as irresistible. Equally, the continual updating and upgrading of the mobile phone is accompanied by formidable marketing campaigns, which helps produce this continual cycle of consumption. As one participant comments, this need for the latest innovation is continual:

David: Everyone wants the camera phone now and when the video thing comes out they'll want that, when it comes out properly with the whole video sending thing, so everyone will want one of those phones then (Group 1)

While young people can impose their own preferences and values in their use of the mobile phone, it is also an example of how their everyday lives are constructed in relation to commodities. The camera phone is indicative of how the motive springs of cultural practice may derive from aspects of commodity production. It both taps into and helps create the increasingly visual culture that young people inhabit. The mobile phone is part of the new wave of digital technologies allowing for the integration of other multimedia forms – in particular mobile photography, video imaging, Internet services, mp3 player, radio and television. This has the capacity to potentially both enhance the cultural experiences of young people, while drawing them into increasingly commercial driven forms of behaviour. To what extent then can young people enact their own power and agency within this commodity culture?

7.3.2 Production from Below: A Cultural Economy of the Mobile Phone

In asserting that forces of production play a role in defining and demarcating cultural practices, we need to be wary of slipping into forms of economic or technological determinism. Certainly, factors of production have considerable power in shaping the nature of consumption; however, consumers also exercise a degree of control over their own cultural practices. Such an analysis of the consumer begins with the proposition that the meanings of commodities relate significantly to how they are understood and appropriated by users. For example, Willis' (1990) discussion of 'common culture' identifies the active participation of young people in the creation of vibrant cultural practices. As Fiske (1987) argues 'the power of the audiences-as-producers in the cultural economy is considerable'. Fiske (1987) contrasts this cultural economy, which he relates to 'meanings, pleasures and identities', with the financial economy, which relates to exchange value and monetary interests. He suggests that the consumer's limited power in the financial economy is countered by the power they wield in the cultural economy. In this way, Fiske (1987) argues, consumers are central in processes of meaning creation and cultural production.

Similarly, much mobile phone research emphasises that it is through appropriation by users that it accrues purposeful uses and meanings. As Lasen (2005: 36) observes: 'An important lesson from the history of the landline telephone is the power of users to impose their own purposes and competence, and how neglected and marginal users find successful uses, unknown or dismissed before by the experts'. Equally, the producers' preferred uses and meanings of particular commodities may also be dismissed by consumers. As Fortunati (2005: 134) asserts: 'the mobile phone is an excellent

concrete example of how users change the behaviour patterns that are inscribed in a technological device'. Many of the developments in mobile phone culture then have been 'user-directed', with the meanings and uses associated with the mobile phone resulting at least as much from consumer practices as from the preferences of producers. Returning to the example of the camera phone, while its introduction was subject to the will of producers, its social and cultural meaning is significantly directed by the manner of its use by particular groups of consumers. The camera phone has been adopted by young people into facets of their everyday experience. In this way, as I discuss in Chapter 6, it sustains forms of peer culture through acting as a means of sociable interaction, or what Reviere (2005) refers to as 'sensation-oriented' collective communities. Within the focus group discussions, the use of the mobile phone for taking pictures emerges as a social practice that unites peer groups through forms of ritual exchange and interaction:

Lisa: You can take pictures of, like, you know when you just see something really funny you're like I wish I had a camera and like you'd have your phone with you and you can just take a picture of it, or when you're going out you can take a picture of people (Group 2)

Younger users then have been especially significant in shaping perceptions and representations of the mobile phone. The use of mobile camera phones in this context now has a recognisable cultural meaning. This meaning is created through the ways in which young people make use of mobile camera phones in their daily lives. Such creative cultural consumption by young people is equally evident in the growth of text messaging. The uptake of text messaging, to the point where it has become the most used mobile phone application, can be seen as user-led rather than industry-led. Although this form of communication is now synonymous with mobile phone use, it

was not originally considered commercially viable on a large scale. The limited word count and the awkward nature of inputting text meant the format was of marginal interest to the industry. Initial promotional campaigns, therefore, positioned texting as an alternative to paging, and targeted business users. Equally, the service was available without charge. However, from the mid-1990s the use of text messaging experienced a surge, driven mainly by younger mobile phone users. Grinter and Eldridge (2001) assert that the reason for this was because texting was 'easier, quicker and cheaper'. Deeper cultural reasons can also be identified, which relate to specific youth cultural values. As established in the previous chapter, young people make use of texting primarily to sustain peer group culture and solidarity. In this way, the cultural meaning of the mobile phone is derived from its appropriation within particular contexts by particular groups of users. As I argue in the preceding chapters, this includes its central role in both family life and particularly within the context of young people's peer culture. These practices allow young people to maintain contact with friends and family, a key consideration for young people in everyday life:

Alan: It's a means of communication... It's a means of getting hold of people whenever you want, wherever you want (Group 11)

In this way, the application and understanding of the mobile phone relates the preferences of consumers themselves. Texting has been embraced by young people as its use reflects and facilitates characteristic features of youth culture, namely the emphasis on peer group interaction. As one participant succinctly notes about the usefulness of texting:

Amy: You get to keep in touch with them all day (Group 3)

Snowden (2005) draws comparisons between the role of the user in the development of texting and ringtones. She suggests that, as with texting, ringtones were not originally seen as having commercial potential, but that through their appropriation by consumers they assume significant cultural meaning. For young people, the use of ringtones is a way of expressing individuality and cultural capital, demonstrating an awareness of what's cool and what's not. As I discuss in the next section, ringtones are significant for young people as means to represent their social status. Katz and Sugiyama (2005) also identify what they term 'user enhancement' and 'personalisation' as examples of consumer creativity. They highlight how this includes colouring the phone or decorating it with stickers or pictures. However, amongst the focus group participants these appear of far less importance than, for example, texting or credit:

Interviewer: Would you get covers for your phone?

Lisa: No, not anymore; when you you're younger

Heather: Yeah, when you're younger

John: They cost so much, they cost like €15-€20 for a cover; it's ridiculous

Derek: Yeah, you're better off just buying credit (Group 2)

Young people's preferences then are based on particular sets of cultural meanings they have for them, rather than from the prescriptions of producers. As argued earlier, there is a discernible homology between young people's use of the mobile phone and the characteristic features of youth culture. This homology implies that the meanings of commodities, such as the mobile phone, relate to the deeper cultural values and ideals of users. As Willis (1990: 154) argues, in processes of meaning-making by young people 'symbolic resources should represent *homologically* some of the elements of the necessary symbolic work of the receivers already in train: they must be 'passable', relevant'. In this way, there must be a fit between particular cultural commodities and

practices and the underlying order of groups. In the context of mobile phone use, this relationship is evident in how young people exhibit a desire to be in contact with their peers and be economically prudent.

For young people then, the cultural meaning of the mobile phone relates significantly to how it corresponds to their wider concerns and ideals. This meaning is manifest in a range of cultural practices, which signify young people's peer group status and involvement, and their sense of independence and maturity. In this way, the mobile phone fits with consistent elements that characterises the experience of youth culture. Young people's practices of consumption are a significant means through which the cultural meaning of the mobile phone is shaped and defined. Accordingly, aspects of use that concern young people have become increasingly prominent in the representation of the mobile phone. Equally, the role of young people in this process of cultural production is also demonstrated by the considerable influence they exert in shaping its actual application in social life.

As discussed, much mobile phone marketing has shifted emphasis from business applications to focus on younger users (see Campbell, 2006). Derived from the ways in which young people have appropriated the mobile phone, themes of sociability, fun, and freedom have become staples in its representation. Equally, mobile phone companies have also been increasingly keen to emphasise the price of both mobile phone handsets and the range of services they offer. In this way, the preferences of younger users exert significant influence on the character of production. As one comment indicates, companies are keenly aware of appealing to younger users:

John: The guy in the Carphone Warehouse said that Meteor is definitely the cheapest for teenagers (Group 2)

In this context, the level of cultural power young people have can often have a role in shaping the manner of production. Efforts by companies to impose products on consumers have often been met with less than enthusiastic public reception. For example, the failure of WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) to meet market expectation, demonstrates the role of consumers in the success or failure of a commodity. Equally, the relatively hesitant use of mobile internet by young people is evidence of how, as Fiske (1989a) observes, the dominance of cultural producers must be questioned in the context of their inability to predict what will prove successful in the marketplace. The cultural power of consumers needs to be examined in terms of how individuals and groups make use of commodities in creative ways. However, such discussions need to push past the dualism of resistance versus incorporation.

7.3.3 'Resistance' versus 'Incorporation'

In perceiving consumer culture as a repressive instrument of ideological control, neo-Marxist theorists have often prescribed forms of resistance to oppose it. Lefebvre's writing demonstrates a sustained commitment to cultivating a process of 'disalienation'. Equally, the Situationist inspired practice of 'détournement' is seen as liberating consciousness and countering the forms of alienation created within the spectacle. These acts of subversion, however, are seen as being countered by the spectacle through acts of 'recuperation', through which creativity, dissent and opposition are assimilated and transformed into commodities. For Lefebvre (1984) this is the triumph of what he termed 'the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption', whereby everyday life is reduced to an object of social organisation. In the context of

contemporary culture, the influence of Situationist thought is evident in the 'culture jamming' movement, which proposes alternative modes of consumption in opposition to dehumanising and alienating forces of capitalism. However, the role of 'culture jamming' in constructing a lasting political alternative has been questioned, with it often seen as merely another commodity brand (see Heath and Potter, 2005).

This model shares descriptive, if not ideological, similarities with Fiske's (1989a & 1989b) notion of excorporation/incorporation. In this context, Fiske argues that, through excorporation, consumers demonstrate their power to make culture out of resources imposed by the dominant system. At the same time, he acknowledges how this then invites incorporation of these practices by dominant powers. However, Fiske has been criticised for a perceived inattention to the political economy of culture. In relation to the mobile phone, however, the example of text messaging shows how consumer power may dictate the uses and meanings of commodities, while it is also an illustration of how young people's cultural practices can swiftly be taken up by commercial concerns. While this shows how processes of excorporation/resistance and incorporation can be discerned in the example mobile phone consumption, this mode of analysis remains problematic. In particular, the distinction between resistance and incorporation too neatly distinguishes between production and consumption and views this relationship as oppositional and exploitative.

Similarly, discussions of youth consumption often belabour the point about young people's 'resistance' versus the 'incorporation' of these cultural practices by a negative mainstream. This emphasis is most pronounced within subcultural theory, which establishes a distinction between what it sees as forms of authentic working-class

resistance as against the conformism of mass culture. In particular, the stress on the perceived political and class-oriented character of subcultural groups suggests that they exist in opposition to mainstream culture. Ultimately, however, this approach offers an overly simplistic reading of the relationship between young people and consumer culture. Carter (1984), for example, accuses subcultural theory of ‘standing on the sidelines of consumer culture’, and suggests the need to examine the ways in which ‘teenage lifestyles’ are assembled as commodities, and deconstructed and reassembled by young people themselves. Similarly, Clarke (1981) asserts that youth cultural practices are more complex than dichotomies such as authentic/mainstream, resistance/incorporation allow for. He calls instead for an approach that treats ‘the breakthrough of style as its starting point’. These critiques of subcultural theory propose then an examination of what Willis (1990) refers to as young people’s ‘meaningful symbolic work’, and, in particular, the meaning that these cultural practices have for young people themselves; themes subsequently addressed and developed in the context of post-subcultural theory.

However, aspects of post-subcultural theory have at times been stricken with a similar preoccupation with notions of cultural authenticity. In its incipient form, post-subcultural theory often positioned dance music culture as initially authentic, independent and politically radical prior to its incorporation into the mainstream. However, both Thornton (1995) and Gilbert and Pearson (1999), in their respective discussions of dance music, refute the notion of a unified mainstream against which subcultural groups form. Alternatively, they suggest young people’s relationships with media and consumer culture is more complex. Thornton (1995), for example, stresses

young people's active involvement with media and popular culture. Gilbert and Pearson (1999) similarly argue that subcultural groups do not necessarily exist in opposition to or outside of mass media and culture. Adopting the concept of 'articulation' from Laclau and Mouffe, Gilbert and Pearson (1999) dispense with metaphors of winning and losing, and move away from questions of how cultural formations oppose, determine and incorporate each other. Instead they propose, using the example of dance music, that 'it is not a simple question of dance culture being 'for' or 'against' the dominant culture, but of how far its articulations with other discourses and cultures (dominant or otherwise) result in *democratizations* of the cultural field, how far they successfully break down existing concentrations of power, and how far they fail to do so' (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999: 160).

The issue then isn't about the extent to which youth cultural formations offer a politics of resistance, but to what extent they can be seen as having power within the cultural field. This involves examining the relationship between production and consumption not as oppositional but in terms of how they link and interact. In this context, youth culture can be seen as arising from its construction in the market, the cultural practices of young people and the relationship between same. The production of mobile phone culture is a pertinent example of this process. It is not necessarily a case of young people having particular cultural meanings imposed on them, nor is it simply a case of them existing free of constraints or limits. As the preceding discussion demonstrates, young people's use of the mobile phone both defines and is defined by its cultural production. Consumption and production then are not separate processes, but are dynamic and interactional. As Katz and Sugiyama (2005: 79) identify, the mobile

phone is the subject to the 'co-creation of public meaning', through which they make a 'precise connection between an industrial ethos (marketing a futuristic status symbol) and the popular reception and co-creation of a communication technology'.

While Gilbert and Pearson (1999) retain a focus on the existence of a transformative cultural politics, 'democratizations of the cultural field' can also occur in often quite subtle ways. While, it would certainly be an overstatement to assert that, for the most part, young people's use of the mobile phone constitutes a form of political praxis, these practices are a means through which young people negotiate everyday life and demonstrate creativity and agency. Specifically, young people have appropriated the mobile phone for the purpose of negotiating power relationships and developing an independent identity. It is used in often unique and inventive ways, which reflect the concerns of young people themselves. For example, in family life participants indicate how they make use of the mobile phone to both preserve a sense of connection with their parents, while also to demonstrate their own growing sense of independence. Equally significantly, the mobile phone is immersed in the forms of sociability and neo-tribal sociality that characterises youth peer groups. Young people have actively appropriated the mobile phone into these contexts in ways that demonstrates the importance of cultural consumption within their everyday lives and its role in the expression of cultural agency. In this way, mobile phone culture, while undoubtedly subject to forms of commodification, can provide a site of cultural power for young people. The issue then is not about cultural victories and defeats, but how everyday cultural practices can both reinforce and undermine systems of power and control.

Crucially, I argue, there is a need to consider then the meaning specific practices have for young people themselves.

7.4 Everyday Life and Cultural Agency

As discussed in Chapter 3, Schilling (2003) notes that while Lefebvre sought to invent everyday life, de Certeau sought the invention that everyday life reveals. This difference derives from the distinction between Lefebvre's explicitly political project of social and cultural transformation and de Certeau's interest in the ordinary and the habitual. Lefebvre's characterisation of everyday life as a 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption' is in stark contrast then with de Certeau's (1984) assertion that everyday life is a site of vibrant cultural activity. For de Certeau (1984), emphasising the primacy of commodity logic in shaping consumption underestimates the subject of the consumer. Following this, recent reflections on consumption generally, and youth culture in particular, have privileged discussions of consumer agency. Rather than being merely passively controlled by the forces of consumerism, consumers are characterised as possessing a greater degree of power and creativity. As Featherstone (1991: 22) asserts, consumer culture is a site of 'dreams, images and pleasures', which provide 'transgression, protest, the carnivalesque and liminal excesses'. This emphasis on consumption as meaningful and fulfilling can be aligned with broader issues of identity and power. Increasingly, studies of consumption have dispensed with discussions of the structural constraints that limit individual action, in favour of examining how consumers make use of cultural goods, appropriating them to their own ends. Similarly, youth cultural research has become distinctly less interested in how

cultural practices are shaped by young people's marginalisation and powerlessness, and more by how cultural practices are a means through which young people actively deal with these issues.

For example, Willis (1990) discusses how young people's cultural consumption is a way in which they actively participate in the construction of everyday life and provides a means for creating group solidarity and cohesion. He argues that young people make use of commodities in ways that extend beyond their meaning in the circulation of capital. Willis (1990) asserts that this is a matter of 'cultural survival' for young people; a way in which they deal with the uncertainty that characterises their social position. This is accomplished through the practices of 'symbolic creativity' and 'grounded aesthetics'. These are part of the symbolic work that young people engage in and through which individual and collective identities are produced and reproduced. Leisure and commercial commodities are the resources for this symbolic work. For Willis then, consumer culture is not purely a site of exploitation and manipulation but an arena in which young people can engage in active and creative cultural practices. This appropriation of commodities allows young people to construct vibrant symbolic worlds and confront and make sense of the contradictions they encounter in their everyday lives.

In this section, I examine aspects of this meaningful symbolic work that young people are engaged in. Firstly, through the concept of lifestyle, I address the role of mobile phone consumption in the creation of individual and group identities. I argue that while issues of class difference appear less significant in shaping young people's cultural consumption than, for example, subcultural theory suggests, the notion of status

remains an important one. Through their use of the mobile phone young people express both their individuality and their place within the peer group. Equally, young people make use of the mobile phone in ways that constructs forms of difference between themselves and both younger and older age groups. Subsequently, I address the 'active' character of young people's cultural consumption, with particular reference to de Certeau's concepts of tactics and strategies. De Certeau's ideas provide a framework that shows how consumers can create meaningful social and cultural action within the dominant order. I conclude by arguing that this cultural power is better characterised as a form of resilience, rather than resistance, through which young people are actively involved in the construction of their everyday lives and the negotiation of their social position.

7.4.1 Lifestyle, Status and the Cultural Value of the Mobile Phone

The concept of 'lifestyle' is one that directly connects theories of consumer culture and theories of youth culture. In both contexts, the term has slipped the bonds of its origins as a structurally determined configuration to represent, in Featherstone's (1991: 83) terms, 'individuality, self-expression and a stylistic self-consciousness'. Featherstone (1991) aligns this shift to three interrelated processes: first, the collapse of the distinction between high culture and popular culture; second, the aestheticisation of everyday life; and third, the rise of the new petit bourgeoisie as cultural intermediaries. These processes refer more generally to the idea of the 'cultural turn', wherein culture assumes primacy within social life. In this context, Chaney (1996) asserts that traditional forms of structural difference are waning – what Giddens (1991) refers to as

a 'post-traditional order'. In particular, Chaney (1996) criticises Bourdieu's (1984) use of the term lifestyle to connote structurally determined formations. By contrast, Chaney (1996: 97) proposes that lifestyles are 'displays of consumer competence', which are expressed within ongoing creative projects the purpose of which is to complete the self. He contrasts this with 'ways of life' which are 'associated with a more or less stable community displayed in features such as shared norms, rituals, patterns of social order and probably a distinctive dialect or speech community' (Chaney, 1996: 92). For Chaney (1996), these 'ways of life' rather than disappearing are reorganised through new patterns of choice that characterise particular lifestyles.

In line with its growing emphasis on cultural agency, youth cultural research has adopted the concept of 'lifestyle' to describe how the cultural identities, of both individuals and groups, are formed. While the term 'lifestyle' is often associated with discussions of individualism and self-identity, both Bennett (1999) and Hetherington (1992) suggest it has a continuity with Maffesoli's concept of 'neo-tribes', particularly as both share an emphasis on the fluidity of social and cultural relations. Similarly, Reimer (1995) suggests that the term can be used to analyse both individual lifestyles and their relationship to broader groups. He argues that while individuals make particular lifestyle choices they do so in relation to others. As Reimer (1995: 125) concludes: 'Analyses of lifestyles should therefore often address similarities and differences between *groups* of individuals rather than towards similarities and differences between individuals'.

In the preceding chapters, I argue that young people make use of the mobile phone in ways that allow them to construct and perform aspects of their individual and group

identities. Their use of the mobile phone reflects their desire to create an independent identity, which is less defined and restricted by parental control. Equally, it allows them to retain ties to parents and family, while also providing a means for the construction of their peer culture. The mobile phone then assumes cultural significance for young people through its use in these contexts, with this cultural consumption contributing to its configuration as a symbol of maturity and independence. The mobile phone also provides a means of demarcating forms of social difference and distinction. In particular, young people make use of the mobile phone in ways that distinguishes them from other groups, specifically adults and younger children. The issue of lifestyle relates then to notions of status, sameness and difference. In this way, it captures the parallel tendencies towards individual identity and group belonging, indicating how cultural consumption can provide satisfaction to both impulses. Through their lifestyle choices, consumers are engaged in constructing both their own self-identity as well as identifying themselves as part of a group.

Alongside its 'social value', Green (2003) argues that, particularly for young people, the mobile phone has a 'cultural value', which accrues in relation to its aesthetic qualities. She asserts that having the 'right' mobile phone confers social status and distinction upon its owner. For young people then, their consumption of the mobile phone is a way in which they pursue individual identity while concurrently aligning themselves with their social group. As Simmel (1905) observes, fashion is characterised by forms of imitation and differentiation, or generalisation and specialisation, which relate to the wish for individuals to stand apart while simultaneously resolving themselves within the social group. Fashion then is generated

by this tension between social norms and individual ideals. In this context, the style and design of the mobile phone can often be a significant concern for young people, as a means for this imitation and differentiation (see, for example, Katz and Sugiyama, 2005; Alexander, 2000). Certainly, the focus group discussions do reveal that, to some extent, these issues are important. In the previous, section I show how young people often express a desire for a new, up-to-date mobile phone; and as one participant succinctly sums up:

Grace: 'Cause if you have an old banger of a phone you get terrible stick off people (Group 9)

However, while this 'cultural value' is important for young people, there is a negotiation between being up-to-date and fashionable against being over-the-top and ostentatious. As Ling and Yttri (2002: 164) suggest: 'there is a fine balance to be struck. One must be savvy in terms of the appropriate models and styles... one needs to know the appropriate way to carry the device... [and] the line beyond which beyond which expensive devices are seen as conspicuous display'. Reflecting this, the focus group participants appear quite pragmatic in terms of their preferences, with most indicating that they want a fairly up-to-date mobile phone without being necessarily being preoccupied by aspects of style or design, for example:

Diane: A good phone – newish – like a modern one, not a big brick thing that they used to have (Group 10)

Similarly, in the survey, respondents largely disagree with the notion that mobile phone is important to them as a fashion item. As Table 7.1 shows, the majority of respondents (76.7%) disagree with the statement that it's 'important for mobile phone to fit in with

my clothes and style’. Equally, most respondents disagree (63.9%) that it’s ‘important to have the newest technology’. A majority of respondents (58.4%) also disagree that they ‘like showing people features of my phone’. A slightly higher proportion of respondents, 40.8%, agree with the statement ‘I often change ringtones/covers/logos on my phone’; although over half, 51.7%, disagree. These responses indicate then that notions of fashion and style are not necessarily central concerns for young people in relation to their use of the mobile phone. By contrast, 76.1% of respondents agree that ‘the mobile phone is fun to have and use’. This suggests that for young people the meaning of the mobile phone more readily relates to the types of cultural practices it can allow for.

Table 7.1 The Role of the Mobile Phone as a Fashion Item

	Agree	Disagree	Don’t Know
Important for mobile to fit in with my clothes and style	14.6% (72)	76.7% (378)	6.1% (30)
Important to have the newest technology	23.7% (117)	63.9% (315)	9.7% (48)
I like showing people features of my mobile phone	30.2% (149)	58.4% (288)	8.5% (42)
I often change ringtone, covers, logos on my phone	40.8% (201)	51.7% (255)	4.7% (23)
The mobile phone is fun to have and use	76.1% (375)	14% (69)	7.3% (36)

These findings are reflected in the focus group discussions where participants suggest that while fashion is sometimes a consideration it is not their major concern or interest. Overall, participants do not appear preoccupied with the mobile phone as a fashion item.

However, there is some indication that its aesthetic character retains some importance for them. As one participant observes:

Elaine: It's nice to have like a nice cover on it or a nice phone or whatever, but it doesn't really matter (Group 6)

The mobile phone's diminishing role as a fashion item is at least partly related to it being increasingly commonplace. As it become ubiquitous, having one does not necessarily have the same role as a status symbol it once held. In the focus groups, participants indicate that when they first got a mobile phone it was considered quite fashionable, however, over time its novelty value has been replaced by an understanding of it as a normal, yet necessitous, part of their everyday lives:

Lara: When they first came out I think it was probably cool but now it's just normal (Group 7)

In this context, the mobile phone has lost its initial lustre as an icon of style for young people. One reason for this is that mobile phones are often fairly comparable in terms of design and features with most young people having similar makes or models:

Damian: Now they're all decent phones so it doesn't really matter, at the start you had these massive yokes (Group 1)

Nevertheless, as discussed, many of the focus group participants voice a wish to have a camera phone. In this way, the style and design of the mobile phone retains some degree of importance for young people. However, as one participant observes:

Elaine: You can't really buy ones without cameras anymore... Well there's a few, but most of them are kinda crap (Group 6)

In this context, we can see how for young people the camera phone has a certain cultural value. With the increasing convergence of digital and media technologies, the camera phone assumes an important role in that it allows for taking pictures and video clips that can be shared with friends or uploaded to social networking sites. In this way, the mobile phone is valued less for its design features and more for its role in peer culture. As Fortunati (2003) suggests, of greater significance than its aesthetic characteristics is the mobile phone's place within the 'aesthetic of communication'. By this, she means the role of the mobile phone in managing interpersonal relationships; and, in particular, how value of the mobile phone for young people resides increasingly in its ability to facilitate forms of interaction and its use for enacting their own cultural imperatives. For example, I argue in the previous chapter that the mobile phone has particular significance within young people's peer group relationships. The social and symbolic value it accrues in this context is more important than its fashionable or stylistic characteristics. As one participant elaborates, the value of the mobile phone derives primarily from its ability to provide them with a means of communication:

Rachel: 'Cause it's a phone! It's working; you only need to text and make calls. You don't want all sorts of crap on it that you're never going to use (Group 7)

While the role of the mobile phone as a fashion statement then has waned, its cultural value is revealed in more subtle ways by the focus group participants. Ringtones provide a pertinent example of how young people's consumption of the mobile phone is a means through which they express both individual and group status. As one participant proclaims:

Alison: Ah, you have to have them, 'cause you can't sit on the bus with a big Nokia tone, you'd be 'scarlet'! (Group 8)

For young people then, the cultural value of ringtones resides in its ability to make visible forms of social status and difference. In this regard, it conforms to a type of 'cultural capital', through which young people display their style and taste. It is part of the ways in which young people make use of the mobile phone to register forms of social identification and difference. For example, young people use them to differentiate themselves from older people and, in particular, their parents:

Interviewer: So you wouldn't have just a regular ringtone?

Samantha: No, they're for moms and dads and things (Group 1)

Equally, ringtones as a form of display are a way for young people to express particular cultural preferences and create their own sense of self-identity. As one participant observes, her choice of ringtone reflects her taste in music, allowing her to express particular cultural preferences as part of the construction of her self-identity:

Rachel: I get ones from bands I like... making a statement kinda (Group 7)

In this context, the mobile phone provides a means through which young people create and sustain both individual and group identities. More generally, the concept of lifestyle provides a means to understand how young people make use of the mobile phone to exercise cultural agency and independence. While the mobile phone doesn't conform to a unified youth lifestyle, it acts as a way through which particular lifestyle choices and preferences can be expressed. It is part of a range of ways through which young people express forms of their self expression and cultural identities. This use of the mobile phone, therefore, demonstrates how young people actively and creatively appropriate and employ commodities in everyday life. In particular, the example of the

mobile phone shows how young people respond to their often marginal social position and enact forms of power. In this context, how young people make use of the mobile phone can be viewed as forms of ‘symbolic creativity’ and ‘grounded aesthetics’, through which they form and carry out particular identities and makes sense of the contradictions that exist for them in everyday life.

7.4.2 The Tactics and Strategies of Mobile Phone Use

Expressing ideas that would later be echoed in the work of Fiske and Willis, de Certeau (1984), in focusing on the subtle acts of creativity that exist within everyday life, identifies a secondary production called consumption. This ‘poiesis’ is revealed through ‘ways of using’, by which ‘users make (bricolent) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules’. De Certeau (1984) describes then how ‘users’ make use of goods in ways that contradict the common assumption of them as passive and guided by established rules. It is worth reminding ourselves that de Certeau (1984: xiv) is not concerned with how power is deposed but rather with ‘how an entire society resists being reduced [to]... the grid of “discipline” [that] is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive’. The subtle actions, which provide the backcloth of everyday life, are a means to ‘escape without leaving... the dominant social order’ (de Certeau, 1984: xiii).

This orientation is given weight by the relationship de Certeau identifies between the concepts of tactics and strategies. For de Certeau, a ‘strategy’ is a function of place that operates as a spatially determined locus of power. Composed around a formal

character of particular operations, it requires a certain manner of strategic thinking to produce a place. In contrast, a 'tactic' is denuded of place-centredness, defined by mobility and 'the absence of a proper locus'. For de Certeau (1984: 37), tactics then 'make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the propriety powers'. In short, the tactics of the weak are used to evade the strategies of the strong. While this terminology implies a conflictual relationship, de Certeau's writing is animated, not with instance of explicitly revolutionary acts, but with illustrations of habitual and prosaic practices, such as talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.

While different forms and logics are at work within strategies and tactics, rather than being directly confrontational, they can be seen as simultaneous impulses that interact to produce friction in everyday life. Tactics then are not the direct opposite of strategies, but are the inventive use of possibilities within strategic contexts. A key point being that tactics do not operate external of strategies, rather they are the 'other' inside, that which escapes, without leaving, the dominant social order. I argue that the ways in which young people make use of the mobile phone can be read, in de Certeau's terms, as tactical manoeuvres used to elude and evade particular power arrangements. These ordinary, and seemingly trivial, acts show how they appropriate and make use of the cultural objects at their disposal in a range of active everyday practices. In general, the ways in which young people make use of the mobile phone in the construction of everyday life is an example of tactics writ large, in that it demonstrates '*ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order*' (xiii).

More specifically, the ‘parent-management strategies’ identified by Green (2002) are examples of the tactics employed by young people in their everyday lives. Young people make use of the mobile phone to evade parental intrusion and surveillance. This can include not answering their phone when their parents call, or giving misinformation about their location and activities. One participant identified a further example of eluding parental supervision and control:

Miriam: I know a girl whose mobile was taken off her by her parents for like there was kind of a big thing and they took it off her anyway. But, ah, she kept the SIM card unknown to her parents and she got a phone like off her friend and her parents didn’t know that she had a phone the whole time... (Group 6)

These practices constitute tactical manoeuvres through which young people are able to evade forms of power and control imposed on them. Here I focus on the example of the school, wherein the ‘tactical’ use of the mobile phone is evident (see also O’Brien, 2009; Talyor, 2005). Young people’s use of the mobile phone subverts the explicit order of the classroom, redirecting their attention away from the prescribed content of the topic in progress. This represents the deployment of tactical manoeuvres within the mechanisms of control imposed by the school. This strategic logic of the school is, in many respects, self-evident. Aside from the ethos of education, the school has a monitoring and controlling function. Schools manage students both spatially and temporally, through division into classrooms, seating arrangements, timetables, uniforms, etc. These impose a specific set of controls that order and determine students’ actions, freedom of movement, and control over time.

The use of the mobile phone represents a challenge to this form of institutional management and control. As Geser (2005) observes, the mobile phone facilitates

interpersonal communication and encourages processes of 'disintermediation', leading to a diminution of institutional controls and boundaries. For example, as I argue in Chapter 6, young people make use of the mobile phone to pursue greater independence from parents. Equally, beneath the surface order of the school lies a subterranean culture of feints and ruses deployed as a means through which young people enact their agency. In this context, the mobile phone provides a distraction that interferes with the smooth running of the school, by challenging the monitoring and control of students. Establishing rules around the use of the mobile phone have been a test for school authorities. While schools prohibit its use in the classroom, some of the schools in this research allow the mobile phone to be used during lunch breaks:

Interviewer: Would you bring it [mobile phone] to school?

Anne: Yeah, we can use them at lunch, but you're not supposed to use them during class (Group 7)

However, as I show below, young people's use of the mobile phone extends beyond these prescribed times and spaces. The allowance for their use within school can be explained, in part, by the fact that parents want their child to have a mobile phone for the purposes of safety and availability. As noted, parents are a key reason for young people's acquisition of the mobile phone. Accordingly, many parents insist on young people having their mobile phone with them in school. School authorities must then try to accommodate this into their policies; for example, by allowing the use of the mobile phone on school grounds at specific times (e.g. lunch breaks). As one focus group highlights, some schools require students to have a note from their parents, if they are to have their mobile phone with them:

Interviewer: What are the rules of the school?

Paul: You're allowed have a phone if like...
Jennifer [interrupting]: If you get something signed
Paul: Yeah, if you get a note from your parents like say you can have it
Ciarán: You can have it "on" though (Group 6)

In enforcing these rules, schools will often have sanctions that prescribe confiscation and informing the students parents if they are caught using a mobile phone in class:

Interviewer: What is the policy in the school?
Joe: You can have your phone with you, but if it goes off in class it's confiscated and your parents have to come in and collect it (Group 4)

While schools then often have specific guidelines in relation to the use of the mobile phone, young people demonstrate a repertoire of actions that allows them negotiate within these controls or evade them altogether. For example, participants discuss how the enforcement of school policy is not always to the letter, with the implementation of school rules carried out differently by different teachers:

Interviewer: What's the teacher's reaction?
Paul: If the phone goes off the teachers' just go "Ah, turn it off!", or some of the stricter ones will just take it away
Interviewer: Do they enforce the rule strictly?
Derek: Some do, some don't
John: It depends on the teacher (Group 2)

Participants are aware then of how teachers have discretionary power in relation to school rules, with many choosing not to implement them. In this context, young people display an ability to identify and exploit weakness and lapses within the institutional control of the school:

Interviewer: What happens if the teacher catches you?
Rachel: They just take it off you
Interviewer: When do you get them back?
Rachel: You get them back at the end of the year, or the end of term
Suzanne: Well they say the end of the year, but you would get them back if you ask

Rachel: Yeah, if you go up

Noreen: If you go up and ask... They'll give it back (Group 7)

Young people then display a keen awareness of how the seemingly rigid controls of the school can be rendered more plastic within the classroom setting. They identify the spaces within institutional control that allow for negotiation and subversion, and, as de Certeau states, 'accept the chance offerings of the moment':

Miriam: Some teachers you'd get away with it kind of, they'd just be like 'Put that away' or 'You're not supposed to have a phone on you'

Paul: They might take it off you for a day or something...

Ciarán: I was caught last week

Interviewer: And was it taken off you?

Ciarán: Yeah, but he [the teacher] gave it back to me at the end of class so it was alright

Paul: Some wouldn't give it back though

Interviewer: So would they be that strict about it?

Miriam: No, not really

Interviewer: So they'd just say to put it away?

Paul: It just depends on the teacher, you'd know the ones' that'd like let you away with and the ones that wouldn't (Group 6)

In this way, young people are able to isolate those teachers that are more lenient and less likely to impose the officially prescribed disciplinary measures. Within the strategic space of the school then, there exists room in which young people make tactical raids to assert their own power and agency. These everyday practices allow them to manoeuvre within the constraints imposed by particular relationships of power. Young people make use of the mobile phone to 'accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment' (de Certeau, 1984: 37)

This use of the mobile phone promotes a culture of concealed use, through which young people evade monitoring within the classroom. The precise manner of this use

captures a further example of how young people 'poach' moments from within the confines of institutional control. In the focus group discussions, participants describe how they can make use of the mobile phone beyond the surveillance of the teacher:

Claire: Somebody rang me the other day and I'm sitting here [in class] with my jacket in front of me and Miss C. [teacher] is talking and doesn't even notice. I was actually sitting behind Samantha, and I was sitting there and going 'Ring me back in a minute', and she didn't even notice (Group 8)

The size of the mobile phone facilitates the enactment of this covert interaction, allowing for its use in close proximity to teachers without being seen. This use of the mobile phone then involves subtlety of movement and gesture in order to avoid detection. As one focus group participant observes:

Claire: It's a bit obvious when you're sitting there like that [holds her mobile phone on top of the desk] (Group 8)

However, participants demonstrate that they are able to use their mobile phone in the classroom by keeping hidden, for example, under their desk. Even within the relatively confined space of the classroom, young people are able to make use of the mobile phone with apparent ease:

Darren: You'd just have it on your lap [demonstrates]

Síobhan: Yeah [laughs]

Darren: Most people can text without looking at their phone (Group 5)

Indeed, anecdotally teachers acknowledged to me that it is often not possible to strictly enforce mobile-related rules because of students' ability to avoid teachers' supervision even within the confines of the class. These accounts reflect participants' comments about how they use the mobile phone in the classroom setting, which sees them operate within the view but out of sight of authority. As one participant comments:

Ciara: They know you have it [mobile phone] like (Group 9)

The motivation for using the mobile phone in class is explained amongst the focus group participants by feelings of 'boredom' and the desire to immerse themselves in the more pleasurable realm of peer interaction. Taylor (2005), in his discussion of 'classroom talk', highlights that this impetus is seen by young people as a 'legitimate reason' for using the mobile phone in school. This use of the mobile phone within the classroom is allied to the impulse to rescue time from the grip of repetitive routine. These practices are ways to alleviate the perceived tedium of the school day. Within the order of the classroom then, there exist forms of disorder that remain out of reach of full control:

Interviewer: Would you use them in class?

Sarah: Yeah

David: Yeah I do, if you get bored you just send a text message (Group 1)

An analogous reason for this behaviour is young people's orientation towards the more pleasurable realm of peer interaction. Regardless of the setting, young people exhibit a desire to remain connected to friends. The mobile phone breaks down previously static boundaries to communication imposed by the school, allowing for continual interaction to take place:

Interviewer: Why would you use them in class?

Catherine: Cause if you get a text

Diana: You could get a message and you can text people (Group 10)

In this context, the use of the mobile phone can be as a new form of the age-old practice of passing notes in class (see Ling, 2004). While the mobile phone transforms aspects of contemporary social life, it is also then a medium for traditional social practices:

Lauren: Like say she was sitting across the way from me I'd text her
Gráinne: We're not allowed to talk, so we just text each other (Group 9)

This behaviour then subverts the control of the school and the teacher, allowing young people space to exercise their cultural power. However, while the use of the mobile phone in school is a breach of specific rules, it does not disrupt mechanisms of authority to the point of dissolution. Such tactics are, in de Certeau's terms, 'the other inside'. In this way, they are internalised within the order of the school. As the comments above show, teachers often accept that young people will use the mobile phone in school and in the classroom. Equally, parents are well aware of how young people will make use of the mobile phone to avoid monitoring and surveillance. In this context, these practices are brief moments that operate in the blindspot of institutional control. They are not necessarily synonymous with opposition, but can be more readily viewed as sets of clandestine inventions that insinuate themselves into the current of domination. As Highmore (2002) notes, tactics and strategies fold back on one other, with each fully understood only in relationship to the other. In this context, as I argue above, the notion of 'resistance' is especially problematic. I therefore propose that young people's cultural practices are better understood as forms of resilience within persistent forms of control, whether that be parents, school or top-down corporate culture, rather than as oppositional forms of resistance.

7.4.3 The 'Resilience' of Youth Culture

Young people's use of the mobile phone demonstrates their active participation in the creation of their everyday lives. They are immersed in what Willis (1990) terms 'meaningful symbolic work'. While this then shows the level of power young people

have in the cultural economy, it needs to be considered in relation to broader issues of power in society. This power to shape cultural practices and define cultural meaning, while significant, does not necessarily mean that it provides young people with space to create engaged or political forms of resistance and change. While the mobile phone has been deployed for politically resistant activities, in general its use in young people's everyday lives is rarely explicitly politically motivated. In this way, how young people make use of the mobile phone constitutes 'semiotic power' rather than 'social power'. For Fiske (1987), this semiotic power relates to the ability to actively create cultural meaning and identities, whereas social power refers to the transformation of the socio-economic system. While Fiske characterises the exercising of semiotic power as a form of cultural resistance, as McGuigan (1992) argues the degree to which such practices offer an effective means of combating forms of exploitation and oppression is questionable.

A difficulty then with the term 'resistance', is that its use in describing an increasingly broad range of practices characterises these practices as political, often without distinction. While I argue here that young people display levels of cultural agency and creativity, this should not imply that this obviates continued and persistent forms of control as acting upon them. For example, Clarke (2002: 293) observes that while the shift from viewing consumers as cultural 'dupes' is welcome, he argues that envisioning 'guerrilla armies of cultural activists seems excessively celebratory'. Amidst the assertions of consumption as individualised and liberating, therefore, we should not lose sight of how young people's access to cultural goods and services remains dictated to by structured forms of wealth, access and opportunity. In this

context, both Blackman (2005) and Hesmondhalgh (2005) are critical of the use of the concept in youth cultural research, arguing that it overstates levels of choice and creativity and underestimates forms of marginality and exclusion. While the participants in this research demonstrate levels of cultural agency and power, the underlying structures of power that shape their experiences retain their robustness. This can be the continuance of parental or school authority, or, indeed, broader forms of social difference and stratification.

Nevertheless, as Bennett (2005) argues, structural constraints do not act as 'dead weights' on young people and that their involvement in cultural consumption provides a way for 'creatively resisting the circumstances of their everyday lives'. For example, I argue that young people's use of the mobile phone in, for example, relationships with parents and school provides an important means through which they assert and express power in circumstances where they might traditionally have little. However, as Miles (2002) argues, while young people's cultural consumption contributes to their self-identity, such lifestyle choices are constrained by various forces in their everyday lives. These constraints range from economic and social marginalisation to peer and commercial pressures. Certainly, the example of the mobile phone demonstrates how young people make use of commodities in often creative, unique and significant ways. However, these cultural practices do not erase deeper forms of difference and more prolonged forces of marginalisation.

Equally, cultural activity is significantly determined by aspects of production. While lifestyle choices can be seen as forms of individual creativity, they remain subject to the influence of what Featherstone (1991) refers to as 'new cultural intermediaries'. As

Chaney (1996: 96) identifies, there has been ‘an enormous growth in the size and range of institutional significance of a social stratum of experts or intellectuals’, which retain a significant influence over individual lifestyle projects. As I discuss above, the role of cultural production in co-opting and defining young people’s cultural lives is a significant one. A range of uses associated with the mobile phone are increasingly the focus of intense advertising and marketing. Texting and ringtones have become especially prominent sources of revenue for mobile phone companies. Young people, however, display an awareness of how the marketing of the mobile phone has an influence over them:

Suzanne: You know as soon as you buy one new model of phone give it three weeks and there’ll be another new one out... Every week there’s some new thing, like now the iPod is big and everyone is getting iPod’s so like the phone was like that for a while but now I think it’s just normal (Group 7)

As the mobile phone has become more prevalent young people can be seen as ‘savvy’ in relation to their practices of consumption. In this context then, traditional models of cultural pessimism, which characterise the consumer as a passive victim of capitalism, appear unsustainable. At the very least, we need to account for the increasing ability of consumers to be aware of and engage with commercial interests. In relation to young people’s use of the mobile phone, participants demonstrate an awareness of the monetary aspects of their consumption. For example, very often, considerations of style are weighed against other concerns, particularly price. As discussed earlier, young people are very conscious of the cost of their mobile phone use, particularly in relation to their personal finances. Equally, when asked about the factors they consider important when choosing a mobile phone, 49.1% of survey respondents indicate that

price is the most important factor, followed by make/model (23.1%) and newest technology (21.9%) (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Factors in Choosing a New Mobile Phone

	most important	Important	neither important/unimportant	unimportant/least important
Price	242 (49.1%)	128 (26%)	86 (17.4%)	18 (3.6%)
Make/model	114 (23.1%)	195 (39.6%)	139 (28.2%)	24 (4.9%)
Newest Technology	108 (21.9%)	137 (27.8%)	168 (34.1%)	55 (11.2%)

In this way, young people, without necessarily directly challenging or eroding deeper structures of power, can carry their own values and preferences through their cultural practices and demonstrate their capacity as active consumers. As Oksman and Rautiainen (2003: 300) argue: ‘they [teenagers] emphasize the functional value, the quality, and durability of the mobile phone and strive to minimize their bills’. This pragmatism is especially evident in relation to ringtones. While above I suggest the role of ringtones in young people’s identity, focus group participants are vocal in avoiding paying for them. As one participant observes, the cheaper way is to get them from friends:

Paul: I’ve never bought ringtones, I just get them off people (Group 6)

Similarly, in another group, participants assert how cost shapes this decision making process:

Ciara: you wouldn’t pay for them though

Grace: no I just wait for people to send them to me (Group 9)

While participants express an interest in having and using different ringtones, they are explicit in not wanting to incur any cost for them. As one participant observes, while

he gets ringtones, he does not pay for them, an assertion that emerges throughout the focus group discussions:

John: If I hear one that I like that's really cool and my friend has it I'll tell him send that one to me or I wouldn't go and buy it off the internet or off the TV or something or off a magazine, they cost like €3 or something (Group 2)

This example shows how young people actively engage with consumer culture. While being thoroughly immersed in practices of consumption, they can still carve out spaces that can subvert the dominant economic system. Rather than offering resistance against top-down corporate culture, such practices demonstrate their resilience within it. This again represents how young people can 'escape without leaving' the dominant social order. Young people's use of the mobile phone is a means of existing within the context of dominant power arrangements. These cultural practices then are a crucial way in which young people soften the often harsh edges of everyday life. This extends beyond their relationship to the dominant economic system to include the ways in which they interact with figures of power and authority that they encounter in their everyday lives.

Through their use of the mobile phone within family and school young people are able to create significant space for social and cultural independence. However, while these practices are often characterised as forms of 'resistance', they do not necessarily work towards dissolving prevalent and existing institutions and relationships. These 'tactics' become part of, rather than oppositional towards, everyday life. While their use of the mobile phone gives them room to carve out an independent identity, the power of parents remains intact. As Taylor (2005: 163) observes, such behaviour constitutes 'localized acts of subversion', which, rather than being subversive in the broad political

sense, are 'locally assembled resistance against an established set of social structures or "rules"'. Rather than liberating young people from forms of control, these cultural practices offer temporary escape within the context of everyday life. They are, de Certeau suggests, part of an 'other order' that exists hidden within forms of discipline and control.

While young people's use of the mobile phone may appear inconsequential, particularly in terms of its content, the cultural practices it involves are an important part of how everyday life is created and sustained. The use of the mobile phone is a means through which social relationships are mediated and produced. These uses operate within contexts of dominant power relationships, but are marked a particular logic of their own. The ways in which young people make use of the mobile phone produces and reproduces the codes and gestures of youth culture. These practices are part of a broader totality of customs that are played out by young people, which register a shared set of dispositions and preferences. In this context, they make up part of the broader cultural field, rather than existing external to it.

7.5 Conclusion

The cultural consumption of the mobile phone involves a range of overlapping and competing processes. The cultural meanings associated with the mobile phone emerge both from its production, marketing and representation, as well as the ways in which it is used by consumers. I argue that understanding the production of these cultural meanings necessitates an analysis of both the political economy and cultural economy. However, these spheres operate not in isolation or opposition but simultaneously. The

creation of cultural meanings emerges forms a 'loop' between forces of production and practices of consumption. In the case of the mobile phone, both producers and consumers have a significant role in establishing sets of social and cultural practices, values and meanings. While marketing establishes and prescribes ways of using, it is through consumption that the use of the mobile phone is invented and assembled. To a certain extent this level of cultural power is undercut by the ability of the market to reappropriate and repackage these practices as commodified forms – witness the example of texting. However, I argue that this relationship is more complex than the model of 'resistance' versus 'incorporation' suggests. In the context of youth cultural consumption, I suggest that emphasising the extent of young people's levels or lack of political resistance is often unhelpful. What is required is a closer examination of how young people make use of particular goods and commodities, and the meaning these practices have for young people themselves in the context of everyday life. While this affords them a degree of cultural power, which forms an important part of youth cultural life, this power needs to be situated in relation to broader structures of society. However, the shift in focus away from debates about forms of resistance and opposition allows for an understanding of how young people possess and enact cultural agency, even within the constraints imposed by consumer society. This is not to suggest that social location and forms of social difference, such as class or gender, do not serve to shape and define young people's everyday lives. For example, socio-economic status can significantly restrict the ability of young people to access modes and sites of consumption. However, as Bennett (2005) observes, they do not act as 'dead weights' on young people. Certainly, everyday life, and most especially the ways in which we

experience and are subjected to particular forms of social organisation, are indelibly stamped by particular social contexts. For young people then, the experience of school, family, leisure, etc. will very often vary in relation class and gender differences; however, I argue here that the use of the mobile phone provides an example of how everyday cultural practices can reveal common forms of social expression and preferences within youth culture, which cut across these forms of social difference.

The use of the mobile phone provides a vibrant example of how young people are actively involved in the making of culture. The mobile phone is a means through which forms of youth lifestyle and status are expressed, and a means through which individual and group identities are enacted. However, while young people can be seen as active rather than passive, we need to be wary of an over-celebratory analysis of their consumer power. De Certeau's (1984) work on everyday life, and specifically his concepts of tactics and strategies, provides a means of addressing the extent and limits of this power. As de Certeau (1984) argues, consumers 'make do' within the 'grid of discipline' imposed upon them. This making do comprises 'invisible' tactical actions that take place within the context of strategic power. This invisibility means that it does not reveal itself through products of its own 'but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order' (de Certeau, 1984: xiii).

Young people's role as consumers then is characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty. While, through their use of the mobile phone, young people display forms of cultural creativity and agency the extent to which these practices offer a means to challenge dominant forms of power and control that are imposed on young people is limited. Rather than offering a means of engaged political resistance, young people's practices

of cultural consumption are a matter of what Willis (1990) terms 'cultural survival'. They are, in de Certeau's terms, 'the other inside', which are 'resistant' without being oppositional; they are part of the residue of everyday life, which emerge within but cannot be contained by the dominant social order. While such activity may not offer means to affect broad political change, they represent micro-political gestures through young people important and significant forms of cultural agency.

Conclusion

A particular difficulty with studying a new technology, such as the mobile phone, is that one is left standing on continually shifting ground. While still relatively in its infancy, the mobile phone has been subject to swift technological development, from texting to picture and video applications to internet capability. The rapid pace of this technological development and change means that this research constitutes a 'snapshot', which captures aspects of this emergent mobile phone culture. As technology advances, there is a range of social and cultural changes that accompany it. For example, the increased capacity of the mobile phone as a multimedia device invites further consideration. The 'convergence' of different technologies means that the use of the mobile phone becomes increasingly integrated into other media forms (see Goggins, 2006). However, although the mobile phone as a technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated, the nature and character of many of the cultural practices that constellate around it relate to broader aspects and concerns of contemporary youth culture. While I take the mobile phone as my starting point then, this research is ultimately more interested in cultural processes and practices than technological development and change.

Through examining the role of the mobile phone in young people's everyday lives, this thesis makes a significant contribution to our understanding of contemporary youth culture. In addressing the mobile phone as a cultural object, a commodity, the aim of this research has been to explore the extent to which its use is a means through which young people's cultural values are enacted and expressed. By focusing on the meaning

this use has for young people themselves, this research gives a close reading of young people's own perceptions and opinions of their mobile phone use. Rather than being alluded to in an abstract sense, young people are afforded a significant voice in shaping the ways in which their everyday practices are analysed and understood. These meanings are situated within theoretical ideas drawn from the sociology of youth culture and consumption, with a particular emphasis being placed on the alignment between these bodies of theoretical knowledge.

The mobile phone is an especially useful and pertinent example of how young people make use of cultural goods and actively produce cultural meaning through their everyday practices. Arguably, the mobile phone is the most recognisable cultural symbol of contemporary youth culture. For young people, its use is less a matter of choice and more a matter of course. In this context, participants in this research can be said to view the mobile phone as an unremarkable part of their everyday lives. Young people then can be characterised as 'digital natives', for whom the wonder of this new technology is diminished by familiarity. However, it is through its familiarity and ordinariness that the mobile phone assumes sociological importance and interest. The significance of the mobile phone in young people's lives is evidenced by its use across a range of social and cultural practices and contexts. It is a means through which young people manage and negotiate the movement between security and autonomy in family life, pursue independence within peer group culture, and construct forms of individual and group identities.

The conceptualisation of youth culture presented here then is one that emphasises it as a culture of consumption. The conceptual alignment of youth and consumption raises the

question of young people's level of power and agency within the context of consumer culture. This relationship is animated by ambiguities, inconsistencies and contradictions; within this 'paradox' of consumption, young people are seen as simultaneously active and passive, as both agents of their own consumer behaviour and manipulated subjects of commodification. Young people's cultural consumption is, therefore, characterised by an inherent complexity, neither wholly conforming to forms of Marxist pessimism about commodity culture nor the optimism of postmodernist theories of consumer agency. Rather than viewing these positions as incompatible polar opposites, the example of young people's use of the mobile phone demonstrates that consumer culture can be seen as often both enabling and constraining. Certainly, the contention that 'youth' is a concept and idea that is consistently mined by commercial interests is not questioned. However, the view that young people are passive subjects of commodification is, at best, partial and incomplete and, at worst, misguided and harmful. In this research I argue that a commodity, such as the mobile phone, assumes social and cultural significance through the active and engaged practices of its consumers.

Youth culture then is a well-spring of vibrant and creative cultural practices. While young people exist in what is often, socially and economically, a marginal position, within the sphere of culture they can pursue a greater level of agency and power. Through their practices of cultural consumption young people assert a cultural power that allows them to negotiate within the social structures and constraints that shape their everyday experiences. I contend that the expression of this cultural power is a significant site for young people to actively involve themselves in the construction of

their everyday lives. However, these processes are not necessarily a means through which young people resist and change the broader character of their social situation, with social power still resting largely with forms of adult authority (e.g. parents, school, the state, etc.). Nevertheless, they remain a force through which young people display their own cultural values and preferences. In this way, young people's cultural practices are an important part of making life liveable for young people, rather than a site of politicised resistance.

One context in which these processes are manifest is within domestic and family life. While youth cultural research has been less attentive to family life than other areas of social life, for young people domestic sphere plays a significant role in the way in which the everyday is constructed and experienced. This research illustrates aspects of continuity and change in this experience of youth. The image of mobile phone use between parents and young people that emerges demonstrates a persistent theme in young people's lives: the liminal position of young people between a continued dependence and their pursuit of greater independence. Equally, the accessibility and flexibility that defines mobile phone interaction has led to a reconfiguration of aspects of family life. The growth of mobile phone use within parent-child relationships leads to changes in the nature of how these interactions are carried out. This relationship is increasingly less defined by authoritative forms of parenting and based more on negotiation between parents and young people around issues such as curfews and young people's use of public space. Young people then make use of the mobile phone in the management and negotiation of their social position between the emerging autonomy of youth and continued dependence of childhood.

While young people make use of the mobile phone in pursuing greater autonomy and freedom, this does not necessarily run counter to the prevailing forms of authority that exist in the family. These practices work to sustain, rather than to oppose, the traditional structures of domestic life. In this context, I argue that young people's use of the mobile phone is a form of 'resilience' within particular sets of constraints and controls, rather than acts of resistance against them. It is a means through which aspects of individual and group identities are pursued amidst the retention of ties to parents. Similar tendencies are evident in young people's use of the mobile phone in the school; a setting that plays a significant role in young people's everyday lives. Participants in this research indicate that they will make use of the mobile phone in the classroom setting. While this runs counter to school rules, this behaviour can be seen as part of the ways in which young people assert their own sense of control. However, rather than a direct form of opposition such practices can be seen as part of what Michel de Certeau (1984) refers to as the 'other order' that exists within the dominant order.

I argue that de Certeau's (1984) work provides a useful way of examining the agency that exists within the ordinary everyday practices that young people engage in. This focus on the ordinary and the habitual is a useful corrective to emphasis within much subcultural and post-subcultural research on 'spectacular' activities and behaviour. For most young people, everyday life can be viewed in terms of, what Kahn-Harris (2004) refers to as, 'mundanity'. The leisure time of participants in this research can be characterised more as part of ordinary and habitual ways of living, rather than as spectacular and transgressive. Equally, this leisure should not be viewed as external to or disconnected from other aspects of young people's everyday lives. Rather these

everyday practices need to be located in relation to young people's position within the broader social structure, and, as Frith (1984: 57) argues, as part of the 'the subtler ways in which young people resist and seek to change their situation'.

Nevertheless, this cultural power remains an important site for young people's creativity and agency. The example of the mobile phone demonstrates how young people play a significant role in the construction of cultural meaning and the creation of cultural practices. As it becomes used within the everyday lives of users, the mobile phone is embellished with meanings and values. The importance of the mobile phone for young people lies then in the ways in which it reflects and re-imagines features of youth culture. In this research, the role of peer culture for participants emerges as an arena of particular importance. Specifically, participants highlight the role of the mobile phone in the peer group interactions. While the mobile phone is often viewed as indicative of the tendency towards individualisation evident in late modernity, its use by young people shows how it sustains forms of group solidarity.

These peer groups are focused on building an affective warmth amongst participants, and binding them together through forms of sociable interaction. In this way, such groupings conform, in part at least, to Maffesoli's description of 'neo-tribes'. While the concept can be seen as insensitive to the persistence of stable categories of identity, its usefulness here lies in its exposure of forms of identification and sociality that lie in contrast to rationally organised groups. In the context of young people's mobile phone use, the notion of neo-tribes helps describe how they occupy multiple peer groupings, which are often loosely arranged and based on forms of sociability and affective warmth. In particular, I highlight the fluidity and immediacy of social connectivity of

these groups, their particular rituals and processes of identification and difference, and the role of everyday forms of sociality and sociability within them.

The use of the mobile phone in the context of young people's peer group relationships and interactions is an expression of non-rational forms of solidarity. Rather than being based around ends-oriented interactions, youth peer groups are often motivated by the desire to be together with their peers as an end in itself. Forms of neo-tribal sociality and sociability sit in contradistinction then to Weberian forms of instrumental rationality. Instead they demonstrate the retention in contemporary life of the tendencies of more traditional forms of communality and solidarity. Such behaviour is a means through which forms of identification and differentiation within and between youth groups emerges. I argue then that the idea of neo-tribes is compatible with discussions of 'lifestyle'. While these concepts are usually seen as diverging, respectively, around notions of de-individualisation and individualisation, they share an emphasis on flexible, transitory and ephemeral forms of association and identification. In the context of youth cultural research, these concepts help expose the way in which aspects of individual and group identities are shaped. As Sweetman (2004: 89) suggests youth culture is indicative of '*both* a reflexive process of identity-construction *and* of a resurgent sensuality or neo-tribal sociality'. For the participants in this research, the sets of cultural practices they demonstrate through their use of the mobile phone is a means through which these individual and group identities are developed. The use of the mobile phone allows for the expression of both young people's individuality and the enactment of broader cultural values of youth.

This research argues that it is through practices of cultural consumption that these processes take root. In particular, young people's use of the mobile phone provides a way through which they express aspects of individual and group lifestyles. This is achieved in an active rather than a passive way, with young people having a prominent role in shaping the cultural uses and meanings of the mobile phone. Participants then can be seen as involved in forms of, what Willis (1990) terms, 'symbolic creativity' and 'grounded aesthetics'. The use of the mobile phone in this context is part of how participants carve out an agentic space in their everyday lives. While these practices provide young people with a sense of power and sovereignty, much of what they gain is fleeting and transitory, with formal social power over young people being retained by adults. The cultural power that young people exercise, therefore, needs to be considered in terms of its relationship to often pervasive forms of social control and authority.

Ultimately then, while the power of the dominant is never absolute the extent to which it can be opposed and deposed remains limited. This cultural power, while an important resource in young people's lives, is not easily converted into forms of social power. Young people then have little ability to challenge or alter the structures of social organisation that shape their experiences, including the family, education, and crucially top-down corporate culture. While in my introduction I point to the example of 'coolhunting' as indicative of the blurring of the boundaries between production and consumption, and a shift in the location of 'cultural authority', this practice also demonstrates the ability of producers and manufacturers to appropriate forms of cultural creativity and repackage them as commodities. The history of texting is a

pertinent example of this process, whereby the innovations of users become subject to commercial interest. Discussions of Web 2.0 raise a number of similar issues. Coté and Pybus (2007) suggest that users of MySpace engage in forms of ‘immaterial labour’. Through this ‘creative power’ users actively engage in the creation of online subjectivities, however, these practices are subject to ‘corporate mining and selling of user-generated content... [including] the tastes, preferences, and general cultural content constructed therein’ (Coté and Pybus, 2007: 90).

However, we should avoid slipping into simply understanding this process in dualistic terms, such as resistance/incorporation, presupposing as it does a clear line of distinction between youth groups and the market, and between forms of creative cultural consumption and capitalist production. The relationship between young people and capitalism is much more complex, and is based on a continual negotiation and struggle. As Coté and Pybus (2007: 96) argue: ‘The ‘work’ of MySpace as a corporate entity, is to ‘monetize’ these practices in a manner which does not compromise the good will of users’. Corporate culture is, therefore, manifestly aware of appealing to the tastes and desires of consumers, in ways that reflect and attend to the latter’s concerns. In this way, the interactivity of Web 2.0 produces what Jarrett (2008) refers to as ‘contingent freedom’. With the increasing sophistication and integration of communication and media forms, it is in this context that further debates can be shaped in relation to my contention here that while young people are never completely ‘free’ as consumers, neither are they merely the passive subjects of manipulation.

Appendix I: Questionnaire

Dear student,

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. I would appreciate it if you could be as honest as possible in completing it – it's not a test. The research is **strictly confidential** and no participant or school will be identified by name in the final report.

1. Gender Male Female

2. Age.....

3. Please specify your access, if any, to a mobile phone
 - a. you own your own phone
 - b. you borrow it on occasion from a family member
 - c. you use a friends phone if necessary
 - d. you have no access to a mobile phone
 - e. other (please specify)

4. If you own a mobile phone who bought it? You Someone Else

5. In total how long have you been using a mobile phone?.....

6. Is your current mobile phone the first one you have owned? Yes No

7. If you answered **no to question 6**, please state:
 - a. How many previous mobile phones have you had?.....
 - b. Who paid for those?.....
 - c. Why did you change?.....

8. Who paid for your **first mobile phone**? You Someone Else
9. If **you bought your first mobile phone yourself**, please state **your initial reason(s)** for doing so (tick more than one if necessary)
- a. Security reasons
 - b. To keep in contact with friends
 - c. Because everyone else has one
 - d. Other (please specify)
.....
10. If someone else bought your **first mobile phone** for you, please state who.....
11. If **someone else bought your first mobile phone for you**, please state **the initial reason(s) why** (tick more than one if necessary)
- a. Security reasons
 - b. To keep in contact with friends
 - c. Because everyone else has one
 - d. Other (please specify)
.....
12. Did you initially want a mobile phone? Yes No
13. If you answered **yes to question 11** what were **your reasons** for wanting a mobile phone?
- a. Security reasons
 - b. To keep in contact with friends
 - c. Because everyone else has one
 - d. Other (please specify)

14. If you answered **no to question11** what were your reasons for not wanting a mobile phone?.....
.....

15. What is your average weekly expenditure on mobile phone use.....€

16. How is payment made for your usage of the mobile phone?

Postpaid (i.e. monthly bill) Prepaid (e.g. 'ready to go')

17. If payment is prepaid how often do you buy credit?.....

18. How important is it to have credit on your mobile phone?

Very Important Important Not Important

19. Do you pay for your **total** use of the mobile phone? Yes No

20. If another party (e.g. parent) contributes to the cost of using the mobile phone please state:

a. Who does.....

b. How much per week they contribute per week.....€

21. If you pay for your use of the mobile phone (in part or in total), please indicate how you get money to pay:

a. Part-time work (weekends, nights, etc.)

b. Savings (from holiday work, etc.)

c. 'Pocket money'

d. Other (please specify)

22. How many calls do you make with your mobile phone on a daily basis?

Make: None 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 more than 25

23. How many calls do you receive on your mobile phone on a daily basis?

Receive: None 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 more than 25

24. Whom do you call most often? Please rank the following from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most called and 5 the least.

- a. Parents/Guardian.....
- b. Brother(s)/Sister(s).....
- c. Friends.....
- d. Boyfriend/Girlfriend.....
- e. Other (please specify).....

25. How many text messages do you send with your mobile phone on a daily basis?

Send: None 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 more than 25

26. How many text messages do you receive on your mobile phone on a daily basis?

Receive: None 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 more than 25

27. Whom do you text most often? Please rank the following from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most called and 5 the least.

- a. Parents/Guardian.....
- b. Brother(s)/Sister(s).....
- c. Friends.....
- d. Boyfriend/Girlfriend.....
- e. Others (please specify).....

28. In which of the following places, if any, would you switch off your mobile phone or set it to silent/discreet?

- a. School: Switch Off Silent/Discreet Neither
- b. Church: Switch Off Silent/Discreet Neither
- c. Library: Switch Off Silent/Discreet Neither

- d. Cinema/Theatre: Switch Off Silent/Discreet Neither
- e. Restaurant: Switch Off Silent/Discreet Neither

29. This question asks for your opinion about the use of the mobile phone in communicating with parents/guardians and other family members. For each of the following statements please indicate whether you agree, disagree or don't know.

- a. The mobile phone helps coordinate family social activities, e.g. birthdays, Christmas, etc.

Agree Disagree Don't know

- b. The mobile phone helps organise daily activities, e.g. collection from school, sports, etc.

Agree Disagree Don't know

- c. The mobile phone helps you feel closer to family members

Agree Disagree Don't know

- d. The mobile phone helps you feel safe

Agree Disagree Don't know

- e. The mobile phone has allowed you more freedom from your parents/guardians in organising your life

Agree Disagree Don't know

- f. The mobile phone gives parents/guardians the opportunity to greater observe and control your activities

Agree Disagree Don't know

30. This question asks for your opinion on the mobile phone in communicating with friends and peers. For each of the following statements please indicate whether you agree, disagree or don't know.

- a. The mobile phone helps coordinate social activities

Agree Disagree Don't know

- b. Having a mobile phone means you can always find out what's happening with your friends

- Agree Disagree Don't know
- c. The mobile phone helps to gossip and chat with friends
Agree Disagree Don't know
- d. The mobile phone helps relieve boredom and pass the time
Agree Disagree Don't know
- e. Having a mobile phone means you communicate with friends more often
Agree Disagree Don't know
- f. The mobile phone helps improve relationships with friends
Agree Disagree Don't know
- g. By using the mobile phone you see your friends more often
Agree Disagree Don't know

31. This question asks for your opinions on your own use of the mobile phone within your daily life. For each of the following statements please indicate whether you agree, disagree or don't know.

- a. It's important for me to receive a lot of phone calls and text messages
Agree Disagree Don't know
- b. I make a lot of phone calls
Agree Disagree Don't know
- c. I send/receive a lot of text messages
Agree Disagree Don't know
- d. I regularly check my phone for phone calls and text messages
Agree Disagree Don't know
- e. I feel depressed if no-one calls or texts
Agree Disagree Don't know
- f. I feel uncomfortable if I don't have my phone with me
Agree Disagree Don't know

32. This question asks for your opinions on the role of the mobile phone as a fashion item/status symbol. For each of the following statements please indicate whether you agree, disagree or don't know.

a. It is important for me that my mobile phone fits in with my clothes and style

Agree Disagree Don't know

b. The mobile phone is fun to have and use

Agree Disagree Don't know

c. I like showing features of my phone to people around me

Agree Disagree Don't know

d. It is important to have the newest models and most technologically up to date mobile phone (e.g. picture phone, 3G, internet access, etc.)

Agree Disagree Don't know

e. I often change the ring tones, covers and/or screen logos on my mobile phone

Agree Disagree Don't know

33. Which factors would be most important for you when choosing a mobile phone?

Please rank the following using the 5-point scale: 1 = most important; 2 = important; 3 = neither important or unimportant; 4 = unimportant; 5 = least important.

a. Price.....

b. Make/Model.....

c. Newest technology.....

d. Other (please specify).....

34. Do you get 'text alerts' on your mobile phone (e.g. news & sports updates, new ringtones, logos, games, etc.)? Yes No

35. Do you use the internet on a regular basis (i.e. weekly basis)? Yes No

36. Do you access the internet through your mobile phone? Yes No

37. How interested are you in receiving content services, subscription or otherwise, through your mobile phone (e.g. travel times, news & sport, games, etc.)?

Very Interested Quite Interested Not Very Interested Not Interested

38. Do you use your mobile phone to send picture messages? Yes No

39. If you **answered yes to question 38**, how often do you send picture messages?

Daily Weekly Less often

40. Please rank the following items using the 5-point scale: 1 = most important; 2 = important; 3 = neither important or unimportant; 4 = unimportant; 5 = least important.

- a. Television.....
- b. Stereo/Personal Stereo.....
- c. Personal Computer (PC)/Internet.....
- d. Mobile Phone.....
- e. Games Console (e.g. PS2, Gamecube, etc.).....
- f. Other (please specify).....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Appendix II: Report on Young People's Use of the Mobile Phone Circulated to Participating Schools

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Morgan O'Brien and I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. My research, which is funded by a National Children's Strategy Research Scholarship, is concerned with how young people use the mobile phone in their everyday lives. Last year I administered a questionnaire relating to the use of the mobile phone, please find enclosed a short report compiling some results of the survey data collected. The report contains some of the statistical findings that have emerged from the questionnaire and covers some of the main areas of interest that I wish to develop further in my research.

I am writing to you now to respectfully request access to carry out focus groups at your school. The groups would contain around 6 students and normally take one class period and it would be my hope to carry out two/three in each school.

At this stage I would hope that you could let me know if you would be willing to allow me access to students for this purpose. Please also find enclosed consent forms, which are to be filled out by the students and a parent/guardian in the event of my being granted access to the school.

I hope that you can again accommodate me and if so I can discuss the particulars of the focus groups in more detail with you.

If you have any questions relating to the report or the proposed focus groups please don't hesitate to contact me at 087-2992426 or by e-mail at morgan.p.obrien@may.ie

All the best

Morgan O'Brien

Introduction

Setting of Questionnaire

The questionnaires were administered between March and November 2004 to a variety of different schools in the Dublin and North Kildare areas. In total six different schools participated in completing and returning the questionnaire. These schools offered a wide representative variety in terms of respondents. Two of the schools are single sex, while the remainder are co-educational. In terms of geographical classification the schools represent a mix of urban, suburban and rural backgrounds.

Breakdown of Respondents

In total 493 people answered the questionnaire of which 280 are male and 212 are female¹. The students surveyed were largely from transition year or first year, with a small number from a fifth year class. The age breakdown is 260 aged between 15-16 years, 188 aged between 12-13 years, with 18 aged 14 years, 13 aged 17 years and 1 aged 18 years².

¹ There was one missing value in this category

² There were three missing values in this category

General Information on Young People and the Mobile Phone

Access to the Mobile Phone

The overwhelming majority of respondents own a mobile phone. 477 (96.8%) stated that they owned their own mobile phone, of the remainder, 9 (1.8%) occasionally borrow one from a family member, 3 (0.6%) occasionally use a friends phone, and 4 (0.8%) have no access to a mobile phone.

The majority of those surveyed, 376 (76.3%), stated that they have had more than one mobile phone. There is no significant difference across divisions of sex, age, or location.

The number of mobile phones that people have previously owned, not including their current one, ranges from 1-15, with the majority previously owning 1 or 2 mobile phones, again there is no significant difference across sex, age or location.

Of those who have had more than one phone the reasons given for changing mobile phones are: it broke (140, 37.2%); got an upgrade to a better phone (129, 34.3%); stolen (6, 1.6%); lost (9, 2.4%); gift/prize (7, 1.9%); and various, which includes some or all of the above, (75, 19.9%).

For the majority of those surveyed their first mobile phone was bought for them by their parents (355, 72%). Of those who paid for their first phone themselves (103, 22.9%) the majority are male (86, 83.5%). Equally, taking into account the total number of mobile phones owned, males are more likely than females to have paid for the device themselves. For example, 49.8% of males paid for their current mobile phone compared with only 19.8% of females.

Reasons for Getting a Mobile Phone³

Of those who bought their first mobile phone themselves (103 respondents) the most cited reason was to keep in contact with friends (74, 71.8%), followed by security reasons (48, 46.6%), because everyone else has one (24, 23.3%), and other reasons (17, 16.5%).

³ In responding to questions on reasons for getting a mobile phone respondents were able to give multiple responses

In the case of someone else buying the respondents first mobile phone, the majority being parents, but which also included other relations or friends, the most cited reason that the mobile phone was bought for them was security reasons (259, 69%), followed by to contact friends (179, 47.7%), other reasons (114, 30.4%), and because everyone else has one (60, 16%).

In response to the question ‘did you initially want a mobile phone?’ the overwhelming majority, (448, 90.9%), responded yes with only 32 (6.5%) responding no to this question.⁴

Of those who initially wanted a mobile phone the most cited reason was to keep in contact with friends (373, 83.3%), followed by security reasons (200, 44.6%), because everyone else has one (121, 27%), and other reasons (58, 12.9%).

Of the 32 respondents who did not initially want a mobile phone the most common reasons given were that they did not see the need (14, 43.75%) and they are a waste of money (11, 34.4%).

From these figures we can see a difference between the reasons young people themselves want a mobile phone, primarily to keep in contact with friends, and why a parent may have bought it for them, primarily for security reasons.

Mobile Phone Expenditure

The average weekly expenditure on mobile phone use (credit, ringtones, etc.) ranged from €1-€100. The breakdown of the expenditure by respondents who answered this question (464) is: 240 (51.7%) spend between €1-€5 per week; 153 (33%) spend between €6-€10 per week; 52 (11.2%) spend between €11-€20 per week; the remaining 19 (4.1%) spend between €25-€100 per week. The form of payment is overwhelmingly by the prepaid (i.e. ready to go, etc) method, 444 (90.1%), while only 33 (6.7%) have a bill pay mobile phone.⁵

181 (36.7%) respondents said they pay for their total use of the mobile phone themselves. Males were more likely than females to say they pay for their use of the mobile phone themselves, with 44.3% of males and only 27.3% of females answering

⁴ The remainder are missing values/not applicable (i.e. those without a mobile phone)

⁵ The remainder are missing values/not applicable (i.e. those without a mobile phone)

yes to this question. Also older respondents were slightly more likely to say they pay for their use of the mobile phone themselves, with 43% of respondents aged 15-18 answering yes compared with 29.8% of 12-14 year olds. However, of these 181, 101 indicated that all or part of their mobile phone expenditure was sourced from 'pocket money', which could be construed as a parental contribution.

Of the 295 (59.8%) who said they do not pay for their total use of the mobile phone the overwhelming majority, 277 (93.9%), said their parents pay for some or all of their mobile phone use, with the remainder including other relations, friends or missing values.

However, it can be extrapolated that 215 of these respondents (43.6% of total, or 72.9% of those who say they don't pay for total use of the mobile phone) cover part of the expenditure for their mobile phone, either through part-time work, savings, etc. Finally, older respondents are more inclined to get money from part-time work than younger respondents; this is fairly self-explanatory as they are more likely to have some form of weekend or nightly employment.

Overall, it can be said that a large proportion of respondents receive some financial assistance from parents to pay for their mobile phone. However, it is equally the case that these expenses are shared as respondents indicated that they source some of the money through part-time work, savings, etc.

However, it seems that parents provide a substantial proportion of their children's mobile phone expenditure. Of the 249 respondents who answered this question 151 (60.6%) received between €1-€5 per week from their parents towards mobile phone expense, 72 (29%) received between €6-€10 per week, and the remainder, 26 (10.4%), receiving between €11-€70 per week.

General Use of the Mobile Phone

Number of Calls Made and Received

Table 1 shows the reported average number of calls made and received by the respondents on a daily basis. The majority of respondents report that they make between 1-5 calls per day and receive between 1-5 calls per day, there was no difference in the level of calls made/received across sex or age.

Table 1: number of calls made/received on a daily basis

	no. of calls made daily	no. of calls received daily
None	41 (8.3%)	24 (4.9%)
1-5	362 (73.4%)	330 (66.9%)
6-10	50 (10.1%)	72 (14.6%)
11-15	14 (2.8%)	23 (4.7%)
16-20	7 (1.4%)	20 (4.1%)
21-25	8 (1.6%)	6 (1.2%)
more than 25	-	8 (1.6%)
missing/ not applicable	11 (2.2%)	10 (2%)

Respondents reported that they use the mobile phone to call their parents the most followed by friends, boyfriend/girlfriend, siblings, other/various (see table 2). Again there is no significant difference across sex or age

Table 2: Respondent's ranking of calls made

	parents	sibling(s)	Friends	boyfriend/ girlfriend	others/ various
most called	251 (50.9%)	12 (2.4%)	174 (35.3%)	54 (11%)	6 (1.2%)
second	96 (19.5%)	74 (15%)	191 (38.7%)	72 (14.6%)	13 (2.6%)
third	85 (17.2%)	152 (30.8%)	72 (14.6%)	91 (18.5%)	26 (5.3%)
fourth	21 (4.3%)	132 (26.8%)	25 (5.1%)	101 (20.5%)	54 (11%)
least	13 (2.6%)	43 (8.7%)	9 (1.8%)	50 (10.1%)	140 (28.4%)
missing/not applicable	27 (5.5%)	80 (16.2%)	22 (4.5%)	125 (25.3%)	254 (51.5%)

Number of Texts Sent and Received

Table 3 shows the reported average number of text messages sent and received by the respondents on a daily basis. While the majority send and receive 1-5 text message daily, there is also a substantial percentage of respondents who send and receive 6-10 text messages daily. There is no significant difference across sex or age.

Table 3: number of texts sent/received on a daily basis

	no. of text messages s daily	no. of texts messages received daily
none	19 (3.9%)	14 (2.8%)
1-5	157 (31.8%)	145 (29.4%)
6-10	131 (26.6%)	134 (27.2%)
11-15	76 (15.4%)	79 (16%)
16-20	42 (8.5%)	43 (8.7%)
21-25	17 (3.4%)	23 (4.7%)
more than 25	41 (8.3%)	43 (8.7%)
missing/ not applicable	10 (2%)	12 (2.4%)

Respondents overwhelmingly reported that they texted friends most often, followed by boyfriend/girlfriend, sibling(s), parents, and others (see table 4). Thus, there exists a clear distinction between who young people call the most and who they text the most. A tentative suggestion would be that calls made to parents are essentially instrumental in nature, arranging school pick ups, or ringing to say they'll be late. Whereas texting is used in relation to peer group relationships to arrange meetings or just to chat. It is an easier, quicker and cheaper means of communication, which at least anecdotally has become very important in young people's lives. These are issues that require further investigation.

Table 4: Respondent's ranking of texts sent

	parents	sibling(s)	friends	boyfriend/ girlfriend	others/ various
most texted	40 (8.1%)	11 (2.2%)	328 (66.5%)	98 (19.9%)	12 (2.4%)
second	48 (9.7%)	86 (17.4%)	105 (21.3%)	97 (19.7%)	21 (4.3%)
third	132 (26.8%)	168 (34.1%)	16 (3.2%)	39 (7.9%)	24 (4.9%)
fourth	147 (29.8%)	104 (21.1%)	11 (2.2%)	63 (12.8%)	54 (11%)
least	81 (16.4%)	34 (6.9%)	9 (1.8%)	43 (8.7%)	107 (21.7%)
missing/not applicable	45 (9.1%)	90 (18.2%)	24 (4.9%)	153 (31%)	275 (55.8%)

The Use of the Mobile Phone in the Family

Respondents were asked to reply ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ to a series of statements on the use of the mobile phone within the family.

The majority of respondents agree that the mobile phone is useful for coordinating family social activities, e.g. birthdays, Christmas, etc., (71.2%) and organising everyday activities, e.g. collection from school, etc., (92.1%).

While the majority agree that the mobile phone helps them feel safe (67.1%) they are less inclined to agree that the mobile phone helps bring them closer to family members, with only 43.8% agreeing with this statement.

Finally, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the mobile phone allows them more freedom from parents/guardians in organising their lives, with 74% agreeing with this statement. Respondents were much less likely to agree with the statement that the mobile phone gives parents/guardians greater opportunity to observe/control their activities, with only 33.3% agreeing with this statement compared with 48.1% who disagree. (see table 5)

Table 5: The use of the mobile phone in the family

	agree	disagree	Don’t know	Missing/not applicable
helps coordinate family social activities	351 (71.2%)	58 (11.8%)	74 (15%)	10 (2%)
helps organise daily family activities	454 (92.1%)	20 (4.1%)	12 (2.4%)	7 (1.4%)
helps you feel closer to family members	216 (43.8%)	182 (36.9%)	88 (17.9%)	7 (1.4%)
helps you feel safe	331 (67.1%)	100 (20.3%)	55 (11.2%)	7 (1.4%)
allows you more freedom to organise your life	365 (74%)	74 (15%)	46 (9.3%)	8 (1.6%)
gives parent/guardian opportunity to observe/ control your activities	164 (33.3%)	237 (48.1%)	85 (17.2%)	7 (1.4%)

The Use of the Mobile Phone among Friends and Peer Groups

Respondents were asked to reply ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ to a series of statements on the use of the mobile phone in communicating with friends and peers.

Respondent’s responses give a largely positive picture of the use of the mobile phone to communicate with friends and peers. An overwhelming majority agree with the statements ‘the mobile phone helps you coordinate social activities’ (88%), ‘the mobile phone means you can always find out what’s happening with your friends’ (83.8%), ‘the mobile phone helps you gossip and chat with friends’ (89.5%), ‘the mobile phone helps relieve boredom and pass the time’ (73%), and ‘the mobile phone means you communicate with your friends more often’ (90.7%). Equally, a significant majority of respondents agree with the statements that ‘the mobile phone helps improve relationships with friends’ (65.5%) and ‘that the mobile phone means you see your friends more often’ (54.6%). The responses were uniform across divisions of sex, age and geographical location. (see table 6)

Table 6: The use of the mobile phone in communicating with friends and peers

	agree	disagree	Don’t know	Missing/not applicable
helps coordinate social activities	434 (88%)	21 (4.3%)	29 (5.9%)	9 (1.8%)
can always find out what’s happening	413 (83.8%)	55 (11.2%)	17 (3.4%)	8 (1.6%)
helps you to gossip and chat	441 (89.5%)	20 (4.1%)	23 (4.7%)	9 (1.8%)
helps relieve boredom and pass time	360 (73%)	86 (17.4%)	38 (7.7%)	9 (1.8%)
means you communicate w/friends more often	447 (90.7%)	28 (5.7%)	10 (2%)	8 (1.6%)
helps improve relationships w/friends	323 (65.5%)	85 (17.2%)	76 (15.4%)	9 (1.8%)
means you see your friends more often	269 (54.6%)	144 (29.2%)	71 (14.4%)	9 (1.8%)

Attitudes on the General Use of the Mobile Phone in Daily Life

Respondents were asked to reply ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ to a series of statements on the general use of the mobile phone in daily life.

The majority of respondents disagree with the statements that it is important to receive a lot of calls/texts (65.3%), that they make a lot of calls (64.9%), and that they feel depressed if no-one calls or texts (78.3%).

While, a sizeable majority of respondents agree with the statements that they send/receive a lot of text messages (60.6%) and that they regularly check their mobile phone for calls/texts (63.7%).

The statement about feeling uncomfortable initially draws no clear answer with 45% of respondents agreeing, while 45.2% disagree. (see table 7)

Table 7: Attitudes on the general use of the mobile phone in daily life

	agree	disagree	Don’t know	Missing/not applicable
it’s important to receive a lot of calls/texts	98 (19.9%)	322 (65.3%)	62 (12.6%)	11 (2.2%)
I make a lot of calls	110 (22.3%)	320 (64.9%)	52 (10.5%)	11 (2.2%)
I send/receive a lot of text messages	299 (60.6%)	142 (28.8%)	39 (7.9%)	13 (2.6%)
I regularly check my phone for calls/texts	314 (63.7%)	133 (27%)	33 (6.7%)	13 (2.6%)
I feel depressed if no-one calls/texts	66 (13.4%)	386 (78.3%)	28 (5.7%)	13 (2.6%)
I feel uncomfortable if I don’t have my phone with me	222 (45%)	223 (45.2%)	34 (6.9%)	14 (2.8%)

While there is no significant differences across age groups, factoring in the sex of the respondent proves significant to varying degrees across three of the statements.

With regards the statement ‘I regularly check my phone for phone calls and text messages’ females were slightly more inclined to agree (69.8%) than males (59.3%). Also, females were more likely than males to agree with the statement ‘I send/receive a

lot of text messages', with 71.2% of females agreeing compared with 52.8% of males. Although the reporting of the number of text messages sent and received doesn't show up any significant difference between male and female respondents.

Finally, as noted the statement 'I feel uncomfortable if I don't have my phone with me' drew no conclusive answer. However, the sex of the respondent appears to have some significance to the response, with 58.5% of females agreeing compared to 35% of males.

The Mobile Phone as a Fashion Item/Stylistic Device

Respondents were asked to reply ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ to a series of statements on the role of the mobile phone as a fashion item/status symbol. Respondents appear to largely disagree with the idea of mobile phone as fashion item, as the majority disagree with the statements ‘it is important that the mobile phone fits in with my clothes and style’ (76.7% disagree) and ‘I like showing features of my phone to people around me’ (58.4% disagree). The results are similar across sex and age.

With regards the statement ‘I often change ring tones, covers and/or logos on my mobile phone’ there is a less clear division with 40.8% agreeing compared to 51.7% disagreeing, again there is no significant difference across sex or age.

Equally, respondents largely disagree that it’s important to have the newest technology and most up to date mobile, with 63.9% disagreeing. However, they overwhelmingly agree that the mobile phone is fun to have and use, 76.1% agreeing, which may indicate that they view the use value of the mobile phone as of greater importance to its role as a fashion item. (see table 8)

Table 8: The mobile phone as a fashion item/stylistic device

	agree	disagree	Don’t know	Missing/not Applicable
important to fit in with clothes and style	72 (14.6%)	378 (76.7%)	30 (6.1%)	13 (2.6%)
the mobile phone is fun to have and use	375 (76.1%)	69 (14%)	36 (7.3%)	13 (2.6%)
I like showing people features of my phone	149 (30.2%)	288 (58.4%)	42 (8.5%)	14 (2.8%)
important to have the newest technology	117 (23.7%)	315 (63.9%)	48 (9.7%)	13 (2.6%)
I often change ring tones, covers, logos, etc.	201 (40.8%)	255 (51.7%)	23 (4.7%)	14 (2.8%)

Factors in Choosing a Mobile Phone⁶

49.1% of respondents say that price is the most important factor when choosing a new mobile phone, followed by make/model, with 23.1%, and newest technology, with 21.9%. The cumulative percentages most important/important factors are price, 75.1%, make model, 62.7%, and newest technology, 49.7% (see table 9).

Table 9: Factors in choosing a mobile phone

	most important	important	neither important/ unimportant	unimportant/least important
price	242 (49.1%)	128 (26%)	86 (17.4%)	18 (3.6%)
make/model	114 (23.1%)	195 (39.6%)	139 (28.2%)	24 (4.9%)
newest technology	108 (21.9%)	137 (27.8%)	168 (34.1%)	55 (11.2%)
other	15 (3%)	24 (4.9%)	26 (5.3%)	117 (23.7%)

⁶ The ranking code use was 1, most important; 2, important; 3, neither important/unimportant; 4, unimportant; and 5, least important. Respondents were able to use the same ranking point more than once if they wished. (However, the majority numbered them 1-3 in order of preference). For table 9 number's 4 and 5 (unimportant and least important) have been taken as a cumulative value.

*The Importance of the Mobile Phone Compared with other Technologies*⁷

Respondents were asked to rank various items according to their importance in their lives. The mobile phone was ranked most important by 38.1%, followed by television (25.6%), stereo (22.7%), pc/internet (12.4%), games console (12.4%), and other (6.3%). Results remain similar if both most important/important rankings are taken into account. (see table 10)

Table 10: Ranking of technologies by importance

	Most important	important	neither	unimportant	Least important	Missing/Not applicable
television	126 (25.6%)	139 (28.2%)	129 (26.2%)	59 (12%)	18 (3.7%)	22 (4.4%)
stereo	112 (22.7%)	128 (26%)	110 (22.3%)	71 (14.4%)	52 (10.5%)	20 (4%)
pc/internet	61 (12.4%)	99 (20.1%)	102 (20.7%)	120 (24.3%)	78 (15.8%)	33 (6.7%)
mobile phone	188 (38.1%)	128 (26%)	78 (15.8%)	47 (9.5%)	34 (6.9%)	18 (3.6%)
games console	61 (12.4%)	57 (11.6%)	77 (15.6%)	76 (15.4%)	173 (35.1%)	49 (9.9%)
other	31 (6.3%)	16 (3.2%)	9 (1.8%)	4 (0.8%)	26 (5.3%)	407 (82.5%)

There are significant gender differences in the respondent's attitudes to various technologies and the importance of them in their lives. With regards the mobile phone female respondents are much more likely to rank the mobile phone as the most important item/technology in their lives than males. With 55.6% of females ranking the mobile phone as most important compared with only 27.2% of males. If we take the cumulative percent for those who ranked the mobile phone as either most important/important we find that 80% of female respondents ranked the mobile phone as either most important/important compared with 55.9% of males.

The ranking of importance for the television sees 58% of males answering that it is either most important/important compared with 52.2% of females. 62.4% of female respondents answered that their stereo/personal stereo was the most

⁷ The ranking code use was 1, most important; 2, important; 3, neither important/unimportant; 4, unimportant; and 5, least important. Respondents were able to use the same ranking point more than once if they wished. (However, the majority numbered them 1-5 in order of preference).

important/important compared to 40.8% of the males. A relatively low percentage of respondents saw the pc/internet as most important/important, 38.6% of males and 26.8% of females. Equally there is a low placement of importance on games console comparative to other technology with 39% of males seeing it as most important/important compared with just 5.85% of females.

Concluding Remarks

In sum what is evident is that the mobile phone has become deeply entrenched within the everyday lives of young people in Ireland. The majority of those surveyed own their own mobile phone. Their attitudes tend to be positive with the majority indicating that they initially wanted a mobile phone. Equally, there is a broad consensus among the respondents that the mobile phone is a useful tool for dealing with family and an important means through which to communicate with friends.

While respondents are positive in their attitudes towards the use value of the mobile phone in their lives they are less inclined, consciously at least, to see the mobile phone as an item of style or fashion.

They tend to place a relatively high level of importance on the mobile phone, particularly the female respondents, and this is borne out by the relatively high levels of use and expenditure cited in by the respondents.

While this research is not an exhaustive account of young people's use of and attitudes towards the mobile phone it is hoped that this research will provide a platform on which to build a fuller understanding of how young people in Ireland use the mobile phone and how this can be understood within a sociological perspective.

Appendix III: Research Consent Form

Research Consent Form (Focus Group)

Researcher:

Morgan O'Brien
Department of Sociology, NUI Maynooth

Purpose of Research Project and Requirements of Participant:

I am researching how young people in Ireland use the mobile phone in the construction of their everyday lives, such as within peer and family relationships and in the construction of identity.

At this stage of my research I am organizing focus groups, which will involve group interviews with second-level students on their use of and opinions about the mobile phone. The school has already granted permission for me to carry out this research but I also need parental consent in order to carry out the interviews.

The research is strictly confidential no individual or school will be mentioned in any report, presentation, publication, etc. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me at 087-2992426 or my supervisor, Dr. Colin Coulter at 01-7083595. Thank you for your co-operation.

Name of Participant: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

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