Imagined Journeys: Experiences of connecting home for those who travel away for work

family rituals 2.0

Multidisciplinary research to support work-life balance for mobile workers in the digital age

CTS Winter Conference

UWE, December 2015

Dr Billy Clayton and Dr Juliet Jain

Centre for Transport and Society

University of the West of England, Bristol

UWE University of the West of England BRISTOL

Centre for Transport & Society

Family Rituals 2.0 – project aim

"Family Rituals 2.0 seeks to understand individuals' values held in everyday rituals and the situated social context of mobile workers, and how digital technologies might be used to support inclusion in these rituals for those who are away from home."

Context

- Historically many mobile roles

- Growth in international business travel

- Focus on family practices
  - Family rituals and routines
  - Recognise that 'home' and 'family' have contested meanings

- Co-presence and virtual presence

Co-presence and virtual presence

- Co-presence = richness of being there
  - Emotion
  - Sensory

  - Communication (verbal and non-verbal)
  - Tacit knowledge

- So, what can technology replace?

Imaginative Travel

The sharing of the experience of a place through images (visual or otherwise) conveyed through talk, text, print, and – more recently – through television and other digital media.

Imaginative Travel

- Imaginative relies on the creation of images for the 'traveller'
  - Talk
  - Text
  - Print
  - Electronic

- Digital technologies increasingly facilitate the communication of visual images through video calling and picture messaging
  - Open a virtual 'window' into a geographically distant location

- How do mobile workers use digital technology to share their experiences of travel with their families?

- What use might the concept of imaginative travel be for considering the experience of absence?

Overview

- Focus on findings from qualitative interviews with mobile workers and their families
  - **20** mobile worker interviews
  - **12** follow-up family interviews
- Three themes
  1. the **types of communications** deployed
  2. the **experience of connecting** home for both mobile workers and their families
  3. the **opportunities** and **limitations** of digital technologies in **affording at-a-distance relationships**

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Routines and structures

- Routines defined by regular activities

- Family meals
  - In the home
    - Preparing/sharing
  - Outside of the home
    - Restaurants, cafes, etc…
- Sports and games
  - Sports
    - Playing or supporting
  - Board games/puzzles
  - Family-specific games
    - "Bedtime Quiz"
- Religious activities
- Social activities
  - Meeting friends together
  - Meeting up with wider family
- Family holidays
  - With each other
  - With wider family
  - With friends

- Day-to-day activities
  - Bedtimes
  - 'Flopping' on the sofa
  - Mealtimes
  - Watching TV/listening to radio
  - Shopping
  - Reading
- Family-specific activities
  - "Film club"
- Dancing
- Walks
- Cycle rides
- Birthdays
- Christmases
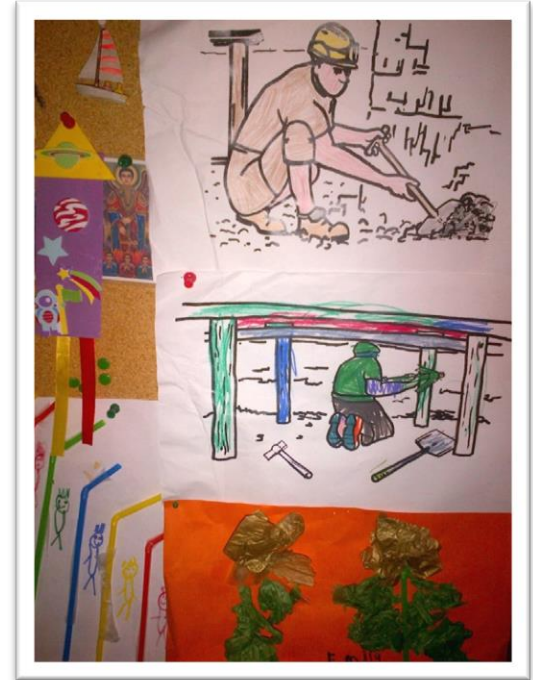- Easter
- Half term
- Anniversaries
- Festivals

Family Activities – Rituals and routines

Example: Food and drink

- Being together
  - Spending time shopping for ingredients
  - Food and drink are a part of broader rituals
  - Spending time over dinner
  - Going out together
- Creating together
  - Cooking often important
  - Working as a team and/or talking whilst cooking
    - Sharing cooking

Taking home away

- Digs
  - Art work by kids
  - Photos
- Home is more of the connection
  - Less evidence of 'home-making' (short stays?)
  - Digital glimpses of home during the day
    - Snapchat
    - Texts
    - Video calling

- *Is digital technology replacing the need/desire for <u>physical</u> reminders of home?*

Connecting home: technologies

More common ↑
Less common ↓

Types

- Phone-calls
- Text messages
- Skype
- Facetime
- Emails
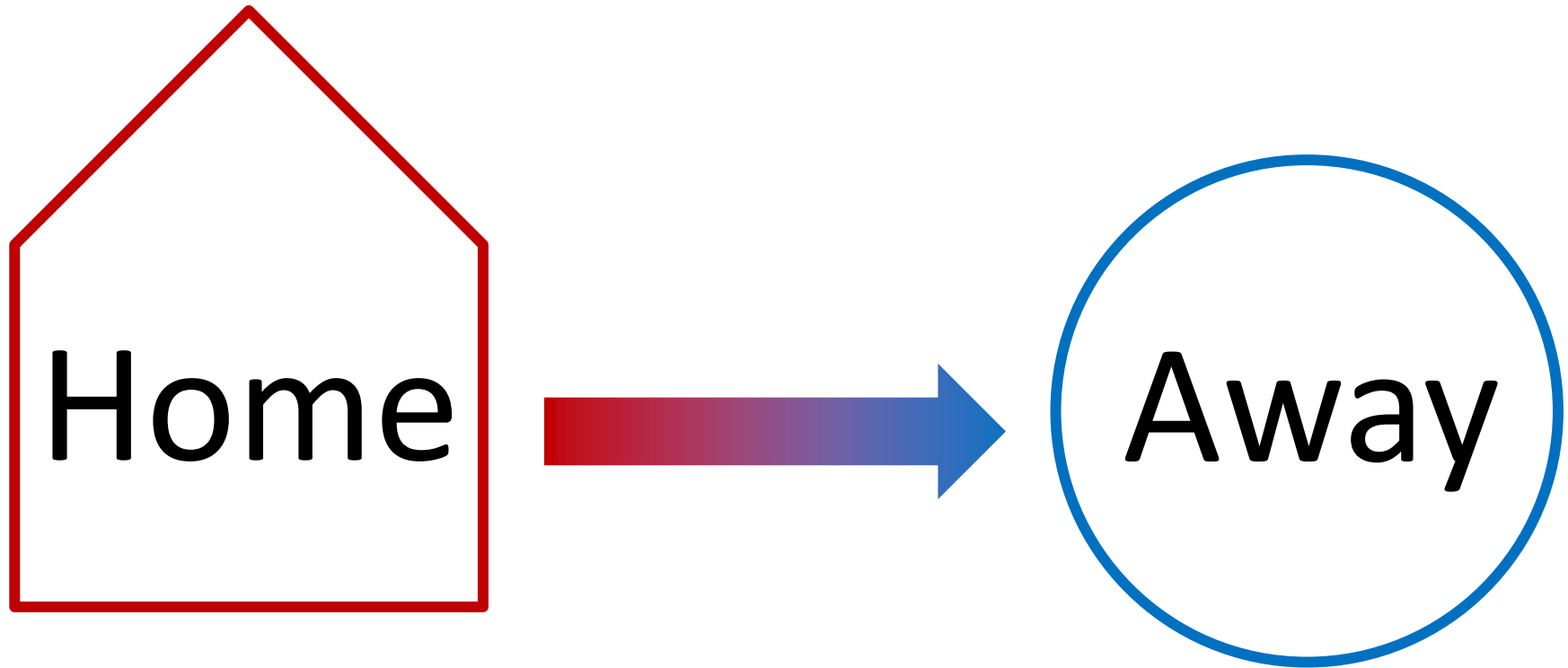- Facebook
- Snapchat
- Postcards
- Fax*

Functions

- Checking in
- Care
  - Consoling
  - Parenting
  - Family 'jobs'
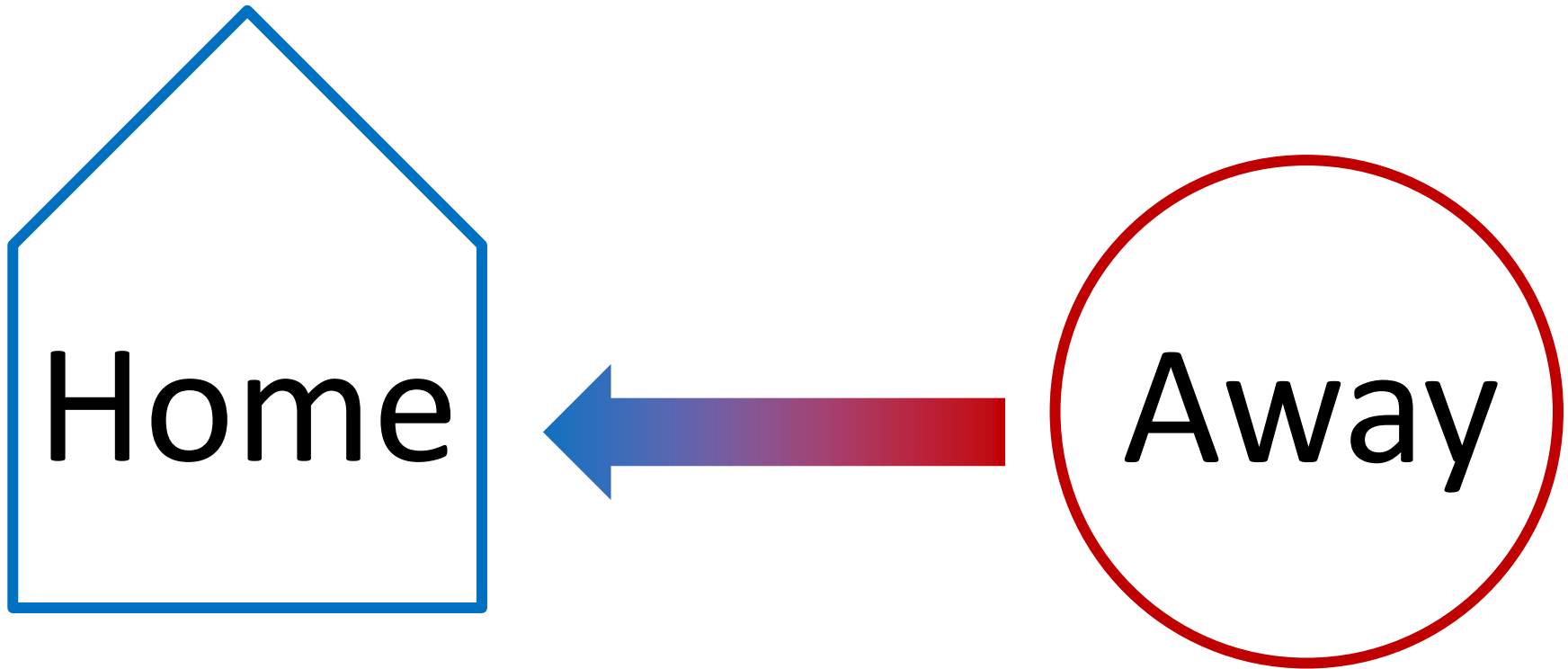- Sharing experience
  - Imaginative travel?

Connecting home: imagined mobility

- Family having an experience of the place in which mobile worker is staying
  - Through visits
  - Through technology (mainly video calling)
- Visual aspect most discussed
- Can create a more engaging/involved experience for family (adults and children)
- However, might also create heightened perceptions of absence
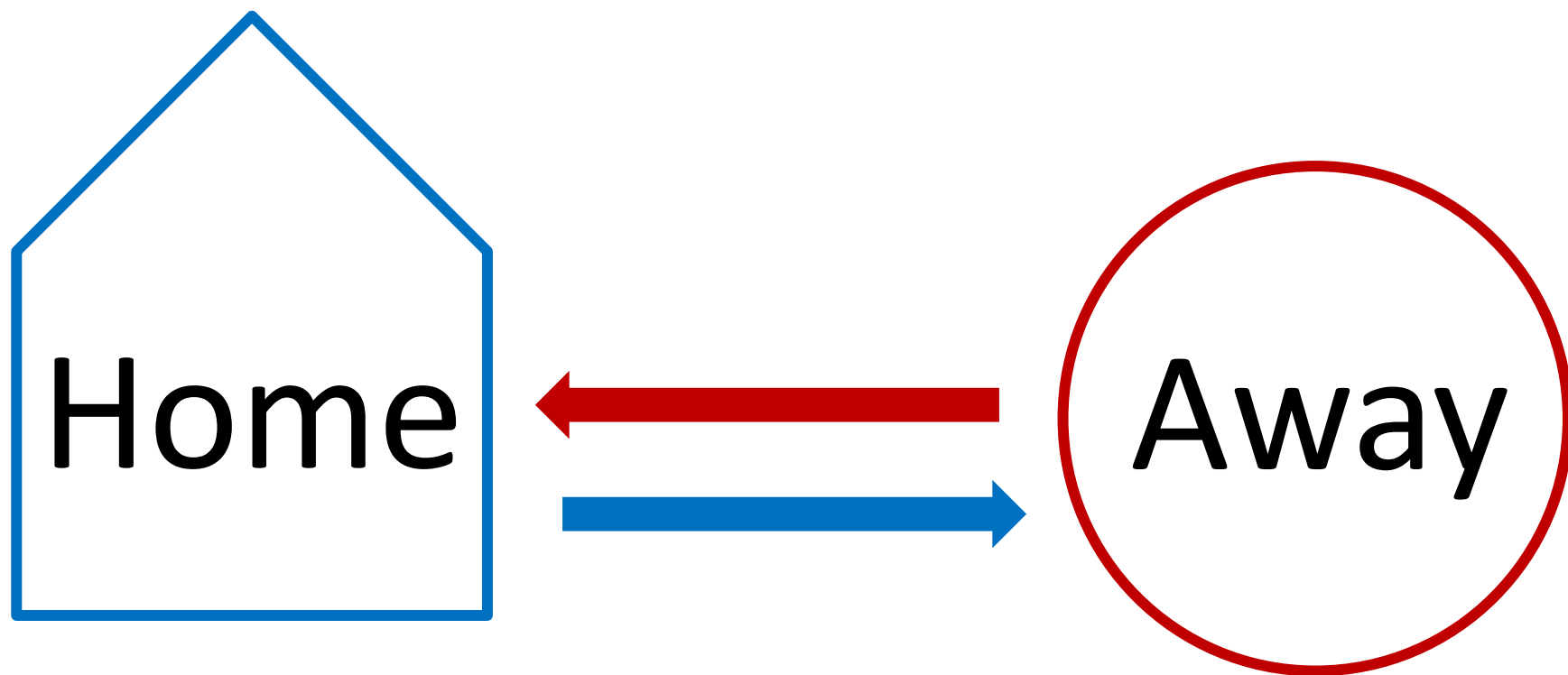- Reciprocal experience for mobile worker?

Imagined mobility: from home

Home → Away

Imagined mobility: to home

Imagined mobility: family connections

Home ← Away

Limits of imagination

- Digital technology still very constrained in terms of facilitating communication through physical contact

- Virtual communication struggles to convey important aspects of face-to-face communication – e.g. body language

- The 'digital window' is not permanently open

- These can serve to create dissatisfactory experiences of communication, and in some instances lead to creating greater stress for mobile workers and their families

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

- Communication is facilitated through a range of digital technologies
- People communicate whilst away for a number of reasons
  - Demonstration of **belonging whilst absent**
  - **Sharing** of experiences
- Mobile workers **'stepping out' of family life**
  - Technology facilitates social obligations

- Imaginative travel
  - What is represented?
- Technology can facilitate **'imaginative glimpses'** of home life/routine

- More expressive communication appears to help improve work/life balance
- *However…*
  - Never a full representation
  - Sometimes positive
  - Sometimes dissatisfactory

- ***Can digital technology do any more than it already does?***

Team partners

With particular thanks to **Dr Marina Marouda** and **Professor Adele Ladkin**, who have partnered in the collection of data presented here.

family rituals 2.0

Multidisciplinary research to support work-life balance for mobile workers in the digital age

MW Name	Gender	Frequency away	Occupation	Partner's Name	Family Int.	Family Characteristics
Adam	Male	>12	Consultant	Alice	No	P + C
Brenda	Female	>150	Other	Ben	No	P + C
Colin	Male	>100	Consultant	Claire	Yes	P + C
Dee	Female	Frequent	NGO	David	Yes	Partner only
Esme	Female	~10-20	Consultant	Edmund	Yes	Partner only
Freddy	Male	~50-100	Consultant	Freya	Yes	P + C
George	Male	Frequent	NGO	Gloria	Yes	P + C
Harry	Male	Weekends	Training	Helen	Yes	Partner only
Ian	Male	~40-120	Flight crew	Isobel	Yes	P + C
John	Male	>150	Tech. advisor	Judith	No	Partner only
Leon	Male	~40-120	Academic	Lisa	No	Partner only
Kevin	Male	~3-4	Journalist	N/A	No	Children only
Max	Male	~10-20	Sales	Moira	No	P + C
Nicola	Female	1 week in 6	NGO	Nathalie	Yes	Partner only
Oliver	Male	>50	Academic	Orla	No	P + C
Paul	Male	>150	Oil industry	Patricia	No	P + C
Rose	Female	~12	Law	Robert	Yes	P + C
Steve	Male	Longer trips	Publishing	Sally (mother)	Yes	Other combination
Tracy	Female	6-12 months	NGO	n/a	No	Living alone
William	Male	Frequent	Flight crew	Wendy	Yes	Partner only