

Rich LING

Mobile Communication and the Generation of Social Cohesion

This paper will examine the development and maintenance of social cohesion through the use of mobile communication. The paper starts by placing mobile communication into the broader context of sociological analysis. A major theme in the sociological project has been to understand the interaction of social cohesion in the face of various types of technological development. The general idea has been that industrialization and modern society has resulted in transitions. Using the notion of ritual as developed by Durkheim and refined by Goffman and Collins the paper then looks at how mobile communication seems to be supporting the development of social cohesion. The specific cases of romantic involvements and the cohesive functions of gossip, joking/banter and argot are used to better understand this. Portes' question regarding the optimal level of social cohesion in the small group is raised. It is suggested that an over-emphasis on the so-called strong ties, perhaps at the expense of the weak-ties may result in what is referred to as bounded solidarity.

Rich LING is a sociologist at Telenor's research institute located near Oslo, Norway and he has an adjunct position at the University of Michigan. He is the author of the recently published book on the social consequences of mobile telephony entitled *The Mobile Connection: The cell phone's impact on society* and the forthcoming book *New Tech, New Ties: How mobile communication is reshaping social cohesion*. He received his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Colorado, Boulder in his native US. Upon completion of his doctorate, he taught at the University of Wyoming before coming to Norway on a Marshall Foundation grant. For the past ten years, he has worked at Telenor R&D and has been active in researching issues associated with new information communication technology and society with a particular focus on mobile telephony. He has led projects in Norway and participated in projects at the European level. E-mail: richard-seyler.ling@telenor.com.

