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Marian Stewart Titus
Rutgers University, maristew@eden.rutgers.edu

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"Phone Home": Remote Parenting across National Borders – Jamaican Students in North America and the Role of Mobile Communication Devices

Marian Stewart Titus
Rutgers University

This study presents a snapshot of geographically distributed families and how they use information and communication technologies (ICTs). The setting is in the Caribbean nation of Jamaica, and by way of qualitative interviews with eleven parents, the study explores the extent to which Jamaican parents communicate with their adolescents overseas using ICTs. Despite the barriers of distance, the parents were able to maintain strong emotional bonds with their adolescents overseas, and used mobile phones and voice over Internet protocols to enact a virtual co-presence with their children, as well as to maintain existing, and create new family rituals. The study has implications for privacy and boundary management between parents and adolescents, and for the sharing of social and emotional capital across national boundaries.

Introduction

This study examines the role that information and communication technologies, hereafter referred to as ICTs, play in enabling parents in Jamaica to maintain their parenting functions, and their adolescents studying in North America to maintain their connectedness with family, across spatial and national boundaries. The explosive growth of the mobile phone market globally, where over half of the world's population is subscribing means that this medium in particular merits more attention. The study focuses on a small segment of this Jamaican immigrant population: Jamaican students in North American colleges and universities, and how they maintain contact with their families in Jamaica. The study examines the role that mobile communication devices such as mobile phones and voice over Internet protocols (voIPs) such as Skype play in helping to maintain these family connections over time and distance.

To date, very little research exists about the Internet, ICT and mobile communication use in the Caribbean itself, or the Caribbean immigrant diaspora in North America. This study intends to add to this emerging body of knowledge on ICT use globally.

The Social Context

Some background on the social context is useful to clarify why the communicative behaviors between Jamaican parents and their offspring in North

American colleges merit more attention. Despite still being categorized as a developing country[1] with severe economic and social problems, Jamaica has a small but affluent middle and upper class. This demographic group identifies both as Jamaicans and as global citizens, with strong connections with North America and the United Kingdom resulting from decades of migration—temporarily for higher education or permanently—starting from the late nineteenth century.

Since 2001, more middle and upper class Jamaicans have been sending their children to private high schools and tertiary institutions in the United States and Canada. As Jamaica's social and economic conditions worsen, exacerbated by the current global economic recession, these affluent families are trying to "ship their children out" to North America for a better life. This is done at great expense and personal sacrifice to these families, with US$1.00 worth J$87.00. Annual tuition fees for private schools overseas range from US$10,000 to US$55,000. The children are sent to these high schools to acculturate them for North American universities, which they subsequently attend. After graduating from university, these families advocate for their children to secure jobs in North America, hopefully permanently, as employment and social prospects have become so bleak in Jamaica.

Voice-over-Internet protocols and mobile phones facilitate synchronous, dyadic communication as a conversation would, but without physical co-presence. Explosive mobile phone growth globally means that this medium in particular merits more attention because it is the most popular ICT device in history in terms of worldwide diffusion. This paper explores the reasons why mobile ICTs were so popular, and with these Jamaican families.

Literature Review

Two strands of literature are examined in turn: first, the use and effects of ICTs in family communication—particularly mobile phones and the Internet—and second, family communication networks within transnational social fields.

Global Mobile Phone Penetration

The literature on ICTs has concentrated on computer mediated communication, and more recently mobile communication via the Internet and mobile phones. Mobile phones have now become the predominant ICT device. Their penetration globally has occurred at a staggering rate since these devices were first introduced commercially in 1983, and "have out-diffused virtually every prior technology, including bicycles, radios, television (TV) sets, wallets, wireline phones, and wristwatches, and have done so in twenty-five years" (Kalba, 2008, p. 1). By December 2010, there were 5.3 billion mobile phone subscribers and users

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[1] UNDP Human Development Report 2010.

worldwide (ITU, 2012), out of a global population of seven billion (Population Reference Bureau, 2012). Adoption is greatest in Asia, Africa, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, and the Caribbean, driven primarily by prepaid mobile phone subscriptions (Kalba, 2008).

Prepaid mobile phones have been able to overcome the barriers of inadequate landline infrastructure in many developing countries, as well as the haphazard economic conditions of many of their citizens who are either underemployed or seasonally employed and so do not qualify for mobile phone contracts. By 2009, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Norway, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and several Caribbean countries including Jamaica had 100+ percent mobile phone penetration (ITU 2012). Penetration is defined as the number of subscribers or users per 100 persons. In many cases, one person may own several mobile phones for work and private use. In contrast, in 2009, the United States had 90.78 percent of mobile phone subscribers per 100 persons (ITU, 2012).

Internet Penetration in the Caribbean

In contrast to total penetration of mobile phones in most Caribbean countries (ITU, 2012), Internet penetration has lagged far behind in the region. This is due to systemic landline infrastructure constraints in many Caribbean islands, and economic insecurity on the part of potential subscribers. The literature is sparse on mobile phone and Internet use in the Caribbean or in the Caribbean Diaspora. Heather Horst's study in 2006, is the only in-depth study of mobile phone usage in Jamaica to date, along with two other studies by Dunn (2007) and Dunn and Dunn (2007). There has been work done on prepaid phone cards strengthening migrant transnational social fields globally (Vertovec, 2004, 2009). Miller and Slater (2000) conducted an ethnographic study of Internet usage in Trinidad and Tobago where they argued that the Internet naturally fitted Trinidadians' intensely diasporic personal relations. These authors observed that most Trinidadians lived in families that were international, even those defined as nuclear families, and the Internet enabled them to be involved in active parenting across national borders.

This dispersed family structure applies to all other Caribbean islands as well. Mallalieu and Cambridge (2007), in a quantitative study of mobile and fixed telephone use, also in Trinidad and Tobago, reported very little Internet use, or nine percent at that time. Dunn (2007), in a quantitative study for Jamaica also reported minimal Internet access and use. However, Dunn's conclusions do not tell the whole story for Jamaica. The International Telecommunications Union (2012) reported that in 2009—the most recent year for which data was available —four percent of the Jamaican population had fixed Internet subscriptions, but in 2010, 26% of the population were using the Internet. Jamaicans are accessing the Internet from their workplaces, and via Internet cafes in resort areas and larger towns. In 2010, the leading Jamaican mobile phone distributor introduced an

inexpensive, portable wireless modem for Internet connectivity for households without landline telephone service. This development is projected to dramatically increase Internet connectivity.

ICTs and Family Communication

The literature on ICTs in families examines Internet use, email and instant messaging, and more recently mobile phones. These ICTs have transformed families into new groups of semi-autonomous actors in personal communities, which have become far-flung social networks (Christensen, 2009; Kennedy & Wellman, 2007). Mobile phones now enable the micro-coordination of everyday life (Ling & Yttri, 2002), facilitate parental hovering (Merriman, 2007), and have removed interpersonal communication away from a fixed place to the individual who has become less connected in person at home and more connected by ICTs (Boase, 2008; Kennedy & Wellman, 2007; Rice and Hagen, 2007).

How do families use ICTs to communicate with each other? They use the Internet together (Kennedy & Wellman, 2007), and when apart, they phone, text and email each other, or use voIPs such as Skype or iChat. Families can now maintain a "connected presence" (Christensen, 2009; Licoppe, 2004), which was unheard of up to 15 years ago.

ICTs and Social Cohesion: The Role of Mobile Phones

Mobile phones in particular are among the few technologies that increase social cohesion (Ling & Ytrri, 2002; Rice and Hagen, 2007), maintain emotional connections between family members (Palen & Hughes, 2007) and support greater family dispersion through time and space (Christensen, 2009). Before examining in more detail the ways in which mobile phones increase social cohesion, a brief reference to the diffusion of early communication innovations such as photography is instructive. Raymond Williams (1975) argued that photography in particular took hold in the early twentieth century because of "greater mobility, with new separation of families and with internal and external migrations, it became more centrally necessary as a form of maintaining, over distance and through time, certain personal connections" (p. 22). Three decades later, mobile phone diffusion has continued this pattern of personal connectivity, enabling for example, Norwegian and Danish families to coordinate contact and activities (Christensen, 2009; Ling & Yttri, 2002), and is evident in North America as well. In a 2008 Pew Internet survey by Kennedy, Smith, Wells, and Wellman, they reported that American families using mobile phones and the Internet increased the quality of their communication with family members who did not live with them (53%), with friends (47%) and with co-workers (40%). Mobile phones and instant messaging also provided American teenagers with a context for exchanging more emotional content, according to Boneva et al. (2006), as cited in Rice and Hagen (2009).

Threats to Social Cohesion

Conversely, mobile phones can threaten social cohesion. Using a mobile phone while another person is present can make that person feel excluded or be seen as poor etiquette (Rice & Hagen, 2009). In an extensive literature review of Internet and mobile phone usage by young people, Rice and Hagen (2009) contend that mobile phone users "must navigate multiple connections, identities, forms of control, and tasks, without threatening the solidarity of either group" (p. 7), these groups being the person who the user is talking to and the person with the user. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the problem of mobile phone nuisance is now very commonplace. Restaurants, cinemas, train services, theaters, religious and educational institutions, and other public gathering spaces implore patrons to keep their cell phones turned off or on vibrate mode to minimize disturbance to other people.

Another potential threat to social cohesion is the use of mobile phones as a means of social control, whereby users can re-shape their personal world and themselves to suit their own needs. Rice and Hagen (2009) point to mobile phone users being able control others' access to the user. These techniques include: blocking calls from unwanted persons, relying on voice mail to postpone conversations to a more convenient time, and camouflage services that provide false background noises and false ring tones to activate during another conversation (Rice & Hagen, 2009). This manipulation of one's social space can have implications, both positive and negative, for users' interpersonal relations and broader social cohesion. Horst (2006) observed that Jamaican migrants in North America used caller ID to identify family members or friends calling from Jamaica who they might not want to speak with at that time, as these callers were frequently asking for money (p. 155). In the worst case, mobile phone use can even destroy social relations. Horst (2006) describes an extreme incident of stalking of a woman in Jamaica by her controlling boyfriend in Germany. His frequent and disruptive mobile phone calls eventually led to the break up of the relationship (Horst, 2006, p. 150).

Boundaries No Longer Fixed

This blurring of boundaries facilitated by mobile phones can extend across communities or even national borders, as in the case of Jamaican migrants. Horst (2006), observed that for Jamaicans "the mobile phone has been particularly important in increasing access and communication between relatives, partners and families living abroad" (p. 148). Furthermore, Horst (2006) noted that mobile phones were a boon for emigrant Jamaican parents who were able to communicate with their children in Jamaica, and so were more involved in their children's academic and emotional growth. According to Horst, mobile phones "enabled emigrant parents who leave their children with relatives in Jamaica to

participate in the day-to-day affairs of their children" (p. 149). Therefore, mobile phone ownership had "collapsed the distance" between Jamaicans at home and overseas as they were able to create a sense of involvement in each other's daily lives (Horst, 2006).

Defining Remote Parenting

The term remote parenting was first used in a gendered sense as "remote mothering" by parents caring for children while way from home (Navarro & Rakow, 1993; Vestby, 1996, as cited in Christensen, 2009, p. 436). The communication literature has shown that families are now more atomized, more mobile and less solid. Time spent together by family members has declined in the past two decades (Kennedy & Wellman, 2007), so parents in Jamaica parenting adolescents in North American colleges is part of a larger emerging pattern of decreased family face time together. Palen and Hughes (2007) identify mobile phones as a major tool for such remote parenting. The literature on using ICTs to maintain long-distance relationships is a small subset of a much larger body of literature on relationship maintenance and intimacy. This ICT use is focused on romantic/marital unions and adolescent relationships (Becker et al., 2009; Carole Pistole, Roberts & Chapman, 2010; Johnson, Craig, Gilchrist & Haigh, 2009; Maguire, 2007; Rabby, 2007; Sahlstein, 2006; Stafford, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford, Merolla & Castle, 2006; Utz, 2007).

Adolescents' Transition to College

The transition from high school to college is a major period of adjustment and maturation for adolescents. For those going to college in another city, state or country, this is their first significant separation from parents. The literature on adolescent development referred to this period as stressful and strange (Berman & Sperling, 1991; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Kenny, 1987; Lapsley, Rice & FitzGerald, 1990; Lee, Meszaros & Colvin, 2009). This period is also when adolescents renegotiate their privacy boundaries vis-à-vis their parents, and form a separate identity (Petronio, 2002). Ledbetter et al. (2010), in a study of parents and their adolescents at college, reexamined Petronio's 1994 theory on privacy boundary management. They found that boundary turbulence was less common for current undergraduates than Petronio posited in 1994. Adolescents now were more connected via ICTs to parents and did not resent their parents' involvement as much as adolescents in the early 1990s. Merriman (2007) struck a cautionary note about this increased parental involvement, where such "helicopter" parenting ran the risk of development delays in college students.

Turning to a more recent ICT: the use of social network sites (SNS) between college students and their parents, the use of these types of sites may be problematic. Gentzler, Oberhauser, Westerman, and Nadorff (2011) conducted an

online survey of 211 college students about phone conversations versus SNS exchanges with parents. They found that students who reported more frequent phone conversations with parents also reported more satisfying, intimate, and supportive parental relationships, but those students who used a social network site to communicate with parents reported higher levels of loneliness, anxious attachment, as well as conflict within the parental relationship. Many adolescents and young adults, whether in college or not, want to keep their Facebook interactions excluded from their parents, and resent their parents reading comments on their Facebook posts even before they do (Wood, 2011). Facebook has been attributed as a cause of family conflicts or misunderstandings between divorced parents, potential stepparents and adolescents (Wood, 2011).

As adolescents at college adjust to their new autonomy and independence, they may use their ICTs, and mobile phones in particular, for social control, to re-shape their personal world and themselves to suit their own needs. Mobile phones enabled adolescents to establish their emancipation from parents while parents could maintain an "electronic tether" to their offspring. Despite this dialectic between both parties, what is certain is that parents and adolescents have a "connected presence" (Licoppe, 2004).

ICTs in Transnational Communication

The other strand of the literature relevant to this study concerns that of ICT use among transnational migrants. There is no one body of literature on this topic as it is drawn from sociology, anthropology, communication, linguistics and other interdisciplinary programs (Panagakos and Horst, 2006). Basch (2001), referring to immigrants from Grenada to New York, defined transnational social practices as immigrants' simultaneous involvement with the host country and their countries of origin. These included family, economic and political relations, and crossed geographic, cultural and political borders. Immigrants who maintained such relationships were called transmigrants (Basch, 2001). Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) argued that transnational practices were characterized by "high intensity of exchanges…new modes of transacting, and the multiplication of activities that require cross-border travel and contacts on a sustained basis" (as cited in Basch, 2001, p. 121). The boundaries of the nation state were therefore treated as elastic (Basch, 2001), and had become deterritorialized (Appadurai, 1990), as its boundaries were defined in social and cultural rather than geographical terms.

Although there is considerable literature on long-distance family communication using ICTs such as the Internet and mobile phones, not much is known about their impact either in destination countries or transnational settings. The existing literature concentrates on Internet based communication. Studies have been done in Norway (Ling & Ytrri, 2002), Denmark (Christensen, 2009), Canada (Kennedy

& Wellman, 2007), El Salvador (Mahler, 2001), and in the United States (Kennedy et al., 2008; Lee, Meszaros & Colvin, 2009; Licoppe, 2004), and of American families using Skype to communicate with relatives living in other states (Ames, et al., (n.d.); Ballagas, Kaye, Ames, Go, & Raffle, 2009).

Studies of Filipino migrants in Europe and their social networks of children and family in the home country showed that migrant mothers worked valiantly to nurture their children via phone calls and letters (Parreñas, 2005). In a study of transnational families in Australia, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Iran, Singapore and New Zealand, Wilding (2006) found that different forms of communication had different consequences for the family relationships they sustained. Email in particular improved the quality and quantity of contact, but all virtual communications often intensified the reality of emotional distance and longing. Although a useful addition to family interpersonal communication, virtual communication did not displace, nor eliminate the effects of distance.

Despite this growing number of studies on transnational families, there are still persistent gaps in the literature. Several scholars have called for more research on ICT use in families (Lee, Meszaros & Colvin, 2009; Meszaros, 2004; Perry & Doherty, 2003, as cited in Lee, Meszaros and Colvin, 2009, p. 736). The literature on Caribbean diasporic families is even sparser, and except for Horst's work, very little is known about ICTs and Caribbean family life. Thompson and Bauer (2000) in a qualitative study of Jamaican transnational families noted that there were no statistics on transnational families, as such information was invariably drawn from separate national studies. The literature that does exist documents the viewpoint of emigrant parents with children left behind in Jamaica (Chamberlain, 1997; Condor, 1998; Fog Olwig, 1999; Philpott 1973; Soto, 1987). This study represents a switch of this viewpoint, by presenting a rare snapshot of the experiences of temporary migrants—Jamaican students in North America—and their transnational social relations with their families in Jamaica.

Research Objectives

- To discover the prevalence of the use of information and communication devices (ICTs), including mobile phones and the Internet, between Jamaican parents and adolescents across national borders.

- To understand the effects of these ICTs on parent-adolescent interpersonal relationships across national borders.

- To understand how Jamaican parents 'parent remotely' using ICTs with their adolescents studying overseas.

- To explore the dynamics of the parenting role across national borders as mediated by ICTs.

Methodology

The Sample

Eleven qualitative interviews were conducted via a snowball sample with parents living in Jamaica between June 2010 and March 2011. There were, in fact, three separate snowball samples. One participant was interviewed twice as she had two adolescents studying in the United States. Signed informed consent forms were collected from all participants. These interviews were carried out with the primary parents—the one with the most contact with the child, which in most Jamaican families is the mother. All participants lived in the capital city of Kingston. The sample was weighted towards middle-income, urban women: one medical doctor, one travel agent, one occupational therapist, three entrepreneurs, one lawyer, and one university professor. The exception was the only male participant: one lower-income taxi operator. One eighteen year old brother of an adolescent overseas, who was in high school in Jamaica, was also interviewed. This homogeneity of location (Kingston), age, income, and occupational level was the by-product of the snowball samples, as participants recruited eligible friends or neighbors, who were mainly homophilous. Five of the parents, including the male, were from dual parent households, three were divorced and one was a widow. The single mothers were all the custodial parents. Nine participants were black and one was of Jamaican Lebanese/Chinese/Black ethnicity. The parents ranged in age from 45 to 54, and the mean age was 49. The high school student was not included in this age calculation, as he was an obvious outlier.

Data Collection

Data were collected between June 2010 and March 2011. Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face, two via telephone, and one via email. Six interviews took place in participants' homes, three at their workplaces, one in the male's taxi cab, and one via email. The face-to-face interviews were audiotape recorded, and notes were taken of the telephone interviews. Each interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. All interviews were transcribed in full, comprising a total of 45 double-spaced typewritten pages.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by the grounded theory method with the themes identified inductively via the constant comparison method. Root categories were formed based on the theoretical focus and research questions. Emerging themes were then identified from these root and sub-categories. Free codes were also created of aggregate versus anomalous responses of root categories. Emerging themes were

then identified from root and sub categories. Finally, preliminary knowledge claims developed, which will be explored further in the Discussion section.

Findings

All participants were heavy users of mobile phones including the Blackberry Messenger service with their teenagers overseas. Most used Skype/webcams at prescribed times. E-mail was less popular, and the least common medium was social networks sites such as Facebook. Parents initiated communication more often than teens, and the choice of ICT was based on the purpose of the communication. Despite the geographical distance, developmental milestones and social rituals were still shared via a virtual co-presence that the ICTs allowed for. There were even some new family rituals created via ICTs, such as using Skype/ webcams for siblings in Jamaican to show school trophies to the teenagers overseas. The teens overseas also tended to negotiate greater privacy and set boundaries with their parents in Jamaica by selecting one particular ICT over another, which was asynchronous and afforded fewer, if any visual cues. The following major themes, which arose from the data analysis, are presented in turn.

Parents initiate communication more often than teens

Most parents admitted that they had to initiate contact with their adolescents, or else they would not hear from them often:

> Participant 3: He usually communicates more when he wants something.
>
> Interviewer: Usually money right?
>
> Participant 3: Yeah!   - *Mother, travel agent, 52*

> She doesn't communicate at all. Sometimes I have to send her a bulldog [stern] message on Facebook to *shame* her! [her emphasis]   - *Stepmother, entrepreneur, 45*

Participant 7, with a son and daughter in college overseas derided Facebook as a distraction and of limited value to her and her son overseas. In contrast, her teenage daughter was a great fan of Facebook. This mother admitted that she and her daughter had a very strained relationship, and that her daughter often deliberately shut her out of her life, whereas her son and she were very close. As her daughter was in the United States, she could easily maintain this emotional distance from her mother. Although initially the mother denied having a Facebook account, she then admitted that she had one, that she had only one Facebook

friend, and that her daughter was not on her account. She spoke with her son via telephone almost daily but she had to phone her daughter, or else she wouldn't hear from her. This finding mirrored that of Gentzler et al. (2011) where American college students who had more frequent phone conversations with parents reported more satisfying, intimate, and supportive parental relationships, than those who use social network sites to communicate with parents and reported more parental conflict:

> Interviewer: Do you ever use Facebook or any other social media Internet site to communicate with your daughter?
>
> Participant 7: No. My son nor myself has a Facebook account. My son thinks it's a waste of time whereas my daughter is totally addicted. Every time she gets up to go to the bathroom you can tell on Facebook. I have a Facebook account but it's not a public thing and I have one friend on Facebook. My daughter is not on my account. I'll text her daily. She doesn't respond. Maybe by the end of the week, she'll respond.
>
> *- Mother, entrepreneur, 45*

Parents report social network sites used primarily for sibling–to-sibling communication

Although only three parents used social network sites to communicate with their adolescents abroad, they reported that the younger siblings in Jamaica used them to share photos and short messages with their older siblings overseas. However, the parents could not elaborate on the frequency or duration of this use:

> Interviewer: Does she communicate with her sister like this [using BBM] too?
>
> Participant 5: She's not as close to her sister, because of the age difference. It's not a lot but for them it is at that age. They're three years apart. They seem to think it's a lot. So I think they communicate more through Facebook and that sort of thing; common interests.
>
> Interviewer: And prior to going away, did she have this kind of contact with these other family members?
>
> Participant 5: She would have it through Facebook but not necessarily with the older family members; my age group, certainly not through Facebook.
>
> *- Mother, M.D., 52*

> My son in Florida is in touch with my younger son [here in Jamaica] all the time on Facebook, but I don't use it.
>
> *- Father, taxi driver, 52*

> I used to Facebook [older brother in Rhode Island] but I stopped because it was taking up too much time and affecting my schoolwork.
>
> *- Brother in Jamaica, high school student, 18*

The mother with the strained relationship with her daughter abroad did not regard Facebook as a suitable medium to repair this tension with her daughter. She was willing to use her younger children as intermediaries between her distant daughter and herself:

> Participant 7: My daughter doesn't need to reach me through Facebook because my two other younger children have Facebook so if she wants to reach me by Facebook she uses that way. She will notify me if there is a new photo and I will use one of my other children's [younger ones at home] Facebook to view her photos, because she knows if she was to try to reach me via my Facebook, it wouldn't happen. She's 22. The younger children here are 14 and 13 in high school here. They're in touch with her by Facebook or instant messaging.
>
> *- Mother, entrepreneur, 45*

ICT choice based on purpose of communication

Participant 3 lauded the benefits of the Blackberry Messenger texting service as it suited her mobile lifestyle, and was very convenient for spontaneous contact. Other participants used a range of ICTs, depending on their communicative goals, both verbal and non-verbal:

> [BBM] you have the option of typing so if you're busy or whatever, not all the time she calls I can talk. They [ICTs] serve different purposes. Each individually and together it's a fantastic combination, it covers all the bases.
>
> *- Mother, occupational therapist, 48*

> If I really want to hear her voice I'll phone. But we really communicate by Blackberry Messenger now…[With Skype & webcam] she would only call when she knew the room was tidy!
>
> *- Mother, M.D., 52*

> When I Skype him I check to see what he's eating and he would produce a bag of chips and a 2 liter Coke bottle, too much junk food.
>
> *- Mother, lawyer, 54*

Developmental milestones and social rituals shared via virtual co-presence

The parents found creative ways to monitor their adolescents overseas, and did not allow the physical distance to deter them from their parental involvement, especially at challenging times for their teens:

> [Daughter sleeping alone in U.S. hotel for first time]. A couple of times she felt a little anxious so I told her to lock the doors and for the first couple of times she felt alone. We decided to turn on the computers so she could see me in my bedroom, and I could see her in her room; at any point in time we could have communicated.   *- Mother, M.D., 52*

Participant 2 facilitated regular virtual visits between her son overseas and his family and friends in Jamaica. These visits mirrored the co-present gatherings of her son and his friends, except that the son was now physically absent but virtually present:

> [Using Skype and webcam] We would carry out the laptop to the back patio and he would be talking with his friends, especially on the weekends … and they would get a chance to visit with him… We'd spend 2 to 3 hours when his friends were involved. We'd talk on and off, and get up to get something to eat, or have a shower.   *- Mother, lawyer, 54*

New family rituals developed via virtual co-presence

The mother with the difficult relationship with her daughter still tried other means to collapse the distance. She simulated family time with her physically absent but virtually present daughter:

> I try to do that [Skype/webcam] once a month so I have a visual and she has a visual of what's happening at home. So she looks at the dog, and she sees me in the kitchen, that kind of thing. She tried to pretend she doesn't have a home so I bring home to her.   *- Mother, entrepreneur, 45*

Participant 1 used Skype and webcam regularly to both bond with her daughter and to enable her younger sister at home to share a new sibling ritual with her older sister:

> [10 year old daughter] likes webcam. I'm not technologically inclined. [Younger daughter] will model her dress to show [older sister] on the webcam. [Younger daughter] was the one who set up

the webcam program, can you imagine?

- Stepmother, entrepreneur, 45

Parent/child bond sustained and increased

Several parents mentioned that despite the distance, they had grown closer to their adolescents overseas and vice-versa. Participant 2 admitted that ironically her son overseas and his father had become closer since their son's departure:

> The bond between [father] and [son] has got even stronger. They weren't as close when [son] was in Jamaica because [father] was always at work. [Son] is always sharing with [father] about his relationship with women, sharing intimate details that he wouldn't share with me. [Father] and [son] spend more time talking with each other [via phone] and less time talking to me.
>
> *- Mother, lawyer, 54*

Participant 3 had a frank and open relationship with her son overseas, and the distance did not deter either of them from discussing intimate details about each other's lives:

> We might talk about his love life … and I'll ask him if he's wearing his condoms. And If I'm vex [angry] with his father I vent. And he'll say "Oh Mom, never mind." I love my son to death. We quarrel a lot but we love hard.
>
> *- Mother, travel agent, 52*

Teens negotiate greater privacy and set boundaries

The teens overseas also tended to negotiate greater privacy and set boundaries with their parents in Jamaica by selecting ICTs which were asynchronous and afforded fewer, if any visual cues. For Participant 7, her daughter exercised caller hegemony (Hopper, 1992) in the strictest sense:

> When she's here, I will stay there and talk to her even if it appears like she's not listening. When she's away, she can always find an excuse to end the conversation. Once you reach a certain point in the conversation, she says she has to go and study or she has to go to the library or something. So she has set boundaries about what she will or will not discuss.   *- Mother, entrepreneur, 45*

Participant 2 explained that sometimes her son didn't want her to see him, so he preferred to phone home:

> If I may say "Let's Skype" he'll say "no I'll be home in a week or so" because he's growing sideburns and he wants to surprise us. He likes phone calls because of the privacy thing.
>
> *- Mother, lawyer, 54*

Discussion

As a result of family ICT use across national borders, new notions of absence and presence have evolved, and geographical distance has become diluted. Place and space have been redefined. The individual is now the network node; rather than the place where they may be at any moment in time. The notion of family is also being redefined as a result of this varied ICT use. These ICTs are enabling the creation of new ICT-supported family rituals, which lead to a connected presence between parents and children that lessen loneliness, alienation, and homesickness. Taken to an extreme, there is an increased or hyper-connectivity, or an unyielding electronic tether between both parties. This hyper-connectivity presents challenges to privacy and control, especially for both teens. There are implications of this increased surveillance of adolescents by parents for boundary management and autonomy for both groups, and for teens in particular.

It was evident from the data that family relations were enriched, resulting from intense communicative exchanges via mobile phones, BBM and Skype/webcams. The ICTs were being used as coping mechanisms to overcome family separation. The new connected presence reduced the pain of separation for adolescents in a foreign country, as most of them were leaving home and their home country for the first time. Based on the ease of this ICT-enabled connectivity, there was the potential for sharing emotional and social capital between these temporary immigrants and their families and friends in their home country.

Social network sites played a minimal role in parent-adolescent communication between Jamaica and the United States. Parents in Jamaica, in parenting remotely with their adolescents overseas, rarely used social network sites. Their adolescents overseas were not using these sites to communicate with their parents either. All the parents were skeptical and wary of these sites, even those three who used Facebook, and were wary of their teens' use of these sites as well. Parents perceived that their teens overseas used Facebook as a privacy management tool with them, as the parents reported that these teens overseas used Facebook with siblings at home, but rarely with their parents. Therefore, the parents did not perceive Facebook and other similar sites as an optimal communicative vehicle to use with their teens overseas. Finally, this researcher is interested in learning whether these findings would be replicated in other cultural contexts, and whether these patterns of remote parenting and the heavy reliance on VoIPs is unique to Jamaican parents, or is a common parental practice for geographically distributed families in other countries.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the small sample size and its purposive nature, the results of this study are not generalizable to wider populations of remote parents. The participants' self-reports regarding their ICT use may contain inaccuracies. Furthermore, there was a lack of demographic diversity in the sample, as it was weighted towards middle class and mid-life urban women. This researcher was uncertain as to whether parents' ICT choices represent a technological determinism on their part rather than a genuine response to their teens' preferred communicative patterns. It would be valuable to learn what role the fathers played in these families, and whether they used ICTs with their adolescents overseas. The perspectives of the students overseas were also needed to provide greater insight.

Areas for Future Research

This topic would benefit from both detailed ethnographic studies, and a quantitative study on ICT use between Jamaican students overseas and family/ friends in Jamaica. Interpretive studies of the texts of ICT messages between these same students and family/friends in Jamaica would also add more richness to this topic. A study of the use of ICTs, particularly mobile communication devices in Jamaican families from a critical gender perspective would be valuable, as Jamaican family structures tend to be matriarchal. How much is remote parenting, as a subset of parenting itself, still disproportionately carried out by women? Mobile phones did make the task of parenting from a distance much easier for mothers, but as Lana Rakow (2007) observed, is mobile communication simply reinforcing already entrenched gender inequities, and the sexual division of labor even more? Remote parenting in these Jamaican families would seem to be one more task on an already long list of responsibilities that women bear, as these mothers were the primary parents, even in the dual parent households. As Participant 4 wryly observed: "I say to [spouse] all the time, these are *my* [her emphasis] children." Finally, focus groups with students overseas and their interaction with siblings in Jamaica using ICTs are essential to provide a complete picture of this phenomenon of ICT use in geographically dispersed families. ICTs and mobile communication devices in particular, are transforming social interaction in significant ways, with their potential to enrich social networks, and transcend spatial and geographical boundaries. This researcher hopes that this study will be a significant addition to emerging empirical data regarding ICTs and their impact on cultures and social practices of countries both large and small.

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