MOBILE COMMUNICATION
MOBILE COMMUNICATION

Bringing Us Together

AND

Tearing Us Apart

EDITED BY

RICH LING AND

SCOTT W. CAMPBELL

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Dedication

Rich Ling
To my colleagues at Telenor

Scott W. Campbell
To my mom Barbara and to my dad Clark, who are making great strides expressing themselves with 160 characters or less.
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Mobile Communication: Bringing Us Together and Tearing Us Apart

Rich Ling and Scott W. Campbell

Introduction

In the first volume of the Mobile Communication Research Series (MCRS), we examined “the reconstruction of space and time.” In this volume, we turn to a more explicit social question of mobile communication and social cohesion. Perhaps unfairly, we ask if mobile communication is bringing us together or if it is tearing our sense of social cohesion apart. The adoption and use of mobile communication technologies give rise to new forms of coordination and social networking. Undoubtedly, these uses of technology can lead to increased cohesion within personal communities. However, some have expressed concerns that social networks become overly configured through mobile communication, contributing to what Habuchi (2005) calls “telecocooning.” In addition, the highly personal nature of the technology might also lead to increased individualization of the user. This volume of the MCRS examines whether mobile communication can bring people together or, alternatively, create social division.

This edition of the MCRS includes thirteen chapters that cover a wide range of issues associated with cohesion and the use of mobile communication. The broad themes include the following:

* the replacement of copresent interaction with mediated contact,
* analysis of mobile-based cohesion and gender,
* the role of media choice and its effect on social cohesion,
* mobile communication and communities of interest, and
* mobile communication, cohesion, and youth.
The chapters presented here include both qualitative and quantitative analyses of mobile use and its impact on social cohesion. There are chapters on caravan couples in Australia, factory workers in China, young couples in Germany, citizens of Slovenia, and sports clubs in Ireland. There is also research on drunken calls between university students in the United States, international students in Switzerland who strive to keep in contact with friends back home, and immigrant women in Melbourne, Australia.

We know from the existing research that the mobile phone generally helps to hold groups together. Yet this is only the broad view. There are countertendencies where the mobile phone disrupts our ability to develop weak ties and, as will be discussed in the following section, disrupts colocated interaction.

The Here and Now, in a Virtual Kind of Way

In the opening chapter, Kathleen Cumiskey describes what she calls mobile symbiosis. While the general direction of her research is that mobile communication brings together members of the intimate sphere, Cumiskey focuses on the degree to which we are drawn into mediated interaction and away from our copresent situation. When we receive a call on our mobile phone in a public place, we become engaged in the interaction with our remote interlocutor. The mobile phone thus causes deindividuation; that is, we are absorbed into a group. In this case, the group is our remote conversation partner. This process means that there is a similar lowering of inhibitions in relation to the colocated situation. Thus, maintaining mediated interaction is also occasion for a reduction in the heed we pay to those around us and the situation in which we find ourselves. While we are busy maintaining the cohesion of the mediated interaction, we are tearing the cohesion at the copresent situation.

Through a series of interviews, Cumiskey documents how individuals can suspend their sense of being remote from their mediated interlocutor and how they can feel drawn into the flow of a mobile phone conversation. While we still have a sense of where to talk or not to talk on the mobile phone (the library, funerals, on the street corner, etc.), there is a countervailing urge to be in touch with our telephonic partners. Cumiskey’s interviewees described the evolving role of the mobile phone and the tension between the copresent and the mediated. On the one hand, there is an urge to limit public use. On the other hand, there is the sense that the risk (both social and
even physical risk, such as when one uses their mobile while driving) of use is discounted in favor of being in touch with remote friends and family.

Another dimension is the use of the mobile phone as a type of screen against unwanted copresent interaction. Cumiskey describes the stratagem of pretending to use the mobile phone to ward off potential attackers or to avoid interaction with bothersome others. The point is that the person is talking on the phone and can either call for assistance or, in the case of bothersome people they meet on the street, assert that they are engaged in other interactions. This discussion comes back to the broader theme of the volume by helping us to understand the allure of talking with friends and the corresponding problem of being accountable in the copresent situation. There is the sense that being on the phone somehow excuses certain dimensions of the colocated interaction.

**Gender Issues in Communities**

There are several chapters that comment on the role of gender in the context of community. In some cases, the mobile phone becomes a way for women to interact with different forms of community. The mobile phone is also seen as an important part of couples’ interaction—coupled identity is, in many ways, the most basic form of social cohesion.

From Larissa Hjorth's perspective, the mobile phone is a device that exposes gendered issues in the continuance of society. As noted in the work of Rakow and Navarro (1993), gender roles are played out via the mobile device. Hjorth notes that the mobile phone is a device of propinquity. Indeed, it provides us with a very direct connection to one another. This channel for interaction provides an opportunity to interact at the instrumental as well as the emotional level. Thus, the device is a way that women can carry out their emotional labor: it is a device used to do the work of intimacy and emotionality. This can take the form of expressing closeness, providing care, or showing vulnerability, compassion, respect, or anger. In order to understand these issues, Hjorth interviewed more than forty women in the Melbourne area. She reports on interviews with multicultural women and examines how they used the mobile phone to maintain familial relationships with others who might be living in another country.

Hjorth takes up the theme of gifting that was introduced by Johnsen (2003) as well as Taylor and Harper (2003). Hjorth documents how
texting facilitates everyday coordination and interaction (text is great for confirming arrangements, like leaving a little note) and how it can also be done in a way that confirms the special connection of the interlocutors. As one of her participants notes, “I have a friend who communicates via text and e-mail with her own variation of English. She randomly replaces ‘c’s’ with ‘k’s’—i.e., kontakt and cashless and aktion. I actually really like it.” Playing on the notion of Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991), Hjorth suggests that linguistic gifting and various forms of interaction allow for the amplification of that which is local. A key concept that Hjorth introduces in this discussion is the notion of imaging communities and the use of local vernacular, which allows groups to share and archive various digital artifacts that become the lore of the group.

*Cara Wallis* provides an analysis of mobile phone usage by young female rural-to-urban migrants in China. This is based on ten months of ethnographic work among this large population of individuals (approximately 100–150 million workers). These women often work long hours for little money in the service and manufacturing industries. In addition to interviews and observations, Wallis collected data on the calling patterns and on the contents of the individuals’ phones (numbers in the phone memories, photos, etc.) and asked informants to fill out call diaries.

The mobile phone is an important device for these women as evidenced by their willingness to use up to a month’s wages to buy one. It allows the women to expand and enrich their social networks. At the same time, Wallis documents how it can also reify their status as outsiders by limiting the social circles in which they move. It does this by providing for practices that characterize unsophisticated use. Wallis documents how the mobile phone, and in particular texting, is used to express emotional issues. Interestingly, the women often draw on pre-composed messages when communicating expressive issues. These are copied from different sources. More urbane persons characterize the immigrant women’s use of these prewritten messages as being overly flowery and sentimental, and lacking in creativity. Thus, this practice is used by more “refined” persons to characterize the immigrant women as quaint or unsophisticated.

In her chapter, Wallis develops the notion of immobile mobility (IMM). It is “a means of surpassing, but not erasing, limiting material conditions to gain inclusion in expanded and enriched social networks.” Wallis calls it “a socio-techno means of surpassing
spatial, temporal, physical, and structural boundaries.” IMM allows these women to work around geographic, temporal, and structural boundaries. It is not, however, a type of virtual reality as in the computer-simulated environment. Rather, IMM is rooted in the material practices of these women and their everyday lives. The mobile phone facilitates their day-to-day activities by making interactions with their rural-based family more convenient. In this case, the mobile replaces the need for writing letters, scheduling calls from phone booths, or traveling to neighborhoods to make or receive calls.

The mobile phone is a key device in the development of social relationships. Wallis connects these social relationships, or guanxi in China, to Bourdieu’s concept of social capital. This can be seen in the breadth of persons that are recorded both in their phone memories and in their call records. In particular, her findings show that while there were a variety of individuals (friends, family, and bosses) in phone memories, the most common calls and communications were with persons from the user’s same class status. In this way, Wallis suggests that the mobile phone is not an instrument that necessarily challenges class boundaries but perhaps reinforces them. This finding is somewhat reminiscent of Rakow and Navarro’s (1993) and Chesley’s (2005) notion that the mobile phone changes, but still reinforces, the status of women. While there is a social cohesion provided by the mobile phone within the existing structures, the mobile phone is not a transformational device.

In another phase of use, the mobile phone can facilitate finding jobs and keeping in touch with other, more peripheral, persons. The names of friends and acquaintances that might be of use at some point can be stored in the phone’s memory. This is similar to Horst and Miller’s (2006) description of mobile phone usage in Jamaica, where it is sometimes seen as a register of persons who are not necessarily active friends but who might be of use in the future. The mobile phone is also a medium through which different types of dating and social intercourse take place. As with Ellwood-Clayton’s discussion of dating in the Philippines (2005), these contacts may be made through a third party. The contacts may also be more observed in mediated form than in actual dates (Law and Peng, 2006).

A key insight from this chapter is that while the mobile phone opens up opportunities for the women considered in the study through IMM, it also reifies their marginalization. The closed social circles seen in their calling records speak to the limited social mobility of
the women. Further, their use of pre-composed messages was a way for those from higher social classes to forge distinctions between the more and the less sophisticated residents of the cities. Thus, the cultural practices and the social networks engendered by the mobile phone close off upward mobility for the immigrant women. Wallis makes the important point that the mobile phone is not a “silver bullet” that eliminates all social problems. To use a different metaphor, the mobile phone can be used to rearrange the furniture and perhaps introduce a new style. However, at the end of the day, the furniture is largely the same as before.

Moving from the situation of only women, Amparo Lasén discusses the way that the mobile phone has a hand in shaping the nature of contemporary coupled relationships in Spain. She describes how mobile phones, in some ways, document the nature and the progression of a relationship. The messages in SMS memory, the names in the telephone book, and the record of calls are all artifacts of a relationship. They also trace the degree to which there is reciprocity in the relationship. Lasén describes how young couples progressively establish their coupled identity by first exchanging numbers, photos, and text messages (thus occupying a type of electronic space in one another’s mobile phones). From there, they might shift service providers so as to avoid the termination charges associated with calling across mobile phone providers; finally, they might enter into a “family” subscription plan so as to get reduced rates or even free calls to one another. This process describes the interweaving of the couple and to use the phrase of Berger and Kellner, their establishment of nomos (1964). All of this, of course, can take place before the couple carries out other forms of integration into a coupled status, such as having a common property, joint mortgage, or marriage.

Lasén also describes how couples use their mobile phones as icons or totems for their relationship. She tells about couples who each have the same photo as their screen saver. She describes how the date of their meeting or of their first formal date might become the PIN code for the device. Another more common practice is to save particularly poignant text messages or text messages that might mark particular phases in the couple’s relationship.

Joachim Höflich and Christine Linke consider how we use mobile communication for a special type of social cohesion: the “continuation” stage of an intimate relationship. The authors use material gathered in two different interview situations, the first a series of interviews with nine individuals and the second a focus group that included six couples.
(twelve persons). Their work studies how couples apply the functionality of mobile phones to the needs of the relationship. Höflich and Linke note that communication is a fundamental dimension of relationships and that communication can define the way that a relationship develops. They also note that relationships shift and change in phases. There is the development phase, the continuation phase, or the phase in which the relationship is in some form of decline. At each point in this cycle, the format, frequency, content, and the delay in communications can be hugely important. The results from the analysis show that the interviewees in the continuation stage of the relationship have a “routinized” form of interaction. At the same time, the interaction in this phase of the relationship can be characterized enough so as to allow the individuals to show a certain vulnerability. That is, they might use nonstandard forms of address and use paralinguistic forms of interaction, such as smiley faces. These practices show that couples can use mobile interaction to exchange what Goffman might call “tie signs” (1971).

The authors write that mobile phone usage provides everyday contact of couples, especially those who do not cohabitate. They note, “For them, the regular exchange of communications, the reassurance that the partner is fine, and the validation of the relationship are of utmost importance.” Beyond this type of remote nurturing and what they call “micro-rituals,” there is also the sense that there is an optimal frequency associated with mediated interaction: too much can be as damaging as too little. Höflich and Linke also describe the use of the mobile to organize meetings, tasks, and errands. This is a functionality that is more common among those who live together and who have routine daily activities (and paid employment). They also consider the problem of producing intimate talk in public settings. Since the interlocutor may not know the nature of the other’s situation, there is the possibility that tension between the content of the message and the location of the users can arise. Thus, while the mobile telephone generally facilitates the processes associated with intimate relationships, there are also dimensions of the technology that need careful management. With these chapters, we see several different ways that the mobile phone is used in the name of constructing social cohesion.

**Media Choice and the Maintenance of Community**

As noted in the previous section, the mobile phone is an instrument that helps to develop the cohesion of the intimate sphere. Rowan
Wilken examines the role of mobile communication vis-à-vis the concept of social capital. Wilken discusses how the mobile phone serves as a cohesive function in Europe, the United States, Africa, and Asia; he also provides an analysis of how the mobile phone can serve to balkanize the social sphere. He traces the development of our discussion of social capital and ties it to the rise of the mobile phone.

In the tension between bridging and bonding social capital, the mobile phone favors the latter. In an increasingly chaotic and dispersed world, this can be a positive thing. However, it does not come without a price. Wilken notes, as does Portes (1998), that over-configured bonding ties can limit access to the group, resulting in local inequities in the distribution of material and immaterial resources. Wilken focuses not only on the degree to which the mobile phone facilitates our participation in social contexts, but also on the degree to which mobile phones enforce strong ties at the expense of weak ties. He sees the mobile phone primarily as a device used to cultivate the private sphere. There are, however, instances when it is used to activate the weaker ties in our social networks. Political actions such as “flash mobs” and the like are all examples of these situations. In addition, the use of so-called blue-toothing and other forms of mediated interaction complicate the picture (see Humphreys, 2007). Other research findings bring the “bonding” issue into question. The activities of teens in Japan and the use of the technology in Jamaica for “linking up” paint a different picture (Horst and Miller, 2006). In these cases, the bridging activities come more clearly into focus.

These alternatives are, however, more often the exception than the rule. When thinking of weak ties, it is much more natural to think of contacting old high-school buddies and remotely located former colleagues through the Internet via the use of, for example, social networking tools and instant messaging. The quasi-broadcasting dimensions of the Internet along with the pricing structures of the Internet compared to the mobile phone push the functionality in that direction. The strong ties, those with whom there is daily interaction (perhaps at a mundane level), seem to be associated with the mobile phone.

The theme of interpersonal ties is also considered in the work of Thomas de Bailliencourt, Thomas Beauvisage, Fabien Granjon, and Zbigniew Smoreda. They describe how the classic organization of interpersonal ties had not, until the arrival of the mobile phone, been transformed by ICTs. According to the work of this group, the user’s
choice of communication medium is guided by determining which tools that both (or all) communication partners can easily use. The choice to use a particular ICT to interact with closest friends and family is based on not just the equipment that is available, but also on how technically savvy the two interlocutors are. Indeed, according to the authors, technology choice involves an aspect of the “least common dominator”: the person who is least technically apt is the one who determines the type of technology to be used in the interaction. Often, in the case of intergenerational interaction, this means that there is a preference for the simpler and more traditional technology, such as mobile voice calls as opposed to texting (Ling, 2008).

Another side of this issue is that as technologies diffuse through the population, there are disjunctures as to how the different groups are able to master different types of mediation. This can lead to barriers in communication we either strategically maintain or attempt to dismantle. Groups of individuals need to work out how they interact among themselves. They introduce an element of power, as it is possible to include or to exclude people based on their communication competence. It is also possible for those who have other types of power (economic, political, or social) to demand that communication takes place with certain types of media. In this case, the least technically advanced can assert their power by demanding a particular type of communication medium.

Andraž Petrovčič, Gregor Petrič, and Vasja Vehovar examine the role of mobile communication along with other forms of interpersonal mediation in our personal networks. The focus of their chapter is to examine if and how mobile communication alters the structure of our personal relationships. In their analysis of 651 Slovenians, they examined the constellation of ICTs used in interactions with near relations. The authors find that the individual nature of ICT interactions (including those with the mobile phone) does not include the dissolution of social integration. Rather, they suggest a transition in the way that we manage social interactions. These interactions exist beside copresent forms of interaction that are indeed central to the development of social cohesion. The mobile phone, along with other types of ICTs, is important in the development and maintenance of our personal social networks. They find that users of ICTs have larger and more interconnected personal networks. Use of the mobile phone and online interaction was found to correlate with copresent socializing. They also suggest, as do other authors in this volume, that
Mobile communication is embedded in personal sociation. The mobile phone is a device of the personal sphere. It is not a substitute for offline social interaction; rather, it provides social networks a new venue to enact social ties.

**Mobile Communication and Communities of Interest**

Papers in the previous section examined the issue of social cohesion and mobile communication from theoretical and a broadly analytical level. In addition, there is material on how the mobile phone is used in the intimate sphere. The two chapters in the next section of this volume look at the specific uses of mobile communication.

*Pat Byrne* examines how the mobile phone facilitates the functioning of already existing groups, namely, local sports clubs in the west of Ireland. The analysis examines the changes brought on by mobile communication at the interpersonal and club levels. At the interpersonal level, Byrne examines how the members of the sports clubs use mobile communication for extensive point-to-point interaction. Texting is used to arrange transport to games, to coordinate social interaction, and to exchange gossip with regard to the other members of the club. Byrne discusses how the club members often have strong social bonds. While these bonds are most often cultivated in copresent interaction (at practice and games), the mobile phone has—as Bailliencourt et al. and Petrovčič et al. suggest—become a conduit through which these links are maintained. Before widespread use of the mobile phone, club members might, for example, have met at a pub by chance. However, after club members adopted mobile phones, casually bumping into a friend on a night out was replaced by the more deliberate action of texting him or her to see where and when they were “out on the town.” The list of telephone numbers in the phone’s memory is often seen as the social universe of the individual.

Byrne provides us with an analysis of communication in a voluntary organization, where there is a regular need to send different types of information such as training schedules, when and where to meet, or last minute changes in venue. One important function of the mobile phone is the ability to send group text messages, such as to all the members of a particular team. The “broadcast” text message sends the same information to every team member on a list. In addition, delivery is more reliable than other forms of mediation. A text message offers the opportunity to deliver a message directly to the person concerned with a reliability not afforded by the Internet, a traditional landline...
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telephone, or simply the passing of a verbal message. This is because the mobile phone makes members of the club individually addressable (Ling and Donner, 2009). This facilitates administration of the clubs and their activities. Thus, at two levels, the mobile phone supports the development and maintenance of the sports clubs described by Byrne. It allows for point-to-point interaction among individuals, and it facilitates the more general coordination of the club through the use of broadcast texting.

Peter White and Naomi White provide us with insight into another form of mobile communication and also the establishment of more fleeting sociation. They consider Citizen Band (CB) communication among tourists traveling by car and camper in the Australian outback. Unlike traditional mobile telephony, this form of communication is not point-to-point; rather, it is a type of broadcasting. The other characteristic is that it is not duplex transmission. With telephony, duplex transmission means that both parties can speak simultaneously; with CB radio, there is only simplex transmission, with one radio transmitting at a time. As long as one person is transmitting, no one else who is in the range of that device can transmit on that frequency. Thus, there are conventions to indicate when one party is done with their utterance, such as the use of the term “over.”

White and White describe the “safety” and the social aspects as motivations for using CB radio. For example, they describe how slower drivers who see large tractor-trailer rigs approaching from behind use the CB radio to indicate that they will pull off to the side the road to let the larger rig pass. This is an interesting type of mediated courtesy that facilitates the interaction of the two drivers. The fact that CB communication is not point-to-point means that there is a more open sense of community associated with system users. Where mobile communication is usually between individuals who intend to talk with one another and very often between members of the intimate sphere, the openness of CB radio means that there are stochastic aspects to the selection of interaction partners. The openness of the system means that people who are unknown to one another can use the CB radio to establish contact in what is, in all likelihood, a one-time interaction. In spite of the transient nature of the contact, the two drivers can afford one another a type of basic civility. While it may be a stretch to say that this generates a specific type of cohesion between the two drivers, it is possible to suggest that their use of mediated courtesy contributes to smooth traffic.
In other cases, the radio-based interaction can also lead to copresent social interaction among people who previously did not know one another. Much like in Internet chat rooms, people who interact on the CB radio can develop locally based interactions that result in their meeting physically for a shared cup of tea. Thus, these interactions are not the fully configured social relations of, for example, a married couple or two old friends. The interactions are casually entered and just as casually exited. They are, however, sociation: people engaging in mediated small talk. Interestingly, the technology of CB radio dictates that it needs to remain in the realm of small talk since others can eavesdrop on transmissions. Unlike mobile phone conversations that may disturb others who are physically nearby one or the other callers, CB radio interactions are broadcast to all the other radio receivers that are within range. In the Australian outback, this can include several different publics, from long-distance truckers to local ranchers and tourists. The comments, concerns, and linguistic manners of one group are not necessarily shared by the others, and care must thus be taken.

**Mobile Phones: Youth and Community**

Gerard Goggin and Kate Crawford examine the mobile phone in the context of youth and the associated discussions regarding the social impact of mobile communication. They discuss the different approaches in understanding the potential trajectory of their ICT adoption among teens and discuss the different approaches to understanding the larger notion of “youth.” For example, Goggin and Crawford note a common developmental approach to understanding teens. They explain the teleological dimension of this approach: children and youth are somehow incomplete versions of the eventual adult. This is a clear possibility when thinking about the process of adolescence. Crawford and Goggin suggest an alternative by noting that we should examine children, youth, and adults each in their own right while still maintaining the notion that they are unique categories. That is, we should understand youth in terms of the culture that they create. Rather than seeing adolescence as a process from one stage (childhood) to another (adulthood), it is useful to take seriously the culture of teens. These issues have the potential to play out in the way that community is developed and how it maintains itself.

Goggin and Crawford consider the role of youth in the debate surrounding mobile communication. They note that there is a common
understanding that youth are technically savvy. To understand the complex relationship between youth and their technology, Crawford and Goggin discuss the concept of “telecocooning” (Habuchi, 2005). The “telecocoon” is constructed by using the mobile phone as a way to help insure security and intimacy. The individual’s existing community is maintained and strengthened through the rapid cycling of self-reflexivity with the use of the mobile phone. The authors suggest that while this is an extremely insightful formulation of the issue, it still retains the “youth as problem” framing of communications and community that is common in other narratives.

Satomi Sugiyama examines the strategies used by international students at a university located in Switzerland. Using a survey approach, she examines the strategies used by 125 students to maintain contact with their friends who are at the university and their friends who are located in their home countries. Sugiyama finds that the students use the mobile phone to maintain relationships with friends and fellow students when they are in close proximity. She also finds that it is used to maintain geographically diffuse relationships. Interestingly, she finds that the use of the mobile phone at school is not associated with a sense of interpersonal solidarity with co-students. By contrast, use of the mobile phone with friends while they are at home is somewhat related to this.

Sugiyama suggests that this difference is the result of social saturation. When the student has many co-students that are immediately available, solidarity is built and developed by other means and interactions. It may be that in these situations, the mobile phone is more useful for coordinating activity. On the other hand, when they are in their home countries living with their parents and their friends are not so immediately available, the telephonic interaction has more dimensions.

Also in a university setting, Erin Hollenbaugh and Amber Ferris examine the emergent phenomenon of the drunken call. In both copresent and mediated situations, alcohol consumption can be an element that facilitates the engagement of individuals in the group; at the same time, however, it can result in what Collins (2004) calls failed rituals. In these instances, the awkwardness of the interaction can destroy any cohesion that might have existed. Alcohol may remove stiff inhibitions and create either a positive experience or a ruined situation.

The mobile phone means that these effects need not be felt only in copresent interaction. The mobile phone allows impulse (including
impulses that emerge late at night while others are asleep) to steer the person who is drinking. They can reach out to other non-present friends and either spread joy or potentially destroy it. Part of the issue here is that while the copresent people understand that alcohol is a part of the situation, those being contacted are put into the position of having to intuit this. Upon receiving the call, they have to put together the pieces and understand that the overly buoyant (or antagonistic or gushy or emotional) friend is in a transposed state. The ability to understand the situation of the drunken interlocutor may enhance or test the cohesion of the friendship.

Another dimension of these drunken interactions Hollenbaugh and Ferris examine is that they take place in a milieu—university student life—where alcohol, and to some degree large amounts of alcohol, is a part of the social scene. The authors document the degree to which this is tacitly acknowledged and how, in this context, the more sober interlocutor may feel a certain responsibility, such as being available to friends who are drunk. This might simply mean that they accept the awkward calls and do not let them color the future relationship, or it might mean that the calls become a part of the lore of the friendship that is laughed about later on. On the one hand, the calls result in direct caregiving or other types of bonding. On the other hand, drunken calls may destroy or hamper a friendship. Given that the mobile phone is often near at hand, drunken calls have become more common. The phenomenon draws a wider circle of remote persons into the situation of person who is drinking. The consequence of this unusual form of interaction may be the enhancement or the degradation of the relationship. This analysis shows that the increased ability to call on impulse can affect social cohesion.

Bibliography


Mobile Symbiosis: A Precursor to Public Risk-Taking Behavior?

Kathleen M. Cumiskey

Introduction

Public mobile phone use has shifted the landscape of social expectations. The necessity of having a mobile phone often relates to the sense of personal safety it affords users by allowing them to contact important others in an instant (Ling, 2004; Rosen, 2004). Mobile phones make a companion readily available in an often frightening and alienating world (Rheingold, 2002). The paradoxical nature of the ways in which mobile phones add to, as well as detract from, social cohesion is at the crux of the study of mobile-mediated communication (Ling, 2008). The attachment of users to their mobile phones indicates that the mobile phone is viewed as an essential tool in maintaining ties to known others. This attachment can lead to an overreliance on the phone as a site of reassurance and as an antidote to a whole host of psychological needs (Bianchi and Phillips, 2005). Beyond a uses and gratification model (Katz et al., 1973; Wei and Lo, 2006), pushing the limitations of mobile phone use often results in taking risks, both social and physical, while using the technology. For example, perpetual communication with a romantic partner may mean that one does not cease mobile communication while doing physical activities; however, mobile phone use becomes risky when it coincides with physical activities requiring the individual’s complete attention, like driving (Drews et al., 2008). This form of risk-taking appears to occur beyond the awareness of the mobile phone user (and certainly beyond the awareness of the caller). The psychological experience of having a known other on the phone may increase a user’s self-confidence,
while at the same time decrease their self-awareness as it relates to their current physical environment (Cumiskey, 2007a). The increased sense of self-confidence may stem from the user’s sense that, while on the phone, they are no longer alone in their current surroundings (Pertierra, 2005). Mobile phone users’ perceptions of aloneness while in public could indicate the lack of social cohesion that exists between strangers and the preference for social interaction with those with whom they have strong social ties. This contact with a known other via the public use of mobile phones may indeed create an alternative psychological state where the user feels as though the remote other has joined them in their current context.

The word symbiosis has its roots in biology and ecology to represent a close association, usually of two unrelated organisms, that benefits at least one of the organisms without harming the other. It is a relationship of joining and dependence where some benefit is gained by those involved. I use this term to highlight the intensity of the changed state of mind experienced by the mobile phone user resulting from contact with a known other. This sense of joining, an almost palpable form of social cohesion, is a mobile symbiosis, which may lessen the user’s inhibitions. This, in combination with diminished self-awareness, may lead mobile phone users to take conscious and unconscious risks. Mobile symbiosis alters the perception of the current environment and may be a precursor to risk-taking.

Assessing the risk of the use of mobile phones has been focused thus far on physical risks—like fears of radiation and accidents while driving—and social risks—like social incivility and impoliteness (Campbell, 2006; Martha and Griffet, 2007). I focus on social risks and the indirect physical risks that may stem from public mobile phone use. The literature on mobile phone use has not explicitly discussed the degree to which taking risks while on the phone is conscious or unconscious. With conscious mobile phone risk-taking, the user knowingly engages in risky activities—such as staying out late or venturing out alone—that they might not have engaged in before simply because they have the phone available to them or because they have a desire to use the phone (e.g., texting or talking while driving). The decision to take risks may be either for the benefit of the user or the benefit of others. Many users justify their phone use as being important and necessary. They are hesitant to admit or acknowledge that they might use their phones for more frivolous purposes or to merely create a state of symbiosis with a known other (Cumiskey, 2005). In addition,
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Mobile phone users may engage in conscious risk-taking due to the influence of the person they are talking to on the phone. Due to the dominance of strong ties, the social influence of the known other on the phone may take precedence over the influence of copresent others (Ling, 2008).

Recent research in the psychotherapy literature has led to discussions and demonstrations of the ways in which mobile phones can be used to alleviate anxiety or serve as a weapon of self-defense or as a “security net” (Wiederhold et al., 2000). However, the overreliance on mobile phones and self-motivated dependence on mobile symbiotic relationships may cause people to not plan for the risks that they face; users—often inadvertently—become risk-takers (e.g., venturing on difficult treks and running the risk of becoming stranded on deserted roads), unprepared to deal with these risks on their own. This lack of preparedness may be due to their faith in mobile symbiosis and their belief that they are not ever truly alone. Chris Uggerholt, an operator on Mount Washington observed:

The cell phone has [led] to a lot of rescues, too often, of panicky people who can get themselves out of trouble if they just stop and think. Guys come up here and they think they’ve got an insurance policy in their pocket. If they get in trouble, they whip out the phone and dial 911. Makes our lives a lot busier. (Quoted in Schneider and Knapp, 2000)

Many research studies have been conducted to examine the risks of talking on a mobile phone while driving (Chen, 2007; McGarva et al., 2006; Strayer et al., 2003). The role that the use of mobile phones has played in traffic accidents has led to the ban of the use of handheld devices in many states (Caird et al., 2008). Research has shown that it is not the mere distraction of the tactile use of the phone that poses a danger to safe driving, but that mobile phone use reduces the users’ situational awareness that often leads them into risky behavior, such as turning unsafely into oncoming traffic (Nasar et al., 2008). Mobile phone use causes the driver to divide attention between driving and becoming absorbed into the phone conversation (Strayer and Drews, 2007). This may lead drivers to take unnecessary risks while driving because they are distracted by the demands of the phone conversation (Wiederhold et al., 2000). There is some evidence in the literature that personality factors may lead to conscious “bad cell phone behavior.” For instance, Beck et al. (2007) reported that people who use their
mobile phones while driving tend to be “male, aged 25–44, [with]
higher counts of prior alcohol and traffic violations . . . [they] miss
twice as many traffic signals, are more likely to swerve into the next
lane (46%), tailgate (23%), have close calls (18%), and run red lights
(10%)” (684). However, research needs to be done to evaluate whether
or not this behavior is influenced by the mobile phone use itself.

What gets labeled as “bad cell phone behavior” may reflect what
copresent others interpret as the rift that mobile phone use causes
between themselves and the mobile phone user. The degree to which
individuals violate the social expectations of copresent others con-
tributes to the social risk of incivility and impoliteness (Cumiskey,
2007b). According to social psychology literature, the resistance of
social norms is more likely to happen by those in a group than by lone
individuals. Classic studies of deindividuation—the result of feeling
absorbed into a group—have been a foundational core to the study of
social psychology. This absorption can result in an individual’s lack of
self-awareness, which can lead to disinhibition (Diener, 1979). This
understanding of deindividuation has shifted slightly in the more
contemporary study of this phenomenon. However, the fundamentals
of this theory remain, in that the state of deindividuation has been
shown to result in the violation of social norms and disinhibited
behavior (Postmes and Spears, 1998). The public use of a mobile phone
provides an avenue through which users can experience the absorp-
tion into a group that is required for the effects of deindividuation.
Connecting with a known other can result in the experience of mobile
symbiosis, feeling as though someone has joined you in your current
context; deindividuation can occur as one becomes absorbed into the
conversation itself. Becoming preoccupied with what is occurring on
the phone can create a sense of detachment from the present context
(Crawford, 2005). This detachment may relate to a diminished sense
of self-awareness and self-regulation. This may, in turn, support a
more contemporary model of deindividuation that relates to social
identity theory, and the sense that social boundaries become more
complicated with the advancement of communication technologies
(Postmes et al., 1998). The social identity model of deindividuation
effects (SIDE theory) states that when one is a part of a group, their
behavior is more influenced by a collective social identity and expect-
tations of a group, rather than a more general or individual sense of
identity and norms (Postmes et al., 1998). If the group norm of mobile
phone behavior is that when a known other—especially one with high
status or closeness—calls, you answer no matter what, the mobile user will more likely conform to the norm of their social group and the expectations of the caller, rather than to the expected norms of the copresent others. This effect can intensify even more when individuals feel anonymous in their current situation, and they experience a diffusion of responsibility, believing that they are not responsible for their actions. This coupling of anonymity and diffidence toward the norms of the current context, over the context of the mobile-mediated interaction, leads to an increase in risk-taking and engaging in behaviors that would not likely occur if they were truly alone (Diener, 1980; Festinger et al., 1952; Postmes and Spears, 1998).

The experience of deindividuation has been empirically linked to disinhibition. Mediated forms of communication have been linked to disinhibition as well. For example, the online disinhibition effect occurs when, in the absence of face-to-face cues and codes, individuals engaging in computer-mediated communication act in ways online that they might not normally act in public (Suler, 2004). The aspect of this effect that is the most relevant to this chapter is called solipsistic introjection. According to Suler (2004), solipsistic introjection is defined as a sense of merging that occurs between online users when they communicate via text displays on computer screens. Since the user receiving the message is not given the face-to-face cues and physical attributes that define the personal and social identity of the person they are communicating with, they must rely on filling in those blanks using their own imagination. This sets the stage for a lack of definition and boundary between what is “me” and what is “you.” This sense of merging may also occur through the use of a mobile phone: mobile symbiosis may decrease a user’s sense of inhibition and lead users to risky behaviors.

The goal of this chapter is to investigate the ways in which the sense of social cohesion via contact with known others contributes to mobile phone users’ willingness to engage in risk-taking while on their phones in public. Does risk-taking occur because the user has lost the sense of social as well as physical limitations? Do they believe that they no longer face the consequences of violating social expectations alone? When the user is in a situation perceived to be risky, does connecting with a known other alleviate the anxiety over being alone in public? Does this connectedness, joining, or mobile symbiosis generate a sense of security, camaraderie, and safety that may lead to episodes of disinhibition and conscious risk-taking, as
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well as highlight the sense of deindividuation, that occur when users lose their sense of self-awareness while engaged in a public mobile phone conversation? In other words, does the experience of mobile symbiosis while in public make users feel not only safer, but also less responsible for their actions in public? Or could this psychological connection/absorption strengthen social cohesion and lead to pro-social behavior?

Method

Twenty people (ten women and ten men) were interviewed about their mobile phones and usage. The interview began with questions that served to establish a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee and to gather general information about the brand of phone they used, features and aspects of the phone that they liked and disliked, how often they used their phone, who they liked to talk to the most, and what it was like to talk to that person on their mobile phone. In addition, questions were asked about whether or not having a mobile phone has made them feel safer and whether or not having a mobile phone has led them to do things they might not have done if they did not have a phone.

Participants were residents of New York City and were found through a snowball technique in which one participant would recommend another individual to be interviewed. The mean age for the individuals interviewed was twenty-six. The youngest person was eighteen and the oldest person was thirty-nine. Participants reported that the average amount of time spent on the phone per day was sixty-seven minutes. There was a marked difference in the amount of calls the interviewees reported receiving, versus calls that they initiated, each day: on average, the twenty participants reported receiving 7.38 calls and making 6.58 calls, per day.

Each of the twenty interviews was transcribed. Responses to each of the questions were coded, and information that could be quantified was analyzed via statistical procedures. The author was responsible for coding the interviews. The qualitative data were coded for theoretical concepts of interest. The results of those codes are detailed in the following sections. Direct quotes from the interviews will be used to provide evidence of (1) the experience of mobile symbiosis, (2) how this experience contributes to deindividuation effects, and (3) how mobile symbiosis leads people to not only feel safer but also braver in public.
Results: To What Extent Do People Experience Mobile Symbiosis?

Having the ability to contact a known other at a moment's notice was something that was directly reported by the participants. This ability changed the users' sense of their immediate environment. The known other worked as a catalyst to transform the users' experience of public space. This transformation was caused by the mobile phone users' belief that remote others were rendered psychologically present in the current physical context. Participants were first asked about who they talked to the most. It was assumed that users would feel closest to someone they enjoyed talking to and someone that they talk to often. Most of the participants indicated that they enjoyed talking to persons in their nearest circle of family and friends.1 One twenty-two-year-old man, who has had a mobile phone for three years and spends about twelve minutes a day on the phone, stated that he had no one who he enjoyed talking to on the phone. He explained, “I don’t enjoy talking on the phone so there’s no particular person; I would rather speak to people in person, but I’m fine talking to anyone though.” This did not, however, preclude him from stating that having a phone did make him feel safer, and he acknowledged that having a phone made him more “daring”: “Yes; it’s the same as feeling safe; if I didn’t feel safe, I wouldn’t be as daring.”

More than half of the respondents indicated that they have experienced a sense of joining when on the phone with someone they enjoyed talking to. Below is a composite representation of these responses:

I can’t see her, but I feel closer to her when we’re talking on the phone, and she shares my experiences to an extent. . . . I was away from home, up in the mountains, and we hadn’t seen each other in a while, so sometimes when we talked it felt like she was visiting me and we were catching up. (Female, twenty-two)

I still do feel like she’s with me when I talk to her because she knows that I’m so aware of my environment that if I’m quiet for a while, she asks what I’m looking at or what was happening, so it feels like she’s there with me. . . . I was shopping at the mall, and I called her to describe to her a dress I was going to buy; she told me not to get that one but to get the one on the rack right next to it; she knew exactly where I was in that store, and where the dress I was looking at was; she’s shopped in the same store, but because she remembered everything in such detail and was guiding me through my shopping, it felt as if she was there with me. (Female, twenty-two)

. . . . It was almost like she was with me when she was actually about three hundred miles away; I would usually talk to her after
9:00 p.m. because I had free minutes. I was conscious of what I was saying to her; I would speak a little softer than I normally do; it did almost feel like she was with me, which was very frustrating; I enjoy her company very much but then I’d realize she wasn’t actually there. (Male, twenty-two)

Words don’t do it justice; he motivates me; I definitely feel his presence as if he’s walking side by side with me . . . It could be something as simple as doing an errand or needing step-by-step help in accomplishing a task. (Male, twenty-five)

Sometimes in New York you are walking for blocks and you just don’t want to walk by yourself and you want some company. So if I’m walking somewhere and I see something . . . I might call right then and there . . . I guess like sometimes you just need to be able to talk to people about the important things, but also about the unimportant things. . . . I feel connected and also validated because then I also feel like they’re a part of my everyday life. Like I can, if I choose to . . . update them on an hourly basis . . . it’s an amazing feeling or opportunity that I wouldn’t have if I had to worry about long-distance costs or if I had to write a letter and it took so long to get there. (Male, thirty-one)

Each of these respondents reported experiencing the sensation that, when on the phone with a remote other, it felt as though that other person was psychologically present. This is not to say that people reported being completely deluded into thinking that the other person was physically present, but that the actual physical separation could be temporarily alleviated by the feeling that the person on the phone had “joined” them, perhaps not unlike the experience of computer-mediated communication. Given the quotes above and the information from other participants, this experience could be quite exhilarating, inspiring, and comforting. Yet the perception of the limitation of this communication also led to feelings of frustration.

Forty percent of the respondents indicated that they did not experience the sensation that someone had joined them via their mobile phone conversation:

Sometimes it is annoying and difficult to talk, especially if we are fighting about something because we can’t see each other’s reactions and facial expressions; no, I don’t really feel like she is right there with me, it’s not that personable. (Female, twenty-two)

Never felt that because it’s a phone conversation, she’s not there but on the other end of the phone; I feel her influence; I’ve called her when I got really upset, I felt better from talking to her but I didn’t feel like she was there. (Female, thirty-nine)
I can’t really answer this question because I try not to have conversations in public; I don’t talk to him when I’m actively doing something usually—if I am with friends, then I usually say I can’t hear him and call him later; if I do have to talk to him when I’m in public, it’s usually while I’m waiting for the bus or during my lunch break. (Female, twenty-one)

These participants appeared to be overly conscious of the limitations of mobile phone communication. These observations also indicated that, in order to achieve mobile symbiosis, users must suspend disbelief. Again, this suspension of disbelief may be the process by which mobile phone use imitates computer-mediated communication. When users enter the state of mobile symbiosis, some of the same mechanisms related to a sense of online presence may be activated. Mobile symbiosis may be solipsistic introjection to the extreme. As mentioned previously, work around online behavior uses solipsistic introjection to describe the experience of feeling as though your mind has merged with the person that you are communicating with (Suler, 2004). This sense of merging is the precursor to online disinhibition: once online communication achieves this sense of merging, users begin to disclose more and participate in online activities that they might not participate in real life. Such disinhibition may also occur with mobile phone use; once the mobile user feels merged with their remote other and this mobile symbiosis is achieved, they may feel less inhibited in their actual physical space.

Using one’s mobile phone in public often requires users to violate situational norms. When users discuss their phone use, they rarely admit to initiating phone calls in public. Past research indicates that users reject a sense of responsibility for cell phone behavior when they do not initiate the call (Cumiskey, 2005). This was reflective in the ways in which participants described good public mobile phone behavior. Determining when to use a mobile phone in public was based on the user’s context and who the user was with. All twenty participants indicated that they were often aware of the situations in which their mobile phone conversations took place, as well as aware of who was around them:

Generally, I try to be respectful when I’m in public spaces. So if I’m on a bus I usually try to keep quiet. But I definitely try to make sure I’m not speaking loudly or being intrusive in the way that I’m talking. (Female, thirty-one)
I think I set pretty good boundaries. Like sometimes I answer the phone when I’m on the bus, e.g., but I put it away right away. So usually I’ll answer the phone and I’ll say, “Hello,” they’ll say, “What are you doing?” And I’ll say, “I’m actually on the bus and I don’t want to be that annoying guy on the cell phone.” So I’ll hang up. So I set those boundaries pretty well. I’ve seen when people have been annoyed by others but I have been able to set my limits. (Male, thirty-one)

Locations that were determined by the participants as places not to have phone conversations were: on the bus, in the hospital, during a meeting, during class, at a funeral, in an elevator, at church, in the library, at movie theaters, in public restrooms, at a doctor’s appointment, in a courtroom, and at museums. The data show that 70 percent of participants indicated that they did not want to be perceived as rude, and another 25 percent indicated that they did not care, and the remaining 5 percent reflected other reasons for not using the mobile phone in those environments.

In most descriptions, there was a sense that mobile phone users struggled with being self-aware during their mobile phone use. They readily acknowledged that their need to be connected with known others challenged the norms of those with whom they were face-to-face. The following responses indicate the struggle to acknowledge one’s surroundings while at the same time being able to participate in mobile phone conversations:

Basically what I try to do is realize what I get really annoyed by people and I try not to be that person. But there are times when I’m sure I’m that person. (Female, twenty)

I’m so aware of people around me and observant of what’s going on around that I don’t pay attention to the person I’m talking to and they ask me if I’m still on the phone. (Female, twenty-two)

Gotten a few dirty looks on the bus when talking to friends, nobody said anything; don’t know what annoyed them. (Female, thirty-nine)

I’m very selective about where I use my phone usually on the street when I see others getting annoyed with people. It’s usually when a person is screaming and they don’t realize it’s intrusive. I try not to do that. (Female, thirty-three)

I can think there has [sic] probably been times when you’re at [a place] and people look at you like, “Are you serious?” You shouldn’t be on your phone. (Female, twenty-three)
Anxiety over the risk of social incivility appears in both realms of the mobile phone experience. Mobile phone users may worry about being perceived as rude by the caller by not answering the phone and worry that the loss of connection may undermine the cohesion of their social network.

The meanings of mobile phone use among those that share personal communication networks may dictate the choice and risks the user makes when deciding to use their phone (Campbell and Russo, 2003). This may also be true about the person or people with whom they are face-to-face. However, some of the respondents indicated that they did not care about those with whom they are face-to-face and felt entitled to use their phone wherever and whenever they chose. This “I don’t care” attitude indicated their preference for feeling connected to known others while in public, as well as the psychological distance they felt from copresent strangers, all factors contributing to a sense of deindividuation and more disinhibited responses:

If I had just hung up on someone because we were having a fight, then I would automatically pick up my phone if it rang; maybe I’m unaware of people being annoyed in such situations because I was so involved in what was happening. (Female, twenty-one)

And I received a phone call and just started having a good time on the phone and I was being completely rude. And that was out of character. For some reason, I’m honestly not sure why, I didn’t really seem to care. (Male, thirty-three)

That, frankly I think that when people are annoyed like that they are just following some sort of courtesy expectation that they can’t really defend the merits of. It’s just kind of the social expectation that you don’t use your cell phone in public. But I don’t know if they really care or can really defend it. (Male, thirty-three)

That’s why most people if you look around have their headphones on, ‘cause first of all, you know, you want to block out the music or the noise, so if someone is talking on their cell phone then it doesn’t bother you. (Male, twenty-seven)

Deindividuation results in diminished self-observation, self-evaluation, and a lack of concern for what others think (Postmes and Spears, 1998). However, participants’ struggle to negotiate when and where to have mobile phone conversations could indicate their struggle with the effects of deindividuation. While conscious of the social boundaries of public behavior, personal use of their mobile phones in public generated a whole set of other expectations related to the known other with whom they were communicating. The evaluation
of their public behavior appeared to happen after they had already engaged in the mobile phone behavior.

To illustrate this pull between satisfying their needs through the use of the phone and struggling with social norms of public behavior, participants provided examples about how they use their phones to negotiate situations and potential risks that arise in their immediate physical environments. They narrated potential land mines in the public sphere. These centered on feelings of isolation and aloneness in public and fears of the intentions of copresent strangers. Four participants indicated the ways in which a phone may be used as a social shield:

My phone is a good distraction when I am in public with a lot of people and I either feel isolated or don't know anyone; it gives me something to occupy myself with or at least pretend to be important. (Male, twenty-five)

I'm thankful I have a phone when I want to appear like I'm occupied to avoid interacting with certain types of people; I use my phone in public places when I don't want people approaching me or if I don't want to make eye contact; if there are sales reps around, I use my phone as a way of brushing them off without being rude; I always call my friends if I'm around strangers and everyone seems occupied. (Female, twenty-two)

There's been a couple of times when I didn't feel like dealing with people so I feigned a conversation on my cell phone. I wasn't really talking to anyone. But I put it up to my ear so I didn't have to deal with anyone. (Male, thirty-three)

Sometimes when I'm waiting for the bus and it's late at night . . . it's better to be on the phone because then people don't approach you. Not that I don't feel safe, just that you don't want to be bothered. But it's kind of a safety issue, you know. You don't want to give someone an excuse to come talk to you. Sometimes it doesn't work anyway, but it's an effort. Like, “Can't you see I'm on the phone? Why are you still talking to me?” Particularly crazy-drunk people. But it's usually because I don't want to be bothered not because I think they're going to hurt me or do anything to me. (Female, thirty-three)

These quotes highlight the paradoxical nature of public mobile phone use. While most users fully understand how the use of mobile phones in public might result in accusations of social incivility, having a mobile phone seems to enhance their experience in the public space (Baron and Ling, 2007). Users’ reliance on their mobiles while in public appeared to center on increasing their sense of security; it
also served as a form of protection against the potential social and physical risks of the uncertainty of public places and emphasizes the preference for interaction with known others over those with whom they are face-to-face.

Acts of social incivility may also result from the amount of distraction created by managing a mobile phone conversation. There was evidence from the interviews that participants often put themselves in risky situations because of the demands of the use of their mobile phones:

Several times when I’m on the phone and I’m walking, I am so involved in the conversation that I keep walking and don’t remember the blocks I’ve passed by; I’ve never really been lost, though. (Female, twenty-two)

[D]efinitely lost sense of where I was. . . . I’ve never really been lost, but I’d often cross an extra street or two in the middle of heated conversations, but then I’d realize where I was; I have definitely missed something happening around me, I just wouldn’t be able to tell you what it was. (Female, twenty-one)

I got off a train once at the wrong stop because I was on the phone and functioning on automatic; it was one stop too early, so I was able to find my way to where I had to be. (Male, twenty-two)

This is why I try not to talk on the phone when I’m driving because you get distracted. So you get like, all of the sudden I didn’t want to turn there and I did, or I’m not sure where I am. It’s just like a lapse of time when you think, “I’m not sure if I know where I’m going.” Or you go a place you didn’t intend to go, like you go someplace routine because you’re distracted so like, your body just took you there. (Female, twenty-three)

Sometimes when I’m shopping and I’m talking to someone I’ll realize that I’ve walked around the store like 20 times. And I’m not really thinking about what I’m doing. Really I’m just wandering around and I’m not focusing on what I’m doing ’cause I’m engaged in the conversation. (Female, thirty-three)

This sense of distraction could indicate users’ sense of psychological absence from their current physical contexts. This sense of psychological absence could, in turn, indicate a changed psychological state that occurs when mobile phone users are on the phone. Based on past research, phone use does cause mental distraction from immediate tasks like driving (Strayer and Drews, 2007). This experience is not mere distraction. Users have a sense that they are no longer fully present in their current context and have “joined” with the remote other on the other end of the phone. This lack of self-awareness may
point to a sense of deindividuation and perhaps, as indicated by SIDE theory, a loss of connection to a sense of consequences for the current behavior.

The interviews indicate that in addition to having the phone at the ready in case something happens, participants actually use their phone to call known others to alleviate their anxiety and to make them feel as though they are not alone in public. This supports the concept of mobile symbiosis as a means to help them feel less inhibited and less alone in uncomfortable and possibly threatening situations:

At night when there aren’t many people around and it’s uncomfortable, if anything happens I’d be talking to someone at least; so I call someone to talk to them just so that I get my mind off these stories even if I know I’m not in any real danger. . . . Having it available and knowing I can call someone makes me feel safer, but I usually don’t use it; if I was really uncomfortable, I’d take it out and have it on someone’s number but I don’t actually end up calling them. (Female, twenty-two)

I only make calls if I’m uncomfortable and there aren’t too many people around; it’s not like a quiet street would induce me to make a call as opposed to a busy square; I guess how dark it is influences me. (Female, twenty-two)

When I’m walking home from the train station late at night, I keep my hands on my phone just in case something happens and I need to make a call . . . I was traveling alone, late at night, had a sense that I was being followed although that may not have actually been, so I kept calling home to tell my husband where I was, how long I’d be, so I knew that if anything happened to me, he would know to get me help instantly as he would know my exact location. (Female, thirty-nine)

I sometimes stay at work until 3:00 a.m., and if someone’s approaching me, I just take out my phone; for some reason, I feel safe talking to someone even if they’re not there with me; I look at my phone in the subway when I get off work late even though I don’t always have network. . . . Every time I’ve been alone or felt someone was following me, my phone becomes my safety zone; I run through my contact list and call whoever I think is awake at that time. (Female, twenty-one)

Not really safer, but more connected; I take public transportation, can’t imagine being stranded and unable to contact my family; having a cell phone allows me to call my dad when I need to be picked up in the middle of the night and there are no buses. (Male, twenty)

Usually, I’ll tell the person that I’m walking home from the train. So there is almost like a GPS aspect to it, “Okay, I know where this person is.” So if something does happen at least there is somebody
who can very quickly locate where I was. Not that I expect that something is going to happen, but it’s nice to know that there is someone who knows where you were. And that since you can hear some of the intrusive sounds that there can be a “witness,” if you will. (Female, thirty-one)

And even the CSI (Crime Scene Investigator) in me knows that even having my cell phone on means that I can be tracked. So while I don’t appreciate the big brother aspect in that, there is a level of security or sense of security in knowing that having my cell phone on makes me feel safer. (Male, thirty-one)

Women appeared more vocal than men about the ways in which mobile phones made them feel safer while in public (Baron, 2008; Baron and Ling, 2007). Given the socially constructed beliefs around women’s vulnerability in public, women may utilize mobile symbiosis and the use of their mobile phones in public as a way of transcending those beliefs. Further research needs to be done to investigate the possible gender differences in this kind of mobile phone use.

If users are reliant on their mobile phones to increase their sense of safety, can this overreliance actually lead to users feeling braver in public which may lead to them taking more risks while in public? Participants reported that having a phone and a group of known others that they could contact in an instant did, in fact, lead them to do things that they normally would not do:

It’s somewhat the same situation, because things I’ve been afraid to do normally, I still do but am nervous about it, but I don’t even think about it because I have a cell phone or am talking to someone on it; walking home at night would be an example. (Female, twenty-two)

I have agreed to do things while talking to my friends without giving it much thought. (Female, twenty-two)

I guess I wouldn’t be staying at the library so late on my own. (Female, twenty-two)

It gives me more freedom, so I guess I stay out late because I have access to family if I need a ride home . . . I stopped going home early. (Male, twenty)

If I didn’t feel safe, I wouldn’t be as daring. (Male, twenty-two)

Connection with a known other while in public via the mobile phone increases the users’ sense of safety. As Ling (2004) states, mobile phones “extend the perceived boundary of safety; that is, it provides a sense of security” (45). This sense of security is encouraged through the changed psychological state of mobile symbiosis, a merging that
not only leads to disinhibition, but also to a feeling that the user is part of a group and no longer a solitary individual.

Feeling as though one is part of a group or connected somehow to a collective, a society, a community, or a social network, the user experiences feelings of deindividuation and thus feels braver:

I saw a man beating a woman around, so I walked over while calling the authorities and got myself involved in a situation that I wouldn’t have gotten involved in if I didn’t have a cell phone. (Female, thirty-nine)

I don’t let locations and times determine when I go out, but I wouldn’t be that way if I didn’t have a cell phone. . . . Called 911 when I saw a bus that had an emergency message scrolling across its display; the cops thanked me for calling even though it was displayed accidentally; if it was something serious, calling 911 may have helped. (Female, twenty-one)

I called the police once while I was driving back from NYC; there was a huge tire in the middle of the road and I almost hit it at about 80 mph; I was able to recover and not get into an accident; I hope they took care of it before someone lost their life. (Male, twenty-two)

One thing that I’ve done a number of times here in New York is if I’ve seen something like going on I will call 911. I can imagine. I’ve seen smoke coming out of a building. I saw a woman on the street and she was bleeding. And I’ve done that. I’ve done that a number of times. But that’s because I could jump on my phone right then and there. There is a good chance that I wouldn’t have run out and looked for a pay phone. I wouldn’t have done it if it weren’t right there. (Male, thirty-three)

These respondents provided examples of times when they acted altruistically, thereby demonstrating that mobile symbiosis does not always lead to acts of social incivility. In fact, extensive social networks and the reliance on others for an increased sense of security may foster altruism and community-mindedness. The ubiquitous nature of mobile phones may encourage people to get involved without perceiving that they are putting themselves at risk. The experience of public mobile phone use as mobile symbiosis may, in fact, lead the user to feel as though they are not acting alone; this sense of deindividuation and disinhibition may encourage helping behaviors.

**Conclusion**

It is important to remember that behind most mobile phone use is a connection to a known other. At times, this connection can lead to the experience of mobile symbiosis. The phenomenon of mobile
symbiosis changes the user’s perception of their immediate surroundings. This change in perception can lead the user to behave in unexpected ways since their presence is split between the immediate environment and some virtual, undetermined space created between the two people on the phone.

The goal of this volume is to investigate the ways in which mobile communication brings us together and the ways in which it may tear us apart. The social impact of mobile symbiosis is governed by a variety of social, psychological, and contextual factors. Becoming absorbed in a mobile phone conversation and negotiating the presence of an absent known other can increase users’ risks of social incivility. Showing a strong preference for known remote others versus those with whom we are face-to-face could result in observers to mobile phone use having a negative social experience (Cumiskey, 2005; Ling, 2008). Overreliance on having others “always with you” via the mobile phone may increase social cohesion; however, it can also impede a user’s ability to be self-reliant.

The constant connection to others and the sense that users can always bring others into an experience has the potential to augment daily activities and strengthen the ties that we have to others. Acknowledging the changed psychological state that occurs when one connects to a known other, especially those within our close social networks, via a mobile device can be the first step in developing ways of harnessing the positive potential of mobile symbiosis. Perhaps it may ultimately encourage a sense of a one-world, social responsibility and strengthen social ties among strangers.

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Notes

1. A best friend was mentioned with the highest frequency (n = 8), followed by sister (n = 4), ex-girlfriend (n = 2), and boyfriend (n = 1), brother (n = 1), and father (n = 1). One respondent said no one. Two additional responses were missing.

Bibliography


Mobile Specters of Intimacy: A Case Study of Women and Mobile Intimacy

Larissa Hjorth

Introduction

The role of mobile technologies, as a lens for thinking about contemporary mobility, has provided much fuel for debates regarding the ways in which work and love, here and there, virtual and actual, are transforming. In an age determined by the public performances of intimacy both online and offline, we can find emerging forms of social, creative, and affective labor. This has resulted in various scholars reexamining intimacy and the role of mediation—leading some to argue for new forms of contractual love (Giddens, 1992) or bemoan the demise of traditional notions of intimacy (Bauman, 2003). Others again assert that contemporary forms of electronic copresence rehearse earlier modes such as the nineteenth-century visiting card (Milne, 2004). Throughout all these debates about intimacy and mediation, gendered practices prevail.

The role of gender is particularly prevalent within the rise of affective technologies such as mobile media and Web 2.0 (Lasen, 2004). This is undoubtedly linked to mobile media’s genealogy as a domestic technology whereby gendered modes of material and immaterial forms of labor are reenacted (Rakow, 1992; Rakow and Navarro, 1993 Wajcman et al., 2009). For Leopoldina Fortunati, the increasing proclivity of mobile media to exploit social labor is inevitably informed by gendered roles of intimacy that, in turn, reflect a sense of belonging and home (Wajcman and Haddon, 2005). Mobile media demonstrates that while domestic technologies can physically leave the home, they are still symbolic of sociocultural notions of what constitutes a household
economy and the attendant forms of intimacy. Far from intimacy being “mobile,” and thus impervious to place, it is the repository of the mobile that further amplifies localized practices of what it means to be intimate (Hjorth, 2005a). Thus, to explore intimacy, we need to consider the role of place as informing our “communities of feelings” (Hochschild, 2003) and “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1983) associated with “affective technologies” (Lasen, 2004).

Indeed, the rise of affective technologies has impacted upon various practices—particularly social capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Colman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Initially outlined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in his groundbreaking study *Distinction*, the notion of social capital (whereby capital was viewed as a form of “knowledge”) was deployed along with cultural and economic capital to understand the ways taste was naturalized. However, this definition has been markedly revised in an age of late twentieth-century media (Colman, 1988; Ling, 2004; Putnam, 2000)—spearheaded by many chapters in this book. My purpose here is not to reiterate the discussions but to consider the role gender plays in particular forms of social capital—specifically social, affective, and emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). As sociologist Amparo Lasen (2004) has identified, the increasing significance of mobile media is predicated around its role as an “affective” technology in which emotional and affective labor become the dominant currencies. In this phenomenon, the gendered role of technologies and emotions is further augmented. While social capital has been given much focus around changing notions of individualism (Ling, 2004), the role of gender in informing different types of social labor has been relatively overlooked.

One way to understand the creative forms of managing social labor and mediated intimacies—and its amplification by some media and dilution by other—is through the crossroads of gender at different ages. Young women have gained much attention within discussions of fashion and youth (Fortunati, 2009; Katz and Sugiyama, 2005)—but this conflation fails to recognize the diversity of experiences and contexts that inform women’s deployment of mobile media at different stages of their lives. In particular, by stratifying gender with different age groups, we can begin to understand more complex models of intimacy as well as provide great depth and rigor in conceptualizing women’s role in new and old media (Fortunati, 2009). This can, in turn, complicate literary canons that romanticize old media epistolaries and demonize anything “new” without regards for their creative and innovative
potential. In this light, it is important to remember that the content of new media tends to be older data and that new media “remediates” (adapts, translates, transforms) older media and vice versa (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). Indeed, far from mobile media being “new” media, we must view these emerging forms of media literacy, labor, and intimacy as rehearsing earlier gendered epistolary traditions.

In order to understand the role of gendered intimacy within increasingly social, affective, and creative forms of labor, we need to identify the role of localized gender performativity. According to post-structuralist Judith Butler (1991), gender is not innate but rather ordered by a set of repetitions and regulations. However, Butler neglects to fully explore the way gender is performed, informed, and transformed by different sociocultural contexts and ethnicities. I deploy the notion of “gendered” performativity to discuss my female respondents’ experiences of intimacy and emotional labor that are produced by different media.

I begin by discussing some of the literature intersecting gender, intimacy, and emotional labor. I then move to a study of forty Melbournian (Australian) female respondents aged between twenty and fifty years from various cultural backgrounds. In this study, I inquire about the ways in which they utilize different modes of mediation to initiate and maintain intimate relations. Exploring the various forms of intimacy from family, friends, and lovers, respondents discuss the various modes of mediation they use—and why.

This study is the beginning of a longitudinal review into ongoing forms of gendered mediated intimacy. In this study, we see some women’s views on mediation and consider the role of media in reflecting different types of intimacy. I consider some of the broad recurring specters of earlier modes of copresence such as letter writing as well as noting some of the emerging new forms of mobile media practices. As this is a preliminary study focusing on a small group of respondents, I do not intend this to be read as indicative of all women’s experiences in Melbourne. Rather, this study attempts to provide new ways for conceptualizing gendered social capital in the context of the emotional labor—a labor that is embroiled within both new and old media practices.

**Mobile Feelings: Women, Emotional Labor, and Media**

Mobility is part of the original sense of the notion of emotion as it refers to agitated motion, mental agitation or feelings of mental agitation. Emotions are those mental states called “passions”
in the past. An important feature of the affects depicted by the category of passions is the idea that they entail ways of being acted upon, of being moved by other beings, objects, events, and situations. Nowadays people are moved and acted upon by their mobile phones. Mobile phone uses are the result of a shared agency. (Lasen, 2004)

Mobility, as a notion, has long been attached to emotion (Lasen, 2004). In the various forms of mobility—people, ideas, labor, and capital—it is undoubtedly women (particularly in the context of developing countries) who are implicated the most (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). Unquestionably, the role of the mobile phone as a technology of propinquity (temporal and spatial proximity) is both instrumental in and symbolic of the transnational flows of gendered modes of labor and consumption. For Judy Wajcman et al., the association with “affective or emotional work is part of the unequally distributed gender division of labor” (2009: 14). In “Intimate Connections: The Impact of the Mobile Phone on Work/Life Boundaries,” Wajcman notes the mobile phone “characterizes modern times and life in the fast lane” and has become iconic of “work–life balance”—or lack thereof—in contemporary life (9).

Wajcman et al. observe that manipulating “the boundary between work and life was one of the principal ways that many people controlled their time” (2009: 10). These boundaries of time and space are determined, in part, by “debates about work–life boundaries” that are imbued by traditional gendered divides “between the separate spheres for market work (male) and domestic work (female)” wrought by industrialization (10). However, Wajcman et al. observe, “there is no reason why the mobile phone should be seen as a gendered artifact, as it does not carry the masculine connotations of, for example, computers that are still identified with hacker culture” (14).

Despite the fact that there is “no reason” for gender divisions around technology to persist, they do. For example, one way to map the rise of mobile media practices such as short messaging service (SMS) is undoubtedly through gender differences—particularly noted in youth studies of mobile media. According to Fortunati (2002), this gendering of technologies and intimacy is due to the fact that the mobile phone is one of the most intimate items in everyday life. Indeed, Fortunati (2009) clearly identifies the way in which practices of intimacy are gendered—a fact that is augmented by the mobile
The mobile phone might be considered as a work tool for reproduction. That is, a tool that supports and facilitates almost all the aspects of immaterial reproductive labor, which are increasingly complex and exponential in influence . . . the mobile phone has become also a strategic tool of social labor. (Fortunati, 2002: 31)

The role of gendered spaces, practices, and labor—in both material and immaterial forms—is amplified by mobile technologies (Gregg, 2007). Within the rise of user-created content (UCC), gendered mobile media customization can be viewed as part of wider trends in the evolution of domestic and personal media technologies that exploit emotional and social labor as obligatory. However, it is important to contextualize this phenomenon as part of broader cultural practices of mobility, intimacy, and media that have always involved elements of copresence.

As Timo Kopomaa (2000) observes, today’s mobile media can be seen as an extension of nineteenth- and twentieth-century mobile media such as the wristwatch. Technologies such as mobile media reenact earlier copresent practices and interstitials of intimacy: for example, SMS reenacts nineteenth-century letter writing traditions (Hjorth, 2005a). As Esther Milne (2004) observes, new forms of telepresence such as e-mail are linked to earlier practices of copresent intimacy such as visiting cards. In this way, the intimate copresence enacted by mobile technologies should be viewed as part of a lineage of technologies of propinquity (Hjorth, 2005b; Milne, 2004). However, there are some striking differences too. Mobile media can been considered as part of shifts in conceptualizing and practicing intimacy as no longer a “private” activity but a pivotal component of public sphere performativity. As Lauren Berlant observes, intimacy has taken on new geo-imaginaries, most notably as a kind of “publicness” (1998: 281), that is epitomized by the mobile phone (Fortunati, 2002: 48).

For Arlie Hochschild, extending upon the pioneering work of Erving Goffman in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), we not only change our outward expression to perform particular duties and functions require of us but we also change our emotions. This is what she called “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1983) in which the type of “emotion work” that is required varies according to numerous, often unspoken, factors such as sensitivity toward cultural context. In The Managed Heart (1983), Hochschild focuses on the women within the service industry
and the types of “right” emotional labor they must perform in order to fulfill their job. This theme is continued in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (2003) in which Barbara Ehrenreich and Hochschild argue that emotional labor is increasingly going global. Through a global process of care culture chains that takes a North–South movement, women from the South (developing countries) must leave their family at home to service families in the North (developed countries)—a process whereby rich countries extract love from poorer ones. The pervasiveness of emotional labor as a major tenor in forces of globalization can also be seen from within developed countries—especially in the case of affective technologies and their growing compulsion to exploit labor under the maintenance of social capital. Within the deployment of affective technologies, a particular subgenre of emotional labor—feeling rules—can be found.

In the context of this chapter, which focuses on the developed country of Australia, this emotional labor is far less concerned with developed–developing care culture chains, but rather the specific forms of unpaid emotional labor and “feeling rules” that are becoming all-encompassing within contemporary technocultures and the associated affective technologies. By technoculture, I refer to the notion that culture shapes and is shaped by technology. Different media require appropriate types of emotional labor—various forms of often unspoken feeling rules. Affective technologies such as mobile media compel us to be more perpetually responsive within a logic of “perpetual contact” (Katz and Aakhus, 2002)—creating a phenomenon of labor that has been defined as “wireless leash” (Qiu, 2007). The gendered implications are striking. For example, Misa Matsuda (2009) has eloquently described the function of the mobile phone for Japanese children as a “mom in the pocket.” In order to understand some of the gendered performativity around types of labor and intimacy, I will turn to my preliminary case study of Melbournian women and their various forms of mediated intimacies and associated feeling rules.

**Labors of Love: A Sample Study of Melbourne Women and Mediated Intimacy**

Despite only recently gaining focus within the area of mobile communication (Goggin, 2006), Australia was one of the first for early research into gendered mobile usage by scholars such as Ann Moyal, Patricia Gilliard, and Wajcman. The obvious role that gender plays in technologies was, of course, spearheaded by discussions of mobile
technologies as part of the domestic technology lineage (Ling, 2004; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996). The first studies of mobile culture around the early 1990s highlighted the implicit role that gender functioned in the emergence and transformation of the business technology into a sociocultural practice.

Moyal’s (1992) study on gender and telephone in Australia was not only one of the first studies in Australia but also an early pioneer in what would become mobile communication research. Gillard’s research in Australia in the 1990s (particularly with the Australian government) was significant in conceptualizing new models for studying telecommunications as a cultural practice. Michele Martin’s (1991a, 1991b) eloquent study explored the transformation of telephone from business tool into a feminized social and cultural artifact. In the same year, Wajcman’s (1991) wonderfully rigorous critique of technology in Feminism Confronts Technology hallmarked the epoch’s feminist reexamination of the socio-technological tropes of cyberspace and politics of virtuality (see also Haraway, 1994; Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1995). This era also saw the emergence of the concept of the “feminization” of technology/telephony (Brunner, 2002) and debates around the gendered body politics of mobile virtuality (Fortunati, 2005).

Despite the rise of mobile communication as clearly invested by gendered politics and the sociocultural economies of the domestic sphere, and the fact that social labor is increasingly a currency and commodity in contemporary information and communication technologies, studies of gendered usage tend to focus on either narrow age demographics—conflating youth, women, and new technology—or developed versus developing cultural contexts as part of globalization (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001). Within these two polemic discussions lies the relationship of generational gendered differences. For example, do stereotypes about age, gender, and choice of mediated intimacies prevail? Do young women prefer new media such as SMS and multimedia messaging service (MMS), while more mature women prefer older, remediated technologies such as letter writing? In order to begin investigating these questions about gendered generational mediated intimacies, I chose a multicultural context: Melbourne, Australia.

Although not the capital of Australia, Melbourne is arguably the capital for fashion and thus a good barometer for the uptake of mobile phone trends in urban Australia. With a population of 3.5 million, Melbourne has a multicultural demographic comprising large numbers of Greeks, Italians, Chinese, and Jews, among others, with
residents coming from different ethnic backgrounds (estimated to be around 140). Settled in 1835, Melbourne has been subject to many influxes of immigrations, most notably the 1850s’ gold rush that saw the arrival of tens of thousands of immigrants.

One look at the mobile phone industry and usage in Melbourne, and the other is confronted by an array of cross-cultural synthesis; far from being ruled by the fashions in Europe by such companies as Nokia, Melbourne is a smorgasbord of global brands. Throughout the bombardment of mobile phone advertisements that grace trams, buildings, and printed matter, one cannot help but conclude that Melbournians are obsessed with their mobile phones—most notably through the practice of SMS. Whether voting on a TV reality program or keeping in contact with a friend, SMS rules. This texting—involving much playful deployment of the English language—cuts across various age ethnic and socioeconomic demographics (Hjorth, 2005a).

In spite of this, one is left to ponder how mobile communications are being used to maintain various types of emotional intimacies with family, partners, and friends. How, if at all, are cultural differences reflected in these practices? How do women of different ages relate to both old and new media in their maintenance of intimate relations? Can particular forms of “feeling rules” be associated with specific media despite differences in the users’ demography? In order to explore these questions, during December 2007, I surveyed over forty women aged between twenty and fifty years. I began with disseminating written surveys giving respondents the option for a face-to-face, in-depth follow-up interview. For the final group of ten respondents, I chose the most multicultural diverse group of respondents that reflect some of the generational and cultural differences and similarities among women living in Melbourne. As aforementioned, this study is not meant to be indicative of all Melbournian women’s experiences; rather, it aims to provide some insights into the relationship mobile communication—and associated forms of emotional labor—has for women of various ages.

Half of the chosen respondents were first-generation migrants, with the other half being third or fourth generational. The respondents were drawn from a diversity of ethnicities: Chinese, Korean, Swedish, Croatian, German, Jewish, and British—the obvious in terms of Melbourne settlement being a British colony. The sample group had differing relationship status from single, married, de facto, and divorced. Moreover, the one-fifth of the respondents were in
same-sexed partnerships, with two respondents were identified as lesbians. Of the diversity of respondents’ ethnic and generational backgrounds, few differences could be noted—almost all preferred the directness of voice calling (especially with family), while texting prevailed among friends. Interestingly, the preference for hard copy media such as letter writing and postcards could be found in both young and more mature respondents, thus challenging conventions about youth being early adopters of new media. One of the key factors was whether or not their family lived in Australia as to how frequently they contacted family at home.

Among the various voices what became apparent was that the significance of coordinating various forms of mediation was an important part of maintaining intimacy. These various forms of mediation—some more direct (i.e. voice calling) while some more indirect (texting or letter writing)—were seen as an integral part of the practice of intimacy, reminding us of Margaret Morse’s (1998) insightful adage that intimacy has always been mediated—even face-to-face is mediated by gestures, language, and memories. When asked to define “intimacy,” none referred to physical intimacy or face-to-face; instead, they used emotional terms, quite clearly the consequence of increasing social labor in everyday life as massaged by the pervasive rise of affective technologies. For the respondents, intimacy was described as understanding, trust, philosophical closeness, personal, private, care, comfort, vulnerability, slow, intensive, melancholic, compassion, respect, honesty, and genuine love.

How has mobile communication reconfigured women’s relationship to other older media? For one married Swedish female respondent in her early thirties, the rise of mobile-mediated communication only further highlighted the significance of the hard copy. As a university postgraduate, self-described family-orientated mother of two young children, she noted that most of her familial relationships were maintained by voice calls and letters as opposed to partners, which were preserved by e-mailing and texting. Friendships had a variety of forms of mediation from e-mails to letters, texting, and postcards. When asked what was her preferred medium—among all—she replied, “I prefer letter writing because I like a little from the person I’m writing to stay with me even after the conversation has ended.”

When asked about how her preference for particular media had changed over the last five to ten years, she replied,
I no longer like to use the telephone as often. I haven't got enough practice to sustain a conversation for very long! I maintain most friendship by regular texting and e-mailing . . . (ten years ago) . . . I used the post almost exclusively, as well as the phone. I particularly liked to decorate my envelopes and make then part of the gift.

Here the respondent highlights the significance of communication methods as a form of gift-giving. Within contemporary forms of media, gift-giving can take various forms—particularly the gift or “present” of copresence. Much of the literature around mobile media has identified the various levels of gift-giving that involve pleasure, power relations, and obligation (Taylor and Harper, 2002)—extending from the groundbreaking study conducted by Marcel Mauss (1954). So too, the rise of Web 2.0 and its so-called participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) have been imbued by the idea of the Internet being operated by a gift economy that works to challenge the burgeoning commercialization. The role of customization differs dramatically between media—with the context of the older media, decorating is a pleasurable experience, whereas in newer, more frequently used media such as SMS, one is less likely to customize his/her language to the “feeling rules” etiquette. While the SMS economy is forged around simplification and abbreviation, this respondent actively defies this etiquette by choosing to write as she would in hard copy letters.

In terms of mobile communication, her most notable usage and changes were reflective of her becoming a mother. She believed that the mobile phone was significant in negotiating this new role of motherhood in which she developed new relationships with other mothers—via mothers’ group—that she would in any other circumstance not maintain. She noted,

I would not have been able to provide my children with regular playmates without the contact I maintain with other parents through texting. These are people I have parenting in common with but little else.

For a new media designer, who was aged thirty and was in a de facto relationship, she preferred voice calling above all other media. She stated,

I like to be able to speak to someone. It is so easy to misconstrue written communication. Being able to hear someone's voice means
you can hear what is behind what they are saying, rather than relying solely on dialogue.

For this respondent, synchronous mediated intimacy is preferred as a more honest and direct mode of communication. Here we see the directness of the medium as synonymous with directness in communication. This respondent was clearly aware of the time-consuming nature of various media and the types of “feeling rules” involved. For this respondent, the push toward increasing customization was another form of creative labor she tried to resist. Given that she is a new media designer—an area where people must be technologically savvy while being subject to market trends and associated precarious labor—this respondent actively avoided further deployment of emotional and creative labor within her communication practices. While voice calling was clearly the dominant mode of correspondence at 60 percent, this respondent freely shifted among various media such as e-mailing, texting, letter writing, and then postcards, depending upon the friend or family member to whom she is communicating. With both her family and partner, voice call was the communication medium 90 percent of the time, while texting dominated with her friendships 60 percent of the time. When asked to discuss this, she said, “I have some friends that I communicate with solely via e-mail. There are others that are predominantly maintained via text.” When asked about how—and why—her usage of media had changed she noted,

Five years ago, I communicated almost entirely by e-mail. I moved away from my friends and family to a new city, and the cheapest way to stay in contact was via the computer. These days, with the introduction of phone caps, I communicate a lot more via my handset. Lots of texting and phone calls. . . . Ten years ago, I had a phone that I couldn’t afford to pay for when I got my bills and it got cancelled. And I had never turned on a computer before. . . . I think mobile technology has all but obliterated letter writing. It is an art form that has sadly fallen by the wayside. I would like to see it come back into vogue. It’s a bit hard to hold a long lost text close to your heart thirty years down the track.

Above, we see the respondent lamenting the demise of older media such as letter writing that she views as an art form. Here we see the way in which older technologies of communication quickly become reclassified or “remediated” as an art form (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). For this respondent, the compulsion for perpetual
customization within the feeling rules of new affective technologies was associated much more with overt forms of labor, unlike older media that she viewed as an art form. This high/low cultural association between new and older media was more prevalent in younger respondents. But factors such as profession and ethnicity also played a significant role in determining these associations. When asked to reflect upon how mediated intimacy can help face-to-face relations, she replied,

People feel a lot more comfortable communicating via text or e-mail when they first meet someone. There isn’t that face-to-face pressure, and you can think about what you want to say before you do something stupid. Many a new relationship has been built via e-flirting.

For a married Korean designer in her late twenties, her preferred medium was “texting [because it is] short and most of the times immediate and it’s good for filling in time.” While she used voice communicating with her family and husband, in all other relationships, personal and professional, she was clearly a texter (60 percent) and then an e-mailer (40 percent). For this respondent, her new media practices deployed in Korea were reappropriated in the context of Australia. This was partly a technological issue given that South Korea boasts the highest broadband rates (OECD, 2006) and new technological innovation, while Australia still has uneven broadband coverage and technological uptake. But it also involved sociocultural elements in which the “feeling rules” of Australia were much more relaxed than the hierarchies of Korean culture. This can be observed in the respondent’s comfort with texting even her boss:

Five years ago, I used to use a phone call for friends and family, even looking for a job. But I now use text with even work colleagues, including my boss (especially on sick days!). SMS is very interesting... I almost find it easier to discover the “true character” or “the other side” of a person by the way they SMS and e-mail.

For a married Anglo designer in her mid-forties, she alternated between voice calling and e-mailing. For family, she used voice calling 70 percent, e-mail 20 percent, and text 10 percent as opposed to friends she predominantly used e-mail 90 percent. For her partner, she deployed e-mailing and voice calling equally. When asked why voice call was her favorite medium, she replied,
The phone is convenient. I can use the mobile when walking or doing housework. I can catch people when they are out or doing other things. Phones are essential especially for women who are busy. . . . I have a friend that I would text or e-mail to continue the conversation when we are not together (physically) or to continue a conversation privately at work. Say, if something happens on the news that we are both interested in or something happens at work, we text as if we are having a conversation, as if the other person was in the room.

When asked about the changes over the last five years she noted,

Text and e-mail allow more choices. I can e-mail or text to pass on a message that I know is private and that the person will receive when they have time. They can reply when they have time. Text is great for confirming arrangements, like leaving a little note. The mobile allows you to ring family and friends from the shops if you see something that the other person might want.

For one single Eurasian lesbian architect in her late thirties, for family voice calling dominated, whereas for friends she evenly alternated between voice calling, texting, and e-mailing, depending on the situation. As this respondent explained,

Tone of voice seems to be very important in understanding what someone is saying and how they are feeling. We do not always say what we mean. Sometimes texting or e-mail can be misinterpreted, but I am finding more and more it a form for sustaining and creating relationships. . . . Texting definitely seems to reinforce bonds of intimacy with good friends. Several friends have particular ways of texting. Usually texting can provide an amusing exchange or shared experience. Often friends will text when something happens to them or they see something that reminds them of a shared experience I have had with them. I guess texting often conveys that you may be thinking about the friend without necessarily having a voice call.

A European social worker in her early forties in a de facto relationship, when asked about her favorite medium, stated,

I love text and e-mail and things like Facebook for the immediacy and the way one can stay in touch quickly and simply. I like postcards as well because it’s another way of sending a simple message, but there is also something more special about it than the other means, as one has to spend the time picking the card, writing, posting it, etc.
Interestingly, despite all respondents having at least one social networking system (SNS) such as MySpace (on the decline), LinkedIn, and the increasingly popular Facebook, only this one respondent used her SNS frequently. Equally deploying her Facebook in conjunction with voice calling for all of her correspondence with both family and friends, this respondent defied the adage of youth as early adopters of new media. When asked to consider how these practices and patterns had changed since five years ago or more, she replied,

As a teenager and in my young twenties, I used the telephone a lot—to stay in touch and to actually have conversations on. Now I find I have lost the art of chatting on the phone, as I am so used to e-mailing and texting what I want to say until I next see that person. . . . Ten years ago, I was on the telephone every night talking up a storm with friends and family!

On reflecting upon how mobile technologies had changed her relationship to media and intimacy, she noted,

I never write letters anymore, whereas even six to eight years ago, I still did. However, despite the loss of that type of communication, I think my experience has been enhanced by having mobile and e-mail technology in my life. I like the immediacy; the fact that if someone wants to tell me something or vice versa, we usually can share that information.

For this respondent, part of her joy in using new affective technologies is learning new forms of customization. Unlike some of the younger respondents, she viewed the customization around newer media as fun, and that the newer media had enhanced her relationships. For one female Croatian immigrant aged fifty and in a de facto relationship, voice calling dominated her mediated practices. Over 70 percent of her communication was via voice call as opposed to only 5 percent for texting and e-mailing. Interestingly, letter writing and postcards featured higher than texting and e-mailing at 10 percent. Her choice for voice calls was simple: “Immediate response, being able to ‘read’ clues by the tone of the voice.” As an immigrant, constant contact with family was via either voice call or letter writing, whereas for friends she alternated between voice calling and e-mailing. In five years, no difference is noted in her modes of communication, and over ten years, the only change has been the introduction of e-mailing and texting. Although she writes more e-mails and text
messages to her friends, her mode of communication with family remains unchanged.

For one Anglo female in her late twenties, in a relationship with another female, she used voice calling for family; SMS and e-mails for friends; and SMS, e-mails, and voice calls for her partner. When asked what was her favorite medium in maintaining intimate relations, she replied,

SMS—mobile phones are always on and always with people. That means I can instantly convey how I am feeling and know that the recipient will read and respond relatively instantaneously also. I love being restricted by character limits, which dictate how I must communicate. I’m much more adventurous with SMS too because I feel that the message somehow is more private.

For this respondent, like the Korean immigrant, texting expressed inner subjectivities of the users and the particulars of their relationship. She noted,

I have a friend who communicates via text and e-mail with her own variation of English. She randomly replaces “c’s” with “k’s”—i.e. kontakt and kashless and aktion. I actually really like it. Helps me to hear her voice in my head while reading. . . . Another friend and I will make up e-mail addresses and role-play stupid stories about random things. . . . For example, I created a character called Boris who was walking from Darwin because he was madly in love with a woman from Melbourne. I set up a unique hotmail name and used this to communicate with my friend as Boris. Silly . . . but fun.

Here we see the role in which particular media can amplify types of vernacular (the “feeling rules”) and playfulness, an important part of maintaining intimacy. This is what I have defined elsewhere as the ongoing process of “imaging communities” (Hjorth, 2009). By “imagining” I refer to all the mobile media UCC practices that can take the form of the visual, textual, aural, and haptic modes of expression. From SMS to camera phone images, these practices of imaging communities reflect forms of intimacy, labor, and creativity, which provide ways for configuring, and intervening, the region’s “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983).6

Rather than the Asia-Pacific being a sum of what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls “imagined communities”—that is, nations formed through the birth and rise of printing press and print media—networked mobile media is best conceptualized as a series of ongoing micro
“imaging communities” that can span visual, textual, and aural forms. Moreover, contrary to Anderson’s imagined communities that saw the rise of the nation lead to the demise of the local and vernacular, “imaging communities” further amplify the local and the colloquial. In the case of “imaging communities,” each community shares, stores, and saves their media in diverse ways reflecting localized gift-giving rituals and emotional labor. These “imaging communities” are indicative of emerging forms of gendered labor, feeling rules, and intimacy that are maintained through a variety of media practices. For this respondent, her imaging communities had changed concurrently with shifts in the availability of new convergent technologies. When asked about how her practices had changed over the last five to ten years, she noted,

Five years ago I was a heavy mobile voice call user. I didn’t rely on e-mail as much to communicate with friends. I did text message but infrequently as far as I can remember. . . . I had a mobile in 1998 and used to rely on it to keep in contact with family and friends. I didn’t text at all and rarely used e-mail. I used a landline and public phones more frequently. I never wrote handwritten letters but loved to send postcards.

When asked about how the mobile helps to nurture particular relationships over others, she replied,

I think mobiles are perfect devices for building more intimate social relationships. . . . The feeling of privacy and immediacy makes them great tools for flirting, for instance, or saying stuff that is harder to do face-to-face. . . . The mobile has reduced the need to connect via e-mail for me. I get so busy at work that e-mail is a hindrance rather than an enjoyable form of connection with friends. I am also lazy and have a short attention span—so text messaging is perfect for me. Oh and I’m visual—so sending images via MMS is sometimes more engaging.

Here we see a perfect example of the pivotal role texting plays in maintaining everyday relationships, a global phenomenon, but with particular ongoing prevalence in Melbourne. Not only is texting cheaper but it is also more reliable in a country that still has an inconsistent broadband infrastructure. However, there are sociocultural reasons as well. As I have argued elsewhere, despite Melbournians being early adopters of new media, low-tech practices such as texting persist. I have argued that this relates to Melbourne’s specific
geopolitical imaginary of the South that is framed by a “postal presence” (Hjorth, 2005a). Rather than being made redundant by new technologies, the significance of texting continues unabated by new technologies and applications. In this way, texting has become so much part of the everyday that it “makes sense”—that is, it is “natural” part of communication and vernacular experimentation that continues to reinforce a sense of place and intimacy. For many of the respondents, both young and more mature, texting provides a vehicle to say things that could not be said face-to-face. It also provides a space for a convergence of social labor and capital, as noted by the interest in playing with language and phonetics to further reinforce what Ichiyo Habuchi called “telecocooning” already existing social bonds (2005). For some respondents like the Korean immigrant, texting could be used in all situations, such as even texting a boss when someone is sick!

Conclusion: It’s Complicated

In contemporary everyday life, there are a multiplicity of media to orchestrate to maintain, develop, and enhance relationships between friends, family, and lovers. In the rise of affective technologies such as mobile media and Web 2.0, we can see both new and older forms of feeling rules being played out, creating new specters of mobile intimacy. Within the terrain of mobile media, we can see both new and remediated forms of emotional labor. Far from “new” media superceding “older” media or “young” users preferring new media while older favor more traditional media, it is far from that simple. Rather, age, class, and ethnicity—along with various forms of social and cultural capital—inform the complexity of “mobile intimacy” on offer today. This phenomenon of affective technologies and the associated feeling rules of emotional, social labor is perhaps epitomized by the Facebook relationship status mantra, “it’s complicated” (Wissoker, 2008).

We could argue that we have all become mimics of Japanese conceptual artist, On Kawara, and his two series, *I AM STILL ALIVE* and *I Got Up At . . .*, in which the artist used the familiar media in the 1970s such as telephone and postcard to produce a series of minimal gestures about temporary, copresence, and intimacy. If these works were made today, unquestionably On Kawara would deploy Facebook status updates, Twitter, and SMS for their abbreviated minimal gestures about copresence and communication. Across the different media, old and new, people are leaving their odes (often unintentionally) to the great work of On Kawara; a plethora of versions of *I AM*
STILL ALIVE and I Got Up At . . . can be found as we stroll across the various platforms and media. And yet the feeling rules attached to each medium, associated with each particular context, suggest that these minimal actions—phatic or not—are, like On Kawara’s work, informed by specific temporali ties and subjectivities of the user and their attendant communities. Proclaiming I Got Up At . . . for a single mother of three young children is very different than the same cry from a hungover young female adult after a big night out with friends. These gendered gestures are marked by generational and lifestyle factors that cannot be ignored.

What could be noted in the respondents’ comments was the way in which age, ethnicity, and sexuality factored only slightly in different media usage; in particular, the collation between youth being early adopters and high users of new media was challenged and undermined. One woman in her late twenties preferred the old art form of letter writing, as did another woman in her late forties, while another respondent in her forties was a ravenous user of new media such as Facebook and Twitter. Most respondents used voice call for family, undoubtedly due to the fact that distance was often a big factor for first-generation migrants and thus the need to be more direct. The fact that parents and older generations might be less apt in new technologies was also apparent. However, in the study we can see the variety of ways in which a sample group relates toward both new and old forms of mediation, a situation that challenges stereotypes around youth and new media as well as demonstrating the importance of utilizing various forms of media to express and represent different forms of intimacy. It becomes apparent that the choice of media reflects various forms of intimacy between family, friends, and partners. Divergent feeling rules and the associated forms of customization and labor give way to emerging imaging communities.

In an age of global “participatory” and affective media, we need to examine the emerging forms of emotional and social labor within the context of older, remediated modes of copresent intimacy. Factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and class continue to inform the “feeling rules” associated with older and newer media. In this chapter, I have provided a snapshot of some of mediated intimacies in Melbourne in which the specters of older media continue to haunt and locate mobile technologies. Within the rise of UCC with its deployment of affective, creative labor around new technologies such as mobile media and Web 2.0, the picture painted by respondents is
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more ambivalent. It is not a matter of these new public practices of intimacy further eroding distinctions between work and leisure. It is neither simply exploitative nor purely empowering. Rather, individual women of various generations and ethnic backgrounds are deploying various old and new media to articulate and maintain numerous forms of intimacy.

By exploring some of the multivalent voices in choices around what Andrew Murphie (2007) calls “technics of mobility,” we can see that the labor around mediated intimacy is haunted by other (older) media just as it has ghosts of users’ previous experiences and memories. For Murphie, technics of mobility structure and organize how we live life. As Murphie identifies, through mobile technologies we can get a sense of the broader forms of labor and intimacy. Mobile technologies provide insight into “new technics of mobility”—that is, arising social, collective, and subjective processes of living in the contemporary world.

Within contemporary culture, the technics of mobility demonstrated by new mobile media must be contextualized in relation to other media. As the respondents illustrate, contemporary forms of gendered generational flows of social, creative, and affective labor manifest through a variety of concurrent media and relationships. These dual specters of the old and new feeling rules haunt various forms of media, amplifying different parts of subjectivity, intimacy, and copresence. In sum, “it’s complicated.”

Notes

1. As Melissa Gregg (2007) notes in her insightful study on the ironies of “working at home,” far from freeing us up, such flexible working practices result in further eroding the boundaries between work and life. However, one must be mindful that these so-called erosions of public and private boundaries have always been in flux, and that mobile technologies just enhance this phenomenon in a different way.

2. It is interesting to reconsider Goffman’s “back stage” and “front stage” (notions for public and private performativity) in an age of Web 2.0, where the two notions have become entangled. Indeed, with “public intimacy” performativity enhanced by sites such as Facebook and Twitter, we could argue that we now occupy the “in-between” curtain position. This curtain position is undoubtedly the product of the fact that, while privacy was born out of inconvenience (Shirky, 2008), now, in an age of Web 2.0, knowledge about one’s private life is too conveniently accessed—thus we have to try and remake privacy inconvenient.

3. In a similar vein, Lana Rakow’s (1992) lucid study investigated some of the ways in which gender has informed conventions around telephonic
practices. The issue of reproductive labor and the shifting politics of “care cultures” that Hochschild (2000) details so vividly in her research is presciently outlined in Lana Rakow and Vija Navarro’s (1993) “Remote Mothering and the Parallel Shift: Women Meet the Cellular Telephone.” Here, the role of the telephone as both a product and a symbol of particular types of emotional and reproductive labor is emphasized.

4. Many contemporary heterosexual couples choose to have a de facto relationship instead of undergoing the formal, traditional ritual of marriage. For same-sex partners in a country where same-sex marriage doesn’t exist, a de facto relationship is the only method. In Australia, many couples choose to live in a de facto relationship—it is officially accepted in the eyes of law after a couple of years of the relationship.

5. This is a type of postpaid system in which people can use up to a certain amount of calls and texts under a certain payment rate.

6. Also see Ananda Mitra’s redeployment of Anderson’s imagined community in the context of the Internet (1997). Extending upon Daniel Miller and Don Slater’s (2001) groundbreaking ethnographic study of the Internet, Maria Bakardjieva’s insightful ethnographic examinations have utilized imagined community in the context of the Internet (2003, 2004, 2005). It is important to note that this theorization of the Internet as an imagined community by Mitra (1997) was soon hijacked by debates over whether the Internet should be conceptualized as a network or community. My usage of community is poignant, given the attempts to shift analysis of technocultures toward the paradigm of networked societies (Castells, 1996). For a detailed outlining of this debate, see Michael Arnold’s “The Concept of Community and the Character of Networks” (2007).

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Mobile Communication


The last several years have witnessed a profusion of studies related to mobile phone use across the globe. How the mobile phone dislodges space and time, upsets previously taken-for-granted notions of public and private spheres, and creates new modes of social cohesion and exclusion have all been topics raised by the diffusion of this personal and transportable device. A large portion of this research has focused on how mobile phones seem to have become part of a global youth culture, with certain similarities in their usage, appropriation, and discursive construction found across diverse cultures (see Ito et al., 2005; Katz and Aakhus, 2002; Ling, 2004). Yet while the subjects of these studies have been primarily educated, relatively affluent, urban teenagers and college students, less attention has been paid to their more economically or socially marginalized peers, and/or those not operating within familiar modes of parental and school organization and control. Without the assumed choices between a fixed-line and mobile phone, nor the mobility in daily life that is—rhetorically anyway—the reason for the mobile phone, and when bound by extremely imposing structural and material constraints, how do young people use mobile phones to surpass these exclusionary conditions?

This chapter attempts to address such issues by focusing on mobile phone use among young rural-to-urban migrant women working in Beijing. As a group that is extremely marginalized culturally, socially, and economically, China’s young migrants, both male and female, are excluded from many of the forms of sociality, leisure, and opportunity enjoyed by their urban peers. Though freed from some of the typical
institutional controls of individuals their age, they nonetheless face myriad structural and material constraints as a result of discriminatory laws and attitudes. In this chapter, I draw upon ethnographic fieldwork to show how mobile phones allow for young migrant women to be included in important modes of sociality by enabling them to expand and enrich their social networks. I also argue that mobile phones potentially help reify these women’s marginalization by solidifying their status as outsiders and marking them as rural “Others.” These possibilities arise within China’s particular course of development, which has simultaneously loosened rigid institutionalized boundaries between the city and the countryside while exacerbating rural–urban differences. After first explaining the research methodology and theoretical framework, I discuss three interrelated factors in China—rural-to-urban migration, mobile phone diffusion, and social networking, or guanxi—that create a specific cultural context in which young migrant women’s engagement with mobile phones must be understood. I then show how mobile phones provide these women with what I call “immobile mobility,” a means of surpassing, but not erasing, limiting material conditions to gain inclusion in expanded and enriched social networks.²

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Much of the existing literature on mobile phones has noted certain shared usage patterns across cultures, including how mobiles allow for the softening of time and more flexibility in scheduling. Among youth, mobiles are often used for “hyper-coordination,” that is, for expressive reasons, particularly through chatting and sending chain text messages, jokes, or what has been called “digital gift giving” to reinforce connection with peers (Johnsen, 2003: 167; Ling and Yttri, 2002: 158–59; Taylor and Harper, 2003: 267). In many studies, the mobile phone appears as a “supportive communication technology” used most extensively to nurture a small number of relationships that are primarily sustained through face-to-face contact (Ito, 2005b: 9; Ling, 2004: 111; Yoon, 2003: 330–31). Just as mobile phones foster group solidarity, however, there is also concern that they can be used as tools of exclusion, as they can become status symbols, a gauge for one’s popularity, and markers of in-group–out-group boundaries (Ling, 2004: 103; Matsuda, 2005: 133; Skog, 2002: 267).

Clearly, mobile phones have a utility for users that goes far beyond transmitting information. At the same time, while there are surely broad meanings and practices shared by mobile phone users, different
cultural, structural, and institutional factors influence particular usages in specific contexts. This chapter draws from the results of a larger study that examined the use of new media technologies by young migrant women, a group that is ostensibly on the losing end of the so-called digital divide due to gender discrimination as well as limited literacy, financial resources, and technical expertise. Most of the women in this study worked in Beijing in marketplaces, restaurants, and hair salons, establishments that employ large numbers of migrants. Two main considerations guided the selection of these sites. First, the majority of prior ethnographic research involving female migrants in China has been conducted among workers in southern factories or with domestic workers (see Gaetano, 2004; Pun, 2005). Recent studies examining the mobile phone use of China’s migrant workers, both male and female, have also been carried out mostly among factory workers in the south, using interviews and focus groups (see Cartier et al., 2005; Chu and Yang, 2006; Law and Peng, 2006). Another reason, and one that is more important methodologically, is that a major goal of this study was to see how mobile phones were integrated into the daily lives of migrant women. The very public nature of these sites meant that mobile phone usage could be observed in natural, everyday contexts.

The fieldwork first began in the summer of 2005 and was primarily carried out from September 2006 to June 2007. The goal of the study was to understand the meaning-making practices of migrant women in relation to the mobile phone, as they navigate their lives in the city. The findings presented here are based on interviews, many involving multiple sessions, with 48 young, 16 to 23 year-old, female rural-to-urban migrants. Interviews were supplemented by extensive participant observation and casual conversations at the participants’ places of work and residence. Seventeen male migrants were also interviewed as a basis for comparison. A set of nine mobile phone diaries where participants (seven females and two males) were asked to document their mobile phone use for four days over a one-week period was also collected. The format of the diaries was adapted from the work of Mizuko Ito (2005b). Participants were asked to record the date, time, context, and content of all mobile phone use. Once the diaries were collected and analyzed, follow-up interviews were conducted to generate deeper insights into what emerged as key moments of communication and certain trends in usage.

In the research, it became clear that a mobile phone is a crucial tool for numerous modes of communication, particularly for women who
frequently either do not have or have only limited access to a fixed-line phone at work or home. A wide range of socio-techno practices linked especially to mobile phones emerged, though here I focus specifically on mobile phones and social networking. In using the term socio-techno, I emphasize the ways in which technology, in this case the mobile phone, is integrated into existing social and cultural practices, while at the same time opening up new spaces or possibilities for their enactment. I also wish to draw attention to how migrant women’s practices are situated in their specific social world and material conditions. I thus follow the lead of other scholars who view technology use as embedded in larger social and cultural structures and meanings (see Chu and Yang, 2006; Ito, 2005a). In so doing, I theorize the mobile phone as allowing for “immobile mobility,” which I define as a socio-techno means of surpassing spatial, temporal, physical, and structural boundaries. Immobile mobility is not to be confused with virtual reality, which is created through a computer-simulated environment; rather, it is rooted in the material practices and constraints of the everyday experience particular to the lives of migrant women, and perhaps to other populations that must deal with similar restrictions on their control of space, time, and mobility.

In using the term “immobile mobility,” I am also not emphasizing the way the mobile phone is frequently used from a fixed place, thus negating its mobile aspect, nor how low-income households use wireless phones as surrogate landlines that remain in the home (Fortunati, 2005; Ureta, 2005). Immobile mobility is as much an affective practice as a material socio-techno practice, in that it allows migrant women to enter a new social space that is both virtual and grounded in the context of their everyday lives. This context is shaped by migrant women’s specific position in China’s cities, their access to technology, and Chinese modes of relation building. This means that as mobile phones have become integrated into migrant women’s social world, distinct power structures inform their usage. As these devices potentially open up new spaces for surpassing such structures, one must ask how they can also possibly preserve, or even strengthen, these same structures.
marginal youth and mobile phones in Beijing

migration and residence policies. While the Mao era’s rigid hukou, or household registration system, effectively created a bifurcated society divided between the urban and the rural, the easing of these restrictions has enabled those with rural hukou to pour into China’s towns and cities in search of employment and opportunities to improve their lives. It is currently estimated that there are 150 to 200 million “unofficial” migrants comprising what is called a “floating population” (liudong renkou). Though China’s development is largely a result of their labor, they have not been easily integrated into urban areas, where they upset many taken-for-granted social and cultural assumptions. These include the separation of the urban and the rural in terms of not only geography, but also perceived degree of “culture.” Migrants are excluded from certain jobs and a range of social welfare benefits, and their presence in China’s cities has engendered fear and suspicion on the part of urbanites, who blame them for crime and straining already overburdened public services (Solinger, 1999).

Female migrants tend to be employed in the low-level service and industrial sectors in jobs that are gender specific and have a clearly delineated low status. They work long hours, receive paltry wages, occupy a severely restricted social space, and face discrimination due to the intersection of gender, class, and their rural origin. They are often called dagongmei, a highly gendered term that means “working little sister” and connotes a young, unmarried migrant woman, who, as a younger “sister,” has minimal rights and even less status (Pun, 2005: 111). Still, much recent research shows that migrant women are not passive victims; rather, they are active agents in negotiating complex and contradictory discourses and desires as they stake out their own path within the disjunctures and dislocations that comprise post-socialist China (Gaetano, 2004; Jacka, 2005). This study aligns with this body of research, articulating how migrant women actively use mobile phones to build social networks and thereby participate in China’s “wireless world.”

China’s Mobile Revolution

In China, the expansion of telecommunications, particularly mobile phones, has changed everyday communication patterns, especially in urban areas. The rapid growth of mobile phone ownership has been profound: in 2000, China had 85.3 million mobile phone subscriptions; by 2002 there were 206 million; and by 2006 this figure had more than doubled (http://www.miit.gov.cn). For years the nation
has led the world in mobile phone subscriptions, with roughly 859 million, a nearly 64 percent penetration rate (Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 2011).

Mobile phones (shouji) have become a personal necessity for a vast majority of China’s city residents. Mobile phones seem to be everywhere, and seem to be used everywhere. Because most Chinese do not use voice mail, people rarely let their phones go unanswered, whether they are in an important meeting, a movie theater, or a quiet restaurant. Loud mobile phone conversations on public transportation are commonplace, but these are not necessarily viewed as rude. Only slightly less ubiquitous than people holding mobile phones are the mobile phone shops that line the streets of Beijing’s upscale shopping districts and the second-hand mobile phone markets found near migrant enclaves. Everywhere, city billboards display highly sexualized images of Chinese women or trendy youth with a mobile as the ultimate signifier of urban cool. Radio and television shows, Internet portals, and advertising companies all vie for attention on and through individuals’ mobile phones, and for those who don’t have the money to promote their services by such legitimate means, spray painting one’s mobile number on walls or sidewalks has become a form of guerrilla advertising.

On the surface, one could say that Beijing is a networked, mobile-saturated city. Though those at the city’s exclusionary margins, such as migrant workers, cannot participate equally in this networked society, the role of the mobile phone in their lives is still quite significant. Certainly communication technologies, however limited, have served a crucial function in helping migrants in China in previous decades to find work, connect with home, and expand their life opportunities. Formerly, pagers, communal phones in work dormitories, and public “call bars” were the primary means through which mediated communication for most of China’s migrant population took place. Now, the mobile phone is increasingly the communication tool de rigueur for what Cartier et al. (2005: 9) call the “information have-less,” a segment that includes China’s migrant workers, who tend to rely on cheaper forms of new media technologies. The term the “information have-less” is useful in discarding the binary of the “haves” and “have-nots” that usually enters discussions of the digital divide, but what do these “have-less” do with the technology they possess? Thus far, a handful of studies on rural-to-urban migrant workers in China’s southern factories has demonstrated the important role of mobile phones in...
facilitating kinship and friendship networks (Law and Peng, 2006; Yang and Chu, 2006).

**Guanxi: Chinese Social Networking**

In contrast to the individual-oriented nature of western cultures, where the autonomy of the individual is presupposed, Chinese social organization has been described as relationship-oriented. In traditional Chinese culture, “the individual is never an isolated, separate entity,” and there is no unique “self” outside of social relationships and the personal obligations that inhere in those relationships (King, 1991: 65). Xiaotong Fei (1992), one of China’s preeminent sociologists, thus likened the pattern of Chinese social structure to “the circles that appear on the surface of a lake when a rock is thrown into it,” where each person “stands at the center of the circles produced by his or her own social influence” (62–63). Fei formulated his theory before 1949 and based his observations on a predominantly rural society. However, despite the influences of communism, industrialization, urbanization, and westernization, many have still found utility in conceptualizing the Chinese sense of self as predominantly relationally focused (see Hwang, 1987; Yan, 1996; Yang, 1994). Kenneth Gergen (2003) has postulated that the mobile phone challenges the western sense of the “bounded self” through emphasizing the relational and “the importance of connection as opposed to autonomy . . . toward network as opposed to self-sufficiency” (111). In China, the mobile phone seems to supplement cultural notions of self and autonomy that have long been in place.

Closely connected to this relationally based self-orientation is guanxi, a widely used yet ambiguous term that literally means “relationship” but often is understood as “‘personal connections,’ ‘social networks,’ or ‘particularistic ties’” (Yan, 1996: 74). Guanxi has been compared to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of social capital, which he defines as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (248). Bourdieu highlights the uneven distribution of social capital, how it is reproduced in and through people according to their location in society, and its exclusionary nature. He also stresses the unceasing efforts involved in building and maintaining networks of relationships through strategies such as exchanging material or immaterial objects.
The focus on exchange, reciprocity, and group boundaries inherent in social capital is particularly relevant to guanxi. As Gold et al. (2002: 6) state:

[Guanxi ties] are based on ascribed or primordial traits such as kinship, native place, ethnicity, and also on achieved characteristics such as attending the same school . . . having shared experiences . . . and doing business together. . . . While the bases for guanxi may be naturally occurring or created, the important point is that guanxi must be consciously produced, cultivated, and maintained over time.

Those researching business and politics in China are more apt to define guanxi solely in instrumental terms, equating it with using others for one’s personal or political gain (see Gold et al., 2002; Yang, 1994). Scholars doing fieldwork in rural areas, however, tend to focus on its more expressive dimensions and its connection to friendship and feelings (see Kipnis, 1997; Yan, 1996). They view the cultivation of guanxiwang (personal networks) as a way that individuals construct themselves, since in a relationally based concept of the self, “relationships are constitutive of one’s self” (Kipnis, 1997: 8). Guanxi is similar to social capital, yet the mutual benefits and interests entailed in guanxi must be implicit rather than explicit. Also, guanxi should contain renqing, meaning “proper human feelings,” but also “the bond of reciprocity and mutual aid between two people, based on emotional attachment or the sense of obligation and indebtedness” (Yang, 1994: 68). Some scholars do not use the term guanxi when discussing ties between family members or close friends since such relationships are supposed to be disinterested and noninstrumental, yet they can serve as a base for potential guanxi (Yang, 1994: 111).

The Chinese Communist Party has always equated guanxi with “feudal” thinking and has waged endless campaigns and enacted numerous policies to eradicate traditional bonds based on kinship and locality and to replace these with a system of universal ethics supporting a socialist morality. Nevertheless, during both the shortage economy of the Mao years and the current era of marketization, the importance of guanxi has been a persistent feature of Chinese society. As a basis for numerous types of social relationships, including those that facilitate rural-to-urban migration, guanxi emerges as a key term for understanding mobile phone use in China (Chu and Yang, 2006: 231; Yu and Tng, 2003: 191).
Before discussing migrant women’s use of mobile phones, it is first necessary to convey the significance of owning a phone for these young women. In interviews and casual conversations, nearly every migrant woman who was employed (and all the migrant men)—no matter their salary, occupation, or education—had a mobile phone. Most of the women in this study earned about 800 to 1,000 yuan (approximately $104 to $130) each month, including overtime, and paid the equivalent of one month’s salary or more for their phones, although cheaper models were available. They usually spent between 50 and 100 yuan (about $6.50 to $13) a month on prepaid phone cards. Most had phones that allowed for voice calling and texting, some had camera functions, and a few had music players. It should be noted that, in contrast, nearly all of the 17 men interviewed and dozens observed had expensive, hi-tech phones except for those who were newly arrived to Beijing.

For women who often grew up without a landline and for whom making a phone call usually meant using a public phone either in their dormitory or at the corner kiosk, a mobile phone brought a profoundly new way of keeping in touch with others. It is not surprising, then, that when asked whether a mobile phone had made a difference in their lives, invariably and without hesitating the most common answer women gave was that it was “convenient.” When pressed to elaborate on what this meant, Zhang Xiumei’s answer below is very representative. She had worked in a factory in Guangzhou for three years before eventually moving to Beijing in 2004. Her dormitory did not have public phones when she first arrived, but during her last year at the factory two telephones were installed (for about 80 residents) that only took incoming calls. When I met her, she had owned a mobile phone for about a year. As she said:

When I was at the factory in Guangzhou, I wrote a letter to my family about once a week. My family didn’t have a phone [until 2003] but our neighbors at the front of the village did, but it was far for my mom to walk, so I only called them from a public phone about once a week. They didn’t call me. [Now, with a mobile phone] it’s very convenient. Before no one knew where I was, for example. So, for a long time I didn’t keep in touch with a lot of people. So, now with a mobile phone, it’s really convenient. You can send a text message, or call, chat. It’s good. Now people know where you are. Before, [when you went out to work] no one knew where you went.
Zhang Xiumei’s answer brings to light several interesting issues. First, no matter where she went she kept in touch with those closest to her, namely her family. Still, such communication took effort, both on her part and the part of her parents—writing letters, scheduling phone calls, using pay phones, traveling some distance, relying on guanxi with neighbors. Once her family got their own landline, their efforts toward keeping in touch were eased, but Zhang Xiumei’s were not until she owned a mobile phone. Her story also reveals the difficulty she had in maintaining ties with nonfamily members. Rural-to-urban migrants are a mobile population, in that they leave their native place to seek work and because they tend to change jobs frequently, often within the destination city but also between provinces, as in Zhang Xiumei’s case. A mobile phone therefore provides a means of keeping in touch with friends and expanding and enriching one’s social network that was previously impossible.

Expanding Social Networks

Like most rural-to-urban migrants, the majority of the women who participated in this study tend to occupy a very small social world. They work extremely long hours, often 10, 12, or even 14 hours a day, some without ever having a day off and others with just one or two days off per month. Work schedules are frequently extended by the constant pressure (or sometimes demand) to work overtime, and arbitrary training sessions or mandatory participation in “teamwork” meetings lengthen workdays even more. Rare time off is usually spent attending to such basics as doing laundry, catching up on sleep, or going to the market. Contributing to this small social world is the fact that most live in tiny apartments or dormitories with as many as 18 to a room, supplied by their employer and with strict curfews, or with a relative, often an uncle or older sibling who serves as a surrogate parent. Their circumscribed place, dictated by work and home, is compounded by spatial and discursive power relations that construct the city as a dangerous, foreign place due to the intersection of their gender, class, and rural origin; in other words, due to their position as dagongmei—rural working little sisters, outsiders marked by their accent, their build, and their mannerisms. For this reason, many young migrant women, more so than men, are reluctant to venture out of their local neighborhood alone unless they are headed to a familiar destination.

Of particular interest, then, is how mobile phones enable migrant women to expand their social networks (guanxiwang) beyond the
small social world they occupy in the city; in other words, how they allow for immobile mobility. One way I sought to understand this was to view the content of their mobile phone address books. These were invariably filled with the names of current and previous coworkers, former classmates still at home or out laboring in other parts of China, and a few family members, usually siblings or cousins. In the instances where a woman had the phone number of a Beijing resident or someone from a different social class, it almost invariably turned out to be their employer, work supervisor, or a staff member of one of the NGOs that serves Beijing’s migrants. These same patterns were revealed in the mobile phone diaries, the majority of which documented interactions between the participants and other migrant peers and siblings, and to a lesser degree with parents or other relatives. There were also several instances of communication with bosses or coworkers. An initial conclusion could be drawn that the small social world reflected in the women’s mobile phone means that it does not expand their social capital, at least not in a Bourdieuan understanding of the concept. Rather, it reinforces Bourdieu’s notion of social capital as exclusionary, serving to uphold distinct boundaries based on class and income, and thus maintaining social inequality. Such a conclusion aligns with recent research showing China to be an extremely socially stratified society (see Rosen, 2004).

However, placed in the context of the Chinese patterns of relationship building discussed earlier, the content of the address books generates a different perspective. The egocentric nature of the Chinese concept of self means that, while of course the individual has an inner reflexive psyche, the idea of someone existing totally outside of the social relationships in which he or she is part is not a dominant notion. Aside from family ties, the prerequisite for establishing a relationship is some sort of shared identity or personal experience. When the women discussed who were in their phones, they never just said “friends” (pengyou). Instead, they differentiated relationships by using the terms tongxiang, tongxue, or tongshi. As Yang (1994) explains, in Chinese “the word tong, meaning ‘same’ or ‘shared,’ is used to designate a whole set of close personal relationships which serve as guanxi bases: ‘person from the same native place’ (tongxiang), ‘classmate’ (tongxue), and ‘coworker or colleague’ (tongshi)” (111). Although some names in the address books were designated as those of “friends” and could potentially overlap with classmates, colleagues, and so on, clearly the women used their mobile phones not only to keep in touch with
friends and family, but also to build and maintain their guanxi bases. Their social world as reflected in their mobile phone use was made up of those with whom they shared varying degrees of closeness. This point was driven home once when I commented on the large number of friends a woman had in her mobile phone book and was told they were mostly “ordinary friends” (yiban pengyou), meaning they were not in her close inner circle.

My aim here is not to assess whether each name in the address books reflected an expressive or instrumental relationship, for surely there could be a mixture of both within a singular relationship. Nor is it possible to comment on the outcome of each of these relationships. What is important in light of the lengthy quote by Zhang Xiumei cited above—and similar stories that I heard—is that the mobile phone is a tool for migrant women not only to keep in touch with those they designate as friends, but also to build a network of strong and weak ties that potentially could be called upon in the future. The following conversation about the mobile phone diaries of Cui Yiping also illustrates this point:

CW: This is a funny message. Who sent it to you?

CY: He is my fellow villager (laoxiang). We met on the train coming back from Spring Festival. It was a long ride.

CW: You mean you didn’t know him before?

CY: No, but we exchanged mobile numbers and now we keep in touch. I helped him get a job in the bar where I used to work.

CW: That was nice of you.

CY: Really? I don’t know [laughs].

Clearly, a mobile phone made it much easier for Cui Yiping and the young man she met on the train to remain in contact. As they were both from the same hometown, this “natural” affinity made it more likely for her to do him a favor. Though not close friends, she could probably rely on his help as well, if needed at some time in the indefinite future.

Cui Yiping insisted she and the young man were “just friends,” yet other migrant women use mobile phones to establish intimate relationships, not by responding to unsolicited flirtatious messages, but through a mixing of the traditional and the technological (Wallis, 2010). In some cases, an intermediary, usually a friend or relative, introduces them
to a potential boyfriend by passing along his mobile phone number. Sometimes an initial meeting is set up via webcam at an Internet café. After a few meetings in this manner, if the new couple deem each other suitable, technology use then shifts to the mobile phone due to the prohibitive costs of the computer-based Internet. All future “dating” takes place via the mobile phone, with text messages sent throughout the day, and long conversations until late into the night. Often, a face-to-face meeting might not occur for several weeks or even months, due to geographical distances or work schedules.\footnote{Immobile Mobility: Marginal Youth and Mobile Phones in Beijing}

The mobile phone thus enables immobile mobility, a virtual and practical means to overcome limited and limiting economic, social, and spatial conditions. Still, for the most part, due to established norms of relationship building as well as rigid class distinctions, the people with whom the women communicated via their mobile phones were like them—migrant workers, classmates, family members—almost all with rural hukou, thereby affirming their identity as “not Beijing people,” as one of the women termed it. Mobile phones allow migrant women inclusion in expanded social networks with much greater ease than if they had no phone, yet these networks are circumscribed by both the women’s local place of origin and their place as outsiders in Beijing. Immobile mobility thus allows for traversing exclusionary structural and cultural factors, but of course it cannot erase these.

**Enriching Social Networks**

In addition to expanding social networks, mobile phones have become a key medium with which migrant women enrich their relationships. For most women, long work hours and minimal free time mean they have little opportunity for face-to-face interactions with friends outside of colleagues. This contrasts both with their lives in the village, where many felt bored and idle once they were no longer in school and their labor wasn’t needed in the fields, as well as with the lives of their urban counterparts, whose burdens of school and extra-curricular activities nonetheless provide a social life. Even on days off, a migrant woman might find it difficult to meet up with a friend who lives in another part of the city. Unless an employer supplies housing in the city center, migrants tend to live in enclaves on the outskirts of Beijing where rentals are cheaper, and crossing the city by bus can take two hours or more with traffic and transfers. After working for two weeks without a break, it is understandable that on a day off, staying home and sleeping might be the preferred option.
Such temporal and spatial constraints, however, were overcome through the mobile phone. In numerous interviews it became clear that many women had a number of friendships that were maintained almost strictly through their mobile phones. The mobile phone thus emerges not so much as a “supportive communication technology” (Yoon, 2003) used with relationships that are mostly sustained through face-to-face contact, but rather as what I call an “expansive communication tool” used not only for maintaining ties with friends and lovers who are now spread all over China, but also with those who, although in the same city, are nonetheless geographically unreachable. Here again we see how the mobile phone allows migrant women access to immobile mobility, a virtual means of surpassing the boundaries of long work schedules, cloistered living situations, and far distances in order to enrich and sustain their social networks. As one woman said, “If you have a mobile phone, your life is much richer.”

Of course, most women do use their mobile phones to communicate, via text message, with colleagues they see daily, but they often dismiss such communication as merely for fun or to relieve boredom. Many said their close friends were not in Beijing, and several, especially those who worked in marketplaces, said they did not have any friends in Beijing (though they might have a sibling), even after living there a year or more. The major exceptions were among women involved in one of the NGOs that sponsor activities specifically designed to facilitate social interaction and friendship building among rural migrants in the city. Clearly these organizations serve a crucial role, but the majority of the women I knew were not involved in these groups due to prohibitive schedules.

Since migrant women have so little time off and do not have the type of social life that entails traveling around the city, the dominant use of the mobile phone is not for coordinating schedules. More often it is a medium for enriching relationships through chatting and sending short text messages, to both friends and colleagues, as mentioned above. Calling is used for more personal issues even though it costs much more, because texting is seen as too cumbersome. Most women have prepaid calling plans that allow them to receive calls for free, and both economics and norms of reciprocity determine who initiates a particular call. Still, the phone is used most often for texting, with messages usually of two types: self-composed and pre-written. Interviews and mobile phone diaries revealed that messages
the women write themselves often contain minimal content—asking if someone is still at work or how they are doing—in similar fashion to their peers around the globe. The prewritten messages are more distinctive, however, and it is to these I now turn.

Prewritten text messages are widely available in China and can be copied from inexpensive books or downloaded from the Internet. The contents are usually jokes, riddles, holiday greetings, and erotica, which are often written by employees of several Chinese Internet portals. Few women interviewed downloaded such messages and none copied them from books; usually they forwarded those that are sent to them. Some of the women relied quite heavily on prewritten messages, a tendency resulting from their particular material circumstances. Such messages were used to compensate for literacy issues (especially difficulty with inputting characters) or to communicate emotions the women felt they could not properly express in their own words.

Common themes can be found in these messages, including expressions of desire for a simpler existence. Sometimes these are quite humorous, such as the following sent by a woman to her friends on International Children’s Day:

Say happy holiday to friends who are young but are sophisticated in mind. Let’s free ourselves and break the rules. Don’t keep everything inside. I know it’s very hard to behave like an adult. The holiday is coming! If you want to suck your thumb, suck your thumb. If you want to wet your bed, then wet your bed. If anyone tries to stop you, then bite him!

This message is playful in tone and is meant to be a release from the hard work and drudgery that many women must endure in the city. Other messages, however, express extreme longing or conjure up images of flying away or forgetting worries. Such themes again show the mobile phone’s use for achieving immobile mobility and for escaping, even if for a fleeting moment, from the realities of daily life. In this way, text messages can become like the lyrics of a song, which listeners use both to construct themselves and to mediate between their private inner selves and the greater social world.

Such expressions of longing are also present in the large number of prewritten messages that are extremely sentimental and use very formal language in the original Chinese. For example, Chen Yuhua, a young waitress in Beijing, recorded the following message in her
mobile phone diary after she had forwarded it to a friend from her hometown who was working in Inner Mongolia:

A peony is the most beautiful flower. Friends are closest to each other. When we became friends, we didn’t care about money. We only cared about our hearts. After flowing thousands of miles, water will return to the sea. Now we are thousands of miles away from each other, but our friendship will last forever. The roots of big trees are connected; the hearts of good friends are connected as well. I wish you good luck always.

Chen Yuhua said she sent this message because she knew this particular friend was tired and homesick, and she wanted to express her warm feelings to him. Calling was too expensive, so when she received this message she passed it along. She insisted the message did not have any deep meaning; she merely liked the sentiment. In contrast, during the course of my fieldwork it became evident that educated urbanites felt that “a city person would never send this type of message,” because it was too flowery and thus reflected a low level of education. Somewhat paradoxically, the extreme formality of the language made it especially subject to the critique that the sender was “trying too hard.”

Another side of immobile mobility thus presents itself. As much as mobile phones allow for transcendence of material constraints, they also potentially reinforce these constraints. Disparagement of these types of text messages was not necessarily done maliciously; it was actually more of a matter-of-fact observation. Nevertheless, it is another indication of perceived differences between city and rural residents and thus reifies urban—rural difference in the same way that myriad other popular discourses do. Obviously text messages are not usually subject to public critique, as they are most often only shared among friends, but there is an awareness in China that the bulk of prewritten messages are meant to cater to the tastes of lower social strata (Cartier et al., 2005: 21). Such “segmentation of the market” speaks volumes regarding how power and discourse operate at the most seemingly mundane level, and that as much as mobile phones allow for inclusion, they also can perpetuate existing exclusions.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how structural, technological, and social phenomena intersect to create a specific context in which young rural-to-urban migrant women’s mobile phone usage emerges.
Migrant women use the mobile phone as a crucial tool for navigating rigid institutional and cultural constraints. At the most basic level, the mobile phone is a convenient device for keeping in touch with friends and family. It eases the hassle of scheduling phone calls and relying on public telephones that lack convenience and privacy. It has also become an important tool for expanding horizontal networks of sociality, alleviating loneliness, and developing potential guanxi bases. As an expansive communication tool, the mobile phone has clearly enhanced migrant women's sense of community and connection to friends and intimate others. I have argued that it is this access to “immobile mobility,” the virtual means of transcending limiting material circumstances that their urban peers largely do not face, that makes the mobile phone such a significant device in their lives.

In closing, I need to emphasize that mobile phones do not usher in sweeping changes that radically alter the structural and material conditions that serve both to enable and to constrain possibilities for personal agency. As this chapter has shown, migrant women use mobile phones for inclusion in expanded and enriched social networks that tend to reinforce their identity as migrants, or “not Beijing people.” Their particular uses of prewritten messages also potentially mark them as “Others.” Of course, it is not that the mobile phone creates exclusion; rather, socio-techno practices associated with the mobile phone are integrated into social and cultural patterns and discourses that preexist its arrival.

Notes
2. Sebastian Ureta’s talk, presented at the Annenberg Research Network on International Communication in April 2005, on the spatial immobility of low-income families in Chile first started my thinking about this term. However, our uses differ.
3. I use an intersectional framework of gender, class, and place to understand migrant women’s position within contemporary China. I adapt this framework from the work of Crenshaw (1992).
4. The inordinate amount of money that migrant laborers spend on their mobile phones has also been noted by Law and Peng (2006) and Yang and Chu (2006).
5. Though the men tended to make more than the women, their choice of phones was due not only to economics, but also to gendered discourses of technology use, a topic I address elsewhere. Although the number of men involved in this study was relatively small, their use of mobile phones for social networking was similar to that of the women described in this
chapter. Since the initial fieldwork on which this chapter is based was conducted, low cost mobile Internet has become widely used by migrants, especially QQ, an instant messaging, gaming, and social networking platform. Although QQ chat is often used now instead of text messaging, the social uses I outline in this chapter remain dominant.

6. All names are pseudonyms.
7. Horst and Miller (2006) also make this point in discussing the use of mobile phones by low-income Jamaicans. It should be noted, however, that while guanxi building shares similarities with Jamaican patterns of networking, or what Horst and Miller call “link-up,” what appears to be distinctive about the way migrant women use their mobile phones for expanding their social networks is that they could always identify the contacts in their phones in terms of some sort of shared (tong) identity. Thus, the women did not appear to use the phone as intensively for building a network of weak ties as those in Horst and Miller’s study.
9. Matsuda (2005) also addresses the use of mobile phones by Japanese youth to maintain friendships with those to whom they are no longer geographically close, but she does not indicate the degree of closeness or number of such friendships.

Bibliography


Instead of “... costs of the PC Internet”, “... costs of the computer-based Internet” has been used. Please confirm.
Mobiles Are Not That Personal: The Unexpected Consequences of the Accountability, Accessibility, and Transparency Afforded by Mobile Telephony

Amparo Lasén

Introduction

Mobile phones are generally considered, at least in Western and developed countries, to be personal, individual, and private devices, increasing individualization and privacy. Drawing on research about how the presence, ownership, and different uses of mobile phones play a role in the shaping and transformations of intimate relationships, this chapter presents empirical illustrations of mobile phone uses and practices that help to nuance this view of mobile phones as strictly personal, private, and individualized devices.

The study of how mobile phones are used to strengthen cohesion in couples, the affective bonds, and the coordination of its members, as well as to identify the couple itself, helps to reveal the dual nature of social cohesion: the achievement of trust, sharing, solidarity, and identity in an interdependent relationship involves not only the establishment of a network of mutual obligations, negotiations, and latent and explicit conflicts, but also control and power relationships. Alongside the usual terms employed to define social cohesion, such as harmony, trust, shared experiences, sense of belonging, togetherness, mutual support, and loyalty, lie subjugation and power dynamics as well.
The empirical background of this text draws on research investigating mobile telephony uses by heterosexual couples in Madrid, as well as my previous research about mobile phone uses and users in Madrid, London, and Paris (Lasén, 2005). The research about mobile telephony and heterosexual couples consists of two pilot studies carried out in Madrid in 2006 and in 2008. The 2006 study involved in-depth interviews and mobile use diaries carried out with the members of four couples, with differences regarding age (young adults/late twenties and middle age/late forties), the duration of the relationship, cohabitation, and offspring, as well as the precariousness or stability of their working situation. Two interviews were conducted with each of the participants. After the first interview, the interview transcript was sent to each interviewee, who was then asked for feedback in a second interview a few weeks later when both members of the couple were interviewed together. One was a case where circumstances called for a couple to be interviewed separately. The reflexive dynamic facilitated by the repeated interviews and by sharing the transcripts was particularly well suited for the objectives of this research. However, we were careful not to push this dynamic to the point where it could create relational problems for the participants. In the interviews, participants were asked about their mobile use and their relationship. Examples of the content of their devices (SMS, pictures, and sounds) were also recorded during the interviews.

The 2008 research was also a pilot study consisting of eight in-depth interviews with heterosexual women and men living in Madrid, aged twenty-five–forty-five, who were in different types of couple relationships. In addition to the interview questions regarding mobile phone use, multimedia materials stored in the devices were viewed, recorded, and discussed during the sessions. Two focus groups were also organized comprising participants who were all mobile users in the same age group involved in couple relationships.

Some aspects of mobile phone mediations of interpersonal relationships are discussed briefly below, before some of the aspects of mobile telephony in relation to the management and shaping of heterosexual couple relationships are described.

Mobile Phone Mediations

According to the International Telecommunication Union, the number of mobile phone subscriptions in the world reached over four billion by the end of 2008 (http://www.itu.int/newsroom/press_
Mobile telephony’s penetration rate is not just a mere quantitative issue. The broad diffusion of this technology, its personal character, and the way it can afford permanent connectivity not only have facilitated its global presence, but have also made possible important transformations in many aspects of everyday life, fostering what can be called a mobile culture (Goggin, 2006). Mobile phones are involved in changes in social rituals of interaction (de Gournay, 2002; Lasén, 2006; Licoppe, 2003; Murtagh, 2001), in the organization of time (Laurier, 2001), in managing group dynamics (Weilenmann and Larsson, 2001), and in fixing and blurring boundaries and connections between different personal realms, such as work, leisure, and family (Chesley, 2005; Grant and Kiesler, 2001; Ling and Pedersen, 2005). Therefore, they help in redefining the public and private divide (Green, 2003), the formation of social networks based on fluid bonds, the distribution of responsibility, and the decentralization of group structures (Sørensen et al., 2008). They are also involved in fostering participation in collective actions (Castells et al., 2007; Kim, 2003; Nicholson, 2005; Paragas, 2003; Rheingold, 2002). All these factors sustain the necessity of studying mobile phone uses related to the constitution and transformation of social cohesion and social bonds.

Chats, e-mails, SMS, MMS, online dating Web sites, and social networking sites often play a part in relationships, from the first contacts between a couple until their breakup. They are present in courtship rituals, flirting, adultery, erotic games, and other strategies of seduction (Bell, 2006; Byrne and Findlay, 2004; Ellwood-Clayton, 2003, 2006; Lawson and Leck, 2006; Wei, 2007; Whitty et al., 2007). For couples living together and forming a household, parenting, domestic tasks, and leisure activities (to name only a few) are also organized through mobile telephony (Dietmar, 2005; Kasesniemi, 2003: 239–63;
Ling, 2006b; Nafus and Tracey, 2002). Mobile phones help to create and sustain affective bonds as well as to monitor and control loved ones (Green, 2001). Mobile communication contributes to the affective economy and the management of emotions, for instance, through the choice of applications (voice and SMS) with different “affective bandwidths” (Picard, 1997: 57). Different applications allow different degrees of exposure, self-control, or emotion to be transmitted. Mobile phones require us to be continuously responsive within a logic of perpetual contact (Katz and Aakhus, 2002), virtual presence (Gergen, 2002), and connected presence (Licoppe, 2004). This form of “wireless leash” (Qiu, 2007) contributes to modify couples’ communication patterns. This permanent availability to a partner, who also has a continuous virtual presence, plays an important role in setting the boundaries of the couple’s territory. This can elicit territorial conflicts between the members of the couple as well, with potential clashes between one’s own time, space, and private realm, and the couple’s sphere.

Mobile phones contribute to a redefinition of intimacy (Crawford, 2009; Pertierra, 2005; Prøitz, 2005b; Tomita, 2005). The practice of intimacy has always been mediated (Hjorth, 2005). As new media are adopted, their affordances and constraints also contribute to the way intimacy is performed and shaped. Thus, mobile phones affect the way we establish trust and new mutual obligations. Furthermore, they create new etiquette rules related to couple communication. Mobile phones help to maintain both closeness and distance and also play a part in power relationships and control. They also play a part in the way gender roles are performed and defined within the couple (Prøitz, 2005a; Rakow and Navarro, 1993).

People’s relations with their mobile phones are an example of a material and bodily tie that mediates other interactions. Using a mobile phone entails sharing our agency with it, as the device affords some practices and activities, and it prevents others. It facilitates some exchanges, activities, and modes of control. It contributes to eliciting, expressing, communicating, and managing affects and emotions. Different uses arise as the device, with its affordances and possibilities, intersects with user and their changing necessities, aims, and particularities. Thus, the device is culturally, socially, and personally shaped; reciprocally, individuals and interpersonal relationships are shaped by technological uses, through this shared agency. For instance, a mobile phone conversation can mobilize several activities and forms of social knowledge such as gender relationships, embodiment, technological
use, linguistic skills, etiquette rules, personal creativity, and emotional management. The technology facilitates shared experiences and at the same time contributes to the content of such experiences.

Social bonds, such as those formed in couple relationships, are also mobile and fluid. They need to be followed, traced, and localized. The possibility of keeping track of these movements, of stabilizing the affective flux of interpersonal contacts, depends to a great extent on the materiality of objects, bodies, and devices. Mobile phones and their ability to keep track of communications, messages, social networks, and activities are an example of this ability (Ferraris, 2005). They afford the inscription and visibility of users’ social networks, of their significant ones’ presence, and of their affective bonds materialized in the images and texts sent and stored. These devices can even provide insight into the degree of a couple’s cohesion by keeping track of the intensity and reciprocity in the relationship. This can be found, for example, in the log of calls and SMS messages: some women in our research compare the frequency and amount of calls and SMS to and from their partners to gauge their relationships.

Mobile phones shape contemporary individuals and their interpersonal bonds. The shaping of the self also entails different modes of dependence, of subjecting the self. In this case, the term “subject” entails a double meaning. In the first, “subject” suggests being subject to something or someone; under the power, control, or dependence of another person, group, or institution. In the second, “subject” suggests being constrained to a particular identity, self-conscience, and self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982). Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and shapes us as subjects. In this chapter, some of the ways in which mobile phones play a role in both aspects will be discussed: identity and self-knowledge, on the one hand, and monitoring, self-control, and dependence, on the other. Dependence and heteronomy concern two aspects: first, the relations between people and the object itself, and second, the interpersonal relationships mediated by the phone.

The pervasiveness and ubiquity of the mobile phone make its role in the shaping of the self more intense when compared to other technologies. This can be seen in the attachment to the device (Lasén, 2005). Attachment and influence also relate to the diversity of senses mobilized by the different applications and uses (Vincent, 2006). To quote the participants in our research, the mobile is “embodied in us,” “a part of my body,” “always on, always open.” They feel lost and
anxious without it. The emergent entity of “me and my mobile” aug-
ments the subject’s availability and accessibility to the world and to
their significant others. Therefore, the need to manage this accessibility
is increased. One’s presence is also mediated by the device (Lasén,
2006): in urban places, in loved ones’ minds and hearts, in the places
where their contacts are, in all the phone books where their numbers
are, and in all the places where those mobiles are.

These characteristics of mobiles increase the heteronomy of indi-
viduals, as the dependence on and attachment to the device are both
narrowly linked to the dependence on and attachment to other people,
as well as our obligations to them. Some aspects of this heteronomy,
narrowly related to the cohesion associated with couple bonds and
obligations, are discussed in the next section.

Managing the Couple With the Mobile Phone

Reading the Evolution of the Couple Relationship in the Mobile Phone

Mobile phones not only afford voice, text, and image communica-
tions. They are machines used to make and keep inscriptions (Ferraris,
2005) in different forms, such as numbers, names, pictures, videos,
sounds, and texts. Diverse aspects of couples’ relationships are also
inscribed in the device. For instance, the evolution of contemporary
couple relations, from the dating game and falling in love to the rec-
ognition of being an item, can be inscribed and read in the modalities
of the mobile phone contract. It is first seen in the inclusion of the
other person in a “favorite numbers” or speed dial list, then “telephone
number portability” to share the same operator, and, finally, the
same contract for both numbers. Mobile phone operators in Spain
offer a cheaper option called the “family contract” wherein several
numbers can be part of the same account. Couples subscribed to
this type of contract are recognized as a family unit by their phone
provider, possibly even before the couple is united by their mortgage
or by the registry office. This evolution of contract modalities, par-
allel to the evolution of the relationship, reveals how the economic
rationality—the possibility of saving money, thanks to the choice of
the operator and contract—follows the development of the couple’s
affective bonds.

The progress of the relationship can also be traced by changes
in modalities of communication (voice and text) and the content
of the exchanges. Processes of routinization linked to established
relationships diminish affective communication, changing the main emotions expressed and elicited. Thus, at the beginning of the relationship, mobile phones mediate and help the affective communication of the couple (Prøitz, 2005b; Wei, 2007: 109–12, 254–55). This is the time of romance, professions of love, and the description of feelings associated with desire, memories, longing, and lust. In the words of one of the research participants, this is also the time of “hard worked SMS” affect expression. According to our interviewees, it is also the time of the missed calls with preestablished meaning (Donner, 2007): “I am thinking of you.” [0] These calls are actually used for different exchanges between the couple, for phatic interaction or for functional types of interaction; in our research, however, long-term couples did not use them for this kind of functional communication.

The start of the relationship is also the time when communication disciplines emerge. These are often seen as signs of mutual interest and care. They include interactions such as the daily good night call. Interview material shows that with time, these romantic SMS and affective expressions from the beginning of a relationship start to vanish, eliciting nostalgia particularly among women.

I told her, “I miss you a lot,” “I love you,” and so on—all those typical things . . . Now calls are “How are you, darling?” “Fine,” “OK, I’m leaving,” “OK, see you.” (Alberto, twenty-eight)

Before marriage there were many, many, many more calls, more SMS, much more. Now there are less, because, as I told you, before we have to call each other before going to bed, every night. Not now; now we sleep together. (César, twenty-eight)

As the relationship advances, disagreements and confrontations are more common, as is the need to manage negative emotions and conflicts. According to the participants, arguing on the mobile is avoided in order to escape misunderstandings that could make things worse.

Now, mobiles not only embody the comforting presence of the other and their loving messages, but also the possibility of a clash. Informants described the ability to manage a conversation in order to avoid (or perhaps postpone) disagreements.

You are talking normally and then you see that he’s going to start an argument and you prefer, you say, “Well, OK, we’ll talk later, and we’ll discuss it.” We stop the conversation, and when we meet, we discuss it. (Rebeca, twenty-seven)
At the next point in this cycle, mobiles are also used to initiate the reconciliation, to make up after a fight or a disagreement. This is seen in a conversation with Rebeca and Alberto, aged twenty-seven and twenty-eight, respectively:

Rebeca: Some days we get worked up. Some days I come home angry, and he ends up going back to his place. But it's always me, it's almost always me who makes up.

Interviewer: How does it happen?
R: It's like I cannot go to bed like that.

Alberto: She feels guilty.

R: Of course, I feel guilty. It's always my fault, isn't it? [Laughs].

I: And in those cases, do you call or do you send an SMS?
R: Both, an SMS or I call him or “misscall” him four times.

If the relationship lasts and the affective bonds grow, the obligation of accessibility increases, parallel to the obligation of transparency. Both obligations are closely linked to mobile phones and are also shaped by the affordances of the device. As mobiles also help to extend and sustain the realm of individual contacts and exchanges, a complex game involving the couple and their mobiles results. Trust in the partner and in the relationship is built against a background made of implicit and explicit jealousy and suspicions. Mobile phones become mediators of territoriality, being both part of and an arena for conflicts in the couple’s and personal private space. Conflicts arise concerning the clash between the exigencies of both realms, as well as regarding the control of the couple sphere. This clash is embodied in conflicts and differences in mobile phone uses and also about the money spent, as we will see below.

The mobile phone is also a part of established couples’ lives. Among those couples who have, for example, formed a household and established family bonds, romantic and sensuous expressions through the mobile largely disappear, as does the perceived danger of negative emotions being caused or driven by the uses of the device. The participants in our research who are married for more than five years do not fear fights and misunderstandings via the mobile phone. This is probably because they have already learned how to deal with these situations and know when they can happen. According to these couples, mobile phones help to diminish ambiguities and misunderstandings.
In contrast, the younger couples report that mobiles raise the risk of creating conflict. In addition, the long-term couples do not make or expect to receive love declarations or revelations of desire through the mobile phone. Their daily calls are not made to know how the other feels, but rather to distribute domestic and parenting tasks (Ling, 2006b). This is seen in the comments of Dan, a forty-seven-year-old managing partner married for more than twenty years with two children: “We call more and talk less.” The management of domestic tasks and family obligations becomes one of the main aspects of the relationship, and mobile phones are a way to increase the efficacy and organization of the couple and the family, which Dan compares to a firm or an organization.

This is a clear example of the moral economy of the household, of the narrow link between affects, recognition, and economic rationality (Silverstone et al., 1992). This link sustains couple cohesion as well. Moral economy is also embodied in the kind of contract subscribed to by its members, sometimes called a “company contract” or “my business.” Dan explains:

> We call each other more, but we communicate less. Anyway, with the years passing, with the maturing of the couple, the couple uses it to, how can I say it? To become a . . . it doesn’t sound great, but that is, it becomes like a firm, and a less dreamy, less romantic, company. So, the use of the mobile goes hand-to-hand with the evolution of the couple. Do you know what I mean . . . ? The evolution of the couple is reflected in the mobile, in the way of using it now. (Dan, forty-seven)

This quote gives an example of the self-knowledge provided by the use of the mobile (and also by the reflexivity promoted by the situation of the interview). The status of the mobile phone is affected by the evolution of the relationship, its length, as well as other factors like cohabitation and parenting. All these aspects influence the couple’s sense of the mobile phone. In the case of couples who have only been together a short time (less than six months for the participants in this research), the romantic partner is the person who receives most of the calls and SMS, more than any other person. While there is still a lot of traffic between partners as the relationship matures, the tenor of the interaction changes.

Another consequence of being in a relationship is that time for sociability with one’s own friends decreases. As a result of this, according to
the informants who are in long-term relationships, the mobile is often used to be in contact with their friends, whereas communicating with their partner was the main reason to get a mobile in the first place. As the relationship matures, the mobile becomes more important for communication with friends than with partners. In this phase, the mobile phone is used for sociability and to interact with friends. According to the informants who have been married for some time, the mobile is used to organize and coordinate working and domestic tasks with their spouses. They also note that it is used more as a tool for individual and conjugal sociability, rather than for the communication within the couple. Housewives experience even more of this reduced sociability outside the household and the family, as the cohesion and demands of “conjugal society” can be a detriment to other forms of sociability and community bonds. According to the research, mobile phones help these housewives to accomplish their tasks and be accessible to their loved ones more effectively. At the same time, mobiles can also help to reduce loneliness and allow housewives to go out. Mobiles afford physical mobility without neglecting their home and family duties. They allow for the possibility of being continually available and of making last minute arrangements when some free time is found. A survey carried out by Spanish mobile phone operator Yoigo found that among 1,000 of its customers, families and couples are the main recipients of mobile phone communication for both women and men, but friends are the third group for women, whereas work-related contacts are the third group for men (2008). This difference not only points to the individual friendly sociability of women, but also to their usual role as the organizers of the couple’s sociability.

Mobile Phone Obligations for Contemporary Couples

The mobile phone provides us with a form of virtual presence. At the same time, it creates the obligation of being accessible. These dimensions characterize couples’ uses and expectations. Being accessible to one’s partner has become one of the expected aspects of being in a couple, as revealed by the anger and the worry when the other does not reply to messages sent or calls made:

It pisses me off, because I always carry it and want to use it. He says, “The batteries are dead.” He lets the battery run out or does not carry the mobile with him, or leaves it in the car, and just doesn’t care and doesn’t realize it till I tell him, “I’m calling you.” And he just says, “Oh, I left the phone in the car.” . . . “Hey, let’s charge it
or have it at hand because I’m here calling you.” And he is just as if nothing happened. For instance, yesterday, his mobile was beeping because of low battery, and I said to him, “Alberto, the phone is running out of battery.” “Oh, leave it,” he said. And I charge it, me! (Rebeca, twenty-seven)

He forgot the mobile at home, went to work, and called me from a colleague’s mobile: “Eh, listen, I want you to know that I forgot my mobile there and haven’t called you because of that.” I said, “Yes, don’t worry. I’ve seen your phone here.” I think that’s dependence. (Memé, twenty-nine)

The mobile phone embodies the constant presence of the other that can be actualized at almost any time. The participants in our research expect to reach their partners when they need or when they wish. There is also the corresponding sense that they always try to answer their partner’s requests. As the excerpts above suggest, however, this may be an ideal; reality was somewhat different. Calls and SMS are an important part of partner communication habits. The everyday call or SMS to know how the other is doing has become part of the relational discipline of these couples and, in general, of contemporary couples in countries where mobile phone use has become widespread. According to the Spanish survey quoted above, people in couple relationships phone their partner between once and three times at day: 6 percent of women and 7 percent of men phone their partners more than six times at day.

Answering calls and SMS, having an operational mobile phone with them, remembering to call to check in on him or her, goodnight calls or SMS for those who do not live together—all these aspects are becoming part of the obligations one has to account for when in a relationship. One participant explains this obligation:

César: Well, it depends on what I’m doing. Maybe I don’t want to stop what I’m doing now to answer.

Interviewer: If it’s a missed call from your wife, do you wait for her to call you again?

César: Nah, no, then I call her as soon as possible. (César, twenty-eight)

According to a survey of 5,000 Madrid mobile phone users aged 18–40 by mobile phone message services provider SpinVox, 60 percent of men and 54 percent of women would always answer a call or SMS from their partners and give them priority over their boss’s calls (“Cambio en los Hábitos”).

Mobile Modes of Subjection

The possibility of perpetual contact, and its affective value of feeling together and loved, also entails the possibility of monitoring and control. In the words of an informant named Alfonso, a twenty-nine-year-old mobile worker with a subscription for work and another for friends and loved ones, “It makes you feel more watched and more in contact, at the same time.” Though people interviewed affirm that such control is not exerted, either by them or by their partners, some of their practices and attitudes say the contrary (Rakow and Navarro, 1993). For instance, some use the SMS and missed calls log to prove that they have tried to reach their partners or show the text with the time they have fixed to meet in order to demonstrate that the other is late. Another similar example is the use of the SMS and call logs to demonstrate the asymmetry in a couple’s communication. This is done to reinforce the reproach, “I call you more than you call me,” or to counteract the other’s scolding about excessive mobile phone use and spending.

Control over a partner’s mobile phone expenses is another way to manage a partner. The concern expressed over expenses is found in couples with differing income levels. It is also mostly a worry of the male participants. In the interviews, they often criticized their partners by their supposed excessive spending.

For many years, she did not want to have a mobile, and then she started to use it. Yes, I’ve noticed some differences…. Now, I know that I can find her on the mobile, and I call her mobile. That’s a change. The other change is the bills [laughs], a substantial change. As you can see the numbers in the bill, she feels guilty sometimes…. What makes me mad is that the mobile seems to be now something essential that everybody pays for, without thinking about the use. If it was a taxi, people would say, “Wow! She spends a lot on taxis!” You see? [Laughs] Or if it was the gas bill. (Dan, forty-seven)

R: He tells me, “Why do you call so much? What are you going to tell Laura if you have seen her last week? Damn it, I’m not surprised by your bills then. How many SMS did you send?”

A: I wouldn’t mind if she didn’t complain when there is a forty-five or fifty euros bill.

R: I accept it. I say, “Shit, this month I’ve spent forty. Well, it’s OK.”

A: Yah, you bloody accept it! You start, “Ahhh, I’ve spent fifty euros, I can’t, I don’t have money,” and I say, “Damn it, don’t call so much, then.” (Rebeca, twenty-seven, and Alberto, twenty-eight)
This issue emerges for cohabiting or long-term couples, but does not appear in the couples who have only been together for a short time. In spite of differences in this control, for instance, due to the economic independence of women, such male worry is expressed regardless of whether or not their partners pay the bill with their own money. Most of the male interviewees complain about it, even when they do not contribute to the woman’s bill. As such, it seems to be a form of male control, a way for men to state and defend their dominant position in defining the moral economy of the couple and the household. For their part, some of the women react to this:

He spends little money. He doesn’t talk much. As I don’t do that, when, for example, I’m having a long call with a friend. . . . It’s not that he’s bothered because I do differently, but, yes, he corrects me and says, “Look, I communicate perfectly and in fifteen minutes, the issue is sorted.” He doesn’t try to change my mind, but yes, he tries to trick me a little bit. (Rebeca, twenty-seven)

Regarding the attempts to control the partner’s mobile phone uses, right and wrong uses can be identified. Some of the “wrong uses” described by men are making too many calls, spending too much money, long calls, and too many text messages. Indeed, it has been found that women text more than men, a difference also found in research conducted in other European countries (e.g., see Ling, 2006a). More of the so-called wrong uses, according to women, include not being accessible or not carrying the mobile, as well as the implicit reproach, under the veil of nostalgia, about the lack of romantic calls and text messages. What is common to men and women alike is that uses considered “right” are their own ones, whereas the “wrong uses” are those different from their own. This highlights the difficulty to admit that it was right for the partner to use his or her mobile phone in his or her own way.

The data seem to indicate that differences of behavior and practices are not really welcomed within the couple. A partner’s different use of the mobile seems to be interpreted as an implicit reproach toward the other’s way of behaving. This difficulty to admit that a different use can also be a right use is also related to the implicit and explicit conflicts at play over the control, definition, and management of the couple’s territory. The material also indicates that women are more willing to adapt their mobile phone use to their partners’ requirements. They are, for example, willing to renounce affective communication
through SMS, and they are often willing to accept a fixed time to call. But there are also forms of resistance. None of the women interviewed who are scolded about the money spent and the amount of calls are willing to restrain their mobile phone use. At the same time, some of the young women whose partners would no longer send affective text messages continue to send such messages of their own in spite of the lack of reply, even when they know that the boyfriend may find these messages “childish.” Thus, the same types of messages (“I miss you” and “I love you”) once cherished when the relationship was new become a form of defiance.

Two modalities of control through the mobile phone arise in the couples studied. First, there is the attempt to control the partner with the help of the mobile phone, by localizing the partner at any time and by the possibility of being a permanent presence. Second, there is also the attempt to control and modify the partners’ mobile phone use according to one’s own views. This is done either by trying to control the money spent on the mobile or by fixing obligations and expectations regarding such aspects as always carrying the mobile, making sure it is always on, answering SMS and calls, or calling at least once at day. The younger participants in the research, young adults in their twenties, present a third modality of mutual control: through the access to the device and the personalization of the partner’s mobile. We call this “trans-personalization.”

Trans-personalization

If the self can be considered as generated by an interactive network of heterogeneous materials including today’s technologies, one can conclude that contemporary selves are shaped by TV and radio reception, mobile use, blogging, chats, social network sites, e-mail, and digital photography, among other activities and applications. All these activities involve the creation, diffusion, reception, and consumption of sounds, images, and texts. The process of shaping, transformation, and preservation of subjectivities is an ongoing aspect of everyday life. It is created by the interaction of different strategies of identification, different modes of socialization, and different personalization of subjects. Personalization is a reciprocal activity. People personalize their devices, such as mobile phones, and are, in return, personalized by them. The growing presence and use of mobile media, as well as their convergence, generate new “cartographies of personalization” (Hjorth, 2009).
In this way, mobile phones are involved in processes of individualization, self-representation, and recognition. These processes involve complex dynamics of difference and identity, isolation and fusion, and regarding other people and groups. Seen in this way, the personalization of the device is one of these performances. Such personalization has an effect on bodies, data, behaviors, and actions in reciprocal and lasting relationships involving people and objects. Mobile phone personalization involves making and keeping a variety of inscriptions, such as text and voice messages, images (pictures and videos), numbers, dates, call registers, songs, ring tones, and recorded sounds. The duration of these traces, more or less ephemeral, depends on the memory size of the device and on a periodic intervention and decision about what should be kept and what can be deleted.

Mobile phone personalization as a way of individuation, self-representation, and identification is not only an individual affair; it also helps create and sustain the identity of the couple. It helps them to develop a common sense of identity and to minimize their differences. In our research, an example of this is shown in a couple that has the same picture of the two of them hugging on their phone’s welcome screens. Some of the female informants say that they have, in effect, used their phones as a diary by saving the key moments of their relationship to their mobiles. This includes things such as a wedding picture on their welcome screen, the date of the first date as PIN, old SMS with romantic content stored in the device, or text messages related to an important issue for the couple such as the one announcing, “We got the house.” In many cases, these records are visible to other people. Thus, mobile phones contribute to the self-representation of the couple for each of its members as well as for other people.

Besides the possibility of permanent contact through others’ virtual presence, we discover that in certain cases the partner’s presence can leave a material mark on the mobile phone, through personalization by the user’s partner. These are not the usual traces of other people found in mobile phones, such as numbers, SMS, call register, pictures, and videos, but the personalization of the device by making material inscriptions on their boyfriend’s, girlfriend’s, or spouse’s mobile phone (images, pictures, sounds, and ring tones). It might also include making decisions about what has to be kept or deleted, as when deleting certain mobile content (old SMS or numbers) on the partner’s device. In our study, the members of the young adult couples who have been together several years report that they have
unhindered access to their partners’ device. They know the PIN, make and answer calls on the partner’s mobile, give the partner’s number to others, and download images, pictures, and sounds onto the partners’ mobile. They also read and even delete SMS and numbers in order to, as they put it, “do some cleaning.” This accessibility seems to have become one of the expectations and obligations of being in a couple. Research participants who have been together for only a few months did not have this kind of accessibility, but still find it normal. Similar practices have also been found in research about mobile use among young couples in France (Martin and de Singly, 2002).

The consequence of trans-personalization and of the shared use of the mobile phone is that the device is not entirely perceived as a personal object, since it also belongs to the partner who uses it and has his or her traces on it. By making these inscriptions and by deleting other people’s traces on the device, they remind their partners that the phone and its management also belong to them. The realm of relationships and communications mediated by the mobile phone also becomes their business and does not escape their supervision and influence. This shared personalization reveals a mode of subjection to the other, as well as an attempt to erase the differences within the couple, through mutual identification. It is highlighted by the obligation of double accessibility—of the person through the mobile as well as of the device and its content. These obligations illustrate the limits to individual privacy within the space of the couple. Participants’ descriptions reveal a lack of acknowledgment of the legitimacy and need of such a sphere: these obligations develop parallel to the expectations of self-disclosure when in a couple. This lack of privacy did not seem to worry the informants in this study. They accept it as normal and expected. Indeed, during interviews, they were quite surprised by my own surprise toward their examples of shared use and total transparency. It seems as if the will to achieve cohesion inside the couple did not allow for autonomy and privacy for its members. They seem to believe, and fear, that anything that is not transparent and accessible hides the threat of a double life. This points to the mobile phone as a potential threat to the couple, as the device could be used to maintain a secondary relationship. The participants in our research feel that not having access to the partner’s phone leaves the door open to the potential of a “double life.” A refusal of access could be a sign of betrayal and infidelity; anything that is not open to monitoring could be seen as a potential threat.
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Mobiles Are Not That Personal

The unexpected consequence of the possibilities of accessibility, accountability, and transparency embedded in mobile phones is, in the words of twenty-eight-year-old Alberto, that “mobiles are not that personal.” This contradicts one of the main features of the device—its personal nature—that is commonly touted (Ito et al., 2005). The possibilities for autonomy afforded by the technical features of the device, being a personal and portable technology, are thwarted by norms and expectations of the couple.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here is situated within contemporary theoretical approaches that challenge the modern views on the status of objects and subjects, such as Actor-Network Theory, the concepts of the cyborg (Haraway, 1991), post-human entities (Hayles, 1999) and post-Humanism, or Foucault's concept of dispositif, which has been recently revisited by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2009). Dispositifs are networks embedding a multiplicity of elements, a collection of practices, knowledge, skills, measures, and institutions whose aim is to manage, govern, control, and orientate people’s behaviors, gestures, and thoughts in a useful way. In spite of their differences, all these theoretical approaches consider agency as the result of a shared endeavor between people and artifacts, a body-to-body interaction between people and devices, a shared agency that can be a collaboration, but also a conflict due to infighting, resistance, and subjection.

Mobile phone uses in couple relationships and communications reveal examples of the shared agency between people and devices. Here, there exists a mutual shaping between technological affordances and constraints, and the couple’s reciprocal obligations, forms of communication, and identity. In the cases studied, some features of the device are developed and strengthened, while others are downplayed, according to the interests and intentions of the users, as well as their partners. The potential of mobile phones to widen the differences between partners, thus undermining their cohesion, is counteracted and minimized. This potential resides in the support and reinforcement of the individual realm of activities and relations afforded by mobiles, which increases the ability to manage and extend the mobility of affects and affiliations. At the same time, the mobile’s capacities to make and keep inscriptions and to exert control over one’s partner are developed. Both aspects entail learning, conflict, and collaboration with the affordances and the features of the device, as well as with the
conditions—such as types of contracts—set by mobile phone operators. Both aspects also interact with the possible conflicting views of the members of the couple.

Mobile phones are involved in processes of mutual recognition and identification within the couple, which entail attempts to eliminate different behaviors, attitudes, and opinions in the fragile and conflicting articulation between individuality and the new entity of the couple. The mobile provides comfort and control at the same time, as seen in the example of the loved one’s permanent presence. Trans-personalization is another practice related to the mutual identification and the attempt to eliminate differences occurring in parallel to the evolution of the couple. It is the result of negotiations, conflicts, and collaborations between the members of the couple and is related to modes of self-identity and self-knowledge afforded by mobile phones. The attempts to modify a partner’s ways of using the mobile and the resistances that result are all particular modes of subjection embodied in mobile phone practices. One of the consequences of these complex dynamics of mobile phone use within couples is that the device can lose its personal and individual character when mutual accountability, accessibility, and transparency are prioritized. This small example helps us understand that achieving trust and interpersonal recognition, both necessary to the success of the couple as the creation of social cohesion, is the result of negotiations, conflicts, and power relationships. This achievement often involves the price of subjugation and the renouncement, at least partially, of one’s individuality and autonomy.

Some authors, such as Giorgio Agamben, consider that the technological mediations of people’s lives and relationships are forms of an increased separation between and among individuals and their environment. According to such views, this separation would make personal relationships more abstract. This alienation would be one of the effects of the growing presence and use of mobile phones and other information and communication technologies. This abstraction or alienation may be the result of the mediation of communication devices. Therefore, the opposite, more concrete and genuine relationships, would point to a kind of unmediated communication embodied in face-to-face encounters. This kind of argument seems to recreate a myth of substantive, pure, transparent, unmediated, and unattached subjects involved in forms of relation and communication without material mediations. However, we should not forget that even in forms of communication that are not technologically mediated, such
as face-to-face exchanges, the language, gestures, accent, clothes, and personal objects, among other aspects, are also mediations of the interpersonal communication. Thus, the aspects of couple communication through mobile telephony described here are some examples of how mobile phones take part in what it is nowadays to be in a couple. They render relationships more complex, open to more participants, but not necessarily more abstract or less genuine.

Notes

2. The results of these research projects were the basis for a larger, ongoing research project (2009–2011), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology. The project investigates the role of mobile telephony in the emergence, expression, and resolution of conflicts among couples.
3. This is the process of taking the number assigned to a mobile phone by one operator and transferring it to a subscription with a second operator.

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Mobile Communication in Intimate Relationships: Relationship Development and the Multiple Dialectics of Couples’ Media Usage and Communication

Joachim R. Höflich and Christine Linke

Introduction

Media—and not at least the mobile phone—have immense influence on how we communicate and live together. Eventually, media influence interpersonal and intimate relationships. But, media usage is also influenced by the kind of relationship between communication partners. Humans are not “exposed” to the media in a trivial sense. Basically, communication media can be considered as enabling restriction, with possibilities as well as constraints in the center of this model (Short et al., 1976). The crucial point here is how people handle the constraints and utilize the possibilities, and in this study we assume that relationships enable individuals to negotiate the constraints of mediated communication. Different people in different social relationships incorporate and use media differently in their daily lives. This indication toward social framing and its influence on media usage shall in no way mean that technological determinism is replaced by social determinism. Rather, it indicates that, in the context of technological and social framings of media usage, a creative, willful, and sometimes also unruly adoption and usage of media is taking place: this forms the basis of a constructive media perspective. In the Anglo-American
world this has lately been stated as the “social shaping of technology” (Williams and Edge, 1996). Consequently, we consider relationships as an important aspect of the social shaping of mobile communication processes: relationships influence the way communication media are used, just as communication media have an effect on relationships (see also Campbell and Russo, 2003).

Because of the fact that media are adopted and used differently, a medium cannot only have negative or positive characteristics attributed to it. More helpful is the hypothesis of dual effects (Mesthene, 1972: 130), which suggests that a technology can have positive and negative effects at the same time. The crucial point is how the media are used, not at least in the context of interpersonal relations. Media usage, and this includes the usage of mobile phones, is therefore a vital part of interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships. The role of media use in everyday life can thus be correctly understood only when human relationships are also part of the equation. Relational aspects refer to the form and the content of communication, as well as which media are being used. According to Stegbauer media-specific characteristics of communication have not been as highly evaluated as the demands arising from relationships (2003: 75–76). Following this, we discuss the usage of mobile phones in intimate relationships, assuming, however, that relationships are a quite dynamic affair.

**Relationships and (Mobile) Media**

Generally, communication and relationships are closely interwoven. Naturally, this is the case since there would be no relationships if there were no communication. The end of a relationship is, to a certain extent, the end of communication as well. In this respect one can follow Morton et al. (1976: 106), who note: “(a) interpersonal communication is the primary vehicle through which individuals define relationships and (b) every viable social relationship requires mutuality or consensus of relationship definition. Conversely, a relationship crisis involves non-mutuality of relationship definition.” In addition, the dynamic aspect of relationships caused by communication has to be taken into account: relationships develop and change over time, or as Littlejohn (1999) would put it:

- First, relationships are always connected to communication and cannot be separated from it. Second, the nature of the relationship is defined by the communication between its members. Third, relationships are usually defined implicitly rather than explicitly. Fourth, relationships develop over time through a negotiation
process between those involved. Consequently, relationships are dynamic, not unchanging. (1999: 252)

Communication is the basis of relationships. Simultaneously, communication indicates the type of relationship. For instance, observers can distinguish between friends and acquaintances on the basis of their verbal interactions: “In short, language conveys degrees of intimacy, is a powerful developer and definer of relationships, and is used to indicate many privacies in relationships. It conveys relational messages by its structure as well as by its content” (Duck, 2007: 35). Thus, one only has to observe the type and degree of communication to be able to conclude the type and degree of a relationship. We propose that even the use of media is associated with the kind of relationship.

Researchers studying interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships barely take the media into account and therefore overlook that today’s world of interpersonal relationships is already a world of media as well. Only recently do the media slowly seem to be taken into account in the publications concerned with interpersonal relationships. Diverse types of relationships are indicated by the usage of different kinds of media or in the particular usage of a medium. The significance of a medium depends, after all, on the type of the relationship in which it is used. As Matsuda (2005) points out, the mobile phone, which is not so much unlike the classic landline phone, serves mainly for communication among people who already know each other (see also Harper, 2003: 194; Ling, 2008). In this kind of communication, close friends, life partners, and lovers are the most frequent communication partners. The mobile phone is a relationship medium wherein specific cultural distinctions can play a significant role. Consequently, the question of how the usage of the mobile phone is framed by relationships should most notably be in the foreground. Using Goffman’s (1974) terminology, relationships are the frame for media usage, and likewise, relationships are stabilized, or even changed, by the usage of a medium. The result is a communicative frame of the interpersonal relationship, modified by the media: any media usage can also be a frame in which communicative relationships are nurtured (or even terminated). The mobile phone, for its part, is a medium that—unlike the landline phone—is used in an environment where third parties have to be taken into account (Höflich, 2005b). Third parties do not necessarily have to be voyeurs: merely bringing the private, nay intimate, in public by revealing an (intimate) relationship
to members of the public can be far-reaching. According to Duck, it is not so much the relationship that has changed, but rather its context and boundaries that have moved: “The key change brought to relational life by technology is not to change how we do relationships. Or even where we do them, but to blur any differentiation between doing them in public places and in our own heads. Essentially, the thinking that we do about relationships does a lot to make them what they are” (2007: 200). Indeed, the change is that relationships, to an increasing extent, have become “mediatized.” It is not enough to submit certain types of relationships to a further analysis; one also has to examine the interpersonal contacts and relationships associated with the usage of media over time. Instead of taking a static perspective, it is vital to take a dynamic perspective.

Theoretical models for the development of relationships provide an essential basis for this dynamic analysis. Levinger’s ABCDE-Model (1980), for instance, provides a fundamental model of stages in couple relationships. In any given relationship, Levinger distinguishes the stages of acquaintance, buildup, continuation, deterioration, and ending. It is critical to point out that both the stages of a relationship and the transition between any of these stages can turn out differently. Since the acquaintance and the buildup of a relationship are very similar and often cannot be separated from each other, this model was subject to criticism for its lack of differentiation between the first two stages. Building on Levinger, various models that focus on only four stages were developed (Lenz, 2006; Scanzoni et al., 1989). These models distinguish between buildup, continuation, deterioration, and ending. After two people have approached each other in the buildup stage of a relationship, continuation is characterized by the fact that both partners define each other as a couple. In the continuation stage, as in any other stage of these modeled stages, transformations are possible. In the deterioration stage subtle, burdensome attitude changes toward the relationship occur inside one or both partners. The ending stage, which can be a drawn out process (Lenz, 2006), is characterized by the fact that one or both partners take action toward the breaking up of the relationship. At the same time, the sequence of these stages can proceed quite differently (Scanzoni et al., 1989). That is to say that, for instance, a continuation can be followed by deterioration, or the ending can be followed by continuation. Stages can also be experienced and reexperienced several times. This is where such models incorporate the frequently emphasized dynamics
of intimate relationships. The distinction between the different stages in these models is obviously a difficult issue. The subjective definition of the stages by couples should be of significant importance here; it is possible, though, that either of the two partners can associate the state of their relationship differently (Lenz, 2006). Consequently, the definition of any stage is something that has to be mutually and subjectively constructed between the partners.

These stage models are attempts at classification in order to approach a complex social phenomenon. In the analysis of this social phenomenon we can also see the importance of empirical research, which can contribute to a better specification of these models. The actual structuring of the stages, the forms, subjects, and quality of communication between partners within different stages, shall be empirically analyzed. Possible interdependencies between relationship stage and specific everyday requirements are also of interest. As the latest research on communication in close relationships shows, using a stage model to understand intimate relationships can be helpful in allowing us to structure our findings and orient ourselves in a vital field of mobile communication. On closer inspection, gaps become apparent: studies on mobile communication and social relationships that allow for an attribution of communicative behavior to certain stages in the development of a relationship are still a rarity. As a first attempt at a review, we would like to discuss some empirical studies in which mobile communication can be matched to one of the modeled stages of relationships. Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2005) describe how communication via text messages offers Finnish teenagers a means to build up relationships: writing text messages assists the teens in overcoming their own shyness. It allows them to communicate feeling more naturally. Höflich and Gebhardt (2005) also focused on the buildup stage of relationships, exploring to what extent first contacts and flirts are carried out through mobile phones. Ling and Yttri (2002) explored the importance of mobile phones for the coordination of activities in two-career-parent families during the continuation stage of a relationship. In a study based on interviews with young couples, Döring and Dietmar (2003) found that jealousy was partially acted out through the mobile phone, to the degree that one partner could be pressured to display their accessibility. As we might expect, their analysis was focused on the deterioration stage of relationships. Ellwood-Clayton (2006) described mobile phone use in the ending stage of a relationship when she examined how one individual discovered, by reading the text
messages on their partner’s phone, that their partner was having an affair. Another example is Ling’s study (2006) on mobile communication in divorced families (see also Ling, 2000). All these findings suggest that there is a relationship between mobile communication and the developmental stages of interpersonal relationships, making clear that mobile communication is relevant on a chronological dimension as well as on a topical dimension.

**Intimate Relationships and Mediatized Behavior in Everyday Life: An Empirical Approach**

A relationship, as previously mentioned, is reflected in communication. In our research, we were mainly interested in the continuation stage of relationships. This stage of a relationship is specifically marked by everyday interactions that are not as insignificant as they sometimes seem, but are instead of major significance: “Ordinary communication is the stuff of everyday life” (Wood and Duck, 2006: 6). Our focus is on the small, routine, common events and conversations that are an important basis of intimate relationships. These emerge in everyday life even when dramatic or highly emotional moments may also occur. In a relationship, couples evolve a repertoire of communicative rules and routines derived from personal, relationship-linked, group, and society rules of communication (Knapp and Vangelisti, 2005). This is not a collection of rigid behavioral patterns, but rather a varying ensemble that changes with the relationship, and frequently merges with the daily routines of the respective partners. Communication between people, as a matter of fact, is increasingly mediatized: mobile communication, in particular, has established itself in the everyday life of people. It is the way that couples maintain everyday contact with each other. Thus, for our empirical analysis, the following questions arose: How do couples in the continuation stage of their relationship use mobile media? To what degree is it important to them? Which special ways of usage evolve in the course of media usage, and what influences and differences can be detected?

The continuation stage can be regarded as the normal state of a relationship. This is the state where partners usually refer to each other as an “item”: one has “got a relationship” (Berger and Kellner, 1964). The curiosities and excitements of the buildup stage are over and the deterioration stage is not in sight. That does not necessarily mean that these individuals do not discover new aspects of their partners, or quarrel and negotiate issues. All those things belong, in a sense of a perpetual dynamic, to the continuation stage. Compared
to the other stages, however, the processes of the continuation stage are more sustainable and the relationship is regarded as normal and natural, and may even at times be taken for granted by both partners. The challenge at this stage in any relationship is, for both partners, to find a mutual everyday life. The definition of their relationship, which has been negotiated by both partners up to this point, needs to be implemented in a way that allows both partners to pursue and adjust their relationship as well as their everyday routines. The cultivation of the given relationship by means of communication is pivotal (Canary and Dainton, 2003), and is a task that both partners have to continually perform. It is important to clarify the extent to which the adoption and use of mobile communication has positive or negative effects in order to expand our understanding of the significance of a duality of effects (Mesthene, 1972: 130), particularly for couples in the continuation stage of their relationship. It is critical to inspect all those processes empirically and thus to differentiate them.

Typical issues and tasks for couples in the continuation stage are, for instance, the accomplishment of education or the start of a career, the distribution of jobs around the house, organization of the couples’ leisure time, planning of and having a family, or the constitution and maintenance of a social network (Lenz, 2006). Also, at this stage of a relationship, a job-related change of one partner, or a change of residence, can produce possible challenges in terms of dealing with a changed socioeconomic situation or dealing with different ways of mobility, resulting in a change in daily routines. Even in the continuation stage of a relationship a considerable number of changes can happen to a couple. These changes can eventually affect their relationship.

Method

An ongoing project at the German University of Erfurt—started in 2006—concerns the effects of mobile communication on social relationships. The following are the first, exploratory findings that stem from this research. From an interactional perspective, we understand communication and relationships as mutual creations of meaning. Relationships are socially constructed and affected by their environment: from this dynamic perspective, relationships can be conceptualized as processes. In order to better understand these dynamics, we report on two distinct but complementary studies. The first is a focus group discussion and the second, a parallel comprehensive interview study. The
main objective of the group discussion was to explore experiences and opinions regarding the use of mobile communication in intimate relationships, at the same time comparing and contrasting all these statements *in situ* during the discussion. The interview study, in contrast, sought to capture the complex routines associated with relationships, and to gather insight into the role of communication media in this process. The focus group discussion was conducted with nine participants who were interviewed about their communication and use of mobile media in intimate relationships. Approximately half of the group was male and the other half female students. All the interviewees were either in their early or mid-twenties. The narrow age span was chosen to insure that all participants had a fairly equal wealth of experience at their disposal, and this allowed us to unearth rather subtle distinctions between participants. This discussion lasted approximately one hour, was recorded, and later transcribed. The material was then analyzed for statements about the different stages of a relationship and was coded into thematic categories that arose inductively from the data. In addition to the findings from the group study, we also present findings from an interview study conducted with six couples. These couples were selected using snowball sampling. The participants were of different ages (early twenties up to late fifties), had different levels of education, came from different professional backgrounds, and pursued different ways of living together, from cohabitation to long-distance and cross-residential relationships (a smaller distance between couples, but with limited access for day-to-day communication: Stafford, 2005). The average couple interview took approximately 100 minutes. In the course of these interviews couples were asked about everyday life, communication with the partner, and communication within the family, as well as the usage and importance of communication media. In order to compare the data from the group interview and couple interviews, the material was coded into emergent categories relating to the use and the significance of communication media in social relationships. There was a primary focus on the mobile phone. We investigated both the positive aspects (such as utility and advantages of use) and the negative aspects (such as risks and problems of use) of mobile communication.

**Empirical Findings**

*Mobile Media and Ensembles of Media*

The analysis of the group discussion and the interviews has shown that a broad ensemble of media is used in intimate relationships. Both
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mobile forms—especially mobile calls, text messages, and sometimes even multimedia message services (MMS) and pictures—and other communication forms such as e-mail, instant messaging, and landline phones were relevant to couples. As the interviewees have moved toward the continuation stage of their relationships they have developed more routine uses of these communication media. For example, couples described how they became more attuned to one another with regard to the usage of media. A twenty-three-year-old woman explained:

At the beginning it is much more that you text all the time and you send kind of little attentions via mobile phone and now it is—it is routine. Take us, for example, we do call every night. Around eight I get my call, so to say [laughing], and occasionally a text message as well, and that is how communication has actually more and more lined up.

To the degree that couples are able to tune their communication, the mobile phone offers a general positive effect for the couples’ communication and thus a positive effect for the relationship. A well-functioning mobile communication routine can therefore be seen as a support of a couple’s communication culture. Both in the interviews and in the focus group discussion it became evident that communication in the continuation stage is very heterogeneous. The change in the concrete structuring of messages, for instance, was described fairly differently by the participants of the group discussion. A twenty-four-year-old female student reported:

At the beginning of a relationship a lot of emoticons are used, symbols and stuff. For instance an icon that has a cheeky grin or that pecks the other. All that really lessens after a while and people put less effort into it.

In the same discussion, another female student of the same age replied that, in her relationship, all this is quite different:

Even after three years into my relationship, I still do the smiley thing.

This indicates that the relationship is still seen as just as vital—and in some cases still involves some naïveté—as in the early phase. Overall, the participants of the group discussion noted that their own
use of mobile communication, both in their relationship and with other communication partners, has increased over the last couple of years.5

**Relationship Maintenance and the Handling of Proximity and Distance**

Mobile phones provide many couples with a means of everyday contact. For them, the regular exchange of communications, the reassurance that the partner is fine, and the validation of the relationship are of utmost importance. This is particularly central for couples who do not live together. The mobile phone gives couples the possibility to exchange information, thoughts, and feelings, and in this way regulate proximity and distance to one another. In this case, the mobile phone is of particular significance to the partners. Communication media are at times the only means of verbal exchange in long-distance relationships, where partners can live in another country or even on another continent and face-to-face contact is scarce. In this case the way that couples decide on their method of communication may be based on reasons of cost or with regard to different time zones. Two participants of the group discussion described such a long-distance relationship, whereby one couple kept up their daily communication almost exclusively via mobile phone, while the other couple primarily used computer-based Internet. One exchange student communicates with her boyfriend, who is living in another European country, primarily via mobile phone. She noted:

> We call each other every day and write a lot of texts, and yes, this is very important. I always have my mobile on me and always check for new texts... It’s our individual way of shaping communication.

Another student, whose girlfriend lives in Asia, primarily uses the Internet:

> I don’t write her so often, but she very often writes me, because of the costs. Internet is for free.

However, he also used cross-network ways of communication, writing her text messages via Internet, which she received on her mobile phone. The following circumstance had to be taken into account here:

> It’s so difficult for us because of the time difference... When I get home, I of course write her a text via Internet and she just got up.
That’s difficult, but we’ve gotten used to it, so this is not a problem anymore.

Dealing with proximity and distance is a central part of relationships in which communication media play an important role. Our findings show this especially for couples in their mid-twenties. It is important that couples agree on a balance between contact and contact-free time and abide by their agreement. In cases of a successful balance, the media usage can have a positive effect on the relationship. Similarly, cases of imbalance can have a negative effect on the relationship. The heterogeneity of the continuation stage is also made clear by the housing and living situation, as well as the mobility of the couple. Couples and their communication patterns differentiate immensely with regard to their ways of living together, the distance between them, and the frequency and regularity of their contact. This includes the usage of media and reveals that the significance of mobile communication can vary widely between relationships. There are different advantages that long-distance relationship couples see in mobile phones, while some of the couples living together or in close proximity claimed that mobile phones were not of much importance to them. But the material revealed there were conflicts within even these responses. Ambivalent individual attitudes concerning mobile media might be an explanation here: one male student, for example, made the following remark in the group discussion:

Well, I see my girlfriend everyday anyway, so therefore we don’t communicate a lot via mobile phone. To be honest, we don’t use it at all, except for . . . except for when it is about everyday planning, when details have to be agreed upon, that are so important that they have to be agreed upon right now, meaning in the time when we don’t see each other.

One interesting finding of our research is that couples using different types of communication media do not restrict sweet nothings, nicknames, and little gifts to one media; these are not an explicit feature of mobile communication. Rather, it shows that when couples contact their partner they choose a communication medium appropriate for situational demands. The mobile phone is just one of the many communication media used in a relationship. An overlapping of media practices takes place, with the result that “practice[s] overlap and interact and the choice of one medium or another is inherently meaningful” (Decker, 1998: 234).
The Organization of Everyday Life

As we saw in the comments of the previous informant, one area in life in which mobile phones are often used by couples is the organization of everyday meetings, tasks, and errands. Our studies show that this function is mostly appreciated by colocated couples engaged in ordinary work patterns: while student couples and couples in long-distance relationships mentioned this type of use to a lesser extent, working couples and families explicitly emphasized the importance of coordination options that a mobile phone offers. As early as 1999, Ling and Yttri described the importance of the mobile phone for the coordination of activities, calling this micro-coordination. They suggested that this function is most important for two-career parents. In this case the mobile phone developed into a daily necessity (Ling and Yttri, 1999, 2002). These findings can be confirmed by our studies, and we would like to stress that this positive effect of mobile media is especially important for couples in this specific living situation. For example, a father summed up the relevance of mobile media in his everyday life:

The mobile phone is likely the most important media, especially with kids. However, it is just easy to contact you and, “Where are you,” “I’m coming now,” “It will take me longer,” or other things can be told. It’s just like this. Mostly we do not talk long on the mobile. But if there are things like these you can quickly clarify issues.

Couples’ Communication Rituals

The findings of our focus group discussion as well as the interview study show that mobile communication between couples is often a ritualistic act. Rituals in intimate relationships were most often found in face-to-face communication (Bruess and Pearson, 2002), but the mobile phone can act as a stimulant to traditional routines. However, our findings suggest that there are also micro-rituals with mobile communication (see also Ling, 2007, 2008). Rich Ling (2008: 119) has argued that large-scale rituals, like ceremonies, as well as ritualized forms of interpersonal interactions, like greetings, gossip, and humor, can be influenced by mediated communication and even be established as mediated forms. In intimate relationships, partners perform ritualized communication via mobile media, such as “good-night” text messages or the establishment of ritualized elements, like symbols or phrases that are part of their mediated communication (Dietmar, 2008). While ritualized acts are especially important during
the continuation stage of intimate relationships, they can stretch into other phases as well.

Rituals are subject to the dynamics of relationships, growing and changing over the course of the relationship. Interviewees reported that sometimes the circumstances of everyday life shape communication rituals, but that at other times the ritual is practiced continuously, in different situations. Ritual can be seen in the timing of mediated contact, in the regular evening call, good-morning text, or instant messages that temporary or long-standing long-distance couples exchange. Accordingly, couples send one another good-night text messages or other messages at other points of time that they define in accordance with their everyday lives. The mobile phone is thus very important because it enables the ritual regardless of where the partner is at the moment. One couple that had lived together for half a year still sent each other good-morning text messages, for example. They had adopted a particular pattern based on their daily schedules. The woman, who had to get up earlier than her boyfriend, sent him a text message when she arrived at school each day, regardless of her specific geographical location on campus:

It depends when I arrive at school. Sometimes I do text him from the car or from the classroom. It depends. Sometimes I even wake him. That’s what he has told me, sometimes I wake him and he answers, “Good you have been texting. I did oversleep.”

The asynchronous nature of text messages allowed them this intimacy while accommodating their schedules. Her partner explained this pattern:

It is about keeping in touch, to hear how the other one is doing.

Ritual elements of communication in intimate relationships are also those not classified by a concrete cause or point of time. Rather, couples develop these interactions in their everyday life, whereby the coordination of both lives of the partners is pivotal. These are for example the ordinary forms of deference as described by Erving Goffman (1989). They are expressed in these ritualized acts (e.g. taking care of each other), or in individual forms of demeanor, by which individuals express themselves as individuals and also as part of an intimate relationship. Humor plays a large role with many couples here: for example, one of the couples shared how they often include
punch lines in their text messages and everyday talks, invoking jokes they laughed at together while watching a TV show. As they described themselves, “We are addicted to punch lines.” This type of half-mediated/half face-to-face interaction was one of the ways that the couple developed and maintained their relationship.

Elements of deference and demeanor are not only found in causes and topics, but also in the structure of mediated communication between partners. Couples create a certain form of ritual that is only shared between them. This can also be found on the conversational level: letters, telephone calls, and text messages contain specific forms of address between partners. Special nicknames are developed or particular goodbyes are contrived that contain an explicit affirmation regarding the relationship ("I love you, take care!"). These ritual forms are not tied to a certain media. They are moreover established in the relationship itself and acted out in the same or a varied manner via different forms of communication. This point of view looks at a mix of media that people have at their disposal. In this respect, rituals are mostly regarded as enhancing communication. But ritualized acts, including those in the form of mobile communication, can also lose their meanings. They are subject to the dynamics of a relationship just like every other relationship feature and have to be confirmed time and time again. Therefore, we also point out some of the negative effects connected with these rituals, namely that they have the potential of becoming empty and meaningless (Collins, 2004).

**Handling Mobile Communication Situations**

Mobile media enable couples to contact each other at almost any time and in any place. Their reasons for doing so can be various. The interviewees described, for example, situations in which they were looking for emotional support from their partner, or in which they wanted to tell them news. A twenty-three-year-old female student reported:

> During the day we call just in case that something has happened. If I need his advice to some issue, if something has happened or if I’m depressed—then this is when we call.

This seemingly easy and unrestricted availability calls for balance and regulation especially since the use of mobile communication carries private conversations into the public. This can create tensions (Duck, 2007; Höflich, 2006; Ling, 2005). For mobile calls between
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partners, both may be found in different circumstances, but communicate together in a “virtual third place.” Thus, the interlocutors may at first not (exactly) know which others are copresent with their partner, or their partner’s situation. Partners are often aware of the complexity of the different situations in everyday life. Several interviewees explicitly described that they imagine the situation in which their partners might find themselves in when they call them. However, the interviewees differed on how they use their mobile phones in public. In our study we have found a variety of attitudes, even in our homogenous discussion group composed of students. Some people said that they already have had negative experiences. One female participant, for example, shared:

It always depends on what the other person is doing. . . . This means that I have often rather chosen text messages instead of calling him, and I even got rebuked for that.

These comments showed that it can be difficult but that it is considered as important to arrange interaction and find a solution that both partners can agree upon. Some of these solutions were described by the informants. One thirty-year-old family father, for example, said that it is not a problem for him and his wife to “cut off” a call when it is inconvenient. The other person then knows that this obviously might not be the best time to call. His comments indicate that couples have to develop a certain kind of sensitivity and tolerance toward their respective social situations, in order to find a common understanding in the reactions of their partners.

Conclusion

The adoption and use of communication media are social processes (Williams and Edge, 1996). The relationships of people do not function as merely the background of media use: they prescribe how the media are used. In this process, the effect of media usage becomes significant for the shaping of interpersonal communication. Thus, communication media again work in a recursive sense on our relationships, meaning relationships influence media use between two partners just as the social shaping of mobile communication influences the configuration of the relationship. Mobile media are particularly relevant because, given their widespread adoption, new qualities of communication structures and ways of usage have been established. A dynamic perspective is necessary in order to detect the linkages
between communication and relationships. This dynamic perspective has also been aspired by the adoption of theoretical models of relationship development. Our approach is only a first move to utilize this concept regarding an analysis of mobile media communication. There is a demand for a further development of these ideas.

Two different empirical studies on mobile communication in intimate relationships have been introduced. The findings demonstrate how couples use media for their communication and how they handle their relationships and their everyday lives vis-à-vis mobile communication. The analysis shows that communication via mobile media is the venue for the negotiation of distance and proximity and the shaping of couple-specific rituals. This ritual-theoretic approach provides a promising line of analysis. We also considered how couples handle situations of mobile communication. In this context, we looked at communication in the continuation stage of relationships. But, beyond this, the results of our studies indicate a need to look at dual effects on various levels and in different areas in the context of intimate relationships. They show an apparent heterogeneity of the continuation stage of intimate relationships, and that there is an irreducible complexity when considering dyadic relationships and the mediated communication of people in these relationships. We therefore suggest not only speaking of a duality of effects, or a dialectic, but rather of multiple dialectics. It became apparent that the researched continuation stage of intimate relationships needs a constant balance for the shaping of mobile communication, which is a demand that couples have to follow additionally to other areas of life. Our analysis shows that mobile communication is not an individual activity, but it is a form of communication that is used in the contexts of various communication media, which all can adopt a new meaning. The shaping of a mix of media usage can therefore take place in relationships.

Notes

2. In Italy, for instance, people often make use of the mobile phone when it comes to keeping in touch with the family (Höflich, 2005a: 128).
3. Following Goffman (1974: 8), a frame is an organization or sequence of experiences. A frame specifies “What is going on here?” From this perspective, every relationship functions as a frame in which communication acts take place, and expresses what communication signifies in any respective relationship frame.
4. This is as Morton et al. (1976: 123) wrote, some time ago: “to apply the same logic of theory and research not only to different relationship forms but to the same relationship at different stages of its history, including crises.”

5. Within the group discussion, participants discussed the price of the mobile communications market. Several years ago, prices for mobile communication devices were very high in Germany; participants attributed their increased use of mobile phones partially to the stark decrease in prices today.

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Bonds and Bridges: Mobile Phone Use and Social Capital Debates

Rowan Wilken

Introduction

Social capital has emerged as a key concept in social, economic, and political theory of the past twenty or so years. Interest in the concept of social capital has paralleled the rapid rise of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and a widespread (if perhaps somewhat misguided) perception that the adoption and use of technologies, such as the Internet and the mobile phone, have led to “an apparent fraying of the social fabric” (Ling, 2008: 25), as well as increased individualism. In this particular context, the mobile phone is an important technology given its ubiquity and almost total global penetration and given that it is a transportable communication device that connects people as part of social networks. Thus, there is a recognized need to further investigate and evaluate the social implications of this medium (Campbell and Russo, 2003: 318), especially as they intersect with social capital debates.

The purpose of the present chapter, then, is to examine the points of intersection between mobile phone use and social capital theory. The chapter examines the available mobile phone literature and explores the extent to which mobile phones work to strengthen existing social ties (so-called strong links) and facilitate broader contacts outside a user’s immediate social sphere (so-called weak links). The chapter begins with an examination of social capital and how this concept is generally understood and defined. As part of this discussion, concerns about heightened individualism are also addressed. From there, discussion then turns to the research literature and an
examination of the extent to which bonding forms of social capital are supported by everyday mobile phone use. Some of the limitations of bonding forms of social capital are then canvassed. In the final part of the chapter, discussion turns to a consideration of the extent to which mobile phones are used to facilitate connections across social networks. From this analysis, it is found that the mobile telephone emerges as a particularly effective medium for strengthening existing network ties. There is also evidence that it can be used to build wider networks of contacts, although examples of this are less prevalent in the literature.

**Literature**

*What Is Social Capital? Meanings and Definitional Tributaries*

The idea of social capital is not a new one. The concept has discernible roots in economic debates within classic sociology from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Woolcock, 1998: 159–61). The first use of the term, approximate to its modern usage, can be traced back to 1916 (192). However, social capital remained largely unexamined as a concept for a long time, appearing only sporadically in the literature until a major revival in interest occurred in the mid-to-late 1980s (Field, 2003: 12–13; Productivity Commission, 2003). This revival began with Pierre Bourdieu’s (1985) study of social capital alongside other forms of capital (including human and cultural), and was continued through the work of James Coleman and Robert Putnam. The work of these latter two (along with that of sociologist Nan Lin), to be elaborated on below, has developed the concept as presently understood and disseminated to a broader intellectual audience.

Coleman (1988), in a widely cited essay that examines the relationships between social capital, human capital, and school attendance, defines social capital by its function:

> It is not as a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure. (S98)

Coleman is said to have developed the concept of social capital as a “means of explaining how people manage to cooperate” (Field, 2003: 21). Coleman’s position, as Field explains, is that social capital is a “public good” (21), albeit one that “demands cooperation between
individuals who are nevertheless pursuing their own self-interest” (24). Because of this self-interest, social capital develops “not because actors make a calculating choice to invest in it” (25), but as “a by-product of activities engaged in for other purposes” (Coleman, 1990: 312).

Around the same time, Robert Putnam draws inspiration from Coleman’s work, but nevertheless arrives at a slightly different formulation of the concept, defining social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam et al., 1993: 167). Putnam (2000) later condenses this definition down to two key ingredients—networks and norms. He asserts that social capital refers to “connections among individuals” and the “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (19). In addition to this definitional streamlining, two forms of social capital are distinguished: what Putnam calls bridging (inclusive) forms and bonding (or exclusive) forms. Each form serves different needs. Bonding social capital is “good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity” (22) and is seen to reinforce “exclusive identities” and maintain homogeneity, thereby “reinforcing specific identities” (Field, 2003: 32). Bridging social capital, in contrast, generates “broader identities and reciprocity” (Putnam, 2000: 23); it connects people across “diverse social divisions” (Field, 2003: 22).

While both forms of social capital are considered important, bridging forms are sometimes seen to be more powerful and constructive insofar as, being outwardly focused, they are “more likely to generate trust in others” (Uslaner and Dekker, 2001: 180). This is not to suggest a specific privileging of one form of social capital over the other, however. The general assessment seems to be that bonding must be considered in tandem with bridging. As Putnam (2000) puts it, “bonding and bridging are not ‘either-or’ categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but ‘more or less’ dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital” (23).

There have been conflicting positions as to whether or not these two definitional approaches should be viewed as, on the one hand, two “relatively distinct tributaries” of social capital ideas (Foley and Edwards, 1999: 142), or, on the other hand, as “complementary dimensions of the same process” (Grootaert, 2001: 10). For the present discussion, it suffices to note that the work of Coleman and Putnam has been and remains foundational to the way that ideas about social
capital have developed over the past decade or so as a concept with broad intellectual appeal.

The Rise of Social Capital

To give some indication of how broad this appeal is, one study reports that since the early 1990s, the term social capital has appeared in at least 109 journal articles between 1991 and 1995 and in 1,003 articles between 1996 and early 1999 (Winter, 2000: 17). The success of the concept is in large part the result of a belief that the value of individual access to social network resources can be applied to a growing list of wider sociopolitical contexts with a variety of claimed benefits. For example, social capital is described as “the glue that holds together social aggregates such as networks of personal relationships, communities, regions, or even whole nations” (Huysman and Wulf, 2004: 1). Social capital has also been linked to productivity and other indicators of economic performance, such as high gross domestic product (Goodman, 2005: 54). All of this has led to the disparaging reprise that “social capital is reputed to be an all-purpose elixir for the ills of society” (Uslaner and Dekker, 2001: 176) and that “the more social capital is celebrated for a growing list of wonderful effects, the less it has any distinct meaning” (Portes and Landolt, 1996: para. 2).

For a number of critics, the diffusion and hollowing out of meaning that results from the growing appeal and wide application of social capital can be traced back to key conceptual differences in how the concept has shifted from Coleman to Putnam. In Coleman’s work, social capital is viewed as an individual resource that is “roughly analogous to other individual assets” that “inheres in interpersonal relations” (Portes and Landolt, 1996: para. 4). As taken up by Putnam, however, “social capital has become a property of groups and even nations, rather than individuals” (Portes and Landolt, 1996: para. 5). Sociologist Nan Lin (2001) argues that “social capital, as a relational asset, must be distinguished from collective assets and goods such as culture, norms, trust, and so on” (26). Lin develops a definition of social capital that is noteworthy for its clarity and simplicity and for the way that it avoids the conceptual pitfalls that appear to have beset Putnam’s definition of the concept. For these reasons, and given the value of this formulation for the discussion to follow, Lin’s conception of social capital warrants some explanation here.

In Lin’s understanding, “social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structure, which can be mobilized
when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a pur-
poseful action” (2001: 24). This is later simplified as “resources embedded
in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions” (25). This
formulation contains two important components: first, resources
are embedded in social relations rather than individuals; second,
access to and use of these resources reside with individual actors (25).
“Capital,” in this context, is viewed by Lin as a “social asset by virtue of
actors’ connections and access to resources in the network or group
of which they are member” (19). With its emphasis on the access of
individual actors to resources embedded within social networks, Lin’s
understanding of social capital would seem a particularly productive
one to employ in relation to studies of mobile phone use and is the
conceptualization that I will use in this chapter. What I do wish to
retain from Putnam’s studies of social capital, however, is his structural
distinction between bonding and bridging.

Before I embark on a closer examination of the mobile phone lit-
erature, the relationship between individual mobile phone use and the
concept of individualism is one issue that has caused some confusion
and needs to be addressed.

*Mobile Phone Use and the Question of Individualism*

Goodman (2005: 54) notes that as a communications technology
that facilitates social networks, mobile phone usage is likely linked
to social capital. Even so, mobile telephony has to date received far
less critical attention than the Internet has, in examinations of ICT
use and social capital debates (see Huysman and Wulf, 2004). This
is surprising given the earlier research focus on mapping the social
impacts of fixed-line telephones (see de Sola Pool, 1983; Fischer, 1992:

This apparent lack of critical attention is changing, however, with
a growing number of empirical studies and theoretical analyses
examining the social capital implications associated with the social
uses of mobile phones. Interest in mobile telephony represents a
natural progression from earlier studies of the wider sociopoliti-
cal implications of ICT use. What is more, the almost total global
penetration of the mobile phone combines with its ability for facili-
tating person-to-person contact within the public sphere while in
transit, making it a technology of considerable importance to social
capital researchers and those with an interest in this concept. This
is because private use of mobile phones in public space has directly
and significantly affected our understandings of public–private tensions (Katz and Aakhus, 2002). These tensions lie at the heart of much research interest in mobile phones, especially in the context of social capital debates. It is also this particular confluence of factors that gives rise to a number of key questions that are central to the concerns of the present volume: Are mobile phones bringing us together or tearing us apart? Will they result in a “flowering of the social sphere, or in the retreat to a balkanized social clique?” (Ling, 2004: 189; Harper, 2003).

One perspective is that mobile telephony can have deleterious effects on social cohesion and engagement in the public sphere. This perspective centers on the idea that use of these devices contributes to an understanding of “an individual as an isolated island in public” (Höflich, 2003: 50). This conceptualization carries a number of implications. It implies a form of “psychic cocooning” (Morley, 2003) in which mobile users “can escape their immediate situation and interact with only like-minded persons” (Ling, 2002: section 5, para. 4). However, there is more at stake here than just seeking safety through communicative interaction with one’s immediate social network. For instance, Gergen (2002) argues that such a retreat privileges “absent presence,” where “one is physically present but is absorbed by a technologically mediated world of elsewhere” (227). This is a position that rehearses familiar arguments from the existing literature on computer-mediated communication and virtual community (see Lombard and Ditton, 1997). In the context of mobile phone use, the impacts of such ambivalent engagement are seen to be significant. As Ling (2002) observes, in the process of retreating from public space into the relative safety of mobile space, an individual “does not just drop out”; rather, “they also colonize a part of the public sphere and reduce it slightly by their unwillingness to participate” (section 5, para. 4). Elaborating on this point elsewhere, Ling (2004) writes that whenever we are in the public sphere, we are always only “minimally social” (193). The risk is that “mobile communication will take a small bite out of the already minimal sociability that is available in this sphere” (193), leading to even further shrinking social interaction and face-to-face engagement between strangers.

What all this could be said to point toward is an emergent culture of individualism. Ling (2004) points out that, historically, the notion of “individualism” has related primarily to how society handled persons as individual subjects (188). Modern usage of this term, however,
carries a decidedly greater pejorative inflection. In mobile telephony research, for instance, Gergen (2008) notes that mobile phone technology “favors withdrawal from participation in face-to-face communal participation” (302) and that private mobile phone use in public often invites “antagonism and scorn” (Ling, 2004: 191; Tofts, 2005). In this sense, the rise of mobile phone use could be characterized as both a barometer of and a key contributor to a culture of increased individualism. For critics who hold to such a view, resisting these individualistic tendencies is imperative if a truly effective civil society is to be achieved (Putnam, 2000; Tofts, 2005).

There is, however, a need to proceed carefully here if a further conceptual pitfall is to be avoided: that of conflating individual action with individualism and of confusing individualism with what Claude Fischer (2005) terms “social privatism.” The difference between these can be usefully explained via reference, again, to the work of Robert Putnam. In his review of Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, Fischer asks whether the Americans described in Putnam’s book “have withdrawn all the way into their isolated, lonely selves (ultimate individualism), or have withdrawn into a more private world of family, work, and friends—a story of greater, but still social privatism” (2005: 160). Fischer concludes the latter: “Much in *Bowling Alone* better fits the formulation of a shift from public to private sociality” (160). A similar question can be asked of mobile phone use and the associated concern for civic withdrawal that some critics express. Is private phone use in public evidence of a retreat into “ultimate individualism” or a shift toward greater “social privatism”? For some critics, the answer would appear to be the former (Tofts, 2005). However, within the critical mobile phone literature, the predominant response suggests the latter: that is, greater—but still social—privatism. With its social interaction programs, the Internet arguably presents quite a different case. Applications such as Facebook enable individuals to maintain and expand the weak tie structure of their social networks (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). In contrast, Kenneth Gergen (2008) argues that the mobile phone “favors intense participation in small enclaves—typically of friends and family”—or what he also refers to as “monadic clusters of close relationships” (302). Further evidence in support of Gergen’s perspective is discernible in a range of studies that explore the social uses and implications of mobile telephony. In the following section, I examine a number of key studies within the available mobile phone literature and, specifically, look at the effectiveness of
the mobile phone in facilitating what Putnam would call “bonding” forms of social capital.

**Mobile Phone Use and Bonding Forms of Social Capital**

In one key study, the EU e-living project, the social capital implications of mobile phone use are specifically examined in a survey of ICT users in Norway, the UK, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, and Israel. Reporting on the findings of this study, Ling et al. (2003) suggest that “the mobile telephone can be seen as a tool to assist in the nurturing of social capital” (364) to the extent that it plays an important role in the maintenance of already established social connections. They conclude that “mobile telephony and SMS can all enhance these interactions once they are established, but one must establish them in the first place” (372). In other words, mobile phones appear to function most clearly in reinforcing existing strong ties, such as the sustenance of family interactions, and peer and friendship networks. Further evidence for social capital “nurturing” can be found in more general studies of mobile telephone use as well. For instance, Scandinavian research suggests that the temporal flexibility afforded by mobile phone use can work to strengthen close exchanges within existing social networks. In a study of Norwegian mobile phone use, for example, Ling and Haddon (2003) point to the key role the mobile phone plays in the “micro-coordination” of everyday activities and, in particular, of basic daily travel arrangements. “The development of mobile telephony,” they write, “softens time’ in that one does not necessarily need to agree upon an absolute point in time but rather can, to some degree negotiate, or micro-coordinate, over where and when to meet” (246).

The “softening of time” through “micro-coordination” as a way of strengthening close social network ties is also strongly evident in studies of Japanese youth and mobile phone use (Ito, 2003, 2005; Ito and Okabe, 2005). For instance, Miyata et al. (2005) report that Internet-enabled phones are primarily used by younger generations of Japanese phone users for connecting with nearby friends via short message service (SMS). These peer-to-peer connections have transformed the way that meetings are arranged in urban space. “In the past,” Ito and Okabe (2005) write, “landmarks and times were the points that coordinated action and convergence in urban space. People would decide on a particular place and time to meet, and converge at that time and place” (226). Now, however, it is more likely that
an initial and rather loose arrangement is agreed upon, and “as the meeting time nears, contact via messaging and voice becomes more concentrated, eventually culminating in face-to-face contact” (227). It is also common for mobile communication to continue even after physical copresence has been achieved in the same urban space (Ito, 2003). This elaborate series of micro-coordinations reveals a complex set of interactions and negotiations between place, physical copresence, and “virtual” presence. One result, Ito suggests, is that “distant others are always socially co-present, and place—where you locate yourself—has become a hybrid relation between physical and wirelessly co-present context” (2003: para. 1).1 Despite these interactional complexities, in overall terms, the net result, again, is strengthened intra-network bonds.

Bonding forms of social capital are also evident in certain counterintuitive uses of mobiles, such as those revealed in Yoon’s (2003) study of mobile phone use by South Korean youth and the practice of “immobilizing.” Yoon develops this term to describe certain strategies by which young mobile phone users “immobilize” (turn off) their handsets in response to perceived sensitivities between peers concerning place, time, etiquette, and content (Yoon, 2003: 334). Turning off the phone also constitutes an important way of diminishing parental control by preventing parents from making contact via text or voice message. In both cases, “immobilizing” serves as a key means to strengthen existing peer-based social connections (bonding social capital), by developing “local sociality” (329), and, in a Korean context, “retraditionalizing the global” (340).

Meanwhile, in his study of mobile phone use in two East African countries—South Africa and Tanzania—Goodman (2005) finds that mobile phone ownership in South Africa is positively associated with overall life satisfaction—something that, following Putnam’s work at least, has been a key marker of social capital development (Putnam, 2000). This finding follows earlier North American and Japanese research, which also reveals a positive correlation between high overall phone use and life satisfaction (Sugiyama and Katz, 2003). Yet Goodman’s research in Tanzania produces even stronger results. In this case, mobile phone ownership and the “perception of community cohesion” is said to be particularly strong (2005: 61). One thing that comes through forcefully in both of Goodman’s case studies is the importance of community access to mobile telephony in South Africa and particularly in Tanzania. In both these contexts, the mobile
phone is seen as “a social amenity as well as . . . a communications tool” (59). The privilege and responsibility associated with possessing such a device, Goodman argues, provides credible evidence that mobile phone ownership in these specific national/cultural contexts is strongly connected with the strengthening of local ties and of social capital at the level of community (64). The essential point Goodman makes here is that the mobile phone is very much a resource embedded in the social networks of these communities, which is then used by the individual actors within these communities.  

Strongly evident in the above studies is the fact that regular face-to-face contact is important in the maintenance of social contact and, by extension, building of social capital (see Ling et al., 2003: 373). This would appear to validate Boden and Molotch’s (1994) claim that we are influenced by an ongoing “compulsion of proximity” and that technologies of distance do nothing to obviate the need for regular copresence through face-to-face encounter. Most studies of everyday mobile media use also tend to reinforce Ling and his colleagues’ assessment that one must establish these encounters in the first place (Ling et al., 2003: 377), and the effectiveness of mobile phones in facilitating new encounters is something that is taken up later in the chapter.  

What also emerges strongly in each of the above (and other) studies is that mobile phone use, by-and-large, tends to privilege bonding over bridging forms of social capital, and it is certainly this form of mobile phone use that has “garnered the most attention from researchers” (Boase and Kobayashi, 2008: 934). What is more, the high frequency of day-to-day mobile phone use within existing social networks is found to reinforce connections within these networks. As Ling (2004) puts it, the “intensity of interaction . . . serves to weld the social group together, be it family or a group of teens” (184–85). Thus, by necessity, these intense interactions are restricted to a limited group of persons: “The ability to coordinate and indeed to micro-coordinate,” Ling argues, “means that the interaction is generally within the sphere of the immediate group” (192). This is a recurrent finding in research into the social uses of mobile phones and is perhaps not that surprising given that earlier research, as Putnam and others note, suggests that fixed-line phones strengthened social capital through the maintenance of social connections (Fischer, 1992; Keller, 1978; Ling et al., 2003: 362; Putnam, 2000: 168)—indeed, it was Fischer (1992) who described the fixed-line telephone as a “technology of sociability” (254). In terms of conceptual understandings of social capital,
this is not a surprising finding either, insofar as this concept is widely understood as a relational construct and one that works best if the value of “the group” is internalized. Lin (2001) argues this is evident in the work of both Coleman and Putnam, where there is an “assumed or expected requirement that there is . . . density in social relations” (26). Nevertheless, this emphasis on bonding (over bridging) forms of social interaction, in the mobile phone and the social capital literature, can be viewed as problematic for a number of reasons.

Limitations to Bonding: Social Exclusion and Unbuilt Bridges

To begin with, bonding reveals the limitations of considering mobile phone use in the context of social capital debates and raises the question of how far and to what extent the concept of social capital is applicable in relation to social uses of these devices. While remembering the tendency of Lin and others to conflate the individual with the collective in social capital theory, there are, nevertheless, some indications that mobile phone use that privileges bonding forms of social capital can have a negative impact on wider civic and political engagement. For example, one early study by Sugiyama and Katz (2003) that examined mobile phone use in tandem with social capital concerns (and with an emphasis on university education) found that “the effect of mobile communication technologies is bi-directional” (384). That is, mobile phones appeared to be used so as to enhance young people’s “endogenous’ networks” (385)—this is consistent with the findings of the studies discussed in the previous section. However, Sugiyama and Katz also found that mobile phones were concurrently used in ways that decreased “trustworthiness” (385). On this basis, the authors argued that mobile phones possibly contributed to the perceived “decreasing civic contribution of young people to society generally” (384). Commenting on this article, Kenneth Gergen (2008) observes that “when friendship is central, issues unrelated to friendship recede in importance” (303), including likely “participation in the democratic process” (305).

There are also recognizable downsides to bonding forms of social capital that critics argue need to be acknowledged (Portes, 1998: 15–18). Portes and Landolt (1996) detail a number of these limitations: conspiracies against the public (“the same strong ties that help members of a group often enable it to exclude outsiders”); restrictions on individual freedom and business initiatives (“membership in a community also brings demands for conformity” and “can also undermine
business initiatives’); and downward leveling pressures (the social capital assets obtainable in ghetto areas “seldom allow participants to rise above their poverty”). It is the first of these shortcomings that is repeated most often and most forcefully in the mobile literature. For instance, as Adler and Kwon (2002) put it, “one of the defining features of bonding forms of social capital” is that “insiders can exclude outsiders from social capital’s benefits” (22). This sentiment is echoed in Field’s (2003) remark from earlier in this chapter: “Bonding social capital tends to reinforce exclusive identities and maintain homogeneity” (32). This potential for exclusion as a result of strong social ties is a concern noted by key social capital researchers (see Portes, 1998; Portes and Landolt, 1996).

Of particular concern to social capital theorists is that mobile telephony use can be seen to permit a restricted or jaundiced form of social capital by denying a core ingredient: access to “weaker links” via bridging forms of social interaction. As already discussed, in definitional terms, Putnam (2000) considers bonding and bridging forms of social capital to be equally important. This is a view shared by Lin (2001), who stresses “the importance of bridges in networks” as well as “structural holes, or weaker ties” (27). Goodman (2005) reinforces this perspective when he combines Putnam’s emphasis on bonds and bridges with Granovetter’s (1973) understanding of strong and weak links to argue that if individual actors are to capitalize on the resources embedded in social networks, they need the means to build “relationships that offer support”—bonding ties/strong links—“as well as relationships that offer opportunities”—bridging ties/weak links (Goodman, 2005: 57).

Given the aforementioned downsides, the importance of Putnam’s call to avoid neglecting bridging forms of social capital thus becomes clearer. Bridging forms, he suggests, are crucial if people are to connect across diverse social divisions. For Lin, bridging is important insofar as it enables actors to draw from a wider network of social relations in which resources are embedded. What should be remembered is that, in developed countries at least, the mobile phone is rarely used in isolation from other technologies, such as the Internet. Given this, it is important to acknowledge that social interaction programs on the Internet often fulfill the need for maintaining weak links. Internet use notwithstanding in light of the broader significance of bridging forms of interaction proposed above, it is nevertheless still valuable to give detailed consideration to those specific, if at times less evident,
instances where mobile phone use has been reported as facilitating bridging forms of social interaction.

**Building Bridges through Mobile Phone Use**

Considerable critical attention has been given to the use of mobile devices in forming “ad-hoc networks” (Ling, 2004: 187–89) and coordinating social action in the form of political protest (see Castells et al., 2007: 185–213; Rheingold, 2002). Howard Rheingold, in a 2008 essay updating his earlier book *Smart Mobs*, furnishes a litany of examples all of which point to the crucial importance of the mobile phone in the rapid mobilization of people in various forms of public protest and collective action. These range from the by now well-known EDSA-2 “people power” demonstrations in the Philippines and various grassroots protests in China to election monitoring in Africa and nonviolent antigovernment rallies in Spain. To these examples can be added Australia's 2005 Cronulla riots (Goggin, 2006), which were racially motivated violent protests allegedly organized via SMS, as well as other, more ephemeral and whimsical forms of mass action, such as “swarming” and “flashmobbing” (Marchbank, 2004). In terms of democratic process, each of the above cases is significant insofar as mobile communications technologies function, in Gergen's (2008) terms, as “two-way influence structures with a strong horizontal communication thrust within the populace” (304). The social capital potential of the mobile phone in this context rests in the device’s capacity to connect many-to-many. In this way, the mobile serves as an important resource. This makes sense if we remember Lin's (2001) conception of social capital as consisting of “resources embedded in social relations and social structure which can be mobilized when an actor [or actors] wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a purposive action” (24). And yet the broader and lasting political significance of these technologically mediated mass mobilizations is far from settled. For instance, Rheingold appears undecided as to whether these ad hoc networks are likely to lead to “the empowerment of individuals” and “stronger democracies,” or whether they will lead to weaker democracies as well as “strengthen the hand of centralized authorities” (2008: 236–37).

In the remainder of this section, and to parallel the earlier discussion on bonding, I want to focus beyond the formation of ad hoc networks to the use of the mobile phone on a more intimate scale, in the strengthening of one’s personal social network and...
network resources through bridging. In particular, I begin by looking at a few specific, if less reported, instances in which bridging occurs as a result of technological innovation, especially growing awareness of the possibilities afforded by the Bluetooth protocol. Next, I move to an examination of everyday mobile phone use in specific cultural contexts, which routinely involve bridging forms of social capital.

Bluetooth—which takes its name from a Danish Viking King, Harald Blåtand (Bluetooth)—is a communication specification designed to enable low-power, radio-frequency wireless communication between small, mobile devices (Barnes, 2002: 167). In effect, Bluetooth turns these devices into short-range beacons, each with their own unique ID code (Eagle, 2004: 12). Experimentation with Bluetooth technology by artists, software developers, and individual phone users has yielded a number of interesting results with potential positive implications for bridging forms of social capital. Contemporary art practice forms a key context where the mobile phone has emerged as a valuable mechanism for exploring the potential for social interaction between relative strangers using Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones. There have been numerous artistic experiments utilizing the Bluetooth protocol (see Innocent, 2007; Stukoff, 2007). One such early experiment, entitled “A Message from the Future,” involved a temporary performance event generated in Melbourne, Australia, in late 2006. For this event, eight artists assembled for a forty-five-minute period at a key inner-city intersection, known for its high pedestrian traffic, and attempted to transmit video art—an artistic “message from the future”—to unwitting passersby. Without any preconceived ideas of likely outcome, the artists experienced a high acceptance rate which, in some cases, progressed to text message exchanges in which inquisitive recipients of these messages initiated a dialogue with the artists, quizzes them about the art piece, the intentions behind it, as well as why they had been contacted in the way that they had been (Coulter, R. Personal Communication, Melbourne, Australia, February 13, 2008).

What the above example shows is the potential of Bluetooth for initiating contact between relative strangers. Harnessing the potential of such fleeting types of social interaction for more lasting forms of conversation, information exchange and potential collaboration, is something that has been explored by MIT Media Lab’s Human Dynamics Group. Researchers within this group have developed a
mobile phone software application called Serendipity (Eagle, 2004). The software is designed to facilitate connections between colleagues in medium- to large-scale office environments who may be unknown to each other but who may work either on similar projects, similar problems, or have compatible knowledge or expertise. Assuming each employee within an organization has the software installed and Bluetooth enabled, the system works as follows:

When two or more people with Serendipity come into the same “bubble” where their Bluetooth signals can be detected, the application connects to a server, sending the IDs of the device. . . . The server then correlates the IDs within existing profiles and performs a matchmaking algorithm. When there’s a match, both people’s phones receive a multimedia message that includes the name and a thumbnail photo of the other person, as well as a short list of talking points to get the conversation going. (Eagle, 2004: 12)

The impetus for the project was to explore ways in which mobile phone handsets “might be used as a means to foster informal face-to-face communications of co-located colleagues who have little, if any, acquaintance with one another” (Eagle, 2004: 10). This was motivated by a belief that “it is exactly these sorts of ‘weak ties’ within an organization that can be particularly powerful in facilitating workplace collaborations, among a number of potential benefits” (10, 12).

Advertising agencies and other parties interested in mobile advertising are enthusiastically exploring the commercial opportunities for Bluetooth and related technologies (Wilken and Sinclair, 2009). Nevertheless, the particular commercial application discussed above shows clearly the potential of mobile devices to facilitate an individual’s access to a broader network of “weak ties” and, in so doing, increase their access to the available store of capital resources.

The potential of Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones to widen existing social networks has also been noticed elsewhere. For instance, preliminary findings from a UK-based study on children’s perceptions of mobile phones and risk in their everyday lives reveal evidence that the use of Bluetooth to initiate connections between relative strangers is already being incorporated into everyday mobile phone practice (Bond, 2007). As the project researcher Emma Bond (2007) reports, “One group of girls in the study described how a group of boys had ‘Bluetoothed’ them in the cinema initiating text conversations and the sharing of images hoping for a face-to-face meeting”
The report goes on to explain the strategies that these girls used to resist these mobile-mediated advances “in order to manage risk” (para. 9). However, the most interesting aspect of this study in the present context is the way that the technological capacities of the mobile handset are being exploited not so much to consolidate an existing social network but to extend their social network by making new connections.

While the last example above is striking for its inventive social applications of Bluetooth, in other social and cultural contexts, everyday mobile phone use has developed in ways that routinely involve bridging forms of social capital in order to establish broader social network contacts. For instance, Goodman’s (2005) research in South Africa and Tanzania has found that mobiles are routinely used to “manage strong links with close friends and family” as well as for establishing “weak links” in the form of contacts outside the community, offering “social and economic opportunity” for those within the community (59). This is also the case in Southern China, where Chinese migrant workers use their mobiles to expand their networks as a way of gaining access to vital information about the job market and to strengthen their bargaining power with present and future employers and protect them from potential exploitation (Law and Peng, 2008).

In the Philippines, Raul Pertierra has studied the sending and receiving of text messages between strangers. Framing his findings around Marcel Mauss’s notion of gift exchange, Pertierra (2006) discovered that “most Filipinos readily agree to exchange texts with strangers.” With limited initial risk, “there is always the possibility of such requests becoming the basis for new friendships” (321). Noting that those most willing to accept such messages come from the poorer rural areas of the country, he suggests that “the imperative of the gift makes more sense for people seeking new resources than for those concerned with maintaining status” (321).

Meanwhile, in Japan, Jeffrey Boase and Testuro Kobayashi (2008) surveyed high school students to determine the extent to which Japanese adolescents use mobile phone texting to bond, bridge, and break with social ties. A number of interesting and potentially significant findings emerge from this study. For instance, the survey revealed that mobile phone texting “is used to bridge and develop new social ties,” with 54 percent of respondents—out of a total of 501—agreeing with the survey question that mobile phone helped them make friends outside of school (936–37). Like many existing studies in
developed countries, the study also found that mobile texting is used by these teens to bond with friends and family. However, according to the study’s authors, close scrutiny of the survey data reveals that “the statistically significant association . . . between bonding and mobile phone email intensity disappears when bridging and bonding are placed in the same model together” (940). In order to explain this finding, the authors propose two interpretations. The first interpretation is that there is a correlation between intensity of mobile text messaging and bridging: “The more Japanese adolescents believe that they can use mobile phone [texting] to form new relationships, the more intensely they use this technology” (940). The second is that Japanese adolescents use mobile phone text messaging to consolidate their immediate social ties, “because close ties are essential both for instrumental and emotional support,” and after these are in place, they “use mobile phone [texting] intensely to bridge and form new ties” (940). Both interpretations, they conclude, “indicate that when both bonding and bridging via mobile are considered, bridging more fundamentally explains why Japanese adolescents use mobile phone [text messaging] so intensely” (940). While the study is speculative in key respects (it measured students’ perceptions of psychological and perceptual change as opposed to actual network change) and is limited in others (only one mode of mobile communication, text, is described), it is nevertheless significant in its attempts to reorient youth mobile phone research toward a consideration of how these devices are being used by adolescents to form weak tie relationships across diverse social groups.

Turning finally to the case of Jamaica, similar practices to those described above occur, albeit arguably in even more elaborate and fluid form. Reporting on detailed ethnographic research into mobile phone use in the Caribbean, Heather Horst and Daniel Miller (2006) argue that traditional conceptions of bonding versus bridging forms of social capital are troubled by the Jamaican example. This is in large part, they argue, due to the fact that the notion of a “network” in that country is “such a complex, multi-stranded, overlapping, contradictory formation” (2006: 83). In light of this complexity, the authors argue that intensifying or renewing existing relationships is not necessarily the primary use of the mobile phone in Jamaican culture. Rather, its key use is for what they call “link-up” (89): the “accumulation of an extensive network” (93) through the collection of names and numbers of friends, acquaintances, and relative strangers. While in many
cases oriented toward establishing sexual relationships, the practice of extending one's social network, they argue, goes well beyond this (95). Indeed, its wide variety of uses range from securing health care or one's personal safety, developing church-related networks, and building business and entrepreneurial trading contacts “such as finding the best price for agricultural products” (95–96). The result of these extensive networks, they argue, is a blurring of “social and economic networks” (96), as both bonding and bridging forms of social capital are in many respects rolled into one. This blurring is very much the case for each of the examples discussed here, not just Jamaica.

In most of the above examples of mobile phone use, specifically those relating to South Africa and Tanzania, the Philippines, and Jamaica, the use of the mobile phone illustrates and emphasizes the many complexities that make up what Thomas Misa (2003) has called the “compelling tangle of modernity and technology” and the regional and local variations in how these complexities are manifested. These examples also reveal the inventiveness with which new (and not-so-new) technologies are employed in situations where necessity, in the form of economic and other forms of disadvantage, becomes the mother of invention. That is, in each of the above cases, mobile communications have been taken up and adapted to form yet another way of ameliorating the effects of poverty (or the threat of it). In these examples, individual actors have developed a variety of complex network strategies involving mobile phones that maximize their (potential) access to the widest possible pool of social capital resources.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined mobile phone use and social capital debates. Examination of the research literature provides ample evidence that mobile communication works to strengthen existing social ties and network connections—that is, “strong ties” or “bonding” forms of social capital. In the literature, there is further evidence that the mobile is, in certain situations, also used to establish extensive networks involving “weak ties” or “bridging” forms of social capital (even if these examples of bridging sometimes tend to blur such neat categorical distinctions). However, while both forms of social capital are represented in the research literature, this representation is not equal: bonding processes receive far greater representation than bridging processes do.
Notes

1. It is important to recognize that micro-coordination is an important, but not the only, interactional mode of mobile communication. As a corollary to micro-coordination, Ling and Yttri (2002) developed the concept of “hyper-coordination,” which combines “instrumental and expressive use of the mobile telephone as well as strictures regarding the presentation of self” (140).

2. For further, more detailed analyses of evidence of bonding forms of social capital in the available mobile phone literature than is possible to give in the space available here, see Ling (2008: 159–74) and Boase and Kobayashi (2008).

Bibliography


Extended Sociability and Relational Capital Management: Interweaving ICTs and Social Relations

Thomas de Bailliencourt, Thomas Beauvisage, Fabien Granjon, and Zbigniew Smoreda

Introduction

For sociological inquiry, face-to-face encounters remain the prototype of interpersonal interaction. Following the seminal work on symbolic interaction, the face-to-face communication process was placed at the heart of the simultaneous endeavor of constructing the self and the society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1934). However, today’s growth of “meeting technologies” and their extremely rapid integration into ordinary communication practices raises the question of a possible reconfiguration of everyday sociability in relation to new communication tools (e.g., Bargh et al., 2002; Haythornthwaite, 2002; Ling, 2008a; Lüders, 2007).

In the previous work, we came to define interpersonal sociability as the flow of exchanges that people maintain with those to whom they are connected, having three distinct poles: the social network, the interpersonal exchanges themselves, and “the various technical means that are available at a given moment of time and that enable an exchange to happen. These poles both pose constraints on and provide resources for interactions; thus, all three poles shape the form that relational practices take” (Licoppe and Smoreda, 2006: 297). A kind of technological shaping of social relations—highlighted by the definition above—becomes a real theoretical issue for the sociology of communication. Indeed, the role of mediated interactions in overall
interpersonal exchanges is constantly growing (Kim et al., 2007). As technology advances, new patterns of mediated communication emerge and become important enough to be introduced into the analysis of sociability. However, can we claim that the intensification, enlargement, and complexity of contemporary mediated interactions substantially transform the mode of human sociability?

The growing role that information and communication technologies (ICTs) play in everyday interactions should not be understood as constituting a special realm of exchange, separated from or concurrent to face-to-face interpersonal interactions. Rather, we see in this process a set of small but significant displacements inside a larger relational system. Thus, we need to approach the multifaceted dialectic between ICT usages and individual relational resources by examining the incorporation of communication tools into everyday life practices. We consider ICTs as one more socio-technical layer enabling individuals to maintain ordinary social links, which can somewhat diversify exchange formats, and the size or structure of the individual network.

Today, the various systems of communication converge on two major tools: the computer and mobile phone. The same functions can be fulfilled by various services, such as short message service (SMS), e-mail, instant messenger (IM), or chat for text-based communication. It is thus urgent to enlarge classic sociability analysis to “extended sociability” and take into account the whole range of ICTs used to contact one’s personal network in different communication contexts. We propose the notion of “ICT interweaving” to account for the way ICTs are integrated into daily interactions. The question of interweaving communication tools and social relations points to a tension between individual equipment and its social network equipment trade-offs. In terms of equipment, the existing research has shown differences in the modes and the rhythms of ICT appropriation within various age groups and relational circles, mostly focusing on technology diffusion, the personal capacity of use, and the desire toward ICT use. It was shown, for example, that younger groups are more attracted to the new tools and adopt them more easily (Jouët and Pasquier, 1999; Ling, 1999; Livingstone, 1999). However, this explanation does not take into account all factors linked to the lifestyle variations between individuals according to their life stage, the configuration of their personal networks, and the generational dimension of ICT appropriation trajectories.
In daily life, users operate permanent trade-offs between the different communication tools available. Their choice is associated with their own customs, the possibilities, and presumed preferences of their correspondents and with the context in which we find both the sender and the receiver. Indeed, the asymmetries of equipment shape the choice of tools: for example, if a person wants to contact his mother, unaccustomed to recent ICTs, they are probably going to choose to call her on her fixed phone, even if they possess the latest communication tools (Ling, 2008b). In a quasi-mechanical way, technological trade-offs are at their fullest extent in contacts between multi-equipped individuals. But we observe that ICT trade-offs also activate more complex mechanisms, which exceed the simple logics of equipment. In everyday interaction, tools are incorporated into exchange schemas constructed in relation to network composition. For example, while teenagers easily SMS to coordinate with their peers who also prefer to use SMS, older adults have the tendency to use their mobile phone for vocal communication. It is thus important to see social links as built into the choice of a communication tool and the interaction context presiding over this situational choice.

To analyze the interweaving of ICTs and sociability, we combine various datasets: individual questionnaires, telephone and Internet traffic measures, and qualitative studies. Such a combined approach is highly relevant to understand the patterns of mediated interpersonal communication (Kim at al., 2007). Our analysis is based on a statistically representative panel study of 2,370 French individuals, which ran in 2005 and 2006, and articulated different data sources by mixing different research techniques: (1) detailed mobile and fixed telephone communication data from billing records; (2) home computer usage data, collected via a software installed on the panelists’ computers, and providing individual-level data on Web, mail, and global PC activity; and (3) phone and paper questionnaires, administrated periodically all along the eighteen months of observation. We mobilize these three data sources together with a specific contact diary study performed with a selected subsample of ten households where all the members were interviewed in depth about their social practices and networks (for more details on our research methodology, see Smoreda et al., 2007).

We will first analyze the scope of the interweaving of various voice and text communication tools that mobilize telephony, SMS, IM, and/or e-mail as well as the factors behind their usage. By looking at
the intensity of usage and the various means of communication, we will see how five different usage profiles organize actual communication tools into differentiated patterns. Second, we will analyze how age cohorts structure the equipment penetration rate as well as the trade-offs between communication tools between generations. Finally, we will examine the interweaving of tools and relations spread over various social networks and the local negotiation in family and marital logics to emphasize the role of family socialization frameworks in ICT usage.

**Extended Sociability in France**

The research on face-to-face contacts seems to indicate a decline of discussion networks (McPherson et al., 2006), which is sometimes interpreted as the dissolution of social links due to the pressure of urban, anonymous life and a more general contemporary individualization process (Putnam, 1995). On the other hand, the telecom operators’ data systematically show that the number of devices in use, the number of communication acts, and the overall time devoted to this activity are constantly growing, and Internet studies tend to show that Internet usage is associated with more social interaction (Katz and Rice, 2002). In our perspective, if we admit that social contacts are more and more intertwined with the technological tools of communication, the two results are not necessarily contradictory. Mediated exchanges are still closely related to physical interactions, but we also observe a kind of enlargement in relation management: a more or less clear functional equivalency between presence and mediated communication channels. This fact can be associated with the hypothesis of a new “connected presence” mode of sociability (Licoppe, 2004). The role of mediated contacts in overall sociability is still growing and makes the encounter only one instance of the interaction (albeit a privileged one). In this sense, the place has become less important than it has been in the past, as we can reach, or be reached by, correspondents virtually in any location (Janelle, 1995). The interaction is partially “disembodied,” as we can be present for the other without sharing with them the physical context. However, most frequently, the people with whom we communicate via ICTs are more or less the same with whom we meet to talk, to work, to eat out, to have fun, etc. The classical organization of interpersonal relationships into time, space, and activity patterns was not, up to now, profoundly transformed by ICTs. Even a relationship started in cyberspace still needs confirmation by
face-to-face interaction before it becomes a “strong tie” (Kavanaugh et al., 2003; Norris, 2003). The most significant transformation here is the increase in the overall number of “communication acts” whatever the communication channel (calls or any text-based communication). For individuals, it implies a greater availability, but it also introduces new strategies in the choice of communication tool, which might involve the availability status of correspondents, their local situation, and the specificities of each tool.

**Interweaving Communication Tools**

Looking at French society today, we observe that “multimodal” communication has become a dominant practice: while 29 percent of French still use only voice communication to contact their network, all others have already adopted a kind of mixed voice and text exchanges incorporating SMS, e-mail, instant messaging, chat, etc., separately or all together (see Table 8.1). The simultaneous use of voice and text communication functions offered by telephones and by the Internet is now quite popular (34 percent of the entire population and as much as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of communication</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>FM</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>MI</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>FMI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None (5.4%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice only (28.9%)</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice + SMS (17.0%)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice + Internet(^a) (14.7%)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-usage(^b) (33.9%)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* F, Fixed phone; M, mobile phone; and I, home Internet. These results are based on a telephone questionnaire (CATI) that did not distinguish between fixed and mobile telephones. It appeared difficult for a respondent to differentiate between these two types of calls; in general, contacts called on a mobile are also called on a fixed phone, be it at home or at work. Additionally, the questions referred to all devices in all places, which captured people who had a fixed phone at home, but still used another computer at home, work, or school, borrowed a mobile phone to send e-mails or SMS, and so on.

\(^a\) Communication functions of the Internet include e-mail, IM, and chat.

\(^b\) Voice and text communication functions include SMS, e-mail, IM, and chat.
55 percent if we look at those equipped with phones and the Internet). This new means of communication is no longer reserved to geeks or technological virtuosi, but has become a standard way of keeping in contact with personal relations. Based on this fact, we need to con-jointly analyze the usages of all those communication tools in order to shed more light on the contemporary forms of interaction.

*Age Effect*

As is common in ICT studies, the age of the person is the most important factor in the adoption of multiple communication channels. Nevertheless, this interweaving of tools is not a phenomenon restricted to youngsters. There is the clear tendency for mixed voice–text interpersonal communication up to the age of fifty (see Table 8.2). The generational divide appears more when looking at the combination of tools used. In mobile phone and/or Internet users, the use of SMS and IM usages for private communication decrease with age but the e-mail age trend is different (see Figure 8.1). Young adults use ICTs more frequently and in a more diverse way. They build their communication practice in relation to SMS and IM, depending on the equipment at hand and online presence of their contacts. The older groups are more e-mail-oriented. The threshold can be positioned somewhere after fifty. In particular, younger users’ correspondent circles are more diversified and are less limited to “strong ties” than older groups. Notably, their IM contacts include a larger number of acquaintances, like class- or schoolmates: “we connect every day for school matters” (student, female, aged twenty). Those exchanges do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.2</th>
<th>Interpersonal Communication Channels with Housemates, Family, Friends, and Acquaintances by Age Group (n = 2,625)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>11–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice only (30.6%)</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice + SMS (17.9%)</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice + Interneta (15.6%)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-usageb (35.9%)</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Communication functions of the Internet include e-mail, IM, and chat.

b Voice and text communication functions include SMS, e-mail, IM, and chat.
not substitute face-to-face interactions but rather are their continuation or, sometimes, a transformation into more intimate, individual chatting, which can be difficult in a collective school or work context. IM chat content also appears to be more varied in the younger group: work, hobbies, networking and group leisure, and file exchanges (music and/or video) are relatively frequent topics during IM sessions.

Text Messaging with Friends

Beyond having an age effect, various technologies have the potential to segment communication practices, particularly text communication. In our analysis, we see this in communications with friends. The elective friendship network is more homogeneous in terms of the member’s age and life stage than other personal networks (Fischer, 1982). Thus, reducing the analysis to friendship relations helps us to neutralize the separated influence of those age and life-stage variables.

Telephone voice communication is largely used to contact friends, but fewer use SMS for this purpose (95 to 38 percent, respectively, with the French sample). However, we can observe that the share of people using SMS with friends changes according to the size of their friendship network. While only 30 percent of people declare a small (less than ten people) friend circle, we observe 45 percent for
others. In larger networks, SMS has a greater chance of being used for communication with friends. This relation is still valid when controlling for equipment and individual socioeconomic characteristics. Similarly, the frequency of encounters with friends coincides with the increase in SMS use: 50 percent of interviewees use SMS to contact friends if they meet at least once a week, compared to 20 percent who meet friends “once a month or less.” The frequency of contacts with friends is an explanatory factor even in the context of facilitating regular encounters with “friends”—as in school, for example.

In a similar manner, e-mail communication (used for private purposes by 37 percent of French) is also associated with the friendship network size. A logistic regression analysis shows that the probability of e-mail use among those with a network of “twenty friends or more” is twice as high as individuals with smaller networks. As in the previous SMS analysis, we again see a positive relationship between e-mail use and frequency of face-to-face contacts with friends. E-mail usage in this context is more popular (45 percent) when the encounters with friends occur on a daily basis. The Internet experience of the person (and implicitly, of their friends) is an important variable as well. Internet veterans use e-mail to contact friends more often: 73 percent of those who have used Internet for more than seven years, compared to only 39 percent for subjects with less than two years’ experience. The relationship that exists between the frequency of contact and more intense e-mail and IM use shows that the face-to-face interaction and ICT usage are not opposites, but go well together.

The use of instant messaging to communicate with friends is largely dependent on the Internet connection at home. Unsurprisingly, in our logistic regression analysis, it is the most determinant factor of IM usage explaining 50 percent of variance. A person with an Internet connection at home is twelve times more likely to use IM than an individual without a connection. However, the presence of an Internet connection in the workplace or at school does not change the propensity to communicate via IM. Fifty-six percent of younger individuals (under the age of twenty-five) use it to contact their friends, followed by children living in their parents’ home: this is the case for 43 percent of eleven- to fifteen-year-olds and 60 percent of sixteen- to twenty-five-year-olds. In addition, young singles are also affected by the phenomenon, even controlling for their available equipment and other sociological criteria.
Interweaving Fixed Phones, Mobile Phones, and the Internet: Five User Profiles

In order to approach the question of interweaving communication tools in a more global way, we decided to use the most precise information in our datasets: phone traffic data and panelists’ home computer logs. To shed light on interwoven usage patterns, we need to examine the behavior of the individuals with the same equipment (fixed and mobile phone users and home Internet users). Furthermore, for feasible technical observations, we chose telephone traffic details only for Orange customers. These choices not only allowed us to work with very reliable data, but also resulted in a large reduction of the sample size (n = 342). The common denominator of all analyzed usage data is the use duration: the amount of use per week for each service was chosen as a dependent variable for analysis. The factor analyses conducted allowed us to build five groups of users:

1. **Fixed talkers (22 percent):** abandoning the computer and using little SMS, they clearly privilege voice communication and in particular the fixed phone (which constitutes more than 60 percent of communication time);
2. **Mobile talkers (29 percent):** dedicating the least time to ICTs in general, they mainly use the mobile phone, on which they spend two-thirds of their communication time. Computer use remains occasional for the majority of them;
3. **Multi-moderated (19 percent):** their total time budget remains similar to that of the first two groups, but is distributed in a very homogeneous way across all the available means of communication. At home, they show a certain preference for synchronous modes of communication: IM use is at the same level of use as the fixed and mobile phone, but e-mail is used less;
4. **Traditional intensives (15 percent):** with about four hours of communications a week, a new stage is reached in the intensity of ICT consumption. This group prefers rather “classic” means (fixed rather than mobile phone and e-mail rather than webmail), sends few SMS messages, and has average IM use. We observe a balanced use of voice and text modes, but asynchronous communication via e-mail is still prevalent;
5. **Online texters (15 percent):** these are those who communicate the most and who have the strongest share of text communication in their time budgets. SMS and, especially, instant messaging are the privileged tools of this class. Online texters show a particular preference for synchronous, individual and mobile supports.
The analysis of usage duration by different communication tools shows an accumulation effect: the time devoted to communication by Internet does not affect the overall duration of voice communication, but is instead added to it. As such, the most extensive e-mail or IM users still maintain their telephone use. The increase in total communication time is accompanied by an increase in text communication. Text communication accounts for anywhere from a third to more than half of the time budget for other groups and is accompanied by an increase in the number of SMS sent and/or received; however, this effect is almost absent among talkers (see Table 8.3).

We can identify several variables that explain the organization of behavior of the groups examined here. The first concerns the time devoted to communication in general, which draw an opposition between low and high ICT consumers. The first three groups (both talkers and multi-moderated) have an average consumption of about one hour a week. The two others, on the contrary, are at more than two and a half hours of weekly communication. The second variable relates to the use of the computer for communication purposes: using PC separates the other groups from the talkers and stimulates the use of text messaging on the mobile phone. In other words, using PC is a marker for interweaving all channels of exchange. Finally, the preferential use of the ubiquitous or the anchored communication

Table 8.3  Weekly Median Time (in Minutes) by Communication Service Used and SMS Frequency (n = 342)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voice fixed</th>
<th>Voice mobile</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
<th>Web-mail</th>
<th>IMa</th>
<th>Total minutes voice</th>
<th>% SMS sent</th>
<th>% SMS received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed talkers</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile talkers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-moderated</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional intensives</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>230.3</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online texters</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>271.2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a IM communication is assumed to be text-only.
tools is another source of differentiation. While online texters prefer more individualized tools like the mobile phone, IM, and webmail, traditional intensives by far prefer the fixed phone and classic e-mail. This differentiation is also related to the issue of accessibility and of independence within the family unit.

The sociological characteristics associated with established clusters provide some supplementary information that allows us to discuss the interweaving of communication tools and lifestyles. A chi-square test on gender and life-stage variables shows a global dependency with the communication profiles ($p = .012$). Detailed examination of the chi-square values lend insight into the influence gender and life stage have on the interweaving of communication tools (see Table 8.4). It shows that the restricted usage profiles are more frequently represented by parents, and both intensive ICT user profiles are overrepresented by both male and female singles, as well as children still living with their parents.

The comparison of the two intensive users’ clusters highlights a generation effect in adopting technological opportunities. The traditional intensives, older and strongly imprinted by the introduction of the Internet and/or professional communication practices, seem to keep their communication customs structured by e-mail and fixed telephone exchanges. The cohort effect seen here strengthens established routines: their friends have similar practices, and this fact stabilizes their preference for this particular configuration of ICTs. On the other hand, online texters, a younger group, show communication behavior more associated with the spread of mobile phones and the emergence of live dialogue systems (chat, IM), which marked their entry into communication practice. The configuration ICTs used produces a kind of equivalence between the voice and the online messaging for these younger users. In this case also, the age cohort effect—associated with the age homogeneity of affinitive networks (McPherson et al., 2001)—appears to reinforce the way in which communication practices are organized. Note that this new tool configuration, which promotes continuous availability, seems to increase and spread in other groups of users. These two examples show that the technological landscape of developing communication customs has an impact on the choice of tools observed today. Among the available tools, one will tend to choose those which allow familiar contact modalities to be closely reproduced.
Table 8.4  Detail of Chi-Square Correlations between Socio-Demographic Variables and User Profiles (n = 342)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>In couple</th>
<th>In family</th>
<th>Single parent&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male        Female</td>
<td>Male        Female</td>
<td>Male        Female</td>
<td>Child&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed talkers</td>
<td>−2.64       −3.43</td>
<td>0.21        1.90</td>
<td>0.03        3.01</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile talkers</td>
<td>−0.54       −0.64</td>
<td>0.00        −0.01</td>
<td>4.57        0.16</td>
<td>−0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-moderated</td>
<td>0.02        −0.35</td>
<td>0.65        −0.05</td>
<td>−1.39       −0.08</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional intensives</td>
<td>1.80       2.66</td>
<td>0.12        0.01</td>
<td>−0.01       −1.20</td>
<td>−4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online texters</td>
<td>1.06        3.33</td>
<td>−3.34       −1.49</td>
<td>−2.32        −0.64</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The figures represent Chi-square values between estimated and observed values per cell. Positive values result from larger observed than estimated values; negative values result from smaller observed than estimated values.

<sup>a</sup> We did not break down children by gender for our analysis.

<sup>b</sup> 62 percent of single parents are female.
In addition, let us note that our cluster comparisons show the disappearance of a gender division in ICT use. In the online texters’ group, gender does not play a specific role in tool usage. By contrast, this technological divide is strongly present in the older, traditional intensives’ cluster. This follows previous research, which suggests that “while the Web audience continues to be strongly male dominated, the user proportion and intensity of usage of the real-time internet conversation tools is similar in men and women” (Beaudouin, 2002: 204). A possible explanation for this gender equality lies in the proliferation of the technological tools in the public sphere: in the period when men invested in ICTs more widely than women, they were in professions where these tools were strongly present. With the adoption of new ICTs into the general public, the gender gap tends to be reduced.

Tools and Correspondents Interweave

The individual’s age, ICT equipment, and personal network size are important factors of text communication use. However, this global data analysis masks some important variability associated with the diversity of interpersonal relations and channels used to communicate with personal networks. As the number of possible communication tools increases, we can note a kind of tool specialization within the groups of users, depending on the relation type (Cummings et al., 2006; Haythornthwaite, 2005). If we examine the type of correspondent contacted, life stage—a variable that combines a person’s age with their marital and familial situation—becomes the major explicative factor. The personal networks’ shape and size change with transformations during an individual’s life; in fact, people of the same age but in different marital, familial, or professional positions have quite different networks (Fribourg, 2007; Smoreda, 2002). Think about a young adult who is a single university student compared to a professionally active adult with a partner and a young child: the lifestyle differences between them are self-evident. Thus, we continue our investigation of ICT use based on social relations using life stage as a point of comparison.

Communication with Friends by Life Stage

The analysis of communication tools used with friends shows a fairly strong relationship between life stage and tools used (see Figure 8.2). Children living with parents adopt the most diverse way of communicating with their friends, followed by young singles and young couples. In general, the caller and their friends come from
the same age cohort. As a result, communication practices and tools are quite homogenous in friendship networks. This fact widens the technological gap between younger and older users as is observed in the present case: in older groups, voice-only communication is very important. Generational communication habits and homogenous network composition reinforce each other: if one’s contacts use only the telephone to exchange, his/her choice of communication channels is limited. This social network feedback operates inside all groups studied, but in different directions. We suppose that a large part of the multimodal communication adoption rate can be explained by the equipment and “technological literacy” shared inside friend circles (Campbell and Russo, 2003).

However, the strong transformation of personal network size and composition with changes in life stage requires separate treatment for children and adults in how they interweave tools with personal networks. We will follow our analysis by first looking at adult, then children’s, communication practices.

**Adults’ Tools—Adults’ Correspondents**

The analysis of adult ICT use shows that a very large part of them interact with four social circles: spouses, parents, siblings, and friends. They get in touch with an average of more than ten relatives and
about ten friends. ICT use is distributed in the following manner: 100 percent use voice means (fixed or mobile phone) to reach at least one member of their social circle, 42 percent use SMS, 41 percent use e-mail, and 20 percent use IM. If we focus on which communications tools are used to contact these different relationship circles (see Table 8.5), we can observe some particularities linked to the nature of relation between correspondents. Intra-household ties (between spouses or children) produce the fewest mediated interactions. Only 69 percent of individuals use ICTs in order to contact their spouses. While we cannot identify a favorite tool for this type of contact, we do notice that voice communication, with 67 percent of usage, is underused when compared to other cases (such as communications with friends or children). As we will discuss, part of the explanation is that exchanges between household members are strongly focused on coordination; communications that allow for longer discussion are less frequent in this case.

The mediated contacts with parents are dominated by phone (91 percent), and parents that are older are less equipped with ICTs. This potential asymmetry in use and equipment type imposes the choice of the telephone to communicate, especially when it is the favored option for the subject as well. The nature of communications with children living outside the household and with siblings is similar: voice exchanges are dominant within 90 percent of the concerned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of communication used</th>
<th>Telephone (voice) (%)</th>
<th>SMS (%)</th>
<th>E-mail (%)</th>
<th>IM (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spouse (81%)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents, stepparents (78%)</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in HH (47%)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children outside HH (50%)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings (80%)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends (100%)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> 81 percent of adults have a spouse; among those, 67 percent communicate with their spouse by telephone, 19 percent by SMS, 14 percent by e-mail, and 5 percent by IM.
population, SMS use is moderate (20 percent), e-mail exchanges are on the rise (between 18 and 24 percent), and IM remains very low (9 percent). Exchanges are most important and varied with friends: almost everyone uses voice communications (96 percent), and SMS and e-mail are increasing among 33 percent of subjects, while IM stands at 13 percent.

When compared to other parents in our sample, single parents show markedly different ICT use for all social circles. We see that some specific factors related to their particular family situation are at work in interweaving communication tools. In this population, multiple channel use is very impressive. SMS is strongly used to communicate with children living at home. We can observe that coordination with their children's favored communication tools plays a strong role in their ICT usage. Thus, single parents adopt communication tools used by children more than other parents. A specific study concerning this group conducted in 2000 shows that the constraint on free time—in particular, the difficulty to go out at night—is associated with the need to keep in touch with friends, placing ICTs in the middle of relationship maintenance (Gournay and Robson, 2000). Since then, other communication tools have obviously been added to the fixed phone. Recent research shows that mobile phone usage and equipment are preferred especially by single parents, as the coordination with children and other important contacts (like grandparents, neighbors, or friends) is complex (Pharabod, 2004). Their SMS adoption rate is actually in line with an affective family logic: subjects interviewed indicated a particular harmony between parents and children in their SMS exchanges. This is also linked to the very practical goals of maintaining a personal and affective life with people outside the household. Like young people living with their parents, single parents find that ICTs allow them to preserve ties with people outside home in an independent, nonintrusive, and economical way.

Children's Tools—Children's Correspondents

The nature of mediated contacts of children living with their parents seems different than that of adults. We know that young people's personal networks are focused on friendship and that their social circle is less family-based than that of older people. This fact affects the communication habits of young people. Consequently, this group uses SMS and IM in a very intensive way. Indeed, 72 percent of children contact at least one of their social circles via SMS and 52 percent by
Concerning telephone communication and e-mail, the usage levels by children is similar to that of adults (respectively 95 and 53 percent). Compared to adult communication practices, teenagers use voice and text tools in a more balanced way. This is especially true when social circles are made up of people—friends, siblings, siblings living outside household—of a similar age: in this case, we observe very small differences between voice and SMS communication (see Table 8.6).

Children contact their parents mostly by the phone (73 percent of cases), but SMS is also used (40 percent of the time) for this type of interaction. On the other hand, compared to SMS and phone, e-mail and IM are used less in family contacts. For 72 percent of the children observed, grandparents are contacted almost always by telephone (99 percent of the time). This effect is the same when adults communicate as well; after all, their parents are these children’s grandparents. Children’s communication with siblings is more diffuse: when they have siblings at home, the children contact them only in 57 percent of cases; when siblings live outside the home, they are contacted in 62 percent of cases. Indeed, this is the relational circle the least contacted via ICT. In both cases, telephone and SMS are used the same amount (48 and 40 percent of the time for siblings at home, and 56 and 40 percent of the time for siblings outside the home, respectively).

In friendship networks, we observe two different relational circles: friends and mates or schoolmates who are less close. For these two

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Table 8.6  Social Circles and ICT Use in Children Used by Correspondent Type (n = 416)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children with . . .</th>
<th>Telephone (voice) (%)</th>
<th>SMS (%)</th>
<th>E-mail (%)</th>
<th>IM (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents (100%)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents (100%)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings in home (85%)a</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings outside HH (46%)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends (100%)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mates (100%)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a 85 percent of children (aged 11–25) living under the same roof as their parents, have brothers and sisters in the home; among them, 48 percent communicate with siblings by telephone, 40 percent by SMS, 14 percent by mail, and 16 percent by IM.
circles, each of the four communication tools analyzed is used much more frequently than with the family. However, these devices are used in a specific way according to the relational proximity with friends or mates. The telephone is more frequently used to call friends (30 percentage points more than that for mates), as well as SMS and e-mail (17 and 18 percentage points more, respectively). However, IM is used at the same level. For contacts with mates, IM exceeds even the popularity of e-mail and is in fact close to SMS usage. These statistics report the degree of commitment offered by the analyzed tools during interactions. Phone conversation is most similar to a private face-to-face conversation due to its immediacy and synchronicity and, in fact, is used the most in communications with close circles of friends and other very personal relationships. IM is a tool that allows for more diverse interactions in terms of accessibility and presence management. It offers the possibility of affective distance control with the person contacted and a variety of forms of contacts and interactions. Therefore, with IM we can find both very intimate or affectionate exchanges and more stereotyped exchanges with mates, as well as collective discussions with a whole group.

**Family Communications**

In family communications, we find a mechanism specific to the individual’s life stage. The choice of communication tool is made to adapt to the ICT habits of the oldest group (see Figure 8.3). This choice is made differently if one still lives with parents, has children, or is younger or older one in the relationship. For those living with their parent(s), family contacts—uncles, grandparents, etc.,—are generally older. The family status difference between the child and their contact family member appears to affect the choice of tool for initiating interaction: the choice is made according to the (supposed) preference of the older correspondents (for gender-related analysis, see Smoreda and Licoppe, 2000). Consequently, for the youngest group, there is a very strong disjuncture between communication tools used to reach friends and those used to reach their own household members and relatives. Conversely, for people aged from twenty-five to fifty, the distinction between friends and family in the case of ICT choice seems less important. A large percentage of this older group utilize only voice communication to initiate interactions with their social circles. Others show mixed usage of various tools, with a preferential association between telephone and SMS. But the
friends–kin distinction is less significant here. Indeed, an important part of the family contacts involves people from the same age cohort (siblings, cousins), so communication patterns and ICT equipment are rather similar to those adopted with friends. Finally, for the oldest groups, we observe a stability in the ICTs used regardless of the
social circle contacted. Communication equipment is no different for contacting friends and family for these individuals, and their age/family status gives them an advantage in defining the exchange channel for interacting with younger correspondents. Their means of communication strongly center on voice exchanges and do not vary with correspondent type.

We note that the set of tools used in contacts with household members is less diverse than that employed with friends. A specific analysis of a subsample of Orange customers for whom we were able to observe detailed mobile phone traffic (n = 1,508) allows for a finer examination of the communication behavior between household members. It shows the importance of mediated contacts between household members: 20 percent of all calls sent with the mobile and 17 percent of all SMS go to them. This exploration also points to a particular function of these exchanges: fixed and mobile phone calls to the people living in the same home are clearly shorter than an average mobile telephone call. The brevity of these conversations and the importance of the SMS in intra-household communication seem to suggest communication for the daily coordination of the family (Licoppe and Smoreda, 2000). Since mediated communication is needed only when all family members are not at home, mobile devices are at the center of their use.6

Case Study: ICT and Blue-Collar Family Dynamics

The family is one of the most important institutions in the management of everyday sociability. The family group is an essential site for organizing relations with others and governing sociability. The role of the parents as relational code prescribes is particularly significant. Relational socialization, the normative frame of reference transmission, suggests that one’s management style for interpersonal relations seems to be a key issue in explaining interwoven communication practices (Granjon et al., 2007). A qualitative study conducted on blue-collar families allows us to examine the dynamics of ICT socialization in a specific family context in more detail. The study of these families shows the influence that family and marital logics have on the ways of maintaining and organizing social networks. Here, we have analyzed three families where all the members completed a contact diary for ten days and were individually interviewed at home. Our choice to examine the ICT use among lower class members was dictated by considering the democratization of ICT use in French society and
the fact that 51 percent of the French population (aged eleven years or older) lives in blue-collar families. Blue-collar households, more so than middle-class families, tend to privilege specific family “rights” and family “togetherness” upon individual identities and personality expression (Schwartz, 2002). The households we have analyzed pay particular attention to family cohesion and value the feeling of family group unity. We observe a strong internal solidarity and a feeling of interdependence between members who define their individual duties and constraints in reference to the family group.

Individual Tools and Family Regulation

It is possible to identify some similarities in the way these families use communication devices. First of all, for the local correspondents, telephone and online computer communications always come after face-to-face interaction, the most valued way of contact. Face-to-face contacts fulfill the needs of emotional and cognitive exchanges: discussion acts as an essential means for the family equilibrium. Face-to-face interaction is the preferred means to activate contact and maintain strong ties. The pattern of the communication channels used to maintain a relationship seems linked to emotional proximity (Licoppe, 2002): the more one is emotionally close to a correspondent, the more one tends to use a large variety of interaction devices in this relationship. Thus, the most frequently seen people are also those with whom ICT exchanges are the most common and where the variety of communication devices used is generally the largest.

Contrary to statistical data, our case study shows that it is in the interaction between household members that the range of the technical mediations deployed is the most important. Parents and children mobilize a rather large variety of devices to get in touch. The mobile phone is strongly integrated into family life, and it also plays a key role in the everyday organization of household life. It not only suits particularly well to the functional needs of coordination (Ling and Yttri, 2002), but also handles elective and emotional link dimensions by extending intra-home interactions outside the place of residence. These usages follow the well-known distinction in communication sociology literature between two types of phone use: the conversation type, which complements face-to-face discussions, and the coordination type, which integrates more into the organization of daily activities (Licoppe and Smoreda, 2000; Mercier et al., 2002). The ways the mobile phone is used with friends and mates follow more or less
similar lines (encounter organization, brief news exchange, etc.) and involve the most routine and the closest social links. Moreover, we also have to note that, for the youngest subjects, there is a growing tendency to turn away from voice modes of exchange toward written modes (SMS and IM). Youngsters seem more at ease with these communication tools, notably considering them less intrusive, quicker, and more functional (Metton, 2006).

The fixed telephone is perceived to be a particularly intrusive tool by our blue-collar families because it directly accesses the home. In the studied families, giving one’s mobile phone number to someone is not so much a sign of a particular confidence; on the contrary, sharing the home phone number denotes a particular privilege. To be able to call the family at home is to be admitted as a family correspondent, and it has to remain a privilege. Within the most tight-knit families, a telephone call is always experienced as an intrusion of the external world into the comfort of family routines. Telephone contact must not be disturbing, nor must it upset the family values and norms. It is in this sense that the mobile phone—with a restricted subscription plan—appears perfectly adapted. In one of our households, the members see the restricted mobile phone plan not as a kind of temporal limitation of their communication potential, but rather as an effective means to reduce intrusions into the family cocoon and a way to keep control over the time and places of communication. The mobile phone usage they develop gives them an illusion of a relational autonomy even if, in fact, they limit the possibilities offered by the device. Indeed, mobile phones fit into very normative familial rules that prescribe a strong gender division that shapes communication practice. On the one hand, the mobile phone allows the father to maintain an exclusive relational network for himself, at the same time allowing him to preserve conjugal unity with regular calls. On the other hand, it gives the mother an opportunity to keep—discreetly—in touch with certain people whom her husband may not appreciate. These links have to remain a secret with a minimalist exchange (short phone calls) in order to preserve gender role assignments and family cohesion and consensus. While the mobile phone conversation is thus appreciated as a support for the strongest relationship, face-to-face interaction remains the ideal type of contact because it is more direct, more frank, richer, and so on. In particular, the mobile phone helps to individualize relationships that are usually collective: as it was observed in another household, the “family head” and his best friend appreciate calling each other on the
mobile phone for long chats in the absence of their respective spouses. However, his spouse is usually involved in his fixed phone or computer communications. The husband’s mobile phone usage is differentiated here because it is directly subject to marital and familial regulation.

In many social situations, particular family and marital regulation patterns play a central role in producing specific communication behaviors. Thus, communication practices of one household show sharp, dynamic contradictions within the family group. Members desire to not only actively protect family links and family cohesion, but also seek emancipation from kin ties through individualized strategies of personal network building. The family members here do not have the same ICT skills. For the father, absolute primacy is given to face-to-face interaction as well as his domestic sphere, which weighs heavily on his desire to build new relations. Consequently, he is largely dependent on his spouse’s decision to share her new contacts. On the contrary, his wife has a strong capacity to go beyond the face-to-face contact format and uses ICTs widely for network extension. For example, she uses e-mail to create new links around her cultural interests—links that were not autonomous enough in their initial domestic context of interaction. Many times, these links are shared neither with her spouse nor with her children.

E-mail and IM usage differs strongly from household to household. For example, in one family, online contact, frequent and performed by all household members, represents an important means of exchange fully participating in the social economy of the household. This communication belongs to a relational trade model in which parents and children alike develop exhaustive collective and individual Internet use not only to contact some segments of their friendship circles, but also to renew the modes of intra-family interactions. However, the situation is very different in another household: here, online communication is limited exclusively to the son, who sees the Internet as a useful means to develop extra-family relationships with friends without breaking physical and moral family unity. In addition, we note that children in all the homes in our study show a marked interest for text communication: online communication allows them to acquire a certain autonomy vis-à-vis the family group, facilitate their self-expression, and construct community links with their peer group.

**Domestic Interaction Role**

Family relation management forms do not always correspond to the individual aspiration of family members, as some (especially...
the children) wish to break free from normative family frameworks imposed on them. By using their social and technical resources, they develop relational experiences different from those by domestic dynamics. Mobile phone and online contacts provide children with relative autonomy when socializing with other young people. Communication tools in the domestic sphere thus facilitate diversity in individual socializing and an individualization of communication practices—even if these practices remain mainly associated with the forms of family cohesion and regulation. This regulation is marked by strong internal solidarity and the spatial and moral proximity of members. The moral economy of the family strongly affects its members’ behavior. The domestic group defines the roles, positions, and hierarchies among its members and frame the ways of “doing couple” and “doing family” (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Within the blue-collar families studied, the construction of individual ICT territories remains linked to the domestic models of interaction. The decisions over the various modes of contact appear as contingent solutions to resolve the normative, emotional, and moral tensions resulting from family relations with the outside world.

The weak development of several communication practices here has little to do with personal skills, in fact. The poor repertoire of communication tools raises the question of acquired technical skills: With whom should I communicate? Why use a new tool? How might it affect the family equilibrium? The main elements that limit ICT usage are a poor relational network (few ICT interlocutors), the relative distance from the kinship, the dissension with certain relational circles, the geographical proximity of the main correspondents, the over-valorization of face-to-face interaction, and the relatively marked degree of household closure.

Conclusion

Our data show how the new means of communication become integrated into the ordinary personal communication practices. Today, a third of the French population fully utilizes the possibilities offered by ICTs in their interpersonal exchanges. Taking into account age cohort effects observed in the adoption of the most advanced modes of interaction and the progress of ICT equipment penetration rate, we can predict that multimodal uses will quickly grow and reach the majority of the population. However, the social network mechanisms identified in the adoption of specific interpersonal communication
tools indicate that multiple tool usages can be both facilitated (as in friendship networks for the younger groups) and hindered (as in the exchanges between generations) by relational factors. Regardless of the dynamic that colors an individual’s relational practices, we can identify a certain number of regularities in the way the communication devices are activated and integrated into the general economy of contact. They are especially linked to individual lifestyles, to life stage, and to the dominant personal network. In fact, we observed that the intensive use of multiple communication services coincides with stronger overall communication practices. Apart from physically remote correspondents, communication by calls, SMS, e-mails, and IM chats most frequently enhances the face-to-face communication.

Furthermore, individual equipment trajectories—the order in which tools are adopted and integrated into daily life practices by a user—play an important role in multimodal communication. We saw the differentiation between Internet veterans more focused on e-mail in text exchanges and the youngest group who prefer IM and webmail (often built in to IM software) for sending e-mails. At the same time, all these services are constantly evolving: e-mail is more and more integrated into the mobile phone and continuous 3G connection will open the mobile phone to IM applications. Considering these advances, we can predict that the convergence of services and tools will iron out the differences between various tool usage rates, in line with growing continuity of services on various terminals. This process will bolster the interweaving of text and voice in mediated interactions as it facilitates the convergence of different communication devices.

Finally, the qualitative case studies in our study show that ICT users are always influenced by their identities, memberships, and perceptions, which in turn shape their motivations and practical capacities to maintain and build their personal social networks. These results invite us to put the hypothesis of the ICT roles in a homogeneous individualization process into perspective and to highlight the critical role of the family socialization frameworks. The ICT usages in this study enable individualized and private sociability management, and offer the possibility of relative autonomy and freedom. But these ICT usages are also limited by restricting social frames.

Notes
1. Orange is the first mobile network operator in France and had a 46 percent market share in 2006.
2. Exchange duration for telephone and instant messaging, time spent on
software for e-mail or webmail. We added the number of SMS. Our choice
to distinguish between the uses of conventional e-mail (like Outlook or
Eudora) and webmail via Internet access (like Hotmail, Yahoo, or Gmail)
is based on the well-differentiated use profiles between users.
3. For a more complete description, see Bailliencourt et al. (2007).
4. For the USA, similar evidence of the disappearing gender divide was re-
ported by Katz and Rice (2002).
5. An adult is defined as the person declared the head of the household or
his/her partner; a child is a young person (twenty-five years old or younger)
still living in his/her parents’ household. There is also a more technical
reason for our choice: the combined study of tools and social links by the
subject’s place within the family can be blurry. For instance, siblings or
parents of a child are in frequently people living in or outside of the same
home, which profoundly changes ICT needs and forms of contact.
6. We are talking about an ordinary situation where household members
engage in their routine activities. The use of ICTs can of course be trans-
formed, such as during periods of long separation like the holidays where
daily family coordination gives way to longer conversations.

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Réseaux Relationnels et Différenciations Sociales du Passage à


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[AUQ2] AU: Please advise whether “... a child are in frequently people...” should be changed to “... a child are frequently people...”.

[AUQ3] AU: Please advise whether the details of the number of participants(n) in this study needs to be specified. If so, please provide the same.

[AUQ4] AU: Please advise whether the details of the number of participants(n) in this study needs to be specified. If so, please provide the same.
Network and Mobile Sociality in Personal Communities: Exploring Personal Networks of ICT Users

Andraž Petrovčič, Gregor Petrič, and Vasja Vehovar

Introduction

With an increasing number of people using mobile phones, the main issues of what mobile communications do to the social ties people have with their family, friends, relatives, acquaintances, workmates, and other social circles have attracted a great deal of attention. Social networks are considered one of the crucial aspects of social cohesion that gives expression to solidarity, provides a structural resource for enhancing the normative context, buffers potential social tensions or conflicts, and allows people to act together in a community. Thus, the debate about the role of mobile phones in managing social ties is important. Recent research dealing with the impacts of mobile telephony on social cohesion has identified three elements to which they are expected to be related: namely, the structural characteristics of social networks (e.g., Boase, 2008; Ishii, 2006), the structure of (mediated) social interactions (e.g., Baron, 2008; Ling, 2008), and the technological landscape, which is made up of “old,” and an ever growing range of “new,” communication devices and services used together with the mobile phone (e.g., Boase, 2008; Licoppe, 2004; Licoppe and Smoreda, 2005).

In this chapter we explore how these three elements are related to each other and how, from the interrelations between them, social forms have emanated that hold consequences for social cohesion. To examine these interrelations on the conceptual level we build on the
notion of sociality (Licoppe and Smoreda, 2005), a process consisting of networks of ties, forms of social interactions, and technological means of communication. Various authors have recently started to associate mobile phones with distinctive forms of network and mobile sociality (for example, Mascheroni, 2007; Matsuda, 2005; Wittel, 2001), exploring changes in the structural features of social networks. To analyze the relationship between social cohesion and the characteristics of social networks, sustained by the uses of various communication technologies, we focus on a concept that, in our view, best describes the basic form of togetherness in contemporary societies—a personal network (Wellman, 1979, 2001). This concept lies at the heart of the dialectic process between integration and individualization (Willson, 2006), which was already implicitly pointed out in Durkheim’s (1984) definition of social cohesion as the dialectic of pursuing one’s own interests and associating with each other.

Recent studies on mobile communication have shown that this dialectic process is mirrored in the uses of mobile phones, which can be employed to strengthen relationships across time and space and/or provide the opportunity for the increased individuation of social ties (Ling, 2008; Matsuda, 2005). However, social ties are usually conducted over a variety of mediated interactions, and to understand how they are supported by mobile communication, one needs to take into account the way in which social ties are embedded in the whole technological landscape. The technological formats in which these extended relationships take place were already complex before the advent of mobile phones, as research on different forms of writing and telephone sociability had ascertained (Fischer, 1992; Wurtzel and Turner, 1977). Moreover, alongside “old” technologies and mobile phones there are other Internet-based services such as e-mail, instant messenger, Skype, and Facebook, which people draw on to connect with their personal networks.

On an empirical level, this study assesses the role of usage patterns of mobile, in-person, texting, telephone, and Internet communication in the social cohesion of personal communities in terms of their size, composition, communication processes, and offline socializing. Focusing on Slovenia as a case, our study seeks to contribute to the growing body of cross-cultural research that suggests that different subtypes of information and communication technologies (ICTs) usage hold diverse implications for the structural features of social networks that underlie social cohesion (for example, Baron, 2008;
Campbell, 2007; Katz and Aakhus, 2002; Ling, 2008; Miyata and Kobayashi, 2008). However, when addressing these issues we do not argue that communication technologies themselves determine the structural characteristics of personal networks and interactional processes within them. Rather, we locate the use of communication technologies within existing structures that have characterized social interactions and personal relationships in late modernity. The domestication of mobile phones as well as of other ICTs took place in these existing contexts, and thereby these communication technologies mirror the social conditions within which they were conceived, developed, and adopted.

Hence, in the next section we first discuss the late-modern condition within which network and mobile forms of sociality are embedded. Next, we address the characteristics of network and mobile sociality with an emphasis on the reverberations they have had on the structural features of personal networks and on the dynamics of offline socializing. This discussion is followed by a description of this study’s survey methodology, data, and indicators before its findings are presented.

The Structural Conditions of the Use of ICTs and Social Connectivity

With the advent of modernity, new transportation and communication technologies led to a disembedding of time and space within social practices (Giddens, 1984). This set of changes coincides with the rearrangement of interpersonal relationships, as well as with the rise of new structural principles that call attention to the relationship between choice and commitment in social ties. Giddens’s (1991) concept of reflexive self-identity emphasizes that choices are imposed on individuals who are thus required to consciously and actively construct themselves, as well as reflexively select their personal relationships with others from a multiplicity of choices, without the guidance of dissolved traditions and social values. Willson (2006) argues that part of this crumbling of constraints in the institutional order of contemporary societies can be associated with the possibilities enabled by new communication technologies. With an increasing technological mediation of social reality, greater emphasis is placed on the individual, and individual desires and choices in terms of personal relationships. Today individuals can organize their personal relationships quite deliberately, deciding who they want to keep in contact with and who they wish to keep out, to a degree not previously possible. Quite often,
individuals are required to act in such a way if they want to handle the structural risks and perils of late modernity. In this regard, Baron (2008) remarks that mobile phones, in comparison to the fixed ones, have introduced a new set of mechanisms that give individuals more possibilities to assert control over when, where, and with whom they interact. As other ICTs extend these possibilities, and as social practices begin shifting to exploit new devices for controlling the volume of social interaction, the question has been raised of whether this shift has had implications for the structural organization of personal relationships.

Giddens (1992) argues that the reflexive nature and active engagement of individuals, which has been at least partly enabled by new communication technologies, have been upholding a change in the prevalent pattern of social ties and personal relationships. These changes are not only in the form of the individual’s involvement in society, but also on the level of community life and social cohesion (Bauman, 2000; Chambers, 2006). An argument has been put forward—most prominently by Castells (2001) and Wellman (2001)—that in such conditions, new organizing principles of sociality emerge from relations between individuals, they are regenerated by the new communication technologies, and, most importantly, these emerging forms of sociality offer similar resources usually associated with the notion of social cohesion.

Emerging Forms of Social Connectivity: The Interlacing of Network and Mobile Sociality

Today, networks are claimed to be the prevalent mode of social organization—the ways in which people collectively order and manage their lives—within an environment reconfigured by ICTs. Networks seem to characterize people’s actions and relationships at work, home, school, and in many other social spheres. When networks become increasingly mediated on a daily basis by personal communication technologies such as mobile phones, in a wide array of social settings, new forms of sociality can be established. Indeed, Andreas Wittel (2001) suggests that “network sociality” is developing within increasingly networked social realms that rest on the technological mediation of interpersonal relationships. He identifies four characteristics of network sociality: (1) network sociality is framed by individualization processes, in that people actively construct social bonds, having experienced less historically prescribed
social forms and commitments and higher levels of geographical mobility and trans-local communications; (2) network nodes are connected through ephemeral, transient, contingent, but intense, focused, fast, and overloaded social ties, which extend weak ties (thus, in this network sociality almost everyone is a potential weak tie or at least can become a temporal member of people’s networks); (3) it is based less on a shared (institutional) history of interacting subjects and more on their common interests, goals, and objectives (what is important is the peculiarity of the interactional situation, of what information each interlocutor can quickly exchange, and the active production of trust); and (4) this sociality is also a “sociality with objects” since it is deeply embedded in new communication technologies, including Internet-based communication services such as e-mail, online communities, and web sites, as well as mobile communication technologies such as notebooks and mobile phones (Wittel, 2001: 65–69).

With mobile communication, social ties not only extend through time and space and are organized as networks, but also become a mobile practice relocalized in a plurality of private and public spaces. Meyrowitz (2005) notes that keeping up with one's social networks while on the move reconstitutes the social reality of personal relationships as a mobile phenomenon. Further, Mascheroni (2007) contends that with the social uses of mobile telephony (and other new media such as online forums), personal relationships are reshaped and activated through reconfigurations of social and spatial copresence. Individuals equipped with mobile communication devices, besides establishing networked forms of sociality, also create and maintain “mobile spaces of sociality founded on a complex intersection of in-person interaction and mediated communication, co-presence and virtual proximity, corporeal travel and virtual mobilities” (Mascheroni, 2007: 527). As the practice of mobile communication is experienced as a reassuring routine against the absence of routines emanating from traditions and social institutions (Ling, 2008), this form of mobile sociality is gaining ground. In other words, ICTs—with the mobile phone in the foreground—have opened up possibilities to sustain networking oriented to establishing and maintaining new or existing ties, by lifting individuals out of their local space. In such ways, rather than dislocating individuals from (local/physical) space, ICTs often facilitate the connected presence of disembedded social ties (Licoppe, 2004).
The Social Cohesiveness of a Technologically Mediated Personal Community

Internet-based communication services and mobile media set up the coexistence of different modes of sociality that has ramifications for social relations and for the dominant forms of the organization of social networks. As Wellman (2001) notes, this technological mediation of interpersonal interchanges is neither a prima facie loss nor a gain in social networks, but rather a complex, fundamental transformation in the recognition of commonalities between people and in ontological categories that frame the form and content of being-together (see also Willson, 2006). Such a change in forms of togetherness is probably best grasped by the notion of personal communities (Wellman, 1979), which are claimed to provide the same resources as traditional cohesive social forms—support, sociability, information, and social identities. The most important characteristic attributes of personal communities are the following: (1) narrow, ephemeral, and intense social ties that are specialized in their resources for an individual; (2) sparsely knit, loosely linked social connectedness; and (3) a move from locally embedded social ties to geographically dispersed networks (Wellman, 2001). Consequently, interactions span across different social contexts, people are involved in various groups with less solid boundaries, and social resources are exchanged among multiple networks (Castells, 2001; Putnam, 2000). In addition, private forms of social connectivity have suppressed public sociality, resulting in what Fischer (2005: 159) refers to as the “privatism” of relationships. This privatism finds a structural expression in the ego-centered network organization of personal communities that operate out of private environments.

The societal flourishing of personal communities and the technological developments of mobile computer networks that underlie it should have profound consequences for the depth of human associations and social cohesion (Ling, 2008; Wellman, 2001). In the individualization of personal relationships, however, social ties become more specialized and fragmented (Chambers, 2006), leading to increasingly focused or weak relationships, yet this does not necessarily impede social cohesion. On the contrary, weak ties can facilitate numerous opportunities for social cohesion. Friedkin (2004: 418) argues that “social cohesion does not require small networks, high density networks, or networks based on strong interpersonal ties.” In fact, he claims that if
the social network has particular structural characteristics, even large, complex, and differentiated networks with lots of indirect and weak ties may be cohesive. Granovetter (1973: 1378) similarly observed that weak ties are “indispensable to individuals’ opportunities and to their integration into communities,” as opposed to “strong ties that can breed local cohesion and lead to overall social fragmentation.” In recent research that captured the mobile phone interaction patterns of a society-wide communication network, Onnela et al. (2007) found support for these predictions. In fact, their study shows that in a mobile communication network, tie strengths correlate with the local network structure around the tie, as well as that weak “mobile” ties appear to be crucial for maintaining the network’s structural integrity, yet strong ties have an important role in maintaining local communities (i.e., the removal of weak ties breaks the network apart, while the removal of strong ties only locally disintegrates a community).

In addition, previous empirical research has also provided substantial evidence for the idea that personal communities and related—but differently conceptualized—forms of social networks in everyday life are supported by different modes of technologically mediated communication (e.g., Boase, 2008; Hlebec et al., 2006; Ishii, 2006; Kim et al., 2007). More precisely, it has been discovered that different types of social ties are supported by diverse communication technologies (Chambers, 2006; Haythornthwaite, 2002; Matsuda, 2005; Miyata and Kobayashi, 2008; Sooryamoorthy et al., 2008), and that personal networks usually remain robust in spite of their newly mediated existence since, as in the case of landline phones (Fischer, 1992; Wurtzel and Turner, 1977), ICTs rarely replace in-person contact with personal network members (Boase, 2008; Ishii, 2006). Even more, social ties sustained via online and/or mobile communication can foster social participation and the sense of belonging to a personal network of peers, friends, and family (for example, Ishii, 2006; Ling, 2008; Matsuda, 2005). However, there is still no empirical verification of the relationship between the use of a total “personal communication system,” personal communities, and various dimensions of social cohesion (Boase, 2008). This is the central point of our empirical investigation into the idea that people use online and mobile technologies to work, coordinate, socialize, and perform other activities that support reciprocity and commitment and invigorate stable personal networks, which may lessen the perils of meaninglessness and uncertainty that might befall individuals in late modernity.
Research Framework

In our research we empirically tackle the question of how the uses of various communication devices are associated with two important dimensions of personal networks closely related to the issue of social cohesion—the structural features of emotional support networks and offline socializing. Many questions can be answered under the umbrella of such a research question—for instance, are the networks of intense Internet users larger and more diverse (but at the same time less gratifying), since Internet-based services lower communication barriers and give the opportunity for new ties to emerge in online communities? Alternatively, are the personal networks of those who predominantly use mobile phones and fixed telephones smaller but more satisfying, since they contain more strong ties with family and close friends? Does the interlacing of network and mobile sociality reduce or augment offline socializing? We thus pose the following specific research questions:

What is the difference between individuals who have different usage patterns of technologies for interpersonal communication: (a) in the size of their social support networks; (b) in their satisfaction with the support they receive from the social network; (c) in the structure of their social support networks (role composition, frequency of contact, geographical distance, duration and importance of ties); (d) in social network characteristics related to the different modes of communication employed to keep in contact with the ties in their network; and (e) in the intensity of their offline socializing?

Measures and Variables

The usage patterns of communication technologies were conceptualized and measured with the help of some relevant studies from the uses and gratification tradition (Flanagin and Metzger, 2001; Leung and Wei, 2000; Wei and Lo, 2006). The following concepts were included: instrumental use for the accomplishment of work tasks, use for micro-coordination such as instrumental social coordination (Ling, 2004), and use for socializing and expressive use. For example, the measurement instrument for four different mobile phone uses was the following:

a. Work-related use: “How often do you use your mobile phone to talk about work, business, and school matters (e.g., to arrange work meetings, to coordinate work/research/school projects, to send and retrieve news, to communicate with workmates/schoolmates)?”
b. Micro-coordinative use: “How often do you use your mobile phone to talk about practical matters such as deciding on a place or time to meet, determining transportation to a given location, locating someone else in a busy park, or trying to coordinate arriving at a location at the same time?”

c. Use for socializing: “How often do you use your mobile phone to chat, socialize, and exchange messages that are a resource of companionship and social support (e.g., to keep in touch with family, friends, or relatives, to keep up or revive personal relationships)?”

d. Expressive use: “How often do you use your mobile phone to talk about personal-intimate matters that, for example, include the sharing of your personal emotions, desires, or feelings?”

These statements were then repeated in the separated questionnaire modules for in-person communication and all the other mentioned communication technologies.

The size of an individual’s social support network was measured with a standard name-generator question developed and later widely tested by Burt (1984) on the provision of emotional social support for each respondent. Respondents could name at most twelve intimate alters. The size of their network was calculated after name interpreters were administered and the list of alters was collected for each respondent. The respondents were asked a set of questions for each of the first four alters, assessing the characteristics of their ego-alter ties (geographical distance; role relation—close family, other kin, friend, coworker, neighbor; frequency of contact; satisfaction with the support; duration of the tie—time of having known each other). The module on social networks also included a question on how often respondents communicated with each of the four named alters via each of the five media: mobile voice calling, SMS/MMS, the fixed phone, face-to-face, and the Internet. The survey question here was as follows: “How often do you communicate with (this) person generally and not only about important personal matters?”

The survey also included two indicators related to offline socializing, which served as a dependent variable. More precisely, they were asked: “How often do you pay a visit to relatives or how often do they visit you?” and “How often do you pay a visit to your acquaintances or friends or how often do they visit you?” In the final part of the questionnaire, the respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics were measured: gender, age, family status, labor status, education, and type of locality.
Data Collection and Sample

This study uses data from the 2005 RIS-IKT survey, a Slovenian application of the Eurostat survey of the adoption and use of personal computers, mobile phones, and other information-communication technology. The 2005 RIS-IKT survey was thus conducted within the framework of the Eurostat guidelines for the 2005 European Union survey. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Four 20-minute nonobligatory modules were added to the initial compulsory Eurostat part of questionnaire. The first three modules focused on the social aspects of the fixed telephone, the mobile phone, and the Internet, whereas the last module contained questions on social support networks.

The survey was conducted via face-to-face interviews in Slovenia in April and May 2005, via the collection of a multistage probability sample of individuals of at least 10 years of age. The survey had a response rate of 77.8 percent (the number of completed interviews among all eligible units in the initial sample), which is a standard response rate in Slovenia when conducting face-to-face surveys on representative household samples. This yielded 1,422 respondents, providing a strong basis for generalizing these findings to individuals aged ten and above across Slovenia.

Since only half the participants enrolled in the sample were supposed to answer all four modules in the second part of the questionnaire and 60 of them did not complete the questionnaire, the final sample was 651 and is treated as a representative sample of the general population of Slovenian residents. The sample consisted of 51 percent males and 49 percent females, distributed across the following age ranges: 10–24 (21 percent), 25–36 (18 percent), 37–52 (28 percent), and 53–75 (33 percent), with a mean age of 42.1 years (SD = 17.9). Of all respondents in the sample, 16 percent had some university education, 45 percent of them were employed, 20 percent attended school (primary, secondary, university), almost half (49 percent) were married, 35 percent lived in urban areas (towns with at least 10,000 inhabitants), and one in three (33 percent) lived in four-person households.

The RIS-IKT 2005 indicated that 556 (85 percent) of the respondents were mobile phone users, 529 (81 percent) had sent and received short text messages, and 582 (89 percent) had access to a fixed telephone in their household. The diffusion of the Internet, on
the other hand, was somewhat lower as only 337 (52 percent) of the respondents had used the Internet in the last three months at home, work, school, university, an Internet café or a public library. Hence, only 299 (46 percent) of the respondents out of 651 reported using all four communication technologies at least occasionally, while 352 (54 percent) of the respondents gave an account of having never used at least one of the four communication technologies. As we aimed to provide comprehensive insight into how personal networks are related to the communication patterns of users who are fully embedded in the network and mobile sociality, this chapter reports the communication behavior of the 299 respondents who used all five communication channels (i.e., the four technologies plus face-to-face) at least occasionally.

**Results**

*Clusters of ICT Users with Similar Communication Patterns*

Because the relationship between ICT use and the structural characteristics of personal networks emphasizes the importance of understanding how communication technologies are combined to form a complex whole, we found it inappropriate to treat the four uses of the five communication devices as twenty separate variables. The use of a single device does not occur in a vacuum, but is embedded in a communication technoscape (Boase, 2008; Licoppe and Smoreda, 2005), in which the individual nowadays can choose one device from among a set of others (five altogether in our case). For this reason, we did not treat the uses of devices as single variables but rather took the patterns of uses of all five devices as independent variables. To do this, we relied on a previous study conducted on the same data (Petrič et al., 2010), which had already detected such patterns by means of cluster analysis. The comparison of ICT use patterns between different groups will allow us to analyze the coupling of communication practices and personal network structures, determining and contextualizing the role of mobile phones in personal communities and the cohesive effects that come out of person-centered mobile communication. In what follows, we shall first draw out the ICT use patterns of the identified groups, and then examine how these patterns shape the structural characteristics of their personal networks and offline socializing.

While studying the communication practices of ICT users in Slovenia, Petrič et al. (2010) discovered four distinct clusters in these
data with recognizable patterns of the use of various communication devices (see Table 9.1): techno-ascetics, cyber-communicators, technorationalists, and mobile-traditionalists. The techno-ascetics, like all the other clusters, possess all modern information and communication devices, yet they are quite reserved in their use. They are the least intense users of all five communication channels across all four communication goals compared to all the other groups. They display a consistently below-average use of communication technologies and face-to-face channels for work-, school-, or business-related matters, as well as for sharing messages that have a relational or expressive nature. They use mobile phone voice calls and face-to-face conversations for micro-coordination most often, but not as intensely as the members of the other clusters. The cyber-communicators have fully integrated and taken advantage of the interactive affordances of new communication technologies in everyday life activities. More specifically, they exploit mobile phone voice calls, texting, and the Internet on a daily basis for both work and social purposes. Although they use mobile phones for micro-coordination and socializing less often, what separates the cyber-communicators from the other three groups is their considerably above-average use of the Internet. Moreover, they are the only group that goes online on a daily basis, not only for work matters but also to use Internet-based interactive services. The technorationalists tend to have a “rationalized,” work-oriented approach to their use of all communication channels and, with the exception of the techno-ascetics, are much less likely than the other groups to use old and new communication technologies for micro-coordination, personal matters, or socializing. Even though they have full access to the Internet, mobile, and fixed phones, they mainly exploit them as work tools, leaving in-person encounters with the primary role of conveying messages for everyday coordination and personal sharing. Finally, the mobile-traditionalists have integrated the mobile phone and texting into their lives and use them especially as a tool for socializing. Interestingly, they also show the same level of activity with more “traditional” interpersonal communication technologies, namely the fixed phone. Like the cyber-communicators, the mobile-traditionalists frequently participate in face-to-face conversations, especially in those that are relationally and expressively motivated. But, they stand apart from the cyber-communicators in their reduced online involvement and more intensive use of the fixed telephone for all four purposes. Similar to the technorationalists, the
Table 9.1  A Typology of Respondents by Uses of Five Communication Channels for Four Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Techno-ascetics</th>
<th>Cyber-communicators</th>
<th>Techno-rationalists</th>
<th>Mobile-traditionalists</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile—work</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile—micro-coordination</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile—socializing</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile—expressive</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS/MMS—work</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS/MMS—micro-coordination</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS/MMS—socializing</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS/MMS—expressive</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone—work</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone—micro-coordination</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone—socializing</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone—expressive</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-t-f—work</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-t-f—micro-coordination</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-t-f—socializing</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-t-f—expressive</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 9.1  (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Techno-ascetics</th>
<th>Cyber-communicators</th>
<th>Techno-rationalists</th>
<th>Mobile-traditionalists</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet—work</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet—micro-coordination</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet—socializing</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet—expressive</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N)</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Differences in the average between the cluster centroids and the total averages are marked with 0, +, or – in such a way that 0 indicates differences on the interval –0.35 to 0.35, + indicates differences on the interval 0.36–0.70, while ++ indicates differences larger than 0.70. The system of – is analogous to +, but indicates negative differences.
mobile-traditionalists also arrange their work/school tasks through mobile phones and fixed telephones on a daily basis. However, besides using voice calls they are more likely to exchange short text messages. The mobile-traditionalists are less likely to go online to settle work- or school-related matters than the techno-rationalists and the cyber-communicators.

The cluster membership of each unit was saved as a categorical variable, which was used in further analyses.

The Personal Networks of ICT User Clusters

Network Size

To study how the usage patterns of mediated communication are embedded in the interaction processes within personal networks, one might be satisfied with a simple analysis of variance since we have the case of a categorical independent variable and an interval-dependent one. However, it has been shown that certain ICT user groups are associated with certain demographic characteristics, which are related to the number of social ties and other network characteristics. For example, younger and better educated people are more likely to use the Internet as well as to maintain a higher level of social contact (Nie et al., 2002). Therefore, we used multiple classificatory analysis (MCA), which, in short, provides differences in average values for each category of a predictor variable that make the statistical effects of other predictors equal (Andrews et al., 1969). Unlike simpler forms of other multivariate methods, MCA can handle predictors with no better than nominal measurements and interrelationships of any form among the predictor variables or between a predictor and dependent variable.

In Table 9.2 the results of MCA using the network size as the dependent variable are presented, where two sets of parameters carry substantive relevance: betas, which are effect estimates indicating the importance of the cluster variable in the explanation of the variance in the size, satisfaction, and structure of a personal network; and adjusted predicted means, which reveal the differences in size, satisfaction, and structure of personal networks between clusters when controlled for socio-demographic predictors. The results show that those clusters of users who use various modes of communication for socializing and personal sharing have larger personal networks than clusters of users with a more reserved attitude to technology or with more focused and rationally driven usage patterns ($\beta = 0.22; p = .004$).
Table 9.2  Network Size and Structure of Respondents according to Their Usage Patterns of Communication Technologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Predicted mean</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Unadjusted</th>
<th>Adjusted for factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with network size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role structure (percent of alters who are . . .)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close family</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other kin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers/colleagues/schoolmates</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>.285</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>35.32</td>
<td>36.13</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>31.45</td>
<td>34.56</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>39.72</td>
<td>35.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>34.79</td>
<td>35.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of tie</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Information on satisfaction with support and on structural characteristics of the network was collected on the first four alters cited. Satisfaction was measured on a scale from 1 (least satisfied) to 5 (most satisfied). Gender was coded if the subject was male. Duration of tie was measured on a scale from 0 (known for no length of time) to 1 (known for one's whole life). Geographical distance was measured on a scale from 1 (least distant) to 6 (most distant).*
Even though the differences between the clusters with different communication patterns while controlling for the other characteristics decreased, on average, the cyber-communicators still had the largest supportive network, followed by the mobile-traditionalists, techno-rationalists, and techno-ascetics, who had a supportive network that was on average more than one person smaller than that of the cyber-communicators. Considering that these differences are already adjusted for the effect of the examined socio-demographic variables, we may conclude that the communication patterns these groups engage in have a relevant role with regard to the size of their personal networks. In this light, it is even more striking that none of the considered socio-demographic factors significantly correlate with the size of the support networks, leading us to the conclusion that the more intense appropriation of different communication technologies for personal sharing and exchanges of intimate matters, characteristic of the cyber-communicators and mobile-traditionalists, can effectively contribute to larger social networks in terms of emotional support.

Network Structure and Offline Socializing

In our study, the four clusters of users showed almost no difference in their satisfaction with the size of their networks ($\beta = 0.07; p = .774$). This is also confirmed by previous research on social networks (Vaux, 1988), which has shown that the success of social support does not only depend on the network size but also on the network structure, such as gender, age, and role composition (percentage of family, friends, neighbors, etc.), geographical distance, duration of ties, and the frequency of using the technology to communicate within social networks. We thus explored the difference in the social network structures of four clusters that share similar usage patterns of communication technologies.

For this purpose fifteen MCAs were run with network structure features and offline socializing as depending on usage patterns of communication technologies and selected socio-demographic characteristics. As shown in Table 9.2, it turned out that, after controlling for selected socio-demographic characteristics, the cluster membership was not significantly correlated with gender ($\beta = 0.12; p = .285$), age ($\beta = 0.05; p = .802$), role composition (all nonsignificant main effects), geographical distance ($\beta = 0.08; p = .749$), or the duration of ties ($\beta = 0.07; p = .581$) in personal networks.
Nevertheless, the results presented in Table 9.3 indicate that the clusters are associated with the frequency of using a specific technology to communicate within social networks (all main effects significant, \( p = .001 \)) with the exception of in-person contact (\( \beta = 0.04; \ p = .925 \)). Namely, after controlling for selected socio-demographic features, the cyber-communicators and the mobile-traditionalists, in comparison to the techno-rationalists and techno-ascetics, make more frequent use of mobile phones and SMS/MMS to keep in contact with network members. In line with their communication patterns, the last two groups are more frequent users of the fixed telephone, even though the mobile-traditionalists are still the most frequent users of the telephone for keeping in touch with those who provide them with emotional support. With regard to the use of the Internet to communicate within the social network, the cyber-communicators most frequently go online to exchange messages with members of their personal network, followed by the mobile-traditionalists and techno-rationalists. To sum up, it can be concluded that usage practices related to communication technology do not lead to changes in satisfaction with the support and changes in the structural composition of networks in terms of gender, age, role composition, geographical distance, and the duration of ties. However, the way people use various (un)mediated modes of communication in their everyday lives is clearly reflected in their communication practices within their personal networks. For example, the mobile-traditionalists who have readily adopted mobile phones, SMS/MMS, and fixed telephones for micro-coordination, socializing, and the exchange of expressive messages also intensely used these media to communicate within their emotional support networks. The same might be argued for the cyber-communicators, although they—in line with their usage pattern—use the Internet in place of the fixed phone to communicate within their personal network. Finally, the techno-rationalists showed a low level of frequency of ICT use within their emotional support network, which is in line with their general tendency to use communication technology primarily to co-ordinate work- or school-related matters.

Table 9.3 also enables a comparison of the four clusters by their levels of offline socializing. After controlling for all selected socio-demographic variables, cluster membership was significantly correlated with the frequency of offline socializing with acquaintances, friends, or schoolmates (\( \beta = 0.19; \ p = .029 \)) as well as with relatives (\( \beta = 0.19; \ p = .021 \)). Turning first to the comparison for socializing with nonkin,
Table 9.3  Communication within the Personal Network and the Offline Socializing of Respondents according to Their Usage Patterns of Communication Technologies \( (n = 299) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main effect</th>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Predicted mean</th>
<th>Unadjusted</th>
<th>Adjusted for factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of communication within the network(^a) Mobile telephone</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS/MMS messages</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationary telephone</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Network and Mobile Sociality in Personal Communities

#### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline socializing with acquaintances, friends, schoolmates, or colleagues</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline socializing with relatives</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-ascetics</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cyber-communicators</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techno-rationalists</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile-traditionalists</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Information on the use of communication channels to communicate within the network was collected on the first four alters cited.*

*a* The frequency of communication within the network is measured by indicators that were calculated as an average on the scale from 1 (never) to 8 (several times a day). The new variables should not be interpreted in relation to the categories of the original variables, but as ordinal variables indicating the range of frequency of contacts on a scale from 1 (least frequent) to 8 (most frequent).

*b* The frequency of offline socializing is measured by indicators that were calculated as an average on the scale from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). The new variables should not be interpreted in relation to the categories of the original variables, but as ordinal variables indicating the range of frequency of offline socializing on a scale from 1 (least frequent) to 5 (most frequent).
Table 9.3 shows that the mobile-traditionalists most frequently paid a visit to or received a visit from their colleagues, friends, or acquaintances, whereas the differences here between the cyber-communicators, techno-ascetics, and techno-rationalists were negligible. In terms of offline socializing with relatives, the mobile-traditionalists were also the most active group. However, the difference between them and the techno-ascetics and especially the cyber-communicators shrank considerably. These results indicate the embeddedness of mobile communication networks in physical space: people use mobile phones to not only connect to their spatially remote/distant ties, but also to get their personal communities together in the same geographical location. Further, they suggest the existence of a human need to fine-tune social contact, manage time, and (micro)coordinate activities in private and public spheres in an increasingly mobile manner, which combines “old” and “new” technologies. In this respect, the intense social use of ICTs does not preclude ready adopters such as the mobile-traditionalists and cyber-communicators from offline social activities and socializing; on the contrary, it has been found to augment their social circles and to intensify the communication within their personal network.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of the present chapter was to develop a clearer and more nuanced insight into how the different uses of mobile and other forms of electronically mediated communication have been involved in the changing forms of sociality, reconfiguring the organizational foundations of contemporary communities that are directly connected to the issues of social cohesion. In particular, it sought to build a conceptual framework to understand the relationship between social networks, social interactions between individuals, and the various technical means for communication today. In the circumstances of late modernity, each of these three poles poses constraints on social cohesion and provides resources for it, thus shaping the cohesive aspect of relational practices and (technologically mediated) social ties. Bearing in mind that “older” technologies for interpersonal communication, and in particular the “relational” mode of telephone usage, have already provided sketches of changing forms of interactional practices and reciprocity (Dimmick et al., 1996; Fischer, 1992; Putnam, 2000), we argued that especially mobile phones, but also Internet-based services, represent the technological background for the emergence
of increasingly mobile and networked forms of sociality. In the interlacing of these two forms of sociality, which are framed by reflexivity as the late-modern way of experiencing relationships and belonging, individuals have become increasingly connected by using the mobile and networking devices available to them. As Licoppe and Smoreda (2005) note, this emergence of technologically mediated mobile interactional exchanges has led to new ways of managing social ties in personal networks, and to different experiences of what togetherness in personal relationships actually means.

In this context, our study investigated whether the patterns of using various communication devices are reflected in the structural features of personal networks in terms of the size, composition, and communication practices within one’s emotional support networks. Our findings indicate that people draw on a variety of commonly used media in conjunction with in-person contact to stay connected with their personal networks. The extent to which the use of in-person, mobile phone, texting, telephone, and Internet communication occurs varies in complex ways with personal network size and communication processes within a network, but it seems to be unrelated to the structural composition of a personal network. The adoption of mobile phones and Internet-based interpersonal communication services tends to make one’s personal network larger and more interconnected. Thus, the largest core discussion networks were noted for the cyber-communicators, followed by the mobile-traditionalists, techno-rationalists, and techno-ascetics. Moreover, the high frequency of communication technology use for the various purposes characteristic of the first two groups was associated with the intensive use of mobile phones (both voice and SMS/MMS) in combination with either the Internet (cyber-communicators) or fixed telephones (mobile-traditionalists) to communicate within the personal network of core confidants.

When viewed from the structural perspective, the different patterns of using communication technologies did not change the network composition in terms of gender, age, role composition, geographical distance, and duration of the tie. These results are consistent with recent evidence suggesting that the social environment of core confidants surrounding the individuated individual has become smaller, more densely interconnected, and more centered on the close ties of spouse/partners, which are expected to be more stable and lasting (McPherson et al., 2006).
structural composition of personal networks was collected on the first four alters cited, it was reasonable to expect a small variation in the composition of personal networks depending on communication patterns. However, it is still plausible to hypothesize that the different usage patterns of ICTs may change the structure of social networks with higher levels of reach in which social ties tend to be more purposely selected and freely dissolved. Since it is clear by now that in different cultures mobile phones help to handle multidimensional relations within diverse spheres of everyday life (e.g., work, school, leisure, and civic participation), we suggest further research that considers the relationship between the patterns of using communication devices and the composition of social networks with a wider, less-localized array of (weak) ties, rather than the closely interconnected confidant ties that were measured here. An alternative option that also deserves future research is to explore how certain individuals’ psychological dispositions shape the structure of their social networks. Although this study showed that demographic differences do not seem to explain the differences in the size of personal networks, prior research provides evidence that the selection of communication technologies is at least partially shaped by users’ psychological dispositions that determine the very formation of personal relationships (for example, Kraut et al., 1998).

A study that would include different name generators and consider relevant psychological factors could also prove advantageous for investigating the mechanisms and forms of social cohesiveness in technologically mediated communities. When considering this issue, this study ascertained that the differential use of particular means of communication lays down a space of relational practices in offline environments. Evidence was found that mobile and online interaction correlate positively with offline socializing. More frequent and heterogeneous use of mobile and Internet communication goes hand-in-hand with more visits to both kin and nonkin. In this regard, our study has two implications for the study of the role that mobile communications play in sustaining personal networks: On the one hand, it seems to support the perspective that suggests that rather than radically altering relationships, mobile communications are embedded in personal networks as part of a larger communication system that individuals use to stay socially connected. Mobile phone calls and text messages provide a pattern of mediated interactions that does not substitute or compensate for in-person communication, but rather
coexists with previous ways of managing (mediated) relationships. On the other hand, our study suggests that the use of mobile communication devices and of other forms of technologically mediated exchange for “fine-tuning” existing social ties tends to correspond to restructured social forms that facilitate cohesion (Katz and Aakhus, 2002). For Ling (2008), these reshaped forms are represented in the emergence of ritual interactions allowed by mobile phones, which constitute a new repertoire for managing social ties in a changing communication technoscape. In other words, the positive correlation between offline socializing and use of ICTs may not only suggest that new communication technologies do not inhibit social cohesion, but also indicate that new forms of sociality are triggering changed structural forms of cohesive practices in personal networks.

To summarize, the individual focus of communication technology use embodied in the changing experience of network and mobile sociality, which form the structural backdrop to personal communities, does not necessarily carry with it the dissolution of integrative social forms. Instead, they can crystallize in new ways of managing personal interactions that are experienced as a contemporary foundation of social cohesion. However, before capturing the technological aspect of these evolving social practices it is necessary to recognize that mediated forms of personal relationships coexist with those that are constituted in unmediated forms. Failure to acknowledge this intersection or coexistence limits the possibilities of a comprehensive analysis of the social cohesiveness that bonds the contemporary techno-mediated community together.

Acknowledgments

The research presented here is part of the target-oriented basic research project “E-life: Social and Cultural Aspect of Virtual Life-Styles” (grant number: J5-7029-0582) supported by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).

Notes

1. For each statement the respondents answered on a five-point scale, from 1 (never) to 5 (daily).[0]
2. The exact translated wording was as follows: “Sometimes people discuss important personal matters with other people, for instance, when they argue with someone, have problems at work, and similar. Who do you discuss important personal matters with?”
3. 1 (living in the same household), 2 (living in the same building), 3 (living fifteen minutes or less apart by car), 4 (living fifteen to thirty minutes apart
by car), 5 (living thirty to sixty minutes apart by car), 6 (living one hour or more apart by car).

4. 1 (once a year or less), 2 (a few times per year), 3 (approximately once a month), 4 (a few times per month), 5 (approximately once a week), 6 (a few times per week), 7 (every day).

5. Satisfaction with support was measured by the question: “Please tell us how much you agree with the following statement on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means totally disagree, and 5 means completely agree”: “On the whole I’m very satisfied with the support of the above listed persons?”

6. The duration of the tie was calculated as the proportion of years of having known the alter in relation to the age of the ego. The higher the value, the longer the respondent had known his/her alter. For example, a value of 1 indicates that the respondent had known the alter for his/her entire life. A value of 0.5 indicates that the alter had been known for half of the respondent's life. A value of 0 means that the alter was not known at all. In this way, we eliminated the impact of the age of respondents on the duration of ties.

7. The response scale was: 1—“never”; 2—“once a year or less”; 3—“a few times per year”; 4—“approximately once a month”; 5—“a few times per month”; 6—“a few times per week”; 7—“every day”; 8—“several times a day.”

8. 1 (never), 2 (occasionally), 3 (monthly), 4 (weekly), 5 (daily).


10. Betas obtained with MCA are comparable to the standardized regression coefficient in linear regression. However, there are two vital differences from the regression procedure. First, the standardized coefficients in MCA are calculated for each categorical variable, instead of for each category. Second, contrary to the regression procedure, betas do not express the direction of the influence but only estimate the size of the effect.

11. In all our analyses using MCA, the effect of communication technology usage patterns (cluster membership) as a predictor variable is presented in more detail. The effect of the socio-demographic variables, which are also included in the analysis as predictor variables, is not presented. They are included in the analysis in order to identify the pure effect of cluster membership on the dependent variable (the effect that would occur if all socio-demographic characteristics were held constant).

Bibliography


Please confirm whether in Table 9.2 the usage of the percent symbol for the values under the group 'Gender' is correct.
There’s an Off-line Community on the Line!

Pat Byrne

Much of the current research on the role of technology and community is focused on online communities—people who are linked through computer networks in order to pursue common goals, including those of entertainment and friendship. This chapter, however, considers the term “community,” in its traditional sense, as persons who live and cooperate in a local area with shared goals and interests. Using a study of two sports clubs in the West of Ireland, I here look at the way in which electronically mediated communication (EMC) can be used to maintain the links between club members as individuals and, within them, as a group. In particular, the use of the mobile phone to send short message service (SMS) text messages helps to organize activities in a way that draws members closer, strengthening the effectiveness of the group as a whole and promoting social capital.

Off-Line Community

For many years, our primary experience of community members was those with whom we shared the local area where we lived. These were the people with whom we came together to work and play, to argue our rights, and to exploit our joint natural resources. Based on face-to-face relationships, and with shared life experiences, communities helped to form our identity. Now, however, increased mobility and developments in EMCs have opened up new opportunities for us to bond with people from both different and distant places. We are no longer bound by locale, but have become a “networked society” with personal selections defining the ties that we make:

Because connections are to people and not to places, the technology affords shifting of work and community ties from linking
people-in-places to linking people at any place. . . . This shift facilitates personal communities . . . that supply the essentials of community separately to each individual: support, sociability, information, social identities and a sense of belonging. (Miyata et al., 2005: 431)

Such individually defined networks are looser and less permanent. We can join and leave at will, depending on our interests and life stages. For local community groups, this ensuing transience of membership brings changes and challenges, transforming their nature, size, and persistence:

Large groups with local chapters, long histories, multiple objectives and diverse constituencies are being replaced by more evanescent, single-purpose organisations, smaller groups that reflect the fluidity of our lives by allowing us to bond easily but to break our attachments with equivalent ease. (Putnam, 2000: 184)

These off-line communities not only struggle to retain the stability and cohesiveness they previously enjoyed, but are also at risk of losing some of the strength of their local social capital.

The concept of social capital has been defined and used in the fields of economics and sociology for some time (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Coleman, 1990; Hall, 1999; Portes, 1998), but has recently had a revival of attention with the widely publicized work of Robert Putnam (2000). In his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam documents the decline of civic participation in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century, and with this the loss of social capital, which he defines as the “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000: 19). There have been various interpretations of the meaning of social capital, but from a meta-analysis of the literature, Pigg and Crank (2004) have identified five key elements commonly found in its definition: networks, resources for action, reciprocity transactions, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust.

Social capital is generally acknowledged to be a property of a group, although created and maintained through the action of individuals. It has two complementary sources: *civic engagement*, the degree to which we become involved in community affairs, and *social contact*, how we as individuals work our engagement with others through interpersonal communication patterns, including visits, encounters,
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phone calls, and social events (Quan-Haase and Wellman, 2004). As such, social capital might be thought of as a synergy created by the trust, reciprocity, and exchange mechanisms inherent in a given social network of which individual members benefit. There are also two recognized forms of social capital based on its effects. Bonding social capital ties a group together and bridging social capital allows for interaction between groups. The sense of comfort created in an environment of high social capital is seen as a positive contributor to the quality of life.

Social capital thrives within off-line communities that meet regularly, and EMCs can support its creation and continuation. There have been a number of published works that examine this, and two recent major European projects: ICTs and Social Capital in the Knowledge Society (Van Bavel et al., 2004) and Social Capital, Quality of Life and Information Society Technologies (SOCQUIT, 2006). These mainly focus on how the Internet enables community groups to gather and organize their activities, but a few studies have also examined the role of the mobile phone in enhancing social capital (e.g., Goodman, 2003; Ling et al., 2003; Sinha, 2005).

In his book The Mobile Connection, Rich Ling identifies the mobile phone as a tool that allows us to maintain our social networks in the same way as the fixed-line phone; empirical evidence shows that it is widely used to coordinate social activities (Ling, 2004). The mobile phone has the added advantages over its fixed-line counterpart in that it is direct (the caller need not be in a specific location) and individualized (calling a mobile phone targets a person, not a place). Ling also identifies the bonding aspect of mobile phone use in that the ubiquity and spontaneity provided by being in contact via mobile phone “serves to weld the social group together” (Ling, 2004: 184). Where the telephone is limited as a medium is in the types of social networks that it can maintain. As Putnam quotes from earlier writings on telephone use, “The telephone is used to maintain personal relationships now severed by space. One does not meet new friends on the telephone” (Putnam, 2000: 168). In other words, the telephone can act as a bonding, but not a bridging, tool for social engagement, complementing the ways we contact those whom we already know.

Using the Mobile Phone in a Local Community

The study described here is part of a wider piece of research that seeks to examine how local community groups might use EMCs,
specifically the mobile phone, to enable changes in their patterns of communication. Unlike work that puts the technology center stage, and (perhaps unintentionally) adopts an implicitly deterministic perspective, this study focuses on the community itself, examining how the technology has become integrated into its social fabric and contributes to the strength and cohesiveness of the group as a whole.

The local communities selected for study are two sports clubs in the West of Ireland. One of these is a rural club focused on hurling, a traditional Irish field game; the other is a women’s Gaelic football club based in an urban area. Hurling and football comprise the main sports administered by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the largest sporting body in Ireland, and members are drawn from all sections of the population and from all age groups.¹ Both games are played on a nonprofessional basis, and although the association has a sophisticated and well-structured administrative body in its Dublin headquarters, local clubs have autonomy over their activities and all work is voluntary.

As sporting clubs, both groups are dependent on face-to-face interaction for their very existence. They were set up before either computers or mobile phones were widespread and even before the fixed-line telephone became ubiquitous. Both the clubs in question are well-established, and attract members and supporters from the local area. In the rural club, members have particularly strong bonds—they often have gone to school together, live close by, have family ties, and share a social circle. In essence, this is a traditional off-line community forming “a relatively stable unit with many short and overlapping communication lines and joint activities” (Van Dijk, 2006: 166), whose members meet regularly, at least weekly during the playing season. Although much of their focus is on the games played, each club also provides an active social life for members. Taking an existing, well-networked community as a starting point enables us to examine the integration of EMCS into individual communication patterns and how technology might contribute to the functioning of group interactions. It also enables us to make a link with local social capital. While it has been suggested that sports are not wholly responsible for sustaining communities or reinforcing social capital, “sports projects and the place of sport within both imagined and active senses of communities can make a valuable contribution” (Jarvie, 2006: 336).
The study includes twenty-two in-depth interviews, fifty-five questionnaires, and extensive observation of mobile phone use within the clubs, carried out during the summer of 2006. At this time, the penetration of mobile phones in the Irish population stood at 106 percent (Commission for Communications Regulation, 2006), and all of those contacted owned a mobile phone. In fact, no one could name a club member who did not carry their own phone. The interviews were carried out in person with club players, administrators, and supporters, ten females and twelve males, ranging from eighteen to fifty-five years of age. Questions asked included details on their own appropriation of the phone, including costs and payment methods. They were asked about what communication methods they used to keep in touch with friends, family, and club members, and how they might have made these same links prior to owning a mobile phone. Questions also probed the role of the mobile phone in supporting their own lifestyle, and their perception of changes, if any, in club communication patterns since mobile phones have become widespread. The questionnaires, completed by those attending local games, were used to examine use within the wider club community. Questions covered phone appropriation, the frequency of using SMS and voice calls, and the caller’s relationship with the person called. Most of the respondents were club supporters rather than active players and administrators, and their answers reflected a more passive contribution to intra-club communication.

One-to-One Communications in the Community: Voice Calls and SMS

The study found that both mobile voice calls and SMS text messaging are widely used in both clubs. During the playing season, meetings for training or matches may mean club members meet in person several times per week; in this case, mobile phone use is limited to refining or clarifying arrangements rather than chatting or gossiping. Members who are not able to meet regularly use their mobile phone to keep up with the news of the club. For those who work or live away from their home base (particularly students who are away at college yet retain their club ties), the regular use of texts ensures they keep current with gossip and news. Text messaging very much dominates communication lines throughout both clubs. Over 70 percent of the questionnaire respondents admitted to making use of text messaging several times per day, and the remainder sent a text at least weekly.
For many players in particular, their fellow club members form the immediate circle within which they socialize. Interviewees report using the mobile phone as a key tool to organize their social lives: arranging meetings, rescheduling when delayed, or texting to see if their friends were in the vicinity on a night out. This type of use is well recognized in research, and Ling has termed it the “micro-coordination” of life (Ling, 2004). Club members and players often text to gather a social group, as described by Danny, a player in the hurling club:

Pat: And most of your text use?
Danny: To see who’s going for a pint. [laughs]
Pat: And before you got the mobile, how would you have made those contacts?
Danny: Ah, by chance meeting them. I wouldn’t ring somebody’s house now to see were they thinking about going out.
Pat: Okay. But you would ring their mobile?
Danny: Yeah.
Pat: So then, do you reckon you have more contacts with people?
Danny: With the mobile, yes. Easier contact. Even out of areas, text message, to where anybody is, where they are in town.
Pat: So in ways it has made your social life more active?
Danny: It has, more contact, yeah. (Male player)

Several interviewees report using text messages in this way, as texting enables a direct line to the recipient. Calling a fixed-line phone (which they often referred to as the “home phone”) would possibly entail engaging in conversation with a third party, or having to leave a message that they could not ensure might be delivered, and would perhaps not reach the called person at all. By texting, they do not interfere in any way with family life.

Text messages in this type of scenario create a link that would otherwise not have formed at all. This forms a distinction in the role that mobile calls and texts have taken in the overall communication repertoire of club members. Respondents report that, to some extent, their mobile voice calls replace fixed-line calls, but text messages provide an additional line of communication. When these extra links
end in a face-to-face meeting, it serves to tighten the circle of friends. One person acknowledged the effect of this:

It’s very handy then when you can just text all your friends and meet up, like. And I suppose the relationship is stronger, the more we see of each other. (Male player).

No matter what the message content, any communications between meetings keeps a complex network in place.

Some members also report that sending texts on their mobile phones has not just brought existing friends closer, but also widened their set of friendships overall. One interviewee describes getting the mobile phone numbers of players on opposing teams, which has widened his circle of friends:

It broadened [my circle of friends] more. . . . Just, say I’d meet them once, and just take their number, and I can text them there an odd time, that’s how we get on, then. . . . Even people I met and play matches with, and talked to . . . and [I] text them later on, and meet them again. (Male player)

This pattern of behavior arose quite a few times in interviews. Swapping mobile numbers is something that is done very casually within the wider GAA community, for example, with anyone who strikes up a conversation or shares interest in the games. Getting a mobile number from someone also confers permission to contact them, even for a small query:

You can . . . it is very socially acceptable to text them. And it doesn’t mean that you are friendly, or anything, it’s just handy to ask them a question or something. (Male player)

This expands the closed organic community into the outside world—embracing a larger definition of the word. The list of numbers held on one’s phone (referred to as the “phone book”) forms a gateway to a double layer of friends, regular close contacts and also more distant acquaintances:

There is a closed group. There is also an expanded group as well, [a] more outside group, from the point of view of just meeting friends, like . . . [for] my twenty-first [birthday party], I just invited people
on my phone. I just went down through all my contacts . . . and they came. So my phone dictates my contacts. (Male player)

In both of these interviews, there is recognition of an inner and an outer circle of friends, where the club, the local community, is part of the inner circle. These are the contacts with whom they meet and interact regularly, while those in the outer circle are more peripheral to their lives and easier to lose touch with. However, interviewees explained how they use text messages to keep this outer circle alive. This could be prompted by casually browsing through the phone book and seeing the name of someone they haven’t spoken to for a while, which then results in sending a text just to “check in” and catch up with any news. It could also be a deliberate action: two interviewees who had studied in Dublin and had a set of friends there now use text messages to keep those contacts active.

The club players in particular are a very close group and often engage in the common Irish activity of “slagging” or teasing their teammates. Several players described using text messages to “slag off” others about their performance: “Why did you miss that goal?” (male player). This is an activity that seems particularly suited to text messages rather than voice, possibly because a text message is less loaded in its connotations and is less likely to embarrass the recipient. For senders, it also had the advantage of not having to experience a face-to-face retaliation while giving them the enjoyment of wondering about the other’s reaction:

I suppose there are some people you get more fun out of texting than ringing . . . slagging and teasing and—just messing. (Female player)

Slagging on a voice call could easily be misinterpreted, as the secondary signals that make this form of humor acceptable (such as smiles and nudges) are absent. There is also the danger that misinterpretation could cause insecurity in the recipient. This is still the case when sending a text although the inclusion of a simple emoticon—such as a “smiley face”;)—will display the spirit in which the message is sent.

The one interaction that is generally not deemed suitable for a voice call (but which could be done by text) is a postmortem of the team’s performance. This is either the subject of a short text to express an immediate reaction or else a social meeting for a more extended
face-to-face analysis. The initial text is usually an expression of euphoria or disappointment:

I’d have one or two buddies, I suppose, that I would text. You might say, “I’m pissed off after that game” or “That was rubbish” or “That was brilliant.” If it’s basic frustration or over-joyment (sic), or whatever, it could be text. (Female player)

Practically everyone agrees that a more detailed post-match analysis is definitely something for face-to-face meetings, usually in the local pub. The idea of using an expensive voice call for such extended discussions or reminiscing is dismissed out of hand.

Over all, the use of text from a mobile phone in all these scenarios helps to create group bonds and keep the group active. As an extra communication line, texting tightens the links to existing ties by providing an easy way to gather and organize. The phone book acts as a repository for contact numbers, which widens one’s circle and provides a ready means to maintain even loose ties.

*Group Communications in the Community: Broadcast SMS*

Text messages are important for maintaining social interaction in the clubs and have become a key tool in the successful administration of each club, which is done on a voluntary basis. Every GAA club has a formal committee responsible for the day-to-day running of the club and its premises (clubroom, social center, and pitches). They also have a number of team managers and trainers, each responsible for one of the several teams for different age groups and levels that may comprise the club. All of these personnel need to communicate directly and quickly with a defined set of members and use their own mobile phones to do so, using broadcast SMS (or “group text”).

Sending an SMS message to a group of people at once can be done either through web-to-phone access or using the “distribution list” function found within the software of (some) handsets. All of the Irish mobile phone service providers offer a limited number of free texts—up to three hundred—per month through their Web sites, in a single transaction, to all members of a prespecified group. This works much like setting up an e-mail list. For instance, the manager of the under-18 hurling team may have the mobile numbers of all of the team set up as a list, and he or she then creates a text message to inform them of a change in the venue of an upcoming match. The manager sends it once, and all on that list receive the message. This
type of communication would originally have been done by the regular postal service or by face-to-face contacts—calling at houses, passing messages through others, or having an announcement made in the local church. In more recent years, use of the fixed-line telephone may have reduced the amount of work engendered, but burdened the sender with many calls to ensure everyone was informed. The use of group text messages renders the job simply and swiftly.

Using group texts offers a direct and speedy method of distributing information, particularly valuable for last-minute changes. It is much more convenient than using the fixed-line phone, and the managers, trainers, and committee members are all very enthusiastic about its affordance. Talking about her use of the technology, one manager says:

I do that a few times a week. I find it very, very good. To do it by landline, you’d have to hang up the phone, and lift it again, and dial every number, [and] engage in conversation, and sometimes the person wouldn’t be there, and you’d have to go back and try that number again later. At least with a text message it’s gone. And whether they read it there and then, or read it the next day, it will deliver eventually. It is fantastic. (Female manager)

The club members who receive the text are passive in this transaction—they reply only if they can’t make the session. They too are very positive about its use and appreciate the timeliness and speed of the information they receive. In particular, getting immediate updates on a change of venue or cancellation of a match due to weather conditions often eliminates unnecessary travel, an important factor especially for rural dwellers. Everyone is aware that the texts that they receive are sent to the group, and it makes them feel included: as one put it, “[it] makes you feel inside the circle” (male player). This is particularly important for younger or newer members.

In the GAA clubs, administrators are regular club members who volunteer their time to the club, taking on their post usually for one year. When doing this voluntary work, they do not use a club-provided handset, in effect also volunteering the use of their own mobile phone and personally picking up any costs that might accrue. In the interviews, no one mentioned the added cost of keeping in touch with club members, probably because broadcast SMS is currently offered as a cheap feature (multiple sends for a single price or with free access through the Internet). Another important factor for
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the club is that since administrative jobs are greatly eased by text use, they are then more attractive to any potential incumbent. When a new member takes on an administrative post, the previous member can easily forward any numbers they need.

Although the use of broadcast SMS in the club has been positive in keeping the group together, there is a possibility that its overuse (or misuse) could have an adverse effect. The text messages usually come from one person, and are often directive in content, which could lead them to being considered as a form of control. It is a thin line between getting a simple reminder that helps to organize one's busy life and a feeling of being inundated with instructions on how to act. The texts could at some future time be viewed by club members as an “electronic leash” similar to the use of mobile phones by parents to keep tabs on their offspring (Ling and Yttri, 2006). Just as children “kick back” to subvert this, the members might ignore or resend the text messages. To minimize this possibility, it may be necessary to limit the number of texts and to ensure that their tone is encouraging rather than dictatorial. Just one interviewee mentioned dissatisfaction with the nature of the messages she received:

I would say that group texts are very impersonal. Say, for example, I get a text: “We definitely have training this evening at 7 o’clock.” People might ignore it, and say, “That’s a group text.” Whereas if it was sent directly, “Hi Sandra, make sure you train this evening,” you’d probably pay more heed to it. (Female player)

Although her point is valid, the suggested alternative solution of a tailored message negates the reduction in administrative burden engendered by sending a generic group message.

The group text message defines a closed loop for communication and, in doing so, excludes as well as includes members. This is currently not a problem in the clubs, as the creation of a text group is a very casual thing, and anyone who might need to know the information distributed can easily ask to join. Since the objective of the text is to bring people in, not to form an elitist group, widening the circle is not a problem. Having a restricted group might be seen as discriminatory, but there would be little advantage to having texts on, for instance, the timing of a meeting sent to everyone. Another source of potential problems would be if a text was written to inspire players but in a tone that provoked aggression toward the opposing team. While friendly rivalry is encouraged, the GAA as an association...
discourages any expression of aggression both on and off the pitch. Such text messages are not part of the ethos of the sport.

Although none of these points were raised in interview, they are all potential (negative) scenarios that could emerge from the use of group texts as practiced in the clubs. It might be seen that a delicate balance in the number and tone of texts sent needs to be maintained in order to keep their effect positive for all concerned.

**Communicating Community with SMS**

Both clubs have been in existence before the widespread use of mobile phones and have always needed to have extensive contact with their members to organize activities and inform about fixtures and results. Face-to-face meetings are, and will remain, the key way in which the clubs communicate and maintain their solidity. Now, text messaging has become an important medium for them for communication both between individual members and within the group as a whole. They are using the mobile phone as a mediator in maintaining and promoting the links that bind them together.

Individual club members have woven use of the mobile phone into their own personal social lives, which of course includes their sports activities. They report that text messages form an extra link in their communications repertoire and are often used between face-to-face meetings for reminders and keeping in contact. The more the group members interact with each other, the closer they become, tightening their social circle. Individual members are also aware of the benefits of receiving group texts. They get updates in club news directly and accurately, irrespective of their personal circumstances or location. They know that the message content often will save them time and travel.

It is not just the texts sent, but also the software features of the handset that help to keep links alive. When a text message is a reminder for an upcoming meeting or training, a bonus is that the receiver can keep the information stored on their mobile. The fact that text messages are stored until the receiver elects to delete them means that the handset can be used to retain details of upcoming meetings, and the message itself can act as a diary entry. Ling describes this use of the mobile as a “repository of personal history” (Ling, 2008), and it is a practice that is becoming more frequent: for example, airlines text flight reference numbers to travelers, replacing the need for paper records. Of course, the main use of the handset software is the phone book feature to record personal contacts. This enables the
handset’s owner to call on any part of that social network, literally at
the push of a button, and also enables him/her to collect and store
new contacts easily. This eases maintenance of relationships both
close and distant, and using text messages is a cheap and fast way to
keep these connections active. Interestingly, for such functions, it is
the mobile phone’s use as a piece of electronic technology (its data
storage capacity), rather than its use as a communication tool, that
delivers these benefits to the holder.

For the club as a community, use of the group text feature has many
obvious advantages. There is a guarantee that the message is delivered
directly to the targeted person, with no need for an intermediary or
the small talk that is part of the social protocol of a voice call. This also
saves time for the sender and ensures message consistency compared
to making multiple voice calls or separate texts. This means less panic
over last-minute changes, as they are more easily able to respond
to changes in match arrangements. This builds flexibility into club
affairs. Also the ease of workload afforded by the mobile phone to the
voluntary job of club administrator cannot be overlooked. Such jobs
as managing a team or serving on a club committee can put serious
demands on personal time, and any tool that eases the responsibility
is positive for an administrator. Making administrative jobs simpler
for, and thus more attractive to, volunteers is beneficial to the club
as a whole, as a turnover in personnel helps to maintain enthusiasm
and gives voice to representative contribution:

Community itself must mean more than just a common bond
between individuals or a sense of belonging and obligation to
others . . . [it must] mean in part democratic community in which
members of the community or the club have a real say over deci-
sions affecting them. (Jarvie, 2006: 331)

A regular turnover of those carrying out the club administration
enables a wider group of people to share in the direction of their joint
activities.

Using group texts also provides some indirect benefits to the club,
mainly in bonding the group together. Getting a message from the club
regularly reminds each member of their part within the community
as a whole. The feelings of inclusion created here have been noted
in other studies, such as that of Farnham and Keyani (2006), who
implemented a group text message system among a number of socially
active friends. In their analysis, members reported a strong sense of
connection to the group, even for those who did not themselves ever broadcast messages. In a study of the impact of computer networking on community, Kavanaugh (1999) surveyed parents who were sent information through e-mail—the equivalent of a group text—by a school board. In this case, 91 percent of respondents reported that having news communicated to them through the list had made them feel more involved in school issues. Being included in an information ring serves to automatically bind members to a group.

The promotion of equality is another unexpected side effect of the group texts. The fact that everyone is getting the same message at the same time is important to recipients, as it reassures them they are all on same footing. If such messages were to be delivered by a method that did not ensure simultaneous receipt, being forgotten from a list, or receiving a message after hearing it from someone else, could create the feeling of being marginalized. The chairman of one of the clubs acknowledged this:

> People feel left out if they aren’t informed of something. Whereas if quite a few people are informed, and you are the one who is not, you’d wonder why. You know, in other years, before mobiles, that was never a problem. (Male chairman)

The last piece of this comment also brings up another point. Before group texts were available, members accepted that messages could be delivered late or that they could be missed out in a complex relay system. Once this equity of information has been established in the club, ceasing it would have a negative effect.

There is no doubt that use of the mobile phone has a bonding effect within both clubs, drawing members together and keeping the ties between them active. Using the five elements of social capital defined earlier—networks, resources for action, reciprocity transactions, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust (Pigg and Crank, 2004)—it can be seen that social capital is also fed through text interactions. The text messages themselves comprise a network of links that define the extent of the community as a group. The use of broadcast SMS to encourage members in their participation and contribution to club affairs acts as a resource for action. Enforceable trust within the group is fed by the shared understanding of expected behavior emanating from the text messages—attendance and contribution to community as a whole. Reciprocity transactions are most likely to occur among those who regularly keep in touch with each other.
Conclusion

The “off-line” communities in this study have integrated mobile phone use into their communication patterns in innovative ways in order to help run, and successfully operate, their sports clubs. Regular meetings are the cornerstones of local community interaction, but the mediated links afforded by the mobile phone can help to keep it active when members go their separate ways:

Mediated interaction can enhance the broader co-present forms of interaction and can also function in its own right as a means through which members of a group can engage one another and develop a common sense of identity. Indeed . . . the directness and ubiquity of the channel can lead to a tightening of the social bonds within a group. (Ling, 2008: 119)

The role of EMCs in contributing to active citizenship is paradoxical—it sometimes intervenes to distract us from our interaction with others, and yet it also facilitates it. As members of a sports club, these individuals contribute to the civic engagement portion of what defines social capital. When using their mobile phones, they contribute to the social action portion.

Old-style “place and purpose,” off-line community is alive not only in sports clubs in Ireland but also in neighborhood groups in Chicago, the community gardens in Havana and the barrios of Barcelona. In all of these cases, “real” community is practiced face-to-face, but technology can have a supportive role in keeping communications alive and facilitating the logistics of organizing the group. With just a little user innovation and careful use, the mobile phone can ensure it is part of this equation.

Note

1. Members of the GAA are from all segments of the population. Forty percent of members come from either the skilled or semiskilled manual working class and 33 percent come from the higher or lower professional class. There is a wide spread of ages, with 43 percent being over forty and 28 percent under twenty-five (Delaney and Fahey, 2005).

Bibliography


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[AuQ1] AU: The bibliographic entry of Ling (2004a) has been deleted, since this citation was changed to SOCQUIT (2006). Please confirm.

[AuQ2] The year for “SOCQUIT” has been changed from 2008 to 2006, as per text citation. Please confirm.
Introduction

The remote Australian Outback is a popular destination for domestic tourists. Its sparsely populated and rough terrain attracts tourists seeking a quintessentially Australian experience. Roads are often unmade and in poor condition. Fuel, food supplies, and health services are widely dispersed, and there is little permanent accommodation. Apart from a small number of regional centers, there is no access to cell phones or radio broadcasts. As a consequence, tourists must be largely self-sufficient. While the primary roads carry significant road traffic, it is possible to drive all day on secondary roads without seeing another person. Isolation and self-sufficiency are both an attraction and a challenge.

Traveling in campervans, towing caravans, or camper trailers and staying in caravan parks, national parks, roadside stops, or alone in the bush, tourists spend extended times in areas where there are few others. Many tourists deal with this isolation by equipping their vehicles with UHF Citizen Band (CB) radios. Depending on the terrain, they are able to listen to and participate in conversations with other CB users within a 10– to 20 kilometer range. In areas where there are repeater stations, the range of radio transmissions can be extended. This chapter examines the role of these CB radios in the daily life of tourists in the Australian Outback and considers the implications of these uses for the future of mobile telephony.
Background

CB radio was extremely popular in the United States during the 1970s. Public attention was directed to CB radio in 1973 and 1974 when independent truck drivers used CB radio to stage highway blockades and protest against the speed limits imposed by the federal government to reduce fuel consumption during the Middle East oil crisis. Nontruckers also started using CB radio to share information about the presence of police and to avoid speeding tickets (Marvin and Schultze, 1977: 104). Adoption of CB radio was rapid, with an estimated sixteen million radios in use by 1976, and user numbers increasing at the rate of 400 to 500,000 per month (Packer, 2002: 41). While truckers used CB radio to organize political protests, warn colleagues of the presence of police, and for social chat to alleviate boredom, Dannefer and Poushinsky (1979) have suggested that the rapid adoption of CB radio by nonprofessional drivers was the result of several other factors. These included the extensive media coverage given to the highway shutdowns staged by truckers and the celebration of CB radio in popular songs. But the most important factor was the recognition by automobile drivers of the “great impact such a medium would have on their experience of the road” (Dannefer and Poushinsky, 1979: 613).

Gordon (1981) explored the significance of CB radio for users by monitoring urban CB conversations and interviewing users. He found that CB interactions could be classified as “talk-for-the-sake-of-talk” between strangers, conversations between people who had an existing relationship, and conversations associated with the task of driving. He found that the dominant form of interaction in urban areas was between people who had a preexisting relationship. These could be family members, work colleagues, or regular “CB buddies.” One of the key issues inhibiting social chat in urban areas was overcrowded communication channels and abuses such as commandeering channels to deny access to others. Because of these impediments to ready access to CB channels, Gordon suggested that the sociable use of CB radio was undergoing a “phase of ‘corruption’” (24) and that it would ultimately stagnate. Despite this, he argued that given the effectiveness of CB radio for conversation between people with existing relationships and for managing issues associated with driving, CB would continue to be used.

Gordon also argued that the rural experience of CB radio could be different from that in cities. This was because there was less channel
congestion in rural areas. Other researchers suggested that CB radio had a special appeal for rural highway drivers—whether they were professional truck drivers or ordinary citizens. According to Dan-nefer and Poushinsky (1979), CB radio transformed the impersonal and atomized experience of highway driving for nonprofessional drivers in rural settings. They suggested that highway driving is an archetypal example of that distinctly modern form of alienation and individualization characteristic of life in the United States. With CB radio, motorists no longer experienced each other as atomized unrelated strangers. Other motorists were not automatically defined as malevolent strangers, but rather as potential “buddies” who could be relied upon for information and aid (616). CB radio was seen as a way of creating new forms of community (Kerbo et al., 1978) and intimate social networks from the privacy afforded by the automobile (Klein and Luxemburg, 1981).

In the thirty years since the heyday of CB radio in the United States, the popularity of CB radio has declined. While there are no statistics on the current use of CB radio, it is apparent that CB radio is the domain of enthusiastic hobbyists in urban areas and professional truckers on highways. For ordinary citizens, the cell phone has become the mobile communications tool of choice. But in areas of Australia such as the Outback, where there is little or no cell phone coverage, CB radio is an important communication tool for professional truckers, local residents, and tourists.

**Theoretical Issues**

Research has shown that travelers use mobile communication services and a range of other communication strategies to maintain a “symbolic proximity” with family, friends, and colleagues (Wurtzel and Turner, 1977) and to promote a sense of “presence while absent,” or “co-presence” (Arminen, 2009; Gergen, 2002; Lury, 1997; Relieu, 2009; Short et al., 1976; White and White, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). Central to the original notion of co-presence was that it was contingent on those involved in a given communication both being and feeling close enough to perceive each other and to be perceived in the course of their activities (Goffman, 1963). That is, the notion of co-presence initially referred to physical presence in face-to-face contact and interactions. However, increasing use of cell phones in particular has meant that this sense of connection can be affirmed at a distance. Mobile communication can be seen as one influence on the “transformation of place
into a space of flow” (Campbell and Ling, 2009: 255). These changes are accompanied by shifting meanings of social connection.

The links between travel, new communication technologies, and a diminished spatial–time divide have been explored by John Urry (2002). He suggests that mobile electronic devices make it possible for people “to leave traces of their selves in informational space” (266). Using these informational traces, mobile communication technologies “track” the movements of travelers, enabling them to communicate synchronously. People become “nodes in multiple networks of communication and mobility” (266).

The communication patterns of travelers and their social interactions exemplify the challenges and possibilities of the spatial-time divide described by Urry. In the face of ongoing mobility, social encounters are significant to tourists, providing them with the opportunity to develop and affirm understandings of their shared common occupation of unfamiliar social and cultural landscapes (Harrison, 2003). Both transitory and enduring relationships provide information, companionship, and resources that allow tourists to create, share, and give meaning to their experiences (Stokowski, 1992). Communication technology also enables individuals to enter and remain part of social networks while physically absent and distant from them (Johnsen, 2003; Makimoto and Manners, 1997; Urry, 2003). The result is a “nomadic intimacy” in an everyday social and physical environment characterized by extended spaces and individual freedom to move around in these spaces (Fortunati, 2002). For travelers in the Australian Outback, this “nomadic intimacy” is both literal and metaphorical, in contrast to what Williams (2003) has described as “mobile privatization,” where people watching television or driving in cars are cut off from others involved in the same activity (19).

But what happens when travelers do not have access to cell phones and the Internet and, as a consequence, do not have access to their networks of family, friends, and colleagues? How do they deal with travel and isolation in a harsh environment? These issues are the starting point for the present study of travelers’ experience of CB radio in the remote Australian Outback. This exploration of how the CB radio has been incorporated into the daily lives of these travelers can be seen as a contribution to an understanding of the domestication of mobile communications (Haddon, 2003) and a way of exploring what Marvin (1988: 98) has described as “constructed complexes of
habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication” associated with CB radio.

Methodology

People were included in the study if they used CB radios while traveling as tourists in remote parts of Western Australian and the Northern Territory. The participants were approached in caravan parks, in camping grounds, and at roadside stops. Most were traveling in caravans, while others were using camper trailers and campervans. Twenty-four travelers were interviewed, twelve men and twelve women. All were traveling with partners or spouses, and one group of two couples was traveling together. They ranged in age from twenty-five to seventy years, and all were Australian residents. The duration of their travels varied from six weeks to eleven months. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews were transcribed and then thematically coded with respect to regularly articulated points of view. Where points of view were distinctive, they were noted during the coding process as contrasting instances. While the relatively small sample size limits generalizability, the issues raised by the respondents provide insights into the meaning of CB radio use in the daily life of travelers in the Australian Outback.

Results

Two broad dimensions of CB radio use by tourists were discerned in people’s responses. The first dealt with motivating factors for its use, which included concerns about safety in an unfamiliar and isolated environment, and also the desire for social contact. The second issue was the set of implicit rules that guided the social contact enabled by CB radio. This etiquette structured how tourists made it known that they were available for contact, and how conversations should be conducted. It also allowed for covert “participation” in the conversations of others.

Why Tourists Use CB Radio

Staying Safe

The primary reason given for traveling with a CB radio was personal safety. The tourists interviewed were aware of the risks associated with traveling in the Outback. Health emergencies, car accidents, and problems with tires in a harsh and hot environment without ready access to water were often mentioned. As one traveler explained, “If
you call a mayday, someone will come out and answer” (female, fifty-five). Another interviewee reported:

Last year, we helped some folks who were bogged in the sand right at the end of the road in the middle of nowhere. The wife just started calling the various channels explaining that they were bogged and asking whether there was anyone out there. . . . We went and towed them out. . . . It would have been a long walk for them to get help. (Female, fifty-five)

Even though most interviewees had not themselves experienced a personal emergency, many recounted stories about how CB radio had been used to come to the aid of someone in distress. The potential safety benefits of CB radio were presented as the primary justification for purchase.

Road conditions were another concern. Travelers were often very concerned about hazards ahead. One traveler noted:

You are always going to hear someone who gives you an insight as to what is happening up ahead on the road. If there’s an accident up ahead, someone’s going to get on the radio and let people know. Or there could be road works or the road could be shitty. (Male, fifty)

Safety arose in another context. Tourists share the rough and often dusty roads with road trains towing up to three trailers. These vehicles can be fifty meters long. A road train creates wind turbulence when it passes a car, trailer, or caravan, and the dust it raises reduces visibility. Because of this, drivers need to be extremely careful when they pass or are passed by these vehicles. Passing a road train at hundred kilometers an hour can require a traveling distance of up to 2.5 kilometers. Interviewees reported that they communicated with road train drivers to negotiate a safe time and place to pass. One caravanner noted:

Sometimes you see a road train coming up behind you. You call him up and say, “I’ll pull over for you mate and slow down and you go.” You use it a lot because it’s safer. We are not in a hurry. Road trains are working, and they are in a hurry and he [sic] is bigger, so he has the right of way. (Male, fifty)

As with the dominant rationale for installing and using a CB radio, Rice and Katz (2003) showed that concern about safety is the primary motive for women acquiring a cell phone, and safety was also important for men. Young people have given similar reasons for using cell
phones (Aoki and Downes, 2003). For CB users in the Outback, the social contact enabled by CB radio provided a means of tracking the movements of other travelers who were nearby. This tracking ability engendered a sense of comfort and enabled them to communicate and exchange information synchronously in a potentially dangerous environment. As a result, a “metaworld” (Suvantola, 2002) of “informational traces” (Urry, 2002) was created by users which enabled them to signal a desire to engage in conversation.

**Overcoming Isolation**

Loneliness was another theme emerging from the interviews. One of the attractions of the Outback is its sparse population. As one interviewee noted, “You can travel all day and not see another soul” (Female, 35). But this loneliness can be a challenge. Another traveler stated, “Some of these roads are pretty lonely. The radio lets you know that there’s somebody else out there” (male, fifty-four). Hearing other travelers talk was comforting. As with previous research showing that travelers use mobile communications services to maintain a “symbolic proximity” (Gergen, 2002; Lury, 1997; Short et al., 1976; White and White, 2005a, 2007), the CB radio conversations enabled the travelers to feel this sense of connection. These interactions also offered them the possibility of converting mediated relationships into face-to-face encounters along the road. That is, some travelers reported that CB-based chats with people while they were driving would lead to a decision to stop along the road for a shared morning tea or lunch.

*How Tourists Use CB Radio*

**Inviting Conversation**

All interactions entail conventions and signals that enable a conversation to commence. These conventions were also seen to apply to CB conversations. Driving in a car or truck involves being physically enclosed, with the drivers and passengers being either invisible or only partially visible to other travelers. Caravanners deal with this lack of visibility in a number of ways. Many have their first names, the name of their caravan, and the channel they use painted on the rear of their van. A typical sign was “Bill and Rose, Traveling Everywhere, Channel 18,” or “Harry and Mary, Bugger Work, Gone Fishing” or just “Channel 18” clearly visible to anyone coming from behind. (Where names were advertised, the male partner’s name was invariably first.) These signs indicated that the occupants of the van or caravan were
available for conversations with other travelers. One traveler said that if he saw such a sign, he would call up by saying:

“Hello, Harry and Mary.” From then on who knows where it goes. It depends on the people. If someone comes back really cheery and a bit cheeky, I can be cheery and cheeky back. (Male, fifty)

The names of caravans were used in other more personal ways. One couple from South Africa had given their van a Zulu name as a way to identify their origins and encourage a specific kind of conversation while they were on the road. This couple reported:

People call us up and ask us what it means. We have lots of calls about that. We’ve had more conversations about that than anything else. (Male, sixty-seven)

Another caravanner reported that he had seen a van with “Nanna and Poppa” on the back. They used that as a cue to start a conversation about their grandchildren.

Caravan names linked to their CB radio channel can also have a deeper personal meaning. One couple had their first names and the number 58 on the rear of their van. (The number 58 is beyond the range of CB channels.) On further questioning, they revealed that the number 58 was the football club number of a daughter who had died. The sign was an attempt to deal with their grief, and its public display allowed for others to enter into a conversation about grief and loss:

It has probably backfired because it puts people back into their shell. Because they think, “We don’t want to talk about death . . . But because of the sign, we’ve met people who’ve lost a child too. (Male, fifty)

As Featherstone (2004) notes, drivers develop competence in switching between a range of communication modes while they are traveling. These range from body gestures to formal signaling devices on other cars. Signage on caravans designed to invite conversation was a specialized signaling device specific to the CB user.

**Conversing**

As mentioned above, conversations between tourists dealt primarily with safety on the road, but also with the exchange of travel information and tips that characterize travelers’ conversations worldwide.
Conversations would also consist of the small talk and chitchat between acquaintances about such things as the weather or the surrounding scenery. When friends were traveling in a convoy of two or more cars, CB radio was used to converse while they were on the move. These conversations helped to fill time on the long stretches of road, and the content was often gendered. One explained:

The girls love to talk about their knitting and work out what they’ve done wrong. We sometimes tell jokes. Also we work out what we are going to do in the next town. (Male, sixty-seven)

These extended conversations parallel the lengthy conversations between drivers equipped with CB radio in the United States during the 1970s: Dannefer and Poushinsky (1979) described those conversations “as diverse as those found at a cocktail party” (614). CB conversations are one instance of relationships free of the obligation of ongoing attachment. Simmel (1950: 45) has written about these kinds of relationships and the sociability that defines them: namely an engagement with others that has “no objective purpose, no content, no extrinsic results” other than the success of the particular interaction, and relies on tact and on the personalities among whom it occurs. Conversations are characterized by quick changes of topic: the topic is simply the means. It can include the telling of stories, anecdotes, and jokes that keep the conversation away from individual intimacy. The social standing or status of the participants in these interchanges is irrelevant, and reference to these status markers is “tactless” because it “intrudes on and militates against interaction” (Simmel, 1950: 46). As Simmel writes, “Sociability thus calls for the purest, most transparent and most casually appealing kind of interaction” (49).

Lofland (1989) has called the relationships structured by these kinds of conversations “unpersonal bounded.” She writes:

I use the term *unpersonal* rather than impersonal to describe a relationship that is simultaneously characterized both by social distance and by closeness. Persons in these relationships may share little, if any, intimate information about themselves (they may not know each others’ names, for example) or if they share such information, they do so with the understanding that no relational intimacy is implied. At the same time, the relationship is experienced as ‘friendly’ or ‘sociable’—its emotional temperature as being ‘warm,’ I use the term *bounded* to convey the restriction of the relationship to public space. (469)
Although these impersonal/bounded relationships, by definition, did not “leak over” into the private realm, they provided the tourists with a means for ongoing social engagement.

In addition to conventions governing the content of conversations, conventions also governed the use of specific channels. Rules governing the use of emergency channels are imposed by government, but other conventions regulating the use of specific channels are user-generated. For instance, Channels 18 and 40 were seen as “working channels.” Some interviewees felt very strongly about people who “cluttered up” these channels and moved to another unused channel when they wanted to have an extended conversation. One couple was unaware of the local convention and could not understand why no one was calling them up. They later discovered that they were on the “wrong channel.” Interviewees traveling in a convoy would use the standard channel for travelers and then agree to move to another channel of their choice for an extended conversation: “When we travel in a convoy, we go off Channel 18 and use another channel to talk” (Male, sixty-seven).

CB conventions in contemporary Australia attempted to deal with the problems the United States experienced in the 1970s when CB channels in urban areas were so congested that they became unusable. While there was never the possibility of congested channels in the Outback, CB users were careful to ensure that their conversations did not interfere with other CB users. They were particularly careful to make sure that they did not interfere with truckers and farm workers who relied on CB radio for their livelihood and safety.

Eavesdropping

CB radio makes it possible to listen to the conversations of others, and it is a common practice with tourists. While modern automatic telephone systems make eavesdropping impossible, eavesdropping on the telephone conversations of others was a common activity when telephone subscribers shared one “party line” in the rural United States in the 1920s (Fischer, 1992: 71). Telephone companies regularly cautioned subscribers against eavesdropping on the conversations of others who shared their party line. While telephone users expressed their concerns about the possibility that their conversations might be overheard by switchboard operators or by their neighbors, oral histories of the period suggest that eavesdropping on the telephone conversations of others was a common pleasure of rural life (Fischer, 1992: 241).
Modern CB radios have the capacity to continuously scan all forty channels, and when a conversation is found, the scanning stops. The tourists routinely left their CB radios in scanning mode. This meant that travelers would often overhear conversations between strangers. They would also overhear conversations between others where they themselves were subject of a conversation. For example:

We scan all the channels so you can hear anyone coming up behind, especially trucks, and you can hear them say, “That damn caravan,” and you can say, “That damn caravan will pull over at the first opportunity.” (Female, forty-four)

The act of listening in on other people’s conversations created dilemmas for some travelers. One interviewee described it as “voyeurism for the ears.” While she described listening to farm conversations as giving her an insight into daily life on huge cattle station, she was tempted to butt into one conversation that she was listening to. On reflection, she decided against entering the conversation. She said:

I didn’t want them to know that we were eavesdropping on their conversation. I’d be embarrassed if a third party knew that we were listening in. I guess that I’ve been taught that you shouldn’t listen in to other people’s conversations. It’s not good manners. (Female, thirty-five)

When travelers overheard conversations between road train or truck drivers, they had mixed responses. These conversations were often sexually loaded and seen as “coarse” by the middle-class travelers. Some were forgiving of the conversational excesses, distinguishing themselves from the rough and tumble world of the “truckies.” One traveler noted:

[Truck drivers use] a lot of bad language, but you’ve got to go with that, because that’s the type of people they are. But you have to go with the flow. We know that we are “playing,” and the truckies are “working,” so you have to be considerate to them. (Female, fifty)

While the language of the truck drivers was often threatening to middle-class travelers, overhearing their conversations was also seen as a comfort. One traveler remarked, “Sometimes you hear truckies talking about their families, and they obviously know each other. It’s kind of nice to see how they think” (female, 50).
Travelers had similar feelings when they overheard conversations from cattle stations. Local cattle station workers and their families would use CB radios for their social and working communications. Travelers would often overhear these conversations. One traveler noted:

When we are driving through a cattle station, we work out which channel they are using, and we lock it on that one. And then we listen until they are out of range. We are city people, and listening to the station chatter gives us a bit of an insight into what it must be like as a farmer working land out here. And then we talk about the farmers’ conversations. (Female, thirty-five)

Another traveler noted, “If you are traveling and there’s nothing you can see, you can listen to the farmer talking to his wife or the kids. It’s absolutely awesome to hear conversations on radio” (female, sixty-seven).

This empathetic listening allows the travelers to imagine the lives of others in settings quite different from those with which they are familiar. Furthermore, hearing farmers talking about fixing the fence in the left paddock or rounding up strays “makes you feel that you’re not alone.” The networking of the travelers’ social life arising from listening in to others meant that they were able to learn about the environment in which they found themselves, as well as enabling them to feel that they continued to remain embedded or “copresent” in social relationships in circumstances of considerable physical isolation.

**Conclusion**

The present study revealed social practices associated with use of CB by physically isolated Outback travelers moving through an unfamiliar and potentially threatening landscape. The travelers interviewed were in their vehicles for long periods, driving for up to eight hours at a stretch with little possibility of contact with others. CB radio played a role in ameliorating these sometimes stressful or boring circumstances. CB radio could be used with ease because, unlike the urban United States in the 1970s, the airwaves in Outback Australia are relatively unused. Travelers driving in a convoy with friends could maintain the normal conversations of friends despite being physically cut off. Travelers were also able to use their CB radios to scan and monitor all of the available CB channels for the purpose of overhearing and perhaps participating in conversations. In addition, they were
able to initiate conversations with other tourists who they saw on the road. Drivers and their passengers could move beyond remaining unconnected strangers by reaching out to other travelers by either making themselves available for active participation conversations with strangers or taking a passive participatory role by listening to others’ conversations. CB radio also made it possible for travelers to obtain information vital for the safe traverse of the huge distances and isolated roads. While interviewees reported that the initial decision to use CB radio might have been its utility as an emergency tool, once they were on the road, it became a source of diversion, transient social connection, and ambivalent pleasure.

The uses of CB radio in the Australian Outback mirror the uses of CB radio in the United States in the 1970s. Both sets of users were drawn to CB radio because it allowed users to create and maintain ongoing or transient social networks or to eavesdrop on the social life of others. As Holmes (2001) has argued, there is a very real need to allay the anxieties that arise when people are not “plugged” into networks (7). People deal with these anxieties by maintaining their integration into the sociality of everyday life by using a variety of interpersonal communication networks. In order to secure social integration, people use these communication networks all day and every day (7). In the same way that CB radio in the United States during the 1970s was used to reduce the impersonal and atomized experience of highway travel (Dannefer and Poushinsky, 1979), the tourists interviewed for this study also regarded CB radio as an important part of their travel experience. CB radio made it possible for them to create and maintain a mobile sociability. They were participants in transitory social networks as either participants or observers. The accounts provided by tourists illustrated the way CB radio enabled people to become “nodes in multiple networks of communication and mobility” (Urry, 2003: 266) and showed how they maintained “co-presence” as members of social networks while at the same time being physically removed from them (Gergen, 2002).

The findings of the present study raise the possibility that mobile telephony might be developed in such a way as to provide some of the functionality of CB radio. That is, the use of CB radio for transient and ongoing group sociability may have implications for further developments of mobile telephony. One area for consideration is text messaging. Cell phone text messaging can be used in a quasi-broadcast mode. This happens when a single text message is sent to groups of
contacts and they in turn relay that message to their respective lists of contacts. The rapid distribution of text messages can lead to “swarming,” where large numbers of people are mobilized to converge on a single location or act in concert. An Australian example of this phenomenon resulted in the racially motivated Cronulla riots. The *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that the rioting mobs were enabled by the rapid distribution of “inflammatory text messages,” which “ensured that people from all over Sydney came to Cronulla looking to cause trouble” (December 11, 2005).

While text messaging associated with the Cronulla riots used *ad hoc* cascading lists of contacts, Hirsch and Henry (2005) have designed experimental text-based networks with the express goal of enabling the functioning of groups and aiding political activism. This system was used during the 2004 U.S. Democratic and Republican National conventions. Researchers found:

[It provided] real-time information to activists in the street and allowed fluid, spontaneous actions to occur across the city, and enabled new forms of participation and collaborations among activists. (Hirsch and Henry, 2005: 1458).

Experimental cell phone–based text messaging systems have been explicitly designed to enable everyday social networking (Farnham and Keyaní, 2006). Users of these messaging systems reported that the services made them feel more connected to their friends and helped them to coordinate their social lives. They were able to monitor their friends’ activities, “fish” for potential company, “scout” for social events and integrate their text-based communication activities with other forms of communications. Their findings are supported by Ito (2003) who investigated the intensive use of text messaging by groups of friends. She describes this use as “persistent but lightweight contact with a small group of intimates, with whom they are expected to be available unless they are sleeping or working” (Ito, 2003). For Ito’s teenage and young adult subjects, the city was no longer a space of urban anonymity. Even when her subjects were alone, they maintained their relationships with their friends. They nurtured these relationships by sending and receiving a stream of messages about shopping activities and other personal experiences.

Another area for consideration is mobile Push-to-Talk, which is offered by a number of phone companies in the United States and elsewhere. These services make it possible for members of a
predetermined group to engage in conversations where one person can talk while the other group members listen. It was estimated that there were 16.8 million Push-to-Talk subscribers in the United States at the end of 2004 and that the number of subscribers could grow to a possible 33.6 million by 2009. While most uses of this service were work-related, the use of Push-to-Talk services was expanding beyond the workforce into usage by family and friends (Seybold, 2005). Widespread development and adoption of Push-to-Talk services have been limited by the lack of an agreed technical standard. This means that subscribers to one Push-to-Talk network have been unable to communicate with subscribers connected to another network. With the publication of a technical standard for Push-to-Talk by the Open Mobile Alliance in 2006, the creation of Push-to-Talk services is made easier and their utility for users is enhanced.

Push-to-Talk systems have been the subject of very limited user research. Woodruff and Aoki (2003) examined the use of a cell phone–based Push-to-Talk service by college students. They found that students used the service in a range of different ways. Some conversations were initiated and completed in a discrete time period and paralleled conventional telephone conversations, though there were differences in patterns of use and reported consequences of this use. The participants in this study reported that they spoke with each other more frequently than before using this service and as a consequence had a better idea of each other’s activities. The Push-to-Talk system made it possible for them to engage in impromptu and brief communication exchanges, which did not involve the typical opening and closing formalities of normal telephone or face-to-face communications. Other Push-to-Talk conversations enabled communications similar to those currently conducted using other media such as texting, instant messaging, or e-mail. That is, the study found that conversations occurred in bursts, with long delays between discrete conversations. These episodic conversations had some of the characteristics of texting, e-mail, and instant messaging conversations: intense communications interspersed with periods of inactivity.

The results of these small-scale experiments with cell phone text systems, Push-to-Talk systems, and the history of CB radio use suggest that there is a possibility that mobile telephone systems could evolve to support social networking in new ways. Prespecified, membership-based networks such as a group of friends could be the basis for one kind of service; the GPS functionality of cell phones
will be harnessed to create other services designed for transient location-based, geographic, but fluid communities. Tourists using CB radio have developed ways of advertising their social status and availability for conversations. An equivalent functionality would be needed for the creation of ad hoc social networking between strangers using cell phones. Alternatively, the providers of Internet-based social networking services could create services specifically designed for users of Internet-enabled cell phones. Carolyn Marvin (1988) writes:

[Media are not fixed objects: they have no natural edges. They are constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication. The history of media is never more or less than the history of their uses. (8)]

Following Marvin, it could be argued that mobile communications have no “natural edge.” The uses of mobile communications are constantly evolving. The experience of CB radio in Australia and the United States suggests that one aspect of future mobile telephone services could be in the realm of social networking.

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**Note**

1. These are known as tractor-trailers in the United States and as articulated lorries in the UK.

**Bibliography**


Introduction

Young people have been a popular subject for studies of mobile communication (Caronia and Caron, 2004; Colombo and Scifo, 2005; Funston and MacNeill, 1999; Kasesniemi, 2003; Nyíri, 2005). The focus on youth can be observed in both academic literature and popular accounts of mobiles, but it is neither a natural, nor necessarily benign, form of attention. As Hjorth has argued, the interest in youth needs to be understood as part of a broader conflation of young people and new technologies, which has contributed to several problematic assumptions about youth culture and the social effects of mobiles (2009: 28). Yet there is little detailed examination of the development of these myths or how they have influenced mobile technology research. In this chapter, we wish to critically engage with one in particular: How the category of “youth” is deployed in debates about social connection and disconnection? Our aim is to contribute to the academic discourse on mobile communication by critiquing the hypervigilant concern with young people and the part they play in strengthening or attenuating community bonds.

Unreflective ideas of community have received much criticism, especially in scholarly literature, but they can still powerfully influence the agenda and dispositions of mobile research. There is a repeated assumption that the community that existed before the arrival of mobiles was more cohesive and inclusive than the community that exists after the coming of the mobile (Rosen, 2004; see also Bauman, 2000; Clifford, 1995; Wellman, 2002). Technologies such as television and computers
have also been accused of degrading the ideal of wide and diverse social relationships—and mobiles are seen to further erode these bonds of community. A particular concern associated with mobiles is that they supposedly narrow down full social connections to a restricted, limited set of intimates (Humphreys, 2007; Thom-Santelli, 2007).

Similar concerns are reflected in the mainstream media. For example, in Australia’s *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper, a 2006 article reported a “worrying trend” of “young people . . . increasingly using SMS to avoid face-to-face confrontations” and avoiding the responsibility of full contact with their friends and family (Florez, 2003). In the Thai newspaper *The Nation*, mobile phones are discussed as a technology that is “warping cultural values” in the young, because “social contact is sacrificed as most people use cell-phones to call those close to them instead of engaging with others” (Editorial, 2006). In the UK, a notable case emerged in 2006 when the author of *Toxic Childhood*, Sue Palmer, wrote to the *Daily Mail* in order to plead that childhood was being eroded by electronic media. Young people are exhausted, she claims, by rapid technological change, not to mention being woken “in the small hours by a mischievous text message from an equally over-stimulated friend” (Palmer, 2006).

Compared to such accounts, many mobile technology scholars would see their work as contributing to more critical account of communication and connectedness. However, signs remain of a reified notion of human community operating within mobile research, particularly in relation to youth. In research literature, as well as public understandings, youth acts as a category where particular sorts of social problems are defined and enacted. Children, youth, and young people are often prioritized as a category of research interest, as their engagement with technology is seen to be a glimpse into adult society in the future—a presentiment of the coming community.

There is a history of association between the concepts of “community” and “youth” (Lesko, 2001). This received version of the connected ideas of community and youth is surprisingly difficult to dislodge. However, we believe it is vitally important for mobile technology research to offer a more nuanced reckoning of the conceptual and definitional problems of the categories of youth and community. In particular, we suggest researchers need to engage with the complex and contradictory experiences of mobile communication, which cannot be neatly categorized as either singularly strengthening communities or increasing social atomization.
Community

Like other concepts such as “culture” and “communication,” “community” is dense, evocative, indispensable, but hard to pin down precisely. The *Oxford English Dictionary* second edition offers several meanings, including “a body of people organized into a political, municipal or social unity,” “a body of men living in the same locality,” and “the general body of which all belong, the public.” In most of the meanings given, “common” is emphasized. The decisive shift appears to have been from the Latin word *communis* (fellowship, community of relations or feelings) to the concrete use in medieval Latin (and also early English) of “a body of fellows or fellow-townsmen” (like the word *universitas*). The famous distinction Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) drew between the ideal types of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (association, society, or even civil society) further accents the close social bonds and feeling believed to be typical of community. Our definition of community, then, is the constitution of a body of people, which has claims to qualities such as unity, having things in common, similarities, and belonging.

However enduring, the idea of community is ultimately constructed (Day, 2006). Moreover, the relationship of “community” to other forms of association, and ultimately to how the social is conceived, is much more fluid than often admitted. In making communities, we also find the creation of exclusions, and difficult decisions and negotiations regarding the image and nature of a community and who may belong to it (Brydon and Coleman, 2008). As James Carey (1989: 33) has observed, there is a fundamental relationship between community and communication: “[P]roblems of communication are linked to problems of community, to problems surrounding the kinds of communities we create and in which we live.”

The idea of the community as an entity threatened by new communication technologies is a surprisingly recurrent notion in public discourse. One paradigmatic late modern example of this can be seen in discussions of television. The television is still framed as something that can threaten social connections, especially when it is the bearer of popular, rather than high, culture. A *locus classicus* of how community is at risk from new media technologies may be found in Robert Putnam’s (2000) celebrated theory of social capital. *Bowling Alone* is notably pessimistic about television and the Internet, and views their attendant cultures of use as contributing to a loss of contemporary community and waning of social capital.
It is fair to say that while critiques of Putnam’s theory of social capital have received a good hearing (e.g., Arneil, 2006; McLean et al., 2002), the questioning of this dominant view of the antisocial disconnecting view of television is still not widely accepted (Hartley, 1999, 2008; Lumby and Fine, 2006; Ott, 2007). What is accepted is that certain uses of television are constructive, for instance, in the role that television news (at least “hard” or “serious” news) plays in informing and fostering civic engagement (Norris, 1996; Shah et al., 2001). Interestingly, while Putnam is concerned with the adverse influence of the television, he considered the telephone as strengthening social connection (though this is rather problematic—see discussion in Ling, 2008: 33). Compared to television, the cases of the Internet and mobile phones are not so straightforward.

In assessing the evidence, a number of scholars have concluded that the Internet offers considerable social connectivity (Boase et al., 2006; Katz and Rice, 2002), if ushering in new forms of social organization (such as Wellman’s “networked individualism”; see Boase and Wellman, 2006). There are also several projects that seek to build upon such understandings by inquiring into the dynamics of connection in Internet and online media for youth (Bennett, 2008; Montgomery, 2007). The mobile phone may represent an even more complex case than the Internet. Our interest lies in an assessment of ideas of community that are framed around the “antisocial” and “pro-social” poles in relation to mobiles and social connection.

There are two recent accounts that deserve attention for the different ways in which they credit the mobile for drawing its users into smaller, tighter, and potentially more isolated groupings. The first of these is offered by Kenneth J. Gergen (2008), who contends as follows:

The undermining of face-to-face communities is largely the result of twentieth-century developments in communications technology. . . . At the same time that communication technology has hastened the erosion of civil culture, mobile communication in particular has played a critical role in bringing about transformation. Essentially we are witnessing a shift from civil society to monadic clusters of close relationships. Cell phone technology favors withdrawal from participation in face-to-face communal participation. (302)

Gergen’s position is multifaceted as he seeks to come to grips with the changing nature of communities, particularly in public settings.
Gergen warns that a lack of face-to-face contact with outsiders, while maintaining perpetual contact with insiders, can lead to an overemphasis of personal affairs and close social ties at the expense of a concern for broader social issues and civic engagement. Or if the members of the “enclave” do share an interest in civic affairs, Gergen worries about insularity through the process of the mutual affirmation of a close circle of intimates.

This is an interesting argument, but we would point to the emergence of mobile media reactivating the connections among members of what in political theory terms one would define as a public (Couldry et al., 2007; Livingstone, 2005). Mobiles—especially with the advent of new applications and technology (notably mobile Internet and games, as well as mobile television and video)—could be seen to create different forms of publics and counterpublics, both face-to-face and at a distance.

We add our critique of this notion of the mobile’s constriction of community to that of Rich Ling. In contradistinction to Gergen, Ling (2008: 183) suggests that mobiles have renewed and recalibrated social cohesion offering “the ability to work out new relationships and to organize broad political interactions”. Drawing on Emile Durkheim, Erving Goffman, and Randall Collins, Ling argues against seeing mobiles as accelerating the drift to individualism; rather he discerns the “legacy of earlier, more communal forms of interactions.” In his view, there is a “strengthening of the in-group dynamics . . . the cultural capital of the group can be spiced up with other bits of social flotsam and jetsam” (187).

Key to the debate about mobiles and social connection is a paradox touched upon by both Gergen and Ling. Clearly with mobiles—and something that the “pro-social” side accents—there is intense communication and community formation in process. Hence there is a need to distinguish between “good” and “bad,” healthy and pathological community formation. So while Gergen argues that mobile phone technology brings about withdrawal from “face-to-face communal participation,” he seeks to explain what is going on with the intense communicative activity one may observe in what he dubs “atomic clusters of communication”:

Simultaneously, however, the cell phone favors intense participation in small enclaves—typically of friends and family. These “floating worlds” of communication enable such groups to remain in virtually continuous contact. The individual may move through the day
relatively disengaged from those about him or her, as physically absent participants in the favored cluster are immanently present. (2008: 303)

Gergen is right, in a sense, to draw attention to this paradox of mobile communication. For his part, Ling sees this “bounded solidarity” as retaining the “human touch of social interaction” (Ling, 2008: 182, 187), while others such as Christian Licoppe, with his notion of “connected presence,” take this phenomenon to have a positive general import (2004). We argue that it all turns on how community is understood—and this is something in which youth plays a critical role.

If community is so problematic, it could be objected that we should just do away with it—or at least shift the focus to another cognate, but less fuzzy and more promising, concept. Even fields such as community studies have struggled with “community” to the point of some UK practitioners giving up on it entirely (Crow and Allan, 1994). Another approach is to shift the focus in discussions of social connection and disconnection to other concepts that signify different modes of connection. When it comes to contemporary digital technologies, one obvious focus is the “network.” Several theorists have argued for the primacy of networks to understanding contemporary societies (Castells, 2000; Lovink, 2002; Wellman, 2002). We think the concept of the network is critical for understanding social connection, but not as a superordinate category. Further, we believe that some concept of community is not only inescapable but also important to retain—because of its evocative persistence and centrality when it comes to questions of association and belonging, as well as how publics form, reproduce, and change.

Youth

Who is young? The answer is neither straightforward nor self-evident. It is relational and variable, a label that resists being firmly pinned to a distinct and fixed age group. It can be arbitrarily ascribed to people within a certain age range, but the boundaries of the category are constantly shifting to suit different contexts (Corsaro, 1997; James et al., 1998; Lesko, 2001).

The pathologization of youth has a long history, and it remains as a prevalent theme in both popular and academic discourses. Young people are commonly used as a lens through which social change is debated and discussed, and have been emblematic of broader fears
about shifts in public and private life. As Nancy Lesko (2001: 55) argues, youth has been “the terrain in which struggles over what would count as an adult, a woman, a man, rationality, proper sexuality, and orderly development were staged”.

Since the eighteenth century, youth and technology have regularly been considered together, as though writers hoped to garner a clearer image when viewing one in relation to the other. Technology is typically regarded as a natural partner to youth and vice versa, but there are considerable and often unacknowledged problems in this coupling. The variegated experiences of mobile communication around the world require a more granular and detailed account, not just in terms of technologies usage but also in terms of the group constituting the most common subjects of study: young people.

A good case in point is the term “telecocooning,” coined by Ichiyo Habuchi (2005) in a chapter about youth, moral panic, and the keitai (cell phone in Japanese). Habuchi’s study focuses on how intimate relations begin through encounters on the keitai Internet. According to Habuchi, telecocooning is the use of the keitai to actively maintain a networked relationship. In Habuchi’s view, telecocooning is related to deeper changes in relational security and insecurity in romantic love, especially in young people, which sees them putting increased effort into relationship maintenance (179). Habuchi argues thus:

More people use keitai for [its capacity to maintain existing relationships] than those who use it to look for new encounters. Since using keitai to maintain familiar relationships strengthens collective social ties, this use serves to maintain the cocoon of the existing community. I have termed this sphere of intimacy that is free of geographical and temporal restraints a telecocoon. (181)

To theorize telecocooning, Habuchi employs the concept of “reflexive modernization” (Beck et al., 1994) and “self-identification” (Castells, 2000). Habuchi is aware of the difficulty of discussing youth within a “discourse on social problems” (165), and he is attuned to the importance of understanding contexts of use. Nonetheless, something of the long-standing, problematic notion of community can be detected. Certainly, the word “cocoon” conveys a sense of swaddled isolation, which is what Habuchi emphasizes with the bias of much keitai-use toward reproducing existing social ties within an insulated clique.
The tension between “closed” community, such as a clique, and the ideal of an open community is an enduring issue. In the trope of the telecocoon, this dialectic of the open and closed community is given a new twist by the idea of hyper-connectedness, seen as a characteristic problem of mobiles and youth (Crawford and Goggin, 2008). The concept of hyper-connectedness also feeds into pathologized models of technology use by young people. “Telecocooning” describes a new mode of social being—something acknowledged not to be experienced as overly negative, by the mobile users it depicts. However, the concept is bound up with a particular argument about adverse individualization through mobile communication and thus continues the youth-as-problem framing of community.¹

Even in cases of sophisticated discussion, the conceptualization of youth in mobile technology research needs further critical work—especially because it is important to how community is conceived. Now we will consider two broad and potentially complementary approaches to community and youth as they appear in mobiles research: youth as a developmental narrative and youth as a cultural phenomenon.

Youth As a Developmental Narrative

A prevalent approach to the category of youth in the mobile technology literature places it within a developmental narrative: a stage between childhood and adulthood when enormous changes occur and individuals gradually become independent beings. Often associated with quantitative methodologies, the developmental approach is well represented in the research literature on mobiles and has yielded important insights. The developmental approach has been useful for its focus on how human beings grow and develop, how aging occurs and what its implications are, and how mobile communication is now an integral part of these processes of everyday life. What such research suggests is that the mobile phone has become an important part of how young people develop a sense of self within strong peer networks; a technology that is now implicated in the processes of identity formation, independence, relationship formation, institution membership and dissent, and meaning-making.

Yet there are real limitations to the developmental approach. A central difficulty is its construction of what is typical or normal about generations and development (Turmel, 2008). With the acknowledgment of empirical variations and diversity, and also the narratives
and lived experience of young people (Mayall, 2002), this pitfall can be avoided. However, even when the developmental approach is carefully situated within a cultural context and based on many empirical studies and rich theory, as in Ling’s work, issues arise. For example, Ling (2009: 52) argues that the mobile is part of “that odd phase of life that is a combination of leaving and becoming”—or, for adolescents, the process of emancipation:

The idea of emancipation might conjure the idea of a gradual transition from one status to another. The emancipation process, however, is not a “onetime” procedure. Rather, it is a whole series of episodes and trials that the adolescent and parents confront. . . . Barring perhaps retirement this period sees the most dramatic changes we experience in our lives. (53)

Adolescence is figured here as a “de facto period of flux,” the Sturm und Drang that must be navigated before reaching adulthood. This process of “becoming adult” sees dependency transformed into a state of self-sufficiency, through the trials of emancipation. While Ling nuances these processes, the danger here is the fixing of period of youth as a time of rapid change, uncertainty, and lack—be it of independence or fully developed values or views. Adulthood, on the other hand, is presented as the peak state of self-sufficiency, autonomy, stability, and completion. Ling proposes that the mobile facilitates this transition:

Mobile communication has clear impacts on the transition from child to adolescent and finally to adulthood. The mobile phone provides the link between the teen and his/her peer group. Thus, the device can help to open up a personal space for the teen in which they can begin to explore the different issues at hand. . . . It is a device through which they can examine the different issues of the day with their peers and, perhaps in concert or perhaps individually, patch together solutions to these issues their movement toward adulthood. (Ling, 2008)

Mobiles are positioned as a critical means by which a developing identity is articulated and connected with others and provides a space where issues are debated and resolved. This is a productive claim that could be tested against all users of mobile phones. But to connect the process of development, the importance of peers and the solving of daily issues as something characteristic of teenagers alone are to miss
the cross-generational impact of mobile technologies. It accords too much power to the mobile to describe it as the “midwife to the eventual emancipation of the children” (Ling, 2004: 86). It also renders young people as “works in progress,” human beings who will reach adulthood only once their independence and identities are complete.

A key difficulty with this being/becoming distinction between youths and adults is its relationship to particular social and economic conditions, now declining and rapidly changing. Such a distinction no longer accurately captures either state. This is an argument made by Nick Lee, who suggests that recent “global economic, political and social changes have begun to erode both these figures [of ‘youth’ and ‘adult’]” (2001: 6). Adults are not immune to dramatic change in a twenty-first-century environment where work is less stable, economic markets more precarious, and identities and skills require regular updating.

Moreover, as Jenny Hockey and Alison James have argued, the view that identity formation is confined mainly to childhood and adolescence ignores the ongoing process of change and development that continues throughout life (2003). The precariousness of the figures of “youth” and “adult” to which Lee draws also our attention is very pertinent when we consider the great growth area of mobile phones, the developing world, and so-called emerging markets (Cole and Durham, 2006; Hansen, 2008) where there are quite different notions of generations, youth, and childhood.

The problem of overly narrow chronological or simplistic generational framing of identity occurs in many accounts. Sherry Turkle updates her famous work on the creation of rich virtual selves through avatars, by suggesting that identity formation takes place in a tethered state of always-on communication of mobile devices (2008: 132). For Turkle, “tethering devices help to constitute new subjectivities” (125) and nowhere more so than in the lives of adolescents. What is perhaps most mourned is the loss of the adolescent’s time to be alone, out of reach from what Turkle refers to as the “on-tap parent.” Maturity is delayed, and rich emotional lives are short-circuited:

Just as always-on/always-on-you connectivity enables teens to postpone independently managing their emotions, it can also make it difficult to assess children’s level of maturity, conventionally defined in terms of autonomy and responsibility. . . . In general, the telegraphic text message quickly communicates a state, rather than
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opens a dialogue about complexity of feeling. Although the culture that grows up around the cell is a talk culture . . . it is not necessarily a culture in which talk contributes to self-reflection. . . . High technology, with all its potential range and richness, has been put at the service of telegraphic speed and brevity. (128)

Turkle’s cultural pessimism is nothing new. One of the difficulties for her argument is that messaging fits into much larger media ecologies and cultural frameworks—it is perilous to read the text message as the principal bearer of a generation’s communicative aspirations. While Turkle proposes intriguing ideas about the evocative objects of mobiles, she nonetheless retreats to the common problematic conceptions of communication in which youth plays a conceptually pivotal role.

Finally, we would suggest that the belief—found in the work of Turkle and many other analysts—that self-sufficiency is a hallmark of adulthood, and something that anchors community, also fails to fully account for the experiences of young people. For example, in many countries, young people live in the family home well into their twenties and beyond, breaking the perceived nexus between adolescence and leaving the family home (Crawford, 2006: 167–70). Even those who move into shared accommodations with partners or friends develop new kinds of shared dependencies. Rather than becoming self-sufficient, young people begin to rely on wider networks for different aspects of emotional, economic, and cultural needs. Mobiles play a critical role in developing and sustaining those social ties over time.

In offering a different account of community and communication, we would draw upon Richard Sennett’s argument that the modern assumption of adult autonomy is both inaccurate and damaging. It constructs dependency as something particular to the periods of childhood and youth, when it could rather be grasped as an ongoing fact of human interactions (Sennett, 2004). Further, the myth of adult self-sufficiency has produced the effect of making “childhood and adulthood, immaturity and maturity, into political categories” (Sennett, 2004: 103). Quarantining dependency from adulthood suits a neoliberal politics that emphasizes autonomous individuals rather than collective responsibilities.

We are not suggesting that autonomy is not important (as the development perspective would underscore) in the formation of
individuals and also their relationship to communities. Rather, we are questioning an overemphasis on autonomy—almost a “politics of autonomy”—that goes hand in hand with the dominant view of community we are critiquing. Thus following Sennett, we would argue that self-sufficiency is an ideologically loaded way to define adulthood, and, if this is a key tenet of many emancipation narratives, then the result is an idea of community predicated on an overly idealistic state of individualized freedom to adulthood.

The developmental account of youth—that often goes hand in hand with what might be called a sociology or anthropology of adolescence—is an important lens with which to understand some of the dimensions of youth and the mobile phone. But difficulties arise when research assumes a dualism between adult completeness and adolescent lack. We are interested in how adolescence and its various cultures work as categories within a set of relations and dependencies, just as youth does, and adulthood too.

Clearly, categories help us make sense of the world. Adolescence is one important category as are other categories that come from an underlying concept of human development. What we argue, following Mary Bucholtz, is that there is a strong need for those interested in mobile communication to use age-based categories sensitively and flexibly—with an eye to carefully scrutinizing the meanings and normative implications that they carry (Bucholtz, 2002). From both this perspective, and also that of developmental approaches, age is an important factor in how the mobile phone is used. But rigid age categories of stages of development, and of patterns of mobile use, fail to account for important variations in gender, class, location, and a wide array of other factors.

Age plays into the construction of youth in particular ways. For instance, there are institutional rules and markers around transitions from kindergarten to primary to high school to post-formal education, as well as voting, drinking, sexual consent, and legal capacity. While such instances of youth definitions might be regarded as quasi-rigid categories, ultimately there is important contingency and flexibility that needs to be brought into more accounts. Youth should be understood as constructed as much within social relations and the dialectics of culture as from biological, psychological, and neurological accounts of how our bodies and identities change over the life course (Hockey and James, 2003).
Youth As a Cultural Phenomenon

The second broad approach to youth that we wish to examine locates youth within a broad sociocultural frame (Bell, 2005). There are some, if still too few, studies that begin with the social and cultural shaping of both youth and mobiles as their starting point (e.g., Hjorth, 2009; Ito et al., 2005; Kasesniemi, 2003; Kato, 2005; Okada, 2005; Wang, 2005). This approach draws on a growing body of work that understands age categories such as “childhood,” “youth,” and “adulthood” as constructed and relational, and as occurring within a field of power relations (Crawford, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007; Hockey and James, 2003; James et al., 1998; Lee, 2001). The material and institutional contexts of youth culture are prioritized over discourses that define youth as unstable, in flux, underdeveloped, or superficial. There is much work in this tradition in media and youth, notably the work of David Buckingham (2008) and Sonia Livingstone (Drotner and Livingstone, 2008; Livingstone, 2002)—which has been extended to new media also (Buckingham and Willett, 2006), but not yet systematically to mobiles.

We find this approach to be useful as a foundation from which to conduct detailed mobile technology research. It allows for a more precise engagement with the specificities of race, location, and class-based factors and resists the most overt kinds of youth reification. In Mimi Ito’s (2005) description of her work on mobiles, a Japanese youth and social content provides a good example:

Rather than locating the affinity between messaging and youth in the developmental imperatives of teens, I take a context-driven approach. I argue that the practices and cultures of youth are not solely outcomes of a certain state of development maturity, or even of interpersonal relations, but are also conditioned by the regulative and normative force of places. I shift the center of attention from the practices and identities of youth themselves to their institutional and cross-generational surrounds. (133)

Typically in such work, youth is analyzed as a set of cultural markers, conditioned by social norms and the precise qualities of place. Ito, for instance, maintains an awareness of the institutions, discourses, and generational dynamics that have an impact on the way young people are recognized and located (Ito, 2005: 134).

Mobiles are factored within this field of relations as both expressive and productive of social relations. They solidify social ties and
assist in maintaining friendships; they express a particular personal style; and they are used to resist the dominance of adult spaces by creating parallel environments. Mobile communications function as a complex assemblage, operating on multiple levels within groups of young people, as well as between “the young” and “the adult.” In this way, youth functions as an ambivalent category, changing its meaning and function depending on the variable locations where youth as a category is produced and consumed, how it is represented, and how it is adopted or resisted. Questions can be asked about the position of youth within broader social structures, about which kinds of human activity are privileged (both in public space and by mobile technologies themselves) and what the political implications might be of such privilege.

Mobile technology research already possesses many useful studies of youth from very different cultural locations. Earlier accounts included many of European countries (for instance, Colombo and Scifo, 2005; Contarello et al., 2007; Green, 2003; Lorente, 2002). Now there is a burgeoning literature on youth and mobiles in other places (including Caron and Caronia, 2007; Choi, 2007; Ito, 2005; Ito and Okabe, 2005; Kato, 2005; Yoon, 2006a, 2006b). However, we still lack dedicated discussion on youth in many of the countries with new patterns of mobile adoption and use (not least the so-called developing countries)—and instead there are important discussions occurring in relation to other topics such as “family” (e.g., Donner et al., 2008).

There is some way to go before this empirical variety is mapped upon, and brought into dialogue, with the theoretical notions that continue to orient much research. A chief difficulty here is the transaction between the specific and the general in such studies of youth and mobiles. Many existing studies of particular uses of mobiles actually make quite general claims. This may, on occasion, be appropriate, but we suspect there are some interesting discussions to be had about how such generality is claimed—and whose experience remains confined to particular and local, contrasted with other experiences that are implicitly felt to be generalizable and even universal.

The category of youth is particularly loaded in this regard, often serving as a springboard for local, specific experiences to underwrite larger claims about social identities and power relations. Against this trend, we argue for an account of the cultural specificity of youth and mobiles in theory and suggest that this needs to be fully recognized before a more precise understanding of how the social, technology, and
belonging can reshape our ideas about community. Mobile technology scholars need to be precise in accounting for the particularities of the youth cultures being studied while also placing them within the context of wider economic and cultural forces. Otherwise, small and important research findings are lost in overextended claims to define a youth monoculture (Haddon and Vincent, 2009: 47). Further, the tendency to generationalize is still evident in mobiles research and particularly around the question of mobiles contributing to social isolation and atomization.

While sociocultural research into mobiles has many strengths, it also requires a more fine-grained account of the operation of the category of youth and how it is manifested and resisted in a range of different youth cultures (Nilan and Feixa, 2006). Shifting the balance to include institutions, places, and discourse needs to be kept in balance with the experiences of young people themselves.

**Conclusion**

This volume begins with the problematic of whether mobile communications tends to “bring us together or tear us apart.” The question all but demands an answer. As mobile technology scholars, we are regularly asked by colleagues, policymakers, friends, family members, and members of the public what we think on this count. Discussions about what society is now, and how we are connected to each other, often proceed through a discussion of youth and how they are doing things differently, or “wrong.” As the representatives of human society as it will be constituted in the future, young people are seen as the bellwether of how communities will be constituted and will develop over time. This is why we argue for the need to reexamine the mutually constitutive ideas of community and youth that go hand in hand with mobile communication.

Problematic notions of community still have a powerful influence over researchers, and such ideas also shape public discourse. There are now sophisticated accounts of mobiles and community, approached via the important standpoints of social capital, cohesion, and connection. Yet even these very often rely upon reified, problematic notions of youth and at the same time rest upon socially constructionist or dynamic accounts of community. Hence we see a need for a critique of theories of youth and make a case for recognition of how rhetorics and politics of youth still shape the ways in which mobiles and community are understood.
Further, it may be that framing mobiles as a technology that either “brings us together or tears us apart” is too limiting. For as this chapter has outlined, there is a complex array of forces that contribute to the co-constitution of mobiles and the social—not a simple tension between isolation and togetherness. Mobiles contribute to the creation of new kinds of publics, as well as generate affordances for what are considered traditional publics. The multifarious ways in which mobiles are used, and the highly specific and localized adaptations of mobile technologies, make it very difficult to stake a generalized claim for either deeper connection or separation. Instead, it may be productive to develop more closely attuned observations of the ways in which mobiles are part of the ongoing redefinition of how we affectively experience social connection and disconnection.

If research is going to be able to offer answers to public concerns about social connection and mobiles, we suggest that we need to revisit our fundamental understandings of youth and community. Otherwise we cannot do justice to the project of grasping mobile communication, nor contribute theoretically cogent and empirically responsive ideas to public debates badly in need of new frameworks. While the *doxa* of youth and community still operates as governing myths in public perceptions of new technologies, the creative uses of mobiles by many sectors offer a new way forward—as does reconsidered, incisive research. As mobile communication develops (especially extending into the ground of media), new ideas of the social are emerging, cocreated with technology (Latour, 2005; Woolgar, 2005). This evolving scene offers new possibilities for recasting youth and reimagining communities, communication, and connection.

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**Note**

1. It is worth noting that Ito and Okabe (2005) have an interesting discussion of a “full-time intimate community,” which they see as a related theoretical move to Habuchi’s “telecocooning.” However, Ito and Okabe see “distributed intimacy” as an example of “practices of micro-negotiations with the hegemonic structures of home, school, and urban space that carve
out new spaces of action for young people” (2005: 142)—a reading that resists the normative overtones of the telecocoon. For further discussions of the telecocoon, see Campbell and Park (2008) and Campbell and Kwak (2008).

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Interpersonal Communication beyond Geographical Constraints: A Case of College Students Who Maintain Geographically Dispersed Relationships

Satomi Sugiyama

Introduction

As communication technologies proliferate, so too do the opportunities for interpersonal communication beyond geographical constraints. Numerous researchers have examined the social consequences of technologically mediated communication. Within that body of work, computer-mediated communication has been subject to greater scrutiny than other technologies. Compared to the research on computer-mediated communication, research on mobile communication has received less attention among communication scholars in the past, despite a “historical movement toward a personal communication society” facilitated by the mobile phone (Campbell and Park, 2008: 381). In the past decade, however, significant effort has been exerted to understand various aspects of mobile communication. As a result, researchers have observed shifts and expansions in the utility of mobile communication. The originally intended function of the mobile phone, for example, is a telephone medium that people can use in transit. However, research indicates that the mobile phone is both functional and symbolic (e.g., Campbell and Russo, 2003; Fortunati, 2002a, 2003a, 2003b, 2005b; Haddon, 2003;
Katz, 2003a, 2003b; Katz and Aakhus, 2002; Katz and Sugiyama, 2005, 2006; Ling, 2003, 2004, 2008; Ling and Yttri, 2002; Sugiyama, 2006). As Fortunati (2001) states, the mobile phone’s identity is ambivalent and constantly on the move. The more people incorporate a mobile technology into their everyday life even to the point that many of them perceive it as a part of the body (e.g., Fortunati, 2003a, 2003b, 2005b; Fortunati et al., 2003; Katz, 2003a; Oksman and Rautiainen, 2003a, 2003b; Sugiyama, 2006), the more significance mobile technology starts to carry in everyday life.

Functionally, the mobile phone allows us to stay in touch with others, leading to the formation of communities and social cohesion. Ling (2008: 18) points out that many researchers agree that mobile communication promotes cohesion of small groups such as family and friends. In addition, Miyata et al. (2005) find that, in the case of Japan, the mobile phone is used to stay in touch with those who are physically close by and also “to maintain strong ties with people who are socially close” (444). Miyata et al. (2008) particularly note this aspect of the mobile phone in comparison with the case of the PC e-mail. Ishii (2006), moreover, reports that friends who live close by use mobile phones more often. Furthermore, Ling (2008) states that “while generally we must be open to both intimates and strangers when we interact in daily life, the mobile phone tips the balance in favor of the intimate sphere of friends and family” (159). These findings all suggest that the mobile phone is a medium that connects familiar groups of people, making preexisting relationships stronger.

This essential functional aspect of the mobile phone is intertwined with the issue of presence/absence of others. Fortunati (2002b), as well as Gergen (2002), posit how the mobile phone can blur the boundary between presence and absence. Fortunati states, “People do not quite understand up to where they are present in space or absent” (519) because the prevalence of the mobile phone creates an impression of accessibility that leads to the ambiguity between presence and absence. She argues that this ambiguity, in turn, provokes a shift in the sense of belongingness from places to one's communicative networks. Gergen (2002) discusses the idea of “absent presence,” claiming that it can lead to more social connections. Communication technologies promote social saturation, which can be further complicated by the temporal/spatial flexibility that the mobile provides (Gergen, 1991). Since mobile phones allow participants within face-to-face groups to
keep connected, “relationships are re-enlivened, common opinions and values are shared, expressions of support and mutual understanding enhanced, and knowledge of the other deepened,” even if they are physically absent (Gergen, 2003: 105). What underlies these arguments is the idea that the ambiguity between absence and presence leads to the strengthening of the preexisting personal network, which is in line with what Miyata et al. (2005, 2008) as well as Ling (2008), report. The way that the mobile phone can make preexisting relationships stronger, however, also comes with “the risk of creating condition of societal conflict,” increasing “the shared sense of ‘we as opposed to them,’ and ultimately, ‘we as better than them’” (Gergen, 2003: 108). This absent/present dynamic calls for a nuanced analysis of the question of whether and how the mobile phone connects or separates people.

The mobile phone not only connects and/or separates close groups of people functionally, but also symbolically. Ling and Yttri (2002) report that Norwegian teens and their peers coordinate their activities, and also how they express themselves, via the mobile. Campbell and Russo (2003) also find that, in the United States, young people develop similar symbolic meanings about the mobile among peer group members. Sugiyama (2006) reports that Japanese college students symbolically define and express who they are and who they are not based on the mobile phone’s appearance. These findings can all be discussed through the theoretical framework of *Apparatgeist* (Katz and Aakhus, 2002), which provides a conceptual framework that attempts to explain the social process by focusing on technologically mediated personal communication.

The question of whether mobile technologies bring us together or tear us apart is multifaceted and complex. Past research found that the mobile phone is primarily used to stay in touch with local friends and close relationships. This also suggests that we need to consider not only the *whether-or-not* question but also the question of how the mobile technologies can connect and separate people. The present study seeks to contribute to the question of the connect/separate dichotomy by bringing in a new conceptual focus as well as a contextual emphasis.

First, this study focuses on the interpersonal level of perceived closeness rather than on the small group or family. The interpersonal or micro level of closeness is distinct from social cohesion, since numerous dispersed close-knit dyads do not necessarily form a
group or produce social cohesion. Therefore, examining how dyadic relationships are managed with the mobile phone might shed some new light on the question of whether the mobile is connecting or separating us. The aforementioned Apparatgeist theory is often understood as drawing our attention to the macro-societal level of sense-making pertaining to mobile technologies, but Apparatgeist may also be applied in investigations aimed to understand the micro-interpersonal level of sense-making. In that context, we see that these technologies carry a certain “geist” within a society, as well as a certain “geist” for an individual and for a dyadic relationship. Since the development of personal communication technologies presupposes “perpetual contact” (Katz and Aakhus, 2002), mobiles tend to aid users to be continuously in touch with their relational partners, whether they be friends or a romantic partner. As this process continues, individual users of mobile technologies start attaching particular meanings to their mobiles. This provokes us to ask, “What meanings?” Therefore, in order to examine how the mobile phone can connect and separate a dyad, both functional and symbolic aspects of the mobile phone demand attention.

For a new contextual emphasis, this study examines the case of college students who maintain relationships that are quite geographically dispersed; their “relationally close” friends are not necessarily physically within close proximity. The issue of relationships is particularly germane to young people who are at a critical stage in their life. For example, college is the time for significant development and possible change in social relationships. Many college students develop new relationships with those who grew up in different regions or even different countries. At the same time, they also maintain old relationships with those they grew up together. This relationship development and maintenance often happen in a new environment, away from “home” and parents. These college students need to deal with physical and psychological distance from the familiar, while developing and maintaining physical and psychological closeness with the new. For these college students, what role do mobile technologies play in the dynamics of interpersonal relationship development and maintenance? Does the mobile facilitate or hinder interpersonal solidarity? What types of relationships do they facilitate or hinder? What is even more unique about the present study is that the participants live in a country—or even a continent—different from the one where they grew up. Due to the mere geographical distance between the
two places, they are less likely to be visiting their precollege friends on a regular basis. The prolonged absence tends to create a relatively clear boundary between precollege and college friends. This situation, distinct from that of typical college students, permits a unique opportunity to examine the connection between mobile phone use and perceived interpersonal closeness and distance with friends at dispersed locations.

Methods

In order to examine the question of how the mobile phone connects or separates college students who maintain geographically dispersed friendships, a survey and interviews were conducted at an international university located in Switzerland from 2007 to 2008. The participants study away from their “home” countries. Most of them are not typical study abroad students who are away from their home campus for a semester or a year, but instead, study abroad at the university for four years. In this sense, their commitment to the academic life, as well as social life, in this “far away from home” setting is quite significant. The students come from various parts of the world. According to the official university data, out of 433 students, about 65 percent are from North America, about 19 percent are from Europe, about 8 percent are from the Middle East, and the remaining from South America, Asia, and Africa. Due to the institutional emphasis on fostering an international/multicultural learning environment, the student body is largely a mix of those who have a strong interest in international/intercultural issues and those who grew up living around the world.

Survey

A survey was developed to examine the relationships among physical location, type of friendship, and interpersonal closeness. Physical location had two conditions: on campus and at home. Type of relationship also had two conditions: friends at home and friends at college. Interpersonal closeness was measured using Wheeless’s Interpersonal Solidarity Scale. According to Wheeless et al. (1984), interpersonal solidarity refers to interpersonal closeness in various aspects including social and psychological dimensions. Cupach and Messman (1999) applied this concept to understand friendship. Given the ways people use the mobile phone for sustaining various relational levels, the concept of interpersonal solidarity is useful to examine the
question of how mobile technologies are associated with interpersonal levels of closeness.

The survey questionnaire was composed of two sections. Section 1 examined the degree of using the mobile phone when school is in session to call their friends at college (local) and their friends at home (distant), as well as the degree of using the mobile phone when school is not in session to contact their friends at college (distant) and their friends at home (local). A question that measures the degree of participation in social get-togethers (e.g., lunch/dinner, party, hanging out in a dorm) when school is in session was also included to gage their face-to-face social activities. Section 2 examined the closeness that the study participants feel with one of their close friends at college and one of their close friends at home using the aforementioned Interpersonal Solidarity Scale. The validity of the scale has been sufficiently supported (Rubin et al., 2004), and the scale has been used for many studies examining various social relationships such as intimate relationships (Baus and Allen, 1996; Wheeless et al., 1984), friends (Cupach and Messman, 1999), siblings (Myers, 1998), grandparents and grandchildren (Downs, 1988), and organizational peers (Myers and Johnson, 2004). Higher scores mean higher interpersonal solidarity, while lower scores mean lower interpersonal solidarity.

The survey participants were recruited via an online survey program. Participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. A total of 125 students responded to the survey. Among those 125 students who responded, 25 completed only section 1 and 100 students completed both section 1 and section 2. Therefore, 125 responses were used for examining the general trend of mobile phone use among the sample group, while 100 responses were used to explore the potential relationship between mobile phone use and interpersonal solidarity.

Among the 125 respondents who completed the first part of the survey, 90 students (72 percent) were from North America (including Hawaii and the Bahamas), 14 (11.2 percent) were from East/West Europe and Russia, 5 (4 percent) were from the Middle East, 3 (2.4 percent) were from South America, and 2 (1.6 percent) were from Africa. Eleven students (8.8 percent) did not report their country of origin. It is likely that they are non-U.S. students and they did not disclose the information to ensure anonymity or that they lived around the world and found it difficult to identify a country of origin. Among
the 100 respondents who completed the second part of the survey, 78 students (78 percent) were from North America, 8 (8 percent) were from East/West Europe and Russia, 2 (2 percent) were from the Middle East, 2 (2 percent) were from South America, and 2 (2 percent) were from Africa. Eight (8 percent) did not provide their country of origin, and these were treated in the same way described above. Relative to the overall student population at the university, the sample slightly over-represents the students from North America. However, the focus of the present study is not a cultural comparison but an inquiry into how these students manage their dispersed friendships using the mobile phone. For that reason, the slight over-representation of the students from North America is not considered to be a critical issue. Among all study participants, no one indicated that they are from Switzerland, so all respondents were studying away from their home country at the time of survey.

Interviews

A series of individual interviews were also conducted during the second half of 2007 and early 2008, at the same university, to complement the survey. In order to gain insights from students with diverse backgrounds about the distance from their home country, a purposeful sampling method was employed. A total of eleven students participated in the interview. More specifically, four participants were from North America, four from the Middle East, one from Russia, one from South America, and one from Africa. The researcher developed an interview schedule that included a series of questions exploring the way these students manage their interpersonal relationships both locally and at a distance using various communication technologies. The interview questions included how they generally use communication technologies in their daily life in order to explore how they see the mobile phone in relation to other types of communication technologies. Each interview lasted one hour, taking a semi-structured approach.

Results

Mobile Phone Use with Friends: Local and Distant

As Table 13.1 shows, the survey results indicated that, when on campus, the participants tend to use their mobile phone to get in touch with their friends at school more than with their friends at home. On the other hand, when they are at home, they reported
that they use their mobile phone to get in touch with their friends at home more than with their friends at college. In line with past research, these college students who manage geographically dispersed friendships seem to use the mobile phone primarily to stay in touch with their friends in a close proximity, rather than those at a distance.

However, correlation analysis among various conditions in terms of the geographical location of study participants and the type of friends offers an additional insight. Table 13.2 shows the results of the Pearson correlation analysis among mobile phone use with different people in different contexts. As seen in the data, regardless of whether they are on campus or at home, those who use mobile phones to communicate with friends who are in close proximity also use mobile phones to contact friends at a distance. Thus, when the frequency

Table 13.1 Frequency of Mobile Phone Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>At school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends at school</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends back home</td>
<td>124 (1 missing)</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Back home</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends at school</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends back home</td>
<td>124 (1 missing)</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Means are calculated using a scale of 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).*

Table 13.2 Correlations among Various Types of Mobile Phone Use (n = 125)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>With friends back home, when on campus</th>
<th>With friends at school, when at home</th>
<th>With friends back home, when at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With friends at school, when on campus</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends back home, when on campus</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends at school, when at home</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ** < .01.
of mobile phone use is compared between friends in close proximity and friends at a distance, it seems that the participants of this study use the technology to contact the friends who are physically nearby and also for all types of relational maintenance to a certain extent, regardless of where they and their friends are.

The dynamics of mobile phone use with friends in close proximity and at a distance were also examined in relation to the year at college. Length of living “away from home country” can be a factor in the extent to which students use the mobile phone with their “local” friends and with their friends “at a distance.” Among 125 respondents, 50 were first-year students, 36 were in second year, 20 were in third year, and 19 were in their fourth year at college. A one-way ANOVA suggests that there are significant differences among students of different years in the degree of contacting via mobile phone their friends at school when they are on campus (see Table 13.3). Tukey post-hoc analysis indicates that fourth-year students use their mobile phones to contact their friends at school when they are on campus more frequently than do first- or second-year students. In addition, the analysis suggests that fourth-year students use their mobile phone to contact their friends

### Table 13.3 Mobile Phone Use and Year in College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>With whom</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>F (df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At school</td>
<td>Friends at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.04 (.99)</td>
<td>4.49 (3, 121) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.03 (1.34)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.45 (1.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.05 (1.03)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends back home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.82 (1.00)</td>
<td>1.52 (3, 120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.66 (.97)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.95 (1.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.26 (1.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>Friends at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.90 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.69 (3, 121) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1.94 (1.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.40 (1.35)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.84 (1.21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends back home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.12 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.41 (3, 120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.86 (1.38)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.95 (1.28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.05 (1.27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **<.01, *<.05.
at school when they are back home more frequently than first- or second-year students. These findings, although not to be generalized beyond the sample group, can be interpreted to mean that fourth-year students have developed solid friendships on campus, which need to be maintained whether they are on campus or at home. Here, the mobile phone seems to find its place in the relational maintenance beyond geographical constraints.

**Mobile Phone Use and Interpersonal Solidarity**

The previous section discussed how the mobile phone is used to maintain friendships in close proximity, which is in line with past research. The data thus far also suggested that those who use the mobile phone with their friends use it regardless of where they are, and where their friends are, to a certain extent. Particularly, the fourth-year students who participated in the survey indicated that they are in touch with their friends at college via the mobile phone whether they are in close proximity or at a distance. These findings suggest that the mobile phone is used beyond geographical constraints among some of these college students who manage geographically dispersed friendships. That is, the mobile phone offers opportunities for perpetual contact (Katz and Aakhus, 2002). However, the question still remains whether or not the interpersonal communication mediated via the mobile phone beyond geographical constraints solidifies relationships. In order to explore this question, the connections between frequency of mobile phone use at varied physical settings and reported interpersonal solidarity with varied relationship types were examined.

In this section, mobile phone use was recoded into two groups: those who never or seldom use the mobile phone and those who use it at least sometimes. In terms of the mean score for interpersonal solidarity with a close friend at school, there was no significant difference between those who use the mobile phone at least sometimes to speak with their friends at school when on campus and those who never or seldom use mobile phone to communicate with their friends at school on campus. In terms of the mean score for interpersonal solidarity with a close friend at home, there was no significant difference between those who use the mobile phone at least sometimes to speak with their friends back home when they are on campus and those who never or seldom use it to contact their friends back home when they are on campus. In other words, use of the mobile phone
on campus was found to be unrelated to the perceived interpersonal solidarity with a close friend on campus or at home. On the other hand, use of the mobile phone when they are back home was found to be somewhat related to interpersonal solidarity. That is, those who use the mobile phone at least sometimes with their friends at school reported higher solidarity scores with a close friend at school while back at home than those who never or seldom use the mobile phone in these circumstances. In addition, while back at home, those who use the mobile phone at least sometimes with their friends back home reported higher interpersonal solidarity with these individuals than those who never or seldom use the mobile phone in these circumstances (see Tables 13.4 and 13.5).

The connections among the context of mobile phone use, physical distance involved in mobile contact, and interpersonal solidarity are summarized in Table 13.6. When the study participants are at school, mobile phone use was not related to interpersonal solidarity with friends at school or those at home. However, use of the technology from home was positively related to solidarity with both distant and proximal friends. These findings reveal a meaningful trend with regard to participant location.

### Table 13.4 Mobile Phone Use and Interpersonal Solidarity with a Friend at School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>T (df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At school</td>
<td>Never/seldom</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>111.26 (18.06)</td>
<td>.85 (29,43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least sometimes</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>114.71 (13.26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>Never/seldom</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>112.03 (15.47)</td>
<td>2.54 (73,92) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least sometimes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>118.79 (10.25)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* *<.05.*

### Table 13.5 Mobile Phone Use and Interpersonal Solidarity with a Friend Back Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>T (df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At school</td>
<td>Never/seldom</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>114.80 (16.96)</td>
<td>1.11 (97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least sometimes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>119.00 (14.26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>Never/seldom</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>103.36 (16.72)</td>
<td>2.77 (98) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least sometimes</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>117.31 (15.66)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* **<.01.*
A possible explanation for this finding is the social details of the students’ milieu. When they are at school, they live with their friends. As a result, they have many occasions for social get-togethers. On the other hand, when they are back home, they live with their families, and they have fewer of friends in their immediate surroundings. These details of the physical surrounding might be important to take into account. In fact, the survey results indicated that those who use the mobile phone at least sometimes with their friends at school when on campus\(^1\) reported that they participate in social get-togethers more frequently than those who never or seldom use the mobile phone with their friends at school, when at school\(^2\) \((t = 2.12, df = 98, p < .05)\). Furthermore, the results indicated that those who participate in social get-togethers at least regularly reported higher scores of interpersonal solidarity with a close friend at school\(^3\) compared with those who do not\(^4\) \((t = 3.98, df = 98, p < .01)\) (Figure 13.1).

If that is the case, perhaps these findings can be described in terms of social saturation of the physical setting, mode of communication, physical distance between the dyads, and interpersonal solidarity (see Table 13.7). Social saturation of the physical setting refers to the degree of engagement with others and the number of interactions experienced by the college students in their physical surrounding. Mode of communication refers to the mobile-mediated or face-to-face (or body-to-body, Fortunati, 2005a) communication. Physical distance refers to the distance between these college students and their friends. When they are at school, their friends at college are labeled as “low” and their friends at home are labeled as “high.” When they are at home, their friends at college are labeled as “high” and their friends at home are labeled as “low.” The survey results seem to indicate that a combination of these factors is related to the level of interpersonal solidarity for these college students who maintain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13.6</th>
<th>Context, Distance, and Solidarity with Mobile Phone Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context of use</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mobile phone contact</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Local (friends at school) –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distant (friends at home) –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Local (friends at home) +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distant (friends at school) +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Lack of a relationship is signified by –.*
friendship at geographically dispersed locations. When social saturation in the physical surrounding is high, the mobile phone is not a technology to develop/maintain a close dyadic relationship with a friend who lives nearby as well as with a friend who lives at a distance. Instead, face-to-face/body-to-body interactions, which are only possible with those in a close proximity, might solidify interpersonal closeness. On the other hand, when social saturation in the physical surrounding is relatively low, mobile-mediated contact can fill up unsaturated space, promoting and maintaining interpersonal solidarity with both a friend in a close proximity and a friend at a distance. Although the connections among these factors should not be taken as causal due to the nature of the data, the dynamics here are noteworthy.
Meaning of Interpersonal Solidarity: Infrequent Mobile Phone Contact, but a Sense of Connection

The survey results painted a rather complex picture of the relationship between mobile phone use and interpersonal solidarity for the college students who maintain geographically dispersed friendships. The results of the interviews offer additional insight into how these college students perceive mobile phone in terms of relationship maintenance and interpersonal solidarity.

Feeling Closer: Self-disclosure Via the Mobile Phone

A participant, a male student from a country in South America, reported the way he negotiates interpersonal relationships quite seamlessly both in terms of geographical boundaries and in terms of physical distance:

I talked to four of them [my friends] through cell phone while I was back home, and our conversation flowed, not bumpy. I talked to some of them like fifteen minutes, which is a lot for me, because I really don’t like to talk on the phone, but those conversations really flowed, and I was catching up with them telling them about my [reverse culture] shock, and they were telling me about their [reverse culture] shock and how everything has changed, and we just talked . . . . One of them was in Philippines. I got a call from Cairo and Spain . . . . and I got goose bumps, because it’s so exciting how people meet in this geographic place, and just in one day, everyone was in every different part of the world you can possibly imagine, with all different kinds of weather, all different kinds of cultures, and you can’t help thinking about it. It just gives me goose bumps. It’s amazing!

(Did you need to think twice to call these people in Philippines, Spain, and Cairo?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical social saturation</th>
<th>Mode of communication</th>
<th>Physical distance</th>
<th>Interpersonal solidarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Mobile-mediated</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-mediated</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Face-to-face, body-to-body</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Mobile-mediated</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile-mediated</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I just called them, for example, one of the days, I was so pissed and everything has changed and I did not belong there any more, so I called, like “oh my god!” So I really did not think that much, I just called him \[with a gesture of snapping fingers\] like that.

This indicates how he found new possibilities of personal connection at college and how he needs to stay connected to them so that he can disclose his feelings even when his friends are not nearby. For that purpose, he used his mobile phone. As the stage theories of relationship development suggest, self-disclosures promote the development of interpersonal closeness (Mongeau and Henningsen, 2008). The interview quote above illustrates how the mobile phone has found its place in disclosing inner feelings beyond geographical constraints and such a communicative event can contribute to solidifying friendship.

Infrequent Contact, but a Sense of Connection/Closeness

An interesting theme that emerges from these interviews is that the participants’ feelings of connection do not necessarily correspond to the frequency of interactions. The aforementioned example was not concerned about frequent contact with the mobile from a distance, but about how the mobile can allow them to share feelings when needed. The following example of a female student from the United States also suggests that constant contact is not a primary relational concern:

Even if we don’t stay in touch all the time, you can meet and can stay friends. Nothing changes. When I go back, it’s fine, you know. . . . Even if I haven’t seen them a year or two, it’s like, it’s fine . . . even though we haven’t been talking, it hasn’t changed our friendship.

The following remark by a student from a country in Africa is in line with the above comments:

Sometimes call, and that’s a kind of thing, I mean, there was stuff like if you are not talking, you are not really friends any more, but we are kind of persons now that they don’t talk for like six months and start talking just like nothing ever. There was no time you know, between the two.

For these students who use various types of communication technologies and manage numerous interpersonal relationships
at a distance, more contact and continuous updates do not mean closer relationships. Then, what is it that facilitates close feeling with friends for them? The following is the response of a male student from the Middle East after being asked how frequently his friends call him:

It’s not something that is set, but for example, sometimes, he [my friend] calls me like three times a month, but sometimes in two months, calls me once. If he does not call me, I try to call or send him a message.

This remark captures his sentiment that it does not matter how many times he calls his friends or his friends call him. The important thing is a sense of emotional commitment and the possibility of perpetual contact in the sense that Katz and Aakhus described in their discussion of Apparatgeist theory. In an effort to advance Apparatgeist theory, Campbell (2008) proposes the notion of “possible communication” as an important underlying logic in understanding social consequences of mobile communication. According to Campbell, possible communication “refers to the ability to connect and not the connection itself” (160). The data presented here offer support for this notion. The same interviewee explained further:

In my country, it’s a good thing that you keep in touch, and they would appreciate it as much as you would. I mean there is nothing special that makes him call me, other than saying “hi,” and I mean because we’ve been together since we were in first grade, or kindergarten even, so they would call, back home, we used to be together almost everyday mostly, so he would call and say “hi,” and why I don’t call him as much as he does, because we understand that I’m a student here in Europe which is not my country, and they understand it as well, so for them much more convenient to call me, not the other way around, but if I do call them, that’s good to do for me as well.

The time in close proximity they shared in the past led this participant to develop a strong sense of connection in this case. Once he reached that point, he continued to feel the friend’s presence regardless of the actual contacts via communication technologies, even if they lived at a distance.

These special relationships at a distance need to be maintained with great care. A male participant from the United States stated:
Like friends I do call, we usually tend not to e-mail too much back and forth, we will just to give updates, but it’s really kind of important and it really highlight[s] the week that I am able to call her and talk to her, have a conversation, whereas if we were to e-mail as frequently as I do with some of my other friends, it wouldn't be as special, wouldn't be as big deal . . . it’s been interesting to think about it.

What makes the relationships special is not continuous interactions that mobile technologies can offer. Rather, it could be the opposite: frequent interactions can ruin a special relationship, or at least, can ruin the feeling of specialness. What contributes to the sense of special relationships appears to be less tangible, impossible to measure by the quantity of exchanges. He, along with all the other interview participants, uses other communication technologies, such as Facebook, to interact with their friends both in close proximity and at a distance. Although accounting for these types of mediated interactions might change the dynamics between feeling of specialness and the quantity of exchanges, occasional mobile conversations still seemed to signal that the relationship is special.

As much as they do not necessarily seek to contact their friends with increased intensity via mobile communication technologies, they contact people with whom they do not feel special connection. After the conversation about his realization that those he considered friends back home were not really friends for him, the aforementioned participant from South America commented:

I would stay in touch with them because I don’t want to be rude, but I’m not gonna care as much, because we’ve taken different paths, you know.

The following remark by a participant from the Middle East also highlights the important distinction between contact and sense of close connection:

If you think about it, I came to this school three years ago, and I do have a lot of friends, but I’m not gonna lie to you, I’m not as close with them as I am with my friends back home. There I grew up with them, and I would do anything, basically, for them. But here, it is not the same case. Therefore, I try to keep in touch with them, keep a very good relationship with them, but when I go back home, it does not mean that I forget about them, but I keep in touch, and I think I do my duty, for example, if it’s Christmas Eve or New Year, I send
them via Facebook, “Happy New Year. Wish you luck.” But it’s not the same case, if I do that with my friends back home, I will not be doing my duty, I think.

Conclusion

The chapter sought to examine the question of connect/separate dichotomy as it relates to the mobile phone, particularly focusing on the interpersonal level of solidarity among college students who study away from their home country. Survey data suggested that, in line with past research, these college students also use the mobile phone more frequently to contact their friends who are in a close proximity. Although the finding is not new, it is noteworthy that these college students, who develop and maintain relationships with the new so far away from the familiar, follow the similar patterns of mobile phone use. The data also indicated that the seniors developed new relationships at college and utilized the mobile phone to stay in touch with them when they are on campus, as well as when they are at home. Furthermore, the data indicated that those who use the mobile phone frequently use it regardless of where they are and where their friends are. These findings suggest that the mobile phone allows them to stay in touch, thus connecting them, beyond geographical constraints.

The findings also suggest that what appeared to be a matter of physical distance between the study participants and their friends could be a matter of social saturation of the physical surroundings. When their physical surrounding is socially saturated, participants’ use of the mobile phone does not seem to play a large role in developing and maintaining interpersonal solidarity. Perhaps in this situation, the presence of those who are physically proximal takes primacy. On the other hand, when their physical surrounding is not socially saturated, participants use the mobile phone in the development and maintenance of interpersonal solidarity both at close proximity and at a distance. In this situation, absence of certain friends needs to be revitalized with the mobile contact.

The interview data further implicate the dynamics among physical social saturation, mode of communication, physical distance, and interpersonal solidarity. The way these college students understand the mobile phone is not necessarily as a convenient tool that allows them to stay in touch with their close friends all the time. In fact, they have to navigate various types of friendships using an
appropriate way of contacting each other at a given situation. Drawing on the work by Collins, Ling (2008) argues that a “successful ritual can engender solidarity and revitalize cohesion, but a ritual carried out ineffectively can fail and thus destroy solidarity” (80). Although Ling focuses on social/group cohesion, this idea seems to be applicable to the interpersonal level of cohesion. That is, dyads also develop certain idiosyncratic rituals for interactions, and they seek to successfully follow these rituals in order to enhance their interpersonal solidarity. If the ritual for a given dyad is not constant contacts via the mobile, frequent use of the mobile phone does not lead to higher interpersonal solidarity.

The study findings confirm the complexity of the question of whether the mobile phone connects or separates us. Rather than pointing to an unambiguous outcome of unity or rupture, the chapter uncovers how the mobile phone can connect the dyads in a close proximity and at a distance. The mobile phone can symbolically mean connection in the sense that it offers potentials for being connected beyond geographical constraints. However, this does not necessarily mean that the mobile phone functionally connects these college students to geographically dispersed friends. If a given relationship is perceived as special, that specialness, rather than the frequency of contact, is attributed to the sense of connection. The study extends the Apparatgeist theory by expanding its scope to the dyadic level of sense-making process. The question of whether the mobile phone connects or separates people needs to be considered within the complex dynamics of various social exigencies people face. And the notion of Apparatgeist allows us to discern the dynamics by drawing attention to symbolic meanings of the mobile phone created by micro-interpersonal interactions.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Noe Steadly, who offered assistance with data collection and interview transcription, and also to the students who participated in the survey and interviews.

Notes

1. \( N = 77, M = 4.03, SD = .78 \)
2. \( N = 23, M = 3.61, SD = .99 \)
3. \( N = 77, M = 116.86, SD = 12.56 \)
4. \( N = 23, M = 104.09, SD = 16.33 \)
Bibliography


Interpersonal Communication beyond Geographical Constraints


“I Love You, Man”: Drunk Dialing Motives and Their Impact on Social Cohesion

Erin E. Hollenbaugh and Amber L. Ferris

Introduction

For the traditional college student, leaving home and immersing oneself in the college environment can be a jolting experience. As college students transition to their new cultures, they are forced to determine how they will reconcile their group memberships. On the one hand, many college students try to maintain a connection with their previously established social networks, which may now reside many miles away. Simultaneously, relationships are being forged with new social networks encountered through the college atmosphere. The cell phone can be a college student’s greatest tool to maintain cohesion among these various social groups (Campbell and Russo, 2003; Henderson et al., 2002; Licoppe, 2003).

Undeniably, the cell phone has become an integral part of college culture. College students make use of this tool in their everyday lives. One can find students talking or texting on their phones anywhere from sidewalks and bus stops to libraries and classrooms on nearly every campus across the United States. Research has shown that college students adopt and use cell phones at a greater rate than any other segment of the population (DeBaillon and Rockwell, 2005). For one-third of these students, the cell phone serves as their only telephone, as they do not have a landline phone (Aoki and Downes, 2003). Undoubtedly, the cell phone is a prevalent communication technology on college campuses.

Turning to the other theme of this chapter, as members of this new culture, students also quickly learn that alcohol often plays a leading
Mobile Communication

role in the college environment. Nearly 73 percent of over thirty-three thousand nationally sampled college students reported drinking at least one drink in the last month (CORE Institute, 2005). In this study, alcohol use was more prevalent than all other intoxicating substances combined, including tobacco and marijuana (CORE Institute, 2005). Alcohol use is a function of the social norms and peer pressures of campus life, which result in alcohol’s strong presence in campuses across America (Borsari and Carey, 2001). Alcohol use, in conjunction with the ubiquity of the cell phone on college campuses, creates an environment ripe for drunk dials, given the effects of alcohol on social behavior.

Research has shown that alcohol often acts as a social lubricant that can reduce inhibitions (e.g., Monahan and Lannutti, 2000). The tendency for alcohol to “loosen the tongue” and to impair one’s cognitive abilities (Monahan and Samp, 2007) often leads to impulsive and extreme behavior (Steele and Josephs, 1990). Calling someone on a cell phone while intoxicated, known as drunk dialing to college students, is one impulsive behavior that may result from alcohol use among young adults. In this sense, we define drunk dials as those calls that may not have otherwise been made if the caller was sober.

Drunk dialing is a ubiquitous phenomenon at American colleges. In our sample of 486 undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university, 79 percent had either sent or received a drunk dial message in their recent memory. As an additional testament to the popularity of this phenomenon, websites have been created to showcase or discuss drunk dialing behavior. The website DrunkDial.org provides a toll-free phone number that can be used to archive your own inebriated messages. The calls are uploaded onto the website, and dialers can log on and listen to their drunk dials at a later date. At the time of this writing, Facebook, a popular social networking website among college-aged individuals, has over five hundred groups dedicated to drunk dialing, including groups titled, “I’m a victim of drunk dial” and “I’ll admit . . . I drunk dial.” Clearly, the term “drunk dialing” represents a meaningful use of the cell phone for many college students.

Although the cell phone has been considered a communication technology that typically draws people together (e.g., Campbell and Russo, 2003; Henderson et al., 2002; Licoppe, 2003), it is unclear whether or not drunk dialing has the same effect. Drunk dials may positively impact social cohesion when they connect people in an
affirming way. However, drunk dials that cause arguments or bad feelings between group members could damage social bonds.

Researchers have explored the effects of alcohol on individuals’ behaviors and their social networks. For example, persistent alcohol abuse often negatively impacts social networks such as families (Barry and Fleming, 2006). One family member’s alcoholism affects the rest of the family so much so that scholars contend that alcoholism is a family disease (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1995). Romantic partners are more likely to experience negative emotions during conflicts when they are intoxicated than when sober (MacDonald et al., 2000). Alcohol consumption often reduces people’s inhibitions—both verbally (e.g., Monahan and Lannutti, 2000) and nonverbally (Samp and Monahan, 2007). Research has also shown that alcohol impairs cognitive ability, which can alter the messages that a person may communicate while drunk (e.g., Monahan and Samp, 2007). From these results, it is clear that alcohol impacts people’s behavior and social networks. However, it is unknown whether and how drunk dialing might contribute to these effects.

According to the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory, reasons or motives for using a medium precede the effects of that use (Katz et al., 1974). In other words, someone’s reasons for calling others while drunk should have an effect on the outcomes of the call. The first step in exploring media use from the U&G perspective is to determine the motives for a particular medium use. For example, in their study on cell phone motivations and social connectedness, Wei and Lo (2006) found that people who were motivated to use the cell phone for affection purposes were most likely to make calls to their family. Additionally, those who used the phone to pass the time or relieve boredom (categorized as the social utility motive) were more likely to use the phone for both social purposes and to call their family. The U&G perspective was adopted in this study to frame our exploration of drunk dialing.

The purposes of this research are to identify motives for college students’ drunk dialing behavior and to explore the ways in which drunk dialing might enhance or detract from students’ social cohesion. Toward this end, we will first present a conceptualization of social cohesion as it relates to cell phone use, followed by a discussion of the guiding theoretical perspective used in this study. Then, a study of drunk dialing motives is presented. Lastly, we discuss the implications of this research for social cohesion among college students’ networks.
Existing Research

College Students: A Culture Connected

Social cohesion is “the degree to which group members feel attracted to their group and desire to remain members of it” (Tsoukalas, 2007: 41). A group has social cohesion when there are strong ties among individuals within that group (Lockwood, 1999). Chan et al. (2006) further described social cohesion as a “sticking together” (289) characterized by trust, shared identities, and closely adhered to norms. In other words, social cohesion is the degree to which people feel connected to their groups. Although a number of conceptualizations of social cohesion have emerged, this definition is used in the present study.

There are two types of groups to which people may belong—present and non-present groups. A present group is the group of people who are physically there or immediate. While at a bar or club, the present group consists of the other bar-goers who are out. A non-present group, however, is the group of people who can be connected through some type of communication technology; in this case, the cell phone. A barfly who chooses to drunk dial a friend is tying in with a member of the non-present group to which he or she belongs. Because this study centers on cell phone use, we will define social cohesion in terms of non-present groups.

As new communication technologies emerge, scholars often turn their attention toward how those technologies may help or hinder social cohesion, specifically as they relate to developing and maintaining personal relationships. This trend has been applied to the cell phone as well. After a series of interviews, Campbell and Russo (2003) found that the need to connect to family and friends influenced their participants’ decisions to adopt and use cell phones. This was especially true when the cell phone users were not geographically close to their social networks (Henderson et al., 2002).

Beyond the emotional and relational connections that can be made through a cell phone, there is also a more practical dimension to the coordinating abilities of this technology. Cell phones can be used to physically draw people together. According to Drotner (2005: 60), “In the sprawling urban centers, young people coordinate their daily, and particularly, nightly activities and interests through their mobiles.” Cell phones allow for a network of college students to meet up more spontaneously than the carefully planned meetings of the
past. Therefore, being a phone have-not may actually have negative effects on one’s social life (Henderson et al., 2002). Without the cell phone, you may not be as strongly tied to the social network. Thus, it is not surprising that many young people have a strong emotional attachment to their cell phones, often feeling disconnected and lost without them (Aoki and Downes, 2003).

The social abilities of cell phones cannot be denied when considering non-present groups. Without a doubt, cell phones can connect us to other people who are not in our physical space at the time. By making a call or sending a text, an individual can reach out to someone beyond his or her geographic location. Bloustein (2007) has explored this mediated sense of social cohesion and social networks among young people. Specifically, Bloustein (2007) examined the abilities of young people to maintain social cohesion using music. In this study, results showed that young adults found new ways to relate with their present groups while also expanding their ties with non-present groups.

Despite the abilities of cell phones to draw us together, it is unclear how alcohol plays a role in the social cohesion among drunk dialers. Drunk dialing a friend may not always bring these two closer together, especially if social and relational norms—such as gradual and reserved disclosure, politeness and courtesy, and positive emotional expression—are not followed. To better understand how drunk dialing contributes to or detracts from social cohesion, we first examined college students’ motives or reasons for drunk dialing others. These underlying motivations may shed light on the potential implications of drunk dialing for social cohesion. To explore drunk dialing motives, the uses and gratifications perspective was adopted for this study.

**A Theory for New Media**

The U&G perspective is a user-centered approach to studying media effect that has been applied in previous cell phone research (Aoki and Downes, 2003; Auter, 2007; Davie et al., 2004; Leung and Wei, 2000; Ozcan and Kocak, 2003; Wei and Lo, 2006). “User-centered” means that, in this perspective, the individual chooses media among many alternatives, in a goal-directed way, to satisfy needs (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 1986, 2002). Additionally, U&G assumes that psychological and social characteristics precede media consumption, affecting the motives for and ways in which people use media (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 1986, 2002).
U&G was originally developed to explore the use of traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers. However, this perspective has been helpful in describing how people utilize new media technologies, including the Internet (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000) and MP3 players (Ferguson et al., 2007). Much of this research has focused on exploring the motivations for employing such media, which is one of the purposes of this study.

Motives precede media use, in that they are the reasons for utilizing a particular medium (Rubin, 2002). Research performed under the U&G perspective has produced typologies for cell phone motives. For example, in Hong Kong, people used cell phones affection/sociability, mobility, immediate access, and instrumentality (Leung and Wei, 2000). In another study, Wei and Lo (2006) revealed six motives: information-seeking, social utility, affection, fashion/status, mobility, and accessibility. Although these typologies inform general cell phone use, it is uncertain what motivates college students to drunk dial others. Therefore, when examining how drunk dialing impacts social cohesion through an analysis of motives, a new typology of motives is needed.

The U&G perspective outlines a process of media use that begins with psychological and social antecedents, which affect people's motives for consuming media (Katz et al., 1974). Motives then impact which medium is chosen, how it is used, and what gratifications (whether intended or unintended) are obtained (Katz et al., 1974). The first stage of studying a new medium is to examine people's motives for its use (Ruggiero, 2000). Therefore, U&G was employed in this exploratory study to reveal drunk dialing motives.

**Direction of This Study**

As noted earlier, cell phone use is quite popular among college students, and so is drinking. The combination of these two behaviors often results in drunk dialing or calling others on the cell phone while intoxicated. Drunk dialing may contribute to or detract from social cohesion with their non-present communities. To explore this new media use, the U&G perspective is adopted, which reveals college students' motives for drunk dialing. These motives help us understand how young people use the cell phone while intoxicated. Additionally, they may shed light on the potential effects of drunk dialing on college students' ties to members within their social group. The guiding research question posed for this study is: What are college students'
motives for drunk dialing, and what implications do they have for social cohesion? Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted to address these questions.

**Methods**

An interpretive approach was applied to this research. Following a qualitative analysis of the data, quantitative data was collected and analyzed as additional support for our findings. The following section reviews the research techniques and sample makeup of this research.

The study’s sample was college students. Two data sets utilized students from the introductory communication course at a large Midwestern university. Students completed the drunk dial questionnaires as part of a larger survey instrument administered each semester. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Across both samples, the average age of the participants was 20 years. Participants were predominantly Caucasian. However, other ethnicities were also represented (African American, Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, other). The proportion of women to men was approximately 60 percent to 40 percent.1

In order to determine motives for drunk dialing, two separate data collection phases were employed. Phase one consisted of an open-ended questionnaire that asked respondents to recall and describe past drunk dials they had made or received. Participants were also asked to indicate approximately how many times per month they drunk dialed others and how many times other people drunk dialed them. Drunk dialing was defined as making cell phone calls while intoxicated that may otherwise not be made while sober. Although young adults use cell phones for a number of functions (e.g., texting, sending pictures), the scope of this study concerned voice calls. People that had not experienced a drunk dial did not complete the questionnaire (102 of the 487 sampled). As reported at the beginning of this chapter, 79 percent of the sample (N = 385) had either sent or received this type of call in the past month, attesting to the commonality of this media use.

To reveal motives for drunk dialing, participants in phase one were asked to list all of the reasons why they had drunk dialed others.2 Then, they listed all of the reasons they believed that others made calls to them while drunk. This open-ended format allowed for participants to be exhaustive in their responses without any prompting or direction from the researchers. Of the 286 participants who had indicated that
they had made calls to others while intoxicated, the average number of instances per month was 5.66 (SD = 7.93). The average number of drunk dials received per month, of the 366 who had reported receiving such calls, was 6.37 (SD = 8.03).

Participants’ listed responses were qualitatively examined to reveal themes. A theme—also called a motive in this study—was defined as a concept formed from pieces of data that had consistent meanings. In other words, when a number of pieces of data were noted as being similar, they were defined as a theme (Miles and Huberman, 1994). We used a procedure called open coding, in which we read through the data and pulled out the responses that “fit” together. Whenever possible, coding was *in vivo*, using the actual language from the participants’ responses. We poured through the data together, discussing each response and determining the applicable codes consensually. Ten themes emerged from the data (see Table 14.1).

Once emergent themes were identified, the ten motives were further sorted into three broad categories—relationship, technological recreation, and alcohol (see Figure 14.1). These categories were created according to what appeared to be the determining factor in forming each of the ten motives. Some motives seemed to fit into more than one category. These motives and categories formed the basis for the quantitative portion of the work.

In the second phase of the study, a quantitative survey was designed using a forty-five-item Drunk Dialing Motives Index produced from the qualitative analysis in order to measure each of the ten motives. Participants indicated how much each item was like their motives for drunk dialing by choosing a response on a 5-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher responses indicated more presence of those motives. In this study, the second phase of data collection was used primarily to provide affirmation for the qualitative findings. To participate in this study, students must have drunk dialed at some time in their lives. Twenty of the original 433 participants were excluded from the study due to missing or incorrect data, and one 46-year-old participant was excluded as an age outlier. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 412 participants.

**Results**

After data analysis to determine motives, further interpretation was used to group these motives into three broader categories. The quantitative data was consulted to assess our conclusions. Cronbach’s
### Table 14.1  Definitions and Examples of Codes from Participant Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of inhibition</td>
<td>Drunk dialing because alcohol makes the caller less reserved</td>
<td>“I might feel more willing to say things that I normally wouldn’t say”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Drunk dialing to facilitate meetings or rides</td>
<td>“[to] invite me to come drink with them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Drunk dialing to assert one’s coolness or to get attention</td>
<td>“[to] brag about how drunk they are”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Drunk dialing because there was nothing better to do</td>
<td>“[I was] bored”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social connection</td>
<td>Drunk dialing to associate with others</td>
<td>“to talk to friends I maybe haven’t seen in a while and to see how their [sic] doing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophily/reciprocity</td>
<td>Drunk dialing to connect with similar drunk others or to reciprocate a prior drunk dial.</td>
<td>“to talk to other drunk friends who aren’t drinking with you at that particular time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confession of emotion</td>
<td>Drunk dialing to reveal feelings to another</td>
<td>“to tell friends I love them, miss them, and wish they were here”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of accountability</td>
<td>Drunk dialing because one could not be held responsible for what one does while drunk</td>
<td>“[you] can say whatever you feel without worrying about it [because] you are intoxicated”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Drunk dialing because it is fun for the self or others</td>
<td>“Because they are fun to make and it is all for fun”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual initiation</td>
<td>Drunk dialing for sexual purposes</td>
<td>“I’m looking to ‘hook up’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alphas were computed for items in each category to determine the appropriateness of this categorization (see Figure 14.1). Additionally, Table 14.2 reports mean scores and standard deviations for the quantitative support for the motives. The following discussion illustrates
Figure 14.1 Drunk Dialing Motives and Categories Emerging from Study Data

- **ALCOHOL**
  - Lack of inhibition
  - Lack of accountability
- **RELATIONSHIP**
  - Homophily/reciprocity
  - Status
  - Confession of emotion
- **TECHNOLOGICAL RECREATION**
  - Social connection
  - Coordination
  - Boredom
  - Entertainment

α = 0.86

α = 0.87

α = 0.83
motives contained within the three main categories (relationship, technological recreation, and alcohol).

**Relationship**

The *relationship* category consisted of motives that seemed to have the most impact on the connection between the caller and the recipient of the call ($\alpha = .87$). Drunk dialing motives that would fall under this category speak to the relational capabilities of the cell phone. For example, sexual initiation is affected by and affects the relationship with the person on the other end of the phone conversation. The relationship category was the most prominent of the three, in that six motives were encompassed in this category (see Figure 14.1). When analyzing the motives, two clearly fell under this category: confession of emotion and sexual initiation.

**Confession of Emotion**

*Confession of emotion* was defined as being motivated to drunk dial people in order to reveal feelings. Participants who identified this motive found their emotions as reason enough to drunk dial someone. One participant speculated that people drunk dial him “because they are so thrilled with life that they want to share their excitement with others.” Another said she drunk dialed “because I feel emotional and I want to talk to a friend.”

Throughout our data, there were many instances of both positive and negative emotional expressions. Henderson et al. (2002) found that for those who were physically distant, cell phones were essential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confession of emotion</td>
<td>2.87 (1.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual initiation</td>
<td>2.48 (1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social connection</td>
<td>3.10 (1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>3.57 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophily/reciprocity</td>
<td>3.32 (1.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>2.46 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>3.09 (1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>3.36 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of inhibition</td>
<td>3.14 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of accountability</td>
<td>2.51 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in maintaining relationships with others. Support for this motive was also apparent in the quantitative data. Participants indicated that they were likely to make drunk dials “to tell someone I miss him/her.” Regardless of physical location, communicating affection for absent others was prevalent among this study’s participants.

On the other hand, more negative expressions of emotions were present in the data. Drunk dialing may serve as a cathartic tool to manage one’s negative emotional state. For example, one participant described a recent drunk dial, “I got a voicemail [sic]. A friend I haven’t talked to in a while was pissed [because] I have a boyfriend and [I] don’t see him as much anymore so he told me and my boyfriend to fuck off.” In this case, it is likely that the drunk dialer had emotions that he felt the need to vent.

Besides expressing positive and negative feelings, one type of drunk dial was quite prevalent in our data—the flippant expression of love. This type of drunk dial did not seem to garner positive or negative responses, but was instead simply disregarded as symptomatic of the caller’s drunken state. Consider the following drunk dial:

Receiver: Hello.
Caller: Hey (name), I love you!
R: I love you, too.
C: Dude, I’m so drunk.
R: I know, I can hear.
C: Just wanted to say hi, love you.
R: Hello, and love you. Go to bed. Bye.

In this instance and many others like it, the cliché, “I love you, man!” was largely dismissed. Whether positive, negative, or neutral, participants often drunk dialed to express some kind of emotion to their targets.

Sexual Initiation

In many instances, participants admitted that people drunk dial because they were “trying to ‘hook up’” or because they “wanted some action!” Sexual initiation was defined as drunk dialing in order to pursue a sexual act or to pursue sexual intentions. This motive was not surprising, considering the research that attests to alcohol’s effects on increased
sexual arousal (Abbey et al., 1999; Dermen and Cooper, 1994) and risky sexual behaviors (Abbey et al., 2005; Leigh and Stall, 1993).

The confession of emotion and sexual initiation motives composed the core of the relationship category because they most clearly are impacted by and have an effect on the relationships between drunk dialers and their recipients. The four additional motives in the relationship category include characteristics from the technological recreation and alcohol categories (see Figure 14.1). These motives—social connection, coordination, homophily/reciprocity, and status—are discussed in the following sections.

**Shared Motives Between Relationship and Technological Recreation Categories**

**Social Connection**

There are two motives that overlap between the relationship category and the technological recreation: social connection and coordination. These motives encompass some features that are inherent to the technology and also some that more directly relate to the relational uses of the phone. For example, the motive social connection is defined as drunk dialing to associate with others. The item “to talk to my friends” received the highest mean score across all the quantitative measures. This finding supports the conclusion that people are likely to drunk dial to connect with others.

The technology of the cellular phone allows people access to their social networks at a level unseen before. Features such as free long distance, free calling periods (i.e., nights and weekends), and text messaging allows easier access for college students to stay connected. Additionally, much of the reasoning behind even owning a cell phone at all is to connect with others (Campbell and Russo, 2003). Many participants in the study remarked that they drunk dialed to relate to old friends with whom they may have lost a closer connection:

A friend I haven’t seen in like months called me to say hey. We just pretty much greeted each other [and] tried to carry on a conversation but didn’t really get anything of significance out. It didn’t really affect our relationship except to say that it just made me reminisce.

These calls may not be particularly substantive when it comes to actual conversation, but they can relate feelings of wanting to stay in touch with others. Rice and Hagen (2007) asserted that much of
the mediated communication is phatic, where “the purpose of using the technology is to maintain social contact and a good atmosphere, rather than to exchange information” (20).

For example, another participant remarked that he or she drunk dialed “because I haven't talked to that person for a long time.” Additionally, the technology of the cell phone allows for these spaces to be bridged much more easily.

**Coordination**

Another motive that integrates both relational and technological aspects of this phenomenon is coordination. Coordination is defined as drunk dialing to facilitate meetings or rides. Coordination has been found to be a reason for using the cellular phone in previous research (Campbell and Russo, 2003; Charlton et al., 2002; Ling and Yttri, 2002). Unlike other communication technologies, the cellular phone allows people to coordinate and change plans up to the minute. Relationally, making calls while intoxicated can be a way to “see where the party is at.” One participant remarked that they drunk dialed to “get people to come party with you.” Additionally, quantitative results indicated that participants were likely to drunk dial “to invite others to join me” and “to meet up with other people.”

*Shared Motives between Relationship and Alcohol Categories*

Two motives belonged to both the alcohol and relationship categories: homophily/reciprocity and status. These motives were sorted into both categories because they were perceived to be impacted heavily by both relationship and alcohol consumption factors.

**Homophily/Reciprocity**

Homophily/reciprocity was defined as being motivated to drunk dial in order to call other people who were drunk or in response to another drunk dial. As one participant explained, “They call me when they are drunk, so just returning to call.” Another participant described his reasons for drunk dialing in this way, “To talk to other drunk friends who aren't drinking with you at that particular time.” Students in this sample reported that they often made these types of calls “to talk to my friends who are also drunk.”

Homophily/reciprocity creates a connection between people and their non-present group, which is why it fits in the relationship category. However, this motive is also grounded within the alcohol category because it centers upon being drunk. Wishing to talk to
other drunk people and engaging in a drunken phone call cannot be accomplished without alcohol. Therefore, homophily/reciprocity is linked to both alcohol and relationship categories.

**Status**

Participants who were motivated by status to drunk dial others did so to assert their coolness or to get attention. When explaining why they thought other people drunk dial, participants said, “They think there [sic] cool” and “to boast.” More specifically, they “thought it would be fun, to rub it in that I wasn’t drinking and they were.” Another participant explained a recent drunk dial, “I called my friend and told him he was missing a great party and the beer was delicious.” Like the previous motive, status belongs to both the relationship and alcohol categories. For this motive, alcohol is the central reason drunk dialers can boast. Participants in this study identified many drunk dials in which people called simply to tell someone else they were drunk.

**Technological Recreation**

The technological recreation category centers on the characteristics of drunk dialing that are due to the technological aspects of the cellular phone ($\alpha = .83$). The two motives that primarily encompass this category are entertainment and boredom. These motives have been shown in previous research as contributing to one’s media use (Ferguson et al., 2007; Leung and Wei, 2000; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000).

**Entertainment**

The entertainment motive was defined as drunk dialing because it is fun for the self or others. People who gave this reason for drunk dialing generally felt that engaging in this behavior was good for amusement. Participants agreed to the likelihood of calling for several entertainment items, including, “to share a story that just happened with someone” and “because it’s fun.” Clearly, entertainment is a reason why college students engage in this activity.

For example, one participant said that he or she drunk dialed because it’s “fun to laugh about with your friends the next day.” Drunk dials can become events in friends’ lives that can be discussed beyond the actual call. Another participant remarked that drunk dialing “makes good stories.”

**Boredom**

Another motive associated with cell phone technology that is relevant to drunk dialing involves boredom. The boredom motive is
defined as drunk dialing because there was nothing better to do. Many participants remarked that boredom was a reason why they drunk dialed. Both boredom items in the quantitative data (“I wanted something to do at the time” and “I’m bored”) received scores higher than neutral. One person felt that people drunk dialed “just to go through the names in their phone.” Another remarked that they drunk dialed because it “wastes time.” This motive seems to not be dependent upon getting in touch with anyone in particular, but more of a need to use the phone because it is there.

**Alcohol**

The alcohol category consisted of motives for drunk dialing that seemed to have resulted primarily from the impact of alcohol on college students. Reliability for this category was good ($\alpha = .86$). Lack of inhibition and lack of accountability are two motives that are clearly linked with alcohol.

**Lack of Inhibition**

Alcohol is sometimes referred to as “liquid courage,” which encapsulates the motive of lack of inhibition. This theme is defined as drunk dialing because alcohol lessens one’s reservations or feelings of reticence. Participants were likely to agree with the statement “When I’m drunk, I have more courage to say the things I wouldn’t normally say.” When asked why they drunk dialed, participants said, “[because] I can say things I wouldn’t say sober,” “to say stuff I was too afraid to say sober,” and “drinking gives me the courage to tell people things that I would normally be too shy to say.”

This finding was not surprising. As discussed earlier in this chapter, alcohol may act as a social lubricant. Steele and Josephs’s (1990) alcohol myopia theory argues that behavior is impacted by two types of cues: provoking cues that instigate behavior and inhibitory cues that constrain behavior. In certain situations, we experience both provoking and inhibitory cues. These situations require people to weigh the impulse to act against the constraining factors. For example, overhearing a story about an ex-romantic partner could serve as a provoking cue for the action of calling him/her to argue. On the other hand, inhibitory cues would include the perceived negative ramifications of this behavior, such as loss of face or potential damage to the relationship.
Under normal circumstances, this appraisal of costs and benefits generally results in appropriate behavior. However, alcohol myopia theory assumes that when intoxicated, inhibitory cues are suppressed due to the difficulty associated with controlling a behavior as compared to acting on impulses (Steele and Josephs, 1990). Thus, the inhibitory cues are less likely to impact people's decisions about their social behavior when they are intoxicated, resulting in more extreme and impulsive behavior.

This prediction is supported by survey data, as the average score was above neutral for the item “I feel more impulsive when I'm drunk.” Rather than making a sound decision about whether or not to call a past romantic partner, an intoxicated person is more likely to attend to provoking cues and discount inhibitory cues. A regretted drunk dial may result. Rice and Hagen (2007) found in their study of U.S. and Norwegian college students' uses of cell phone and Internet technology that one of the social control issues that participants reported when discussing their own use of technology was “regretting messages sent while drunk” (22). Regretted messages may be a direct result of increased impulsiveness and decreased inhibitions related to alcohol consumption.

**Lack of Accountability**

Another motive that composes the alcohol category is lack of accountability. This theme includes being motivated to drunk dial because drunk people should not be held accountable for what they say and do. In other words, as one participant explained, “It is an excuse to call anyone and in no way can anything be held against you for calling someone when you're drunk, because when you're drunk you do stupid things and everyone should understand that.” Many participants said they could use alcohol as an excuse to say the things they wished to say. Thus, drunkenness serves a protective function against responsibility for one's actions or statements.

Lack of accountability may be a very freeing experience for a drunk dialer. As one participant described, “I may feel that I must confess something to someone, and then later on use the fact that [I] was intoxicated as an excuse.” Thus, after sobering up, drunk dialers do not have to claim ownership of what they said while drunk. Although this may be beneficial for drunk dialers, their recipients may or may not adhere to that standard.
Discussion

To summarize, the purpose of this study was to discover college students’ motives for drunk dialing. To accomplish this goal, two sets of data were collected. The most useful data in this study was the open-ended responses gathered from 385 undergraduate college students. These data were analyzed using open coding to reveal ten motives for drunk dialing. These motives were iteratively sorted into three categories—relationship, technological recreation, and alcohol. The second data set, which consisted of quantitative responses on the Drunk Dialing Motives Index, was used to describe how often undergraduate students reported being motivated to drunk dial for each of these ten motives.

The relationship category included motives that were the most influenced by relational variables. Six motives composed this category—confession of emotion, sexual initiation, social connection, coordination, homophily/reciprocity, and status. Social connection and coordination also shared characteristics with the category technological recreation, which included motives that were a direct result of using cell phones as a medium. Boredom and entertainment were two other motives that made up this category. Finally, the alcohol category, which included motives that resulted from intoxication, included lack of inhibition and lack of accountability, as well as the shared motives of homophily/reciprocity and status.

Drunk Dialing and Social Cohesion: Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

Results of this study yielded descriptive findings for college students’ motives for drunk dialing. These motives can be used to speculate how drunk dialing might affect the social cohesion among people who use this form of communication. The following discussion focuses on the potential implications of these motives on young people’s relationships and social networks.

Positive Effects on Social Cohesion

Four motives—boredom, social connection, coordination, and homophily/reciprocity—seemed to generally enhance drunk dialers’ cohesion among their groups. For example, bored callers may just flip through their address books and call those easily accessible. One person defined drunk dialing as “when you have been drinking and start calling random people on your phone list.” This idea is also supported with this person’s comments about why they think others make
calls to him/her while drunk: “Because they are drunk and my name is at the beginning of the alphabet.” These calls could build cohesion among participants, especially if this practice is common within their social networks.

The social connection motive encapsulates the ability of drunk dialing to enhance social cohesion. One participant explained he/she drunk dialed “because I haven't talked to that person for a long time.” These calls could strengthen social cohesion among members of a group that may have been weakened due to time or distance.

Coordination allows dialers and their targets to meet up with one another, whether for social (e.g., “see where the party is at”) or practical reasons (e.g., to get a ride). This motive allows for greater social cohesion because individuals can physically join one another while they are out on the town without prior plans. Through coordination, drunk dialers can connect with their social networks in practical ways, reinforcing their ties with one another.

Homophily/reciprocity can also contribute to social cohesion among members of a non-present group. As discussed earlier, adhering to a group's norms is one indication of social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006). By returning drunk dials, college students are establishing and reinforcing a group norm. Drunk dialing can become an expected way of behaving in college culture. While discussing a recent drunk dial with her cousin, one participant reported, “We both do it to each other often.” Thus, this motive may enhance a group's social cohesion. Also when calling to connect with other drunk people, these drunk dials may enhance a sense of camaraderie and group identity. The homophily side of this category may reinforce a shared identity, a necessary component of social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006).

Although there are clear ways that these motives could positively affect groups, these conclusions came with some reservations. For example, to be included in this group through drunk dialing, group members must be listed in the drunk dialers’ contact lists. Without an easy way to retrieve people’s phone numbers, drunk dialers would not be able to connect with others.

**Questionable Effects on Social Cohesion**

Several motives, specifically confession of emotion, sexual initiation, entertainment, lack of inhibition, and lack of accountability, could enhance or detract from social cohesion. The valence of the emotions communicated via drunk dials impacts whether calling for confession
of emotion positively or negatively affects social cohesion among group members. In our data, there were many instances of positive calls, often professing love for another or that the caller missed the target and wanted to reconnect. One participant wrote:

[A] friend called me from California to tell me how good a friend I was and that he missed me. I didn't answer but I listened to the message on voicemail [sic] and I liked it. I think they're funny and it shows deep down they care [at] least a little.

Research has shown that self-disclosure enhances relational satisfaction (Meeks et al., 1998). Therefore, a drunk dial to tell someone that you miss or love him or her could have positive outcomes for that relationship. Additionally, when college students were asked about their relational maintenance strategies, communicating “assurances” was the most frequently used strategy. Assurances included communicating supportiveness and overt expression, such as telling someone you love them (Canary et al., 1993). Self-disclosure via a technology such as the cell phone, even when intoxicated, may still serve a function of bringing (or keeping) people together.

However, not all intoxicated calls are so well-received. In another example, an emotional drunk dial had very negative consequences for a participant’s relationship: “My girlfriend was drunk and emotional. She called and started an argument. I was annoyed [with] her and broke up [with] her.” In this case, the cell phone served as a mode of emotional expression (on the girlfriend’s part) that led to negative consequences (the dissolution of the relationship). Of course, it is likely that the girlfriend’s drunken state, the subject matter of the argument, the relational history between the two parties, or a variety of unknown relational variables played a large role in the breakup. However, the breakup may have been exacerbated by the girlfriend’s decision to drunk dial.

Although professions of love can be taken positively, our data showed that often the overused and flippant “I love you, man!” drunk dial may serve the function of maintaining contact with others, regardless of the content of the message. Katz (2007) argued that cell phone technology has created a norm that frequency of contact is more important than the meaning of the message.

The message of love conveyed in this drunk dial seems more superficial than meaningful. These flippant calls from group members
could solidify drunk dialing as a social norm, and this may not have any immediate positive or negative consequences regarding cohesion. Instead, norms regarding drinking and calling behavior may serve to diminish any positive or negative repercussions of the drunk dial. In a study of U.S. adult cell phone use conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Rainie and Keeter, 2006), 44 percent of the sample indicated that they wait to use their cell phone when it won’t count toward “anytime” minutes (typically during nights and weekends). This time period coincides with normative college drinking behavior. It is possible that a drunk dial may seem “par for the course” among particular social groups, and thus the content of the message is less important than the act of dialing.

Like confession of emotion, it is clear that sexual initiation can have an effect on social cohesion. However, the particular effects this motive has cannot be speculated without understanding the other party. For example, a casual “hook up” that is appreciated by both participants may be perceived positively, such as the following drunk dial recalled by a participant:

Me: Hey, can I come visit?
Them: What [are] you [trying to] do?
Me: Whatever you are.
Them: Okay, call me when [you’re] in the lobby.

This participant identified the context of this drunk dial as “friends and booty call.” Regardless of the end result, the “them” in the above example did not reject the offer to visit. Sexual initiation drunk dials may also be made between committed partners, which may positively contribute to their relational satisfaction. On the other hand, some booty calls may be perceived negatively. Calling previous or potential partners to engage in sexual activity may be a violation of roles and social norms that may have lasting negative effects. Again, a closer look at both parties involved would warrant stronger conclusions about the effects of sexual initiation on social cohesion.

The effects of entertainment drunk dials are also questionable. The “good stories” facilitated and fueled by these calls can build social cohesion among groups because they can become integrated into the group’s culture or serve as a social norm in that network of friends. A funny drunk dial may be saved on voice mail and replayed again or the story of that conversation may continue to be told as part of
that group’s/couple’s culture. These happy memories can strengthen bonds among group members.

While some drunk dials may add to cohesion by creating a shared experience within a network, some “fun” drunk dials may not have positive outcomes. One person recalled a recent drunk dial where a person “called to tell me they were getting arrested. Then they said they were drunk and just kidding.” In this case, the caller thought it would be funny to play a prank, but this call could have positive or negative implications depending on how the other person perceives it. There could be discrepancies between what is deemed “fun” at the time from the dialer’s perspective and what is fun on the receiving end. This may be exacerbated when the call happens early in the morning. One participant recalled, “It was 4 a.m. and my friend from work called me. A bunch of them were out. He was acting stupid. It didn’t change our relationship—it was funny.” However, one can imagine that such a late call could also have a negative impact on relationships. One participant recalled, “I was in bed sleeping [because] I had [to] work at 8:00 a.m. and someone called me to come where they were, and I said I was in bed. They said ‘boo’ and I haven’t talked to them recently.”

One reason this late night calling may seem appropriate could be due to the technology of the cell phone. Drotner (2005) asserted that cell phones differ from landlines because they connect people and not spaces. Drotner also explained that cell phones blur time distinctions; there is a norm that people are always available. While making a drunk dial to tell a funny story to your friend at 3:00 a.m. might bring you closer to one another, an unwanted call could have negative implications.

Finally, the effects of the alcohol-driven motive lack of inhibition are somewhat up in the air. Although there may be social rewards when a person is less inhibited, there are many possibilities for hurting others, too. According to alcohol myopia theory, alcohol can lead to more extreme behavior, which could hurt a social network (Barry and Fleming, 2006). For example, people who are drunk may not effectively weigh out the costs of their communication, resulting in behaviors such as inappropriate self-disclosure or gossiping that could impact the relationships within one’s social group. This could be exacerbated when the recipient of this communication is not physically present. Inhibition may be diminished, and the likelihood of spreading a story about a friend or coworker may be increased. Therefore, this motive may detract from a group’s social cohesion.
However, in the sense that alcohol simply allows for more sociability, lack of inhibition may point toward more positive effects on social cohesion. “Alcohol makes me feel very outgoing and sociable,” one participant said. Another explained, “I’m more open to talk to someone when I’m drunk and not hold back.” This increased communication with others may help build up social networks, rather than tear them down.

If off-the-wall drunk dials are not taken seriously by their recipients, the lack of accountability motive may not impact a group’s social cohesion. However, as this data shows, the sober recipients of drunk dials sometimes do hold their drunken counterparts accountable for their phone calls. Many participants said they were annoyed or angered by drunk dials, especially while sleeping, and one even ended his relationship with his girlfriend over her drunk dial, as discussed earlier. Therefore, the impact of lack of accountability on social cohesion depends largely on whether or not all members of a group adhere to the “rule” that intoxicated people should not be held accountable for what they do and say while drunk.

The effects of these motives—confession of emotion, sexual initiation, entertainment, lack of inhibition, and lack of accountability—on groups cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the recipients’ perspectives. For example, an unwanted sexual advance through a drunk dial could significantly hurt a relationship between two people. However, if the recipient was welcoming of such a proposal, and if this type of behavior is considered a norm in that social network, this type of drunk dial could draw people together. In subsequent studies, we hope to expand our approach to this topic beyond simply looking at individuals. Examining groups that participate in frequent drunk dialing would give us a better picture of how this phenomenon truly affects group cohesion.

Conclusions on Social Cohesion

From this research, we conclude that no steadfast implications can be made regarding the positive or negative effects of drunk dialing on social cohesion. On the one hand, there were ways that drunk dialing could pull people together as a centripetal force. On the other hand, in many cases, it seemed that drunk dialing would serve as a centrifugal force, pushing dialers away from their social networks and detracting from social cohesion. However, it is clear from these results that drunk dialers’ motivations for calling should be considered in future
examinations of the impact of drunk dialing on social cohesion. According to this study, the effects of drunk dialing on a social network are largely determined by the intentions behind the call as well as the idiosyncratic norms of the network itself.

**Conclusion**

This study has implications for social cohesion literature, cell phone research, and the U&G perspective. Although some research has examined how young adults manage their social ties with networks through mediated channels (Bloustein, 2007), the particular context of drunk dialing has remained untouched with regards to how it affects social cohesion. A detailed look at this particular use of the cell phone could also contribute to the research on cell phone use. Although existing literature on cell phones does much to reveal the motives of general phone use, individuals who use cell phones for a particular use, such as drunk dialing, may have different motives that have thus far been unexplored. This study helps shed light on this specialized media use, which is a fundamental characteristic of U&G research.

Based on these results, it is clear that there is more work to be done in order to fully understand the implications of drunk dialing. One direction for future exploration deals with how technology impacts physically present groups. If you are distancing yourself by talking or texting on the cell phone from those who are physically present, what message are you sending those individuals? How might group cohesion be affected when a non-present other is chosen over those physically present? If drunk dialing has become a normative behavior, it may not affect the physically present group. However, it could negatively impact the present group if too much importance is placed on absent others.

Another direction for future research involves the relational implications of drunk dials. As an initial U&G treatment of drunk dialing, this study explored reasons for why someone might drunk dial. However, it did not fully explore what happens to social cohesion as a result of the dials. Although implications can be made, future studies would do well to fully explore this aspect in more detail, expanding on the potential of the U&G perspective. Are you brought closer to someone when they drunk dial you at 3:00 a.m. to tell you that they love you, or are you pushed further away? If you haven’t seen someone in a long time, do you really feel closer to him/her when drunk dialed, or does it exacerbate the fact that you are relegated to a drunken thought
on a Saturday night? What truly is more important in maintaining your groups, the quantity of messages or the quality? Furthermore, how does drunk dialing facilitate social cohesion between the drunk dialer and other drunkards as compared to the relationships between drunk dialers and their sober friends? The answers to these questions could shed further light on the repercussions of drunk dialing on social cohesion.

One limitation of this research is that it was conducted on the individual level. U&G views technology use as an individual choice. Research typically examines the motivations individuals have for choosing a medium to satisfy goals and not how groups use a technology. Despite this limitation, implications can be drawn from examining individual members' usage of technology to connect to their personalized social group. Cell phone communities are unique in that members of the group are constructed within one's phone book. Future research should explore the use of the phone book as it applies to group cohesion. Several participants remarked that they flip through their numbers when drunk to get in touch with people. If someone is on speed dial or if they are alphabetically near the top of the list, they may be included more in the drunk dial culture than others. If you are not in the phone book, you are not deemed worthy enough for a random dial. It may also be interesting to examine college students' present social groups to determine which members are called most often and how that may impact the feeling of cohesiveness among members.

One inherent problem is that drunk dialers may not be aware of their intentions or motivations. Some participants made comments such as “I don’t remember, I’m drunk” or “I don’t know. I was probably drunk so I don’t remember.” U&G assumes that people are active users of media that understand the reasoning behind their use. This could be an obstacle when alcohol use is combined with technology. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2004), even a few drinks can lead to memory impairment. This could lead to problems with self-reports, particularly from the sender of the drunken message. An additional complication concerning alcohol and this data set is that we cannot be sure of the level of drunkenness of the participants. Therefore, the sample may be skewed toward people who were less drunk (or not drunk at all) with better recollection ability than those who responded, “I don’t know—I was drunk.” It may be that the drunk dials from those who can’t remember may differ from those who can. 
Alternate methodologies and theoretical perspectives may prove useful to this area of study. Future research should continue to explore a variety of interpersonal and mediated theoretical perspectives. Figuring out why people use a medium and the purposes for that use is the first step; future research should move into the realm of effects of this behavior and how it relates not only to social cohesion, but how drunk dialing relates to college students and the college culture.

Notes

1. The first sample included 385 participants (234 women, 150 men, 1 unidentified). Their ages ranged from 18 to 44 years. The second sample was composed of 412 students (244 women, 168 men), with ages ranging from 18 to 32 years.
2. Contact the first author at ehollen2@kent.edu for the complete questionnaires used in this study.
3. For a full treatment of the quantitative data from the second phase, see Ferris and Kleman (2008).
5. $M = 3.83, SD = 1.02$.
6. $M = 3.72, SD = 1.02; M = 3.56, SD = 1.10$, respectively.
7. $M = 3.38, SD = 1.17$.
8. $M = 3.77, SD = 0.96; M = 3.42, SD = 1.09$, respectively.
9. $M = 3.50, SD = 1.03; M = 3.21, SD = 1.20$, respectively.
12. For an expanded discussion of how technology affects physical presence in communities, see Bugeja (2005).

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“I Love You, Man”: Drunk Dialing Motives and Their Impact on Social Cohesion

Ferris, A. L. and E. E. Kleman. An Unconventional Use of the Mobile Phone: Motivations for College Students’ Drunk Dialing Behavior.


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[AuQ1]AU:  [sic] has been included here. Please confirm.
Collectively, the contributions to this volume show that its overarching question is a two-sided coin with multiple facets to each side. As Hjorth concludes in her chapter, “it’s complicated.” Not only does mobile communication help bring people together and keep them apart, it does so while changing the dynamics of cohesion and division on various levels of social order. Chapters in this volume illuminate the role of mobile communication in connecting and disconnecting at the levels of personal relationships, personal communities, public life, and social segmentation. Here we draw from select findings and insights to examine key themes that are apparent in each of these areas.

Cumiskey’s study of “mobile symbiosis” demonstrates how the mobile connection between two individuals can be experienced on the psychological level. She advances this concept to characterize the absorbing sense of joining, or some would call it, social presence, while connected with another in mobile communication. While previous research and theory have largely emphasized the benefits of social presence during mediated interaction, Cumiskey shows that mobile symbiosis can actually loosen the user’s attachment to the physical realm of social activity. This disconnect is evident through participants’ reports of violating social norms and using technology to make themselves unavailable to copresent others. Furthermore, users can put themselves at increased risk of danger when the psychological bond makes them feel safer than they actually are. These findings depict a recurring theme throughout this volume: oftentimes the benefit of “bringing us together” in one way comes at the expense of “tearing us apart” in others.
Sugiyama's chapter also explores the intersections between interpersonal uses of the mobile phone and proximity, while shifting focus to the locality of the social ties. Notably, participants in her study were more likely to use the technology to maintain their friendship connections when both parties were locally situated rather than separated during a school break. Höflich and Linke also found that proximity shapes mobile phone use in their study of couples in the “continuation stage” of a relationship. In this chapter, we see how the technology serves as a primary channel for the routines and rituals characteristic of established relationships. However, the authors also note that those living in shared proximity need to be careful not to violate expectations by overusing the technology, which can have the paradoxical effect of driving a wedge between partners who need a certain amount of space (so to speak).

Expectations also play an important role in Lasén’s study of couples. Broadening the scope to various relational stages, Lasén reports how mobile technology has become a primary tool in bringing and keeping couples together, such as through affective exchanges during the early stage. As is the case with Höflich and Linke’s chapter, Lasén reports how tension and social division can arise when expectations are not met, particularly in cases of accessibility. Continuing with the theme of expectations, Hollenbaugh and Ferris’s study of “drunk dialing” reveals how this use of the mobile helps and hinders social cohesion in college culture. In their study we see how drunk dialing can signal and strengthen a relationship when motivations are agreeable, such as to meeting up or to simply catch up. However, tensions arise when intoxication leads to inhibition, and drunk dialers overstep the boundaries of this shared norm by making an unwanted sexual advance.

The studies of personal communities share similarities with those examining dyads, while illustrating ways that mobile communication shifts the dynamics of cohesion and division at the level of social networks. Instead of looking at mobile communication in a vacuum, some of these chapters situate the technology in the larger media landscape. As Petrovčič, Petrič, and Vehovar explain, today’s mix of network technologies, including mobile and Internet-based services, is integral to changing forms of sociality associated with reconfigured foundations of contemporary communities. They and others highlight how the mobile, in the context of other personal media, helps to both build and maintain personal community networks, fostering social cohesion as well as social capital. Petrovčič et al. and Bailliencourt,
Beauvisage, Granjon, and Smoreda find that the use of personal media is associated with increased network ties, which is notable considering this is part and parcel to social capital via shared resources (Bourdieu, 1986). Furthermore, these connections are enriched through new forms of sociality, as seen in Byrne's study where members of Irish sports clubs developed a strong sense of community membership through being included in regular mobile updates pertaining to their respective clubs.

But are these new forms of sociability replacing traditional forms, such as face-to-face communication? As with Sugiyama's study of dyadic relationships, the evidence from Petrovčič et al. and Baillien-court et al. suggest the answer is “no,” at least on the level of network participation. That is, mobile communication, along with the use of other network technologies, is associated with increased face-to-face engagements with network ties, bringing people together physically as well as psychologically.

This potential for enhanced network connections is particularly meaningful for socially marginalized groups, such as the young migrant women in Wallis’s study. As Bourdieu (1986: 249) points out, “the existence of a network of connections is not a natural given.” For poor rural women working in urban China, this is certainly the case. However, Wallis reveals that mobile communication technology helps even the playing field by opening up new opportunities for marginalized groups to develop and enrich network connections. As she finds, mobile communication allows for young migrant women to surpass, although not erase, the material conditions hindering their participation in guanxi, the Chinese cultural construct of social networking. Beyond a sense of connection, this access can translate into social capital, as members mutually benefit from the “multiplier effect” of shared resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990).

However, as is the case with the studies of dyads, the social cohesion that comes out of new forms of sociability at the network level also has a flip side, in that it underscores certain social divisions. These divisions can primarily be seen in the exclusive nature of network membership. While such exclusion is inherently part of inclusion, it manifests in new ways when mobile media are used for network configuration. Case in point is Byrne’s conclusion that group text messaging “defines a closed loop for communication, and in doing so excludes as well as includes members.”
On a broader level, we see various ways that mobile communication helps and hinders social connection in the realm of civil society, including norms for civility and civic engagement. In Cumiskey’s study, mobile symbiosis occurs at the expense of psychological involvement in the user’s physical surroundings, causing them to disconnect socially with copresent others in shared space. One way this disconnect occurs is when users violate social norms that help constitute the fabric of public settings. While these violations tend to occur unintentionally, individuals also intentionally disconnect from copresent others by explicitly using mobile communication as a means of avoiding them, thereby failing to provide the civil inattention expected in public spaces (Goffman, 1963: 88–99). These findings help us see how the two sides of our proverbial coin, with social connection on one side and disconnection on the other, cut across various levels of social order, here with connection at the interpersonal level and disconnection at the level of civility.

Some are concerned that shared norms are not the only aspect of public life challenged by mobile communication. Wilken points to concerns that mobile communication fuels trends of individualistic retreat from civic affairs, discussed by Putnam (1995, 2000) in *Bowling Alone*. However, as Wilken argues, we must be careful not to confuse individual action with individualization. Instead, he contends it is more appropriate to think about mobile communication in terms of social privatism, which is distinct in the sense that individuals are still connected in their networks of private relationships. But, Wilken acknowledges that social privatism offers its own concerns for public life when individuals are disengaged civically, as this still resonates with Putnam’s conclusion about individualized retreat.

Mobile communication is notably absent from Putnam’s arguments in *Bowling Alone*, as most of his tracking data on declining levels of civic engagement reflect time periods prior to it reaching critical mass in American society. Indeed, scholars have only begun to examine whether and how mobile communication plays a role in civic life. Gergen (2008) warns that mobile communication can feed into “monadic clusters” or small enclaves of like-minded close ties that shut themselves off from the viewpoints of others, and sometimes from the civic sphere altogether. While there is some evidence supporting his argument (Campbell and Kwak, forthcoming), studies also show that certain patterns of mobile communication are associated with increased levels of participation in organized groups, civic affairs,
and the political process (Campbell and Kwak, 2010a, 2010b; Ling et al., 2003). This is certainly the case in Byrne’s study of hurling and football clubs, where various uses of the technology keep members up to date and provide a sense of connection to their team. Instead of bowling alone, these individuals are playing together and staying connected in between practice and matches.

In fact, there are several examples in this volume that assuage concerns about mobile communication leading to social privatism. In Byrne’s study, the Gaelic Athletic Association draws members from all sections of the population and age groups, and mobile communication technology helps bridge new ties, for example through the exchange of numbers with members of an opposing team. Wilken also reports how distinctive mobile communication practices help in a bridging capacity, including the use of Bluetooth and text messaging as means for initiating contact between strangers. While bonding within networks of close ties is certainly emphasized in the existing literature, these studies and others (see, for example, Boase and Kobayashi, 2008) show that mobile communication can bridge as well, hindering retreat into social privatism.

On an even broader level, contributions to this volume shed light on connections and divisions that occur along lines of social categorization, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and intersections among them. Goggin and Crawford’s essay on conceptualizing youth highlights how mobile communication practices are illustrative of social differences that cut across generations and life stages. They argue that the social category of “youth” should be treated as a cultural construct, and that mobile communication is a prominent resource for negotiating this distinctive cultural landscape in distinctive ways. According to the authors, youths use mobile communication technologies not only to maintain social ties and express their personal style, but also as a means to “resist the dominance of adult spaces by creating parallel environments,” hence reinforcing traditional differences among age groups while also manifesting them in new ways.

Bailliencourt et al. also highlight how communication patterns reflect lifestyle differences associated with age. They widen the lens by examining trends across various age segments as well as technologies, uncovering meaningful junctures between the two. For example, they find that children and young people flexibly shift between technologies and their features depending on who they are contacting, while older adults predominantly rely on voice calling regardless of whether they
are connecting with friends, siblings, spouses, or others. Use of these media helps bridge generational gaps by bringing together individuals of vastly different ages, for example when a child calls a grandparent. The authors also underscore important differences across, and even within, age segments. Notably, they find that a young person’s choice of media reflects and helps constitute the closeness and nature of their social ties, thereby sharpening the lines that separate, for example, peers from family members and friends from close friends.

Shifting from age to gender, both Lasén’s and Hjorth’s chapters uncover how mobile communication can bring people together while delineating gendered relational roles. Patterns of use and expectations in their studies reflect not only differences, but the flow of power along gender lines as well. For example, Lasén’s female participants report that men use the technology to exert control by keeping tabs on their movements and trying to modify their use. Placing gender roles in the historical context of domestic and work expectations, Hjorth shows how mobile communication can play a part in the exploitation of women via intimacy and emotional labor. As Hjorth notes, “The role of gendered spaces, practices and labor—in both material and immaterial forms—is amplified by mobile technologies.” Rather than “tearing us apart,” it is perhaps more accurate to characterize these studies as exemplary of how mobile communication has been integrated into preexisting dynamics of a gender divide.

In her study of young, rural women working in urban China, Wallis examines how age and gender intersect with social class to alter, yet also reify, the landscape of social categorization. She finds that mobile technologies give rise to new possibilities for surpassing constraints of marginalization by providing these individuals access to guanxi. Simply owning a mobile phone brought profound benefits in terms of keeping in touch with others to these women, as many grew up without even a landline. Whereas their previous social connections were rooted in shared space, letter-writing, or the occasional call from a public phone, mobile communication technology offers convenient access to others, allowing these individuals to maintain, enrich, and expand network ties despite frequently changing jobs and locations. In this sense, mobile communication is bringing young migrant women together through new forms of sociality. However, as Wallis concludes, the social networking practices that bring them together also help solidify their status as outsiders from other segments of urban society.
In the end, we need to answer the question posed by the title of this book. Is mobile communication bringing us together or is it tearing us apart? We are tempted to answer, “Yes.” Both of these dynamics are a part of the scene. The mobile phone has rearranged the social scene. It brings some groups closer together and allows them to have ongoing interactions, while simultaneously distancing us from other persons and activities. It enhances some interactions while at the same time strains others. It is important to note that the mobile phone is not necessarily causal. The technology is only as powerful as the pre-existing motivations of the users. Because of this, it lets us play out our desires and it subjects us to those of others, for both good and bad. So, like Hjorth says: “Its complicated.”

**Bibliography**


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Putnam, R. D.

About the Contributors

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Scott W. Campbell is an assistant professor of Communication Studies and Pohs Fellow of Telecommunications at the University of Michigan. His research is concerned with the ways that mobile communication can help and hinder civic life, and how these consequences are shaped by social network characteristics. In collaboration with the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Scott has also recently coauthored a study of mobile communication and teens in the United States (http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Teens-and-Mobile-Phones.aspx). He is currently working with survey and focus group data from that project for theory building about the meanings, uses, and ramifications of mobile communication in the lives of young people.

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Larissa Hjorth is an artist, digital ethnographer, and senior lecturer in the Games and Digital Art Programs at RMIT University. Since 2000, Hjorth has been researching on gendered customizing of mobile communication, new media literacy, and gaming and virtual communities in the Asia-Pacific—these studies are outlined in her book, *Mobile Media in the Asia-Pacific* (London, Routledge, 2009). Hjorth has published widely on the topic in journals such as *Games and Culture, Convergence, Journal of Intercultural Studies, Continuum, ACCESS, Fibreculture*, and *Southern Review*. She recently coedited two Routledge anthologies, *Games of locality: Gaming cultures in the Asia-Pacific* (with Dean Chan) and *Mobile technologies: From telecommunication to media* (with Gerard Goggin). In 2007, Hjorth co-convened the International *Mobile Media* conference with Gerard Goggin (www.mobilemedia2007.net) and the *Interactive Entertainment* (IE) conference with Esther Milne (www.ie.rmit.edu.au). Since 2009 she has been an Australian Research Council discovery research fellow (with Michael Arnold) exploring the role of the local and online with communities in the Asia-Pacific region. This three year cross-cultural case study will focus on six locations—Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore, Manila, and Melbourne.
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