

When There Are Unexpected Calls: Anxiety and Involvement According to Engagements to Power Geometries

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Abstract

Reachability has replaced *connectivity* when mobile communication gradually substitutes telecommunication nowadays: People are not assumed to answer a phone call anytime and anywhere instead of at a certain place where the telephone line goes, which is described as *wearability* or *perpetual contact*. The change does not only connect people during calls or other device-based communications, but also forces them to be alert to the possibility that mobile communication may come at anytime. Mobile phone somehow represents the straggle of both the physical place where people are and the remote place where people call, which can as well be explained by the analogy of *primary engagement* and *secondary engagement*. The evaluation of different power geometry types of each place or engagement to people causes them *anxiety* while requires them to develop the coping strategies. Five case studies are carried out in the paper to illustrate basically two simple questions: *Why* different people suffer different levels of anxiety under different circumstances, and *How* they deal with it.

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Key word: Anxiety; involvement; strategy; perceptual contact; place conflict; power geometry; mobile phone

Introduction

Perpetual contact (Katz, 2003) is a best epitome of whole society in the name of mobile communication. Agree or not, mobile phone has already changed the way we live by dramatically tuning people's traditional spatial and tempo senses via super sticky connectivity. No matter where one stays, his/her mobile phone's ringtone or vibration can put him/her through to another place all out of expectation at anytime. When the mobile communication is conducted, the person with the mobile phone becomes a scar of space who resides him/herself at both sides contemporarily, exposed to double stages (Goffman, 1959; 1963), norms, rules, needs and power geometries (Ito, 2005a) and faced with corresponding conflicts.

Even when the communication is not at "progressive tenses" and the current physical place restores its normal order, the conflicts for each mobile phone holder are not over. Connected presence (Licoppe, 2004) illustrates the mighty penetration of mobile technology in our life, which facilitates interpersonal communication without considering the value of information and the cost of transmission. The mobile phone is now a habit and "wearable" (Owain Jones et al, 2003) which forms its own ritual and infuses into existing social rituals (Ling, 2008b). May not be communicating all the time, one is continuously bound by the "illusions of control" (Hanson, 2007) and expectations of phone rings (Licoppe, 2008). In the light of these respects, one is always-on (Sherry, 2008) because the internal desire is not for fully official or serious information obtaining; it is the sense of reachability (Ling, 2009), a virtual call for expectation on feasibility and possibility to activate connection, that really matters.

One is hereby caught up in a serial of ruthless and restless conflicts of 1) the physical place where the power geometries are obvious, learned and certain and 2) some remote places which is vague, mysterious, surprising, unknown and unpredictable. The empirical studies of co-present conflicts are plentiful on the actual disruptions occurred at certain environment, but as I have depicted, the conflicts is somehow eternal and the disruptions are the minority eruptions of them.

Whenever the eternal conflicts are displayed in the form of disruptions, the process is more like change from maneuver to warfare: it has to deal with all kinds of possibilities and rehearse the illusionary and imagined emergency in advance; or has to deal with the real incidents which is short, certain and determined. Warfare is costly but maneuver is no less. Nuanced degree of anxiety is expected to glut one's entire time at different routine places like family (dormitory), classroom, library and transportation.

This study is to follow the non-progressive tenses of dealing with conflicts of places caused by mobile communication technology from the answerer's point of view, interviews and observations are to be conducted measuring the correlation between the college students' varied degrees of anxiety for possible coercive mobile communication and their physical locations in the sense of co-presence.

By underlining the term "power geometries" of certain places, this paper tries to differ it from the usual understanding of social norm, which is always consistent with conformity and deviance (Benoit Teste, 2003; Hewstone, 1996). Norm is external,

objective and tardy; I may carry forward Ito's notion further by defining the power geometries as internal, subjective and transmutative: it is the perspective from one's point of view and the sense within one's mind on measuring the surrounding environment, which mingles the outside world with his/her own intentions.

Around five individual cases will be introduced into this study to illustrate the following relationships among concepts: 1) the personal sensation of belongingness or engagement to one's different physical place and corresponding interactivity; 2) the relationship between one's involvement at physical place and his/her sense of anxiety; 3) one's coping strategies to decline or prohibit this sort of anxiety.

Literature Review

Disruption by a phone call is not a newborn coming accompanied by mobile phone but an always tempting topic even in the early landline phone arena. Licoppe (2008, p139-141) argues that "a telephone call creates an expectation—an emergency that explains why one feels compelled to answer a ringing phone", which is quite a mutation compared with the original model of telephone communication considering "the answerer of the call believed the caller had thought about the most suitable moment to phone". He vividly narrates the traditional French scenes where it's the duty of the servant to pick up the phone and deal with all the mechanical procedures and the unexpected, like wrong dialing and request for certain family

member (Bertho, 1984), which he integrates as a strategy to save the negative face and present the positive face into play (Brown et al, 1987). Sherry Turkle (2008, p132) describes the “rapid response” feature of so-called always-on and always-on-you technology which depicts a telephone call as a quick-response system and its technology-induced pressure for speed, in correspond to young people’s reluctant attitude toward formal thinking and evaluation before taking up the call in the continual presence of communication devices. However, more studies show the paradoxical sensation on mobile communication of disruption and expectation have been intensified since the mode of interpersonal connectivity is changing to embrace overdosed intimacy.

Perpetual Contact

Castells (1996) raises the concept of “network society” and argues that the power of ICTs has been changing the traditional social structure and connection, which cannot be realized if the technologies do not reach vast range of populace. Mobile phone is regarded as a device providing “coherent network logic” which bound every social individual with “relentless connectivity” (Castells et al, 2007, p6, p248). The innovated concept of connectivity is ritualized into routine and becomes less significant (Ling, 2009, p24), which involves Giffman’s logic that it is via the execution of rituals that people develop and maintain social cohesion within their intimate groups. Further, compared with landline telephone which usually takes

telecommunication as sort of business requiring time arrangement and agenda setting, mobile phone links everyone to “connected presence” (Licoppe, 2004) that allows random and unplanned interpersonal micro-coordination (Ling, 2009, p78) or even more trivial or less meaningful information. Licoppe believes that “the continuous nature of this flow of irregular interaction helps to maintain the feeling of a permanent connection, an impression that the link can be activated at any time and that one can thus experience the other’s engagement in the relationship at any time ” (2004, p141). His interpretation prolongs the general conception of connectivity that emphasizes the real-time and improvising mobile communication to “reachability”, “addressability” (Ling, 2009, p10, p136) and “wearability” (Owain Jones et al, 2003) that highlight conversion from terrestrial fixture to sticky portability.

More creative, “apparatgeist”, a neologism invented by James E. Katz and Mark Aakhus (2002) to define a sociologic basis of mobile communication theory, describes the consistent interplay between individuals and their personal communication devices. Mobile phone is pictured with the meaning of “perpetual contact” which deconstructs the mobile phone term as a pure device and enables more symbolic aspects (Katz, 2003). Correlated with Katz’s multiple unscrambling of telecommunication devices, Hanson develops his terminology “illusions of control” (2007, p49) to demonstrate the personal negative sensations towards ICTs based on individual’s tempo resource. He depicts a typical dilemmatic situation that people use ICTs to enhance the control of time yet controlled by the machines so as to waste more time. Penetrate deeper, the illusions of control upon devices are produced

based on the assumption that one is perpetually cautious about the device when assumed to use it whenever and wherever. Empirical mobile addiction studies shows that the sensational desire of mobile communication is morbid (Beranuy et al, 2009; Leung, 2008; Takao et al, 2009).

Above assertions prove that the mobile phone is not like landline telephone or the Internet which are more terrestrially related and promote a global village to bring people nearer at sometime; mobile communication is personally related and directly brings people sticking to others at anytime. The traditional metaphor of narrowing geographic distance has been replaced by superposing and mingling of places in the epoch of mobile communication.

Place Conflicts

In the light of the changing and alienating human-environment relationship, many empirical studies are conducted according to different regions, nations, peoples and other environmental features. The new situation maps the coexistence of spatial overlay and tempo unity, which highlights the academic interests on the conflicts of places and disruptions of co-presence summarized as below. The division is based on the nature of the physical places.

The conflicts of places in co-present activities are generally observed and argued in public places like transportation (Ito, 2005; Ito et al, 2005; Taede, 2009),

library (Kathleen, 2003), classroom (Campbell et al, 2006; Furedi, 2008; Gilroy, 2004; Ito, 2005; Scornavacca et al, 2009) and other locations where the social norms of personal activity are highly restricted and seriously regulated. The interesting part of these studies shows that the different organization patterns and their corresponding mobile communication issues are quite systematized. Transportation represents a decentralized and less organized environment; library represents a decentralized but highly disciplined environment; classroom identifies the most organized and disciplined environment even always with a executing governor. Generally speaking, participants show less tolerance when encountering disruptions at more constrained circumstances.

Another branch of this topic focuses on the domestic/family mobile phone usage. Sun (2006) studies the cell phone usage for in-house foreign maids in Singapore. This article describes the suspicious employers share a continuous negative feeling on their employees' mobile communication, which involves connection with their overseas relatives, local co-workers and local homeland embassies. The maids are in the "everyday resistance" coping with the employers by ignoring their contests or even challenge their ruthless discourse. Ito (2005) describes the unique Japanese family condition where all members, especially the kids, share insufficient physical space and privacy. Mobile phone becomes one of the outlets for the youth who may connect their friends or lovers to compensate the omission of domestic freedom. The parents show suspicion, "curiosity" and "dissatisfaction" (p136-140) on their offspring's manner and forbid it in some relatively formal and ritual

events, like having dinner or conducting educational dictation and critique.

The conflicts go extremely fierce sometimes especially in some labor-intensive factories at third world countries. Qiu (2009, p186-191) describes that in Southern China some factories ban mobile phone carriage or access during working hours or within workshops for the lowest level laborers, which may be bit by bit loosen when the employee's position at the hierarchy in this unit rises, like being a team leader or a group head, who will be given the privilege to take the phone calls while supervising others. Quite like the situation of the maids at Singapore families, the employer in China believes that the mobile phone usage will do harm to the laborers' working efficiency, and that their communication with mates will enable more autonomy to rise organized strike or rebellion.

Although most relevant studies focus on the conflict aspect of the co-present interactivities, the academic discourse is fairly diversified. It has been noticed that the youth whose life encircles more mobile communication habits are likely to extend their terrestrial scene through phone calls when convene non-present buddies for some social entertainments or carnivals in Japan (Ito, 2005; Habuchi et al, 2005). European studies which somewhat favor adolescent breeding and education environment have figured out that mobile communication helps to create an overwhelming caring and monitoring atmosphere composed by both parents and school workers (Demie et al, 2005; Harper et al, 2006).

Nevertheless, whether the remote place is linked seamlessly to one's

terrestrial place is determined by the activity of the core person and the view point of the observer. If someone is so enveloped in his/her mobile conversation as to ignore or jam the environment with eyes open but blind, this activity is displacing place similar to a devoted Ipod lover (Sharon Kleinman, 2008). As the bolt of the places, the one operating the mobile connection have to control both sides and pave the emotion or information channel mutually. Those previous studies which believe in partial harmony of the co-present interactivities mostly form their discourses viewing the connection launchers whose intention of conducting the communication is based on his/her arranged or at least anticipated scene. Disruption cannot be sighted from the active source and it is impartial to neglect the passives. Actually disruptions will always be found on the other side, whose "putting through" is less planned and more unexpected.

The above two types basically put the disruptions at different sorts of environment: It is obvious the social norm, relative deviance and compromise are highly characterized and nuanced from one another. "Power geometries of places" (Ito, 2005) is used when conducting a comparative research in certain society but varied places. Ito argues that when some place has been ritualized and functionalized to special usage and routines, and most of its participants are restricted to its designed norms and conferred with certain identities, the power geometries are to be formed mostly according to the early or mighty members' will. He uses this concept to determine the characterized power geometries at different places including family, school, transportation and the new space created within mobile communication.

According to Weber (1963), power is “the chance that an individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her own will even against the resistance of others”, which entitles power geometries as confined social norm carried out by unequal individuals, and confers the disruptions of co-present places with the inwardness of power geometries conflicts.

Coping Strategy

Responding to one’s permanent connection possibility and relevant conflicts, previous investigations show three types of coping strategy from the answerer’s point of view. The most prominent and widely adopted way is to communicate via text messaging while oppressing the voice call function when the answerer is physically trapped in some disciplined environment or interactive procedure.

Micro-coordination (Ling, 2009, p78; Ling, 2008b, p171) is one of the major social functions of mobile phone and text messaging is more appropriate when dealing with more frequent, informal and emotional interplays which extend the “connected presence”. This assertion is also confirmed by Lin et al (2007) who believe that text messaging between girl students enhance their co-presence and intimacy. Leung (2007) studies college students’ usage of text messaging in Hong Kong and implies that it is more like a substitute for youth who are less skillful or willing at Face-to-Face communication and that the communication are more feasible

for students who are likely to be pinned in the classrooms and or captured by idle times in transit.

Ito (2005) stresses the asynchrony of text messaging can become the advantage of habitual communications since unlike the voice call which forces the answerer to make a quick decision and produce more anxiety, text messaging may allow people with more indolence and flexibility to arrange the expectations and needs from both physical place and remote place. In addition, it is discovered that the asynchrony is limited somehow: the answerer is expected to reply the message in a limited and generally accepted time; the caller will demonstrate feelings of loss, suspicion and angry if his/her waiting time is extravagantly prolonged just like calling but getting ignorance (Kakuko et al, 2008). Naomi Baron (2008, p181) compares the access and “affordance” of text messaging with Email and IM to show the asynchrony allows the user to identify the remote and organize his/her ideas with less stress.

“Secondary Engagement”, developed by Ling (2008a, p100-102) with respect to Goffman’s dominant involvement (1963, p44), is to describe the ritual emergence of the co-presence of both physical and remote places. Ling argues that the primary (dominant) engagement represents the physical on-going process of one’s real location and that the secondary engagement represents the other part of co-present situation created in mobile communication, especially by texting message. Usually the secondary engagement can fulfill the gaps between the succession processes in the primary engagement, and also proceed alongside the primary engagement.

Mentioning text messaging, Ling says: “While mobile voice telephony offers the possibility for engrossing interactions, text messaging can often take place without disturbing the gathering, be it a class or a bus ride (2008a, p101)”. Given an interactive or organized scene, text messaging can usually go parallel with the current rituals without causing as much attention as by a voice call. At last he argues a few about the vulnerability of the dominant engagement to secondary engagements, such as a ringtone case.

The second way of dealing with possible co-present conflicts is determining and choosing his/her physical location. Ling (2009, p107-113; 2008a, p93-100) raises several vague and open-end guesses on the latitude of measuring and studying the different social norms and tolerance of disruptions at different places: 1) Openness and size, which indicates the personal sensation towards the physical features of the place, like comparison of street and indoor, large houses in the US and pathetic bedroom in East Asian countries; 2) procedure and organization, which applies to the progressive tense of one’s local and social interactivities, such as differences between an on-going school lecture and a traditional family reunion at a corking dinner; 3) Participation and engagement, which infers the active degree of someone in the previous dimension, for example, expectations of dealing with sudden ringtone vary from the meeting leader to some low-level listener, or individual’s attitude changes according to his/her enthusiasm upon the current process; 4) regulation and morality, which are the indicators of evaluating social deviance and lurching punishment; 5) example and emulation, which happens as one accounts his/herself

as the later and less mighty character who is to follow others on both self-discipline and deviance (Rogers, 2003, p168-218).

The third way is attribution. Kathleen (2005) studies immoral mobile phone behaviors and people's attitudes on condition that he/she is the disruptor or the disrupted. She briefly reviews the two most important branches in attribution theory. One tends to overestimate the degree to which other's disposition is the root cause of his/her behavior, and underestimate situational factors which may be also important in influencing the social phenomenon. This problem is called the fundamental attribution error. Contrarily, "we attribute behavior that is consistent with our self concept to our disposition, and attribute behavior that is inconsistent with our notions of self to situational factors (p226)". Back to the mobile conflicts, people are likely to scold others for breaking the current order while are likely to justify own mistakes by attributing to the caller or the importance of the call conversation.

Ling (2009, p109) argues that one's internal attitude of disruptions is "perhaps sins of omission rather than sins of commission", which provides a feasible measurement of different levels of disruption. His comment is based on a constructed scene when one hears ringtone at some suppose-to-be quite locations, for example, cinema. It implies that passive and first offence are to be considered as omission and forgivable; albeit any further disruptions are to be deemed as commission and more strong disgust will rise.

Purpose

In the light of all previous studies, I argue that the technology impact which the mobile phone brings to routine life is not limited to the disruptions when phone rings or when different locative power geometries confront each other. Rather, since mobile phone brings in perpetual contact to their users, the occasional conflicts evolve to permanent stress to individual, whose is affected by both the incidents and the nonevents. Also I propose that the stress varies according to different physical involvement since the power geometries nuance correspondently.

Empirical study of this article will focus on the following research questions:

1. How does one's personal sensation of belongingness or engagement vary according to one's different physical place and corresponding interactivity;
2. How does one's involvement at physical place correlate to his/her sense of anxiety;
3. What are one's coping strategies to decline this sort of anxiety?

Put this simply, I emphasize on INVOLVEMENT, ANXIETY, the CORRELATION of the two and the coping STRATEGY.

Method

By following Ling's writing style in Mobile Communication (2009) which

demonstrates five individual cases from developing countries like India and China, and other five from developed countries in Europe and North America, this study may select five cases from southern provinces and districts of China to reveal partially the relationships discussed above. There are several principles of choosing the targets:

1. Individuals using mobile phones comes from different occupations;
2. These occupations are commonly believed to lead to different social routines;
3. They are educated enough to brief their own social routines;
4. Cases are basically isolated from each other.

Based on the above rules this article primarily selects:

1. a college student and Christian studies in Hong Kong which is more than 2500 kilometers from her homeland in Northeast China (direct interview and observation);
2. a partial housewife with no religion lives in Jiangxi Province who does not go far away her house because of her most serious carsickness (direct interview and indirect observation carried by her daughter);
3. a journalist and Christian working for the reporter station of a Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po Daily* in Fujian Province, also his hometown (direct interview);
4. a newly recruited white-collar employee born in Henan, but working for a large IT company in Guangdong Province (direct interview);

5. a senior entrepreneur runs a county fruit & vegetable wholesale market in Hubei Province, not far away from his new villa in Wuhan City (direct interview and observation).

Unstructured Interviews and Observations (optional) are carried out mainly cut in their stories from the routine mobile phone usage. The interviewees are requested to depict their related sensations and activities grounded on their different locations and environments which are documented as notes for further check. The interviews are systemized into small personal biographies in similar style for analysis.

Cases

One: Fiona

Fiona comes from Heilongjiang Province located at far northeast China. Born in the late 80s of last century in a pretty affluent family, she in Beijing received baptism and became a Christian at university. Fiona came to Hong Kong in 2009 for a one-year MA program in Sociology.

Quite unlike her classmates and local friends who took the mobile phones with them every day, Fiona lives at the village house at the back of a hill where mobile phone signal is always incontinuous and unstable. So whenever she stays at her own department, whether the mobile phone can be reached by her study group members

in Hong Kong, boyfriend at overseas and parents in mainland touches her nerves all the time. She and her roommate, also her classmate who shares a two-level bed, used to be the customers of one giant local mobile service operator but unluckily her residence happens to be the semi-blind zone to base stations. Then she chooses another provider whose signal quality is recommended by her landlady, but the condition comes out with no inspiration.

So actually Fiona and her roommate all suffer the same problem that they are possibly not reachable to the outside via mobile phones depending on some unknown factors. When staying at home especially in the evenings, Fiona and her roommate reach an agreement: both of their mobile phones are left 24-hour open; put near the small open window of the dormitory and they give each other's phone number to their potential contacts as the substitute if one's own phone is momentarily out of service. Fiona thinks that by putting two mobile phones belonging to different operators together will narrow the blind time window to each of them. Once someone calls her or another, the receiver will cut the ring or use a short talk and bring her own mobile phone to the open outside for conversation. In the light of that, they only use each other's service in the way of pagers.

This agreement becomes even more important when both of them are facing the job hunting season when some company may call for direct interview or notification for further touching. But one of the companions is not pleasing. Fiona's daily schedule is almost consistent with her roommate except for every Sunday when

she shall get up relatively early in the morning to religious service in a nearby church while her roommate stays soundly asleep even to the early afternoon with her mobile phone silenced. Fiona received two phone calls for her roommate when she was in church during the prayer in a time. Though the phone was in silence mode, the vibration sounded so annoying in the church hall when no one made a noise. She felt “embarrassed and quite disturbed” and had to loosen her fixed hands to cut off the vibration, which made even more noises. That feeling came to be fiercer when she found that the two calls were nothing but trivial to her roommate.

However angry she was, Fiona could not blame her roommate which may be treated as resentment to their agreement. Fiona as well needs her roommate to collect phone messages for her and thinks her own business must have caused displeases to the roommate similarly. Actually, this kind of disturbs are not regular especially in the Sunday morning. But Fiona still feels uncomfortable in the coming Sundays since “a remote control bomb is ticking in my bag”. She even tried to leave her mobile phone at home “on purpose” for once, but that day became uneasy because Fiona felt “less secured”, she could not even read her schedule or the time since she uses her mobile phone to do the jobs. When asked why not turn the vibration off as well, Fiona does not respond for a while. She has never done that before and says “if no vibration and no ring, why should I still carry it”.

When asked whether her classes or other activities at school are interrupted in the same way, Fiona believes that taking a phone call in this university seems to be

usual that no one is to blame or to be blamed for this.

Two: Linling

Linling is a 57 years old partial house wife living in Jiangxi who stays in a small county almost all the time. 3 years to her formal retirement, her company reserves her full salary but intimates her to live a retired life to make room for the younger generation. Her eyesight is not good due to a minor traffic accident in her youth, which is her excuse of refusing mobile phone for years.

But last year her son-in-law in Shenzhen, Southern China bought her a domestic made Seniors Mobile Phone (laorenji), which is specially designed for senior citizens who are not good with complicated functions and settings, and also with bad eyesight. The design is simple with only basic functions like voice call and SMS, but the buttons, letters, numbers and characters are extra big for clear reading. Linling is quite happy with the new device and take it everywhere with her.

According to her description and the observation, mobile communication is not quite essential to Linling though she carries the mobile phone all the time. She does not have any real work or business to do; her only daughter lives far away in the south and is married; her husband keeps a disciplinary daily schedule on and off duty. Moreover, she has just got the mobile phone for no more than two years, her company and most of the remote friends are still used to the telephone at her home. Only quite limited population call her via mobile phone and the mobile communication

seems not to be conflicting to her at all.

Her daughter and son-in-law are the most possible callers for her. Generally they call in a fixed time window around 7 pm once or twice a week. Usually Linling at that time is participating in some seniors' health activity like body-building dancing and Tai Ji Quan in the local city open-air plaza along with hundreds of participators of the similar age. So most of time when they call, Linling is with her companies in some kind of house wife gossips. Surprisingly, the juniors' call is not a problem but actually an expected case. Linling will take the phone call proudly within the friend circle; her voice is not too loud to interfere with others' conversation, but not too low as well to allow her friends to listen and guess the contents. The conversation will not last for long originally and the contents are basically all trivial routines mostly containing health, wealth, relatives and works. After the conversation, Linling does not have to apologize for the rudeness and the topic of their talk are likely changed to her juniors and others' children later on.

The situation for Linling is staged. How she will response if the mobile conversation reveals more than routines and good news is quite convincible. She is not going to take all the phone calls in front of other; sometimes she walks away from the crowd and have some more unexpected talks the caller with much lower voice. Linling is apparently not free to talk about the content details, but these topics of course cannot be pushed to the public without any filtration. Her friends may ask but the ordinary ones may not get to the bottom if Linling simply relies with "nothing

important". She maintains that the situations are not common in her life and these unexpected are just sometimes too personal to be publicized immediately.

Three: Huang

Huang serves as a journalist working for the reporter station of a Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po Daily* in Fujian Province, also his hometown. Before this occupation he worked in Guangdong Province also as a journalist. Mobile phone is part of his work which requires him to keep the phone on 24 hours a day in case of emergency.

The mobile phone is quite essential but annoying to Huang at the same time. As his description, he has been called off friend reunion, family dinner or other private activities quite often since he chose this career. The mobile phone actually blurs the line between privacy and publicity for anyone in the same position. Huang complains that the phone calls from the newsroom seem to arrive always when he is working on some private interpersonal activities, for example, escorting his girlfriend to the movie theatre. When he is bored and need something to deal, the phone never rings. This impression makes Huang feel quite uncomfortable especially when he is up to some important personal arrangement, which let him germinate the idea of retreatment of this career.

However, phone calls become so important that Huang tend to use the public awareness of his phone's importance as an excuse to avoid some situations. His

office is to have a regular meeting every Monday evening at 8 pm o'clock and the arrangement is boring with rare exceptions. Sitting in the newsroom and listening to the dictations of the boss is a good experience. The meeting usually lasts for two or three hours and Huang sometimes set a timing alarm with a usual ringtone around forty minutes since the beginning. When the time is up, he can take a reasonable and fair leave to the outside and have some relief.

He even uses the similar strategy to get rid of some dull family doings. Huang say his mother helped to arrange most his spare time to marriage interviews (xiangqin) before he found his real love. In Fujian, the interviews are always arranged along with two families' early morning tea in a restaurant, with parents and their child from both sides. As a Chinese tradition, most single youths are somehow coerced to the interviews to a totally strange woman or man by advices and dictations from the seniors. Huang had to attend several times during the weekend but he managed to convince his boss in the newsroom to assign the break news duty of the weekend to him in advance. Whenever there was accident in the city like fire case or jumping (of the building), he will get a call from the reporter station, which rescued him away from the tiresome breakfast.

Four: Zhang

Zhang is a newly recruited white-collar employee born in Henan, now working for a large IT company in Guangdong Province after his graduation in the spring of 2010. Before this job Zhang has no working experience at all and he joined an IT

company because the personal relationship in a pure technology company is simple according to his initial assumption.

But the situation is not as good as his perspective. Zhang went outside to pick up a phone call from a team member of a collaborating technical group during the first team regular meeting on Friday when his director poured critiques upon the mistakes happened in the past week. The atmosphere in the meeting room got weird when he comes back: the coworkers were looking at him, and the director was silent with terrible looks. Zhang was told after the meeting that this director preferred high control over the team and his leaving during the meeting could be deemed as a huge disrespect to the director's authority apparently. Zhang finds that most colleagues are typing SMS or using mobile IM software under the table. No one tells him, but Zhang smells that his director requires more on presence than attention: no ring, no leaving, and no disrespect.

But the deputy director acts in quite a different way. When the director is off to some other cities, the deputy director takes his duty and operates the regular meeting, not in the assembly room, but in bars or restaurants. The cost is divided among each individual but the secretary, who is in charge of making up a meeting record and put the file in the director's office for future check. The environment change marks the deputy director's personal perspective of group power distribution and his willing to be part of the recruits, not part of the authority. There is no restriction to any personal activities and someone can even bring their lovers.

The time when director is off is not much and the relationship in the office is not pleasing as well. Zhang has been called at round 11 pm o'clock for more than once to fill the director with some trivial details in report or formula. The interruptions to his personal life anytime break his nerves but he is not liberating to turn off the phone or simply ignore the rings which he believes may even provoke the caller. But around two weeks ago he found some special domestic models are able to filter the incoming calls and SMS according to pre-settled rules; moreover, the blocked caller shall hear busy tone indicating the receiver is currently having another talk and may not receive the message. The built-software does Zhang great favors at securing his sleep and night life but he dares not to use it much in case his director may become suspicious.

Basically, Zhang is not a fan for mobile phone since most of his calls according to his memory are boring and job related. The feeling gets worse when he has to pay for the phone bill with his own wallet. He is young and uses the Internet a lot, which shares the major channel for his personal communication with families and friends. His director, though as an IT elite, prefer to use phone calls to monitor his subordinates whose lives are rudely intruded.

Five: Nian

Nian is a senior entrepreneur runs a county fruit & vegetable wholesale market in Hubei Province, not far away from his new villa in Wuhan City. He has worked for the government, two state-owned enterprises and his own factory during the past thirty years, the local wholesale market is almost his final strike in business which

focuses more on steady yearly incomes rather than huge profits.

With no hearing problem, Nian likes to talk in extremely loud voice with mobile phone and scolds people most of the time: his younger son, wife, brother, workers, managers and even some government low rank officials. Since his current business is quite essential and secured to the county and almost no partner is involved, Nian seems to be the definite core and dictator in his circle. He drives a lot in and out the county and it is quite common for him to get calls during driving. Although the contents may not be always pleasing according to his terrible manner to the phone speaker, Nian seems quite natural to the frequent rings. Of course not all the incoming calls are business related, but it is not easy to tell the differences if no knowing his local dialect well. His loud voice and terrible manner compose a quite powerful and unpalatable impression that no matter who calls first, he is always the dominator.

But Nian has a standardized life schedule which guides him to bed at 10:30 pm almost exactly. As he sleeps, he turns off the phone immediately. He will get up the next morning at 6:00 am and turns the phone on accordingly. When asked whether turning off the phone during the night may cause loses to business, Nian believes that a good sleep is the most important issue to one's health, especially for a man at his age, also that good business never comes at a unofficial time. It is common that SMS are left to be sent onto his phone during the night when people, usually his subordinates and elder son living in Southern China, schedule a mobile

conversation time for the next day. There is as well a fixed line telephone at home, which can be always put through if his close families and relatives have any emergencies.

Finding

Involvement

How does one's personal sensation of belongingness or engagement vary according to one's different physical place and corresponding interactivity?

This research question is based on the assumption that certain place represents certain power geometry which involves almost fixed interpersonal activities and relationships. According to the previous cases, some traditional places like home and restaurant generally fit the profile but more places are reluctantly to be classified to some types since they are generated because of some unconventional social realities, like the shared dormitory of the college students which is actually a village house. Some other places may have be far more powerful than it should be, for example, the newsroom and the office where young men and women started their junior careers; the workplaces are not confined to some physical rooms and 8 hours a day, but exert even to personal privacies after work.

Personal sensations of belongingness or engagement to certain places vary

according to one's personal experiences and social acknowledges, while the degree cannot be measured by pure index or indicator. For Fiona, the dormitory is the place she lives and shares the very important mobile phone services with her roommate, and the church is the place her innermost spirit belongs to. For Linling, the open-air plaza of her county is where she and her best local friends gather and enjoy abundant funny information though actually gossips, but it would be irresponsible to mark its most significance comparing with her home. For Huang and Zhang, their workplaces are always unpleasing but as the junior employees they have no choice but to let it be and even allow some degree of intrusion to their family or peer lives. For Nian the place is not a problem since he has copious experiences of travelling; as the boss of the monopoly business of his county, his career and personal life are intertwined together.

This research question is proposed according to the vast studies done to analyze the mobile phone usages at different places which tend to approve the previous assumption without proof. However I found the applicability of the same logic to different individuals with different identities is not optimistic. But the tie between the current activity and power geometries still stands: 1) Higher interactive level of certain activity holds positive effects on one's sense of involvement; 2) Higher rank in the bureaucracies of the activity holds positive effects on one's sense of involvement; 3) Higher self identification to the activity holds positive effects on one's sense of involvement.

Anxiety

How does one's involvement at physical place correlate to his/her sense of anxiety?

In some cases the anxiety level is positively correlated to the sense of involvement. Fiona feels bad when her prayer is interrupted by the vibration caused by trivial calls to her roommates, and the situation becomes even worse when her anxiety causes more noises. Huang even develops an impression that the calls from the newsroom are likely to come precisely to disrupt his personal arrangement. Zhang has to find some technical solution to filter his director's call during his off duty time. It seems that when the primary engagement is quite important or the scenarios that the secondary engagement represents are not comforting.

Although technically a phone call can be from anyone, but in reality, some people have agendas of which person may call at what time. Linling's case is quite surprising that she actually enjoys the co-presence of both engagement of her local friends and distant juniors. More importantly, not only Linling herself but friends in her circle do not mind the interruption which on the contrary becomes the next topic naturally. Her junior's call is a sign of filial respect to the mother, so the call itself becomes good deed to show off. The local friends' talk is highly interactive but the contents are of no importance that can give way to any similar topics at once.

This can be viewed as the counterexample to the positive correlation under

several conditions: 1) the physical activity is hot but not important; 2) the local agenda is less settled; 3) the remote agenda is well settled; 4) the remote agenda becomes part of the local agenda.

This analysis can be further certified when Linling encounters some unexpected calls or contents at the very similar physical environment. Any unexpected can come up to ruin the harmony since it may not be safe to be delivered to the current local interactivity smoothly. During these accidents, Linling's performance is quite similar to the students and young employees whose anxiety is pull high if the mobile communication is not at good control.

Nian's case is different since his contact network is large and complex but apparently he is at the top of most of the interpersonal relationships. He gets calls at any given places during the day time; calls to and from him make no difference to his manner. In all, he is the core of bureaucratic both at his physical place and on the phone. Quite unlike other cases, Nian is not quite sensitive to the unexpected calls because he gets called by too many people and used to it; no big deal is discussed and most of the people on the other side are lower in bureaucracies to him.

In all, I conclude that the correlation between involvement and anxiety may be spurious association at some time, and that the factors of anxiety lie in: 1) the probability of unexpected calls; 2) the probability of negative impact from unexpected calls.

Strategy

What are one's coping strategies to decline this sort of anxiety?

Setting the agendas of both engagements

This strategy may bring in high satisfaction if one's communication network is relatively simple, his/her is not in some significant bureaucracies and the regular life style is respected by his/her contacts. By setting the agendas of both sides one can not only deal with each of them properly but even integrate the two smoothly. A good agenda setting can effectively eliminate the unexpected and surprising factors of any incoming calls.

Avoiding synchronous conflicts

Synchronous conflicts can be found commonly in the using of SMS which maintains the harmony at the surface but secondary engagement at the same time. Calls direct to the receiver by mobile phone sometimes tear one's life apart especially when working affairs can arrive at any second. It is also possible to use some technical means to partially block certain communication channels to avoid strong requests from both engagements synchronously.

Sacrifice the less crucial engagement

When two engagements are confronting to each other, a quite normal way is to sacrifice the less crucial one after comparing the power geometries on both sides.

Sometimes one would take the boss's call even though he is having some important personal doings because career actually matters more. This strategy sounds pity but people can also use the comparative importance to get rid of some unpleasant situations if the coming call is publicly believed to be more crucial.

Dominate the power geometries of both

The problem can be solved if the one trapped in the double engagements is not threatened with negative effects from any sides. The reason why people feel trapped is that they have to make choices without making hurts to the sacrificed side. However, if someone is the dominator in most of his/her personal and business affairs, the negative effects can be overlooked since the power geometries on both sides are likely to respect his/her diversion.

Limitation

The research method is based on interviewees' and direct observers' memory which may lead to the Recall Problem (Rogers, 2003, p126-129) which somehow entices the interviewees and direct observers to give more obvious and typical description of the cases in order to please the interviewer's intention and request.

Since mobile phone usage and mobile communication are just part of these people's routines which may involve quite unrelated scenes. The interviewer has to

make choices and some generalizations to make the points needed in this paper more clear even during the objective illustration of cases which may mingle some subjective and positive factors.

The place/location factor used in the research questions is developed from the previous literatures that are likely to assume certain location is linked with certain population and corresponding power geometries but less exemplified via the cases. In fact I find that it may not be proper to compare different locations, anxieties and power geometries among quite heterogeneous cases.

Conclusions and Discussions

A mobile communication activates the co-presence of one person in both the physical and remote places where different power geometry types expect his/her involvement contemporarily. Usually his/her involvement to the physical presence is deemed as primary engagement while remote as secondary engagement which sometimes challenges while compensates the primary engagement from time to time.

One's involvement to the physical or remote places can be evaluated via by the standards: 1) Higher interactive level of certain activity holds positive effects on one's sense of involvement; 2) Higher rank in the bureaucracies of the activity holds positive effects on one's sense of involvement; 3) Higher self identification to the activity holds positive effects on one's sense of involvement. Assuming the

relationship of the two kinds of engagement is at variance, the person's anxiety lies in the match of the two.

Comparing with the mobile communication, there are usually more clues to follow during the current physical interactivity, which means the secondary engagement is more likely to be unexpected. It is observed that the two engagements can stay in harmony if 1) the physical activity is hot but not important; 2) the local agenda is less settled; 3) the remote agenda is well settled; 4) the remote agenda becomes part of the local agenda.

Further illustrating, one's anxiety of the perpetual contact era can be reduced if 1) the probability of unexpected calls is lowered; 2) the probability of negative impact from unexpected calls is lowered. In practice there are four general strategies based on previous analysis: 1) Setting the agendas of both engagements, 2) Avoiding synchronous conflicts, 3) Sacrifice the less crucial engagement, 4) Dominate the power geometries of both engagements.

Mobile phone has become our most crucial daily standard equipage which brings us conveniences as well as troubles. Friends around us are always complaining the downsides of mobile communication but at the same time see the mobile phone as most important. This paper uses five cases to illustrate several identical scenes of mobile phone usage, part of which happen to you and me. I argue that the caused anxiety is not limited to the moment when mobile conversation goes on but at progressive tenses due to possibilities of getting called. The negative effects

cannot be fully eliminated but people have already developed ways to encounter. I hope this qualitative research enriches the existing academic concern upon psychological health in the light of mobile communication nowadays.

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