
The Everyday Driving Life of Mothers

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Abstract

The current paper describes ongoing ethnographic work with families to study the everyday media practices of families in cars. Our approach involves following families on routine journeys as well as collecting naturalistic video data of family interactions in cars. In our data we show how mothers who drive, manage and situate their interactions with technology and child passengers alongside the demands of driving on busy roads.

Author Keywords

Family life; mobile media; parenting

Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation

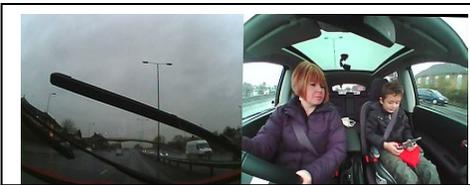
Introduction

Because families spend an increasing amount of time travelling in their cars, routines of parenting and caring increasingly involve the family car [1][2]. There has also been a growing interest in developing technology to support such interactions [2]. For families juggling multiple responsibilities and roles, ICTs such as mobile phones have become a part of everyday activities, even driving. During family journeys a number of outings and events are coordinated. In this paper, we reflect on some of our observations of routines in the family

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Figures 1 & 2 show mothers managing multiple demands while driving (with child passengers occupied)

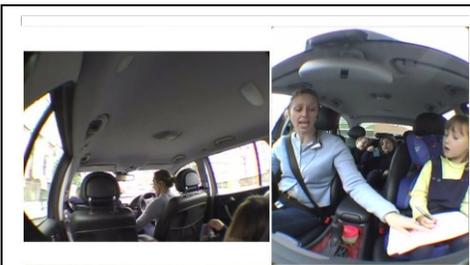


Figure 3 shows 'learning'/ 'assisting' on the move

car, examining the intricacies of social interactions and travelling around practices of media use within the car.

Everyday Family Practices in the Car

Cars enable parents to organise trips and plan errands based on their availability and expectations of traffic [5]. It is not uncommon to use family time in cars to resolve issues and build the togetherness of the family unit [4]. Research on family car conversations also suggests that the time spent in cars may be used to oversee children's homework assignments as well as coordinate upcoming parenting tasks [3].

While we do not state that mothers are sole caretakers of children, in our own data, we found that the everyday tasks of shuttling children to and from various activities are most often handled by mothers. This was supported in a study on gendered geographies [1], which found that care while travelling and transporting children from various activities is routinely dominated by mothers.

Preliminary findings

While the importance of the car to family life is clearly highlighted in previous studies, our preliminary findings indicate a number of design-relevant concerns:

- The car is seen as a multi-activity context where families are engaged in a number of activities while driving. In our observations they included eating & drinking as well as (critically) engaging with mobile technologies.
- Mothers in our study find hands-free devices to handle calls in the car extremely useful and almost indispensable to managing their everyday routines. Nearly all mothers used them on a day-to-day basis.

- It was common to see child passengers engaging with mobile media (portable games, iPads) on long journeys. This was helpful to allow parents to focus on driving, and was used by mothers in sophisticated ways to do this.
- We have observed how the dual role of mother and driver is done while driving. In our work, it was common to find parents engaging with children while teaching or explaining often-complex issues while driving (ref fig 3).
- There is a need for immediacy of access and simple interaction to portable devices given the car's involvement in prevailing road conditions.
- Artefacts are placed and moved around in the car by passengers and drivers, in order to gain timely access to them.

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