

GENDER AND THE TELEPHONE: VOICE AND EMOTIONS SHAPING AND GENDERING SPACE

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Abstract: *In the field of communication studies, the topic of telephony and the gendering of space via voice and emotions has received limited attention. The focus of this article is how telephone conversations are mediated by voice and emotions, which in turn shape and gender social space. The methodology is a collaborative autoethnographic design based on diary notes and memory work. Two central themes emerge from the findings that explain how space becomes gendered when using the telephone: (a) the voice and relations of power, and (b) the interstices between work, caring, and the telephone. Our findings reveal the central role of work and caring and how these spaces constantly are being traversed and transformed as the mobile phone becomes an important appendage for sensory perceptions of hearing/listening/voice. We argue that these themes point toward the crucial impact of emotions in the construction of multiple and gendered spatialities of telephony.*

Keywords: *gender, space, telephone, mobile phones, emotions, voice, autoethnography, diary, memory work, caring, work.*

INTRODUCTION

The conceptualization of the mobile phone as an affective technology increasingly has come to the fore in social science research (Fortunati & Vincent, 2009; Lasen, 2004; Sutko & de Souza e Silva, 2011). The mobile is a device through which users of all ages and genders tend to “enjoy an affective relationship... [whereby] expression, display, experience and communication of feelings and emotions” occur and are exchanged (Lasen, 2004, p. 1). Mobile phones make it possible for voice, text, or even photographs and videos to reach us instantaneously, bringing messages, seeking contact, and disrupting—even altering—relations between people and emotions in time, space, and place (Lee, 2005). These forms and demands of communication result in places becoming intimately connected and bound up with emotional landscapes shaped by embodied and sensory experiences (Moss, 2006).

The focus of this article is on how telephone conversations are mediated by voice and emotions, which in turn shape and gender social space. Specifically, we are concerned with how we use our voices to convey emotions and how we emotionally respond to the voices of others when using the phone for paid work and in caring for family and friends. We particularly are interested in the intersections of paid work and caring that arise via mobile phone use, intersections that are shaped by emotional landscapes and, in turn, shape both public and private social spaces.

However, before examining the telephone in relation to the private and public spheres, we affirm that technology is always used in the context of gendered subjectivities and power relations, and, as a consequence, telephone use may at times transform gendered spatial and social relations (Celeste Kearny, 2005; Domosh & Seager, 2001; Gorton, 2007; Grosz, 1999; Massey, 1994, 1999; McDowell, 1983, 1999; Moss, 2006; Reading, 2008; Wajcman, 2004). The gendering of space has been theorized well within communication studies in relation to information and communication technologies, particularly personal computers and the Internet. Although less emphasis has been placed on telephony and the gendering of space, there is a notable body of work (e.g., Garcia-Montes, Caballero-Muños, & Pérez-Álvarez, 2006; Katz, 1999; Lasen, 2004; Lee, 2005; Moyal, 1992; Palen, Salzman, & Youngs, 2001; Plant, 2003; Rakow, 1992; Rakow & Navarro, 1993; Reading, 2008; Vincent & Fortunati, 2009; Wajcman, 2008). Hjorth (2009, p. 21), for example, aptly argued that local places “are conduits for localised practices, which, [*sic*] give meaning to gendered telephone practices.” She demonstrated that gendered practices of consumption vary within and across the Asia-Pacific region according to place, despite globalized patterns around gendered consumer behaviors and telephone use. The telephone, and more specifically the mobile phone, increasingly has been theorized as a device that allows subjects to reconfigure “relationships between people and the spaces they occupy,” which alters social interaction (Wajcman, 2008, p. 66). However, examination of such reconfigurations and/or new social interactions in relation to gender has been limited. Indeed, gendered telephone use predominantly has been viewed within the context of prescriptive and traditional roles that place women in the private sphere and men in the public (e.g., Chesley, 2006; Igarashi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2005; Ling, 2001a, 2001b; Rees & Noyes, 2007; Smoreda & Licoppe, 2000; Turner, Love, & Howell, 2008). These studies confirmed stereotypically gendered behavior in frequency and use of the telephone. That is, they argued that women use the telephone more frequently for social networking in relation to kin and family (Katz, 1999). These same studies showed that men comment on women’s frequent and social use of the phone, whereas men use the telephone for business calls and as an artifact that symbolizes power and thus inscribes a masculinity that is in control of and controlling external forces (Katz, 1999; Plant, 2003). These studies mapped patterns of gender and the telephone in different spatial contexts, but their authors rarely engaged in analysis of gendered spatiality other than to make inferences about domestic and public arenas (see, e.g., Smoreda & Licoppe, 2000).

Recent studies, however, suggest that mobile communications may enhance the balance between women’s work and family lives, allowing women to undertake multiple tasks, such as arranging social events and attending to children’s needs whilst working (e.g., Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown, 2008), and older studies suggest mobile phones enable women to engage in remote mothering (e.g., Rakow & Navarro, 1993). The idea of remote mothering is one where women use the mobile phone as a way of checking on the well-being of their children and attending to their needs whilst they are physically separated from them. Thus the telephone is

used to transverse physical space to create a sphere for emotional and social relationships in a range of different ways, including parenting, caring, intimacy, and friendship (Celeste Kearny, 2005; Flichy, 1997; Garcia-Montes et al., 2006; Palen & Hughes, 2007; Rakow & Navarro, 1993). However, these studies leave unexamined the content of conversations and the emotional responses of women to remote mothering and to balancing multiple work and social tasks. As feminist scholars have argued, the spatial separation and dichotomization of private–public, home–work, and studying–parenting is problematic; an examination of how these blur and women’s emotional responses thereto allows us to obtain a greater understanding of women’s lives (Contarello, Fortunati, & Sarrica, 2007; Fortunati, 1998, 2001; Lee, 2005; Ling, 2001a, 2001b; Massey, 1999; Moss, 2006).

This paper begins with an examination of the literature on voice, emotions, and the telephone. We then draw on findings from telephone diaries and written memories to examine how we use voice to show and conceal emotions when using the mobile phone to shape interactions around paid work and caring. To the scholarship on communication technologies and emotions, we bring autoethnography as a methodological approach and a nuanced examination of how telephone conversations occur in emotional landscapes, giving meanings, many of which are gendered, to place and space.

THE VOICE AND EMOTIONS: CREATING EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE VIA THE TELEPHONE

Vincent and Fortunati (2009) provided the most comprehensive analysis of emotions and the mobile phone, explaining the different roles of emotion in social context by drawing on Goffman (1969) and Wright Mills (1951), as well as more recent theorists such as Barbalet (1998) and Hochschild (2005, 2006). Their analysis suggests that, sociologically, emotions have been understood as a process of regulating and controlling behavior in a range of social settings, including the workplace (e.g., Goffman, 1969; Hochschild, 2005, 2006; Wright Mills, 1951), and as ways to “better understand the social construction of the emotional life” (Fortunati & Vincent, 2009, p. 11).

Ahmed (2004) drew attention to how studying emotions requires analytical awareness of conceptual dynamics because individuals’ relationships to emotions vary significantly. Showing or suppressing emotion is, in itself, a sign of gendered and other power relations and is vital to the process of exclusion and inclusion. Lasen (2004), developing this argument specifically in relation to mobile phones, suggested that the telephone is a conduit for mediating emotions and emotional exchanges. By doing so, Lasen drew attention to human agency in the context of exchange—between what Latour (2005) would later consider the human and nonhuman (or technology)—where interaction gives rise to emotions, competencies, and performances. These multiple forms of exchange occur in situated places and practices involving other actors and objects, which are likely to be enmeshed within relations of power.

Particularly interesting for our study is the transformative agency of emotions and how the life of emotions is related to the complexity of imagination and the senses of sound and vision. Indeed, emotions—transferred or suppressed through the voice—pave the way for analyzing transcendence, resistance, and movement. As Fortunati (2009, pp. 42–43) suggested, through the telephone,

an extension of the ear and the voice takes place, which is a kind of extra-sensorial perception (McLuhan, 1981)... On the telephone we are our voice to the extent that the voice becomes our audio portrait (Friedman and Weiss, 1987). The voice has specific potency on the telephone, since it is a part that speaks for the whole. (Esposito, 2007)

Through the voice—our tone, our inflection, and how loudly or softly we speak—we transmit emotional dialogue (Sutko & de Souza e Silva, 2011). Using caring as an example, studies have shown that the voice through the telephone may provide a spatiality of caring through empathy, advice, comfort, and assistance (Moyal, 1992).

We are particularly concerned with how the telephone traverses space and creates new spaces and connections that shape the public and private spheres for women. Some forms of transcending private and public space have been discussed in recent literature that introduces the imaging functions of the mobile phone to capture visual and portable memories and, thereby, create a new image or language for communication across space (Campbell & Park, 2008; Lee, 2005; Reading, 2008). Theorizing the gendering of space allows us to problematize and contextualize the gendered use of telephones and, in particular, the rendering of creative meeting places that are real, lived, and imagined. Also, we recognize the variety of forms of telephone use in regard to gendered historic and temporal technological transformations. To generate understandings about emotional landscapes and the telephone for women, in the section to follow, we introduce our autoethnographic research design and textual methodology.

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC TEXTUAL METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Ellis (2004, p. xix) described autoethnography as practices of “research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political.” Our scientific inquiry about voice, emotions, and space in relation to women’s use of the telephone was based on our own personal and professional telephone lives, and was investigated using diaries and memory work (see also Bryant & Livholts, 2013). Autoethnography enabled us to record and examine the flow, interruptions, and situations of telephone use. Pink’s (2008a, 2008b, 2011) work on sensory ethnography assisted us in understanding the interaction between humans and their environments as a practice of shifting embodied experiences of the senses and a process of place-making in everyday life. Place-making, for researchers and the researched, is a process of becoming that we create “through our own routes and pathways” (Pink, 2008b, p. 179). Smell, taste, vision, and sound are central in this process, and Pink argued for a theory of multisensoriality, movement, and place as event.

As described in a previous paper, our backgrounds and histories include both commonalities and differences (Bryant & Livholts, 2013, p. 406). We are both women in our early 50s who research and teach at our respective universities in Australia and Sweden. As white women, we inhabit privileged spaces at a time when privilege is being challenged, and this intersects with other dimensions, such as our geographically peripheral locations, from a global perspective, our class backgrounds, and our family constellations. One of us lives in a city in the southern region of Australia and is of Greek heritage; the other lives in a small city in rural Sweden, is of Swedish heritage and has a farming background. One lives in a relationship with a man and has a teenage daughter; the other, at the time of the writing of this study, was a single mother with three sons, one of whom was living with his other parent in a

distant city. Our mother tongues differ, and we both use our second language, English, in teaching and research. Thus, to facilitate collaboration, which involved reading each other's reflections, we chose to write our diaries and memories in English. However, our native languages required us to further consider the term space in the analysis. In Swedish, the word *rum* (room) is more commonly used as a term that covers both rooms in houses and outdoor environments like city spaces. The Swedish word *rymden* (space) refers to outer space beyond the earth. In Modern Greek, there are multiple words reflecting the various meanings of space, and it is common to conflate space with place, land, district, or region. Aware of our culturally contradictory or bounded meanings of space, we both actively utilized a common space, that is, the discipline of social geography, to construct our spatial understandings (e.g., Massey, 1994).

Diary writing allowed us to document and to examine reflexively our typical everyday telephone use, whereas writing our memories allowed retrospective engagement with situations to which we had previously ascribed particular meaning. Hyers, Swim, and Mallett (2006) argued that, in comparison to commonly used qualitative data collection methods, such as face-to-face interviews, diary writing typically documents mundane life experiences rarely included in oral telling (e.g., Latham, 2003; Widerberg, 2002). We both wrote diaries in the first person, "I," one day per week over a 7-week period. To avoid life patterns that are day specific, we gathered data on a different day each week over this longer period of time, recording on the Monday of the first week, the Tuesday of the second week, and so forth. On these designated days, whenever we used a telephone (landline or mobile), we notated the content and context of our conversations, as well as our reflections and emotions during and after the call.

To allow for an examination of our memories of the spatiality of gender and the telephone, we turned to memory work. As noted in Ito and Okabe's (2005) ethnographic research in this field, memory work can help us identify particular situations that teach us more about the creation of meaning and emotion through sensory perceptions in the interface of technology, embodiment, and place-making. Memory work proponents view memories as a basis for lived experience in a context of society and discourse that allow one to create a subject–subject relation with attention to "moments," that is, the fragmented and nonlinear character of our lives (Haug, 2008). Memory work was first introduced by Haug et al. (1983/1987) and has been used as a collective and individual method of data collection (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992; Kuhn, 1995; Onyx & Small, 2001; Widerberg, 1995). An important technique in memory work is to write in the third person, "she," to create distance and to be able to improve remembering a situation in detail. Thus, for the purpose of this study and in addition to the first-person data collected, we agreed to write three memories in the third person on the "Where are you?" theme, referring to one of the most common questions asked by mobile telephone users (Garcia-Montes et al., 2006). When we wrote our memories, we learned that they did not deal necessarily explicitly with only location, but with the contextual and environmental issues implicitly intertwined with space, which in turn impacts emotion and voice.

When our data collection was complete, we exchanged copies of our diaries and memories to enable self- and peer-analysis of the material. We employed a narrative analytical approach in this study, focusing mainly on the content of the written material, but also recognizing the ways in which sensory perceptions were expressed (Ellis, 2004; Pink, 2009). Ellis (2004) described how analysis in story-telling methods such as autoethnography is closely linked with narrative research and that different forms of writing stories shape representation of knowledge. In a

similar manner, Pink (2009) warned against strict separation of collecting and analyzing data in sensory ethnography, and promoted a situated analysis where the written material is open to be reinterpreted into new knowledge about the ethnographic place as a new event. In this study, our own telephone lives constituted the source for writing diaries and memories, which promoted an analytical reflexive process during data collection. For example, we became aware of how we structured our stories using metaphors and concepts, and how we organized and communicated the experience to the reader. However, we also worked analytically, reviewing our diaries and memories to identify themes that would solidify our key findings. Our study emerges as a co-constructed story-telling and analytical strategy. Therefore, after we completed our initial assessment of our analysis, we initiated a discussion to jointly interpret the emergence of gendered spatiality of telephony from the data. As a result, we identified two primary themes: (a) voice and relations of power, and (b) the interstices between work, caring, and the telephone.

Although we have argued for the need for methodological innovation to understand gender and the telephone, we recognize that our design also has limitations. First, data were collected from our own lives and, thus, conclusions are limited to our specific life situations and privileged positions. This can reduce the study to self-consciousness and the reproduction of privilege because, as Pease (2012) warns, stating positionality and even demonstrating reflexivity does not take away privilege. However, Widerberg (1995) and Kuhn (1995) both have argued that memory work constitutes valuable grounds for analysis, even by a single author, when theoretical knowledge about power relations is articulated in the research design.

We now turn to the themes identified in our analysis of the data that indicate the power of emotions and their ability to shape the social spaces in which telephone use becomes gendered. These themes include an analysis of voice and relations of power and intersections between work, caring, and the telephone.

THE TELEPHONE AND THE GENDERING OF SPACE

Voice, Relations of Power, Emotions, and the Telephone

Gendered spatiality of telephony in our study was constituted in intersection with generational and family responsibilities and emerged in complex entanglements of various locations, such as work and home. We found these interconnections were most evident when actively listening to the voice on the other end of the line with a readiness to negotiate and arrive at a decision. Thus, although the sensory interaction through the telephone is more than a transmission of voice and has multiple uses, it is the transmission of voice in time and space and the social relations inherent in conversations that give rise to emotions.

Particularly relevant to understanding the changing perceptions of spaces and the possibilities and/or limitations of agency was Ahmed's (2004) notion that suppressing or expressing emotions is part of how relations of power are shaped. Further, Pink's (2008b) emphasis on how place-making is a process where social power relations are shaped through sensory perceptions of hearing-listening-voice interaction contributed important insights regarding reflexive encounters with our own use of voice, as well as that of others. Our diary material illustrated how relations of power were transmitted through the voice in telephone spaces and how we both recalled "acting professional" by concealing emotions. Thus, the

telephone creates a possible distant meeting place where interpretation of voice and subsequent feelings of irritation and shame arise. We expressed this in our diaries by documenting emotions like, “*I feel annoyed. Hide it and remain professional,*” or “*... she must wait. She sounds stressed. Will it be a short talk?*” or “*... she has a calm, nice, guiding voice.*” These practices of telephone interactions gendered space through ways in which we experienced ourselves limited in acting beyond femininity, for example, by avoiding appearing dominant or not sufficiently kind. But we also evaluated other women with administrative work tasks positively for their “*nice, guiding voice.*” In one of the themed memories, one of us wrote about a telephone meeting at work and how, during the course of the conversation, emotions related to power struggles changed her well-being and the meanings she associated with her physical working space:

Phone meeting, a space for voices that made it possible to hide the physical expressions of her body. She felt her heart beating, cheeks blushing. Holding the phone in her hand with a strong grip.... Afterwards, her working space had changed. However, no visible participants were leaving. It was just her taking down the sign: “Telephone meeting. Please do not disturb.”

This extract from a memory illustrates how a telephone meeting without visible participants affected the perception of one’s working space, emotional status, and potentially other relations. Written as a memory, it illustrates how the notion of work as an emotional place can change. The researcher experienced a power struggle during the telephone meeting, like an intrusion into a private room. The description of “*holding the phone in her hand with a strong grip*” suggests a struggle for control. Attending remotely a meeting where other participants are physically present has an interesting potential to trigger emotions related to having less agency to resist unequal power relations. The meeting involved a power struggle between women and reveals that being physically separated from the group at the other end of the line potentially creates a disconnection that produces unequal power relations. Thus, power relations in a group can vary due to presence (face-to-face vs. telephone) in the interaction.

Another example from a written memory shows how failed attempts to make contact with a work colleague created anxiety and distraction across spatial contexts.

She has to quieten her mind. She slowly walks back to her office. Places the mobile on the hard drive of the computer box directly in front of the screen. She sits opposite the screen and begins to work. Conscious of the phone. Waiting.

As the example from the memory above implies, keeping one’s mobile phone within close range in the physical office landscape can work as a kind of control from the perspective of the telephone holder or can be an expression of emotions of longing. Vincent (2005, 2006) argued that emotions are more deeply tied to ownership and use of the mobile phone than for any other communication device. Indeed, the process of actively waiting for the telephone to ring is perceived as intrusive, with the telephone becoming a symbol of relations of power. Vincent (2006) proposed that feelings of anxiety over missing calls or not being able to reach someone are not uncommon when users cannot make connections. Although this suggests that the way we now use the phone results in the controlling of time, which may be oppressive for some people (e.g., Green, 2002), our diaries and memories indicate the multiplicity of emotions and reactions that occur and shape space. As Lasen (2004, p. 2) argued, “mobile phones receive the affective meanings of the communications and exchanges that they mediate and they also

contribute to modifying the ways of expressing emotions. Mobile phone users also create opportunities for emotions to arise, for example, when reading or writing an SMS.” In what is to follow, we discuss the phone as a medium to provide comfort.

Emotions, Work, Caring, and the Telephone

As previous studies of the telephone and its relation to caring show (Flichy, 1997; Moyal, 1992), distance and spatiality become both a possibility and a challenge. In work situations, our emotions were often intimately related to situations of caring as a gendered practice, with the main responsibility for care falling on women. This responsibility emerged through complex patterns that involved our children, aging mothers, and friends. The ability to interpret the needs of another person across space and time and to mediate voiced engagement appropriately via the telephone is important, and what is appropriate depends on one’s relationship to others and age (Palen & Hughes, 2007). For both researchers, caring occurred several times a day through the use of the mobile phone. This caring took a number of forms: caring for children, caring for ill parents, and caring for close female friends. In transcending the time–space boundaries of gender and generation, patterns of responsibility and support are central. Like Moss (2006), we found that our emotions arising from mothering were often ambivalent. Interruptions to our professional thoughts and activities or turning off the phone during a meeting at times created feelings of inadequacy. Thus, our responsibilities as mothers and workers make the mobile phone an object that mediates potentially unequal gender relations. As one of us wrote in her diary:

What I was aware of this morning was the sense that my phone needs to be, must be, always with me; that it must be turned on. Turning it off requires active resistance. Feelings of irresponsibility.

Typically, we use the phone to care for our children by talking to them about getting food for themselves, checking if they were at home and safe, and helping them with homework. As scholars have demonstrated, the advent of readily available mobile phones has resulted in an increase in the monitoring and control of children by parents (Clark, 2011, 2012; Hjorth, 2009; Matsuda, 2010). The mobile phone, perceived as a device that increases the safety of children, is deemed a necessary technology for families (Matsuda, 2010). The phone took on a dominant role when we were away from our children so that we could continue to care for their emotional and physical well-being. As mothers, we specifically checked, listened to, and always were alert to how their voices sounded. Again, interpretation of nonverbal messages—transmitted by the voice and not necessarily by the spoken words—was central. For example, we documented thoughts like, “*he sounds happy*” or “*her voice sounded guarded*,” and from this we tried to estimate possible ways of continuing or changing the conversation or not. Is it ok to speak now? Have they had a difficult day? Exploring emotions in relation to telephone use allowed us to act across material spaces, for example, from our office to the kitchen in our home. Thus, caring via the telephone for us, as women, was sometimes associated with stress and lack of opportunity to separate work and family (as reflected in Chesley’s 2005 findings), but it also allowed for acts of resistance and, as Wajcman et al. (2008) found, provided us opportunities to give and to receive care. Occasionally, we were able to resist constant responsibility because we could hide our location from unwanted identification. In this way, the

mobile phone's "unlocation" (see also Bryant & Livholts, 2013) was indeed, at times, liberating. *"Mum's voice sounded unwell ... Didn't tell her I was away from home. Told her to ring me if she was sick so I could come. [Mobile phone hides where you are]."*

We acknowledge that our own voices in conversations transmit emotion and we use the phone as a medium to respond to our own emotional needs as well as those of others. We ring a friend or a family member when we need to talk through our feelings of concern about work, conflicts, or ill parents. Thus, the telephone disturbs and blurs the private and public spheres as many social scientists have suggested (e.g., Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Wajcman et al., 2008) but, at the same time, for women, these blurred boundaries both enhance and produce tension around the work–family balance.

We also found that the gendered spatiality of telephone use sometimes occurred in a situation of mobility when the phone holder and/or the receiver were on the move, creating experiences of multiple spaces that emerged through multiple sensory perceptions. We found that the embodied interaction with the telephone, through touch, voice, and sometimes text and image, created a new space that was "floating" due to the absent–present characteristics of its becoming (Gergen, 2002, 2003). An important aspect that shaped traversing location was our various relationships with people located near us or at a distance. This also had relevance for the rhythm, space, and time interactions of our relations across space. For example, one of us had organized regular phone calls to a child who lived with his father in another city and weekly calls to a mother who lived far away. Thus, the question "Where are you?" when we rang someone allowed us to begin to visualize his/her location. In addition, we noted the landscape of the distant surroundings that came to our memory and senses. For example, one of us was sitting at the kitchen table phoning a friend who replied on her mobile phone while travelling on a bus. The friend was traveling to the locale where the caller grew up, bringing to the mind of the caller images of the familiar landscape.

The methodological design of this study allowed the importance of spatiality and place to emerge. Mapping telephone use via memory showed how the geographical situatedness of the phone holder plays a part in shaping emotions. As one of us wrote, as a memory,

She stops by the huge beautiful outdoor Christmas tree outside the city hall, which has been decorated with bright red lamps. Instantly, she picks up her mobile phone and dials the number of her son who lives in another city. Impatiently she listens to the regular tone, waiting to hear his voice:

"Hello."

"Hi, it's me! Oh, I am so glad you replied. Do you know where I am?"

"No, where are you?"

"I am standing under the big Christmas tree outside the city hall. It is so beautiful and I wish you were here."

(short silence) "That sounds good, me too, but I will see you soon, ok?"

"Ok. Where are you?"

"I am with friends. Can we talk later?"

"Yes, fine, love you."

"Ok, bye."

The memory illustrates the phone holder thinking about her teenage son who does not live near her. The moment of watching the Christmas tree created emotions of longing, which made the connection potentially fragile. Moss' (2006) conceptualization of emotional landscape is

particularly relevant to the Christmas tree scene and it can be noted that reading memories, depending on who is reading, infuses the visual into the memories. In relation to the telephone as a connecting device, this memory inherits gendered interpretations of how mother–son relations may encounter difficulties of acknowledgement in the context of a peer group, but also that the location and place of embodied selves in particular situations limits connectivity.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

By undertaking a collaborative autoethnographic examination of our own telephone lives, we explored how social relations emerge in the intersecting relations of gender and generation, family and friendship, work and home. Our findings reveal the central role of work and caring in our lives and how these spaces are constantly being traversed and transformed as the mobile phone becomes an important appendage in contemporary life. Although voice and the spoken words are central in telephone interaction, the physical body and multiple locales also play key roles. A mother can stretch via voice from work to home to guide a child by envisioning familiar locations. However, in other similar situations, geographical distance, as well as not being able to envision particular placement and environment, matters. In depicting such transcending, visioning differs from visuality, as Haraway (1988) suggested. Thus, our study opens up space for further theorizing on extending human vision beyond what the eye can actually see during telephone use. Further, vision is one part of sensory perception that forms autobiographical encounters with ourselves and with others in a range of technological situations shaped by power relations.

In this study, theorizing space through gendered telephone use is intimately linked with emotion. Emotions are expressed and suppressed depending on *where* the call is received or made, *who* is calling, *what* the topic is, and *how* it is mediated. This suggests that place is relevant for emotions and sensory perceptions in producing gendered power relations. We found that the emotional landscape of the gendered spatiality of telephony hybridized physical, embodied movements, perception, and imagination. This constant presence, at times bringing security and allowing us to remotely care for others, also brought unexpected and unwanted interactions and emotions. For example, receiving a call from a person who had been out of contact for a long time could evoke troubling memories of the past and feelings of uneasiness, even as the distance in time and space allowed resistance. Thus, our theorizing offers an important insight for future studies on how place, understood as the geographical situatedness of the telephone caller and call receiver, is of utmost relevance in shaping communication through emotions.

Our memories connect us to imagined places, whether rooms in a house or outdoor locations. As Moss (2006) suggested, moments and the way in which they are bound with physical location and emotions are also potential sites for seeing life circumstances in a new way and for enabling agency.

We argue that studying the complexity of telephony for complex inquiries of power relations and studying the role of emotions are intertwined with methodological challenges. Our autoethnographic textual design opened up the study of gender, space, and the telephone in a way that promoted reflexive analytical thinking for theorizing the context of everyday telephone use.

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