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10 Together Individually

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Introduction

Digital society pervades all aspects of our social life and entails an evolution in our social processes, relationships, and activities (Beath et al., 2013; Hess et al., 2014; Sawyer & Winter, 2011). The use of multiple ICTs in social settings is altering the ways in which people interact with each other, not only in cyberspace, but also while located in the same physical space in intimate settings (Castells et al., 2007; van Dijk, 2009; Scheepers & Middleton, 2013; Shove et al., 2012).

People are still doing the same things at home as previously (tending to their personal relationships, taking care their personal interests, doing homework and work brought home from the office) but – enabled by ubiquitous information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones, laptops and tablet computers – they now incorporate these various technologies into their everyday. This technologically mediated lifestyle means that their preferred ways of interaction are increasingly enabled by and dependent on the technology they use (Scheepers & Middleton, 2013). The expanding salience of ICT in the home increases the complexity of social interaction, and requires families to develop new skills to master multiple ongoing engagements simultaneously. Over time, the new ways of interacting may become mutually accepted and commonplace, thus affecting the social contract of family members – that is, the general social expectations people have of each other as individuals, members of the family, or as a part of society (see Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2008).

This chapter focuses on the current ways families spend time together at home with and around ICT as instances of the socialization process of children. In the socialization process, family members work towards a mutually accepted social contract of family togetherness. Today, this social contract also entails knowledge about the accepted and unaccepted uses of ICT when other family members are present in a shared physical space. To understand and describe the emergent social contract of spending time together at home with children, we studied instances of face-to-face

interaction in the home from a 150-hour corpus of video recordings. According to our findings, the present conduct of spending family time with and around multiple ICT devices is relevant to the development of socialization patterns. This suggests that the socialization of the children may be evolving because of the emergent tensions and opportunities present in our digitalized and individualized society.

We are nevertheless adamant that the inclusion of ICT in family time does not pull families apart, as feared, but instead allows emerging individualized togetherness. According to our findings, we are not all becoming lonely: the relentlessly ongoing connection to the digital world does not lead to us being ‘together alone’ in a shared physical space – the new kind of solitude suggested by Turkle (2011) – but rather to being ‘together individually’ as a new form of individualized togetherness.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows: in the next section, we present the theoretical background, followed with the data, method, analysis and findings. After discussing the findings, we conclude the chapter with a summary of our findings and a few thoughts on potential future ways of being ‘together individually’ with and around ICT.

Background: Digitalization, individualization and the genesis of ‘together individually’

Digitalization refers to a process of transformation that synthesizes the possibilities of ICT (comprising the Internet, ubiquitous smart devices and digital social network services and applications) into everyday life (Hess et al., 2014). These possibilities enable new means of social interaction during both work and leisure (Scheepers & Middleton, 2013; Yoo, 2010). Digitalization can also have unintended consequences. People often adapt ICTs for their own purposes and end up using them in novel ways while also changing their own practices in the process (Ilmonen, 2004). In this way, digitalization may also alter the practices related to the social relationships of the users if the users perceive that the new applications add value to them, despite the changes they impose (Castells et al., 2007; Ilmonen, 2004; Norman, 1999; Rogers, 1962).

Digitalization is not the only factor affecting social interaction in the home, however. Another developmental undercurrent, individualization, has been

affecting the social contract in the home since the 1960s (Harari, 2014).

Individualization is a process of social change in which the acceptability of making personal choices increases while the pressure to follow norms and traditions diminishes. These changes allow enhanced individuality and the differentiation of social practices (Beck et al., 1994; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2008; Giddens, 1991). In the digitalized society, these individualized practices are often carried out and even enabled by ICT use. In this way, though individualization and digitalization are independent phenomena, they are in practice often simultaneously present in social settings around the use of ICT, creating the conditions for the emergence of their joint effects. For example, individualization is relevant to the adoption of new technologies, generating an atmosphere open to the emergent individual ICT user's needs and circumstances. Furthermore, it provides the impetus to alter traditions and incorporate new technologies into social settings. On the other hand, digitalization promotes individualization by offering new expressive vehicles through which to carry out individualized practices.

In this chapter, we explore the interplay between digitalization and individualization in the context of families spending time together at home with and around ICT. Family life is an area of complex and meaningful social relationships that have undergone profound changes with individualization, opening up negotiations and differing options of togetherness (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1990). In an individualized family, everybody wants to feel socially fulfilled while also leading a personally meaningful life, and this demands altruism and negotiation from all parties to keep family together (*ibid.*). The dual demands of personal fulfilment and the need for compromise to ensure the happiness of others create widespread tensions within individualized families, resulting in various attempts to reduce these tensions with purposeful solutions (Beck et al., 1994; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1990; 2008; Chambers, 2012; Giddens, 1990).

Using case examples, we demonstrate how ICT can both contribute to the emergence of such tensions within families and also be used as a solution for mitigating them. Well-established social conducts, such as the ways of spending time together at home with the family, often include established elements that give meaning to the action for the participants and contribute to the formation of the shared

experience (Giddens, 1991). These kinds of social conducts tend to be resistant to change (ibid.). People may, however, start reconsidering their traditions if, for example, a new technology comes along promising some kind of perceived advantage through its adoption (Ilmonen, 2004). In the digitalized society, ubiquitous ICT devices pervade all the elements of life, including family togetherness. It is at moments when ICT devices are used during the family's time together that family members must make decisions as to whether they also accept the potential changes in their social conduct of being together.

Children also need to be socialized into the acceptable ways of using ICT in the digitalized society. Traditionally, the parents have been in a leading position in the socialization of children into the social conduct of the family (Giddens, 2009). With the inclusion of ICT devices in family life, however, the socialization processes are affected by the ubiquitous and interactive nature of ICT (Tiilikainen & Tuunainen, 2014). We begin by exploring the emerging ways of socializing children with and around ICT, drawing on Castells' (2000, p. 21) vision about the process of socialization in the digital age:

[in a network society] ... the process of socialization becomes customized, individualized, and made out of composite models. The autonomous ability to reprogram one's own personality, in interaction with an environment of networks, becomes the crucial feature for psychological balance, replacing the strengthening of a set personality, embedded in established values.

In an individualized and digitalized society, the socialization of children towards the acceptable use of ICT as a part of social situations is a complex process including not only the parents and the children but the demands of ICT, too (Tiilikainen & Tuunainen, 2014). The resulting socialization process is a hybrid between the individualized family values and the values inscribed in and put forth by the ICT (and media content) used (ibid.). Family values and the values put forth by ICT may contradict one another, and this can increase tensions and conflicts between the parents and children over the use of ICT in social situations (ibid.). The parents hope that ICT-embedded values will support their family values and the socialization of their

children while helping to ease the tensions within the families arising both from the individual demands of the family members and the use of ICT (ibid.).

The theoretical framework on which this chapter is grounded builds on the premise that the use of ICT during family togetherness brings forth emergent tensions between the togetherness and the individual interests of the family members, and thus the use of ICT have either to be managed and made a part of the collocated togetherness or rejected. We theorize that doing this is a part of the individualized composite socialization process (see Castells, 2000) for the children towards the mutually agreed social contract (see Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2008; Ilmonen, 2004) of the family, because during these negotiations the children learn about acceptable and discouraged ways of using ICT in social situations. Simultaneously, the emergent situations brought about by ICT and the processes of negotiating over them force the parents to constantly evaluate and reorient their responses and actions around ICT.

Figure 10.1 (below) presents our theoretical framework.

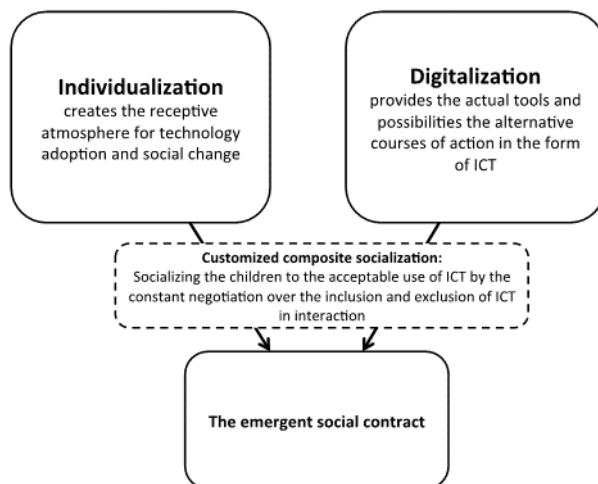


Figure 10.1 The theoretical framework for studying the socialization of children and the social contract included

Data and analysis

This chapter uses qualitative video material from 26 families in Finland between May 2011 and January 2012; it was collected for the ‘Media, family interaction and children’s well-being’ project. The data contains 665 hours of video recordings, comprising either a capture of just one family member present, children without their

parents or all the family present. Because our interest in this chapter is the socialization of children, we selected for our analysis 150 hours of recordings in which all the family or at least one parent and one or more of the children was present. During the analysis, we used multimodal techniques: we broke down the video material into sequences of interactions to reveal the interactional organization of the action and the role of the physical surroundings and ICT in it (see Heath et al., 2010). We combined the visual analysis with interaction and conversation analysis to form a picture of the social action in its physical environment and to capture both the spoken and non-spoken (gesture-based) socialization techniques present in data (see Arminen, 2012; Goodwin, 2000; Streeck et al., 2011). Our goal in the analysis was to find instances where a member of the family (either a child or a parent) used ICT during the moments of family togetherness to see how the other family members present reacted. We paid special attention to the examples given by the parents about how to use – or not to use – ICT, to the attempts to use ICT made by the children and the ways the parents received these attempts in order to understand how the children are socialized into ICT use and the social contract being formed in the process.

Findings

According to our findings, both ICT use and the negotiations over ICT use between the children and the parents are ubiquitous in the data. Across the families studied, the social conducts and rules regarding the acceptable or unacceptable uses of ICT as a part of family togetherness in a shared space are situated and based on the reflexively achieved patterns of social interaction in the families. Each family has its own code of conduct regarding ICT use during family togetherness, and there appears to be no discernible similarity between families. Most of the families appear to have a rule of not using ICT devices during mealtimes, but there are also families where mobile phones are used during meals, in particular, if family members eat at different times or in separate groups. However, we found evidence for acceptable and unacceptable ways of using ICT devices during family togetherness based on the negotiation processes present in data. We call the emergent social contract formed in these negotiations ‘together individually’, because we find it contains elements from both being together and simultaneously tending to individual interests. Using our theoretical framework

(see Fig.1) and our empirical evidence, we argue that the children are socialized into the ‘together individually’ contract as follows: individualization creates a receptive atmosphere for new ways of doing things and ICT provides the means for alternative courses of action, so the ongoing negotiations make both the parents and the children learn and re-learn the boundaries of possible and acceptable ways of using ICT devices during family togetherness in a shared physical environment. As a result, the emerging social contract of ‘together individually’ comprises individualized and digitalized elements. Below, we provide examples of these elements with three cases from the data.

Case 1: Producing togetherness with ICT

Mobile ICT devices afford convivially concurrent engagements in which participants can flexibly engage and disengage in their activities, as in Case 1. Here, after turning the bedroom TV off, the mother has started reading a book, the son is playing with toys and the daughter is using her newly acquired mobile phone. When the daughter starts moving towards the mother, her eyes catch her daughter’s movement. She attends to the daughter’s mobile phone for a while, but then focuses back on her book. The daughter is very amused by her mobile phone, and manages to get her brother’s attention. Then the daughter laughs and pushes her mobile into her mother’s field of vision, thus getting her attention for a moment of shared laughter. After this moment of togetherness, the mother raises her book up again as a kind of interaction shield (see Ayaß, 2014) and returns to reading.

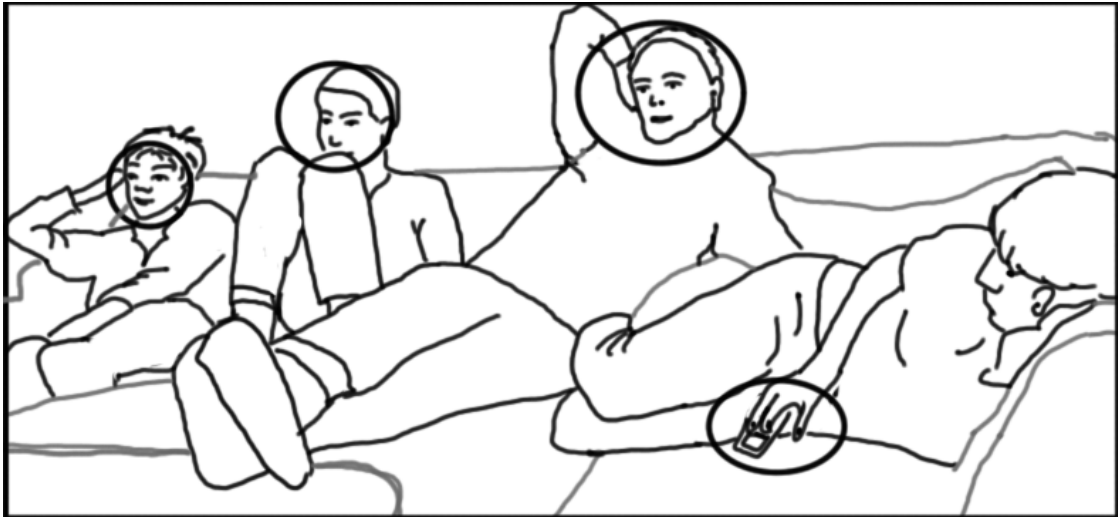


Case 1 shows how the mobility of ICT can be used to produce and reproduce family togetherness in a shared physical space: the child moves to be within an arm's distance of the mother, and then pushes the mobile device towards the mother, introducing repeated calls for togetherness into the situation. While the mother is committed to reading her course book, being physically but not socially present, the child uses her mobile app to invite moments of togetherness by pushing the device into her mother's field of view. The child does this several times, but still within limits that become evident in the interaction. In Case 1, the child explores the limits of acceptable ways of entering the private space of her mother, whose responses teach the child about the possibilities and limits of ICT in initiating togetherness. Enabled by ICT and its versatile content, the child is trying to shift the situation from the personal time of mother to the togetherness of the family based on the child's playfulness with the ICT content. In this situation, both the mother and the child have to negotiate how to manage the emerging tension between the interests of the mother, the child and the social contract of the family regarding the conduct of togetherness. In Case 1, this tension is resolved by the mother accepting several rounds of sharing the ICT content with the child. At the end of Case 1, the mother simply refuses further togetherness and resumes her individual commitment (reading). The child accepts this, although her mobile phone still has the potential for initiating more moments of sharing, because of the unlimited variety of content available. Case 1 shows how in 'together individually', although ICT has the potential for producing and reproducing family togetherness, the moments of togetherness over sharing the ICT content have to be

achieved collaboratively; individual wishes for private moments set limits on togetherness. Case 1 shows how ‘together individually’ may be reproducible with and around ICT, but it still has to accommodate individual wishes, too.

Case 2: Juggling the demands of family togetherness and ICT simultaneously

Changes in family sociality often raise worried voices about new conducts tearing down family traditions and togetherness (see Turkle, 2011; 2015). Our data shows how family members (parents and children) still opt to spend time together at home, albeit in an altered form. The essential part of the togetherness in ‘together individually’ is achieved nonverbally through visual cues in the shared physical space: this multimodal multi-activity is carried out simultaneously with individualized technology use. This allows the establishment of individual freedom within family togetherness, but the demands of the togetherness have to be monitored at all times. To achieve this, the participants can move between focused social activity in the shared physical space and peripheral awareness, as in Case 2. Here, the family (the father and three children) is gathered on the living room sofa to watch the TV show ‘South Park’. The eldest son has been communicating with text messages, and he receives one just as the punch line of a joke is building up in the show, forming the social experience of sharing humour together with the family in the shared physical space. The son briefly glances at the phone, but puts it away, prioritizing shared humour with his family. He then focuses on TV show, first smiling and then laughing. After the gag, he returns to messaging, still switching back between the TV and the phone message. Strikingly, all other family members have not attended to the messaging with its alert tones. The son, on the other hand, has to juggle to find balance between the engagements.



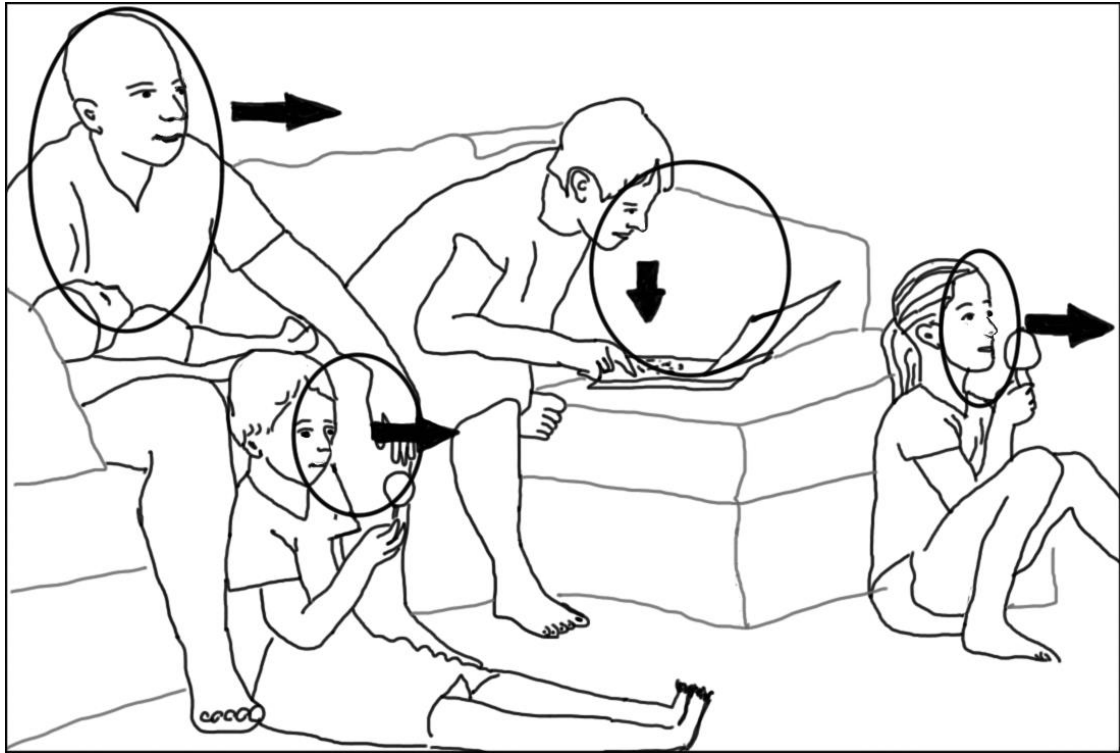
Case 2 demonstrates how during family togetherness in a shared physical space, the ICT use of an individual can connect him with further social worlds outside the home. In Case 2, the outer social world is connected only to the son receiving the messages and therefore for the family togetherness it represents his individual, private engagements. The other members of the family have to decide whether this is acceptable in the context of family togetherness or not. Even though traditionally everybody is expected to focus on the same thing during moments of togetherness (Goffman, 1961), such as watching TV, Case 2 demonstrates how, by not attending to the extracurricular ICT use of an individual, the family members choose to accept the momentary extracurricular activities of the son receiving the message. Other family members (the father, both other children) ignore the son's incoming messages. By doing this, the father is respecting his son's privacy and also indicating to the other children that the behaviour is acceptable.

Consequently, the use of ICT is combined with family togetherness seamlessly. The son receiving the messages, on the other hand, delays the emergent demands of the ICT device, prioritizing the engagement in togetherness in the physical world according to the situational demands. The son demonstrates mastery of the social conduct of the family by delaying the reading of his message until the shared laughter has passed, thereby showing respect for the social contract of the family. Case 2 shows how in the 'together individually' contract, family togetherness in a shared physical space can accommodate momentary individual ICT engagements, too.

However, in the case of conflicting demands of ICT and family togetherness, both individual behaviour and family norms become accountable.

Case 3: Directing togetherness with ICT

In the 'together individually' contract, the participants have to be able to smoothly reallocate their focus between their personal commitment and other engagements in order not to neglect anyone. In Case 3, the family (a mother, a father, a baby, a son and a daughter) is gathered in the living room. There is an ice hockey game on TV; the father, holding the baby, watches TV with the children who eat ice cream; the mother is looking at housing ads on a laptop. When the father shifts his attention to the baby, she responds with babbling. Simultaneously, the son has been trying to challenge the others to participate in an ice cream-eating contest. When the father comments on the baby's babbling, the mother starts turning to attend to them; at the same time their son starts turning, gazing at his mother already before the mother's eyes settle on the baby. When the mother starts to turn back towards her laptop, her son seizes the moment to initiate the appeal for an ice cream-eating contest again. While the mother turns her head, her gaze passes her son, who has just started to relaunch his contest appeal. The mother's finger on a keyboard has all the way reserved her return back to the laptop. The son's gaze and utterance make it necessary for her to turn back and acknowledge her son's plea. This brief mother/son dialogue also catches the attention of the daughter, who initiates an inquiry concerning possible plans to move to a new apartment. After the parents briefly explain that they are not moving yet, they all return to their original positions oriented towards the TV or laptop (see Sacks & Schegloff, 2002).



In Case 3, the mother uses ICT to pick up an emergent topic to discussion based on the parents' interests, departing from the frame of the ice hockey game on TV. The mother has been quietly browsing the laptop on the side, occasionally commenting on some housing ads. By doing this, she shows the children that it is acceptable to introduce parallel topics alongside the other members' ongoing engagement with the sport on TV during the family time together (as opposed to concentrating on one thing only). The father and the children have to decide whether or not and how to integrate the new engagements as a part of the family togetherness.

Case 3 contains an orientation to topical cohesion and continuity (Sacks, 1987). The parents juggle their focus between the TV, housing ads, and their children. The son aims at introducing yet another new frame – the ice cream-eating contest. By monitoring his mother's attention, he manages to get an acknowledgement of his idea but does not succeed in engaging others in it. His sister instead succeeds in returning the conversation to the family's housing plans, thereby also showing her grasp of her parents' topical relevancies. In this way, she is teaching her brother that topical cohesion and continuity outweigh unconnected topics. The emergent togetherness has an internal orderliness: the topics introduced have to be either related to the content

introduced or disclosed properly before moving on to the next topic. In this way, the media augmentation of family togetherness does not change the principles of topical cohesion and continuity (Sacks, 1987). Case 3 shows how the ‘together individually’ contract may be complex, but not chaotic.

Discussion

Our results show how families manage the inclusion of ICT into their time together at home by the formation of the emergent, accountable social contract of ‘together individually’. Our results also show how the children are socialized into this social contract with constant negotiations over the acceptable and unacceptable uses of ICT during family togetherness in a shared physical space. Fig. 10.2 summarizes the genesis of the ‘together individually’ social contract.

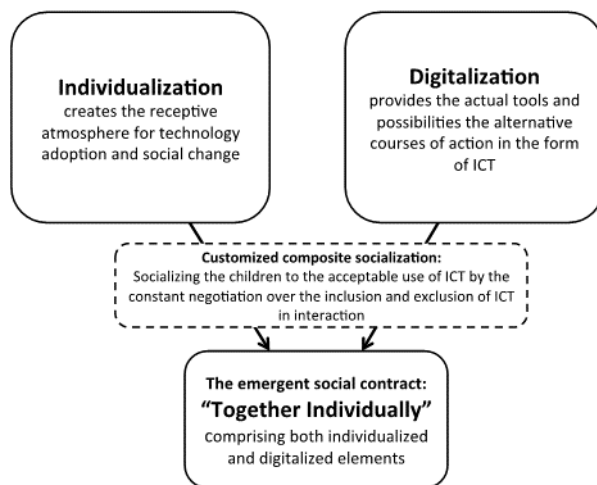


Figure 10.2 The genesis of the ‘together individually’ contract

‘Together individually’ is an emergent and accountable form of social contract, because it is formed and maintained through constant negotiations and it contains both individualized and digitalized elements (Morgan, 1996; 2011). According to our findings, despite being emergent, the ‘together individually’ contract is accountable too. The three cases selected from the data provide evidence for our arguments and demonstrate the defining characteristics of the ‘together individually’ contract.

The previous generation of immobile desktop computers raised worries about the isolating effects of IT use, potentially resulting in people being ‘together,

alone' (Turkle, 2011). However, mobile ICTs are not confined to one place; they can be used anywhere. Our results demonstrate how in the 'together, individually' contract, the family members gather in a shared space, carrying their mobile ICT with them to where they naturally want to spend time within the home. The mobility of ICT devices is essential for being 'together individually.' Since concurrent face-to-face engagements are dependent on the physically shared location, the ICT used have to be either mobile or located in a place where families spend time. Any distance from the shared physical location is usually enough to block attempts at casual sharing. An increased bonus of the contract is that the children are using technology within the physical and emotional proximity of their parents, so small children can rely on immediate parental support in the case of frightening content, and the parents can easily keep an unobtrusive eye on their children's media use. In previous research, the mobility of ICT has also been associated with socially isolating effects, harming the engagement and commitment to conversation and the formation of empathy towards others (Turkle, 2015). Our results show how the opposite effects are possible, too: firstly, mobile ICT can also bring family members together, provide points for initiating conversation and assist in sustaining the conversation on the chosen topic or change the topic if appropriate (cf. Aaltonen et al., 2014). In our data, this appears to be especially important for teenagers and their parents, who are offered topics to talk about during family togetherness.

Secondly, our results show how the parents socialize their children during the use of ICT, teaching them to use it in a way that shows respect for family togetherness and the feelings of others, thus teaching empathy to the children in the process. Both of these effects are dependent on the shared physical location and the presence and socialization work of the parents, however: those children who grow up alone with ICT or whose parents fail to take their children into account when using the devices themselves may not be learning about the social skills related to the considerate and empathetic use of ICT during time together with family and friends (see Turkle, 2015). Our cases show how social skills and empathy are a prerequisite for being 'together individually' at home. In summary, 'together individually' is an emergent, accountable social contract, an achievement that has to be constantly maintained and renewed by negotiation over the use of ICT in a way that is mutually

acceptable. Reaching the state of ‘together individually’ can open the door to the beneficial effects of ICT use, facilitating togetherness and conversation. We suggest that more attention should be paid to the formation and upkeep of ‘together individually’ as well as the socialization of children into the ‘together individually’ contract in the future, to encourage the positive effects of the increasing use of ICT in social situations, both during leisure time and at work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analysed the socialization of children into the social contract we call ‘together individually’. This contract involves the use of ICT as a part of family togetherness in a physically shared space at home. We have defined ‘together individually’ as an emergent and composite form of social contract comprising both individualized and digitalized elements that must be constantly maintained and negotiated concerning the use of ICT. Using three cases from the data, we have demonstrated how ‘together individually’, despite being emergent and complex, also has distinct characteristics that reveal how the family members balance their togetherness and individual wishes with the use of ICT.

Firstly, we demonstrated how ICT can be used to produce togetherness, but in a way that takes the wishes of each individual into account, too. Secondly, we showed how ICT can be used for extracurricular social activities during family togetherness, but the demands of the family togetherness have to be monitored at all times. Thirdly, we revealed how ICT can be used to direct togetherness by either complementing conversation or introducing new topics of conversation, but the resulting conversations must have an internal order and not be chaotic.

Through our results, we also demonstrated how the parents socialize their children into successfully engaging in the ‘together individually’ contract by showing them examples of what can and cannot be done with ICT during family togetherness. Finally, we suggested that paying more attention to achieving and maintaining the ‘together individually’ contract could be a way of encouraging the positive effects of ICT, both during leisure and at work.

Notes

1 Due to space restrictions, we are limited to one still per case, and we cannot show in detail the embodied orchestration of the participants' conduct in each individual case.

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