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What is disturbing and why not to disturb. On mobile phones, gender and privacy
within heterosexual intimacy.

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Abstract

Drawing on recent research conducted in Spain, this article analyses how mobile telephony contributes to (re)create and (re)mediate gender, couple intimacy and privacy. We take a Goffmanian approach to analyse the utterances of *disturb** (*to disturb, disturbing, disturbed*) in interviews and focus-groups on mobile phone uses and practices within heterosexual couples, showing how gendered ways of everyday management of intimate bonds and territories of the self contribute to the ordinary reconstitution of gender hierarchical differentiation. These gendered ways, in conjunction with mobile telephony possibilities and constraints, are producing the contextual norms and expectations which set the condition for privacy, or the lack of it, within current couple intimacies.

Keywords Mobile telephony, gender, couple intimacy, privacy, ordinary practices, heterosexuality

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The diverse forms of considering privacy and the public sphere share two fundamental kinds of opposing imagery: in one hand, what is hidden, withdrawn, secret vs. what is open, revealed, accessible, visible; and in the other hand, personal vs. collective. Digital mediations of couple relationships offer a privileged site to observe the convergence and clashes between the shaping of the self and privacy, understood in those two ways.

The ubiquity and pervasiveness of mobile media and digital mediations contribute to the multiplication of hybrids of public and private (Sheller and Urry, 2003) as they induce changes in the contextual norms of appropriateness and distribution of information. They are indiscrete technologies (Cooper, 2001, p. 24), not just because they facilitate forms of social indiscretion, but because they do have the capacity to blur distinctions between ostensibly discrete domains and categories, such as public and private, remote and distant, work and leisure. Formal and informal norms, as well as ordinary expectations about what is appropriate for whom in a given situation or relationship, show how different contexts and realms of everyday life

entail different privacies¹ whose demarcations, meanings and contents are thus highly contextual (Nissenbaum, 2004; Thompson, 2011). These evolve in relation with the materiality of social life, as the contemporary forms of mobile intimacy “in which the geographic and physical space is overlaid with an electronic position and relational presence, which is emotional and social” (Hjorth and Lim, 2012, p. 478).

Methods and approach

This paper explores some of these dynamics related to the articulation between mobile phones uses and practices, gendered subjectivities and affects. Our sociological analysis is grounded in two lines of research: conflicts and violence in heterosexual couples and mobile phone intimate communication, which merged in the project *New communication technologies and the re-articulation of gender relations: emergence, expression and management of couple conflicts*². The fieldwork was carried out in Madrid, from 2009 to 2011, involving 2 focus group, 24 semi-structured individual interviews, 3 semi-structured interviews with both members of the couple, 12 4-days-diaries of mobile phone use from both members of 6 couples and 1,000 telephone interviews. However, this paper focuses specifically on the discourses collected through the focus-groups and the interviews, both individual and in couple, lasting from 1.30 to 2.15 hours, whose participants were heterosexual middle class women

and men, aged 20-45. This age group was chosen because it presents a sufficient familiarity with digital technologies, as well as the probability of having experienced several couple relationships. Furthermore, they have grown in a democratic context, with egalitarianism as one of its emblems, which distances them from the Spanish traditionalist and authoritarian recent past. The relative homogeneity in the academic background and income level helps to strength the comparison between the social and sociological egalitarian portrait of contemporary “modern” couples (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) and the daily practices of those who are presumed to embody and perform it. Though we selected different kinds of couples, according to the length of the relationship (less than one year, from one to five years and more than five), with and without children, living together or not, our analysis here highlights the commonalities of the gendered interaction order.

This analysis focuses on how mobile telephony contributes to (re)mediate (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) and (re)create performatively gender, privacy, couple intimacy and domesticity through ordinarily ritualized and mediated practices. In order to do so we attend to how the participants in our research use the term “disturb” and its derivatives regarding mobile phone interactions within the couple. Methodologically, it implies to situate our analysis on what is disturbing and for whom within the dramaturgical interaction order:

Who is brought or brings himself into the immediate orbit of another; who initiates talk, who is selected as the addressed recipient, who self-selects in talk turn-taking, who establishes and changes topics, whose statements are given attention and weight, and so forth. (Goffman, 1977, p. 324).

The question is then who decides, who leads, and who follows in the dance of digitally mediated and face-to-face interactions, and what the broader symbolic and material implications of these choreographic arrangements are. Moving from the methodological to the theoretical, Goffman also provides us with a choreographic view of gender which reveals its ordering potential as a "remarkable organizational device" –up to the point that it can be stated that "gender, not religion, is the opiate of the masses" (Goffman, 1977, p. 315). In the rituality of everyday ordinary encounters and digitally mediated forms of communication in couples, gender relationships emerge as a particular choreography, a performance in which one's position, subjectivity and movements are arranged regarding the position, subjectivity and movements of one's partner while simultaneously other orders and hierarchies are performed and re-enacted as well, such as professional/domestic, public/private or information/communication. The different uses and meanings of disturb in the interviews illustrate this complex articulation of gendered ways of everyday management of couple bonds and personal space, as well as they reveal how gender

hierarchical differentiation is reconstituted and keeps on serving as a basis for other social orderings. At this point, Goffman's proposal contrasts with some common assumptions on contemporary couple relations and dynamics, which presume the progressive dissolution of gender and its asymmetric orderings: when "some of our citizenry no longer believe that women's traditional place is a natural expression of their natural capacities [...], if the traditional pattern is sustained it will be sustained less comfortably" (Goffman, 1977, p. 309). Analysing the uses of the verb disturb can help us to understand this less comfortably-sustained order without denying the role of gender as a key "remarkable device".

Framing contemporary couple communication

Couple relationships undergo diverse interconnected transformations related to the general socio-historical context (the so-called risk, uncertainty or informational society), to gender relations and subjectivities, to family notions and structures, as well as to ordinary practices and interactions, such as digital mediations of relationships, communication and everyday life. Some of the most influential contemporary sociologists have analysed those processes as a shift from traditional to more consensual bonds or "pure relationships" (Giddens, 1992), where love becomes crucial but chaotic (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 2)³. Thus, couple relationships become

a paradigmatic example of “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011: 1): a double-bind when the object that draws your attachment sustains you in life at the same time as it is a threat to your flourishing. This is, a clash between the “fantasies of belonging” and the “conditions of belonging in particular historical moments” (Berlant & McCabe, 2011).

As we have already discussed (Lasén & Casado, 2012), communication plays a central role in this changing landscape for intimate bonds. Ambivalences between the process of individualization and the resilient character of gender relations and life in couple, as a node of personal life projects and social structures, are a fruitful ground for the mystification of both the affective bond and communication. A certain idea and ideal of communication appears as the very condition to make the precarious character of contemporary intimate bonds certain, liveable and enjoyable, at least temporarily. When connected to transparency, commonality and communion (Carey, 1989; Peters, 2000), communication is usually invoked as the key to understanding and as the irrefutable solution for the arguments and troubles people have to face. It is taken as an unproblematic assumption: we assume we know what it means, we deeply trust in it, but we can hardly define it. Thus, our view of communication, particularly when applied to love and coupledness, shows the fantasy of believing that differences, inequalities and conflicting interests would dissolve once we communicate and understand each other’s feelings and intentions. The promise of ubiquitous and

permanent contact and communication enacted by mobile media strengthens this ideal (Hashimoto and Campbell, 2008).

However, this approach on communication fails to notice that understanding and agreeing are not synonymous. Communication operates in reaching consensus, but also in processes of differentiation, in strategic purposes, as when trying to control the situation and ourselves, or just in making connections of all kinds including of course arguments and controversies. That said, intimate relationships and heterosexual bonds are not precisely well equipped to face controversies under the inertia of gendered differentiations and inequalities. Furthermore, the intimate bond and domesticity have to face some new tensions about the uncertainties of contemporary life, with two individual subjects with particular plans, worries, troubles, fears, tastes, beliefs, moral commitments and desires willing to connect.

Couple relationships yield a paradox regarding privacy. According to the liberal conception of individuals as economic subjects, private property becomes the ultimate basis for privacy and independence. The modern view of autonomy becomes understood in terms of control, and ownership over personal space, time and information. This clashes with how trust and love are sustained in intimate relationships through mutual disclosure, producing expectations and obligations of transparency and extended sharing (projects, tastes, beliefs, opinions, activities,

groups).

Conflicts between personal autonomy and mutual recognition and dependency are enacted, embodied, traced, originated, mediated, and, sometimes, solved in mobile phone uses, practices and interactions. Mobile media take part in the game of designing and defending personal and collective territories. They are involved in the emergence, expression and management of these conflicts and in the ordinary rearticulation of gendered power relations.

All these changes have taken place in Spain at a particularly high speed following a traditionalist dictatorship (1939-1975) (Casado, 2002). This historical peculiarity can make the Spanish case a good place to see how gendered differentiation and its embodied subjectivities, far from being progressively dissolved, are ordinarily performed, and how the public/private divide is entwined in this practical reconstitution⁴.

Couple obligations and mobile accessibility

To disturb is a transitive verb and, as such, it entails an object that a) interferes with the normal arrangement or functioning, b) interrupts the sleep, relaxation, or privacy or c) makes someone anxious. To be disturbed, then, involves something experienced as disturbing by a specific subject, which points to the relational and

situational dimension of social life. As we have learnt from Goffman or the ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, 1967), nuisances are a fruitful ground to recreate the demarcations and assumptions of our ordinary practices. Focusing on what becomes disturbing in mobile communication within heterosexual couples and for whom, what is the margin to avoid it and how it is expressed, can be very useful for social analysis. It can illustrate how mobile telephony remediate the gendered scene, adapting simultaneously to its inertias, scripts, roles and divides, thus contributing to their practical reconstitution.

Significantly, the annoyances due to the device have much to do with the overlapping of public and domestic settings that it facilitates and its effects on the framing of the interaction situation (Fortunati, 2005; Rettie, 2009). This is particularly relevant for couple life nowadays, as what was once taken for granted (the public/private divide, the sexual division of labour, etc.) is now open for controversy.

Given that you have something that you want to utter to a particular other, how do you go about getting into the circumstances that will allow you appropriately to do so? (The opposite question is of interest too, namely, how do you go about avoiding the circumstances in which you would be obliged to disclose something you would rather not?) (Goffman, 1983, p. 32)

In our interviews, women perform a firmer compromise with the first question while masculine worries are related to the second one. In women's discourses mobile phones are represented mainly as a new possibility to act and speak, although they can also become a potential new source of control. Men's discourses stress the opposite: mobile phones are a potential tool for control but at the cost of putting at risk their autonomy as they also become more available for others, particularly for their intimate partners, and can experience more pressure to self-disclose. Therefore, men perform greater resistance to this device, highlighting its potentiality as a source of "musts" which can disturb their normal arrangements, interrupt their relaxation or privacy or, one way or another, make them feel anxious.

I don't like having more musts than needed. I phone you because I want to. Do not get angry because I could not phone you before or I could not phone you one afternoon or whatever (23-year-old man)

The mobile is becoming a nightmare for me (31-year-old man)

However, this performance is ambivalent as men display a greater interest both

for technical aspects of the device and brands⁵; but it is legitimized by their professional usages and technical disposition, thus freed of any consumerist suspicion which can threaten the gendered play of differentiation:

There are things that are really important and things that are not. I don't mind not having a plasma TV. But for the mobile phone there are things that I do have and which are necessary (45-year-old man)

Likewise, the usually avowed tension between being connected and the wish to disconnect is more firmly performed by our male interviewees, who defend and come to represent the rational and efficient usages of the mobile phone:

It is useful but, damn it!, depending on it for everything gets intimacy out. Relishing a book, sitting peacefully, talking to your girlfriend and stop to be talking to an object... I own two mobiles and, unfortunately, one of them is a PDA because I need it. It pisses me off. I think it is necessary but, as everything else, you should know how to use it (Focus group, 20-45-year-old men)

This nostalgia of a purely human world freed from technology, with clear

demarcations among professional and domestic spheres and public, private and intimate scenes, expresses the gendered strain to defend the “territories of the self” in the contemporary digital landscape: “in general, the higher the rank, the greater the size of all territories of the self and the greater the control across the boundaries” (Goffman, 1971, p. 40-41). But, its defence clashes with the contemporary couple obligation of transparency and disclosure as a way of supporting trust and demonstrating love. This is highlighted by the obligation of a double accessibility afforded by mobile phones: to the other person as well as to the device and its content. For instance, the shared use of the mobile phone by members of the couple (access to the partner’s device for answering calls, downloading and uploading, sending messages, reading and deleting content, etc.) reveals a mode of subjection to the other through an increased mutual identification and intimate disclosure (Lasén, 2011).

These obligations set the limits for individual privacy inside the couple. In some cases, they are accepted as a normal feature of being involved in a relationship, especially for the younger, with less past couple experiences; in others, they elicit tensions and rejections, in particular when this accessibility has contributed to previous break-ups and crisis. The way people describe this accessibility reveals the size and control of their territories but also a lack of acknowledgement of privacy

within intimate bonds. Such obligations develop in parallel to the expectations about self-disclosure that are distinctive of being in a relationship, as it was already noted by Simmel (1906) a century ago, highlighting the worrying consequences for the lasting of the love bond. However, this lack of privacy does not seem to worry the participants in our research. They accept this “transparency” as normal and expected, as believing and fearing that anything that is not accessible hides the threat of a “double life”. It is as if the will to achieve cohesion and trust prevented autonomy and privacy.

You can have your little privacy, but I don't have any problem if I'm driving and I receive a text. I say: “please see who it is”. No problem at all. I don't have anything to hide and I'd love to have the same feeling. I'm not telling that I'll take your phone every day to check what you've done, of course not. But if one day you are on *Facebook* and I sit close to you, I'd like not to have the impression that I'm watching something private and that I have to go, because that's the feeling I get now. Or when you are doing your email and I stand next to you to see the pictures that you are looking at, and I have to go because I don't want to have the feeling that I'm taking away your freedom (28-year-old woman)

This notion of trust requiring a total transparency is expressed in some interviews when particularly women do not understand the resistance to a total intimate disclosure, unless one has something to hide.⁶

He doesn't check my mobile, but if I caught him doing it I wouldn't care. I have nothing to hide. I'd find it funny (32-year-old woman)

It's like sharing your life completely. I think that you have to share everything [...]. He entrusts me with his life. It's the same for the mobile (39-year-old woman)

Even those far from the romantic love narratives share this view. As this 35-year-old woman who, despite of defining herself as "zero romantic" and thinking that falling in love is "becoming idiot", states: "I've never gone out on my own or had very private things when I'm in a relationship. Everything has to be told and there is a lot of trust". Transparency justifies accepting the partner's monitoring via the mobile phone, whilst control is associated with suspicion and double life, with jealousy, but not with the obligation of being localized, accessible and available. Therefore when we are "very transparent" and "do not have anything to hide", we are neither controller nor

controlled. The immediacy and connectivity afforded by mobile phones become distinctive features of intimate relationships:

When you call and there is no answer you say: “it is not possible, they must answer”. You become more demanding with communication (35-year-old woman)

At the end a couple relationships is communications and a mobile phone helps to communicate immediately (39-year-old woman)

For my friends [...] if three days pass without a call back is not that important, it doesn't matter. But with my girlfriend I expect a quicker answer (23-year-old man)

This obligation of accessibility facilitated by mobile communication in general, increases for couples: the greater intimacy, transparency and immediacy, the higher obligations to fulfil the expectations. Those features of mobile connectivity fit well with the logic of (asymmetric) des-differentiation and recognition within couple relationships.

Knowing about the other's life, the everyday life, being able to come into contact..., this is for me basically. If something unexpected happens, good or bad, I like calling him to tell it and when you don't have the phone this possibility doesn't exist anymore. This facilitates me to come into contact with him. (27-year-old woman).

This is also revealed by the anger when a call or a text message are not answered, the suspicion of a dark intention for not doing it, or the annoyance when the partner forgets the ritual call. Stating "how much" contact is "too much" depends both on gender relations and expectations towards their partners and on the stage of the relation itself. Thus, the interest for connection at the beginning of the relationship can encourage –or help to admit– a more intense flow of affective communications, while, as times goes by, practical issues tend to play a main role, increasing that potential tension between will for autonomy (mostly expressed by our male interviewees) and will for sharing (most explicitly referred by female participants).

Interviewer: Do you phone each other when you need to make a decision?

He: Most of the times I don't.

She: No, he doesn't. He... [*laughs*]

He: I make it directly.

She: He does everything straight away. I like phoning, organising, consulting. He doesn't. He is more... "I do it without consulting" [*laughs*]

He: Of course. Yes, I do.

She: I do like phoning for everything (unmarried couple of a 28-year-old man and 25-year-old woman)

Territories of the self and gender arrangements

The tension between autonomy and sharing takes us back to the issue of the defence of the territories of the self and gender relations within the couple. Our male interviewees express a deeper tension but they embodied a more advantaged position in its management. Gender stereotypes, displayed as particular personality traits, serve to legitimize their defence against what is presented as the irrational usages of technology by women and youngsters. "For what I say in a minute she needs one hour", states a 32-year-old man. Thus, mobile phone practices seem to slip easily towards "nonsense" when used by or with women, this nonsense covering a huge range of possibilities starting from dating and flirting:

At the beginning you can spend three hours messaging each other, then you don't. You settle down a little bit and say: "let's give it a break" (45-year-old man).

Defining some uses as nonsensical can be a way to address discomforting issues regarding negative feelings or potential interferences in one's own action or self-image or to avoid the kind of topics that does not deserve enough value or attention. Significantly, masculine resistance to the overlapping of spheres is expressed as a call for "respect", which now is not due to a traditional patriarchal authority but to the individuality they traditionally embody. This masculine performance is discursively reinforced and legitimized through the discourse of individualisation:

He is in his right, because why are you going to be obliged to answer every phone call if you do not want to (28-year-old woman)

Social practices and spheres are hierarchically (re)produced in this move. Daily gendered practices reconfigure the matrix of asymmetrical dichotomous oppositions that gives them sense and consistency. Thus, efficient information is opposed to ritual (nonsensical) communication (Carey, 1989). Furthermore, the domestic sphere has to

accommodate (and it does) the requirements of paid labour –the first presented as routine, the second as adventurous– reinforcing gendered differentiations:

Generally I am the one that phones. Her life is much more patterned; in my life everyday is different. I like it and I appreciate that my wife accepts it (39-year-old man)

Thus, work and sexual division of labour legitimizes social demarcations of mobile availability. Here, “I do not phone him to say silly stuff because I do not want to bother him”, stated by a 25-year-old woman, fit in with “I am available during the hours I am available, I mean, in work hours it is known that I am not”, stated by a 45-year-old man. According to our interviews, this choreography does not change significantly: whatever the work situations are, gender displays authorize male more than female to wish and demand not to be disturbed, reinforcing the attached normative value to the masculine, to its tasks and representatives. One way or another, gender arrangements help men to avoid convincingly and assertively the tensions:

When she reproaches me [for not answering the phone] I do not allow her to

do it. (23-year-old man)

Male assertiveness (“I do not allow her”) fits in asymmetrically with female acceptance and caution. In fact, women interviewed hardly utter the verb to disturb: “It bothers me is maybe a little excessive word” (32-year-old woman). Thus, they express less control over their territories. In these everyday practices subalternity as well as autonomy and reflexive capacity are thus ordinarily reconstituted. Although, in contemporary equalitarian landscapes, these become deeply personalized, minimising the significance of gender while reinforcing its orderings.

He needs like more room to meditate and to reflect on his work. As I have more or less reflected already on it, I just keep going [...]. It is not that it bothers me
(31-year-old woman)

Our male interviewees “do not like to be disturbed”, they rarely recognize themselves disturbing others, and when they refer to their partners’ irritation (for instance for their lack of response to phone-calls) they tend to minimize the legitimacy or rationality of feminine demands; on the other side, women state and perform that they “do not want to disturb” their partners:

I think it is due to insecurity, maybe by thinking that it is my fault, that he can become bored of me, that he can feel annoyed, that I can disturb him (31-year-old woman)

Since social validation for subaltern positions depends on not demanding too much (Branaman, 2010, p. 248), feminine discourses reveal a strain to avoid bothering, as it could attach them to traditional feminine stereotypes (“the pest” or “the chatterbox”) risking both their public image of modernity and their intimate relationship:

There are moments in which obviously he cannot answer the phone. But I am not a pest (35-year-old woman)

These displays reorganize a hierarchical ordering: men perform the entitlement to regulate the interaction while women follow their footsteps, with accessibility and heteronomy expressed and reconstructed in mobile communication.

Interviewer: How does that situation in which you phone him more frequently

and he felt a little controlled evolve?

Well, giving up phoning so much. Indirectly, it makes him feel freer and he acts differently (34-year-old woman)

Therefore the interaction order in mobile phone communication within heterosexual couples rests mainly upon the feminine adaptation to masculine definitions of the situation (when to phone, how long to talk, when not to expect an answer, what not to talk about), based on their embodied legitimacy for establishing and monitoring the social frames and lines:

He really bothers if I am not available [...]. But in his day by day work he only phones me for children arrangements: "Listen, I can not arrive on time to pick them up at their music class, so go yourself". (40-year-old woman)

It is disturbing only if I need something urgent [...], if we have an appointment and I have been phoning her because I need to change it and she is not paying attention to her mobile. (23-year-old man)

When he is there, I try not to use the phone. And if somebody phones me I say

“I will phone you back tomorrow”. (24-year-old woman)

Those gender ritual performances, reinforced through multiple forms of institutional reflexivity (Goffman, 1987), recreate a masculine fortress-self and a feminine relational-self, which seeks for connection as a form of recognition (Lasén & Casado, 2012). They can be apprehended through the adjectives that our interviewees attributed to themselves and to each other, or through the greater feminine fluency when explaining what their partners provide them in their relationship.

He is different. I am much more dependant, much more about doing things together, you know, of achieving things in common (28-year-old woman)

As a partner, he provides me what I want in a man: protection, security, the feeling that you have someone there who understands and helps you, who makes you laugh. (31-year-old woman)

These gendered selves frame the conditions in which intimate bond is established, with different expectations, demands, and subjectivities:

If I share my life with someone, it is not that I am just going to do whatever he said, but I do have to consult him, I have to count with him, I have to think of him, I cannot go alone. That's the way it is. (31-year-old woman)

I can spend three hours on the computer and she can stay there, but I need that she does not need me [...]. I need to be concentrated on this and alone and to be sure that I have this under control (32-year-old man)

The main thing is the individual. There is a core that is yours, unyielding, and you must promote it. Once you have this really, with your life project of what you want to do, you try to share it with somebody and you look for the right person (34- year-old man)

As Goffman (1977) noticed, “males will have an opportunity of doing and females of showing respect, if not gratitude, for what is done. But observe how social practice has made it possible for men and women to stage these self-confirming scenes” (p. 320):

It is a sacrifice he does [...] I am infinitely grateful to him [...]. I am the kind of

person who needs to be told constantly what is felt for me. It's a condition, you know, quotations marks, that I pose and he perfectly accepts and satisfies it. And I love it, because he does it. [...] It makes me feel more happy and supportive. And thus I think we get a harmonious relationship (31-year-old woman)

In summary, coupling patterns,⁷ in conjunction with ideals over masculinity and femininity, the subordination of the domestic to the professional and of the emotions to reason, all of them reinterpreted from equalitarianism, institute the gender arrangements that simultaneously sustain those demarcations. There are gendered performances to understand and embrace each other, to achieve intimate harmony that, far from cancel asymmetries, reconfigure them choreographically:

In all of this, intimacy certainly brings no corrective. [...] Cross-sex affectional gestures choreograph protector and protected, embracer and embraced, comforter and comforted, supporter and supported, extender of affection and recipient thereof; and it is defined as only natural that the male encompass and the female be encompassed. And this can only remind us that male domination is a very special kind, a domination that can be carried right into the gentlest,

most loving moment without apparently causing strain-indeed, these moments can hardly be conceived of apart from these asymmetries (Goffman, 1987, p.8-9)

Conclusions and connections: Remediated privacies, shared agencies and gendered choreographies

The analysis of the uses of the term disturb and its derivatives regarding mobile phone uses and practices questions, at least partially, the contemporary descriptions of modern couples, which have certain truth-value –in fact they are truly performed and sustain the fantasy of the “good couple relationship” with all its potential to elicit forms of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011)– but are partial. Gender arrangements have become indeed less comfortable due to significant social transformations, but this is far from implying that, under the rubric of equality, our ordinary practices are progressively genderless or in the way of becoming such. As far as “gender expressions are by way of being a mere show; but a considerable amount of the substance of society is enrolled in the staging of it” (Goffman, 1987, p. 8), and as far as the stage is being mediated and remediated thanks to the multiple digital participants, the demarcations among public sphere, privacy and intimacy (Hjorth and Lim, 2012) become simultaneously contextually rearticulated.

In this sense, contemporary gender arrangements within couple relations are highly remediated, according to both aspects of remediation described by Bolter and Grusin (2000): subject to extended mediations regarding multiple devices, applications and most aspects of everyday life, as well as aiming towards an ideal of immediacy and transparency. The uses and practices of mobile media highlight their ambivalent potentialities (Cooper, 2001), supporting both a growing possibility of mobility and flexibility, as well as an increased ability to track communications, networks and activities, and to monitor other people (Green, 2001).

Social practices and the ways people use these media reveal forms of (gendered) attachment: among people, and between people and technologies. To be attached to others through mobile mediation means to be accessible. This increases the need to manage availability, as it rearranges the limits for privacy and territories of the self. This ambivalence fits in with the paradoxical male position found in our research: a certain nostalgia for a pre-digital and disconnected world when the territories of the self were more firmly defined, handled and supported, coexists with the usual “love for technology” due to the promise of control over the world, others and self. Digital technologies as mobile phones dismiss that promise, as they afford accessibility, connectivity and increase openness to others and the world, making their territories of the self more vulnerable. The mobile phone potentialities to localize and

exert control over the partner, the wireless leash (Qiu, 2007), are also part of this gendered and mediated choreography. As secrecy, inaccessibility and personal realm clash with a hegemonic view of the intimate bond as a relation where transparency and full sharing seem to be the grounds of mutual recognition. Mobile phones have the potential to support and reinforce the individual realm of activities, and to manage and extend the mobility of affects and affiliations. Within the couple, this autonomy and privacy, particularly protected and sustained by men, are fought and downplayed by mobile phone uses and expectations set mostly by women.

The understanding of the social implications of mobile media for privacy and its contextual integrity needs to take into account this complex articulation of mobility and attachment that stress or play down different features of the technologies, according not only to people's particular will or intention, but to other social orderings and constraints. Thus digital media remediate and contribute to reconfigure previous contextual and relational arrangements of private and public. This clarifies the difficulty of considering both realms as dichotomous spheres. A short fieldwork tale can illustrate this particular entanglement. A young married woman with a child living with her family in a small flat, where she does not have a room of her own, says that her privacy is her laptop. For her, surfing the web, exchanging mails and messages, tweeting and facebooking, taking part in online publics, all these online activities are

ways of achieving a personal space, her territory within the household, affording the necessary distance from couple and family requirements.

Therefore, digital media play a role in the configuration of people's subjections and dependencies, not only related to a growing attachment to the devices and applications, but also by the new social obligations, accessibility and ways of monitoring that these technologies are facilitating. They take part in the shaping of contemporary individuals and their interpersonal bonds, and thus, in contemporary (gendered) subjectivation processes: in the "way a human being turns him or herself into a subject" (Foucault 1982, p. 208) through a variety of "operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their thoughts, on their own conducts" (Foucault 1988, p. 18). The shaping of the self entails different modes of dependence or subjection. In this sense, "subject" has a double meaning: as being subjected to something or someone, under the power, control or dependence of another person, group or institution, and as constraint to a particular identity, self-conscience and self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982). Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and shapes our subjectivities. The remediated gendered choreographies of couples' everyday lives reveal how mobile phones play a role in both aspects: identity and self-knowledge on the one hand, and monitoring, self-control and dependence on the other.

The pervasiveness and ubiquity of mobile media make its role in the shaping of the self more intense: the dependence and attachment to the device are both narrowly linked to the dependence and attachment to other people, and to our expectations and our obligations towards them. Gendered choreographic arrangements perform a shared agency between people and mobile telephony. The notion of shared agency stresses the mutual shaping and training regarding people and technologies involved in the learning process of digital uses and practices. Using mobile phones entails sharing our agency, as the devices and their applications afford some practices and activities as well as prevent others. In our case study different uses arise from the meeting of the device and applications, with their features, possibilities and constraints, and people, with their socio-historically situated and changing subjectivities, necessities, aims and particularities. There is a cultural, social and personal shaping of digital technologies while, reciprocally, individuals and interpersonal relationships become shaped by the presence, uses and practices of digital devices.

This is a collective learning process involving modes of collaboration as well as multiple and potential clashes. It includes people and devices, and institutional regulations and other kind of norms. As we have seen, a mobile phone conversation mobilizes several activities and forms of social practical knowledge on gender and

other intertwined social orderings, embodiment, technological literacy, linguistic skills, etiquette rules, personal creativity and emotional management. This shared agency contributes to set the contextual norms that delimit privacy and territories of the self, regarding appropriateness and the information flow. Looking at the specific case of norms and expectations about mobile phone uses and communication within heterosexual couple helps us to grasp the gendered way privacy is configured, protected or undermined.

Notes

1 The notion of privacy is embedded in larger trends of political and social changes (cf. the five volumes *History of the private life* edited by Ariès and Duby 1987– 1991).

2. The research was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (CSO2008-05207). Rubén Blanco and Antonio García are also part of the team.

3 A critic of these views on heterosexual intimacy can be found in Eldén, 2012; Jamieson, 1999 and Gross, 2005.

4 The relevance of this case is grounded as well in the widespread adoption and use of mobile phones in Spain for both men (94%) and women (94,30%), similar to other European countries, with a mobile phone penetration rate of 118,2% and the highest penetration in Smartphones in Europe with 66 percent (data of the INE (National

Institute of Statistics), July 2013,
<http://www.ine.es/jaxi/menu.do?type=pcaxis&path=/t25/p450/a2013/&file=pcaxis>)

5 This technical interest can be interpreted as an enactment of their embodied masculinity, as both have been mutually shaped in modern societies. “This is not to say that there is one masculinity or one form of technology: rather, it is to note that in contemporary Western society, hegemonic masculinity [...] is still strongly associated with technical prowess and power” (Wajcman, 2000, p. 454), as most research on gender and (communication) technology has shown (Caputi, 1988; Faulkner, 2001; Lohan and Faulkner, 2004).

6 Apparently they share the same view as Zuckerberg when trying to justify the changes of privacy settings in Facebook or as U.S. officials and journalists trying to justify the NSA PRISM program.

7 Echoing Goffman (1977), “the customary age differential between the pairing sexes ensures that, by and large, the male will be more experienced and moneyed than the female, this, too, supporting the show of control he exhibits in social situations” (p. 321).

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