

MEDIAMATTERS



Larissa Hjorth, Kana Ohashi, Jolynna Sinanan, Heather Horst,  
Sarah Pink, Fumitoshi Kato and Baohua Zhou

# Digital Media Practices in Households

Kinship through Data

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# MediaMatters

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*Kinship through Data*

*Larissa Hjorth, Kana Ohashi,  
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and Baohua Zhou*

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# 1. Introduction

## Abstract

In this introductory chapter we begin with one of our participants, Rika, as she uses her smartphone practices to help create a sense of care at a distance with her aging mother—what we call *Digital Kinship*. We then turn to contextualizing the methods deployed over the three years in three locations and how each of the three cultural contexts informs different rituals around data use. We discuss how Digital Kinship can make sense of the paradoxical role of surveillance in an age of datafication through “friendly surveillance” and “care at a distance.”

**Keywords:** data; dataveillance; care at a distance; intergenerational; Digital Kinship; ethnography

Data—and its locative possibilities and potentialities—can be found in almost all our quotidian moments. Waiting at the bus stop. Riding home on a bike. Searching for the nearest bookshop. Grabbing a bite to eat on the run. Moving from one work meeting to the next. A school pickup. A Sunday brunch with family. In these everyday moments, the mobile phone is on hand. Listening. Tracking. Connecting.

For many, the datafication of everyday life has both *invisible* and *visible* dimensions and implications through social mobile media. Datafication—the “conversion of qualitative aspects of life into quantified data” (Ruckenstein and Schüll 2017, 261)—unevenly occupies many of our lives in ways we are yet to fully understand. Sometimes the narratives between practice and perception converge, other times they diverge. Datafication occupies a paradoxical role in our lives—empowering and yet exploiting, visualizing while camouflaging, user-generated and yet platform (corporate) personalized.

Mobile media devices such as smartphones and Apple Watches—along with apps like Strava and Instagram—weave multiple data trails of *intentional* and *unintentional* tracking. From self to social to corporate, the data

trails and tracks are as *thick* as they are *dynamic*. Examples are endless. Sometimes we consciously check on a relative through social media, other times we unthinkingly watch ourselves and loved ones on a post. Sometimes we reflect on a deceased loved one with someone in another country via a post. Sometimes our data trails take a life of their own, in ways we are still yet to fully understand.

Much scholarship has been conducted into these two camps of belief—one, the dataveillance (Ruppert 2011; van Dijck 2014; Lupton 2016) group who see empowerment narratives underscored by obligations often not understood by users; the other group more aligned with Quantified Self (QS) ideals that see the body as the laboratory for creative reflection and self-knowledge through numbers. Indeed, much is still to be learnt from ethnographic and creative explorations into everyday datafication as a way to reimagine ourselves within social dynamics (Sharon 2017; Pink and Fors 2017; Khot et al. 2016; Fors et al. 2019). Such research into self-tracking and wearables has demonstrated how personal data can become part of people's personal and collective digital lives—whether as part of ordinary everyday life, or within the context of the QS movement (e.g. Lupton 2016). However, there is another dimension to mobile tracking that is less immediately visible, yet perhaps even more pervasive than digital self-tracking.

In the literature, the role of data to *care at a distance*—especially between the generations—has been relatively overlooked. For instance, how can we learn from quotidian intergenerational practices to reflect upon the changing role of care with datafication? What are some of the making-do practices emerging around intergenerational care at a distance?

In *Digital Media Practices in Households* focus on intergenerational mobile media practices, through an analysis of how these are lived and experienced across three different social and cultural contexts. These practices are played out in an *ambivalent* and *paradoxical* space that is at the intersection of *intimacy*, *care* and *data transition*. Attention to such practices account for, but goes beyond, the emphasis on personal data, spans different types of platform and media practices, and brings attention to the intergenerational and cross-cultural understandings that are often left out of the debate. We seek to understand datafication in terms of the often-invisible care work done in intergenerational relationships. We bring care and media practice together to think about contemporary forms of kinship that marry the digital, social and material in complex ways.

In *Digital Media Practices in Households* we trace the cross-cultural and intergenerational role of mobile media practices in three locations—Shanghai, Tokyo and Melbourne. Through the concept of Digital Kinship, we bring



together the continuities and discontinuities in and around the negotiation of mundane intimacies in the digital and non-digital worlds. In this book we seek to connect the discontinuities with the continuities through four key kinship concepts—*Digital, Playful, Visualizing, Co-futuring*—and show how these elements of kinship are played out through culturally specific modes of the intimate and mundane.

From social media like LINE, WhatsApp and WeChat and self-tracking health apps on smartphones to wearables like Apple watches, this book explores the multiple ways in which intergenerational practices play out around mobile media for care at a distance. This can involve locative and non-locative possibilities. We recognize that quotidian forms of locative media are often embedded in social and mobile media practices. As Rowan Wilken notes in *The Cultural Economies of Locative Media* (2019), within the all-pervasiveness of everyday mobile media, we can find multiple and contesting forms, textures, and gradations of location that inform our contemporary ways of being in place (2019, 5). Thus, understanding locative media needs to be done in the context of the embedded mobile media practices.

Entwined within our exploration of mobile media in households and familial contexts is the integral role of care within contemporary media practices. Care, as we argue, isn't just a practice for feminist or social services but rather crucial to an ethics of media practice (Mol 2009; Bellacasa 2018). As the fallout from the Cambridge Analytica debacle still resonates around notions of trust, bringing care (ethically, theoretically, conceptually and methodologically) to media practices is key (Gold and Klein 2019). We redeploy Jeanette Pols' notion of care at a distance (2012)—originally used in telecare settings to explore the role of technology to enhance relationships when used in unison, not replacing, people—to consider the *tacit, informal and mundane* ways in which mobile media does often invisible care work in everyday intimate relations.

Given the above ambitions, *Digital Media Practices in Households* is not a conventional academic book. In it we seek to bring readers into the mobile and digital family lives and everyday worlds of participants, across three different cultural and national contexts. This means leading our discussion by example, rather than by theory. *In particular, through the practices of our participants we reflect on the quotidian and often-invisible forms of care at a distance constitute contemporary Digital Kinship.*

Through cross-cultural examples, we seek to explore the ways in which place and context inform particular rituals of belonging. We believe this helps to bring to the fore the socially active micro-moments that matter to our participants, and our analysis. In doing so, we invite readers into





an interpretive process that is based on ethnographic encounters with participants in the places where mobile media practices are meaningful to them. Through this process, we seek to explore the everyday intimate and mundane meanings of caring and relationality that, in turn, has methodological consequences and makes a substantive contribution to the study of intergenerational mobile media practices across cultures.

In this introductory chapter we begin with one of our participants, Rika. We visit her experiences in negotiating her aging mother's independence and how her smartphone practices help to create a sense of care at a distance—what we call *Digital Kinship*. We then turn to contextualizing the methods deployed over the three years in three locations. Then we discuss understanding Digital Kinship as a form of intimate mundane co-presence. This is followed by a reflection upon the ways in which we seek to understand the paradoxical role of surveillance in an age of datafication, through “friendly surveillance” and “care at a distance.” Having outlined key concepts, we then contextualize our three contrasting sites that can provide insight into some of the salient and culturally specific notions. We reflect upon how understanding data and care through an intergenerational lens can provide nuanced insight. We then discuss the book structure. Now let us turn to Rika.

## Meet Rika

In 2014 we met 32-year-old female flight attendant Rika who lived in a bedsit about an hour by train from Tokyo. Just a stone's throw away from her apartment, Rika's only family member—her 72-year-old mother—lived alone. Rika would often leave home for work early in the morning and return home late. Rika and her mother respected each other's daily rhythms by living separately. While traditionally families in Japan would live together in bygone times, now it is common for them to live apart. However, Rika's smartphone (*sumaho*) provided a care at a distance whereby Rika was able to monitor her elderly mother through the constant co-presence of social mobile media.

Like many Japanese of her generation, Rika grew up with the mobile (*keitai*) and viewed her phone as an integral part of her everyday life. Rika's first *keitai* was the one that her mother bought her when she was in junior high school, with the intention of using the phone as a form of personal security—or what Misa Matsuda (2009) calls “mom in the pocket”—to accompany her constantly when travelling from after-school cram (or “*juku*”)



school. Since her first *keitai*, Rika and her mother had a long history communicating phatic, logistic, and emotional messages through and by the mobile phone. As the mobile phone had grown and transformed into the *sumaho*, so too had Rika and her mother's relationship evolved through its constant co-presence, so much so that the mobile played an integral role in maintaining their broader kinship network.

After graduating from university, the mobile phone became even more important in maintaining Rika's relationship with her mother, as Rika started to fly around the world as a flight attendant. Overseas flights occasionally caused unexpected delays. As Rika described, "I couldn't come back to Japan when there was a flood in Thailand and a volcanic explosion in Iceland. In these situations, if it wasn't for mobile phones, my mother would not have been able to find out if I was OK." Her airline policy stated that family members of employees were not allowed to make calls directly to the airline if a hijacking occurred. This made the mobile phone indispensable in allowing Rika to communicate with her mother especially when she was abroad.

Rika often did a "check-in" on Facebook when she went abroad on business. One reason was to let her mother know where she was. Her mother did not have her own Facebook account. So, Rika kept hers logged-on via the tablet PC and gave it to her mother, who could then check Rika's timeline without it being bothersome. Previously, she used to give a paper-based hotel list to her mother, but with Facebook "check-in" functions this was no longer needed. Social media platform LINE also played a key role in connecting the pair when they were away from each other. They could talk or chat for free by using LINE—the most used social media app in Japan—when they have WiFi connection, regardless of their location.

In this opening vignette we see Rika utilizing mobile media to share both co-presence and co-location with her mother as a type of care at a distance. Over the three years of the fieldwork, Rika went from using locative media as a tool for care at a distance with her mum to becoming a mum herself. Through these transitions, Rika adapted media practices in accordance with the rhythm of her everyday life. We understand how Japanese social media platforms LINE and Facebook were used for digital and visual reflection *of*—and *for*—kinship. These digital kinship practices played a key role in the maintenance of social rituals and gift giving economies as well as affording new ways to express mundane intimacies in playful and visual modes. Through the study of Rika's media practices over three years, we recognized that the relationship between mother and daughter was gradually changing as they began to adopt new mobile media technologies.





Figure 1.1: Rika's LINE picture to her mum

In Rika's exchange with her mother we can understand the power of digital media to create different forms of care at a distance. For many feminist scholars, care cultures are an important site for affective, emotional and unpaid labor (Mol 2009). Fields such as nursing and teaching are often underpaid despite the pivotal role played in maintaining many societies. The role of care as a feminized form of labor often plays out in many work and social contexts with particular "feeling rules" (Hochschild 1979) being expected. The maintenance of particular feeling rules often involves a type of informal surveillance.

Care has always had a complex relationship to surveillance (Bellacasa 2017), but digital media obscures this imbrication further. Mobile technologies have been deployed as ambient forms of surveillance between family members as evidenced through the substantial research of Misa Matsuda (2009) in Japan. More recently, work has begun to emerge around

mundane, emergent practices that maintain intimacy in families (Clark 2012; Sengupta 2012; Leaver 2017; Burrows 2017), school surveillance (Shade and Singh 2016) and intergenerational “friendly surveillance” (Hjorth et al. 2017). We know very little about the ways mobile media practices relating to care and intimacy—what Tama Leaver calls “intimate surveillance” (2017)—are being played out in everyday familial contexts. And how, in turn, these mobile intimacy practices are recalibrating how surveillance is being conceptualized.

In Rika’s mundane and intimate exchanges with her mother through social mobile media we see the persistence of previous media rituals—most notably the *keitai*. We begin to comprehend how the *keitai* cultures have become part of the fabric of ritualization that represents an extension of existing types of care and gift giving practices as well as new ways to be co-present—a mode of electronic proximity that expands upon temporal, spatial and geographic distances. These modes of co-presence afford ways in which the mobile phone can operate materially and symbolically, expanding upon existing care cultures through the ambience of co-presence. A message or “stamps” (stickers) on LINE can send feelings of care and responsibility—reminding us of the ongoing role of the mobile phone in gift giving practices (Taylor and Harper 2002). As we will see in Chapter 2, the uptake of different platforms in the specific contexts highlight that cultures enhance particular modes of “platformivity” (Lamarre 2017) as much as platforms frame our ways of seeing. In Japan, LINE dominates, while in China WeChat is all-pervasive. In Australia there is a mixture of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

Paralinguistics—like *emojis*, stamps and stickers—provide emotional and facial clues for mediated environments. Each platform has its own customized form of *emojis*, further enhancing particular cultural nuances and norms. They also expand upon discourses around mobile parenting research by affording unilateral social or friendly surveillance between children, their parents and grandparents. During the age of the *keitai*, children were the ones monitored by their parents. Now, however, in the age of the *sumaho*, it is the grown children who are monitoring their elderly parents in what can be understood as a “social” (Marwick 2012), friendly or careful surveillance (Hjorth, Richardson and Balmford 2016).

Underlining the tension between enduring and changing rituals of kinship, Rika’s story and use of digital forms of co-presence also demonstrate how new forms of kinship are being interwoven within the everyday. *Understanding Digital Kinship is central to this book.* Through the role of locative media use and non-use, we explore how cultural and generational





Figure 1.2: Sending messages, stamps and videos to family members on LINE

differences are informing practices of care at a distance, social surveillance and maintaining intimacy. The significance of “non-use” is now a significant part of the repertoire of everyday media practices (Baumer, Ames, Burrell, Brubaker and Dourish 2015; Baumer, Adams and Khovanskaya 2013; Satchell and Dourish 2009) and researchers are starting to realize the importance of understanding media practices as part of a continuum that involves use and non-use in relation to the rhythms and activities of everyday life.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter we outline some of the key concepts and methods included in this book. First, we begin with a brief methods section. We then discuss the role of *Digital Kinship* as *intimate mundane co-presence*. This is followed by a review into some of the ways in which surveillance has been theorized and consider how it is being recalibrated through familial locative media use. Then we examine our fieldsite locations, ethnographic methods, and how ethnography can provide valuable insight into understanding locative media in practice. We conclude with a discussion of the book’s structure and chapter outlines.

## Methods

Mobile and haptic media play an increasingly central role in intergenerational and transnational relationships and intimacies. To understand how locative, social and mobile media fits into the rhythms of everyday life—with its mundane routines and intimacies—requires us to go beyond standard interviewing methods. Instead we developed ethnographic techniques that

enable the researcher to engage empathetically with people's intimate experiences in mundane life (Pink, Ardèvol and Lanzeni 2016). Often mundane experience of digital technologies is difficult to access or to observe as a researcher, precisely because it happens at moments when people are alone and in situations where they are unlikely to usually share with others, let alone with researchers.

We employed mobile media as a tool for the researchers and participants, and also positioned mobile devices and software as tools in themselves. This approach was predicated on the idea that mobile media such as smartphones and apps work as a very intimate and mundane objects, allowing for ethnographic research to be undertaken without participants feeling the need to be 'on display' or perform activities that were not part of their usual lifeworlds.

Given that locative media is often used on the move, this makes it even harder to trace. Earlier in the research we had considered using Go-Pro video cameras and giving them to participants, however we felt such a technology would be too foreign and thus destabilize everyday familiar practices. Much of locative media that is activated intentionally, occurs while moving and waiting to move—at a bus stop, planning a driving trip, on public transport, just before getting up in the morning or just about to go to sleep at night, tagging locations while on holiday, or while taking a moment out of a social situation. That is, *transitional moments*.

To conduct an ethnography of Digital Kinship through locative media means developing techniques to understand these practices as situated within the familial rhythms of everyday life. This means understanding it as part of social mobile media practices more generally. In particular, our study followed 12 households over three years (2014–2017) within the three very different locations we strategically selected (Melbourne, Tokyo and Shanghai) to gain a sense of cultural differences and similarities with respect to intergenerational use. In each cultural context, one local informant was the key researcher to ensure for nuanced understandings of the linguistic, social and cultural practices. In each location we had one Chief Investigator (CI) who worked with a research assistant to recruit a diverse cohort of families in different parts of the three cities. Given the attrition rate over three years, we began with 36 households and ended with 30 households.

In Tokyo and Shanghai, interviews were held in Japanese and Chinese, then transcribed into English. Interviews were predominantly held in the home except when participants, for convenience, requested alternative sites. In this three-year study we were keen to put locative media into context—culturally, socially, linguistically and technologically. This required

that we deploy methods that sought to understand locative media as part of the assemblage of social mobile media practices. We used video interviews focused on the participants' discussion of their everyday practices through their hand gestures in and around the device. This technique—tactile ethnography—allowed us to explore some of the tacit feelings and practices informing the rituals. There is a growing need to understand screens as part of a haptic ecology that moves in, across and around the screen—which mobile media can help elicit (Pink, Sinanan, Hjorth and Horst 2016; Richardson and Hjorth 2018). For example, often in re-enactment, the hands would role play the movements across the screen in ways that sometimes provided more insight than what was being articulated by the participant. This would then allow us to ask more questions about the gestures as a way to discuss the performative and tacit forms of practice and proprioception. We need to consider what researching *through* and *by* the hands might add to our methods and theorization for mobile media and screen research. These haptic practices inform how we interact, experience and understand locative media in our everyday.

We asked participants to show us a few activities—scenarios of use, 'one day in the life of' (re-enacting a typical day of mobile media use, usually yesterday), app walkthroughs—while they talked us through the images, texts and apps they use and why. This approach to ethnography allows us to understand motivations for use which can put digital media into practice: that is, what certain images, words and rituals mean as part of broader kinship practices. The project sought to put into context these rituals rather than seeing the digital as a mere 'disruption.' Just as no method is left untouched by the field (Lury and Wakeford 2011), so too does the relationship between the digital and kinship become one about continuity across articulated and tacit lifeworlds and experiences. These methods allowed us to understand the dynamic relationship between the interfaces, bodies and cultures framing particular forms of mundane Digital Kingship.

## Digital Kinship as Intimate Mundane Co-presence

Understanding Digital Kinship has been central to the broader research project. Over three years (2014–2018) our work traced the role of cross-cultural and intergenerational practices in three locations—Shanghai, Tokyo and Melbourne. These contrasting urban contexts provided different examples of the "digital city" as a complex cartography that involves contested interfaces, vulnerable agencies and placemaking (Foth, Brynskov and Ojala 2015).



While urban studies scholars have studied the role of smartphones in public engagement and citizenship, it is the more informal practices within the home—and how the home is carried with us through the phone (Morley 2003) across different spaces, places and cultures—that is central to our notion of Digital Kinship.

Through the notion of Digital Kinship, we bring together the continuities and discontinuities in and around digital media and intimacy. Digital Kinship embeds the study into broader debates about the changing (or residual) nature of what it means to be a “family” in an age of networked media as argued by Clark (2012) as well as Horst and Miller (2012). Kinship has always been important to ethnographic understandings of culture. With the added dimension of the digital, we see how kinship moves in and out of online and offline spaces and, in turn, how these spaces have come to develop their own histories, connections and memories.

Doing intimacy within contemporary contexts requires acknowledging the ways in which it can be public and community orientated (Jamieson 2011)—especially through the gradations of publics afforded by social media. In *The Feeling of Kinship*, David Eng (2010) puts forth a theory of intersectionality whereby previously conceived private and individual psychic structures are transformed into collective ones—that is, the feeling of kinship. Kinship, or in this case *Digital Kinship*, is central to understanding how contemporary locative media uses and non-uses reflect doing intimacy and boundary work.

As Lynn Jamieson (2011) has noted in her detailed historicization of intimacy, the dichotomy between “private intimacy” and “public community” is deeply flawed. Drawing from feminist literature, Jamieson argues that much of contemporary “doing intimacy” involves community and civic engagement—a process that sees a complete transformation of the role of intimacy in and around the notion of family. Research on couples offer a “mixed picture” on the place of boundary work in doing intimacy. In the work of Lasén and Casado (2012) they discuss how heterosexual couples deploy mobile media in ways to express different forms of intimacy and boundary work—processes that can involve “quiets” and “disquiets.”

Understanding digital kinship requires us to think about intimate co-presence and the mundane. Co-presence has been an important term in new media, internet and mobile communication research. Outlined by Erving Goffman (1959) as an integral part of everyday presentations of self, the notion of co-presence sees all forms of intimacy as mediated. The work of Mimi Ito and Daisuke Okabe (2005) was seminal in adapting this concept to mobile phone contexts in Japan. Moreover, debates around the





co-present role of the researcher in, and around, the online (and its relation to co-location) have taken on further significance with ethnographies arguing that the field is always mediated (Beaulieu 2010), if not by technology then by language, gestures, subjectivities and memories. For Anne Beaulieu, this requires ethnographers to think not only of the politics and practice of co-presence but also co-location.

The intimate mundane brings together two strands in recent literatures that are concerned with the embodied and affective dimensions of mundane everyday life at home and with digital media: the role of the mundane and banal as a site for analyzing power relations and rituals; and the role of the intimate as entanglement within everyday digital media practices. Intimacy here must be understood beyond western or Anglophonic traditional notions which privilege the face-to-face as wrongly unmediated (Jamieson 2011). Rather, intimacy needs to be understood on various levels—between individuals, groups and societies—while also acknowledging the role of such concepts as Herzfeld's "cultural intimacy."

For Herzfeld, cultural contexts inform the ways in which intimacy plays out in everyday practices. Herzfeld (1997, 44) notes that the "intimate seeps into the public spheres that have themselves been magnified by the technologies of mass mediation." Here cultural intimacy takes three forms: historical, institutional, and geographical. Through a notion of cultural intimacy, we can reconfigure intimate publics as they move in and out of the digital practices.

As Laurent Berlant (1999, 281) observed in the last century, intimacy had taken on new geographies and forms of mobility, most notably as a kind of "publicness." In keeping with Michael Warner (2002), Berlant sought to queer traditional and static notions of the public and citizenship by addressing the often tacit and yet increasingly important role of the intimate. In a digital material environment, intimate relations are not simply performed in pairs, bounded groups or cultural contexts; they also traverse the online and offline. This traversing sees physically public worlds entangled by electronic privacy, and an electronic public that is geographically private. As Mimi Sheller asserts "there are new modes of public-in-private and private-in-public that disrupt commonly held spatial models of these as two separate 'spheres'" (2004, 39).

As noted by others (Dobson 2015; Berlant 1999; Warner 2002; Hjorth and Arnold 2013), the idea that forms of intimacy might be generated in contexts that are at the same time public is not new. Mobile media amplify inner subjectivities as they conform to existing socio-cultural rituals and practices. As one of the most intimate devices in everyday life, mobile phones are



vehicles for haunting upon multiple material, symbolic, and immaterial dimensions. They are vessels *for* and *of* our intimacies and emotions, shaping and being shaped by affective bonds. Hjorth and Arnold (2013) have argued that mobile media are also increasingly vessels for *intimate publics* and *mobile intimacy*. Here we can understand mobile intimacy as an overlay woven between the electronic with the social, and the emotional with co-present. Intimacy is a multilayered and contextual concept.

Advancing this further, they have proposed a recalibration of intimate publics in an age of social media, through which we can understand the competing histories, identities and practices within the Asia-Pacific region. This work builds on the research on intimacy and mobile telephony (Hjorth 2007; Prøitz 2007) that has shown how technology invites new forms of presence and proximity. The bodily presence and emotions are not lesser, but different from the traditional. For Marika Lüders (2008), what was previously considered private is no longer restricted to the private sphere. This relationship between the private and intimacy is even more complicated by social media (Hjorth 2009). Locative media, coupled with algorithms and Big Data, have challenged how media, control and intimacy are conceptualized and practiced (Andrejevic 2006; Andrejevic, Hearn and Kennedy 2015). And, in turn, how care and intimacy is playing out through the media practices.

## Friendly Surveillance and Care at a Distance

While locative media is becoming a default in many mobile apps, their usage and non-usage speak to ways in which people *curate* their intimate and yet public lives. For some, the intimate and public are interwoven. For others, they use media to re-create boundaries between the intimate and private in a world in which these concepts seem to blur. Locative media has provided much food for thought in rethinking privacy (Gazzard 2011; Farman 2011; de Souza e Silva and Frith 2012). Here privacy isn't seen as something we possess (or don't) but rather something we constantly do and define through practice (Dourish and Anderson 2006).

Although there has been discussion about corporate and governmental surveillance in an age of Big Data (e.g. Farman 2010; Andrejevic 2006; Cincotta, Ashford, and Michael 2011), the rise of new forms of social surveillance in families (Marwick 2012) is creating an additional—and to date under-researched—layer of everyday practices layered by locative media (Clark 2012; Sengupta 2012). We know very little about the ways locative media practices relating to privacy, intimacy and surveillance are being played



out in everyday family contexts, in what way these impact on how, when and where locative media are used, or the implications of these practices for how place and time are experienced. Through studying the messiness of practice across generations and cultures we can begin to think through complex ways in which locative media is used to maintain intimate relations, especially at a distance. To understand locative media in practice requires new approaches to surveillance and its relationship to care and intimacy. In this book, we situate locative media as part of broader social mobile media practices.

Lee Humphreys (2013) identifies three kinds of surveillance involved within social media practice. In addition to the traditional notion of surveillance—characterized by its non-transparency by an authority (i.e. government or corporation)—Humphreys identifies three other kinds of surveillance: voluntary panopticon, lateral surveillance, and self-surveillance. There are other types of surveillance emerging—lateral and social. Lateral surveillance is the asymmetrical, nontransparent monitoring of citizens by one another (Andrejevic 2006).

We saw this practice in our fieldwork, epitomized by 30-year-old Melbourne participant Catherine and the watching of her girlfriend (30-year-old Susan) in the Uber through the app's tracking functions. There are many apps that allow citizens to monitor other citizens' behavior through nonreciprocal forms of watching. Every day people can search for information about other citizens without their knowledge or permission.

The advent of various social mobile media platforms has given rise to other forms of lateral surveillance such as “social surveillance” (Marwick 2012), which suggests a mutual surveillance among actors using social media. Like lateral surveillance, social surveillance involves nonhierarchical forms of monitoring (i.e. not involving the state or corporate entities) among everyday people. Unlike lateral surveillance, social surveillance suggests that people engage in permissible and reciprocal forms of watching. We will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3 on “friendly surveillance.”

As we have seen in fieldwork, tinkering and perpetual modulation are two key practices we identify in participant's practices. Over time, the relationship between intimates and media evolve and dissipate while forming a rhythm of careful maintenance and modifying expectations. Throughout this book you will meet our participants and see a variety of ways in which different relationships and types of kinship are played out and through locative media use. These practices take on various forms of care, co-presence and intimacy and are best understood through ethnography. In order to locate the study, we will briefly outline the three locations, which we have



chosen for their diversity in adoption of locative media over time. All three locations have very different mobile phone cultures and telecommunication regulatory structures.

For Pols, care at a distance is the processes whereby digital media ambivalently reinforces, rather than replaces, face-to-face contact. In her study of digital technologies in palliative care settings, Pols notes that media can be useful only when used in unison (2012). As we will show in this book, intergenerational usage of mobile technologies showed the informal ways grandparents, parents and children were using the technologies to provide a sense of continuity—what we call Digital Kinship. Parents have always found ways to spy on their children, and vice versa. However how this watching takes on the overlays of the mobile, social and locative media creates new types of “sense-making.”

## Kinship Across Three Cities, Generations and Cultures

The research discussed in this book was developed across three cities in the Asia-Pacific region: Melbourne (Australia), Shanghai (China) and Tokyo (Japan). Tokyo, Shanghai and Melbourne provide compelling stages in locative media practices. Tokyo offers one of the longest examples of everyday mobile phone use. Shanghai represents a location with a rapid and large-scale uptake of locative media by predominantly generation Y, the *ba ling hou* (CNNIC 2011; Hjorth and Pink 2014) and generation Z, and also the “millennials.” Melbourne offers an example of fast locative media adoption through high percentages of smartphone penetration (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011; Our Mobile Planet 2012). By contrasting and comparing these three divergent cultures through locative media use and non-use we can gain deeper insights into mobile media as part of emerging twenty-first century everyday cultural practices.

The rise of the smartphones within urban contexts has generated much interdisciplinary debate from urban studies and human computer interaction (HCI) to name a few. Smartphones, as part of the Internet of Things (IoT), have been discussed as both a vehicle for empowerment (open data) and exploitation (surveillance). As cities such as Tokyo embrace smart city infrastructure that allows for data collection, analysis and evidence-based policy interventions around environmental responsiveness and sustainability (Hobson and Marvin 2017), the role of these digital technologies for social innovation (especially informal wellbeing and social inclusion for older adults) becomes increasingly important. And yet, understanding the



informal practices of kinship care which often occurs in the home—especially in terms of intergenerational care of older adults—has been left out of the discussion (Hasan and Linger 2016; Koch 2010; Muramatsu and Yarime 2011). As we explore in the last section of this book, understanding Digital Kinship can provide insight for future planning around super-aging contexts.

Although historically kinship and the structures of family life vary significantly across the three locations (e.g. Daniels 2010; Fong 2004; Kitaoji 1971; Xu and Xia 2014; Wallis 2013; Nonoyama 2009; Amagasa 2012; Matsuda 2009; Dobashi 2006; Hjorth and Arnold 2013), one of the commonalities across all three sites is the changing role of the family with urban migration and growth (Baldassar 2007), which in turn, is changing the ways in which “family” is defined and practiced across all three sites. In particular, an increasing trend towards nuclear families at the same time as a marked growth in the aging population in China and Japan—coupled with policy frameworks—have shaped the structures of families. The concept also acknowledges changing definitions of family in multicultural urban areas such as Melbourne, including the growth in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) families, single parents, and families without children. These new forms of families are, in turn, shaping emergent meanings and forms of kinship and relatedness.

In the following section, we briefly outline the three locations to provide readers with a context.

## Shanghai

Over the last 30 years Shanghai has grown into a mega-city with a population of 24.2 million people in 2015. One of the first areas to explore the open-door policy, it is now the largest city in China which is known for the increase in sectors ranging from finance and retail, to real estate and growth in the tertiary sector. Acknowledged for overcrowding and extensive pollution associated with industry and transport, housing has expanded across the region with the increased suburbanization and peri-urbanization of the city adding to the burden of daily commutes. “Temporary” migration has also added to the population and infrastructure burden of the city. Nevertheless, Shanghai attracts such temporary migrants from rural and peri-urban areas of China precisely because of the higher quality of life.

An increase in consumption both of consumer goods, food as well as energy and other resources is prevalent, and scholars have noted the rise of a middle, consumer class (Lewis, Martin and Sun 2016). The growth of the middle class has concurrently increased healthcare and other quality



of life measures, including lifespan. As Gou observes, another particularly important characteristic of Shanghai is the large proportion of the population over 60 years of age, “22.5 per cent of the overall population in 2009, a figure that is almost double the national average” (2011, n.p.). As a result, the need for communication across generations who might not live in the same region of the city, or the country, makes the understanding of the micro-dynamics of kinship through digital media of central importance.

Like Japan, social media is synonymous with mobile media for most of the older generation. For many millions of people living in regional areas, the use of QQ provided an early entrance into both mobile media and the internet (Hjorth and Arnold 2013). QQ was initially used by young adults who moved away from home as part of a broader trend of geographic and economic mobility unimagined by their parents. By 2010, it was RenRen (meaning people people)—which had the same functionality and design as Facebook—that started to be popular. This was then superseded by the highly popular and easy-to-use stand-alone apps WeChat and Weibo.

Throughout these transitions, young adult children taught their older parents how to use each new platform. Increasingly Chinese families started to form collaborative WeChat groups in order to experience instant online communication no matter how far they lived or worked from each other geographically. This popular new media channel, with its wide range of user adoption and distance-sensitive cases involved in such new family communication patterns, enabled a new way of intergenerational communication between parents and adolescent children. These shifting intergenerational relations need to be reflected in the light of the One-Child policy carried out by Chinese government from the 1980s, which has radically changed the size and intimacy of millions of families in China.

Therefore, the *Digital Media Practices in Households* research team in Shanghai carried out qualitative research to explore the general questions about how social mobile media use interact with intergenerational relationship within families, using in-depth interviews and scenarios of use (re-enactment) as the main method. A total of 11 family sample groups were collected based on various factors including gender, age, and distance between parents and children. Given the expanding tertiary sector, all of the families in the study included undergraduate students who lived in Shanghai. Parents and children were interviewed separately, consolidating dyadic data of each family from both the elder and the younger generation perspectives. This chosen interview style contributed to avoiding biases in conclusion caused due to partial information collection. Textual analysis on the WeChat interaction screenshots were also carried out. These rich

first-hand materials made it possible to dig deeper into group online information sharing practices within members of tertiary/university students' families via WeChat.

## Tokyo

In urban Japan the nuclear family consisting of “a couple and child(ren)” has come to be regarded as an exemplary model of the family (Nonoyama 2009). In practice, the composition of the typical family has, in fact, diversified due to the decrease in the number of people getting married, a trend towards marrying later in life, and a decline in the number of children couples and families have. For example, the number of couples married in 2012 was 670,000, which was 60% or 430,000 less than the level in 1972 (1.1 million).

The average age of first marriage in Japan was 30.8 years old (male), and 29.2 years old (female) in 2012, which signals a rise in the average age of first marriage by 3.0 years (male) and 4.0 years (female) over the last three decades (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2013). The total fertility rate (TFR) fell to record-low of 1.26 million in 2005 as compared to 4.3 million during the first baby boom from 1947–1949. The number still remains at a low level when compared with countries in Europe and the United States, even though there is a slowly increasing trend in 2011, when the number was 1.39 million (Cabinet Office 2013).

Trends in percent distribution of households by structure of household show that the percentage of one-person households and households of couples has only been increasing in recent years (Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2012). As of 2010, 25.5% of every household was a one-person household and 22.6% of households consist of a couple without children. These statistics illustrate the extent of structural changes to the family in Japan over recent years. In light of this phenomenon, Hisaya Nonoyama (2009), an advocate of the “family lifestyle approach”, argues that today, the notion of “family” indicates various forms of family selected by individuals' lifestyles, and family has become an important object of choice for individuals. Thus, within the context of “family”—which is selected and formed as a lifestyle—individuals have to exert active effort to build and maintain “familiar relationships,” otherwise s/he cannot enter, or s/he falls out of the family circle.

In order to understand the role of mobile social media in Japanese families over three years we conducted fieldwork predominantly by revisiting households and viewing media practice in situ. The participants were recruited through various channels, including students from the university that the



authors belonged to, as well as through snowballing (social capital networks from friends and acquaintances). The interviews were conducted at locations the participants were familiar with, on a one-to-one basis between one of the authors and the participants, spanning from one to two hours. Part of the process involved participants becoming familiar with the interviewer, providing a detailed understanding into the various ways social mobile media plays into everyday rhythms.

Within the interview, participants were asked to discuss—in conversation format—how they came to own their first *keitai* and their social media usage with their family after purchasing a *sumaho*. The participants themselves determined who was included in their “family.” The participants were asked to bring their *sumaho* during the interview and to provide screen shots, to a feasible extent, of interactions between family members using social media. The participants’ name (pseudonym), age, occupation, household structure, scope of “family” was assumed by the participant. In the study, eight out of twelve participants used LINE most frequently in communicating with their families (See Chapter 2). All of these eight participants were female. Over the three years of working with these families, the significance of LINE in intergenerational relationships became increasingly dominant. In addition, six out of these eight participants have a “family” group on LINE and send messages back and forth with their families. Here LINE operates as a digital genealogy for offline intimacies.

## Melbourne

In Australia there were an estimated 6.4 million families consisting of a total of 19.4 million family members in 2012. The vast majority of families were coupled families (83%) with about half of the coupled families having dependents living with them (43%). The next largest group were one-parent families (15%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013).

One of the particularly important dimensions of Melbourne as the key city for this study is the significant number of overseas residents and, in turn, the role of social media in maintaining a sense of transnationalism. Indeed, 42% of Melbourne’s residents were born overseas and the most commonly spoken language after English is Mandarin (10%) (City of Melbourne 2013). In addition, Melbourne accommodates over 24,000 international students, including a total of 207 ancestries that residents identified with, 138 overseas countries of birth and 121 languages spoken at home other than English (Ibid.). This is reflected in our selection of families, over half of which include individuals born overseas. In addition, we actively sought out





GLBT households (4) who are working to define and redefine the meaning of family and kinship in Australia.

In the first two phases of research in Melbourne, we utilized a method known as “tactile digital ethnography” (Pink et al. 2016), which sought to explore what the tactile and often tacit gestures around the screen articulates about mundane practices (i.e. what the body remembers); embodiment, engagement and the everyday. Tactile digital ethnography began with focusing upon filming people’s hands in and around the screen while they discussed and re-enacted their locative media use. Through a focus on the hands we were able to understand their ways into the technologies and the sensory experiences that were part of this—thus opening up a route through which to gain a sense of their unspoken and often-invisible everyday technology use (Ibid.).

Over the course of interviews in families in Melbourne, a range of discussions emerged around “data” and especially discursive relationships regarding notions of privacy. In the final phase of the project we explored the ways in which people navigated data in practice, and the ways in which data, or the value of data, circulated between objects and other objects, technologies and devices, as well as between people through data and social media biographies. These often included the use of technologies and devices to “store” data such as photographs, which became traces of relationships to people or places, the transfer of devices between family members and friends with (or without) traces of data as well as the transfer of data between devices. It also attended to blockages and loss often articulated in relation to ideas about losing data, losing track of (or control of) data, and data being “trapped” on devices ranging from hard drives and smartphones. Attending to screens, the data and social media biographies were recorded via video.

By following participants over three years, *Digital Media Practices in Households* sought to understand media practice as dynamic and nuanced. This book outlines some of the key characteristics of media in and around familial ties. During this period, we witnessed shifts in media usage that included tensions between social media as “impression management” and self-diarization, the archival and yet ephemeral, fleeting role of media. The focus of much social media on the temporal “moment” (WeChat had even started its “Moments” feature in response to this phenomenon) leads to questions about how we can study mobile media if this trend continues, especially as there will be little or no archives for us to study. Given this trend, it became apparent that studying the gestures in and around the mobile media—that is, the way in which we frame the practices in and through



the knowing hands—will continue to gain significance in understanding mobile media practice.

Moreover, as those participants who grew up with mobile media grow even older, their practices in and around representation of life and after-life will undoubtedly become more prevalent. So too, will issues around the curation of these mobile data trails by loved ones after they pass away. Understanding the role of stewarding (Brubaker 2016; Cumiskey and Hjorth 2018)—that is, the taking care of social media tribute pages by loved ones of the deceased—will continue to grow. Within this area, trying to make sense of tacit obligation and responsibilities will increasingly become an issue as the amount of people that pass away have digital media traces.

## Structure of the Book

In this book we seek to reconcile and recalibrate the often-paradoxical relationship formed in and around continuity (kinship) and discontinuity (digital disruption). Digital Kinship allows us to think beyond the digital and through the digital historically, conceptually etc. In order to do so, this book is organized into four sections—*Digital, Playful, Visualizing, and Co-futuring Kinship*.

The first section, Digital Kinship, explores the ways in which kinship and forms of relatedness are being created and reproduced through digital technologies. In Chapter 2, “Platform genealogies,” we consider the continuities and discontinuities around LINE, WeChat, Facebook and WhatsApp as a digital genealogy. We explore the particular histories and practices informing those platforms—what Gillespie (2015) calls “the politics of platforms” or Lamarre (2017) calls “platformativity”—and why they are being adopted intergenerationally. For example, the developed and quick uptake of LINE was in direct response to the way in which mobile social media shifted in and after the earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011 known as 3/11 (Slater et al. 2012; Hjorth and Kim 2011; ITmedia Business Online 2013). The next chapter, Chapter 3, seeks to frame Digital Kinship in terms of debates around the effects of media especially in terms of emotion, intimacy and surveillance. Bringing discussions around emotion and media by Fortunati, Pertierra and Vincent (2012), along with debates around social surveillance (Humphreys 2013; Marwick 2012), mobility and transnationalism (Baldassar 2007), this chapter considers the ways that different forms of mobility (chosen and enforced) are recalibrating familial ties.



In Section II—Playful Kinship—we begin with Chapter 4, which revisits historical discussions around mobile media as gift (Taylor and Harper 2002) and the important anthropological meanings of the gift as a practice into power relations and rituals, to think about how we might expand upon this practice in terms of location. Here location, co-location and co-presence are revisited. In Chapter 5 we begin to focus upon the ways in which families “play” with co-presence through different engagements with digital media. We discuss in detail our methods around understanding co-present practices, especially through “tactile digital ethnography” (Pink et al. 2016). This chapter examines how studying the hand gestures in, and around, the screen might help us contextualize a more embodied practice of mobile media in the everyday.

Following upon the multi-sensorial nature of digital kinship discussed in Chapter 5, Section III embarks on the “visual turn” within much of social mobile media. Increasingly, visual apps like Instagram are being deployed to create new forms of ambient and co-present intimacies. The first chapter of this section, Chapter 6, analyzes the growing role of the visual in social media practices in terms of tensions between sharing, impression management and self-cataloging. Chapter 7 considers the role of generational literacies and etiquettes around visual genres. For example, in our study, younger participants tended to take and share more pictures, while older participants tended to take less but comment more on their children’s images. Here, generational understandings of co-present gift giving rituals can be found.

In the last section we turn to Co-futuring Kinship—the ways in which past and present practices inform how the future of the kinship for care at a distance. This is particularly important for “super-aging” contexts like Japan in which one in three is of 80 years old. How can we map and learn from some of the informal media methods for care at a distance around supporting older adult’s independence and social inclusion? Chapter 8 sets the scene for discussion around digital health in which mobile media is fully imbricated in. Discussions around a “silver bullet” in the form of a mobile app still dominant despite the fact that there is much work into the need for social, rather than technological, solutions (Gawande 2014). Chapter 9 explores how some of these practices are playing out for our participants, and how this informs generational imaginaries around data for care at a distance. In Chapter 10, we reflect upon a future rubric for imagining social mobile media.

This book therefore provides ways in which we might contextualize media practices as part of broader cultural and familial rituals. As families change, so too do their practices. Through the three locations we seek to



provide insights into cultural and generational dynamics and the ways that locative media, as part of a datafication more broadly, can operate as a lens onto contemporary forms of kinship. We seek to explore how we can locate kinship practices in and through mobile media.

In short, *locating the mobile*.

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