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Young Adults, Mobile Messaging, and the Negotiation of (Un)Availability

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Abstract

With a mobile phone, a person can reach and be reached anytime, anywhere. As many scholars have noted, this creates mutual expectations of availability, particularly among young adults whose friendships typically involve high rates of mobile messaging. What happens, however, in the moments when young adults do not want to be available, or cannot be available, to their friends? How do they resist this logic of constant availability in order to make space for themselves or to attend to other tasks or priorities? This thesis engages with these questions by investigating how young adults negotiate unavailability in a contemporary mobile environment.

In doing so, this thesis draws on interviews with 39 young adults and a historical comparison of availability etiquettes. The semi-structured interviews focus on young adults' perceptions and experiences of mobile communication, namely, mobile messaging. Messaging is of particular relevance to the negotiation of unavailability because it is less disruptive to a person's physical surroundings than calling and is thus often subject to higher expectations of responsiveness. It is also heavily used in many young adults' friendships. In this context, negotiating unavailability is both particularly necessary and particularly challenging.

On the basis of participants' accounts, this thesis argues that young adults use the affordances of mobile devices and messaging apps to enact a range of nuanced practices for negotiating, limiting, and avoiding interactions. These include technical practices, which involve manipulating the features and qualities of mobile devices and apps; temporal practices, which involve the timing of messages; and discursive practices, which involve their written or visual content. To contextualise these practices, this thesis draws on a historical comparison with 19th century etiquettes for house visits and calling cards and mid-20th century etiquettes for domestic landline telephone calls. Through this historicisation, this thesis argues that participants' experiences are often a continuation of earlier communication etiquettes, particularly their use of indirect techniques for negotiating unavailability. That said, some etiquette for negotiating unavailability in the context of mobile messaging is yet to stabilise, which can lead to conflict within friendships. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that mobile technologies mediate the negotiation of unavailability not just as material devices that shape

actions through their materiality, but also as meaning-filled objects that are bound up in narratives about friendship and technology use.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
- ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
- iii) the thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Katherine Mannell

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Introduction

Mobile communication is premised on a logic of constant availability — with a mobile phone, you can reach and be reached anytime, anywhere. What happens, however, in the moments where people do not want to be available, or cannot be available? How do people resist this logic of constant availability in order to make space for themselves or to attend to other tasks or priorities? In this thesis, I engage with these questions by investigating how young adults negotiate unavailability in a contemporary mobile environment.

Popular discourses about young people and mobile phones have long been characterised by angst and hyperbole. In terms of how phones mediate their friendships, there are two dominant concerns. On one hand, there is a concern that mobile communication means young people are constantly in contact — that they are tethered to one another, distracted, never alone. According to this perspective, constantly messaging one another means that they may never experience the solitude necessary to develop resilience and emotional maturity (e.g., Leggat, 2020; Thomas, 2019; Turkle, 2011). In this scenario, phones tie them together too tightly; they make the space between them too small. On the other hand, there is concern that mobile communication means young people are not connected enough. Practices like ghosting, screening calls, and texting rather than talking are seen as evidence that young adults are avoidant and lacking in relational skills (e.g., Bindley, 2011; Burns, n.d.; Edwards & Fox, 2018; Lantern, 2015). In this scenario, phones are barriers that keep them too far apart; they make the space between them too large.

Technologies can certainly have paradoxical outcomes (Arnold, 2003) and there are elements worthy of legitimate concern within each of these perspectives. However, this binary fails to adequately reflect the nuanced experiences of social interaction that characterise the everyday mobile interactions of many young adults. This thesis aims to provide an account of such experiences by examining how mobile messaging is implicated in the negotiation, reduction, and avoidance of social interaction among young adults.

There are three key terms in this aim that I want to clarify before proceeding. Firstly, the term ‘mobile messaging’ includes both Short Message Service (SMS) messaging, which uses the

signalling channel of a telecommunications network, and Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM), which is enabled by smartphone messaging apps and sends messages via an internet connection. In this thesis, I distinguish between these two forms of messaging when necessary, but otherwise use the term ‘mobile messaging’ to include both forms. I focus on mobile messaging in this thesis, rather than other forms of mobile interaction, as it creates particular challenges for limiting availability. Compared to mobile calling, messaging is relatively unobtrusive and can be carried out more surreptitiously, making it easier to use in a wider range of contexts. Accordingly, expectations for people to be contactable via mobile messaging are particularly high (Licoppe, 2004; Ito & Okabe, 2005), and thus particularly difficult and necessary to negotiate.

I also use the term ‘implicated’ very intentionally. I am not just seeking to understand the actions of people in negotiating unavailability but also how mobile technologies participate in and influence these actions. In other words, this thesis aims to examine the *sociotechnical* performances involved in negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability — performances that involve people and technologies acting together. Accordingly, I draw on a methodology that blends principles from symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and postphenomenology (Ihde, 1979, 1995) to focus attention on both the interpersonal dynamics and the dynamics of technological mediation that are bound up in negotiating availability.

Lastly, the term ‘social interaction’ is also carefully chosen. In investigating how mobile messaging is implicated in the negotiation of social interaction, I leave room for investigating the limiting of availability for mobile mediated interactions, but also for face-to-face interactions that are coordinated through mobile communication. Including the coordination of face-to-face gatherings within the scope of my investigation is important as this is a key function of mobile communication (Lenhart et al., 2010, p. 36), and thus availability for messaging for coordination are tightly interwoven.

Research questions and contribution

In investigating how mobile messaging is implicated in the negotiation, reduction, and avoidance of social interaction among young adults, I pursue the following research questions:

1. What affordances do mobile messaging technologies provide for people to limit, reduce, and otherwise manage their availability to and through mobile communication?
2. How, and in what circumstances, do young adults engage with these affordances? What *practices* do they employ when limiting, reducing, and otherwise managing availability to friends?
3. How do these practices compare to the availability-management practices used in other techno-historical contexts?

Given that the term ‘affordances’ features heavily in these research questions, I want to briefly clarify its meaning (for a more detailed explanation, see Chapter Three). Some scholars have misinterpreted affordances as meaning the properties of a technology or the actions that are enabled by those properties (see Davis & Chouinard, 2017). That is not how the concept is used in this thesis. In its original form (Gibson, 1979) and in more recent theorisations (Costa, 2018; Davis & Chouinard, 2017; Faraj & Azad, 2012; Treem & Leonardi, 2012), the concept refers to the possibilities for action that stem from the *relationship* between a technology and specific users. Costa (2018, p. 3651) states this especially clearly when she writes, “Affordances are never specific to a platform only, but are always specific to the relation between the platform and the situated users.” Thus the benefit of the concept is that it encapsulates both the materiality of the technology and the agency and context of the user. Accordingly, when these research questions ask about affordances they are asking not just about the properties of mobile devices and messaging apps but about the possibilities for action that are generated by those properties *in relation to* specific users — in this case, the participants in this study. As a result, this thesis deals both with the materiality of technology, the actions of users, and the socio-cultural context in which they meet.

Another term central to these questions and this thesis is ‘availability’ which I frequently use to describe the subject of this research. In particular, I use phrases like ‘managing availability’ and ‘negotiating availability’ throughout this thesis to describe the key phenomena of interest. I want to clarify, however, that my focus is not how people make themselves available to others (i.e. how people connect) but rather how people *limit* and *reduce* availability. How do people avoid or delay mobile interactions? How do they push back against the imperative to be

constantly available? When I use the term availability it is always with an interest in how that availability is being restricted or negotiated, rather than in how people seek to make themselves available or secure the availability of others. I also want to be clear that I am thinking of availability like a spectrum, where there are different degrees and forms of availability. This includes being completely unavailable but also other levels and forms of restricted availability. Someone may wish to be available in some ways, or under some conditions, or to some people, but not others.

To address the above research questions, I conducted interviews with young adults about their perceptions and practices of messaging and, specifically, of limiting and negotiating availability. I also used the data from these interviews to conduct an analysis of the affordances of messaging apps for limiting and negotiating availability, and provide a historicisation of participants' experiences by comparing them with earlier communication practices and etiquettes.

In using these methods to respond to the research questions, three key findings emerge. The first is that while messaging apps and mobile devices apps are designed to encourage frequent contact, they also have affordances that enable people to resist connections. Participants used these affordances to enact a wide range practices for managing and limiting their availability for messaging interactions and for face-to-face interactions that were organised through messaging.

The second key finding comes from a comparison between participants' experiences and the etiquette for limiting social interactions via calling cards (19th century) and landline telephones (mid-20th century). My research finds that the practices young adults use to negotiate and limit their availability often have close historical equivalents. This is significant because many of the practices young adults use to limit their availability, such as deception or intentionally slow replies, are somewhat evasive and thus appear to support popular narratives about young adults lacking soft skills. The historical comparison illustrates, however, that they are in keeping with a longer history of indirect techniques for negotiating social interactions.

The third key finding is that while participants' practices are similar to those used in earlier contexts, some of the etiquette around mobile messaging practices is not settled. As individuals, participants had strong ideas about how availability was to be managed, but these ideas were often inconsistent across participants. In some cases, participants had accounts of significant tension or conflict occurring within friendships due to differing views about messaging availability etiquettes.

Overall, this thesis argues that young adults have a range of nuanced strategies for negotiating and limiting mobile-mediated availability and that the key challenge they face is neither being too connected nor not connected enough, but rather that a lack of widely accepted etiquettes often complicates their efforts to regulate social availability. In making this argument the thesis provides a more nuanced view of the messaging practices of young adults than those that presently dominate much public discourse on the subject. It illustrates that, on the whole, young adults do not mindlessly succumb to the 'always on' logic of mobile communication but rather continually and actively negotiate their mobile connections. This thesis also counters the deterministic tendencies of popular accounts by grounding its analysis in an affordances framework, and counters their hyperbolic tendencies by providing much needed historical perspective.

In making this argument, this thesis also contributes to two primary bodies of literature: disconnection literature from media studies, and social interaction literature from mobile communication studies. In media studies, there is an increasing interest in practices and discourses of disconnection and non-use as they relate to digital technologies. This includes investigating practices of disconnection that occur *within* the use of technologies and are aimed at limiting the connections that these technologies facilitate. This literature also includes comparisons of media resistance across historical contexts, which highlights that new technologies are often subject to suspicion and critique. Thus far, however, this body of work has focused primarily on social media, particularly Facebook, with much less attention given to mobile communication. As such, this thesis contributes to literature on disconnection and non-use through a discussion of how disconnective practices play out in the specific context of mobile messaging.

In the field of mobile communication, scholars have paid increasing attention to the challenges of continual availability, particularly in messaging. There is, however, limited understanding of how people negotiate these conditions. Just a few studies have begun to provide evidence about how people limit and reduce messaging availability. This thesis contributes to this small body of existing evidence by investigating the practices young adults use to negotiate mobile-mediated unavailability and through a historical comparison that contextualises those practices.

Thesis outline

This thesis proceeds in nine chapters across three parts. In PART 1 (Chapters 1 & 2), I situate the current study in related literature and establish the research methodology and design. Chapter One outlines the two key bodies of literature that inform this thesis: literature on disconnection and non-use; and literature on mobile availability. Chapter Two outlines the symbolic interactionist and postphenomenological principles that inform my research; namely, a focus on how meaning is made through interpersonal interactions and the role of technology in mediating experiences. It also describes the inductive, interpretive research design that follows from these principles.

In PART 2 (Chapters 3, 4, 5, & 6), I draw out findings from my interview data to describe participants' practices for limiting and negotiating availability to and through mobile messaging. This begins in Chapter Three with a discussion of disconnective affordances. Building on recent developments in the theorisation of affordances, I describe how the technologies involved in mobile messaging — including devices, operating systems, and apps — provided participants with different kinds of opportunities for managing their availability. I outline a typology of five disconnective affordances: disentanglement, jamming, modulation, delay, and expression. I describe how these different affordances function, arguing that messaging technologies enable, but generally discourage, disconnective actions.

Chapter Four provides a further investigation into the affordance of delay. In this chapter, I describe how participants deployed the affordance of delay in order to enact a range of temporal practices for negotiating and limiting availability. In doing so, I employ Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis project as a means of highlighting the multiple intercepting rhythms of daily

life and their role in shaping, complicating, and giving meaning to these temporal practices. In keeping with the methodology of this research, these rhythms include relational and interpersonal rhythms as well as technological rhythms.

Chapters Five and Six take up the affordance of expression and provide further investigation into participants' use of this affordance for discursive practices of limiting and negotiating availability. Chapter Five concentrates on ending conversations and the use of dissuasion while Chapter Six concentrates on deception and ambiguity. In each chapter, I draw on Goffman's work around ritual, performance, and face work to unpack the interpersonal dynamics that shape each practice, and describe how these dynamics are also influenced by the design of messaging technologies.

As noted, this section of the thesis draws on three theoretical frameworks (affordances, rhythm analysis, and Goffman's interaction order) with different chapters emphasising different frameworks. These theoretical frameworks are, however, all approaches to the theorisation of everyday life that can accommodate an analysis of sociotechnical dynamics and processes. As such, they provide different lenses within a sociotechnical analysis rather than three wholly distinct perspectives.

In PART 3 (Chapters 7 & 8), I clarify what is distinct about participants' experiences by comparing them with earlier communication contexts; namely, 19th century practices of calling cards and house visits and 20th century practices of landline telephone calls. In doing so, I shift from considering how participants take up the affordances of messaging technologies in order to enact specific practices to also consider the wider understandings of etiquette in which these practices are situated. In Chapter Seven, I draw out the continuities between historical and contemporary practices of availability management, arguing that there are strong similarities in the etiquettes around deception, limiting intimacy, and ending relationships. In Chapter Eight, I turn to differences between the historical and contemporary data I analyse. I note that while historical etiquette manuals outline a stable set of normative etiquettes for regulating social availability, the experiences and views of participants indicate that contemporary etiquettes are not yet settled. I propose the following reasons for this lack of stable etiquette: the newness of mobile technologies; the continual updating of features across apps and operating systems; the privacy of messaging which means that other people's messaging

practices cannot be easily observed; and the diversity in participants' daily schedules which reduces common reference points for estimating availability. I also note that studying how people manage mobile-mediated unavailability, and the sociotechnical dynamics of these processes, highlights a complexity within our relationship to mobile communication: we are negotiating both our availability to the technology and our availability to others. These two concerns become tightly entwined, as our ambivalence about or resistance to the role of mobile technologies in our lives complicates our efforts to negotiate our availability to others. Ultimately, this illustrates that mobile messaging mediates the negotiation of availability not only as a technology that shapes action through its affordances, but also as an object with attached cultural meanings that likewise shape action.

The thesis finishes with a brief conclusion that summarises the key contributions and notes limitations and directions for further research.

CHAPTER 1 — Disconnecting From and Through Mobile Communication

This chapter outlines the two key bodies of literature that this thesis is situated within: literature on voluntary disconnection and non-use, and literature on availability within mobile communication. I begin with the literature on disconnection, particularly those studies that investigate the practices people use to limit or resist digital technologies. I map the turn within this literature toward studying disconnective practices that are integrated into the use of digital technologies and note that this raises questions about the role of such practices within mobile communication. I then turn to literature on mobile availability, which, despite being distinct from literature about disconnection, has begun to address some of these questions through observations about how people manage and limit availability in their use of mobile communication. I contextualise this literature by acknowledging its roots in early studies of mobile communication and conclude by outlining the ways this thesis draws together and extends both bodies of literature through an investigation of young adults' negotiation of mobile-mediated unavailability.

Non-Use and Disconnection

Over the past several years, there has been a fast-growing interest in how voluntary disconnection and non-use figure in our relationships to digital communication technologies, particularly social media platforms. In part, this interest is a response to the longstanding focus on connection within studies of digital communication. As Light (2014, p. 9) notes with regard to social media:

there is a huge amount of research on SNSs [Social Networking Sites] available to us now, but if one considers how we define SNSs, the questions asked, and findings obtained, these generally enrol notions of use and more specifically use as related to an implicit assumption of connection.

Light argues that this has left practices of disconnection understudied, particularly those that are “pervasive” in our everyday use of social media. Syveston (2017, p. 2) makes a similar argument about media resistance more broadly, stating that media studies research has tended

to focus on the production and use of media but, as a corrective, “should devote more attention to expressions and acts of resistance, how they connect, persist and change”. Accordingly, to correct a long-standing focus on use and connection, scholars of digital communication technologies have begun looking to practices, discourses, and theories of non-use and disconnection.

Increased scholarly interest in themes of disconnection is also partly a response to the rising popularity of discourses and practices of digital disconnection. Where once the Internet and digital technologies seemed to promise social cohesion, convenience, and more robust democracies, they have become strongly associated with a range of negative outcomes, such as privacy violations, the spread of misinformation, and the corrosive effects of the attention economy (Syveston, 2017). Consequently, pessimistic and critical approaches to digital technologies are overrunning the more optimistic approaches that dominated their early histories, and, in response, discourses and practices of disconnection have become more prevalent (Foot, 2014; Woodstock, 2014). Even people involved in developing digital and internet-based technologies have become invested in some forms of resistance, such as the Silicon Valley tech workers who frequent digital detox camps (Fish, 2017), send their kids to technology-free schools (Weller, 2018), or make anti-distraction smartphone apps (Perez, 2018). In response to this mainstreaming of disconnection, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to how and why people resist digital communication technologies.

While I have focused so far on voluntary forms of disconnection, it is important to note that disconnection can also be involuntary. Research into involuntary disconnection began in the mid 1990s as scholars and policy makers noted that rates of internet access were low among certain groups, namely disadvantaged and marginalised populations (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1995, 1998, 1999). This led to the development of the term ‘digital divide’ and an associated program of research into the factors that inhibit internet access and use (Selwyn, 2003; Wyatt, 2003; Thomas et al., 2019). Research on digital exclusion has since grown to encompass other, more recent, developments, such as the rise in authoritarians using internet throttling and shutdowns in response to political unrest (e.g., Freyburg, & Garbe, 2018; Wagner, 2018). While there is considerable research into

these involuntary forms of non-use, they fall outside the scope of this literature review as they are not motivated by a desire to limit or reduce connection.

Following Hesselberth (2018), the fast-growing body of literature on voluntary disconnection can be broadly divided into three key streams. One stream focuses on understanding popular discourses of disconnection, such as those found in self-help articles, Instagram posts, and social media content (e.g., Foot, 2014; Gomez et al., 2015; Syvertsen, 2017). This literature notes that discourses of disconnection have become increasingly prevalent over the past decade as people have become disenchanted with and concerned about digital technologies and online platforms (Foot, 2014; Syvertsen, 2017). These discourses are characterised by a fairly consistent set of concerns about issues like privacy, distraction, compulsive technology use, superficial relationships, and a desire to live more meaningfully (Foot, 2014; Gomez et al., 2015; Syvertsen, 2017). To mitigate these issues, people are encouraged to be reflexive about their digital media use, to take steps to limit it, and to replace media use with other, more meaningful activities (Foot, 2014; Gomez et al., 2015; Karlsen & Syversten, 2016; Syvertsen, 2017). Scholars note that these discourses rarely place responsibility for the negative aspects of digital media use onto media industries, tech companies, or broader social factors (Karlsen & Syversten, 2016; Syvertsen, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2019). Rather, as Karlsen and Syversten note, these discourses “reflect the trend towards self-management where everyone is responsible for solving their own problems” (2016, p. 36).

This trend is further evident in the prevalence of detox discourses, which draw on terminology from nutrition and addiction to advocate for temporary breaks from digital and social media (Fish, 2017; Jorge, 2019; Karlsen & Syvertsen, 2016). Advocates of digital detoxes are motivated by many of the concerns noted above, but also encourage ‘unplugging’ in order to improve physical and mental wellbeing, live more authentically, and achieve a more balanced relationship to digital technologies (Sutton, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2019). Scholars have noted that these detox discourses again place a strong emphasis on self-responsibility, ultimately reinforcing rather than challenging the structural issues that foster compulsive technology use (Fish, 2017; Jorge, 2019; Sutton, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2019; Karlsen & Syvertsen, 2016). This is particularly true when detox discourses are commercialised or co-opted by the attention economy. For instance, Jorge (2019) notes that much of the Instagram content using hashtags

like #offline or #unplug is produced by influencers or advertising detox themed products and services.

Importantly, this literature notes that new media technologies have often been the subject of critical discourses, and that these discourses have often focused on concerns about changes to society, hollowing out of relationships, and harms to physical and psychological wellbeing (Gomez et al., 2015; Sutton, 2017; Syvertsen, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2019). Syversten (2017) for instance, traces discourses of media resistance across a range of media formats to identify the continuities and discontinuities between them. She notes that while there have been similar underlying principles that drive resistance across historical contexts (such as concerns over morality and culture), resistance to digital media has particular characteristics. For instance, compared to critiques of television, there has been less focus on demanding regulation or the removal of content and more focus on raising awareness and lobbying for technologies that people can use to tailor and limit their own media use (2017, p. 95). Similarly, while wellbeing concerns are common across history, the concern about people becoming “couch potatoes” during the television era has been replaced with a concern over people losing the ability to focus (2017, 95-96). Lastly, unlike previous eras, many notable critics of digital media began as enthusiasts, but changed their minds due to negative experiences. Syversten notes that, consequently, “more than anything, the sentiments emerging [around digital media] are not panic and fear, but disappointment and distrust” (2017, p. 97). Providing this historical context is important as it better clarifies what is distinct about digital disconnection and what it is common across other historical and media contexts.

Another stream of disconnection research integrates the idea of disconnection into theoretical debates about issues like platform capitalism, surveillance, and how we conceptualise social media and communication (Karppi, 2011; 2018; Mejias, 2013; Plaut, 2015; Zuboff, 2019). Karppi (2018), for instance, interrogates the threat that disconnection poses to Facebook and the techniques the platform uses to mitigate that threat. Taking a broader view, Mejias (2013) investigates the implications of social life being mediated by a wide range of digital networks and uses disconnection as a lens for how networked connectivity could be resisted.

A final stream uses methods like surveys and interviews to investigate how and why individuals enact practices of non-use and disconnection. This focus on *practices* of

disconnection intersects with my interest in how connections are negotiated via mobile messaging. I turn now to a more detailed discussion of this literature.

Individuals' Practices of Non-Use and Disconnection

While some studies of individual practices look at resistance to social media (Neves et al., 2015) or ICTs more generally (Hardey & Atkinson, 2018), much of this work has focused on practices relating to specific platforms. These platforms include Myspace (Tufekci, 2008), Grindr (Brubaker et al., 2016), Twitter (Schoenebeck, 2014; Sleeper et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2014), Instagram (Sleeper et al., 2015), and, most commonly, Facebook (Baumer et al., 2013; Franks et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2014; Karppi, 2011; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Rainie et al., 2013; Sleeper et al., 2015; Tufekci, 2008).

While there is some variation, these studies broadly agree on the key factors that motivate practices of disconnection. One common factor is privacy concerns, including concerns about managing social and relational privacy, and concerns about data privacy and surveillance (Baumer et al., 2013; Guo et al., 2014; Neves et al., 2015; Steiger, et al., 2013; Tufekci, 2008). Another key factor is becoming disenchanted with a technology or platform (Kennedy et al., 2020; Morrison & Gomez, 2014; Satchell & Dourish, 2009), such as developing objections to the politics and practices of corporate social media companies (Hardey & Atkinson, 2018; Portwood-Stacer, 2013). On a more personal level, disconnection is also motivated by concerns about perceived technology addictions or a lack of control over use (Baumer et al., 2013; Hardey & Atkinson, 2018; Steiger, et al., 2013), a desire to avoid irritating distractions and time-wasting (Baumer et al., 2013; Brubaker et al., 2016; Guo et al., 2014; Hardey & Atkinson, 2018; Sleeper et al., 2015; Schoenebeck, 2014), and concerns about, or disinterest in, forms of socialisation that are seen as inauthentic, superficial, and/or performative (Sleeper et al., 2015; Hardey & Atkinson, 2018; Neves et al., 2015; Tufekci, 2008; Woodstock, 2014).¹

¹ While these concerns are repeatedly found to motivate non-use and disconnection, there are also instances where motivations are more directly linked to the specific qualities of a platform. For instance, a study on leaving Grindr found that, in some instances, people did so because they had begun dating someone and leaving the app, or reducing their presence on it, was seen as part of negotiating the terms of a more committed relationship (Brubaker et al., 2016).

As a result of these factors, people engage in a range of disconnective and non-use practices, the most severe being quitting (Baumer et al., 2013; Brubaker et al., 2016; Karppi, 2011; Portwood-Stacer, 2013), or abstaining from use (Hardey & Atkinson, 2018; Lampe et al., 2013; Tufekci, 2008). Quitting, in particular, can be done individually or as part of a collective action such as the Quit Facebook Day which occurred in May 2010 or, more recently, the #quitfacebook campaign, that began in response to revelations about Facebook's connections to the political consulting firm, Cambridge Analytica. As Portwood-Stacer (2013) observes in her study of people who abstained from or quit Facebook, these acts are often highly performative. She uses the term "conspicuous non-consumption" to describe a mode of refusal that is executed publicly (for instance, through posting 'goodbye' posts) and operates not only as an act of resistance but also as a marker of cultural distinction (2013, p. 1041). Such performative acts of disconnection can backfire, however, when others view them as elitist or as disrespectful to relationships maintained through the platform they are leaving. Digital detox practices, which I discuss below, similarly afford cultural distinction for those who have the capacity to temporarily disconnect without suffering social or economic repercussions.

While this literature has largely focused on social media platforms and dating apps, there have been some studies that address mobile phones. Rosenberg & Vogelmann-Natan's (2018) study of mobile phone refusers was motivated by an observation that within the literature on non-use there is almost no mention of people who completely refuse to use mobile phones. They acknowledge that this is likely because these people are rare but argue that it is important to understand their experiences nonetheless. Through interviews with mobile phone refusers they note two broad groups: 'ideologists', whose rejection stems from their critical view of mobile phones; and 'realisers', whose resistance stems from having a forced experience of non-use, like breaking their phone, that they unexpectedly enjoyed.

Ribak and Rosenthal (2015) investigated a different form of mobile non-use by interviewing people who own feature phones, which have very limited internet capability, or basic phones, which only allow calling and SMS. They describe these people as "smartphone resisters" (2015, para. 10) whose device choices stem from their ambivalence about smartphones. In particular, these resisters were critical of smartphone users who they saw as insensitive and obsessive in their use of the technology, but also suspected that their own resistance would eventually end,

as lifestyle changes or the decreasing costs of smartphones might make resistance less important.

Toward Integrated Practices of Connection and Disconnection

One key finding from these studies is that the line between use and non-use, or connection and disconnection, is not always clear cut — a finding that, as I will discuss shortly, is of particular significance for this thesis. For instance, someone might refuse to get a Facebook account but be a “surrogate user” as they access the platform through the accounts of friends or family members (Neves et al., 2015, p. 129). Leaving can be similarly complex. In the context of Facebook, there are multiple ways to leave: signing out, deactivating, and deleting — all of which involve different options for reconnecting (Baumer et al., 2013). Further, as Brubaker et al. (2016) note, leaving is often a drawn-out process that lacks a distinct moment of departure. In the context of Grindr, they observed that leaving is “neither a singular moment nor a linear path. Rather, it is a process in which people execute, negotiate and undo the meaning of leaving, even while keeping open the possibility of return” (2016, p. 385). Leaving can also take many forms; as they note, “because participation means different things to different users, so too does departure” (2016, p. 382).

Temporary Non-Use

Recognising that binary models of use and non-use fail to adequately describe practices of disconnection and resistance, scholars have increasingly studied forms of disconnection that are more partial or entangled with use. One example is practices of temporary non-use. Schoenebeck (2014), for instance, investigated the cyclic patterns of over-use and hiatus among people who give up Twitter for Lent. Rainie et al. (2013) found that 61 per cent of the Facebook users they surveyed had taken voluntary breaks lasting several weeks or more. Similarly, Franks et al. studied the experiences of young adults who took “Facebook sabbaticals”, which they define as “a conscious decision to not use Facebook for a period of 3 days or more” (2018, p. 2). They note that individuals often chose to take repeated sabbaticals, leaving Facebook when they became frustrated with or concerned about the platform and re-joining when they felt they could or when they began to miss Facebook interactions. Lastly, Baumer et al. (2015), studied people who took part in ‘99 days of Freedom’. This was a pledge

to refrain from Facebook for 99 days, organised in response to revelations that Facebook had manipulated the newsfeed algorithm for some users to see if it would alter their emotional state.

Scholars have also noted practices of *temporary* non-use relating to mobile phones. In one example, Rosenberg (2019) studied the role of mobile phones in young adults' backpacking experiences. They note that mobile phones challenge the principles of autonomy and independence central to backpacker travel and that, consequently, some people choose to travel without one. Further, even when participants did report taking a mobile phone, their use was generally limited to updating and reassuring parents and other loved ones. Consequently, they frequently engaged in temporary non-use by leaving their phones off for long periods of time.

In another discussion of the temporary non-use of mobile phones, Hutchins (2016) investigates debates about the spread and use of smartphones by spectators attending live sports games. Through two case studies, he demonstrates that selected fans and sports powerbrokers strongly object to the saturation of sporting events by mobile media. These people feel that sporting events should be sites of temporary non-use, where people put aside mobile devices in order to participate in the event unfolding around them.

Lastly, digital detoxes often involve the temporary non-use of mobile phones (Sutton, 2017; Syvertsen & Enli, 2019). As noted above, digital detoxes are often focused on improving wellbeing, living more authentically, and achieving a more balanced approach to technology use. These detoxes can be focused solely on avoiding phone use, or they can include phone avoidance as part of a larger suite of technology avoidance behaviours. They can also be structured, collective events, as in the summer-camp style detox retreats that are popular among Silicon Valley tech workers (Fish, 2017; Sutton, 2017), or they can be more individualised and based around a person's decision to temporarily avoid mobile or digital media use (Syvertsen & Enli, 2019).²

² I have focused here on examples of voluntary temporary non-use however there are also examples when temporary non-use is involuntary. For instance, mobile phone bans have become more common in schools. Some entertainment venues, meanwhile, have begun taking mobile phones off patrons for the

Media Resistance

Scholars have also considered how people integrate disconnection into their everyday media practices through limiting their use of digital technologies. Morrison and Gomez, for instance, identify the development of “pushback” which they describe as “a reaction against the overload of information and changing relationships brought about by communication technologies such as smart phones, tablets and computers connected to the Internet” (2014, para. 3). They observe that, while some people completely disconnect in order to achieve these ends, others limit their use of particular technologies by using strategies like collective agreements to restrict use, employing technologies designed to help limit use, or changing behaviours by setting self-imposed boundaries. Similarly, Woodstock (2014, p. 1983) interviewed “media resisters”, a “minority” (p. 1984) of users who “intentionally and significantly” limit their use of digital media (p. 1983). Again, while some of the resistance actions that Woodstock describes involve quitting or completely abstaining, others involve limiting use through actions like minimising email communication.

Both of these studies note that mobile phones, and specifically smartphones, are often the subject of these efforts to limit digital media use. For instance, as examples of using collective decisions to limit media use, Morrison and Gomez (2014) cite mutual agreements to put away phones while dining at a restaurant or the act of asking wedding guests to abstain from using their phones. Similarly, Woodstock’s description of the practices of media resisters includes people who try to avoid mobile messaging in favour of calling or talking face-to-face.

Importantly, while these studies focus on people who self-identify as particularly resistant to or jaded by technology, limiting mobile phone use is also common among people who do not specifically identify as resisters. For instance, a study by Lee et al. (2014) found that 59% of people surveyed had employed forms of temporary non-use to reduce the negative impacts that their smartphones had on their everyday lives. Popular methods included altering phone settings (such as using aeroplane mode), physical separation (such as leaving a phone at home), mental efforts (such as setting personal non-use goals) and using a basic phone that

duration of an event in order to encourage attention and prevent people posting footage of the event online.

does not allow internet access. The recent rise of apps designed to curb compulsive smartphone use, such as Freedom, Siempo, and Moment, further suggest that many people are interested in finding ways to limit their mobile phone use.

These studies of disconnective practices are important because they illustrate the increasing ambivalence and resistance towards digital technologies that characterise the present moment. Further, studies of temporary or partial disconnections begin to illustrate the small ways that people resist the imperative to be connected via mobile communication. However, while these studies investigate how people disconnect *from* mobile devices, they do not consider how people disconnect *through* mobile devices — that is, how they negotiate and limit their availability to other people through their use and non-use of mobile communication. There is, however, disconnection literature that has begun to consider these issues in the context of social media, as I discuss below.

Disconnections in Use: Negotiating Connections to Others

Scholars have begun taking an even more fine-grained approach to disconnection by considering the disconnections that occur *within* digital technology use. Central to this body of work is Light's (2014) book *Disconnecting with Social Networking Sites*, which investigates the role of disconnective practices in social media use. Light sees disconnection and connection as deeply integrated, as disconnection “acts as a device that allows forms of connection to exist both within and beyond any given SNS” (2014, p. 3). Thus he describes disconnective practices “as something we do in conjunction with connection” (2014, p. 3). To illustrate how such entangled modes of disconnection are evident in the use of social media he analyses actions like de-friending, lurking, creating backchannels and hiding posts from the newsfeed. These behaviours resist the connectivity that social media platforms are designed to promote but still involve using the platform and, in some cases, enable other forms or instances of connection. Indeed, Light & Cassidy (2014) argue that sites like Facebook build in capacities for disconnection in order to make their continual use sustainable. These sanctioned forms of disconnection act as “release valves” (2014, p. 1179) that provide people with just enough space to negotiate connections so that they do not become frustrated and leave the platform.

In drawing attention to the disconnective practices involved in social networking, Light extends the trend within disconnection studies toward analysing increasingly nuanced and integrated forms of disconnection.³ Light's work not only takes an even more fine-grained approach by looking at disconnections within use, but also shifts focus from the disconnections people use to distance themselves *from* a technology towards the disconnections people use to distance themselves from others *through* technology.

Light's project has been extended by subsequent studies that focus on practices of defriending and unfollowing. Much of this work has focused on contexts involving political unrest, such as the Israel Gaza conflict (John & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015; John & Gal, 2018; Schwarz & Shani, 2016) and the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement protests (Zhu et al., 2017). These studies find that, in contexts of heightened political tension, some people cut ties with Facebook friends who post content they disagree with or find offensive. Unlike the actions discussed by Light, these politically motivated disconnections do not appear to be very common. Studies have found, for instance, that only 15-16% of people engage in unfriending during periods of political unrest (John & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015; Zhu et al., 2017). Several studies note that the practice appears most common among people who are more ideologically extreme and politically active on social media (Bode, 2017; John & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015; Zhu et al., 2017).

When applied to mobile communication, this interest in the disconnections enacted through digital communication technologies leads to questions about how people manage and limit connections through mobile devices. This is, as yet, an area that has not been explored within disconnection literature. As outlined above, while there are studies that address disconnection in the context of mobile technology use, these focus on disconnections that are motivated by resistance to mobile technologies.

That said, the second area of research covered in this literature review — literature on mobile communication and availability — has begun to investigate these issues. This literature further illustrates why it is important to study the disconnections enacted through mobile

³ This is also part of a wider trend in theoretical and empirical work that rejects binaries as unhelpfully blunt and looks instead to analyse phenomena in terms of co-dependencies and hybridities (e.g., Harraway, 1985; Latour, 1987).

communication and begins to describe the practices used in managing and limiting connections.

Availability in Mobile Communication

Scholars of mobile communication have long acknowledged that availability is fraught in the context of mobile interactions. Here, I outline key literature on mobile availability, noting that there is a growing interest in understanding the pressures created by anytime, anywhere communication. I note that it is only recently, however, that that research has begun to look into the practices people use to manage and mitigate this pressure, creating a small body of evidence to which this thesis contributes.

The Dialectic of Mobile Availability: Freedom and Pressure

A key focus for early research on mobile communication was understanding the new forms and intensities of interaction it enabled. As part of this effort, scholars produced terms to describe the dynamics of anytime, anywhere communication. Katz and Aakhus' (2002), for instance, use the term "perpetual contact" to describe how the adoption of mobile phones enabled frequent communication between remote individuals. They suggest that perpetual contact is not just a style of frequent communication but also a broader "socio-logic" — that is, a shared presumption about how mobile communication is to be used (2002, p. 307).

Other early studies make similar observations, noting that mobile messaging, in particular, encourages small but frequent interactions. For instance, Licoppe (2004) investigates the use of home telephones and mobile phones and notes that they are used for two distinct modes of communication between close friends or family members: scheduled interactions of longer duration and spontaneous interactions that are shorter and more frequent. He argues that the latter mode, which he terms "connected presence", is particularly prevalent in mobile communication (2004, p. 144). These small but frequent interactions maintain presence over distance, continually reaffirming a relationship through exchanges in which the content is often less important than the fact of the interaction. Licoppe (2004, pp. 149-150) notes that this form of interaction is especially prevalent in the context of mobile messaging as messages are less

intrusive than calls and require less investment so they can be exchanged spontaneously and in a wide range of contexts.

Ito and Okabe (2005) come to a very similar conclusion after studying heavy mobile email users in Japanese cities. They found that these people exchanged high volumes of largely phatic messages and that this was changing perceptions of what it means to “be together” (2005, p. 268). They use the term “ambient virtual co-presence” to describe this new mobile-mediated togetherness (2005, p. 257). Again, they note that messaging is particularly suited to this form of presence, explaining that “unlike voice calls, which are generally point-to-point and engrossing, messaging can be a way of maintaining ongoing background awareness of others, and of keeping multiple channels of communication open.” (2005, p. 264). Each of these seminal terms — perpetual contact, connected presence, and ambient virtual co-presence — speaks to the new intensities of connection enabled by mobile communication, and particularly, mobile messaging.

Much of the subsequent research into mobile communication has built on these early observations by investigating the implications of this new form of continual contact. That said, research has also long noted that the connections mobile communications enable are not as smooth as terms like ‘perpetual contact’ suggest. Even some of the seminal accounts described above include early acknowledgments that the continual availability afforded by mobile communication is often fraught, and that the seamless contact it promises exists largely in theory where it remains unhindered by the realities of people’s limited availability.

For instance, in his discussion of the techno-social dynamics of connected presence, Licoppe notes that the possibility of anytime, anywhere communication is not only a resource but also a threat because, “as a result of this theoretical accessibility, each failure [to respond] indicates unavailability, suggesting that one of the protagonists is too absorbed in a situation to resume the relationship” (2004, p. 145). To mitigate this threat, relationships are continually affirmed through short but frequent interactions. However, this gesture of short but frequent interactions is threatened by two possibilities. The first is that the other person will be unavailable, which is now a problem that requires justification as frequent mobile interaction has been relied upon to construct presence and maintain the relationship. The second threat is

that requests for interaction begin to feel overbearing and “swing into the interpretive register of surveillance” (2004, p. 145). Thus, Licoppe notes:

Mobile phone communication is recontextualised by constraints of availability, which depend on opportunities stemming from its inscription in particular flows of activity, places, and time frames. Effective availability is thus always negotiated in situ, but within a participative frame in which it may initially be expected from the other party. (2004, p. 146)

Thus, while proposing connected presence as a new mode of being together, Licoppe also acknowledges that the relational economy of this perpetual contact is always taking place within a context of limited availability.

Ito and Okabe (2005) similarly acknowledge the complexities of availability in their discussion of ambient virtual co-presence. They describe how the heavy mobile email users they studied had very high expectations that others would be available for interactions unless it was clear that they were working or sleeping (2005, p. 264). Participants described this mutual expectation as creating strong pressure to respond to messages quickly so as to avoid violating social expectations. They noted that this could lead to problems in situations where they were unable or unwilling to respond quickly. For instance, one participant reported feeling “terrible” when she realised she had missed a message that had been sent to her hours prior while another explained that her friends continually chided her about her slow responses (2005, p. 265).

The complexities that Licoppe and Ito and Okabe raise point to a central and defining dialectic within mobile communication: by enabling anytime, anywhere communication, it produces both freedom and entrapment. As Arnold (2003) observes, this is the Janus-faced phenomenology of mobile phones. Like Janus, the Roman deity with two faces, mobile phones point simultaneously in opposing directions, opening up a range of contradictory outcomes. Among these is the fact that they allow both extension and invasion; they allow us to reach out, but “in reaching out, it is also necessary that there be a ‘reaching-in’. If we can call, then we can be called. We can reach others anywhere, anytime, but they can reach us anywhere, anytime” (Arnold, 2003, p. 264). This paradoxical outcome is underscored by the findings of a large-scale survey of mobile phone users across five countries which demonstrates that connectivity is

both the *most* and *least* liked aspect of mobile communication (Baron, 2011). More specifically, the ability to contact others at any time is greatly prized while the resultant ability to be contacted by others at any time is widely disliked (Baron, 2011; Ling & Baron, 2007).

Techno-social Drivers of Increased Availability Expectations

In recent years, this tension has only increased as mobile communication has become more deeply embedded in everyday life. Drawing on qualitative research into mobile communication practices across the past two decades, Ling (2016) notes that the obligation to be continually available has become a “structural expectation embodied in the mobile phone.”

This is partly due to the way that mobile communication has become socially embedded over the past decade. In the mid-1990s people often displayed a begrudging acceptance of the continual availability enabled by mobile devices (Ling, 2016, para. 22). By the early 2000s, however, continual availability had become a clear and widely entrenched social expectation. As Ling (2016, para. 4) explains, the mobile phone is:

increasingly a quasi-obligatory part of our daily kit. Not having it violates, in some small way, our mutual obligations to one another. We see a somewhat benign example of this when we are unable to, for example, reach our partner when we need to reorganize our daily errands.

This obligation to be available via mobile communication is further evident in the fact that many everyday actions, from seeking information to meeting someone in person, are structured according to the assumption that everyone has a mobile phone that they check regularly. Indeed, research has shown that we embody this obligation to be available by responding to non-conscious triggers that prompt us to check our phones throughout the day (Bayer et al., 2015). There is also evidence that defying this obligation comes at a cost as experimental studies have shown that people who respond to messages slowly are judged less favourably than those who respond quickly (Heston & Birnholtz, 2017). Thus, the stakes around negotiating mobile availability have risen as we have become both more flexible and more entrapped.

Availability expectations have also risen over the past decade due to technological developments, particularly the uptake of smartphones. This is in part because smartphones

allow for rapid switching between apps and services on one device. Consequently, as Lee notes, “mobile social communications mediated by smartphones enable individuals to maintain states of hyper-connection and hyper-awareness” (2012, p. 68).

As well as this capacity for communication across channels, there have also been specific developments in messaging apps that heighten expectations of availability. Being largely internet-based, smartphone messaging is essentially free, thus removing the financial barrier that previously limited some messaging exchanges. Smartphone messaging apps also typically have features that provide information about the attention or availability of others, like: read receipts, which show if a message has been received and/or opened; last active statuses, which show how long ago someone last accessed the app; and typing indicators, which show when a person is writing a response. Studies demonstrate that these features create heightened social pressure to be available as people fear that others will be offended if they read a message without responding (Church & De Oliveira, 2013; Pielot et al., 2014). These features were not present in earlier forms of SMS, and continually evolve as developers release software updates that alter their form and function, often in an attempt to keep up with, or differentiate from, their competitors. The implications that these processes of innovation and change have for the negotiation of availability will be discussed throughout this thesis.

How People Experience Availability Pressure

As the expectations around mobile availability have broadly increased over the past decade, mobile scholars have become interested in better understanding how and when people experience this expectation as social pressure, and with what effects. A key finding from this work is that not everyone perceives the expectation to be available as a burden, and that personal preferences around availability (i.e. having a preference to be more or less available to others) can determine whether people feel coerced into participating in mobile interactions (Halfmann & Rieger, 2019). Availability preferences can also impact the perceived quality of a person’s mobile interactions. A survey of undergraduate students found that individuals who prefer to be very available to others report more enjoyment of mobile interactions, particularly with weak ties, than individuals who prefer to be less available (Trieu et al., 2019). This research suggests that the challenges posed by mobile availability are experienced differently by people depending on their preferences around availability.

There are also, however, a broader range of factors that can also influence the extent to which someone experiences mobile availability as a problem. This is addressed by Hall (2017) in a multi-study investigation of “mobile entrapment” which addresses the guilt, anxiety, or stress to respond and be available to others via mobile devices. As Hall notes:

Entrapment is neither inevitable nor universal. Rather, entrapment is a potential negative consequence of individuals’ personal and relational struggle to navigate the culture of mobile dependency. Individuals’ typical and relationship-specific patterns of mobile use, including the type and frequency of contact, expectations of responsiveness, and dependence on the device, all contribute to the emotional and affective experience of mobile use. (2017, p. 149)

While thus recognising that experiences of entrapment result from a confluence of personal and relational factors, Hall also finds that there is a particular correlation between experiencing entrapment and using texting to maintain very large networks that include many weaker ties. Thus, Hall posits that “perhaps entrapment is a consequence of adopting mobile usage patterns that attempt to breach the upper limit of the number of friends one can maintain” (2017, p. 156).

These studies provide important insights into the feelings of pressure people experience around mobile availability. In particular, these studies note that negative feelings can become quite severe under certain circumstances. What is less clear from these studies, however, is what actions people take in relation to these feelings. How do people respond to these feelings of pressure or obligation? How does the degree of pressure people feel impact their messaging practices? These are the kinds of questions that I focus on in this thesis as I investigate how young adults manage and negotiate mobile availability. As I will discuss shortly, there is a nascent body of literature on the practices people use in negotiating availability pressures — both severe and quotidian. Before describing this literature, I want to first briefly outline literature on young adults and mobile messaging in order to provide justification and context for my focus on this age group.

Young Adults and Mobile Availability

Scholars have long noted that young people have a distinct relationship to mobile communication, and to messaging in particular. For children, mobile phones are an important means of facilitating independent mobility as they give parents reassurance that a child can be reached while travelling alone and provide a way for children to report that they have reached their destination safely (Nansen et al., 2017). As children grow older, mobile phones are often central to their increasing independence, with children seeing mobiles as providing freedom and mobility, and parents seeing them as extending parental authority outside the home (Williams & Williams, 2005). Upon entering secondary school and their teenage years, mobile phones become enmeshed in young people's peer relationships (Nansen et al., 2017). As many studies have noted, mobile communication, particularly messaging, is prized by young people as it provides a private sphere for interacting with friends (Grinter & Elridge, 2001; Ling & Yttri, 2006; Livingstone & Bober, 2003; Stern, 2007). Indeed, the use of SMS for personal communication was largely pioneered by younger people whose enthusiastic adoption demonstrated the commercial viability of the new technology (Taylor & Vincent, 2005, p. 81).

For young adults, and even older adults, mobile messaging continues to be strongly associated with social interactions, particularly communication with intimate peers (Campbell & Kwak, 2011; Ishii, 2006; Ling, 2004, 2008; Wilken, 2011). In his review of mobile communications literature, Wilken (2011) found that mobile phone use primarily supports the strengthening of existing close social ties, as opposed to the development of broader contacts. In terms of young adults more specifically, an early study by Quan-Haase (2007, p. 671) into the digital and online communication of university students found that "friends were the most important communication partners in students' everyday lives."⁴ A more recent study of university students reiterated that they "showed a strong attachment to their phones for communication with peers" and that messaging was one of the two most common uses of mobile phones (Mihailidis, 2014, p. 64). While messaging has long been popular with young people (Ling,

⁴ The participants in this study used Instant Messaging (IM) more than texting due to issues of cost and reliability, however the reduced cost and improved reliability of mobile messaging means that it has largely taken the place of IM in young adults' social communication.

2002, 2004; Nielsen Research, 2010), the shift from SMS to smartphone messaging apps has further reinforced its popularity. This shift greatly reduced the cost of messaging, making it more accessible to younger people provided that they can afford or are given a smartphone device. Smartphone messaging also enables much easier forms of group communication, which has become very popular among young adults for phatic and instrumental interactions among friends (Thulin, 2017; Ling & Lai, 2016; Mannell, in press; O'Hara et al., 2014).⁵

Earlier, I explained that, in recent years, the social embeddedness of mobile communication together with technological developments has increased the expectations of availability produced by mobile communication. As heavy users of mobile messaging, young people are subject to these same, if not greater, expectations of availability, particularly from friends (Mihailidis, 2014; Weinstein & Selman, 2014). This can lead to a heightened experience of the freedom/entrapment dialectic described earlier. Mascheroni and Vincent, for instance, find that young people “identify full-time access to peers . . . as the main consequence that smartphones and messaging apps have on their interactions with friends” (2016, p. 311). They note that this continual access to peers “produces contradictory feelings among young people: intimacy, proximity, security as well as anxiety, exclusion and obligation” (2016, p. 311).

Hall and Baym (2012) found similarly contradictory findings in their study of mobile phones and relationship maintenance among university students.⁶ They noted that greater use of mobile phones to call and text close friends leads to “higher expectations that friends will use mobiles for relational maintenance” (2012, p. 318). That is, the more that friends communicate via mobile communication, the more that they expect mobile communication to continue.

⁵ While practices like sharing a mobile device meant that more than two people could be involved in a messaging interaction, pre-smartphone texting did not allow for the sending and receiving of messages between more than two devices at a time. In contrast, smartphone messaging apps allow people to send messages to groups of selected recipients. These group messages are visualized as a thread that all group members can view and engage with, making group interactions significantly easier. See the final section of Chapter Three for further discussion of group messaging.

⁶ While the sample for this study did include some older adults, I use it here as evidence of the experiences of young people as the sample was recruited from an introductory course and was primarily young adults. This is evident in the fact that the median age of participants was 20.

Having high expectations of mobile availability within a relationship positively predicted two contradictory outcomes: dependence, which increased friendship satisfaction, and overdependence, which decreased friendship satisfaction (2012, p. 327). In other words, more mobile interaction among friends leads to higher expectations of mobile availability which can lead to positive feelings of intimacy and support *or* negative feelings of smothering and entrapment. Establishing the causes of a positive or negative outcome was beyond the scope of the study, although, as noted earlier, experiences of entrapment are the result of multiple personal and relational factors.

It is perhaps unsurprising that navigating mobile availability to friends can be fraught for young adults given the role of friendships in this transitional period of life. Young adulthood is a time where people are becoming more individuated from their families and are surrounded by peers who are experiencing similar challenges and opportunities. Consequently, it can be an “auspicious period for forming deep and zestful friendships” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 104). During a period typically marked by change and unprecedented independence, friends can be a critical source of input about one’s self-conception, life choices, and beliefs (Rawlins, 1992, p. 103). Friendship can also be complex for young adults as they selectively transcend or preserve adolescent friendships. Particularly when entering higher education, young adults are “forced not only to build a new social support system but also to renegotiate relations with family and friends back home” (Shaver et al., 1985, p. 194). As Rawlins (1992) notes, older friendships that are maintained play an important anchoring role by providing continuity during a period of instability and change. However, they can also “prevent necessary changes in one’s actions and attitudes” or may simply be too hard to maintain due to limited time and energy (1992, p. 104). Many new friendships are also formed during this time, some of which last whilst others are short lived (Rawlins, 1992, p. 105). In sum, friendship is an important but highly dynamic dimension of the lives of young adults.

Under these conditions, where mobile messaging is central to young adults’ friendships and subject to high expectations of availability that can, in turn, create troublesome experiences, actively negotiating availability is both especially necessary and especially difficult. This makes young adults an important site for studying how mobile-mediated unavailability is negotiated.

Negotiating Mobile Availability Under Conditions of Constant Connection

While most research to date has focussed on understanding how people *perceive* the pressures of constant connection, research has recently begun into how people *respond* to these pressures by managing and limiting their availability for mobile communication.

As there is currently little dedicated literature in this area, many of the existing observations about how people control and limit mobile interactions are made in the course of broader studies into availability and attention. One such study by Birnholtz et al. (2017) investigates how people manage the level of attentiveness between themselves and their interlocutors. Using a custom-built app, they collected meta-data and, where possible, content, from the messaging and calling activity of 102 young adults. Their findings focus on practices for gaining or holding the attention of others, but they also report a few findings about practices for de-escalating or reducing attention. In particular, they suggest that many of the delayed responses they observed in the messaging meta-data were examples of people seeking to de-escalate the attentiveness of their interlocutor, although they note that these delays could also be caused by the person being too busy to respond. They also observe that people use phrases to end conversations and note that these phrases are often initially quite subtle (e.g. “I’m getting sleepy”) but become more explicit if initial attempts fail (e.g. “Goodnight!”). Lastly, they note that people’s response times vary according to the relationship they have with their interlocutor, as “people tended to respond more quickly to those with whom they are not as close” (2017, p. 268) Because of the limitations of their data, however, they are only able to speculate about the reasons for this pattern.

A study by Vorderer et al. (2016) similarly contains observations about negotiating and limiting availability amid a broader investigation of mobile communication. They conducted an online survey of university students (aged 16-33 years) with the aim of better understanding what they term “permanently online/permanently connected” behaviours. Within this investigation, they discuss the role of “awareness cues”, such as read receipts, in increasing the pressure to be available (2016, p. 701). They note that participants had various strategies for dealing with these cues when responding to messages:

Forty-three percent of them mentioned that they often postpone opening a message, instead reading the message in an “unopened” status (pop-up or on start screen). This

allows them to reply to the message at a later point in time without letting the sender know that they have already read it earlier. Other strategies include writing quicker but shorter messages, online hiding options, or intentionally staying offline in specific situations so that others could not see if a message has been read. (2016, p. 701)

These observations make it clear that young adults have strategies for limiting and reducing their availability to others. One other relevant observation that Vorder et al. (2016, p. 701) make is that contextual factors can influence how quickly or slowly people reply. Specifically, they note that the speed of response is generally determined by the urgency of the message, who the sender is, and the situation in which the message is sent or received. I expand upon this observation in Chapter Four by providing more analysis about how these and other factors are considered when delaying responses. While this study provides compelling evidence that young adults have a range of practices for limiting and negotiating availability, the broader scope of this project means that no further details about the interpersonal complexities of these practices are provided.

In a final example, Wohn & Birnholtz (2015, p. 26) conducted a study into what they term “interpersonal attention management” which includes how people “manage their own availability, maintain awareness of others, and adapt their strategies for reaching others in the face of these failures.” To investigate these practices, they conducted interviews with young adults about a wide range of relationships including work-based and romantic relationships. While many of their findings focus on increasing the attentiveness of others, they also note several practices related to limiting and restricting availability. They observe that some people prefer to turn off notifications in order to avoid distractions; that people sometimes respond slowly to messages in order to lower other people’s expectations; and that some people use specific platforms or devices for communicating with specific people or groups in order to more easily limit or avoid their communication (2015, pp. 29-30). In one particularly extreme example, a participant had a dedicated mobile phone for communicating with her mother so that she could more easily limit their interactions (2015, p. 30).

Wohn and Birnholtz (2015) also reiterate that how and whether to respond to others often depends on the perceived urgency of the message and the relationship between sender and receiver. Interestingly, they note that one participant would respond to acquaintances faster

than close friends as she “didn’t want to offend them” (2015, p. 29), providing a possible explanation for the trend in response times observed by Birnholtz et al. (2017). As with the studies above, Wohn and Birnholtz (2015) provide compelling evidence that young adults have practices for restricting their availability however these practices are only briefly described due to the broader focus of the research.

It is also worth noting that both Wohn and Birnholtz (2015) and Vorderer et al.’s (2016) studies are published within the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI). This is a multidisciplinary field focused on improving the usability of computing technologies. While HCI scholars have come to interpret ‘usability’ quite broadly (Carroll, 2013), research in this field remains focused on producing findings that have direct implications for technology design. Consequently, while these studies make important observations about the fact that people engage in practices around limiting and reducing availability, their discussion of these practices is focused on implications for design, leaving open questions about their social and relational implications.

In addition to these studies, there is also a small collection of research that is specifically dedicated to investigating how people limit and restrict interactions. In one such study, Burchell (2017b) examines how the everyday use of networked communication technologies involves the negotiation of absence. He notes two roles that absence from networked communication plays in the everyday lives of his participants. Firstly, they ignore or delay engagement with particular interactions in order to re-establish “temporal sovereignty” — essentially a sense of control over time in one’s day (2017b, p. 188). Secondly, ignoring or delaying interactions is used to re-segregate work and home life through actions such as setting specific times for dealing with work emails (2017b, pp. 191-192). This reiterates the findings of earlier studies that likewise observed that people control boundaries between mobile communication pertaining to work and home (e.g., Wajcman et al., 2008). While this study does not solely focus on mobile communication, much of the discussion includes examples from mobile interactions, particularly in terms of the use of delay. In Chapter Four, I expand on this by looking in more depth at the use of delay to limit and negotiate availability.

Lastly, there is also a body of literature that investigates how people use white lies told via mobile messaging when accounting for their unavailability (Birnholtz et al., 2010, 2013; French

et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2013). This literature calls the practice “butler lying” in an allusion to the lies told by 19th century butlers to shield their employers from unwanted visitors (Hancock et al., 2009, p. 519). Through this comparison with historical etiquette, butler lying is envisioned as a polite strategy for accounting for unavailability. Importantly, this literature notes that deception is not only a strategy for negotiating availability for mobile communication (e.g. ‘Sorry, I only just saw your message’) but also availability for in-person interactions that are coordinated through mobile communication (e.g. ‘Sorry I can’t make it, I’m feeling unwell’). This is an important observation that I will return to shortly.

To support the proposition that butler lying is a common and distinct practice, the literature employs quantitative evaluations of its frequency and characteristics. In the earliest study, Hancock et al. (2009, p. 517) propose that lying about availability is “an important social practice” within instant messenger (IM) conversations. In a subsequent paper, Birnholtz et al. (2010, p. 1) transfer the concept of butler lying to the context of SMS, concluding that it is a common practice that participants used “strategically, drawing on the inherent ambiguities of SMS while maintaining plausible narratives”. Reynolds et al. (2013) builds on these studies by examining how butler lies are perceived by those who receive them. To do so, they asked pairs of friends to identify which of the messages they had sent to each other were deceptive and indicate when they felt they had received a message that was deceptive. The results indicated that “butler lies play a relational role that is expected by both parties in a dialogue” (Reynolds et al., 2013, p. 769). As the participants within these studies were exclusively university students, French et al. (2015) conducted further quantitative research with a larger and more diverse sample to establish that butler lying is also common among a wider population.

In addition to these quantitative analyses, Birnholtz et al. (2013) conducted an interview study of 47 participants that examined participants’ experiences and perceptions of telling and receiving butler lies. With regards to the former, they note that participants “carefully design their butler lies to be perceived positively” by weighing up “the potential relational consequences of a possible lie, as well as the relationship’s resilience to a possibly blunt telling of the truth” (2013, p. 2235). They also reported that participants typically viewed butler lying

as a “necessary evil” — a benign, though not entirely moral act that can be justified on account of the sender’s good intentions (2013, p. 2233).

This body of literature is significant as it provides a detailed account of one particular practice used for negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability. In addressing one practice in such detail, it illustrates the significance and complexity of availability-management practices. That said, as the research is situated within HCI, it focuses more strongly on implications for design than on unpacking the ethical and relational dynamics and implications of deception. As such, while it demonstrates the significance and complexity of a specific practice for negotiating unavailability, there is scope for a broader investigation of the interpersonal dynamics involved in this practice, and others.

Overall, this literature establishes that people regularly engage in practices of negotiating and restricting availability to and through mobile communication. It begins to map out some of these practices, providing a body of evidence to which this thesis adds. Overall, however, this current body of evidence remains limited because of two general trends across this literature. The first is that many observations about how people limit mobile availability or avoid mobile interactions occurs within the context of studies that look at availability management broadly conceived and that, as such, there is limited in-depth discussion of how, why, and with what impacts people restrict mobile interactions or manage unavailability. The second is that several of these studies come from HCI, meaning that while they generate rich insights into mobile practices, the analysis of those insights focuses primarily on implications for design rather than on an extended discussion of social or relational implications. This means that there remains more to be understood about the full range of practices people employ and the sociotechnical dynamics of these practices. This thesis offers such an understanding by providing an in-depth investigation of the affordances and practices involved in the negotiations of availability among young adults. Lastly, compared to these existing studies, this thesis also incorporates a broader view of availability management by considering not just availability *for* mobile interactions but also availability for face-to-face interactions that are negotiated *through* mobile communication. I elaborate on the reasons for this broader view of mobile availability below.

Coordination: Managing Face-to-Face Availability Through Mobile Communication

As noted, studies of butler lying make the important observation that mobile communication involves not only negotiating availability for mobile interactions but also availability for face-to-face interactions that are coordinated through mobile communication. In this thesis, I take the same dual approach. As such, I want to briefly outline some key literature that establishes why and how mobile communication is so central to coordination and thus why a study into the negotiation of mobile-mediated unavailability needs to take it into account.

Even early in its adoption, many scholars noted that mobile communication enables a uniquely flexible, on-the-fly approach to coordination. Among the first to observe this was Ito (2003) who, in her study of Japanese mobile users, noted that “teens and twentysomethings usually do not bother to set a time and place for their meetings”, instead exchanging messages across the day that “progressively narrows in on a time and place, two points eventually converging in a coordinated dance through the urban jungle” (2003, n.p.). Similarly, Castells et al. (2009, p. 172) observes that the development of a mobile-enabled “wireless networked society” means that committing to a meeting place is no longer as important when organising small, informal gatherings. They note that people instead engage in “rendezvousing”, a practice whereby “people walk or travel towards their destination while deciding which destination it is going to be on the basis of the instant communication in which they are engaged” (2009, p. 172).⁷

Ling’s (2004; see also Ling & Yttri, 2002) concept of ‘microcoordination’ provides the most comprehensive account of the emergent coordination practices observed by Ito (2003) and Castells et al. (2009). Ling (2004) observes that microcoordination — the flexible coordination process enabled by mobile communication — has three characteristics that distinguish it from earlier coordination practices: midcourse adjustment, iterative coordination, and the softening

⁷ As well as mobile calling and messaging, other forms of mobile media have also impacted coordination practices. One key example is location sharing apps, such as Four Square, although these were often used more for self-presentation than for actually coordinating to meet (Frith, 2014). Given that the use of dedicated location sharing apps was not prevalent among participants, and their functions are largely peripheral to my interest in unavailability, I focus here on how mobile communication has reshaped coordination practices.

of schedules. Midcourse adjustment refers to the ability to coordinate the time and place of a meeting while *en route* as the mobility and instantaneity of mobile communication allows movement and communication to occur simultaneously (2004, p. 71). Iterative coordination refers to the practice of progressively refining the details of a future activity in the period leading up to it, as per Ito and Castells et al.'s observations above (2004, p. 71). Lastly, the softening of schedules refers to the use of mobile communication to renegotiate the details of a face-to-face meeting at the last minute in order to accommodate changes in availability (2004, p. 73-75). Ling describes sending a pre-emptive message about running late as illustrative of how this softening of schedules can help avoid breaches of etiquette by adding "slack to the more precise nature of time-based agreements" (2004, p. 74). By enabling flexible, on-the-fly, organisation, Ling suggests that practices of microcoordination challenge the "taken-for-grantedness" of mechanised clock time as the basis for social coordination (2004, p. 57-68). Indeed, Ling views mobile communication's affront to the primacy of clock time as arguably "the greatest social consequence arising from the adoption of the mobile telephone" (2004, p. 69).

Ling has since updated his work on microcoordination to account for the recent development and adoption of group messaging (Ling & Lai, 2016). Early practices of microcoordination were enacted through SMS and voice calls, which made microcoordination difficult when organising larger groups as SMS and calling required people to be contacted individually. Group messaging overcomes this limitation, allowing for multiple people to interact in a single messaging thread. Consequently, Ling and Lai (2016) observe that group chats enable planning to become a shared endeavour, where each person is responsible for helping the group organise itself, rather than requiring one person to be responsible for organising the group. They also note that the sociotechnical dynamics of group chats create new challenges for coordination, such as large volumes of notifications, conversations going off track, trouble reaching consensus, and the awkwardness of being added to unwanted groups. Still, overall, group messaging provides a convenient channel for coordination, with studies showing that coordination is one of the key uses of group messaging (Church & de Oliveira, 2013; Ling & Lai, 2016; Thulin, 2017).

For many people, microcoordination is a very convenient way of organising everyday life, however, it is worth noting that not everyone enjoys such a flexible approach. For instance, Chung and Lim (2005) note that it creates problems for people who prefer a more structured schedule. In interviews, these people expressed frustration over increased unpredictability, the absence of firm plans, and a perceived growing disregard for punctuality. Chung and Lim thus describe the spontaneity enabled by mobile communication as a double-edged sword because “while it can increase one’s social opportunities, such nebulous chain-sequencing of events can paradoxically prove constraining and unsettling given the mutability of plans” (2005, p. 280).

Another complication that is of particular relevance for this thesis, is that microcoordination increases the pressure to be constantly available for mobile communication (Larsen et al., 2008). Drawing on Simmel’s (1903/1950) argument that the 20th century paradigm of clock time was restrictive in its rigidity, Larsen et al. (2008) observe that the flexible, just-in-time coordination enabled by networked technologies is similarly coercive as it demands continual engagement with those technologies (2008, p. 646). This argument illustrates that coordination is implicated in the negotiation of mobile availability by adding to the pressure to be available for mobile communication, as being unavailable could result in missing out on spontaneously organised face-to-face interactions.

The above literature also demonstrates that mobile communication is now central to the way we coordinate. Accordingly, because mobile communication has become a key channel through which face-to-face interactions are organised it is also a key channel through which availability for these interactions is negotiated. This is illustrated by the studies into butler lying, but it has arguably become even more so the case since their publication as the development of group chats has made coordination via mobile messaging even more central to everyday life. Thus, it is important that an investigation of how mobile messaging is implicated in young adults’ negotiations of availability involves attending to the negotiation of face-to-face availability *through* messaging. Consequently, I often use the term ‘mobile-mediated unavailability’ throughout this thesis as it encapsulates both availability for mobile interaction and availability for interactions organised through mobile communication.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the two bodies of literature that inform this thesis. The first is literature on voluntary disconnection. Broadly, this literature supports the aim of this thesis by illustrating the importance of studying how disconnection is implicated in the use of technologies that are usually thought of in terms of the connections they afford. This literature also describes rising sentiments of distrust and concern about the role of digital communication technologies in people's everyday lives. These growing practices and discourses of resistance form an important backdrop to participants' perceptions and experiences of smartphone use.

Studies of disconnection have often focused on severe actions like quitting or abstaining from particular technologies, but have increasingly turned toward studying more nuanced and integrated forms of disconnection and resistance. In doing so, scholars have begun to attend to the disconnective practices involved in the use of digital technologies although, so far, these studies have focused on social media. Consequently, to this literature I contribute insights into how people negotiate, limit, or avoid connections in the context of mobile communication.

The second body of literature that I described concerns mobile communication and availability. I noted that while mobile communication is often thought of as enabling constant contact, people's limited availability means that, in practice, mobile contact is often more negotiated than constant. I noted that obligations to be available for mobile communication have become broadly embedded in everyday life. However, successfully negotiating mobile availability can be challenging, particularly for young people, and failing to do so effectively can result in negative experiences of entrapment. While there is a considerable body of literature that describes the continual availability that mobile communication affords and the pressures this can create, there is less research into the practices people use to manage or push back against this continual availability. The studies that do exist are often concentrated around an HCI agenda of identifying implications for design, or focus on availability management more broadly conceived, including not only how people limit or reduce availability but also how they make themselves available or seek the availability of others.

In contributing to this mobile communications literature, I extend the existing evidence about availability management practices through a detailed and programmatic analysis of how young adults manage, and specifically *limit*, their availability to friends in the context of mobile messaging. This includes both one-to-one and group messaging and both availability for messaging interactions and availability for face-to-face interactions coordinated through messaging. This focus on friendship is important because among young adults, friendships are important, dynamic, and heavily mobile-mediated. They are also distinct relationships, lacking the defined roles of work-based or familial relationships and involving a different degree and intensity of intimacy than romantic relationships.

I also add to the existing literature in this area by comparing practices of availability management in mobile messaging with practices used in earlier media contexts: specifically, 19th century practices of calling cards and house visits and mid-20th century practices of landline telephone use. This kind of historical comparison has been important within the first body of literature I outlined. As I discussed, within literature on disconnections, historical comparison has often been used to highlight the continuities and discontinuities in resistant attitudes towards new technologies. Bringing a historical comparison to discussions of availability management in mobile messaging is similarly important as it provides context about what is particular to contemporary messaging practices and what is a continuation of earlier practices. This represents a further contribution that this thesis offers to literature on mobile availability.

In making these various contributions, this thesis draws on data from interviews with young adults and historical accounts of availability management practices. The methodology and research design for these processes are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 — Methodology and Research Design

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design of this thesis. I begin by describing the methodological approaches that inform my research, explaining that symbolic interactionism and postphenomenology together establish the key ontological and methodological paradigms underpinning the project. I then explain my research design, which consists of two key methods: semi-structured interviews with young adults and a historical comparison of etiquettes for limiting and reducing social contact.

Methodological Paradigms

This research is informed by two key perspectives: symbolic interactionism and postphenomenology. These two perspectives are best understood as theoretical approaches that have direct methodological implications. Broadly speaking, symbolic interactionism emphasises that people act towards things on the basis of the meaning they hold for them and thus advocates for interpretive qualitative methods, while postphenomenology emphasises that technologies mediate human experiences and are thus best understood through case studies of specific human-technology relations. As I outline below, the overlaps and tensions between these perspectives creates a productive space for investigating how people negotiate mobile-mediated unavailability.

Symbolic Interactionism

While not uncontested, the broadly accepted narrative of symbolic interactionism holds that it emerged from Mead's (1934) translation of American pragmatist philosophy into theories for the social sciences (see Sandstrom et al., 2001). Among Mead's (1934) key ideas were that people do not passively respond to their environments but rather are active, self-conscious actors that engage reflexively with the world around them. His work was extended in the post-war period by sociologists at the University of Chicago, most notably Blumer (1969) whose foundational text *Symbolic Interactionism* champions the merits of Mead's theories for sociological analysis. The perspective was then developed further by their graduate students — sometimes referred to as the 'second Chicago school' — including scholars such as Goffman (1959), Strauss (1978), Lopata (1971), and Becker (1963).

In this later period, symbolic interactionists were defined by their resistance to the positivist approaches that had come to dominate sociological research. Where positivist sociology understood the social world as an objective reality that could be measured quantitatively, symbolic interactionists saw the social world as constructed through human interaction, a process best understood through interpretive qualitative methods. While its anti-positivist stance initially set symbolic interactionism in opposition to mainstream sociology, many of its key tenets are now broadly accepted across the social sciences, including within media and communications studies (Fine, 1993). This often-unspoken incorporation, along with the diversification of those who identify as symbolic interactionists, means that many of the traditional critiques of the approach as being too narrow in scope no longer apply. It has also led some scholars to question whether an identifiable symbolic-interactionist perspective still exists (Fine, 1993; Sandstrom et al., 2001). Despite its diffusion and diversity, however, the central tenets of symbolic interaction still provide a useful framework for research on social practices.

Foundational Principles

In laying the foundations for symbolic interactionism, Blumer argued that “society *exists in action* [emphasis original]” (1969, p. 6) and that social action should thus be social science’s “primary subject matter” (1969, p. 55). To aid in the study of action, he outlined three premises according to which action should be understood (1969, pp. 2-5).

The first premise is that people act towards things on the basis of the meanings that those things hold for them (1969, p. 2). For Blumer, ‘things’ include not only physical objects but also institutions, ideals, other people and their actions, and the situations encountered in everyday life. Blumer notes that while few of his contemporaries would disagree with this initial premise, dominant approaches within psychology and sociology at the time downplayed the role of meanings in shaping action, emphasising instead factors that could be isolated and measured, such as attitudes and motives for psychologists or social roles and group affiliations for sociologists. Meanings, in so far as they were studied, were integrated into these factors. In contrast, for symbolic interactionism “the meanings that things have for human beings are central in their own right” (1969, p. 3).

Blumer's second premise holds that meanings are developed through the process of social interaction. As Blumer explains, "the meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person" (1969, p. 4). Thus, it is through social processes that things come to hold particular meanings for particular people. This view sits in contrast to ideas about how meaning originates that were dominant at the time which held that either meaning was intrinsic to things or that it was the product of psychological elements coalescing within a person (Blumer, 1969, pp. 3-4).

However, while Blumer argues that meanings are formed through social processes, he emphasises that the use of these meanings is not a simple process whereby someone takes a pre-established meaning and directly applies it to their own experience. Rather, his third premise is that the use of meanings involves an interpretive process (1969, p. 5). This process involves a person firstly indicating to themselves the thing towards which they are acting and then actively working with the meanings available to them to establish whether and how these meanings might fit with the situation. This is a formative, interpretive process in which a person "selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in light of the situation" (1969, p. 5).

For the present study, these symbolic interactionist principles have several implications. They emphasise that any act of limiting or negotiating availability will be shaped by the meanings that messaging technologies, partners, and practices hold for the person taking the action. These meanings will have been informed by a range of prior interactions. Such prior interactions could include conversations with friends about messaging practices, behaviours observed from other people, or messages picked up from the media, internet culture, or other sources. In using these meanings to direct their actions, people may be selective, choosing those that best fit with other factors. They might also wrestle with these meanings, altering or interpreting them in order to fit their own circumstances. As a result of these processes, the meaning of messaging technologies, partners, or practices will likely vary between people and in different contexts.

It is also worth noting that the premises outlined above have led symbolic interactionist research to focus on several key areas of study, one of which is of particular relevance to this

thesis. Because Blumer saw meaning as produced through social interaction, symbolic interactionist research has focused heavily on understanding the dynamics and processes involved in interactions, particularly direct interpersonal interactions (e.g., Goffman, 1959). As Blumer (1969, p. 8) explains, social interaction is important within symbolic interactionism because it *forms* human conduct, rather than just providing a setting for the expression or release of human conduct. He notes that interaction thus requires people to account for and respond to the actions of others: “One has to fit one’s own line of activity in some manner to the actions of others” (1969, p. 8). This is significant in the context of this thesis because limiting availability to and through mobile communication often involves directly interacting with someone else. For example, explaining a past absence or ending a conversation are both interpersonal interactions. Accordingly, in Chapters Five and Six, which focus on practices that involve direct interactions with others, I draw on Goffman’s (1959, 1967) work on interaction, which is informed by symbolic interactionist principles.

Methodological Implications

These symbolic interactionist perspectives have direct methodological implications. As Blumer states, “the contention that people act on the basis of the meaning of their objects . . . signifies immediately that if a scholar wishes to understand the action of people it is necessary for him to see their objects as they see them” (1969, pp. 50-51). In other words, to understand the social world, researchers need to study what it means to the people who inhabit it. Researchers must come to understand the perspective of the people they are studying, the meanings that those people attach to things, and the social processes through which these meanings are formed. Symbolic interactionists argued that these kinds of understandings could only be achieved by paying close attention to the empirical world and using interpretive qualitative methods to study behaviour in its situated forms (Blumer, 1969; Hughes, 1971).

While the early proponents of symbolic interactionism were, at times, rather dogmatic in their methodological commitments (see Fine, 1995), the case for such situated approaches does make sense in the context of this thesis. Understanding how young adults negotiate mobile-mediated unavailability requires attending to their own perspectives about situations and the actions they take to manage them. Following this approach, I am less interested in trying to establish objective measures of the value or efficacy of participants’ communicative practices;

rather, I am interested in what these practices mean to participants themselves. How do they approach the issue of negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability? What actions do they feel are possible or not? What actions do they value and in what contexts? How do their understandings of relationships and technologies feed into the actions they take or avoid?

In seeking these understandings, I use semi-structured interviews to generate detailed accounts of personal experiences. As I explain further below, the processes I used for gathering and analysing interview data is informed by grounded theory. This is an approach that developed directly out of the symbolic interactionist movement and its commitment to inductive qualitative research (see Colomy & Brown, 1995, p. 33-34).

While symbolic interactionism provides a useful framework for understanding how actions are shaped by meanings, it lacks a robust account of how actions are also shaped by the materiality of objects. Within symbolic interactionism, the work of Carl Couch (1996), and to some extent Goffman (1959), considers how human interactions incorporate, or are structured by, objects and surroundings. However, attention to materiality has not been a strong focus within symbolic interactionism. Given that this thesis addresses sociotechnical practices, it requires an additional methodological perspective that accounts for the role of technologies in shaping action.

Postphenomenology

For this, I turn to postphenomenology, an approach to the study of technology that focuses on understanding human-technology relations. Postphenomenology grew out of Ihde's (1979, 1990, 1993) work on the philosophy of technology. Ihde views technologies as non-neutral mediators of human experiences. A central aspect of his work has been the development of a typology of human-technology relations. This includes embodiment relations, where the world is experienced through a technology; hermeneutic relations, where the world is experienced by 'reading' a technology; alterity relations, where the technology itself is experienced as a 'quasi-other'; and background relations, where technologies form part of a broader environment (Ihde, 1990). Ihde's ideas about human-technology relations have been expanded by other scholars (e.g., Verbeek, 2005, 2008; Rosenberger, 2012) and applied to a wide range of case

studies, including cochlear implants (Besmer, 2012), cars (Rosenberger, 2012), and self-tracking technologies (Van Den Eede, 2015).

Ihde, and the postphenomenological scholars who follow him, draw on, but have an ambivalent relationship with, classical phenomenology. Phenomenology, as represented by the work of Husserl (e.g., 1970), Merleau-Ponty (e.g., 1962/1945), and Heidegger (e.g., 1927/1962), was born out of resistance to the positivistic view of reality being presented by modern science. In protest against the absolutisation of this view, phenomenologists sought to describe, rather than scientifically analyse, reality and thus access a more authentic and richly meaningful world (e.g., Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1945). Over time, however, the argument that an original world could be accessed through rich description became untenable, as philosophers recognised that human experiences are always mediated in many ways, including by technologies (Ihde, 1990, 1993; see also Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015, pp. 11-12; Verbeek, 2005, p. 105).

In response, Ihde (1990) adopted a revised phenomenology that gives up the impossible project of describing the 'original' world and assumes instead that relations to the world are mediated. The focus of this *postphenomenology* is, therefore, describing how people relate to the world and, specifically, the role of technologies in these relations.⁸ To understand these human-technology relations, postphenomenology begins with case studies of specific technologies and their use (e.g., Rosenberger, 2014; Verbeek, 2008). In thus turning toward materiality and concrete practices, Ihde was influenced by American pragmatism (e.g., Dewey, 1905; James, 1907; Peirce, 1992/1878), particularly the principle that inquiries should be grounded in embodied, situated perspectives and engage with practical issues (Ihde, 2008; see also Mitcham, 1994). Indeed, Selinger (2012, p. viii) describes postphenomenology as "the hybrid coupling of phenomenology and pragmatism".

⁸ Verbeek (2005, pp. 105-108) states that this was always the task being conducted by phenomenology, even when classical phenomenologists argued otherwise. He argues that the descriptions of reality provided by these philosophers were actually descriptions of how humans *relate* to reality. He interprets Merleau-Ponty's work, for instance, as a description of how humans relate to the world through perception.

A Postphenomenological Ontology of Technology

The postphenomenological approach to human-technology relations views technology as a mediator of human experiences. Crucially, Ihde (1979, 1990) emphasises that technologies are “non-neutral” mediators. He makes this argument in several ways across his work. In developing his typology of human-technology relations, he illustrates how the process of technological mediation shapes experiences in particular ways. For instance, embodiment relations involve the magnification of some aspects of an experience and the reduction of others (1990, p. 78). One example is that while a telescope extends vision into the distance, it restricts peripheral vision. Ihde also discusses the non-neutrality of technologies directly through his comments on “technological intention” (1990, pp. 49-50, 141). He argues that “technologies, by providing a framework for action, do form intentionalities and inclinations within which use-patterns take dominant shape” (1990, p. 141). He illustrates this argument by considering different writing implements — a fountain pen, a typewriter, a computer — and how each lends itself to specific writing practices and styles.

While postphenomenological approaches emphasise the intentionality of technologies, they also recognise that technologies can support a range of different relations: that is, they can be understood and used in different ways. In postphenomenology, this property is referred to as the *multistability* of technologies and has its origins in Ihde’s (1986) discussion of visual perception. In the context of visual perception, Ihde (1986) used a range of simple visual illusions to illustrate how an arrangement of markings can be viewed as several different images. He later applied this notion to technologies, arguing that they can likewise be used and understood in a range of different ways, or, in postphenomenological terms, have different “stabilities” (Ihde, 1990, 1993). A hammer, for instance, is usually used for its intended purpose (to hammer), but could also be used as a paperweight, an art object, a murder weapon, a door handle, and so on (Ihde, 1993, p. 37). This “ambiguity of uses, however, is not indefinitely extendable” as the multistability of a technology is limited by its material properties (Ihde, 1993, p. 37; 1990).⁹

⁹ What enables a user to relate to a technology in terms of a particular stability? To address this question, Rosenberger (2009, 2013) develops the notion of “relational strategies”, which are the particular understandings and bodily approaches that enable a user to relate to a technology in terms of

The attention that postphenomenology pays to the materiality of technologies and the relations they enable is important within this thesis because the practices I investigate are shaped by a range of technologies: messaging apps, telecommunications infrastructure, and the operating systems and hardware of mobile devices. My treatment of these technologies is informed by a postphenomenological perspective in so far as I view them as mediating people's experiences of connection and availability, and thus also their efforts to manage and limit availability. Through mediating these practices, mobile technologies are non-neutral as they encourage some actions and discourage or prevent others.

That said, where Ihde and much subsequent postphenomenological work focuses on relations of perception — that is, how perception is mediated by technologies — I focus more on how actions are mediated by messaging and related technologies. I am interested in how technologies are implicated in the *practices* that people use when negotiating and limiting their availability. I thus adopt the concept of 'affordances' as a primary theoretical framework rather than Ihde's typology of relations. The term 'affordances' refers to the possibilities for action that are created by the relationship between a technology and a user (Gibson, 1979; Hutchby, 2001). Although I outline this concept in greater detail below, I want to note here that it is consistent with a postphenomenological approach, as it adheres to the key principles of intentionality and multistability. The concept of technological affordances highlights the fact that technologies encourage particular actions, but also holds that, within the limitations of their materiality, their possible uses shift according to a range of contextual factors (Davis & Chouinard, 2017; Nagy & Neff, 2015; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Further, as I also outline below, Kiran (2015) illustrates that the concept of affordances can be integrated into a postphenomenological account of the structuring conditions of technological mediation.

Further Methodological Implications

While postphenomenology does not advocate for a specific methodology, the perspective does have methodological implications. Because postphenomenology focuses on understanding technologies through the relations they enable, studies that use this approach are grounded in

a particular stability.

empirical observations of specific technologies and their uses (Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015, pp. 9-10; for examples, see, Bottenberg, 2015; Irwin, 2005; Wellner, 2014). Through case studies of specific human-technology relations, postphenomenological studies explore how technologies shape human practices and experiences, and further philosophical understandings of the relationship between technology and people. Further, the pragmatist roots of this approach mean that postphenomenological studies are oriented towards addressing practical challenges, such as driving safety (Rosenberger, 2012), and impact of ultrasound imaging on decision-making about abortion (Verbeek, 2008). Following this approach, my investigation focuses on understanding mobile messaging technologies by looking at a specific challenge associated with their use (the negotiation of availability) within a specific context (the friendships of young adults).

The approaches taken within postphenomenological case studies vary and no specific approach is mandated by key postphenomenological texts. However, the focus on investigating specific technologies-in-use fits well with the interpretive qualitative methodology promoted by symbolic interactionism, as discussed above. This methodology emphasises attending to phenomena as they occur in everyday life and understanding them from the perspective of those involved. Such an approach fits well with postphenomenology's emphasis on studying situated technology relations.

Combining Postphenomenology and Symbolic Interactionism

While there is a tension between these two methodologies, this tension is productive in the context of this thesis. By foregrounding the mediating role of technological affordances, postphenomenology mitigates symbolic interactionism's focus on human agency. Likewise, symbolic interactionism's attention to interpersonal relations and socially produced meanings mitigates postphenomenology's focus on the relationship between individuals and technologies. The combination of these approaches are also fitting in light of the research questions outlined in the introduction. These ask about the *affordances* involved in limiting and negotiating availability. As I noted in the introduction, and discuss in more depth in Chapter Three, affordances is a concept that refers to the opportunity for action that emerges from the relationship between a technology and a user — a relationship that encompasses not only the user's perceptions and abilities, but also the broader socio-cultural context in which they are

operating. Postphenomenology provides a framework for thinking about specific socio-technical relations, and symbolic interactionism provides a framework for thinking about the broader systems of meaning in which they are situated — both of which are central to an analysis of affordances.

Further, despite their differences, postphenomenology and symbolic interactionism share pragmatist roots and a keen interest in everyday experiences. They also both advocate for situated approaches that produce knowledge through detailed observation of the empirical world. It is these essential tenets of qualitative research that I turn to now.

Qualitative Principles and Interview Method

This thesis uses a three-part research design that centres around interviews, an analysis of affordances, and a historical comparison. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I describe each of these parts in turn, beginning the methods used to collect and analyse interview data.

In accordance with the theoretical and methodological foundations outlined above, I use a qualitative approach that draws on inductive and interpretive modes of inquiry. Using an inductive approach means following a process whereby the important dimensions of phenomena "emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be" (Patton, 2002, p. 56). Using an interpretive approach means concentrating on how people understand their own social worlds, rather than pursuing widely generalisable results through isolating variables and using representative sampling. An interpretive approach thus "focuses on specific, situated meanings and meaning-making practices of actors in a given context" (Schwartz-She & Yanow, 2011, p. 1). Using an inductive, interpretive approach is important to this project because it aims to understand the sociotechnical practices involved in negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability, without presuming at the start what these practices are or how they are understood by the people using them. Accordingly, while research questions guided my investigation, I used methods designed to allow for an exploratory process of data collection and analysis.

In following a naturalistic, inductive approach, my research is broadly aligned with grounded theory, a methodology that provides "guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to

construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). As this quote suggests, the defining characteristic of grounded theory is that it does not assume a theory, define a hypothesis based on that theory, and then set out to test the hypothesis with data, but rather is driven by a desire to develop theory from data. This approach was initially developed by Glaser and Strauss (1965, 1967) at a time when qualitative research was falling out of favour. They made a case for its value by developing rigorous codified methods for the collection and analysis of qualitative data according to their grounded theory approach.¹⁰ Beyond the key characteristic of developing theory from data, the central tenets of their approach include: (a) sampling that is focused on illuminating the phenomena of interest rather than on population representativeness; (b) an iterative data collection process whereby early observations shape further data collection; (C) constructing codes and categories from data rather than from preconceived hypotheses; and (d) using memo writing throughout to track, refine, elaborate, and link analytical categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; see also Creswell, 1998). These are all principles that I use in my research methods, as explained further below.

It is important to briefly note, however, that while my work is informed by grounded theory, I do not adhere to the more prescriptive steps that Strauss and Glaser developed for collecting and analysing data. Indeed, the positivist assumptions that underpin these more rigid elements of their work are now of limited value given contemporary developments in qualitative methodologies and, consequently, grounded theory has recently been subject to various revisions (e.g., Bryant, 2002; Clarke, 2003). Thus, my methods are informed by Charmaz's (2006, p. 9) reinterpretation of grounded theory methods "as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages." Charmaz proposes a more open and flexible approach to data collection and analysis which allows more room for the discretion of individual researchers. Further, her approach, which is heavily informed by pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, "explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it", and is built on the premise that qualitative research is always a process of co-construction between researchers and participants (2006, p. 10). This

¹⁰ Strauss and Glaser initially developed the approach together but they later diverged, developing their own versions of the methodology in different directions.

reworking of grounded theory is better aligned with the ontological and epistemological foundations outlined in the prior section, which are likewise rooted in a commitment to partial situated knowledges.

Data Collection

As is common in research informed by grounded-theory, I employed in-depth semi-structured interviewing as my primary method of data collection. In-depth interviewing utilises focused conversations — something already central to human life — to produce detailed accounts of people's experiences and perceptions (Brinkmann, 2012, pp. 2-5). A semi-structured approach, whereby the interviewer guides rather than predetermines the conversation, allows "much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 21). This approach is in line with the exploratory, inductive nature of the research as it gave me access to rich descriptions of participants' own interpretations of their practices and perceptions and allowed space for unexpected findings.

Other methods, such as focus groups and ethnographic observations, would have provided similarly detailed, naturalistic information. However, focus groups may not have allowed for the same degree of self-disclosure as one-on-one interviewing: in a group context, people may have been less willing to discuss how they restrict their availability given that some of these practices could be perceived as selfish or rude. Similarly, the labour involved in using observation as a method would also have restricted me to a very small sample. Given the exploratory nature of this work, I wanted to include a range of experiences from a larger sample of participants. It would also have been very difficult to find an ethical method of observing messaging exchanges as they happened. Real-time observation would not allow participants to redact highly personal exchanges, violating their privacy and that of their messaging partners.

To obtain varied accounts of media practices, participants were recruited in two cohorts. The first, totalling 24 participants, identified as regular messaging users—that is, they used messaging in a manner that was broadly equivalent to their friends. The second, totalling 16 participants, identified as using messaging rarely or in a limited way. Below, I describe the

methods used to recruit and interview each group in turn. This is followed by a discussion of research ethics and data analysis.

I gained ethics approval for this study from the University of Melbourne's Human Ethics Advisory Group prior to starting recruitment (Application ID: 1544154). Further details are provided below.

Cohort A: Sampling and Recruitment

In grounded theory approaches, initial sampling is focused on identifying a sample that is relevant to the research questions, rather than representative of a particular population (Charmaz, 2006, p. 100; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 151).

Accordingly, I used a purposive sampling approach (also called purposeful sampling) which involves selecting cases that will generate rich insights into the issues being studied. More specifically, I used a form of purposive sampling called 'criterion sampling' whereby predetermined criteria are used to select a sample that will richly illustrate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002, p. 238). There were three key criteria for the first cohort of participants.

The first was that participants were young adults — i.e. between the ages of 18-30 years. As discussed in the prior chapter, young adults are an important site for studying how mobile-mediated unavailability is enacted for several reasons. They are known to be heavy and adept mobile device users, they often have social lives that are characterised by a lot of intensity and change, and these factors together can make negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability both necessary and fraught. There is also a further reason: recruiting young adults meant that participants would be in the same age group as me during the period of data collection, potentially making them more inclined to form rapport and thus be more open in an interview context. It is also important to note, however, that while young adults share an age bracket, "the social, economic and cultural significance of this physical reality is far from common" (Wyn & White, 1997 p. 25). As such, while I take a particular age group as my focus, I do not presume that age is the only, or the most important, condition structuring participants' lives and messaging practices. While young adults are a valuable focus for this research, the selection of another age-cohort may well provide different but valuable findings. Accordingly, comparing and contrasting age-cohorts would be a worthwhile pursuit for further research.

The second sampling criteria was that participants lived in Melbourne at the time of the interview. Situating the research in an urban centre adds richness to the project due to the culturally-diverse and highly mobile population. For instance, many of my participants had moved suburbs, states, and even countries, to attend universities in Melbourne. This added to the complexity of their social lives as they made new friendships and navigated changes in older friendships. Situating the research in Melbourne also helped produce detailed findings as I was familiar with the spaces and infrastructures that participants discussed, having lived in the city myself for three years at the time of data collection.

The third criteria was that participants regularly used mobile messaging for communicating with friends. This was necessary in order to ensure that participants could discuss their experiences and perceptions of navigating availability via messaging. The fourth criteria was that participants were fluent in English so that we could communicate effectively. Beyond these four criteria, I sought a diversity of genders, ages, and living situations to enable comparisons between different experiences.

To recruit participants, I posted an advertisement on the student job search websites of several Melbourne universities (University of Melbourne, Swinburne University, La Trobe University and RMIT University). By advertising through these websites, I was able to reach a large number of people who met the sampling criteria. The advertisement encouraged people who met the criteria to contact me via email and provide some basic demographic information, such as their gender, age, and living situation.

Recruitment began in June 2015 and generated around 70 responses. I contacted prospective participants in the order they had contacted me but occasionally selected specific participants so that the sample would contain a range of ages and living conditions and a relatively balanced distribution of males and females. Following the principle of theoretical sufficiency (Dey, 1999), recruitment ended when I had a good spread of demographic factors and had collected sufficiently rich data to conduct a robust analysis.

The sample for this cohort consists of 24 people (11 male and 13 female), ranging from 18-30 years, with an average age of 21. Almost all participants were students and the sample encompasses a wide range of disciplines and study levels from secondary school through to

PhD candidates. Most participants were Australian, although several identified as being of mixed nationality. The remaining participants were international students or people who had permanent residency in Australia but identified with a non-Australian nationality. These participants were from Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. For more detail about the demographics of this sample, see Appendix A.

Cohort A: Interview Process

Interviews with this cohort took place from June to December 2015. During this time, I met with each participant three times: first for an initial meeting of around 30 minutes and then two further times for interviews.

The initial meeting had three purposes. Firstly, I explained what was involved in participating, asked participants to read a plain language statement describing the research, and then sign a consent form if they agreed to participate. It was important to me that we conducted this process in person because participating involved supplying a small sample of messaging prior to the first interview. This is an ethically fraught request (an issue I discuss further below) and so by meeting in person, I hoped participants would have a better sense of who I was and whether they trusted me. It also meant that I was better able to ensure they understood and consented to the process. Secondly, I used this initial meeting to explain how to provide this messaging sample. This process was relatively complex and explaining it in person helped me ensure that participants understood and executed it correctly, in a manner that protected their privacy and that of their messaging partners. Lastly, the meeting provided an important opportunity for building rapport, which is critical to conducting successful interviews (Minichiello et al., 2008, p. 83).

One shortcoming of interviewing is that self-reporting can involve biases (Boase & Ling, 2013) and is limited by the memory of the participant. Given that some of the practices I wanted to discuss were very mundane, I was particularly concerned that participants may struggle to accurately recall relevant situations. To mitigate this, I decided to ask participants to send me a small anonymized sample of their messaging history prior to their first interview.¹¹ I then

¹¹ This process is informed by Robards and Lincoln's (2017) scroll-back method whereby participants scroll back through their social media timelines with an interviewer who asks them to explain or

reviewed these samples and used relevant sections as prompts during interviews. This proved to be a very effective mechanism for eliciting discussion about specific messaging instances.

Depending on the messaging apps they used, collecting this sample was fairly arduous for participants (as I explain further below) which could lead to participants not properly anonymizing the sample, putting in more work than I was able to compensate them for, or dropping out of the study. To mitigate these risks, I asked participants to only collect messages from a recent 24-hour period of their choosing. If they found that, even with this limitation, the process of collecting the messages was taking a long time, I encouraged them to stop the task after one hour. I felt that this provided a good balance between not unduly burdening participants and making it likely that they would provide relevant material.

To capture this messaging history, participants were asked to export, or copy and paste, their sample of messaging history into a secure text-based file. In the initial meeting, I asked participants which apps they used the most and then walked them through the process for collecting messaging off those apps. I assumed that WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and SMS apps would be the most commonly used apps among participants and gave participants a written version of the instructions for collecting messaging from these apps. If a participant used apps that I was unfamiliar with, or with which it was especially difficult to collect messaging, I planned to ask participants for brief notes about interactions that occurred on these apps within their 24-hour time frame. However, this process was not used as my assumption that participants would primarily use WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and/or SMS proved correct.

Once participants had collected their sample, I asked them to review the messages and redact any content they wished before sending the files to me via email. I asked participants to send me their samples at least a day before our interview so that I could review the messages and

elaborate on specific posts. While Robards and Lincoln (2017) emphasise that the participant is always the person in control of the scrolling, the more private nature of messaging meant that following an equivalent process where participants scrolled through their messaging exchanges would not provide them with sufficient control over the information revealed to the interviewer. As such, my own process involved participants providing a redacted sample prior to the interview and then going over particularly relevant content together during the interview.

note the interactions that I wanted to discuss in the interview. The instructions for collecting the sample are provided in Appendix C.

As mentioned above, asking people to supply private correspondence is ethically fraught and requires careful consideration to protect the privacy of participants and of the people they had exchanged messages with. Further information about the processes used to mitigate privacy risks can be found below, in the section titled 'Research Ethics'.

Most interviews took around an hour, although some were as short as half an hour and others as long as two hours. Interview length was largely determined by how extensively a participant talked and how long it took for me to feel that we had covered sufficient ground. Interviews were audio-recorded on my iPhone and laptop. Interviews generally took place on university campuses. Other locations included a public library, a public square in the Melbourne CBD, a food court, and one participant's home. I avoided locations that were formal or intimidating, or where noise levels would affect the recording.

The initial round of interviews was broad in scope, covering a wide range of situations related to availability. I generally began these interviews by asking participants to describe which messaging apps and mobile devices they used and how they used them. This established important contextual information and helped both myself and the participant to settle into the conversation. I then asked about various situations and issues related to negotiating availability via messaging such as intentionally delaying or avoiding interactions (both mediated and face-to-face), situations where the participant was most available and least available; managing availability in relation to particular people, and the coordination of face-to-face interactions (those instigated by the participant and those instigated by their friends). I also incorporated content from their messaging sample that I felt was pertinent, asking for clarification and reflection about specific instances. Following a semi-structured approach, I tailored my approach to each participant by focusing on areas that were generative and moving quickly through areas that were not.

During the interviews, participants sometimes spoke about particular messaging interactions. If I felt that a detailed account of the interaction would be helpful, or the participant was struggling to recall details, I encouraged participants to look up the interaction on their phone.

In some instances, participants showed me exchanges on their phone or read them aloud. Where possible, I kept the names of the interlocutors involved in these interactions out of the recording and always used pseudonyms or general terms like 'friend' when transcribing these sections.

I conducted a follow-up interview with each participant three to five months after our first interview. This process of returning to the field is in keeping with the grounded theory approach that informs my research design. As Charmaz (2006, p. 29) notes, when following a grounded theory approach, "we look for ideas through studying our data and then return to the field and gather focused data to answer analytic questions and to fill conceptual gaps." Accordingly, after the first interviews, I conducted a preliminary round of analysis to identify key themes that could be developed further and unexpected findings that required further investigation. For example, in the first interviews, I was surprised by how dominant group chats were in people's messaging practices, so in the second interviews, I asked more questions that were specifically about group chats. I also found that deception was a common means of avoiding interaction so I developed further questions on this practice. Conducting follow up interviews also so allowed me to observe changes in the friendships and messaging practices of some participants.

As I was refining the focus of the research, the follow-up interviews were less exploratory than the first interviews and instead discussed specific aspects of messaging in greater detail. These aspects included the flow of conversations, ending conversations, read receipt features, and interpreting other people's availability signals. The interviews also covered specific practices relating to face-to-face coordination including changing plans, rescheduling, cancelling, and using deception as a strategy for avoiding interactions. These follow-up interviews also provided me with an opportunity to clarify, or follow-up on, things that a participant had raised in the first interview and, on reflection, were worthy of further discussion.

I did not ask participants to provide a messaging sample before the second interviews as I had a much clearer sense of the practices I wanted to discuss at this stage. I did, however, give participants a list of messaging-related situations and asked them to bring any recent examples

of these interactions to the interview.¹² Some participants showed me the conversations on their phones; others read the messages aloud or came with written notes about relevant exchanges. These examples served as prompts for discussing specific experiences and again helped to mitigate some of the limitations of self-reporting. This process of refining my methods is in keeping with the grounded theory principle of iteratively developing data collection methods to target gaps in analysis (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 28-29; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 143-151).

Participants in this first round of interviewing were paid AUD\$50 in recognition of the time invested in participating.

Cohort B: Sampling and Recruitment

Two experiences with the initial cohort led to the recruitment of a second sample. The first was that one participant, Kevin,¹³ consciously restricted his messaging use because he had become concerned about how his phone was impacting on his concentration. He felt that other people generally understood that, in most cases, he would only have limited messaging exchanges. The second experience was that multiple participants talked about having friends who were “bad texters” — people who replied slowly, briefly, or not at all. Despite the label, participants generally reported accepting and understanding the preferences of these friends to restrict their messaging.

These two experiences suggested that some young adults actively and consciously limit their messaging availability in a way that is more restricted than usual, but still broadly accepted and not perceived as extreme. For these people, restriction seemed to be a default strategy, rather

¹² Specifically, I asked participants to look for the following situations: a conversation that ended unexpectedly; a conversation that ended intentionally; an instance where they really wanted someone to reply to their message; an instance where they should that someone else really wanted them to reply; an instance where they had committed to meeting up but then their availability had changed; an instance where someone else has committed to meeting up but their availability changed; a conversation where they lie about their availability; and a conversation where they thought someone else was lying about their availability.

¹³ This name is a pseudonym. The use of pseudonyms is discussed in more detail below.

something that a tactic selectively applied in certain contexts or toward certain interlocutors. To understand this better, I intentionally sought out additional participants who could speak to this experience of 'slightly more restricted than normal' mobile use. In doing so, I followed the grounded theory principle of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is a targeted process of additional data collection whereby sampling is "based on concepts/themes derived from data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 143) and targeted towards filling out and refining emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

For the second cohort of participants, I retained the same recruitment criteria, but instead of seeking people who identified as regular messaging users, I sought people who used messaging rarely or in a limited way. Recruitment for this second cohort began in early 2016, after completing interviews with the first cohort. I recruited participants via an advertisement listed on the same student job search university websites used to recruit the initial cohort, except for The University of Melbourne. I had already received many responses before I received confirmation from The University of Melbourne site that they would post the advertisement and so had no need to go ahead with the listing. Again, these advertisements generated many responses. To ensure that people were eligible for participation I asked respondents to briefly describe their use of messaging to me via email. Several respondents were excluded from the study at this point as they appeared to use messaging too heavily. Beyond this, respondents were selected to achieve a range of ages, living situations, and genders across the sample. Again, recruitment ended once I had a good spread of demographic factors and little new information was being generated through the interviews.

The sample for this second set of interviews consists of 15 people (7 female and 8 male). All participants had mobile phones but used messaging less frequently than most of the initial cohort. Participants had an average age of 21 with the oldest being 28 and the youngest being 18. All participants were engaged in tertiary study at the time of the interview, except one who had recently graduated. One third of the participants identified as Australian with most of the remaining participants identifying as either Indian, Malaysian, Indonesian, or American. Further demographic details are provided in Appendix B. These participants used messaging but identified as using it in a more restricted way than many of their friends. The degree of restriction varied across the cohort but was often motivated by similar factors, namely finding

messaging to be frustratingly inefficient, disliking the style of chatting that people engaged in over messaging or the sensation of being continually available, and having concerns about the potential harms of smartphone use, such as time-wasting or compulsive use.

Cohort B: Interview Process

I began the interviews with this second cohort of participants by asking broad questions about the participants' feeling about and use of mobile messaging. This was an easy topic for them to discuss, helping to ease us into the interaction. It also gave me important contextual information about their attitudes towards messaging and mobile devices and some sense of their friendships. Interviews then usually progressed into more detailed discussions about the practices they used to limit or avoid messaging, how other people responded to their avoidance, and which alternative forms of communication they preferred. As with the earlier interviews, we discussed how they negotiated not only mediated availability, but also their availability for face-to-face interactions that were organized through messaging.

As with the first interviews, participants sometimes spoke about particular messaging interactions. Again, if I felt that a detailed account of the interaction would be helpful, or the participant was struggling to recall details, I encouraged participants to look up the interaction on their phone. In some instances, participants showed me exchanges on their phone or read them aloud.

Interviews typically lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, with the length being largely determined by the degree of relevant experiences the participant had had and their willingness to talk about those experiences. I did not conduct follow up interviews with these participants as their more limited messaging use meant that we had less to discuss. Almost all these interviews were conducted within university study spaces or meeting rooms, the only exception being one interview conducted in an outdoor area on the Swinburne university campus. Participants were paid AUD\$30 in recognition of the time and, at times, travel, involved in participating.

In the chapters that follow, the interviews from Cohort A provide the core data as the restricted messaging use of participants in Cohort B meant that many of the subtler processes for negotiating availability were not present in their accounts. That said, the interviews from

Cohort B provide important insights into some experiences and practices. In these cases, the data from Cohort B is marked as such.

Research Ethics

The University of Melbourne's Human Ethics Advisory Group granted ethics approval for this project on the 26th May 2015 (Application ID: 1544154). After conducting the interviews with Cohort A, I lodged an amendment to the ethics application that outlined the intended procedures for recruiting and interviewing Cohort B. The amendment was granted on the 16th of December 2016 (Application ID: 1544154.2).

As noted, the collection of messaging samples was a particularly ethically-sensitive element of the research. Messaging is a very personal form of interaction with a high expectation of privacy. Further, by collecting a messaging sample from participants, I was not only asking for their correspondence but also that of their interlocutors. These interlocutors had not consented to participate in the research and so I was especially concerned about ensuring that I did not receive any identifiable or personal information about them.

That said, I felt that requesting the sample was justifiable for two reasons. Firstly, the main alternative was to ask participants to review their own messaging history prior to the interview to refresh their memory about relevant exchanges. I felt, however, that participants would struggle to note relevant situations, in part because they were so mundane (participants were often surprised at the very quotidian practices I was interested in) and partly because the exploratory nature of the work meant that even I was not yet sure what would or would not be relevant. Secondly, because the messaging interactions that I was interested in were quotidian, I did not require access to any personal or sensitive exchanges. To ensure that I did not receive any messaging of this nature, I asked participants to edit their sample before sending it to me. I asked them to remove, edit, or paraphrase messages if they wished and specifically requested that they remove anything they deemed to be of a personal, sensitive, or extraordinary nature. In the event that participants failed to remove sensitive information about, or content from, their interlocutor, I planned to immediately delete it myself when reviewing the sample, however this process was not necessary as participants followed my request to remove all sensitive content. That said, it is still possible that participants gave me messages that their

interlocutors would have deemed sensitive, despite them not appearing as such to the participant and myself. In addition, I asked participants to remove all names and identifying features from the messaging sample so that their interlocutors would be entirely anonymous to me. Participants were able to complete this process in their own time, in a location of their choosing, and on a device of their choosing. No messages from interlocutors are included in this thesis or in any publication arising from this research.

Another ethically significant issue was finding a method for collecting the sample that was not too laborious for participants but also did not pose security risks or involve additional costs. This was challenging because most messaging apps are ‘walled gardens’: they make it difficult for users to access, export, or share their own data. While there are third-party apps, such as spyware, that make it easy to copy messaging history, using them requires installing an app that, in many cases, require jailbreaking the phone. These apps would have made the process simpler, however, their security risks, financial costs, and shadowy nature meant that I ultimately decided on a more labour-intensive, manual processes. The specific details are available in Appendix C, but in short, these methods largely involved opening the messaging app on a desktop computer and then copying and pasting messages into a word document.

As well as carefully considering the messaging sample procedures, I have taken other steps to protect the privacy of participants and ensure they knowingly consented to the research. To protect their anonymity, I refer to participants by using pseudonyms in this thesis and all other research outputs involving the interview data. Participants were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym—an option that many took. In Appendices A and B, which provide demographic information for each sample, an “(s)” denotes participants whose pseudonyms are self-chosen. In the chapters that follow, I also include each participants’ age and an “F” or “M” to denote their gender the first time that I refer to them within a chapter.

In addition to gaining informed consent prior to the interviews, I began every interview with a reminder that participation was voluntary and that participants were free to decline to answer questions or to withdraw unprocessed information at any stage. All data has been stored securely, in locked cabinets or on password-protected computers.

Data Analysis

In the months following each round of interviewing, I transcribed the audio recordings myself, except for approximately half of the second cohort, for which I used a paid service. I chose to do the transcription myself due to the cost of paid services and because it meant I could begin sorting through the interviews for relevant material and key themes. I transcribed most of the audio verbatim but eliminated or paraphrased less important sections. I also chose to include utterances such as laughter, long pauses, and false-starts wherever possible and to also include these in the quoted material that is presented in the following chapters. These utterances are valuable as they signal the affective dimensions of an interview exchange, such as discomfort, uncertainty, or embarrassment.¹⁴ I also kept memos while transcribing about any analytical observations that occurred to me in the process. In what follows, I describe the coding process I used to organize and analyse the data, however, it is important to note that analytical decisions also occurred during the interviews, as I probed some discussion points and not others, and extended into the transcription process through the processes described above.

I began the analysis of this data by importing the transcripts into Dedoose, an online research management platform that provides tools for coding text.¹⁵ In grounded theory, coding involves looking for patterns and themes within the data rather than applying a set of predetermined codes (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process is central to the aim of producing findings that are ‘grounded in’ the data. This approach is in keeping with the inductive, exploratory nature of this project, as I sought to understand participants experiences from their own perspectives, rather than beginning with fixed hypotheses to test or predetermined practices to find.¹⁶

¹⁴ See, for instance, Verran’s (1999) discussion of laughter as ethnographically significant.

¹⁵ While Dedoose provides a range of analytical tools, I used the platform solely for coding excerpts and writing memos.

¹⁶ It is important to note that there are a range of views about how coding should be done within a grounded theory approach and that my own process is not aligned with the original methods proposed by Strauss and Glaser. While famously disagreeing on the specifics, both Strauss and Glaser felt that a universal coding process could be laid out for use in all grounded theory research. They outlined a rigid, prescriptive coding process, including very specific types of codes that should be used at varying stages

Following Charmaz (2006, pp. 47-57) I began the analysis by conducting initial coding. For Charmaz, initial coding involves a close but quick reading of each transcript to identify and label key actions, ideas and processes (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). Codes are developed by comparing data with data (p. 54) and, where possible, using in-vivo coding to preserve participants' terminology (p. 55). The aim at this stage is to stay very close to the data and recognise the tentative, provisional nature of these codes by remaining open to possible alternatives or reworking of the analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). This coding can be done at varying levels of granularity and, in my case, involved coding a line-by-line and incident-by-incident level. As is typical at this stage of coding, I developed more codes at the beginning of this process than towards the end as by this stage I was refining and integrating existing codes, albeit without losing sight of the potential for new and unexpected codes to arise.

Due to the large number of codes, I began nesting child codes under parent codes fairly early on in this process. This was partly due to the features of Dedoose, which make working with a large number of codes awkward unless the coder nests codes into a basic structure of main codes and sub-codes. As I moved through the transcripts I also periodically revised or reorganised codes, for example by breaking apart any that were becoming too heavily populated or vague, or combining codes that overlapped.

One key decision that I made during this initial coding was to include references to relationships other than friendships. While my focus in this thesis is on friendships — as opposed to family members, colleagues, employers, educators, or romantic partners — participants occasionally raised situations involving these latter kinds of relationships during our interviews. While seeming to fall outside my stated focus on friendships, I chose to retain some of this material for several reasons. Firstly, different kinds of relationships often overlap. For example, some participants had colleagues who were also friends; others had friends who they had previously dated or hoped to date in the future. In these instances, I kept and coded the data as it was clear that the relationship involved a degree of friendship. Further, in some instances, participants described how the norms of interacting in one type of relationship

of analysis (Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These prescriptive coding instructions stemmed from their belief that a theory will emerge from data as long as the correct steps are taken.

informed the norms of interacting with another group. For instance, if a participant typically communicates with their parents via SMS this may inform their preference to use Facebook messenger when communicating with friends. In situations such as this it is important to include the dynamics of family communication in order to fully articulate the dynamics of social communication, and so the data regarding other kinds of relationships was not excluded.

In addition to the coding practice described above, I also used memoing throughout this process of early analysis. Memoing is common to all grounded theory approaches. It involves recording early analytical thoughts and notes about the coding process (Charmaz, 2006, p. 32). I kept memos about the development of my code system, noting details like the definition and scope of codes, how codes developed over time, and which codes might need revising later to break them up into smaller codes. I also made memos about observations that occurred to me as I worked with the transcripts and codes. I returned to these memos periodically during the later stages of coding and the early stages of drafting each chapter. They provided a helpful record of decisions I had made while coding and served as reminders about ideas I would otherwise have forgotten.

I then re-evaluated the data, working one chapter at a time to develop more analytical codes that identified broader themes within the data. This followed an approach that Charmaz terms “focused coding”, whereby higher-order codes are created or selected and then used to evaluate and order the data into a more analytical formation (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). The aim here is to “synthesize and explain larger segments of data” through coding that is “more directed, selective, and conceptual” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). I generally began this process by identifying the initial codes that were for a chapter and exporting them from Dedoose into Excel. I then re-coded them within Excel, grouping them into broader and more analytical categories. As Charmaz (2006, p. 58) notes, focused coding is generally not a linear process. In my case, it often involved moving between coding, memoing, reading, writing, and further coding.

Lastly, it is important to note that external knowledge has informed my coding process. Whether, and to what extent, external knowledge has a place in a grounded theory analysis is the subject of ongoing debate. Some argue that researchers must avoid any influence from literature to ensure their theory is truly grounded in their data (Glaser, 1992; Holton, 2007);

others encourage scholars to become familiar with related literature in order to foster a “theoretical sensitivity” that can guide their analysis and to prevent them unintentionally rehashing existing ideas (Charmaz, 2006; Gibson 2007; Timmermans & Tavory, 2007). I have taken the latter approach. I conducted an initial literature review prior to coding the data in order to familiarise myself with related work and develop research questions that could guide my analysis. Most notably, the concept of affordances emerged during this literature review. That concept then shaped my research questions and, as a result, also informed my data analysis.

These research methods are a consistent and coherent application of my methodology as they enable me to collect accounts of everyday interpersonal and sociotechnical experiences and analyse them in a manner that concentrates on the meanings these experiences held for participants.

Historical Comparison: Investigating Etiquettes Across Communication Contexts

The final aspect of my research design involves a comparison of etiquettes for negotiating unavailability across three contexts: mobile messaging use, mid-20th century practices of landline telephone use, and 19th century practices of calling cards and house visits.

Early in this project, I planned to recruit and interview two cohorts — one younger and one older. My intention was to use the two cohorts to compare how people managed their social availability with and without mobile messaging. The reflections of the older cohort about their experiences prior to mobile messaging would provide the latter. I attempted to recruit older participants via a snowball method that involved distributing advertisements to my initial participants and asking them to pass these along to older friends or family members. This recruitment method was always fairly speculative and, ultimately, did not produce any participants. To overcome the difficulties of recruiting an older cohort but retain a comparison between experiences of negotiating unavailability with and without mobile messaging I shifted my focus to comparing different historical media contexts.

Looking to the past for parallels and precedents is a well-established approach in the study of communications media (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Gitelman, 2006; Humphreys et al., 2013; John, 1998; Marvin, 1988; Milne, 2010; Shapiro & Humphreys, 2013). By comparing media forms and practices across historical contexts, scholars are able to clarify what is distinct about a particular communications medium and what is an evolution or continuation of previous media forms and practices. This historicisation is particularly important in the study of digital media, which are typically characterised by their new-ness. To challenge this overemphasis on newness, many studies that historicise digital media highlight continuities, as well as differences, between new and old media (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Gitelman, 2006; Marvin, 1988). For instance, as personal computing emerged in the late 1980s, Marvin (1988) looked to the early history of electric communication in order to contextualise and better understand contemporary issues. She observed that, contrary to the discourses of ‘revolution’ that surrounded both electrical and digital media, new technologies do not create radically new practices but rather inspire the reworking of old practices. Similarly, as noted in the previous chapter, historical comparisons have been important in the study of digital resistance discourses where they serve as important reminders that new technologies have long attracted critique and suspicion (e.g. Gomez et al., 2015; Syvertsen, 2017).

While historicisation has been used to understand mobile media in general (Farman, 2012a, 2012b) it has been largely absent from mobile communications literature about availability. There are, however, two exceptions. The first is literature on mobile-mediated coordination, which I outlined at the end of the previous chapter. This literature often looks back to development of mechanised time in order to assess the nature and scale of the changes involved in shifting to micro-coordination (Larsen et al. 2008; Ling, 2004, pp. 57-69). The second exception is Farman’s (2018) book *Delayed Response*, which investigates the role of waiting across a range of historical and contemporary communication systems, including mobile communication, and provides a compelling example of the rich continuities that exist across technologies and practices. These examples aside, empirical studies into how people experience and manage mobile connectivity tend to emphasise the uniqueness of mobile technologies and the availability dynamics they enable. There has, as yet, been little consideration of how the availability challenges associated with mobile communication, and

the practices people use to navigate them, might compare to those associated with earlier forms of communications media.

In this thesis, I provide such a consideration by comparing the etiquettes for negotiating unavailability across three historical contexts: contemporary use of mobile messaging, mid-20th century use landline telephones, and 19th century use of house visits and calling cards. In doing so, I follow an approach used by Humphreys et al. (2013) and Shapiro & Humphreys (2013) that involves direct comparisons between contemporary and historical media forms. To understand Twitter use (Humphreys et al., 2013) and military blogging (Shapiro & Humphreys, 2013), these scholars looked for parallels with 18th and 19th century practices of diary keeping. In both cases, their analysis revealed strong continuities between current and historical practices, indicating that while online platforms have unique properties, their functions speak to long-held social needs for recording and sharing personal experiences. In this thesis, I likewise anchor my historical analysis in a direct comparison of specific media forms. This enables continuity with the focus on materiality and affordances that is established earlier in this thesis as, like messaging, telephones and calling cards have features and qualities that shape how availability can be managed.

I have chosen forms of socialisation from the 19th century and mid-20th century as a point of comparison with mobile messaging because, as with messaging, sociotechnical shifts in each of these contexts produced new possibilities for interaction that seemed to undermine people's ability to control their availability. In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution led to increased populations in urban areas and the growth of an aspirational middle class. These factors, combined with improved transportation and more public spaces meant that large numbers of people from across the social classes were coming into contact and seeking out new social connections (George & George, 1993, pp. 6, 45, 116). In the 20th century, the domestication of telephones allowed physically distant people to enter the home, a previously private space, and request social interaction (Fischer, 1994, p. 225; Stern & Gwathmey, 1994, pp. 45-55). Calls could arrive from anyone, at any time, particularly as costs reduced and the telephone directory was established (Stern & Gwathmey, 1994, p. 45-55). As a result, telephone communication was widely seen as intrusive and unpredictable. As I describe further in

Chapter Seven, this is akin to early observations about the constant contact enabled by mobile communication and the challenges it posed for regulating interactions (see Chapter One).

Further, in both contexts, new practices and etiquettes were required to re-establish a system for negotiating the limits of social availability. In the Victorian context, the system of cards and house calls functioned as a response to the challenges of increased availability by regulating who was admitted to a person's circle of friends and acquaintances and clearly demarcating the degree of familiarity and intimacy they could claim within that circle (Curtin, 1987, p. 140-1; *Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, p. 30; Post, 1922; Pool, 1994, p. 64-8). The etiquette surrounding cards and calls also controlled availability by regulating the timing and duration of other people's visits and provided socially sanctioned methods for registering one's unavailability to receive visitors. Similarly, despite widespread concern about the disruption telephones would bring, by the mid-20th century people had developed a set of socially-sanctioned practices for regulating telephone conduct. This included practices to mitigate the risk of imposing on someone at an inopportune time when calling, to excuse oneself when on the receiving end of a poorly timed or unwanted call, and deal with the ending of calls. These etiquettes for making and receiving calls provided a means of structuring the unpredictability of telephone availability and enabled people to collectively manage the new and unpredictable forms of availability it facilitated. These arguments are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

In conducting this historicisation, I draw on secondary sources about the etiquettes of the periods in question. I also, however, draw on primary sources in the form of etiquette manuals. This analysis of primary sources was necessary as I was seeking information about very specific kinds of everyday practices, such as the ending of telephone calls or the process for declining invitations, which were rarely covered in sufficient detail in the secondary sources I consulted. Etiquette manuals were popular in both the 19th and mid-20th century contexts I investigate and provided a valuable source of such details.

While courtesy books, which provided instruction on moral conduct, had existed for decades, the 19th century saw the development of etiquette manuals that "stressed the style of manners and their conventional form" (Young, 2002, p. 134). These books became hugely popular, particularly among the middle-classes to whom they were largely directed. For these people, who were financially secure and seeking social mobility, etiquette manuals provided

instruction on how to emulate the more achievable elements of aristocratic life (Curtin, 1987, pp. 40-43; Plante, 1997, p. xii; Young, 2002, pp. 134-136). As further evidence of the aspirational nature of these manuals, the authors often claimed to be aristocrats, or to have closely consulted with one, although this was not always the case (Curtin, 1987, pp. 47-49). When an aristocrat was involved, it was often anonymously and out of financial need, while in other cases, they sold the right for their name to be associated with a manual but did not contribute to its writing (Curtin, 1987, pp. 47-49). Etiquette manuals remained popular through the early to mid-20th century, although they changed in style and content. Reflecting a broader backlash against the rigidity and complexity of turn of the century manners, a new generation of texts provided simpler and more practical advice (Arditi, 1999, p. 32). Etiquette manuals also changed in form, leaving aside the treatise style of the Victorian period for the format of a reference book (Arditi, 1999, p. 34). Their function, however, remained largely the same — providing guidelines for the aspirational middle classes (Arditi, 1999, p. 28).

It is crucial to note, however, that these manuals had a complex relationship with the reality of everyday practices. As Curtin (1987, pp. 4-5) observes, some people ignored or contravened the advice they provided, while others were not aware of etiquette and needed to be informed, hence the popularity of etiquette manuals. Historians have also noted that some etiquette writers pushed for reform or conveyed personal views on issues like gender equality (Curtin, 1987, p. 5; Plante, 1997, xii). These factors lead Lees-Maffei (2014, p. 70) to conclude that, “advice literature is as useful in illuminating some of the ideals to which people in the past may have subscribed as it is unreliable as a source of information about how people lived.” That said, it would be incorrect to claim that etiquette manuals provide no information about how people behaved. Curtin (1987, pp. 4-5) explains that, unlike other forms of moral instruction, Victorian etiquette manuals were not intended to represent ideals to strive for but rather behaviours that were already in common use. Indeed, as explained above, this is what led to the popularity and commercial success of these texts — they enabled people in classes immediately below social elites to emulate some of their practices. This was only possible because these texts did, to some degree, record common practices. Further, etiquette manuals helped to produce social reality by describing and encouraging behaviours (Young, 2002, p. 137). Etiquette manuals, therefore, do have some value as records of daily life and have been used as

such in historical and sociological research (e.g. Goffman, 1963, 1971; Plante, 1997).¹⁷ Thus, in contrast to Lees-Maffei, Young's conclusion about etiquette manuals is that "it is clear that, with some limitations, they describe real practice" (2002, p. 137). Given this range of views about the value of etiquette manuals as records of behaviour, and given the fact that a precise evaluation of their veracity of is beyond the scope of my concerns, in this thesis, I take them primarily as an indication of a normative standard of behaviour, but also assume that the practices they describe would have been familiar to many people at the time, if not always enacted.

In conducting my analysis, I collected etiquette manuals that originated from Western countries during the late-19th century or mid-20th century, as these were periods when calling cards and landline telephones were dominant forms of social interaction. I began by searching online repositories and local libraries for any text that fell within those parameters. I then searched within the manuals for relevant content — that is, discussions of calling cards and house visits in the 19th century texts or telephone calls in the 20th century texts. This produced a corpus of fourteen 19th century texts and sixteen 20th century texts. I then reviewed these excerpts and compared the etiquettes that they and other secondary sources described with the experiences of my participants.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology and research design used in this thesis. I have argued that combining symbolic interactionist and postphenomenological principles provides a robust framework for investigating how mobile-mediated unavailability is enacted. Specifically, these perspectives emphasise the need to attend to the role of meaning and materiality in shaping action, and to understand sociotechnical phenomena through situated enquiries that investigate practices in context. In following this approach, I adopt a three-part research design that begins with in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young adults about their messaging practices. Using a data collection and analysis process rooted in principles of grounded theory enables me to focus on the meanings of these practices as understood by participants

¹⁷ For more on the use of etiquette manuals as historical sources see Curtin (1987) and Plante (1997).

themselves. Applying an affordances analysis to these interviews provides a means of also keeping in view the role of technologies in shaping these practices. Lastly, conducting a historical comparison allows me to compare affordances and practices across contexts, clarifying what is distinct about young adults' contemporary messaging use.

CHAPTER 3 — A Typology of Mobile Messaging's Disconnective Affordances

This chapter marks a shift in the thesis as I begin to draw out findings from my interview data. I start by explaining that the findings focus primarily on three messaging apps — WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and SMS — as these were the platforms most commonly used by participants. To provide context for this chapter and the ones that follow, I give a brief overview of each platform and their key features.

Turning to a key theoretical framework in the thesis, I then outline the concept of affordances. In doing so, I clarify how this concept is used across the thesis and how it relates to the methodological approaches described in the prior chapter. I then apply this concept to my interview data. Building on recent theorisation of affordances, I describe how the technologies involved in mobile messaging — including devices, operating systems, and apps — provided participants with different kinds of opportunities for negotiating, reducing, and avoiding social interactions. I outline a typology of five such disconnective affordances: disentanglement, jamming, modulation, delay, and expression.

The first two affordances, disentanglement and jamming, are relatively simple in that they are used in a limited range of circumstances to produce a limited range of outcomes. The three remaining affordances, however, are complex in the sense that they can be mobilized in many different contexts to achieve many different ends. Accordingly, while I introduce these affordances here, I expand on them in the three following chapters where I provide a further discussion of why, and to what ends, participants made use of these affordances.

In the final section, I describe in more detail how these different affordances function, arguing that while messaging allows various forms of disconnection, it rarely encourages them. On the contrary, engaging with disconnective affordances often requires navigating a complex array of functionalities that both pull toward and push against the possibility of disconnection.

Overall, the findings in this chapter begin to advance this thesis' argument that young adults have many ways of managing availability via messaging, despite the technology being premised

on constant connection. It achieves this by illustrating how opportunities for restricting availability are created by the features of messaging technologies and by beginning to outline how participants took up these opportunities to limit and reduce their availability.

Key Messaging Apps: SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger

While there are many mobile messaging apps, this thesis concentrates on Short Message Service (SMS) apps, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger, as these were the main apps that participants used. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are both Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) apps: they can be installed on a smartphone and used to send messages via an internet connection (Church & De Oliveira, 2013). SMS, on the other hand, is best described as a category of app. Generally, SMS apps are native to a particular operating system, meaning that there are different versions aligned with different brands (for example, iPhones come with the iMessage app pre-installed while phones that run Android operating systems come with an SMS app called Messages). SMS apps send messages via the signalling channel of a telecommunications network as opposed to, or in addition to, the internet.

The popularity of these three apps among participants is unsurprising. At the time of data collection, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger had the largest number of monthly active users of any MIM apps (Statistica, 2017, 2018a). This is still the case, as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger have 1.6 billion and 1.3 billion monthly active users respectively (Statistica, 2019). The popularity of these apps among participants also reflects the fact that all participants lived in Australia at the time of this study, and those that came from other countries were primarily from Singapore, Malaysia, India, and Indonesia. Different messaging apps are popular in different regions, and these are all countries where Facebook Messenger and/or WhatsApp are among the most dominant messaging apps. The third most popular app globally is WeChat — a Chinese platform that is mostly used by Mandarin speakers (Statistica, 2019). As only one of my participants was Chinese, the app was almost never mentioned by participants.

The one other messaging app occasionally mentioned by participants was Snapchat, an image-based messaging app in which messages can be set to disappear after a certain time. Snapchat is mentioned a few times throughout this thesis but was not a central feature of participants' accounts.

Brief Histories

SMS

SMS was a speculative addition to early mobile phones that was initially intended for business use. Unexpectedly, the short alphanumerical messages became hugely popular, particularly as a means of social interaction among young people. The meteoric rise of SMS has been well documented elsewhere (e.g., Goggin, 2010; Taylor & Vincent, 2005) but a few aspects are of particular significance to this thesis.

Technical, economic, and physical constraints shaped early messaging practices. Messages were restricted to 160 characters and, on early mobile phones, had to be composed using a small keypad. If messages exceeded 160 characters, they would be divided into several shorter messages that were sometimes delivered at different speeds, jumbling their order.

Telecommunication companies monetised SMS by charging a per-text fee, making it relatively expensive to send large volumes of messages. As a result of these factors, early SMS use was characterised by short messages containing abbreviations and shortened words (e.g., Ling, 2005). With the development of smartphones, many of these limitations have been lessened or removed. SMS apps no longer enforce small character limits meaning that messages can be much longer and there is less need for abbreviations or shortened words. SMS apps also often include auxiliary services that allow messages to be exchanged via an internet connection which significantly reduces the cost of sending messages, especially internationally or between different network providers. The touchscreen keypads of smartphones also make it easier to type and additional features like auto-correct and predictive text further increase the speed and ease of writing.¹⁸

Because SMS apps are native to operating systems, they vary across mobile devices. During the period of data collection, there were significant differences between Apple's iMessage app and Android's Messages app. Namely, Android's Messages app lacked some of the chat-style

¹⁸ Auto-correct fixes errors, like typos and incorrect spellings, as text is being written. Predictive text suggests the next word or phrase as a message is being constructed. These are features of mobile device operating systems and thus are also available in other messaging apps, including WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

features, such as typing indicators and read receipts, that had been introduced by MIM apps and adopted by iMessage. However, additional SMS apps with some of these features could be downloaded onto Android phones. I did not ask participants with Android phones which SMS app they used as SMS apps were rarely mentioned in the interviews. Generally, when participants named specific apps, the app was either Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. In describing participants' experiences, I only name specific apps when it is pertinent to do so — a point that I clarify further at the end of this section.

Facebook Messenger

Facebook Messenger began as a chat feature embedded in the Facebook social networking site. It was only accessible via a web browser and for people with a Facebook account. Once logged in, Facebook users could use the chat window to exchange messages with other Facebook users. More recently, Facebook has reinvented its messaging feature as a standalone MIM app. In 2011, the company released Messenger, a smartphone app version of their chat feature (Kincaid, 2011). This new app was optional until 2014 when Facebook removed the ability to use Messenger within the Facebook app (Constine, 2014). Now, when Facebook users open a chat window within the Facebook app they are automatically redirected to the Messenger app. Since 2015, people can also access Messenger via a dedicated website — Messenger.com (Constine, 2015a) — and sign up with Messenger without needing a Facebook account (Constine, 2015b). These changes, along with developments in design and branding, increasingly position Messenger as fully independent of Facebook's social networking platform.

That said, Messenger and Facebook are still strongly connected. Messenger can still be used within the main Facebook platform when it is accessed through a desktop web browser. Messenger profiles and Facebook profiles are also connected. To add a new contact in Messenger, you need to search for the person's Facebook username and profile picture, unless they have made a separate Messenger account. Perhaps most importantly, Messenger remains part of the Facebook data-mining ecosystem. While Facebook does not scan message content for ad-targeting data, messages do generate location data and other meta-data that is likely used for various purposes including ad-targeting and product development.

With recent updates, Messenger has introduced a wide range of features, such as the option to turn on end-to-end encryption or to delete messages, however, many of these features were not mentioned by participants and are thus not discussed in the findings of this thesis. Lastly, while the app is officially named 'Messenger', I will refer to it as 'Facebook Messenger' throughout this thesis to more clearly distinguish it from general references to messaging.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp was created in 2009. The app is free to download and use because messages are sent via an internet connection.¹⁹ This made WhatsApp among the first free messaging apps, which was a key reason for its initial popularity (Church & de Oliveira, 2013; O'Hara et al., 2014). Another defining feature of the app is default end-to-end encryption which was introduced in early 2016 before it was widely available on other apps (WhatsApp, 2016).

While WhatsApp messages are sent via internet networks, they are routed using phone numbers. WhatsApp automatically imports a phone's contact list as part of its installation process, so a new user can instantly begin messaging with existing contacts who also have WhatsApp. Other contacts can then be added by entering their phone numbers into WhatsApp. In 2014, WhatsApp was bought by Facebook for USD\$19 billion (Panzarino, 2014). The two apps have become increasingly similar in terms of features, although the visual design varies between them.

A Comparison of Key Features

Despite their varied histories, SMS apps, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger currently offer similar functions. All three display messages in a scrollable chat-style thread, making conversations easier to view than earlier forms of SMS. They also allow people to exchange not just text but also voice recordings, images, videos, locations, links, files, emoji, gifs, and in many cases, stickers.²⁰ Many messaging apps can also be used across devices, including smartphones,

¹⁹ Initially, WhatsApp was free for the first year of use after which there was a USD\$0.99 annual subscription fee. This fee was removed in January 2016 (Hern, 2016); during the middle of the data collection period, however, no participants mentioned the subscription fee during the interviews.

²⁰ The key exception is Android's default SMS app, Messages, which had a more limited range of features

tablets, and desktop computers. During the period of data collection, for instance, iMessage, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, could all be used on a desktop, although during the initial months of data collection the desktop-accessible web-version of WhatsApp was not available to iPhone users.²¹ Using these apps on larger devices makes it considerably easier to write messages quickly.

Another key feature of mobile messaging apps is group chats. Pre-smartphone texting did not allow people to send and receive messages between more than two devices at a time (Ling & Lai, 2016, p. 837). In contrast, smartphone messaging apps allow people to send messages to groups of recipients (Seufert et al., 2016, p. 225). These group messages are visualized as a thread that all group members can view and engage with (Ling & Lai, 2016, p. 838). Group messaging has become a very popular form of communication, especially among young people (Seufert et al., 2016; Thulin 2017). Early research on smartphone messaging apps suggested that group messaging was a key reason people adopted them (Church & Oliveria, 2013) while more recent research suggests that group messaging has become young people's primary form of mobile communication (Thulin, 2017, p. 10).

Consequently, participants frequently spoke about group messaging, often using the term 'group chats.' I also adopt the term 'group chats' throughout this thesis as it was used by participants and is also commonly used in existing literature.²² Participants appeared to mostly use WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger for group chats. This is likely because, during the period of data collection, the lack of cost and interface design of these apps made them much better suited to group chats than SMS apps. The Android Messages app, in particular, had only

during the period of data collection. It did not, for instance, allow for the exchange of stickers or higher resolution images. These differences are not pertinent to the findings of this thesis so I have not outlined them in detail.

²¹ WhatsApp launched a desktop app that is available to all users during the midpoint of the data collection period.

²² The term is common in literature across different disciplines (e.g., Seufert et al., 2016, from computer science, Dixon, 2018, from cultural studies, and Ling & Lai, 2016 from sociology). Further, studies that do not use the term 'group chats' often use closely related terms such as 'groups' (Church & De Oliveira, 2013), 'chat groups' (Han & Tang, 2017) or 'group threads' (O'Hara et al., 2014).

limited capacity for group messaging during the period of data collection (DeNisco Rayome, 2019).

Another key characteristic of mobile messaging apps is the inclusion of features that signal presence. These features take four key forms: typing indicators, which signal when someone is typing a message; read receipts, which indicate when a message has been opened by the recipient; status notifications, which signal whether someone is currently using the app; and last active notifications, which show when someone last used the app. These features are a relatively new addition to the messaging experience as they were not included in most pre-smartphone SMS services. There are also some differences across apps, namely that all four features are included within both WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, but the active and last active notifications are not included within some SMS apps. Apps also give people different degrees of control over turning these features on and off. Most notable, WhatsApp allows people to disable read receipts but it does not provide an option for a person to hide whether they are currently using the app. In contrast, Facebook Messenger does provide this option — you can permanently set an ‘offline’ status — but read receipts can only be disabled via third-party plugins or by hacking the app.

Lastly, these apps are all subject to continually rolling updates, with features regularly being tweaked, added, and removed. This is a consequence of the shift to smartphones, which has meant that messaging technologies can be altered through software updates rather than requiring updates to hardware or infrastructure. These continual updates are also a product of a crowded messaging app market in which developers seek to differentiate from, or keep up with, their competitors by regularly introducing and refining features. These rolling software updates have two key implications for the thesis. The first is that the features within these three messaging apps will continue to change after the completion of this thesis. Indeed, there were several small changes over the duration of the research. It is therefore important to note that all features are described as they were during the period in which I conducted interviews with participants. The second implication is that continual changes to messaging technologies make it more difficult for messaging etiquettes to stabilise — a point that I discuss in detail during the final chapter of this thesis.

A Note on Terminology

This section has given an overview of the main messaging apps that participants used and discussed. It has emphasised that while these apps have varying features and histories, their core functions are largely the same. Consequently, while participants occasionally spoke about specific apps, much of the time they simply referred to messaging in general. I only asked them to clarify if they were referring to a specific messaging app on the few occasions where this detail was important to understanding their experiences and observations.

This means that, in the findings that follow, I refer to specific messaging apps when necessary but otherwise largely follow my participants in talking about messaging as a general category, without noting specific apps. As per the discussion above, however, the reader can assume that the messaging apps being referred to are primarily SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger (as opposed to apps like WeChat, which have significantly different features).

Lastly, participants varied between using the terms ‘texts’ and ‘texting’ or ‘messages’ and ‘messaging’. These terms were often used interchangeably and did not appear to refer to specific apps or modes of messaging. For the sake of consistency, I use the term ‘messaging’ throughout this thesis to refer to all forms of mobile messaging, but I have preserved participants’ use of ‘texts’ and ‘texting’ when it occurs in direct quotes.

Affordances: Analysing Sociotechnical Possibilities

Put simply, affordances are opportunities for action that are produced by the relationship between a technology and its users. In this thesis, I focus on the affordances of messaging apps, mobile operating systems, and mobile devices, specifically those that relate to limiting or reducing availability. Because affordances are relational properties, I draw my analysis of affordances out of the interview data, as well as supplementary analyses of technological features and functions where it was necessary to clarify how certain technologies operate.

While the concept of affordances is widely used within media studies and related disciplines, it has rightly been critiqued as a term that is prone to misuse (see Evans et al., 2017). However, through recent efforts to refine and clarify the concept (e.g., Nagy & Neff, 2015; Treem & Leonardi, 2012), it remains valuable as a framework that highlights the agency of technologies

while being sensitive to the complex, contingency of that agency. I thus turn now to a further explanation of the precise formulation of affordances that I use within this thesis.

The Concept of Affordances

The ecological psychologist James Gibson (1979) coined the term ‘affordance’ to describe the action possibilities that an environment presents to an animal. For example, air affords breathing, a cave affords shelter, and water affords drinking and washing. Critically, however, affordances are not simply material properties or functionalities but rather “have to be measured relative to the animal” (1979, p. 127). So, while the affordance of water relative to an elephant is bathing, its affordance relative to a water bug is support. Gibson repeatedly emphasises this relational ontology, for instance, stating that:

an affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour . . . An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer. (1979, p. 129)

This ability to point “both ways” is the defining feature of Gibson’s concept and, as I discuss shortly, has been the focus of recent efforts to refine and clarify how it should be used.

Extensions and Clarifications

The concept of affordances has travelled widely among academic disciplines. It has become especially popular within disciplines that study techno-social phenomena, such as HCI and sociology of technology, as it provides a way of acknowledging technological agency while avoiding technological determinism (e.g., Hutchby, 2001). Consequently, the term is now commonly used in studies of digital media (e.g., boyd, 2010; Bucher & Helmond, 2017; McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015; Schrock, 2015; Wellman et al., 2003).

The prominence of the term affordance, however, belies its growing indeterminacy. Several scholars note that the term is used inconsistently across and within disciplines (Evans et al., 2017; McGrenere & Ho, 2000; Parchoma, 2014), with some calling for it to be abandoned altogether (Oliver, 2005). This inconsistency is partly due to differences in interpretation

among early proponents of the concept (see McGrenere & Ho, 2000); partly due to expected (and necessary) evolutions as the concept moves between disciplines; and partly due to misinterpretation and misapplication. One issue, for instance, is that it has often been used to refer to the features of a technology, rather than the opportunities they create relative to particular people—a conflation that erases the relational duality of Gibson’s original formulation (see Evans et al., 2017).

In response, scholars have worked on refining the definition of affordances, particularly by clarifying the relational subject–object ontology at the heart of Gibson’s concept. As a result of these efforts, there is growing consensus that affordances are best understood as opportunities for action that are produced by the properties of an object, relative to the perceptions of the person engaging with that object (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015; Nagy & Neff, 2015) and the broader context in which they are acting (Costa, 2018; Davis & Chouinard, 2017; Faraj & Azad, 2012; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Bloomfield et al. (2010) provide an especially lucid example of this in their study of how personal computers are configured for use by disabled people, highlighting the inextricable relationship between the actions that an object enables and the body that is using it.

In this thesis, my use of the concept is heavily informed by the work of Evans et al. (2017) who build on these developments to provide three criteria for correctly identifying affordances. The first and second criteria are that an affordance must be neither a “feature” nor an “outcome,” where features are the static material properties of a technology and outcomes are the ends to which those features are used. To borrow their example, the camera on a smartphone is a feature and using the camera to record human rights injustices would be an outcome. Evans et al. (2017) note that scholars have tended to mistakenly conflate affordances with features or outcomes rather than understanding affordances as a relational process that sits between them. In their example, the affordance is “recordability”. Neither a feature nor an outcome, recordability is a multidimensional, relational process that mediates between the two. The third criterion is that affordances must possess a degree of variability. This is because, unlike material features which either exist or do not exist, affordances exist in gradations. Visibility, for example, can exist in greater, lesser, or relative degrees.

Taken together, this work reminds us that while affordances are always material, they are also always more than material — understanding them requires attending to the relational, affective, ideological, and sociocultural contexts that structure whether and how material opportunities arise. Following this literature, I use affordances as a way of thinking about the potentials for action that sit between the static features of mobile devices and platforms and the manifold ends to which those features are used. In outlining disconnection affordances more specifically, I aim to describe how the materiality of mobile technologies facilitate disconnection opportunities without losing sight of the role that people and their contexts play in determining whether, how, and when those opportunities are exploited.

Affordance as a Postphenomenological Concept

By adopting affordances as a key concept, I ground my analysis in a theoretical framing that is aligned with the postphenomenological ontology underpinning this research. As noted above, Ihde (1979) argued the process by which technologies mediated our relationship to the world is “non-neutral”. Technologies are never just tools to be used as we please; there are always conditions that structure their use and therefore their mediation between a human and the world. For example, when we use technological instruments, their mediation magnifies some aspects of perception and reduces others (Ihde, 1979, pp. 16-27).

Drawing on Ihde, Kiran (2015, pp. 124-125) outlines four dimensions through which the structuring conditions of technological mediation can be mapped: an existential dimension of *revealing-concealing*, an epistemological dimension of *magnification-reduction*, a practical dimension of *enabling-constraining*, and an ethical dimension of *involving-alienating*. The focus of this chapter is how my interview participants navigated the features and qualities of mobile messaging in the process of managing their availability. As such, my focus here is on the practical dimension of technological mediation and its conditions of enabling and constraining.

Kiran notes that the concept of affordances provides a language for thinking through the enabling-constraining structure of specific technologies, without losing the relational ontology central to postphenomenological approaches. Affordances then, provides a way of thinking about how a technology mediates action and interaction; how it encourages, or pulls us toward, certain practices and restricts, or pulls us away, from others. In line with a

postphenomenological understanding of mediation, this process of affording is not a static property of the technology but rather a contextual property of the relationship between technology and people.

While I have emphasised the connections between postphenomenology and the concept of affordances, it is worth reiterating that an affordances analysis also integrates with the symbolic interactionist perspective I draw on in this thesis. As I outlined above, affordances emerge from the situated relations between technologies and users. Symbolic interactionism can provide a framework for better understanding aspects of that situated context. In particular, it can help us understand the meanings that shape peoples interactions with technology, and reminds us that these meanings are always socially produced and subject to change (Blumer, 1969; see Chapter Two for an extended discussion).

Unpacking Disconnective Affordances

I have emphasised above that affordances are produced through the relationships between a technology and user. In keeping with my commitment to this relational ontology, I draw my analysis of the disconnective affordances of mobile messaging from participants' accounts of their messaging use, rather than presuming to know what they will be by looking just to the features of the technology. In drawing affordances out of specific empirical accounts of technology use, my analysis is informed by three studies that take this same approach. The first, by Bloomfield et al. (2010), draws on ethnographic work into the use of personal computers by people with physical disabilities. In observing the affordances, or lack thereof, that emerge through the relation between technologies and disabled bodies, Bloomfield et al. (2010, p. 415) provide a compelling reminder that affordances are "inextricably bound up with specific, historically situated modes of engagement and ways of life." The second study that informs my approach is McVeigh-Schultz & Baym's (2015) analysis of Couple, an app designed for use by romantic partners. Like Bloomfield et al. (2010), McVeigh-Schultz & Baym map out the affordances of Couple by drawing on qualitative data about its use — in their case, interviews conducted with romantic pairs who used the app. By grounding their analysis of Couple's affordances in qualitative accounts of its use, McVeigh-Schultz & Baym are able to observe how participants made sense of the material structure of the app, rather than assuming how this process would unfold. Lastly, Costa's (2018) ethnographic study of social

media use in Turkey further underscores the value of this approach. In observing social media use among the members of medium-sized town, Costa noted that the phenomena of context collapse, which has been described as an affordance of platforms like Facebook, was conspicuously absent due to the patterns of social media use among the townspeople. On this basis, Costa argues that the notion of context collapse being an affordance of social media platforms stems from a reductive use of the concept of affordances whereby scholars overlook its relational component and fail to acknowledge how the actions they observe are specific to a given socio-cultural context (generally, an Anglo-American context). To avoid this kind of analysis, Costa advocates for grounding analyses of affordances in situated accounts of use and highlighting the contextual specificity of these accounts.

Following these calls to take seriously the relational ontology of affordances by grounding analysis in specific accounts of technology use, I construct my own analysis of the disconnective affordances of mobile messaging out of the interview data gathered from participants. This process began after I had done an initial round of coding, as described above, to identify key actions and themes within the transcripts. I then reviewed these codes, looking for the action possibilities that underpinned the various practices that participants described. In some cases, affordances were captured in a single code, as in the parent code 'delay'. In other cases, I needed to dig further into my coding schema in order to identify the affordances that enabled sets of practices. For instance, I observed that the codes 'conversation closers', 'minimal reply', 'emoji', 'excuses/lies', and 'ambiguity' were all practices enabled by the act of written expression. In this way, my analysis of affordances is grounded in the experiences of participants and care is taken to explicitly acknowledge the situated nature of these experiences.

A Typology of Disconnective Affordances

In the following sections, I use the concept of affordances to begin describing participants' experiences of negotiating, limiting, and avoiding mobile-mediated interactions. In beginning my discussion of the interview data with an account of the affordances they reveal, I am laying the foundation for the chapters that follow, which take up and extend the affordances introduced here.

In his account of mobile media's communicative affordances, Schrock (2015) lists availability, portability, locatability, and multimediality as the defining affordances of mobile media. He then observes that the affordance of availability does not necessarily result in constant social interaction because "availability is often negotiated and filtered in response to changing social contexts" (2015, p. 1237). The typology I propose below nests within the availability affordance that Schrock identifies. It adds granularity by describing the affordances of mobile devices, operating systems, and messaging platforms that enable the negotiating and filtering that Schrock highlights. That said, given the relational nature of affordances — that they are produced by the relationship between a technology and a user — the categories listed below are not a universal and exhaustive list but rather are an account of the affordances most significant to participants.

Disentanglement

Mobile phones are small, light, and wireless, making them easy to carry and thus keep within eyeline and earshot. This physical proximity is coupled with an array of visual, auditory, and haptic notifications that produce calls to attention. Depending on the phone, these can include pop-up notifications, vibrations, small LED lights, short sounds or longer rings, and red 'badge' icons showing the number of unread messages waiting within an app. These calls to attention are strengthened by the allure of the unknown ("who is the message from and what does it say?") and the pressure of expectation ("whoever it is, they expect a reply"). The sum of these features and qualities is an entanglement between device, platform, and person whereby a person is always available to be called to attention — a condition Licoppe (2012) describes as the "crisis of the summons."

While the features of mobile devices and messaging apps work to maintain this entanglement, features at both of these levels — device and app — also create opportunities for disentanglement. By disentanglement, I mean a loosening of these ties to attention so that device and platform retreat in a person's field of awareness. In terms of Ihde's (1990) typology of human-technology relations, this could be described as an effort to shift into the register of background relations, whereby the technology is active in one's environment (the phone is still receiving messages) but is not the focus of attention.

At the app level, disentanglement is enabled by notification settings that people can modify to reduce their awareness of incoming messages. One participant, who chose the pseudonym 'Z' (20, M), explained how: "with iPhones now, it comes up with the message on the screen in a preview and I turn off that preview notification so I physically have to go in and open the message." Some participants changed notification settings permanently like Z, while others made temporary changes.

I don't have control over when people send me the messages, or when I get to see them. So, I try to do things to control that more. So, for example, I try not to log in on Facebook on my app and I turned off all the notification settings for my tablet and my phone.
(Steve, 21, M)

Hmmmm, usually just put my phone on silent. And then, yeah, I just go about doing whatever I feel like doing. And then I get back to people when I feel like it, I guess.
(Jasmine, 19, F)

Well if I really, really, absolutely don't want [to talk to] anyone I'll put my phone on Do Not Disturb.²³ (Belinda, 25, F)

In these instances, disentanglement is enabled by features within the platform that are largely being used as intended. While it is unlikely that designers intend for people to turn off notifications entirely or permanently, as some participants did, this ability to modulate notifications is an intended function of messaging platforms and smartphone operating systems. Indeed, the degree of autonomy people are granted in customizing notifications is a recent development: before smartphones, most mobile devices allowed people only limited control, such as the sound of auditory notifications or providing the option for vibrate notifications.

Disentanglement is also enabled by features at the device level, although this involves a more *resistant* leveraging of technical properties. While the small size of mobile devices is designed

²³Apple first introduced their Do Not Disturb feature in the 2012 release of iOS6. While the feature has been subject to minor updates, the essential function that it offers is suppressing notifications related to incoming communication. It includes an option to allow notifications from 'favourite' contacts and it can be scheduled to turn on and off at a specific time.

to allow people to carry them around, it also means they can be left behind, put away, or turned face down. For example, Masie (30, F) explained, “Sometimes I have it in my bag, or just at the bottom of my basket or something.” Similarly, Bill (23, M) noted, “If I find, like I’m getting distracted, then I’d throw it aside. These actions further weaken the phone’s summons by obscuring notifications and/or removing the device from a person’s field of vision.

Participants used disentanglement to enact a range of practices. Often, they used it to temporarily reduce distractions so they could concentrate on specific tasks. For instance, Jasmine (19, F) explained that “if I’m having a movie marathon, I’ll just put my phone away and just enjoy that.” Studying was another situation in which participants often used disentanglement to reduce distractions. Bill, quoted above, was balancing internships and university study and saw temporarily disengaging from his phone as an important part of remaining productive. He explained:

If I’m really busy, or if I need to study for exams or something, then I won’t want anyone to contact me. But I won’t turn off my phone and I won’t be like uncontactable; I’ll just turn my phone on silent.

For both Bill and Jasmine, disentanglement allowed them to redirect their attention towards specific activities. This reiterates Wohn & Birnholtz’s (2015, p. 26) finding that some people turn off notifications in order to reduce distractions.

For other participants, however, disentanglement was less about reducing distractions in order to focus on specific tasks and more about disengaging from messaging or their phone for its own sake. For instance, Maisie described how sometimes she will “consciously put my phone away, ‘cause I find if I use it too often I start to get a bit of a headache and I just need to have a technology-free hour.” In these instances, Maisie leverages both the device- and platform-level features simultaneously — “I have it on quiet and I put it in my bag” — to disconnect for the sake of physical comfort.

The use of disentanglement to reduce engagement with mobile devices was particularly common among Cohort B. These participants were very conscious of their phone use and actively sought to reduce it due to their dislike of being available, of communicating via messaging, or of smartphones in general. One participant from Cohort B, who chose the

pseudonym 'RatherbeatMU2017' (28, M), put his phone on silent and turned it face down whenever he was at home. He explained, "It's just how I sort of get away from it all and just- it's like, I'm home. I'm not at work. I'm not at school. Like, leave me alone sort of thing." For RatherbeatMU2017, disentanglement provided a way of asserting control over his availability.

Other participants used disentanglement for similar reasons, but made more permanent changes as opposed to the temporary or situational actions of Maisie and RatherbeatMU2017. For instance, Ella (19, F), who was also from Cohort B, permanently turned off all notifications for her messaging apps. She explained:

Ella: Instead of the app calling for me, I check the phone, not the phone check for me.
[Otherwise] It's like, "Hey, I'm here, I'm here, I'm here!" It's really annoying.

Kate: Can you tell me a little bit about what's so annoying?

Ella: I just don't like the phone distracting me . . . I feel that it has control over me and I want control over my phone. I want to determine when I check my phone, not the other way around.

Leveraging disentanglement allowed Ella to change messaging from a push system of communication to a pull system, where she had to retrieve incoming communication rather than it being pushed on her through notifications. This allowed her to more easily limit her engagement with messaging and gave her a greater sense of control over her attention and availability. This use of disentanglement was common among across both cohorts of participants although Cohort B participants often restricted their notifications more stringently, as in Ella's case, whereas Cohort A participants tended to remove audio notifications but keep visual pop-up notifications for most messaging.

Returning to Evan et al.'s (2017) criteria, outlined in the prior chapter, we can see that disengagement is an affordance because it is an action possibility that is distinct from the features that enable it. Where these features are static — the phone is always the same size and always has the same range of notification settings — the affordance is dynamic, being conditional on the broader contexts of use. Lastly, we can see that disentanglement is also not the outcome, but rather it leads to a set of outcomes determined by the user, including the

redirection of attention towards study or leisure activities and the translation of messaging into a pull, rather than push, system of communication.

These outcomes are perhaps best described as *technical practices* for limiting availability, as compared to the temporal or discursive practices that I outline in the following chapters. The practices enabled by disentanglement are technical in the sense that the key mechanism for reducing availability is the manipulation of messaging apps and mobile devices. This is distinct from temporal and discursive practices which, despite also involving the material affordances of messaging, are primarily enacted through the manipulation of time and language, respectively.

Jamming

‘Signal jamming’ refers to a range of techniques for intentionally preventing the transmission of wireless communication. Initially popularised in relation to radio waves, I adopt the term here to label a disconnective affordance that is centred not on attention — as with disentanglement — but on the transmission of messages via networked telecommunication signals. These signals facilitate communication between individuals regardless of time or location, enabling the perpetual connection often identified as a key affordance of mobile communication (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). However, these signals can also be jammed in a variety of ways, preventing messages from being received and thus rendering the receiver unavailable.

One way of preventing the reception of messages is to simply turn the phone off. This was rare among participants, although a few did use it in limited contexts. Z, for instance, turned his phone off every night before bed to avoid receiving messages during the night. Another participant, Josh (18, M), turned his phone off before playing football as part of his mental preparation.

While the off switch is largely designed to enable disconnection, jamming can also be enabled by operating system features that are intended for other purposes. Some participants turned off their Wi-Fi connection to avoid internet-based messaging. Kevin (25, M) used this mode of jamming to reduce distractions when he was studying and Darryl (28, M), a participant from Cohort B, used it every night before going to sleep. While they could still receive messages

through SMS, turning off their phone's Wi-Fi connection blocked apps like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, which they associated with more distracting and less important communication. Other participants turned on aeroplane mode as this prevented all messaging. For instance, Josh (18, M) explained, "When I study, I try to turn my phone on to aeroplane mode — just so there's no distractions, so I'm not getting notifications or text messages and my phone's not going off so I don't have to check it." Matthew (20, M) took a similar approach:

I put my phone on aeroplane mode a lot these days. So, I might be doing a bit of study or . . . thrash out some work or something. I'll put my phone on aeroplane mode and that's pretty much me going, "I don't want to be contacted at all".

As these examples suggest, the outcomes of jamming were often the same as those of disentanglement: reduced distractions and increased focus on specific tasks.

In other instances, however, jamming was motivated by a desire for time to oneself. One example of this was Erin (22, F) who, as a self-described "introvert," found solitude restorative. She listed the times when she would put her phone on aeroplane mode to have "me time":

When I'm cooking. When I'm creating music or playing my instruments. When I'm reading the Bible or reading things in general. If it's magazines I'm okay, but if it's something intellectual or philosophical I want to delve into the book. Actually, [Laughs] I have a lot of times when I just switch my phone off to aeroplane.

Another example was Z who turns off his phone every night before going to sleep and turns it back on at around eight o'clock in the morning. Despite admitting that people often saw this as "strange" behaviour, he was adamant about the benefits:

So basically, apart from the whole like radiation in my room thing, [Laughs] when I go to sleep, it's kind of like, that's sleep . . . I don't need to hear buzzing and then it half wakes me and it's three in the morning and I can't go back to sleep. It's like, that should be a time when everyone can just say I'm not responding to an email or anything. Cause it's me time.

There are practical motivations at play here — removing notifications helped Z to sleep more soundly and Erin to focus on tasks like reading and attending classes. Their references to "me time," however, suggest they were seeking a further, more affective outcome — to feel alone. They achieved this by turning off their phone or turning on aeroplane mode because the

technological disconnection of jamming produced a greater sense of aloneness than just obscuring notifications. They were not satisfied with relegating messaging to a background relation (Ihde, 1990)— something still functioning but without their attention. They wanted to sever the relation entirely.

Another important outcome that distinguishes jamming from disentanglement is that it can prevent communication but preserve other phone functions. Erin, for instance, explained that she liked aeroplane mode because it enabled her to have “me time” while still using other functions of her phone:

Sometimes when I’m doing my me time I’ll take walks or something, and I’ll see something. I still want to be able to take pictures of it so I put aeroplane mode on so I can still use the other functions of the phone.

Lastly, because jamming involves removing the ability to transmit messages, it was only ever a temporary tactic used for specific periods of time. This is in contrast to disentanglement, which some participants used on a permanent or longer-term basis, for instance, by permanently changing their notification settings to reduce calls to attention.

In summary, jamming is enabled by a range of features that disrupt the receiving of messages, although in some cases, it involved using features for in unintended or uncommon ways. Having the ability to block telecommunication signals became meaningful for participants in situations where they wished to reduce distractions or sought a sense of personal space and solitude. By deploying jamming, participants produced a range of outcomes both practical (such as increasing focus, sleeping soundly, and cooking a meal) and affective (such as safeguarding emotional wellbeing and processing difficult feelings or situations). As with disentanglement above, these outcomes could be described as *technical practices* for reducing availability, as the key mechanism through which availability is reduced is the manipulation of mobile technologies. Below, I discuss further instances of jamming, such as blocking and muting, that are deployed in relation to specific people or groups.

Modulation

Disentanglement and jamming are affordances that do not discriminate — they make a person equally unavailable or less available to anyone who sends them a message. One of the defining

features of mobile communication, however, is that it is individualised. Mobile devices are, generally, owned and carried by one person. Within messaging platforms, communication is directed to individuals through personalised phone numbers or social media accounts and messages can be read, replied to, or deleted individually. These features enable modulation, by which I mean the opportunity to modulate availability in relation to specific people or groups of people.

Modulation might best be understood as a higher-order affordance which overlaps with, or modifies, other affordances. An example of this is the 'block' feature which stops all messages from a specified contact. The block feature enables *modulated jamming* — it is modulation in the sense that it reduces availability to a specific person and jamming in the sense that it prevents the transmission of communication.

Participants primarily used blocking to disconnect from people whose intentions seemed dubious. Erin, for example, explained to me that she had used the block function on WhatsApp several times: "I find it quite useful. Sometimes guys can get quite creepy! So, [Laughs] yeah I do that." She had also used it on Facebook, explaining that she had blocked "quite a few" "dodgy people". Blocking afforded her the selective capacity to shut herself off from people whose intentions seemed dubious. A similar motivation was reported by Min (25, F) who blocked her landlord after receiving several WhatsApp messages from him asking that she check the mailbox. These messages struck Min as unusual because she had never given him her mobile number.

Yeah, so I blocked him. Well, the first time was fine because I just moved in and I understand that there are issues with the post box and stuff like that, so I'm happy to do that. But it just became like really incessant and stuff, so I just blocked him.

She had also blocked strangers.

Min: The others [I've blocked] were like, I don't know where they got my number from and they'd just say "Hi" or something and I just blocked them.

Kate: Like strangers?

Min: Yeah. But it was on WhatsApp, so I don't know how they got my number.

In each of these instances, the modulation afforded by the block feature is operationalised in response to contact that is unwanted because it is annoying, irrelevant, and/or “dodgy”. The participant uses the selective affordance of messaging to enact a semi-permanent change in their availability — the interlocutor can no longer contact them unless they later decide to unblock.

The ‘leave’ feature in group chats has a similar affordance of modulated jamming. Group chats were valued by participants as a convenient means of organising events and keeping in touch with groups of friends. At times, however, group messaging could become burdensome, irrelevant, or unwelcoming. In these situations, apps provide the option to leave a group, effectively deleting the group message and blocking all future messaging. For Leonard (21, M), the leave feature was his main way of dealing with unwanted group messaging. He explained, “I tend to leave a group after its purpose has been fulfilled.” This had happened recently when a large group chat began to annoy him. He explained:

The subject matter was not entirely relevant a lot of the time and for that reason I decided to leave the group. Not because of any personal fall-out with anyone in the group, but it just got annoying because I’d get several notifications throughout the day just about rubbish, or things that don’t matter, and I tried to minimise that.

This problem of conversational detritus clogging up one’s phone with notifications was a common reason for using the ‘leave’ function.

Hadiya (20, F), for instance, had also left a group chat for this reason. The group chat had been set up to organise a birthday gift for a friend but had been side-tracked by two of the group members.

Hadiya: There’s like two or three people who just decided to take it in the direction of like “Oh! Hey! How are you going!?” Their own personal conversation in the group conversation. For some reason, they thought that was the most convenient place to hold it. They organised if they wanted to meet up, like, “Oh there’s this thing on, do you wanna [go?]” This is all while organising the group gift on the side.

Kate: So, both conversations are happening at once?

Hadiya: Yeah, yeah! At once! I'm really sick of getting all this spam so, at the end of the day, you know, when you've got so many notifications, I just decided to leave that conversation.

[...]

Kate: So, 'spam' is referring to all the notifications?

Hadiya: Yeah, it comes up in my phone like "You've got a notification from this particular group chat" and you're like, "Uhhhh, not this again." [Laughs]

As with the modulation afforded by the block feature, the modulation afforded by the 'leave' feature is used to avoid specific instances of unwanted communication. Both blocking and leaving groups are easily afforded in a technical sense: the features are easy to find and use. However, as I discuss below, there are further technical and social factors, that, for some participants, limited the veracity of these affordances.

Delay

Mobile messaging is often seen as synonymous with near-instantaneous communication. Messages are delivered immediately, at little or no cost, and with little effort. While certainly enabling rapid interaction, mobile messaging also has an affordance of delay as messages are stored indefinitely and can be retrieved and responded to at any time. In most cases, a message can be replied to days, months, even years after it was received. Through the affordance of delay, a person might be available in the sense of being free to read a message but unavailable in the sense of being unwilling or unable to reply until later. Being able to delay responses is the basis for a range of temporal practices for managing and negotiating availability. I describe these practices in detail in the following chapter; here, however, I briefly outline the characteristics of the delay affordance.

In many cases, participants drew on the affordances of delay and modulation together in order to have immediate exchanges with some people while not responding to others. The strategy of selectively ignoring messages or delaying responses was also observed by Burchell (2017b), whose participants used these actions to selectively avoid communicating with particular people. My participants used selective delays for the same reason, but also to assert control, avoid obligations, and to give them time to think, plan, or process emotions. Matthew (20, M),

for example, used the ability to delay responses in order to withhold his reply to an unwelcome request.

Before my final exam, a person who I barely talked to throughout the semester proposed that we share resources, and it was only 2 days out from the exam so I can imagine that they would have wanted me to reply to their message relatively briskly. I was reluctant to respond right away 'cause I barely knew them. I knew that they weren't the most dedicated sort of student. There was a bit of an imbalance in what we'd each receive out of it.

Matthew's delayed response was motivated by his reluctance to comply with his classmate's request and enabled him to assert control over the situation by withholding his notes and reducing their usefulness.

As well as being used selectively, participants sometimes delayed responses to all or most messages that they received. For instance, several participants managed high volumes of messaging by waiting until a convenient time to respond to multiple messages in one session.

When I have time in bulk I'll just be like, reply, reply, reply. 'Cause I don't like constantly being on my phone. I'll sort of take it in chunks when I'm free. (Z, 20, M)

I usually reply in blocks. Like sometimes I can't be bothered messaging and then it builds up and then I just have to reply to like everything. (Jasmine, 19, F)

I usually reply to all the messages I've left when I get on a computer. Because now we've got WhatsApp on the computer. I find that very, very efficient. So when I get to a computer I'll log on and I'll just go bang, bang, bang, reply. (Bill, 23, M)

This practice of replying in blocks is one example of how people use non-selective delays to reassert control over their availability.

Expression

Messaging is often understood as having a limited capacity for expression. Compared to face-to-face interactions or phone calls, messaging is less able to convey subtle variations in tone, interest, and emotion as it lacks meta-textual cues such as tone of voice and body language. However, expression is also one of messaging's defining affordances. Smartphone messaging, in

particular, allows not only alphanumeric communication but also the sending and receiving of emoji, stickers, and gifs which enrich the affective dimensions of messaging exchanges. Thus, while limited, messaging still enables a vast range of expression.

This expressive capability contributes to the obligations and pressures associated with messaging availability. We are expected to be available for a wide range of communicative interactions. However, this affordance can also be leveraged to restrict and negotiate availability. Expression can, for instance, be used to explain absences or end conversations. The range of expressive capabilities within messaging also allows people to restrict availability by limiting the content of their messages. For instance, Leonard explained, “If there’s someone who’s messaging me who I don’t want to talk to, then often times I just won’t reply, or my replies will be very, very brief and succinct.”

Being centred on language, this affordance is complex and can be used in a wide range of circumstances to produce a wide range of outcomes. Accordingly, rather than attempting a further summary here, I use Chapters Five and Six in this thesis to expand on the practices that stem from this affordance. In these chapters, I outline how participants used the expressive capacity of messaging to develop a range of discursive practices for limiting and negotiating availability. As with delay, these practices often involve high degrees of modulation as they are deployed selectively to specific interlocutors. Other practices, however, involve using modes of expression that are more broadly deployed across most or all of a participants’ messaging activity.

The Mechanisms of Disconnective Affordances

Nagy and Neff (2015, p. 2) argue that, in analysing affordances, media and communication scholars have tended to “describe communication technologies as placing power in the hands of the users, rather than with the technologies or their designers.” They are critical of this approach, arguing that what users gain from a technology has been overemphasised at the expense of properly acknowledging the complexity of technology use. With this in mind, I do not want to overstate the agency that mobile messaging’s disconnective affordances grant to users. To avoid this, it is important to not just describe what the different disconnective affordances of messaging are, but to also consider how these affordances operate.

This requires investigating the dynamics through which mobile devices and messaging platforms make bids on, or respond to the bids of, the people using them. Historically, this has been an under-theorised aspect of affordances, something Davis and Chouinard (2017) set out to rectify by outlining six mechanisms through which affordances operate: request, demand, encourage, discourage, refuse, and allow. These mechanisms account for different methods and intensities of interaction between affordances and the people engaging them. They are, however, not entirely technologically determined. Davis and Chouinard (2017) stress the sociotechnical nature of these mechanisms, arguing that they are always shaped by the contexts of use. Drawing on prior literature, they highlight three key contextual factors that can structure how an affordance operates: what people know about an object (perception), what people are able to do with an object (dexterity), and the broader social and structural contexts of the affordance.

Request and *demand* represent bids that technologies make on the people interacting with them. The directness and intensity of the technological agency involved in these mechanisms mean they do not apply to disconnective affordances. Disconnective affordances are not requested or demanded — on the contrary, they run counter to the dominant connective logics of mobile messaging technologies. That said, disconnective affordances are also not *refused*: each disconnective affordance was, to some degree, available to each of my participants. This leaves three mechanisms that can describe the affordances outlined above: *encourage*, *discourage*, and *allow*.

Allowed: Disentanglement and Expression

The affordances of disentanglement and expression are both *allowed* in that messaging technologies are largely indifferent to their use. Regarding disentanglement, platforms *allow* people to reduce their notifications and mobile devices *allow* people to put them away and leave them behind. Regarding expression, actions like restricting message content are similarly *allowed* — there is no requirement that messages are above a certain word count.

As Davis and Chouinard (2017) note, however, the mechanisms of affordances are clearest when considered in relation to each other. Thus, while disentanglement is *allowed*, it sits in opposition to other actions that are much more strongly *encouraged*. For example, mobile

devices *allow* you to leave them behind, but they also *encourage* you to form affective attachments (Lasén, 2004; Vincent, 2005), which in turn *encourages* you to keep them physically close. Similarly, while messaging apps *allow* curt messages, they *encourage* longer, more elaborate messages by providing a range of emoji, stickers, and other multimedia capabilities, as well as unrestricted message length and user-friendly keyboards.

Allowed but Oppositional: Jamming

The affordance of jamming is also *allowed* in that mobile technologies present little resistance to the various ways that people can block signals. There is a slightly different mechanism at play here, however, as the features that most participants used for jamming — turning off Wi-Fi and turning on aeroplane mode — are intended for other purposes. This makes jamming a kind of “oppositional affordance” (Shaw, 2017), as features are being used for unintended purposes.

Allowed but Discouraged: Modulation

The mechanisms involved in modulation are more complicated still. Modulating availability by blocking contacts and leaving groups is *allowed* but also *discouraged* by features that reveal these actions to the people being avoided: a blocked person can often tell that they have been blocked²⁴ and the members of a group conversation are told when someone leaves. This is one example of how mechanisms are shaped by context. It is the social pressure that this transparency creates that discourages actions like blocking and leaving. Expressing a common sentiment, Erin described how this forced transparency deterred her from using the block and leave features.

I actually sometimes don't want to exist in certain groups [Laughs]. I want to leave them but when you leave, like, the whole group knows! When you want to leave a party, you can just ghost out — you don't have to really say bye to everyone, people don't really

²⁴ On Facebook Messenger, when blocked contacts try to send a message, they receive a notification reading “Message Not Sent: This person isn't receiving messages at this time.” On WhatsApp, people could infer they have been blocked by someone because all messages they send to them will only show one tick beside them, indicating the message has been sent but not received. On iMessage, there is no way for someone to tell they have been blocked, but participants often seemed unaware of this.

mind. But when you do that in group chats on messaging platforms, it shows! “So and so just left the group!”

Because blocking and leaving were discouraged, participants found alternative ways to disconnect from specific people and conversations. For one-on-one messaging, many participants ignored people, rather than blocking them, as this provided more ambiguity.

Ignoring was less effective in group messages, however, as they typically involve a high volume of messaging activity and, subsequently, a high volume of notifications which become annoying when a conversation is unwanted. Accordingly, rather than leave or ignore group messages, participants used “mute” features. These features differ slightly across platforms but typically disable all notifications from a group message for a specific period — an hour, a day, a year — or until the mute feature is turned off. Matthew’s use of this feature was typical of many participants.

Sometimes Facebook chats just run on and you’re not really a part of the conversation, you don’t know what’s happening really. When you get a message at the top of the screen, without sort of logging into the screen you can drag it down slightly and then there’s a mute button there and that will pretty much mean you don’t get notifications from that message for a while, so you can sort of ignore it.

Muting groups was encouraged in that it enabled people to disconnect from specific groups without the forced transparency of leaving.

Allowed but Discouraged: Delay

The delay affordance involves the most complex mechanisms. While messaging platforms *allow* delay in that storage and retrieval functions make it possible, they increasingly *discourage* it by adding features that *encourage* quick exchanges, such as status indicators and read receipts. Status indicators show whether a person is currently active on an app and *discourage* delayed replies by giving interlocutors a reasonable indication of whether someone is intentionally ignoring their message.²⁵ Read receipts show the sender of a message whether the receiver has

²⁵ While most SMS apps do not have these status indicators, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp show whether a person is currently active or, if they are not active, when they last opened the app.

opened it, similarly *discouraging* delays by indicating that a person is likely to be intentionally delaying their response.²⁶

Read receipts, in particular, strongly discouraged participants from delaying responses. In keeping with observations from prior research (Church & De Oliveira, 2013; Pielot et al., 2014), many participants felt pressure to reply shortly after opening a message out of concern that delaying their response would offend the sender. Like many participants, Danielle (19, F) described how accidentally tripping the “seen” notification would make her reply promptly.

If it’s a message that I don’t particularly want to reply to, but I accidentally click on it, and I know that they have seen the “seen by” notification, that will make me a lot quicker to reply. I don’t want to seem like the person who leaves you hanging for a few days already having seen the message, because that conveys to people that you’re obviously kind of ignoring them or not too keen to reply.

Many participants responded to this pressure to reply by not opening messages until they were ready to respond. This was an imperfect strategy, however, as it meant not knowing the content of a message until they were ready to respond.

To compensate, participants found workarounds that enabled them to see the content of a message without tripping the read receipt. For example, Bill describes how he used the previews included in pop-up notifications to decide whether to open a message:

When I feel that the person knows that I’ve read it, I’m more inclined to reply. You know how when you get a notification you can sort of see a little bit of the message? So [Laughs] I’ll judge if I want to read it or not from that little bit, and if I don’t, I’ll just leave it for later.

This method of using preview notifications was common across most participants and has been observed in prior research (Vorderer et al., 2016).

²⁶ WhatsApp indicates this by blue ticks. Facebook Messenger indicates it by placing a person’s profile picture next to the most recent message they have viewed. In iMessage, it is communicated by the word “read” next to the message, although this can be turned off.

A few participants, however, used more obscure workarounds. For instance, Hannah (21, F) stumbled on a workaround when she “gave up” Facebook during her final year of high school to focus on her studies. At the time, she did not have access to Facebook Messenger as a separate app, instead still accessing it through the social networking site. Concerned that she would miss important messages, Hannah changed her settings so that Facebook would send copies of private messages to her email account. After returning to Facebook at the end of the year, she realised that these emails gave her a valuable means of viewing messages without opening them and thus tripping the read receipt notification.

So, if I can see in my email that it’s important, like, “What time do we have to be there tonight?” then I’ll respond to that. But if it’s general like, “Oh, how’s your life?” then I’ll wait a while.

Hannah’s accidental discovery is an example of how affordances can emerge through processes of discovery and experimentation, rather than being immediately apparent (McVeigh-Schultz and Baym, 2015).²⁷

This account of the mechanisms of disconnective affordances demonstrates the complex processes they involved. By tracing the contours of these mechanisms, it becomes clear that while mobile technologies and messaging platforms provide opportunities for disconnection, they certainly do not encourage it, often making these opportunities difficult to exploit or countering them by strongly encouraging connective actions.

A Note on Relationality

As noted, technological affordances are always relational. They exist relative to the user. Early accounts of affordances focused on visual perception as a key aspect of this relationality — for affordances to arise, they need to be plainly visible to a user (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988). Extending this, McVeigh-Schultz and Baym (2015, p. 2) propose the idea of “vernacular

²⁷ Another workaround used by a couple of participants involves marking messages as unread. This feature is provided by Facebook Messenger and allows you to mark messages as unread to remind you to reply to them later. However, it was often cited as a way of reversing read receipts as participants assumed that it similarly reverted a message to unread on the sender’s app. My own tests indicate that this is not the case; a message that is marked as unread remains read on the sender’s phone.

affordances” as a way of foregrounding the various “sense-making” processes through which people come to understand new technologies. Rather than focusing solely on visual perception, the idea of vernacular affordances shifts attention to other ways that people’s understandings of a technology might unfold over time — through engagement, happenstance, and personal and collective experimentation. Further, as noted above, Davis and Chouinard (2017) emphasise that the mechanisms through which affordances operate are likewise shaped by contextual factors.

Given that the affordances described above are not encouraged by messaging technologies, and thus often require unintended and oppositional forms of use, they only arise in relation to a relatively high degree of technical competency and a willingness to experiment with features and functions. It seems likely then that among a population that is less comfortable with mobile technologies, or who uses it less often, some of these affordances might not be present. For example, even something as simple as delaying a reply requires knowledge about how to retrieve a message after the initial notification has disappeared.

Additionally, given Portwood-Stacer’s (2013, p. 1054) observation that disconnection is easy for some but impossible for others, it is also important to note that a degree of privilege is necessary for these affordances to present as viable possibilities. As young, healthy, educated, largely middle-class people, the conditions of participants’ lives were such that becoming unavailable did not pose a threat to themselves or others. This is not always the case. For instance, people with caring responsibilities might not be able to turn their phone off or put it on aeroplane mode because they need to be continually contactable. This might also be the case for people with significant health conditions who use their smartphones for monitoring and reminders, or people who are underemployed and need to be contactable to pick up extra shifts. Thus, while outside the scope of this thesis, it is also important to ask for whom, and in what contexts, are these affordances not available?

Conclusion

This chapter opened by identifying and describing the key messaging apps used by participants. It then described how the features of these messaging apps, along with those of mobile devices and operating systems, produce disconnective affordances that participants

used to limit their availability. They took up the opportunities that these technologies presented in order to pursue a range of outcomes, from delaying specific interactions to carving out periods of solitude. These outcomes were not, however, always easily achieved. As an investigation of the mechanisms of each affordance revealed, disconnection is enabled but certainly not encouraged. On the contrary, engaging with disconnective affordances often requires navigating a complex array of functionalities that push against the possibility of disconnection.

I explained that the first two affordances — disentanglement and jamming — enable *technical* practices for limiting and managing availability as the key mechanism used to limit availability is the manipulation of technological features. This can be compared to the affordance of expression, which enables discursive practices, and the affordance of delay, which enables temporal practices. These latter two affordances lead to a much broader array of practices and so are discussed further in the following chapters. I also described how modulation acts as a modifier of the other affordances, and thus is also further elaborated in the following chapters in situations where discursive or temporal practices are used to limit availability to specific people or groups.

It is also important to note that some of the affordances, and resulting practices, described in this chapter are primarily about limiting and reducing connections to messaging itself. This includes affordances of disentanglement and jamming, which are about limiting distractions and feelings of constant connectivity, as well as practices like delaying all responses and replying later in blocks. Drawing on Ihde (1990), we could say that in these cases the availability that is being negotiated exists in a relation of alterity, where the phone itself, as a quasi-other, is being avoided or resisted. Other affordances and practices, however, are about limiting and reducing connections to other people *through* messaging. This includes practices like selectively delaying responses, blocking contacts, or ending conversations. In these cases, the availability being negotiated exists in a relation of embodiment, as availability to others is limited through the use of messaging technologies. These twin modes of relation — negotiating availability *to* messaging and *through* messaging — are reiterated throughout the following chapters as I analyse in more detail many of the practices introduced above.

Overall, the findings in this chapter begin to advance this thesis' argument that young adults have many ways of managing availability via messaging, despite the technology being premised on constant connection. It achieves this by illustrating how opportunities for restricting availability are created by the features of messaging technologies and by beginning to outline how participants took up these opportunities to limit and reduce their availability. The following three chapters build directly on this discussion, giving expanded accounts of how participants engaged with the more complex affordances of delay, modulation, and expression. The chapter also offers a theoretical contribution by applying recent developments in affordance theory to an empirical example, illustrating how Evans et al.'s (2017) terminology facilitates rigorous descriptions of affordances and how Davis and Chouinard's (2017) account of mechanisms helps to reveal the often-complex processes through which affordances function.

CHAPTER 4 — Delay Tactics: A Rhythmanalysis of Temporal Availability Management Practices

In this chapter I focus on the affordance of delay that was identified in the prior chapter and expand on how this affordance was implicated in participants' negotiation of availability. This chapter identifies four key practices of delay: triaging, where messages are prioritised according to urgency; affective arrhythmia, where messaging rhythms diverge from a person's usual or desired rhythms due to affective obstacles; rhythmic manipulation, where messaging rhythms are controlled or manipulated to achieve specific ends; and intimate asynchronicity, where delays are normal and expected because of the intimacy between interlocutors. It is important to note that all practices of availability-management have a temporal dimension, including the technical practices discussed in the prior chapter and the discursive practices in the chapters that follow. In this chapter, however, I am focused on practices where temporality, and, specifically, delay, are the *primary* mechanisms through which availability is negotiated.

In analysing these practices, I employ Lefebvre's (1991/1974, 1992/2004) *rhythmanalysis* project to highlight how each practice shapes and is shaped by a range of everyday rhythms. While unfinished at the time of his death, Lefebvre's writings on *rhythmanalysis* propose a method for analysing everyday life by becoming attuned to its many intersecting rhythms. His ideas have been widely adopted, in large part because they encourage scholars to consider how everyday experiences are characterized by varied temporalities, thereby providing a valuable counter-narrative to accounts of the acceleration of everyday life. In this chapter, his ideas are used as a means of sensitising my analysis to the interwoven rhythms of participants' lives and to how these rhythms inform the temporal practices participants employ when limiting, reducing, and negotiating availability.

The chapter begins with two brief literature reviews: the first on mobile media and time, and the second on Lefebvre's *rhythmanalysis* project. This is followed by a discussion of each of the four practices and the rhythms they involve.

Overall, this chapter advances the thesis' argument that, as negotiating unavailability has become a larger part of mobile interactions, young adults have developed a range of nuanced strategies for managing and limiting mobile-mediated availability. In particular, this chapter emphasises that while messaging is often thought of as instant communication, young adults commonly make use of slower modes of exchange.

Temporality and Mobile Media

Acceleration vs. Multiple Temporalities

The relationship between digital technologies and time has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, a thorough review of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. I do, however, want to begin this chapter by briefly mapping out some key fault lines in this area in order to contextualise the findings that follow.

Much of the literature about digital technology and time is concerned with debates about whether or how digital technologies are contributing to the acceleration of social life. Proponents of acceleration differ in their arguments about what causes it and how the world should respond but are unified by their belief that there has been a paradigmatic shift in the speed of contemporary Western societies.²⁸ Seminal accounts include Castell's (1996) "timeless time", Urry's (2000) "instantaneous time" and Hassan's (2007) "network time". Discussing the differences between these concepts is beyond the scope of my concerns here but, taken together, these scholars argue that acceleration is the defining temporal experience of contemporary society and that this experience is driven, in large part, by technological developments including the evolution of information communication technologies. Acceleration literature often cites mobile devices as one example of a technology that contributes to acceleration (Castells, 1996; Gleick, 2000; Hassan, 2009; Lash, 2002). Broadly

²⁸ These debates stem from a much broader and longer-standing discussions about the relationship between time, society, and technology. Scholars have long observed how changes in technologies — especially time-keeping technologies — are linked to changes in the temporality of societies. Most often, these narratives are presented as a progression from agrarian societies organised around the cyclical rhythms of nature, to industrial societies dominated by clock time, to post-modern societies dominated by the acceleration and/or obliteration of time (e.g., Toffler, 1970).

speaking, the argument is that mobile communication increases the pace of daily life by eliminating down-time; it transforms time that was previously used for daydreaming or self-reflection (such as sitting in a waiting room or commuting on public transport) into time that is used for communicating via mobile devices.

Other scholars, however, contest this argument. Some scholars directly critique the idea that acceleration is the universal, defining temporal experience of contemporary society (e.g., Leccardi, 2003; May & Thrift, 2001; Sharma, 2014). Leccardi (2003, p. 37), for instance, largely agrees that acceleration broadly characterises postmodernity but argues that everyday life involves a more complex range of temporalities as it “is located at the crossroads between different worlds, public and private, each with different rhythms, durations, and sequences in accordance with the complex temporality of human beings and their social life”. Other scholars contest the idea that technology is a driver of acceleration. Wajcman (2008, 2010, 2015), for instance, argues that technologies like the mobile phone reconfigure experiences of time within everyday life, rather than just accelerating them. She also argues that while some people experience a sense of daily life as rushed, this experience of time is not technologically determined but rather produced through an array of social, cultural, and technological factors.²⁹

A further group of scholars emphasise that there are temporalities *other than* speed and acceleration that are bound up in digital and mobile media use. While not always directly engaging in the debate over acceleration, this often-empirical work provides valuable counter-narratives to universalising theories of technological acceleration by highlighting different temporalities. For instance, Farman (2018) observes that waiting has always been central to communication, and describes how it remains central in digital and mobile interactions. Scholars have also highlighted that while immediacy and speed are often seen as defining qualities of digital technologies, for people without access to the latest technologies or infrastructures they can be frustratingly slow (e.g., Freeman et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2019).

²⁹ For example, in her book *Pressed for Time*, Wajcman (2015) describes how the sense of acceleration that some people experience within daily life is not just the result of technology but is also influenced by changes in work patterns and family routines.

With regard to mobile communication more specifically, scholars have noted that it encourages flexible approaches to time by allowing arrangements to be made through iterative, on-the-fly processes (Chung & Lim, 2005; Larsen et al., 2008; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Ling, 2004). Similarly, scholars have noted that mobile communication can lead to the erosion of temporal boundaries between work and leisure (e.g., Gregg, 2011; Wajcman et al., 2008).

The Temporalities of (Un)Availability

Providing a statement about whether mobile devices are contributing to an accelerated society is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is important to note, however, that the ‘anytime, anywhere’ communication practices that scholars use as evidence of an accelerating society (such as using down time to send and receive messages) are certainly pertinent to the issue of unavailability. This is because, as discussed in Chapter One, the fact that people are increasingly available to communicate at all times of the day is precisely what makes negotiating and limiting availability a necessary part of mobile communication practices.

While the speed of technological processes is part of the context that makes continual availability management necessary, theories of acceleration do not provide a suitable framework for considering participants’ temporal practices as these theories are too broad in scope and often proceed from a view of technology that is too deterministic. This would be in contradiction to the methodological commitments of this thesis which, as outlined in Chapter Two, are to ground my analysis in the observation of situated interactions between people and specific technologies (postphenomenology) and to attend to the meanings that people attribute to these engagements (social interactionism).

Of greater relevance to this chapter, then, are the arguments that everyday life, technology use, and mobile technology are the site of multiple temporalities that are influenced, but not entirely determined, by technologies. Following Wajcman’s argument that technologies like the mobile phone reconfigure experiences of time rather than just accelerating them, this chapter considers the various forms of delay that participants used in managing and limiting their availability. It contributes to literature on the varied temporalities of digital and mobile media use by providing a more granular understanding of the specific forms that delay takes in the

messaging practices of young adults, as well as contributing to literature on availability-management by outlining the temporal practices that people employ.

That said, it is important to note that there are a few existing studies that consider the role of delay in messaging practices. Vorderer et al. (2016) and Wohn and Birnholtz (2015) note that the speed of message responses is generally determined by the urgency of the message, who the sender is, and the situation in which the message is sent or received. My discussion of triaging practices below expands on these observations by adding further details about how these factors are evaluated and adding several other factors that participants considered when determining response time. With further regard to the effect of the identity of the sender on response speed, Birnholtz et al. (2017) collected meta-data and content from messaging exchanges and note that faster responses were more common in relation to acquaintances than close friends. Wohn and Birnholtz (2015) make the same observation in their interview study of young adult messaging users and also note that responses are sometimes intentionally delayed to lower other people's expectations.

A further study by Burchell (2017b) identifies two practices of 'networked-absence': ignoring or delaying responses to regain temporal sovereignty and only responding to particular kinds of communication (namely, work vs. social communication) during specific hours or days. Burchell notes a range of motivations for these absences: to avoid or delay interactions with specific people, to reduce interruptions and reassert control over availability, or to "re-segregate" work times and spaces from social times and spaces by relegating certain types of communication to certain time periods.

My own data reinforces and provides further detail about some of these observations, as well as building on them by identifying additional practices of delay.

Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis

Lefebvre's writings on rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre & Régulier, 1985/2004, 1986/2004; Lefebvre, 1991/1974, 1992/2004) provide a helpful framework for thinking through the multiple temporalities bound up in participants' management of their messaging availability and,

specifically, their use of delay as a tactic.³⁰ For Lefebvre, the temporality of everyday life is best understood as a cacophony of rhythms operating at all levels from the microscopic to the cosmic. These rhythms are biological and cultural, personal and collective, fleeting and enduring. They vary from the obvious (breathing, hunger) and the public (calendars, ceremonies), to the complex (social life, sexuality) and the secret (memory, the non-said). At their most fundamental, rhythms are relational: "Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure or energy, there is rhythm" (1992/2004, p. 15).

Importantly, Lefebvre explains that for something to be rhythmic does not mean it must be perfectly regular or monotonous. While rhythm requires repetition, this repetition can incorporate "stops, silences, blanks, resumptions and intervals" (Lefebvre & Régulier, 1985/2004, p. 78; see also 1992/2004, p. 6). He also emphasises that the rhythms of everyday life do not operate in isolation but constantly permeate one another (1991/1974, p. 205). While the idea of irregular and intersecting rhythms might seem chaotic, Lefebvre insists that the polyrhythmia of daily life is often symphonic. He gives the body as an example of how manifold complex rhythms can exist in harmony: "The body consists of a bundle of rhythms, different but in tune . . . The eurhythmic body, composed of diverse rhythms — each organ, each function, having its own — keeps them in metastable equilibrium" (1992/2004, p. 20).

As well as describing the rhythms of everyday life, Lefebvre also began to articulate a methodology for studying these rhythms. This is first outlined in *The Production of Space* where he suggests that "it is possible to envision a sort of rhythmanalysis which would address itself to the concrete reality of rhythms, and perhaps even to their use" (1991/1974, p. 205). He continues, both here and in later works, to explain that a "rhythmanalyst" should begin by attuning themselves to the rhythms of their own body and then proceed by shifting their attention to the rhythms of their environment (1991/1974, p. 205, 1992/2004, p. 19).³¹

³⁰ Lefebvre's key text on rhythmanalysis, *Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms*, was published posthumously in 1992 and translated into English in 2004. Earlier versions of these ideas were published in *The Production of Space* (1991) and in two short essays published with Catherine Régulier: *The Rhythmanalytical Project* (1985/2004), and *Attempt at the Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities* (1986/2004).

³¹ Lefebvre demonstrates this methodology in his study of Paris (1992/2004, p. 29-30). Sitting at the

Lefebvre's writings on rhythmanalysis have been widely employed across a range of academic fields, including the study of digital media (e.g., Nansen et al., 2009). Some scholars draw on the more methodological aspects of the rhythmanalysis project to inform their research designs (e.g., Edensor & Holloway 2008; Wilken, 2012). For instance, Wilken (2012) employs a form of embodied participatory ethnography that is informed by Lefebvre's methods to study the rhythms of commuting via public transport. Other scholars use the concepts from rhythmanalysis as an interpretive lens for analysing research objects or data (Highmore, 2002; Obert, 2008). Nansen et al. (2009), for instance, employ rhythmanalysis as a theoretical framework in their study of domestic media use. Drawing on a range of qualitative methods, they explore the relationship between the proliferation of media in the home and the rhythms of domestic life and find that the rapid growth in domestic media technologies is producing domestic rhythms that are more emergent, negotiated, and less stable. In this chapter, I employ rhythmanalysis in this latter mode: as a framework for interpreting the data gathered during my interviews.

One of the things that makes Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis project particularly valuable is that it can provide an important counterpoint to totalizing theories of time which often elide the varied rhythms of lived temporality. This is the case in urban studies, for instance, where Simonsen (2004) has argued that Lefebvre's work is an important alternative to the dominant narrative of cities as places of acceleration.³² For Simonson, these urban acceleration narratives "tell the stories of times and spaces emptied of meaning and content, consumed in ceaseless movement and acceleration" (2004, p. 45). This is problematic, she argues, because these stories fail to recognise both the heterogeneity of contemporary city life and the different temporal trends that characterise its evolution, such as the increasing colonisation of the night by previously daytime activities. Simonsen views Lefebvre's insistence on the multiplicity of space and time as an important corrective to these totalizing narratives. She also emphasises

window of an apartment well above street level, Lefebvre is at once removed from but subject to the rhythms of the street. From this position, he begins to list the various rhythms he can see and hear.

³² The view of cities as spaces of acceleration is a long-standing narrative that ties in with the acceleration literature mentioned above and can be traced back to Simmel's (1903/1950) book *The Metropolis and Mental Life*.

that while Lefebvre complicates theories of acceleration, he does not reject them entirely, instead, positioning them as “only one amongst different trends in the spatio-temporal organisation of urban life” (2004, p. 46).

I raise this example from urban theory because it mirrors the role that Lefebvre plays in this chapter. His framework of rhythm analysis allows me to acknowledge the processes of accelerated communication that exacerbate and complicate people’s need to manage their availability, but positions this as one of many rhythms that shape, and are shaped by, messaging practices. It is also important to note that in drawing on Lefebvre I am not abandoning the theoretical elements used elsewhere in the thesis. Rather, Lefebvre’s ideas provide a lens that encompasses the technical and social dimensions I am interested in while highlighting the temporal aspects that are central to this chapter. And, as noted in the introduction, these temporal aspects all fall within the affordance of delay identified in the prior chapter.

Rhythms of Unavailability and Disconnection

The categories below describe different kinds of temporal practices used in negotiating availability and the rhythms they involve.

Triaging

It’s a case of prioritising what to respond to, rather than responding to everything regardless. It’s almost like there’s a subconscious hierarchy of priority. (Matthew, 20, M)

Triaging involves determining which messages should be responded to quickly and which can be left until later. As illustrated in Matthew’s quote above, this act of prioritisation is used when a person is unable or unwilling to respond to all the messages they are receiving because they are occupied, or when their circumstances mean they are willing to respond to particular kinds of messages and not others. Most participants referred to some form of triaging throughout our conversations — it was a taken-for-granted rhythm that they often struggled to articulate as it formed such a quotidian part of their messaging.

Participants considered several factors when prioritising messages relative to each other and their own availability to respond. These factors include those noted in prior studies, such as the

urgency of the message, the relationship between sender and receiver, and the context in which a message is received (Vorderer et al., 2016; Wohn & Birnholtz, 2015). My discussion of triaging practices expands on these accounts by providing further details about how factors like urgency, relationships, and context are evaluated and noting several additional factors that participants considered when triaging messages. In the discussion that follows, I divide my discussion of these various factors into the content, the sender, the platform, and the message type.

The Content

Prior studies have noted that the urgency of a message impacts how quickly people respond (Vorderer et al., 2016; Wohn & Birnholtz, 2015). In keeping with this, participants largely assessed the content of messages in terms of urgency. Participants from across Cohorts A and B consistently reported that they would respond to “urgent” messages as quickly as possible, while leaving other messages until later.³³ Urgency was usually a measure of how time-sensitive the message was but could also be related to its level of importance. Commonly cited examples of urgent messages included messages about organising face-to-face interactions and messages that contained specific questions or requests. The following quotes illustrate how participants described urgency or importance and its impact on whether they could delay their response.

Another factor [in my reply speed] is how important the message is. So in the final phases of co-ordinating [to meet up] I'll be texting constantly. It's important. You have to be really quick, so there is that expectation. (Steve, 21, M)

Well if someone's asking something about the immediate future, I'd probably reply pretty quickly . . . Or if somebody asks me to do something, I'd reply straight away. But if someone sends me a comment, like just a comment about something, I'm not gonna reply straight away if I'm busy. (Chelsea, 20, F)

³³ That said, participants in Cohort B would often return messages, including urgent messages, with calls in order to avoid using messaging.

If there is someone who's asking me for information that I can easily supply them with . . . and there's an urgency in the text . . . even if I am doing something I will try, more often than not, to respond immediately . . . Whereas most of the time . . . a lot of the messages I receive don't have that urgency and I can reply whenever I want. (Leonard, 21, M)

In assessing urgency, participants also described being sensitive to the rhythms of their interlocutor. For example, several participants described how it was important for particular friends to know in advance about plans to meet face-to-face because they needed to travel further, so participants would consider their messages to be more urgent and respond more quickly.

One factor that could complicate the process of assessing message content was read receipts. As discussed in the prior chapter, participants often felt compelled to respond to messages they had opened if the messaging app had read receipts. To manage this, they employed a range of workarounds to avoid opening messages that they might not want to respond to immediately. In many cases, assessing the content of messages for the purposes of triaging involved using these work-arounds, namely, reading the previews that are included in pop-up notifications. In other cases, the content of the message, and its relative urgency, could be inferred from who was sending the message and the surrounding circumstance. For instance, in Steve's quote above, he describes responding more quickly to messages that are about coordinating an impending meet-up — content that could be inferred from the fact that messages were from a person he was about to meet.

While participants felt it was important to respond to urgent messages quickly, they often included a disclaimer that most of the messages they received were not. As Octavius Maximilian VII (18, M) quipped, "It's not as if I'm a paramedic or anything." Given that few messages were urgent, participants used other factors to determine the relative priority of non-urgent messages.

The Sender

One such factor was the identity of the sender and, in particular, the intimacy of their relationship with the receiver. As noted earlier, prior studies have observed a tendency for people to reply to acquaintances more quickly than closer contacts (Birnholtz et al., 2017;

Wohn & Birnholtz, 2015). Birnholtz et al. (2017) speculate that this could be because messages from acquaintances tend to be more targeted and immediate in nature. Wohn and Birnholtz (2015) report a different explanation given by a participant in their study: that she was more concerned about offending acquaintances and so responded to them more quickly. Some of the participants in my own study reiterated this point, explaining that they were more inclined to prioritise messages from people they knew less well as they felt there was a higher chance for offence and misunderstanding.

Others, however, took the opposite view. They felt that people should generally respond more quickly to closer friends than more distant acquaintances. This was because the speed of a reply reflected a person's commitment to and interest in their interlocutor: time is precious and replying quickly means investing more time in those you love. Octavius Maximilian VII, for instance, explained that the person who sent the message was one of the primary things that impacted his response time because "there are people I give priority to over others." When I asked him to expand on this, he explained:

Well, I suppose some friends I value more than others and give more time to in the allocation of my time [Laughs]. So if they were to message me then I'd try to prioritise messing them back, [as opposed] to someone I know less well.

For Octavius, messages from less intimate friends could wait while messages from closer friends were responded to quickly.

Another participant, Chelsea (20, F), applied this same logic to her friends' response times: the closer the friend, the higher her expectation of a prompt reply. During high school, Chelsea had realised that a person she considered a best friend was not putting as much effort into maintaining communication as she was, leading to the end of the friendship. Since then, she has seen communication practices as an important way of gauging the intimacy of friendships:

You don't put as much effort into people who don't put as much effort in back . . . Like I know where my friends sit on a scale, in terms of our friendship, of how close we are, right? And I'm okay with people who are on the lesser end of the scale not being as responsive, if that makes sense, 'cause it goes both ways, right? But then, people higher up on my scale, I expect them to be a little bit better.

For Chelsea, a mutual expectation of prompt replies was an important sign of intimacy; without it, she struggled to deepen a relationship as she felt the other person was not dependable.

As noted above, however, other participants held the opposite view, stating that closer friends could be responded to more slowly because the intimacy in the relationship meant there was less pressure to reply. This discrepancy, which illustrates how affordances are perceptual and contextual, is discussed further in Chapter Seven. The identity of the sender could also cause responses to be delayed in situations where there was relational tension between the messaging partners. This is discussed below in the section on Affective Arrhythmia.

The Platform

Participants also made triaging decisions on the basis of which messaging platform was being used: some platforms were seen as connoting greater urgency or seriousness than others and so messages sent through these platforms could be given less priority.

For example, Bill (23, M) explained how WhatsApp messages were a greater priority for him than Facebook messages as Facebook messages felt more like social media.

Bill: It tends to be more of a longer timeframe with Facebook messenger than WhatsApp. I dunno, I just feel like it's more of an instant message if its WhatsApp compared to Facebook, for some reason.

Kate: This might be difficult but can you put your finger on why?

Bill: Well, I think WhatsApp's probably a little bit more accessible because it's on your phone — it's *for* instant messaging — whereas Facebook, it's more of a social media platform which you can sort of, take your time on. It's not really instant — it's not *for that*. Although they have Facebook Messenger, but that is sort of more of a social media platform. You sort of group it into one. And so you can have more time. I dunno, it might be just me [Laughs].

As in Bill's comment above, participants generally rationalised their views about the urgency and intimacy of platforms through reference to the platform's features or histories. However, group norms also appeared to play an important role in determining the 'meaning' of a messaging platform as participants often gave contradictory accounts about which messaging

platforms required faster or slower responses. For instance, in contrast to Bill's view of Facebook messages as slower, Hadiya explained that she responded to Facebook messages the fastest: "If it's text then it's not so huge a priority to respond immediately . . . But yeah, definitely on Facebook I try and go for a speedier reply." I discuss these contrasting opinions about platforms further in Chapter Seven as part of a broader analysis of the variation in participants' views about messaging etiquette.

The Message Type

A final factor that participants used in triaging was whether messages were sent one-on-one or as part of a group chat. Participants across Cohorts A and B widely consistently that messages sent to group chats involved much less obligation to reply quickly, if at all, than one-to-one messages. Danielle (19, F), for instance, explained that a person's "responsibility to answer declines exponentially" if the message they have received is in a group chat and, in particular, if there are a lot of people in the group chat. She explained: "they can have a conversation without me, whereas if it's just a one-on-one conversation you have to reply to keep it going." With multiple people involved in a conversation, the social pressure to reply was distributed across the group, in much the same way that individuals in a group of people speaking face-to-face feel less obligation to respond to every comment than two individuals speaking directly to each other. Consequently, messages sent to group chats were often assigned the lowest priority.

That said, messages sent to group chats could be given higher priority when they were sent by close friends and contained urgent content. This was often the case for Matthew (20, M) who had formed a group chat with his university friends to organise spontaneous catch-ups for lunch or coffee between classes. If someone messaged suggesting they meet and he was keen to do so, these messages became the highest priority because the content was perceived as urgent.

Intersecting Rhythms

By responding more slowly to some messages and faster to others, participants created triaging rhythms that structured their experiences of receiving, reading, and responding to messages. As well as creating rhythms, however, triaging is also informed by rhythms. Above,

I've discussed how triaging is informed by rhythms associated with factors like messaging platforms or relationships. However, triaging is also informed by the rhythms of a person's own availability, as participants used triaging primarily when their ability to message was limited. Sometimes availability was limited by external constraints that discouraged messaging, like being at work or in a class. In these cases, triaging was partly a product of institutional rhythms of work hours, break times, or class schedules. Other rhythms that shaped availability were more personal and self-selected, such as preferring to work on assignments during the weekend or stream TV shows in the evenings. Sometimes rhythms were social, as participants minimized their messaging while attending events or spending time with others. And sometimes the rhythms were physical or emotional, such as limiting messaging because of feeling tired, stressed, or just "not in the mood" — situations that are discussed further in the affective arrhythmia section below.

These various rhythms informed participants' messaging rhythms by producing greater or lesser need for triaging as their availability for and interest in messaging ebbed and flowed across the day. One participant, Steve (21, M), gave a summary of how his availability shifted across the day and impacted how likely he was to respond to non-urgent messages:

If I see it first thing in the morning, I'll read it and leave it for later. But if I'm already out, active and doing things, and I'm not involved in an immersive experience — like work or cooking — if I'm just walking around in the street or watching a movie, or just surfing the web then I'll be more likely to reply to it as soon as possible. Especially if I'm in a productive kind of mood as well. If I'm in a lazy mood then I won't get to my messages or emails.

Here, Steve explains how a variety of everyday rhythms, including circadian rhythms, bodily rhythms, rhythms of labour and leisure, and of concentration and distraction, determine when and how he employs triaging to modulate his messaging responses.

For some participants, triaging was also driven by a desire to limit messaging in order to limit distractions or preserve time for other tasks and priorities. As described in the prior chapter, for instance, some participants preferred to limit their messaging during the day and then "reply in blocks" during specific periods such as mealtimes or while commuting on public transport. In these cases, participants would use triaging to prioritise which messages needed

a response quickly and which could be replied to later along with other messages. This reinforces Burchell's (2017b, pp. 188-190) observation that his participants delayed responses in order to regain "temporal sovereignty". This term highlights the fact that in delaying responses to minimise disruptions and exercise control over one's time, participants were consciously rejecting or resisting the temporal logics inscribed in the materiality of messaging technologies which are centred upon rapid responses and continual availability.³⁴

This desire for temporal sovereignty was often even more important to participants in Cohort B. For these participants, triaging usually involved responding to urgent messages but leaving all others until a much later time. This more stringent triaging process was driven by a desire to avoid messaging as much as possible and resist the more rapid and continual rhythms of interaction encouraged by messaging technologies. One participant from Cohort B named Sabrina (21, F) provides a good illustration of this approach. She disliked the continual availability of mobile communication, saying "it is so invasive — it's like every minute someone can contact you." She also minimised her phone use because she found that it would often become a distraction that took up more time than she had planned. To manage her messaging communication, she responded immediately to urgent messages but set aside specific times to work through other messages, particularly ones about making plans. She explained:

I set apart a certain amount of time — like, say, a Sunday evening — and I dedicate it to my phone. I go through my messages and sort of plan things throughout the week . . . therefore avoiding having to, sort of, check it more during the week. . . I get out my diary, my calendar — that sort of stuff — and I go through messages from friends to see what they were hoping to do that week or in the future. And I look in my diary [to see] whether that's gonna work, and then I send them messages being like, "Oh I could do it then." And then, normally they'd get back to me pretty quickly [Laughs] so it's quite easy. You can lock in when you're doing stuff.

This process was similar to that of participants in Cohort A who also replied to messages in blocks. However, Sabrina's process involved a much more stringent triaging process and less

³⁴ Burchell (2015) describes this as rejecting "networked time" — the accelerated and infinite time of networked connections.

frequent blocks of responding as she sought to more significantly minimise her phone use throughout the week.

As Sabrina's account suggests, triaging also relies on anticipated rhythms — on times in the near future when one will be more able or willing to reply to the 'not urgent' messages. For many participants, these future times often aligned with consistent rhythms that could be easily anticipated. For instance, Matthew, who commuted to university via public transport, would often triage his messaging throughout the day and then use his commuting time to address the remaining messages:

I'll pretty much take public transport everyday so it's pretty much guaranteed. Not saying that the only time I respond to messages is on public transport, but it definitely is a time when I'm more open to using my phone, like just sort of constantly typing away.

Participants also used other predictable rhythms, such as mealtimes or weekends, to "catch up" on messages.

Intimate Asynchronicity

I think we have this common understanding like we might see the message now, but we reply when we are free-er, like at night or when we have time. (Erin, 22, F)

Intimate asynchronicity is a rhythm that emerges between close friends. It is present in situations where an immediate response is not given by the receiver and/or expected by the sender because of the intimacy between them. As Farman observes, (2018) the meaning of a delay is always contextual. In these relational contexts, delays that might otherwise be cause for concern are accepted and understood. Drawing on Lefebvre's theories of rhythm, intimate asynchronicity could be seen as an example of "eurythmia": a united or harmonious rhythm (Lefebvre, 1992/2004, p. 16; see also Highmore, 2005). That is not to say that intimate asynchronicity requires people to have matching messaging rhythms. As Highmore notes in his review of Lefebvre, "spontaneous and chaotic rhythms can have a eurythmic quality" (2005, p. 149). In the case of intimate asynchronicity, it is the common understanding beneath the often-chaotic rhythms that makes them eurythmic.

Familiarity with Schedules

In some circumstances, intimate asynchronicity develops because interlocutors are intimately acquainted with each other's daily rhythms to the extent that they do not expect messages at certain times. These include obvious daily rhythms, like the time zone that shapes patterns of sleeping and waking, but also more intimate rhythms like class schedules, leisure activities, family commitments, and work hours.

The pre-interview messaging sample with one participant, Hannah (21, M), contained an especially notable example of this mutual familiarity with daily rhythms. When reviewing the sample, I was struck by an exchange between her and a friend. This fairly synchronous exchange ended abruptly when Hannah sent a message about how she had been feeling frustrated with her terminally ill mother. There was a long gap — almost a full day — before the friend responded with a brief message and an apology for the slow reply. This long delay seemed meaningful. I assumed it was because Hannah's friend had been unsure how to respond to such a sensitive topic or perhaps they were not invested in the relationship enough to prioritise responding quickly and thoughtfully. When I asked Hannah about the gap, she explained that it held none of these meanings:

This was on a Sunday. So, my friend plays baseball on Sundays and she has all this family stuff on, so on weekends our conversations tend to be quite spaced apart. Saturdays and Sundays for both of us. And then normally after a big gap she'll say, "Sorry I didn't get to respond." Especially when it's a long message like that and especially when it's a serious one.

Hannah continued explaining how the varied schedules between her and her friend often caused staccato messaging rhythms but that this was an understood and accepted part of their relationship.

Sometimes like I feel like we live in different time zones —like we have a long-distance relationship — because she starts work really early in the morning, at 4am, and I don't get up until like 10am [Laughs] and I stay up really late. So I message her when she's asleep and she messages me when I'm asleep. In those cases, she doesn't say "Sorry I didn't respond" because she knows that *I know* that she's gone to bed.

For Hannah, the delayed response to her message was unremarkable. Rather than a sign of distance between her and this friend, the delayed response was a sign of intimacy as expressed through their common understanding and acceptance of each other's unavailability.

This practice builds on Wohn and Birnholtz's (2015) observation that many of their young adult participants developed an intuitive understanding of their contacts' daily rhythms and routines. While Wohn and Birnholtz's (2015) explain that their participants used this information to get in touch with people more easily, accounts like Hannah's show that this familiarity is also used to explain and excuse absences.

Familiarity with Mobile Rhythms

Participants also became accustomed to messaging rhythms that were driven by their friends' attitudes toward mobile phones, as opposed to their daily schedules as discussed above. Josh (18, M), for example, explained how he expects slower or faster responses from different friends because they have different kinds of relationships with their phones.

Comparing two of my mates, I know one is always on their phone, always checking their stuff, always texting. I dunno, he's texting about 10 people. I don't even know who they are. And the other one, he's not into his phone that much. He checks it here and there but he's not constantly on it like, everywhere he is. Like he just kind of checks it when he feels like it.

As in Josh's example, these were often *one-way* forms of intimate asynchronicity: participants adjusted their expectations about how quickly friends would reply by learning their messaging rhythms.

Participants from Cohort B also described this form of intimate asynchronicity but from the perspective of the person who was slow to respond. These participants recognised that they were less responsive than their friends due to their dislike of messaging. Their closer friends were accustomed to their slow and sporadic replies, often accommodating them by adjusting their own behaviour. One participant from Cohort B, Wade (19, M), preferred communicating through calling and emailing whenever possible and used messaging "a last resort", mainly when someone would not answer their phone. He explained that his close friends understood and accepted that he was rarely available for messaging, saying, "If people need to get in

contact with me right away, most of the time people tend to go through the other avenues. Meet me in person, emails, calling.”

This acceptance of messaging unavailability was also evident in the context of group chats, which participants from Cohort B rarely used. They often chose not to leave group chats with close friends because they saw them as expression of group solidarity, but only checked in sporadically in order to minimise their phone use. Many of their friends had become accustomed to their absence in these groups, accepting it as part of their communication preferences. This became especially evident when group chats were used for coordinating social gatherings. Because they did not check the group chats often, participants in Cohort B were often at risk of missing out on these gatherings, however, several reported that their friends would call or message them individual to inform them about social plans. As Aamir (20, F) explained, “I have groups with friends, but they know I don't reply that much, so they'll make plans and then usually one of my friends will just text me and be like, ‘Hey this is going on’.” In these instances, participants' close friends became accustomed to and accommodated their unavailability within group chats.

This pattern of behaviour is interesting to consider in relation to Wohn and Birnholtz' (2015) observation that some of the young adults in their study intentionally delayed responses to lower other people's expectations around their availability. The fact that participants from Cohort A adjusted their expectations for friends who disliked messaging, and that participants from Cohort B had friends recognise and accommodate their preferences, suggests that this strategy is often effective.³⁵

In other situations, becoming attuned to a friend's messaging habits could result in a more mutual rhythm of delayed responses. Danielle, for example, explained that she took her cues from the messaging rhythms of people she communicated with regularly.

The more that you talk to someone the more that you kind of know their WhatsApp life, or Messenger life, so you know how quick, or not, they reply. So if they reply really fast

³⁵ The exception to this is situations where someone's response speed is so slow that it begins to annoy or inconvenience others. Some participants described this happening, but only rarely and in situations where people were extremely unresponsive.

you feel really pressured to do the same. And if I know they reply, like, once every few days then I'll take my time as well 'cause I know they won't be upset.

As Danielle notes, taking on the messaging rhythms of another person could mean adopting a faster pace. In at least some cases though, becoming more acquainted with someone's response speed norms created a mutual acceptance of slower responses.

Trust and Mutual Agreements

Participants also described a form of intimate asynchronicity that was less about learning messaging rhythms or daily schedules and more about developing trust within a relationship. In these cases, the ability to delay or avoid responding was founded on the trust that the other person would not perceive slow replies, or even no reply, as an act of rejection. Belinda (25, F) explained how this kind of mutually slow response had developed between her and one of her closest friends:

My one friend, I don't even reply to her but, like, we're cool like that. Like, today I'm like "Hey" and she only replied to me hours later, and then she's like, "Look at this" and I saw the message but I didn't reply. I don't need to say "Okay." She knows I'll look at it.

Hannah also had an example of this kind of intimate asynchronicity. Earlier, I described how Hannah had a friend whose schedule was so different from her own that she described them as living in a different time zone and explained that, because they knew each other's schedules, they did not expect responses at certain times. She described having similarly slow messaging exchanges with another friend but, in this case, the slow pace was based more on a mutual understanding that they could respond slowly without the other person taking offence. Hannah explained how she and this friend would "take our time in responding to each other — maybe [responding] once a week." She described them as being "like pen pals" because their messages were akin to the slower and more in-depth exchanges that characterise letter writing.

These mutual agreements about delay could also be context-specific. Erin (22, F), for example, had a shared understanding with her closest friends back home in Singapore that she would take a day, or a few days, to respond to some of their messages. This was because she needed to wait until she had the time and emotional energy to thoughtfully engage with the kind of "deep things" she discussed with these friends. She explained: "We'll share really, really deep or big

stuff, so sometimes I want time to think. But they know. Like, we have that common understanding that ‘Erin always takes time to reply but she will reply.’”

Intimate asynchronicity somewhat complicates authoritative early accounts of mobile communication that emphasise the role it plays in strengthening close ties by allowing people to be constantly in touch with their most intimate contacts (e.g., Gergen, 2008; Habuchi, 2005; Ling, 2008). In contrast, for many participants, the closeness of relationships is expressed through an acceptance and understanding of not being in continual contact. It appears that as there is now considerable techno-social pressure to be constantly available, being okay with unavailability has become a sign of intimacy.

It is worth emphasising that while some participants developed intimate asynchronicity with most, or all, of the people closest to them, other participants developed it with some people but not others. This is because intimate synchronicity is not solely the product of intimacy within the relationship but is also produced through other rhythms like personal schedules and relational norms. Hannah, for example, explained how she had staccato rhythms with her “pen pal” friend, her friend who felt like they were in a different time-zone, and her boyfriend who she knew did not check his phone often. With her other two closest friends, however, messaging was much more rapid: “We message a lot . . . I respond more quickly because I know that they check their phones often.”

Lastly, the intimate asynchronicity observed among my participants provides another possible explanation for Birnholtz et al.’s (2017) finding that slower responses are more common in relation to close friends than acquaintances. As discussed above, this finding is drawn from a study of meta-data and content from messaging exchanges, so Birnholtz et al. (2017) can only provide speculative explanations for this trend. The accounts of participants described above, however, suggest that a further reason for this trend may be due to intimate asynchronicity developing between close friends. That said, it is also worth noting that in my earlier account of triaging, I described participants as having different attitudes about whether messages from closer friends or more distant acquaintances should be responded to more quickly, a discrepancy that I will discuss further in Chapter Eight.

Affective Arrhythmia

In medical terms, arrhythmia is a problem with the rate or rhythm of the heartbeat. Lefebvre uses the term to describe discordant or pathological rhythms — rhythms that “break apart” or “alter and bypass synchronisation” (1992/2004, p. 67). This section describes messaging rhythms that, while not necessarily pathological, are a departure from a person’s usual or desired patterns. This arrhythmia is due to affective obstacles that limit messaging availability.

Not in the Mood

Participants often described situations where they diverged from their usual or desired patterns of responding because of affective conditions that reduced their desire or ability to be available. Often these conditions were referred to as not being “in the mood” to message, an affective state that people struggled to articulate and variously attributed to being busy, hungry, tired, stressed, lazy and/or disinterested. Other times, people adjusted their messaging rhythms because of a more significant emotional state. Jiya (21, F), for example, explained to me that she occasionally had a month or so where she “wasn’t in a very good mood” and felt like she was “kind of in a hole.” In these periods, Jiya found messaging irritating and burdensome. Consequently, while she would still read messages during this time, she would only reply to the most important ones:

If I get a message I’ll check it but then I’ll be, sort of, rude. I’ll check it and I won’t reply. During these times I might be, like, reading [messages]. You know, on WhatsApp there’s a blue light if you have an unread message, so maybe I’ll read it, but if it’s unimportant I just don’t reply. Because I don’t wanna reply. I just see it.

As her comment about not responding being “rude” suggests, this messaging rhythm is unusual for Jiya. She usually prefers to reply promptly so that she’s always up to date with her messaging communication. Her arrhythmic messaging, which occurs in periods when she is down, or perhaps even depressed, involves a severe form of triaging where she reads all messages but only responds to the most important.

Leonard’s (21, M) messaging rhythms similarly changed during “busy or stressful periods”. As an Honours student in a music programme and a professional singer, Leonard’s life during the time we spoke was characterised by periods of intense pressure and activity. Sometimes these

periods were acute, like the 24 hours leading up to a performance; sometimes they were extended, like weeks where rehearsals and university assessments coincided. During these busy periods, Leonard described how “I tend to go into my own cave and so any social interaction from the outside world I tend to just filter that out.” Like Jiya, Leonard’s filtering involved a more severe form of triaging. He would largely ignore group chats, for example: “I just won’t be listening or reading it half the time, ‘cause I’m just in another place.” He also put less effort into his replies. He would, for example, respond to questions with brief responses — “I’ll send them a quick message saying, ‘Yep sure’. Just a few words.” — whereas he usually enjoys being thoughtful and playful in his responses.

While these practices of limiting messaging due to mood are partly about wanting to limit interactions with others, they are also about limiting interactions with the phone itself. Participants described how messaging could feel arduous in certain circumstances and thus became unappealing when they had limited reserves of energy and emotion. This is akin to Burchell’s (2015) observation about how, under the conditions of networked connectivity, acts of communication come to be viewed as tasks to be completed. As he explain, “this perspective on interactions as fragmented tasks occurs against the backdrop of constant networked connection, lending itself to seeing communication not simply as activities of engagement between individuals but as practices of managing the communication environment” (2015, p. 38). In Burchell’s case, he is interested in how his participants actively managed these tasks across the day, whereas my interest here in participants who ‘failed’ to manage them by not responding. While the outcomes are different, what I am suggesting is that a similar view of messaging interactions as tasks is what makes them feel arduous to participants. Because they are tasks, they are something that people are, at times, “not in the mood” to complete. This dynamic takes us back to Ihde’s (1990) description of alterity relations whereby the focus of an experience is on the technology itself. When “not in the mood” for messaging, participants were resistant to their phones and the tasks that they were generating as much, if not more, than the actual people sending them messages.

Relational Tension

In these examples, Jiya’s and Leonard’s usual messaging rhythms are disrupted by feelings that stem from personal circumstances that impact their desire to be available. In other examples of

affective arrhythmia, usual patterns of messaging availability are disrupted by feelings that stem from conflict or tension between interlocutors. During our interviews, Chelsea described a situation where she was deciding whether to attend her friend Sarah's 21st birthday that weekend. The situation was complicated. Chelsea's own 21st birthday had happened recently, and Sarah had decided not to attend at the last minute and given an excuse for her absence that Chelsea found unconvincing. This made Chelsea reluctant to put in the effort required to attend Sarah's birthday given that it was across the city from a birthday party being thrown the same night for another friend — a friend who *had* come to Chelsea's birthday. The last message Sarah had sent Chelsea was the message where she said she wouldn't be attending Chelsea's birthday party. Chelsea never replied, but she would need to message Sarah soon as the party was less than a week away and Chelsea needed to tell her whether or not she would be there.

I've almost decided not to go. But then I have to tell her that. And she's going to think it's because she didn't come to mine, which is partly true but partly not. It adds to the argument for not going but it's not a vengeful decision — I actually have somewhere else to be. Now I'm actually going to have to tell her that, right? And tell her in a way that she understands that it's not me being a bitch about it. "We're still friends. I still like you. I still want you to have a great 21st." But how do you do that in a text message? It's not that easy to do. So you actually have to, like, think about it. You have to sit there and craft something, and I just haven't done it yet . . . I'm gonna put it off until I can really, yeah, figure out how to do it.

For Chelsea, the relational tension bound up in this messaging exchange was dissuading her from responding, causing a longer than usual delay as she avoided an awkward and possibly confrontational interaction.

Emotional Labour

In a final version of affective arrhythmia, responses are delayed because of the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) involved in responding — that is, it involves the difficult work of managing one's own emotions, the emotions of others, or both.³⁶ Emotional labour is often a

³⁶ While Hochschild initially developed the concept of emotional labour to refer specifically to managing one's own emotions to fulfil the requirements of a job (often, service work) she has since noted that the

factor in the situations described above that involve conflict or relational tension. However, there were also situations that did not involve conflict but where participants still delayed their responses because of the labour of processing and managing thoughts and feelings.

For Maisie (30, F), this was characteristic of her exchanges with one friend who she described as “very emotional”. She explained: “I get really long, long messages from them that must just take an age to write. I can’t even fathom.” Maisie needed to “dedicate some time to those messages”, because of the “long thought process” involved in processing the messages and figuring out how to respond in a sensitive and encouraging manner. Consequently, Maisie usually delayed her responses to these messages until she had free time and a clear headspace, such as before beginning work on an assignment or while commuting on public transport.

This tactic of delaying responses until an anticipated future time was common among accounts of affective arrhythmia. As with triaging, participants put off responding because they knew that, in the near future, they would have the amount and quality of time needed to articulate a suitable response. Also akin to triaging, these future times were typically linked to other rhythms, like after exams, during the weekend, or in Maisie’s case, while commuting when she could “actually focus on what’s been written.”

Another participant, Erin, was involved in mentoring at her church and through her work as a counsellor. She was also someone to whom friends often turned for support and was heavily invested in maintaining her friendships back home in Singapore while also building new friendships in Australia. She explained that while she valued supporting people through these different relationships, it was often draining and meant that she needed time alone to recharge. As mentioned in the previous section, one strategy that Erin developed to manage her different commitments was fostering a form of intimate asynchronicity with her close friends in Singapore. She explained that their acceptance of her delays was built on a mutual understanding that because they shared “really, really big or deep stuff”, she needed time to develop a suitable reply:

concept also applies to personal contexts. For a concise summary, see Beck (2018).

It's like, they know me, they know that I'm always caught up with doing stuff there, and I'm really invested in my time here. Speaking to people, and I do a lot of counselling work with people as well, so they know that sometimes I get really drained and tired, and I would really wait for a time when I was completely rested to talk to them, and give them my time.

This is one example of how the categories presented in this chapter can overlap. Erin's delayed response to her friends is produced by her need for the emotional time and energy to respond (affective arrhythmia), a situation that is understood and accepted by her friends due to the intimacy between them (intimate asynchronicity). That said, in order to craft a thoughtful response, Erin has to counter the intended rhythms of messaging, which are conversational, brief, and fast. This is true of many of the forms of delay outlined in this chapter — they involve pushing back against the features of messaging, like read receipts and push notifications, that encourage fast responses.

Overall, these practices of affective arrhythmia illustrate that changes to mobile-mediated availability are not always rationally calculated but can instead be driven by sensations and feelings.

Rhythmic Manipulation

In the previous three categories, messaging rhythms are heavily informed by other rhythms — the rhythms of one's day (triaging), of other people (intimate asynchronicity) and of energy and emotion (affective arrhythmia). In rhythmic manipulation, participants were acutely aware of their messaging rhythms and sought to strategically slow them down to achieve specific availability-related ends. These practices can be divided into two categories on the basis of the ends being sought: goal-oriented rhythmic manipulation, which seeks immediate instrumental outcomes; and meaning-oriented rhythmic manipulation, which seeks to convey relational or social meanings.

Goal-Oriented Rhythmic Manipulation

One of the key reasons that participants used rhythmic manipulation was to avoid or minimise specific unwanted conversations. Often this was because the participant felt that the

conversations were not interesting or important relative to other tasks they were doing at the time. For example, Steve described a situation where a friend was trying to engage him in a conversation by sending long messages peppered with questions. Steve messaged back but manipulated his messaging rhythms, drawing out the length of time between his replies because he did not find the conversation “engaging” and “just wanted to do my own thing and stop getting distractions”. This is distinct from triaging because Steve was delaying his responses to extract himself from the conversation, as opposed to delaying his responses so he could reply at a more convenient time.

Other participants manipulated their messaging rhythms to avoid specific conversations by halting their replies when they felt a messaging exchange was about to tip over into an ongoing conversation. This practice suggests that once a messaging conversation has developed a certain degree of momentum it becomes difficult to exit, and that participants were able to read the flow of conversations and identify when these tipping points occurred. This was the case for Chelsea, who explained that she would cut off an exchange before it gained momentum:

If someone texts me and you know that it’s like the beginning of a conversation, and I don’t feel like having a conversation, I’ll delay that until I feel like having a conversation. Because you don’t wanna text them and then they text back, and then you text back, and then– you know? . . . So, if someone looks like they wanna talk about something and I’m not in the mood for it, I just don’t reply to begin with. I just leave it until I’m ready to chat.

Sometimes Chelsea made this assessment at the very start of an interaction but at other times she would sense a shift in the conversation partway through. When I asked Chelsea to explain how she knew that her interlocutor was bringing in “something else” that would make it difficult for her to leave the conversation she replied: “If it’s a piece of gossip. That’s how I know”. She scrolled through her phone finding examples. In one example, a friend sent a vague message that ended with an ellipsis. Chelsea explained, “When she put ‘dot-dot-dot’ I could tell that she wanted to have a *conversation* about it. Like a long-winded, ‘Let me explain what’s going on’ kinda thing.”

In this example, Chelsea did not respond partly because she was occupied with other things but also partly because she preferred to have some conversations face-to-face as it made them more enjoyable:

This is really bad to have recorded but I do like a good piece of gossip. Like I enjoy a good piece of gossip. And I'd rather just have that [conversation] face-to-face. It's more enjoyable. It's different to my friend texting me. [I'd respond] "Oh yeah cool" and put my phone away. When you're talking about it with someone [face-to-face] it's like "Really!? They did that!? Really!?"

Chelsea's expertise in the conversational rhythms of her friends enables her to identify points where the nature and intensity of a conversation is shifting. In response, she manipulates her own messaging rhythms, halting her responses to avoid entering the kind of conversation she does not have time for, or to save the conversation to have in-person.

Jiya also talked at length about the rhythmic manipulation she used to avoid some conversations. Jiya usually replied to messages quickly but would delay her responses when she wanted to avoid specific conversations or people in the hope that, when she eventually responded, the other person would be too busy to pick up the conversation.

If you don't want to talk to them then don't reply as soon. Wait till they're not as free. So if I reply and then you instantly reply me, then I might feel like, "Oh I don't want to continue the conversation" so I tend to wait maybe like one day or one hour and then I reply you. And maybe you're doing something else so you won't reply as soon.

As well as delaying her responses to protect her own time, like Steve or Chelsea, Jiya was also thinking about the rhythms of other people's everyday lives and trying to time her responses for moments when she thought they would be less available to interact, thus reducing the synchronicity and duration of the exchange. In our second interview, Jiya described a further strategy where she would gradually extend the delays between her messages to reduce momentum: "I just talk slower, then they reply slower, then suddenly, okay [exhales in relief]. It ended." This strategy was useful in situations where abruptly stopping the conversation would make it "too obvious" that Jiya was avoiding the person or the topic of conversation.

In a final form of goal-oriented rhythmic manipulation, participants delayed their responses to avoid requests for particular actions. Matthew, for example, explained that he would delay his responses to messages that contained requests he would rather avoid: “Like if somebody asked if I could do something, I might just sort of delay the response a tiny bit so that I don’t have to do it immediately.”

In other cases, participants delayed their responses in the hope that they could avoid a request entirely. Jasmine (19, F), for example, would pretend that she had not seen messages from colleagues in her work-related group chat when they were asking for someone to cover shifts: “I kinda just wait for someone to reply first hoping they’ll say ‘Yes, I can cover it’. ‘Cause, like, I *can* but I don’t *want to* this week.” Because the group chat had read receipt notifications, Jasmine screened messages through the preview function to make it less obvious that she was not responding intentionally. She explained, “I can get away with just pretending I was busy for the day, and that I didn’t see it until just now . . . Yeah, it’s a bit more obvious if I open it and just leave it.”

Meaning-Oriented Rhythmic Manipulation

As well as these goal-oriented delays, other forms of rhythmic manipulation were designed to convey social and relational meanings that extended beyond a single interaction. One example of this was delaying response in order to limit intimacy. For example, Z (20, M) explained a situation where he intentionally slowed down his responses to a person he had known at high school in order to convey that he was not interested in rekindling their friendship. This friend messaged Z and another of Z’s close friends, Ash, suggesting that they all catch up. Z and Ash spoke about the situation and agreed that they would prefer to leave the friendship in the past. Z explained to Ash how he would manage the situation by saying “I’ll reply really sporadically so it kind of looks like I’m just busy and unattainable.” When I asked Z to clarify what “sporadic” meant, he explained:

If they message me now it’d be, like, I’ll reply tomorrow morning or really late tonight . . . If they go, “Oh hey, how’s it going? Want to catch up?” I’m like, “Oh yeah, how are you? I’m busy at the moment. I’ll let you know when I’m free” . . . and then that’ll be it. They’ll probably just reply something like “Okay cool, let me know.” And I’ll just say “Okay”

another day later. So it's kind of like inferring, without being really rude, that you have other priorities. It's a way of subtly saying that it's probably not going to happen.

This strategy adds a further dimension to Wohn and Birnholtz' (2015) observation that people sometimes reply slowly to lower other people's expectations around communicative availability. Z's actions demonstrate that, in some instances, there is also a relational dimension to this practice as people seek to reduce expectations around the relationship more broadly.

Steve experienced a similar situation but employed a different form of rhythmic manipulation to manage it. A person messaged him via Facebook asking to meet up but Steve was not interested in spending time with them so he "ignored" the message, not responding at all. While he "didn't really want to interact with this person", Steve was concerned that they would interpret his actions as "an outright rejection" and be hurt or upset as a result. Steve wanted to avoid this, so he read the message via the notification preview rather than opening it and tripping the read receipt. He felt that this would prevent the person from "feeling so bad" by making his reason for not responding more ambiguous and "giving them" the possibility that his silence was accidental.

Participants often spoke about the difference between opening and not opening messages in situations where they did not intend to respond. As Steve states above, not opening a message was often rationalised as an act of kindness as it preserved some ambiguity about why they had not responded. This ambiguity is minimal, however, as the likelihood that a message is missed accidentally is extremely low. Given this limitation, Matthew, provided a more robust account of why not opening a message was perceived as polite. For Matthew, the social meaning of not opening messages was best understood relative to the alternative: opening the message, tripping the read receipt, and not responding. To open a message and not respond meant that "you've got more of a message to send by not responding straight away." Matthew continued:

If you've 'seen' it — oh that's like a dagger through the heart . . . I've got friends, like N for example, there will be guys that occasionally talk to her on Facebook [Laughs] who are interested in her and she'll tell the group "Oh there's this guy." And then she's like "Oh, shall I seen it? Shall I just, like, open it and then not respond?" And that's a way of conveying the message that perhaps you're not as keen or interested. Sometimes it might be a sign of, like, anger or frustration towards the person as well.

Thus, in certain circumstances, to open a message and not respond was a fairly definitive sign of disinterest or rejection. In comparison, to not open the message signalled that there was no ill will. As Matthew explained, “We’re aware that other people *have* most likely seen our message” but accept that they are trying to politely signal that they do not want to interact.

Participants also used their choice of platform to limit availability and intimacy with particular people through modulating messaging rhythms. Hannah, for example, explained how:

Snapchat is for catching up with people that you don’t want to talk to. You send them a snap, or you respond to their snap, but then the conversation doesn’t go for very long, so you’re kind of like, still keeping in touch but not so much that you have to talk to them or see them in person.

Hannah is thinking here of people from school who she was never very close with; people she would say hello to on the street but would not invite out for a coffee and a long conversation. Hannah felt that Snapchat was good for contacting these kinds of people because it did not encourage ongoing or in-depth conversations. It discouraged lengthy exchanges in several ways: it is “inconvenient” in that it requires a person to photograph something to send a message, it allows a comparatively small amount of text, and it has disappearing messages, meaning that if a message is opened while a person is occupied they are likely to forget to respond, lowering the expectation of continual responses. Snapchat’s truncated rhythms of exchange thus stem from the functions of the app but also from the accepted norms of use that stem from these functions (a person might forget to reply). The net effect was a platform that Hannah felt limited the communicative availability expected of her: “I think you can have trivial ‘How’s your day been?’ conversations, but once you actually want to talk about something you just switch to texting.”

This reiterates Burchell’s (2017a) observation that people attribute different levels of intimacy to different communication platforms. In the examples Burchell provides, his participants’ interpret the relational meanings of communication platforms on the basis of three factors: who it is used to communicate with (e.g. platforms used for more distant friends were understood as less intimate by association), how embodied it is (e.g. more embodied forms of communication are associated with greater intimacy), and how regularly it is used (e.g. platforms used more frequently were associated with more intimate relationships). Burchell

emphasises that while participants assumed that their judgments about the relative intimacy of platforms were widely accepted, there was in fact little consistency across participants' about the relative intimacy of platforms.

Hannah's experience expands on Burchell's findings in two ways. Firstly, it adds the rhythm of a platform to the three qualities that Burchell identifies as the basis for judgements about platform intimacy. For Hannah, her assessment of Snapchat as good "for catching up with people that you don't want to talk to" was based on the difficulty of developing and maintaining a reciprocal flow of messages. Secondly, where Burchell's participants largely used the relational meanings of platforms to *increase* intimacy over time, Hannah uses her choice of platform to *limit* the intimacy in certain relationships. That said, it is important to point out that, akin to Burchell's participants, Hannah's view of Snapchat was not shared by all other participants. For example, Matthew associated Snapchat with several of his closest friends because they were very active on the app and it was the most reliable platform for contacting them quickly.³⁷ This again points to the differences between participants in terms of the meanings they ascribed to some messaging technologies and practices — a theme I take up further in Chapter Eight.

While the above scenarios involve manipulating rhythms to convey relational meanings, participants also manipulated messaging rhythms to convey messages about identity and image. Several participants talked about manipulating their messaging rhythm to convey specific impressions about their relationship to their phones. Ferdinand (18, M), for example, tried to delay his messages to avoid giving the impression that he was always available or overly attached to his phone.

When I get messages, I normally like to just let it sit for a while cause for some strange reason I don't like other people thinking I'm just completely available all the time and I'm just on my phone the whole time. It's partly the fact that young people seem really addicted to their phones; I don't really wanna be seen like that.

³⁷ It is also often cited as an intimate platform because the ephemerality of disappearing messages encourages people to share more personal and intimate content, although this was rarely discussed by participants.

In other cases, participants delayed their responses in order to avoid seeming like they were “too keen” about the person or the conversation. Octavius Maximillian VII included this among several reasons why he might delay a response: “It might also be because that I don’t want whoever I’m texting to think that that’s all that I’m doing, that I’m just there waiting for them to message.” Avoiding being seen as overly eager was particularly important in new friendships or friendships with romantic potential, as participants were concerned that the other person could be put off if they approached the relationship with too much intensity.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the temporal practices that participants used in negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability. While all the practices described in this thesis involve a temporal dimension, in this chapter I have focused on practices where temporality is the primary mechanism through which availability is negotiated. More specifically, I’ve taken up the affordance of delay introduced in the prior chapter and considered the different forms of delay that are involved in the negotiation of unavailability. In describing the different delay-based practices that participants engaged in, and their sometimes-differing understandings of these practices, I have illustrated how affordances are open-ended and lead to a range of outcomes that depend on contextual factors.

In categorising and analysing these practices, I have drawn on Lefebvre’s ideas around rhythmanalysis to examine how different practices of delay relate to the rhythms of messaging as well as other biological, social, and technological rhythms. This chapter thus contributes to a broader body of literature that focuses on the multiple temporalities implicated in mobile and digital media use. It also builds on existing studies into the role of delay in messaging by providing an account of the varied forms delay takes in young adults messaging practices and the understandings that they attribute to these forms of delay.

Together with the prior chapter and the two following chapters, this chapter contributes to the thesis by providing evidence of the wide range of practices that young adults use in negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability. In particular, this chapter emphasises that while messaging encourages fast responses, there are a range of slower modes of exchange that can also characterise its use, including among intimate ties.

CHAPTER 5 — Written Tactics: Ritual Closers and Dissuasion

In this chapter, and in the following chapter, I focus on the affordance of expression that was identified in Chapter Three and expand on how this affordance was implicated in participants' negotiation of availability. Despite the ever-growing functionality of mobile messaging apps — some of which now include features like games and payment — expression remains central to their use. Smartphone messaging in particular allows not only alphanumerical communication but also the use of emoji, stickers, and gifs which enrich the affective dimensions of messaging interactions. As I noted in Chapter Three, because the affordance of expression is centred on language, it can be used in a wide range of circumstances to enact a wide range of practices.

Erving Goffman's (1956, 1967) work provides a helpful lexicon for parsing these different discursive practices. Like Lefebvre (1991/1974, 1995, 2004) — and in contrast to mainstream sociology of his time — Goffman championed the detailed observation of everyday practices. In particular, he sought a better understanding of the “interaction order” — the domain of everyday interactions between individuals. While Goffman focused primarily on face-to-face interactions, scholars have since applied his work to online and digitally mediated contexts (e.g., Hogan, 2010; Ling, 2008).

In this chapter and the next, I follow these scholars in combining Goffman's detailed attention to interpersonal interactions with a sensitivity towards the material affordances that can structure these interactions. In particular, I draw on Goffman's ideas about ritual, performance, and face-work to describe four different categories of discursive practices that participants used in managing and negotiating availability. In this chapter, I outline two of the four practices that participants used to end messaging interactions: ritual closers and dissuasion. In the following chapter, I describe the remaining two discursive practices: strategic ambiguity and deception. Participants used these latter two practices in a broader range of situations, including negotiating requests for face-to-face interactions that were issued via messaging.

Before describing ritual closers and dissuasion, I begin this chapter with a brief account of Goffman's work, including how his ideas have been used to analyse mediated interactions and

why they are especially applicable to the discursive practices of my participants. Then, in describing ritual closers and dissuasion, I provide an overview of when and how participants used each practice, unpack its relational dynamics by applying relevant concepts from Goffman's work, and consider how it is shaped by the materiality of messaging technologies. In doing so, I further advance the thesis' argument that young adults have developed a range of nuanced strategies for managing and limiting mobile-mediated availability.

Working with Goffman's Interaction Order

Goffman's work can be challenging to use, despite its ubiquity in media and communications research. As Jacobsen and Kristiansen (2014, p. 51) observes, Goffman's research methods were "eclectic" and ill-defined. He disparaged experimental and statistical methods — for instance, critiquing experimental methods as having "no substance outside the room in which the apparatus and subjects are located" (Goffman, 1971, pp. 20-21). His own approach, which he referred to as "microanalysis" (e.g., Goffman, 1983, p. 2), tended toward the opposite extreme; except for a few periods of ethnographic fieldwork, Goffman's data collection was informal, sporadic, and drew heavily on impressions from everyday life. Goffman also used snippets from novels, short stories, newspapers, and movies to inform and illustrate his ideas. He wove these observations together into works that were unconventionally literary in style (e.g., Goffman, 1965; see also Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2014, p. 42; Winkin & Leeds-Hurtwitz, 2013, p. 21).

Partly on account of these fuzzy methods and literary style, Goffman's oeuvre consists of a loosely bound collection of ideas that are never tidily integrated into one another. As Meyrowitz notes:

Goffman's most important principles are often left implicit or are slipped in surreptitiously at the end of paragraphs. To complicate matters further, Goffman rarely integrates a new work with his earlier works, he abandons his own sets of terminology as quickly as he creates them. (1990, p. 66)

Making a similar observation, Winkin and Leeds-Hurtwitz (2013, p. 52) describe Goffman's concepts as "'butterfly' concepts: beautiful but lasting only a season." Goffman also frequently re-examined the same phenomena through different metaphorical lenses (Jacobsen, 2010, p.

19).³⁸ This reworking of ideas through new concepts and metaphors produces a richly layered body of work. It also, however, creates ambiguity as Goffman rarely makes explicit his reasons for switching terminology or explains connections between related metaphors and concepts.

Consequently, when working with Goffman, a scholar is confronted with an array of often overlapping terms and metaphors that are constructed out of various observations and textual artefacts. This can make Goffman's ideas challenging to synthesize and apply as there are often multiple, closely related concepts or theories that could apply to any given finding. In the findings below, I often lean into the complexity of Goffman's overlapping concepts and metaphors by drawing on sets of related ideas from across his work, rather than trying to apply a single metaphor (such as 'the stage') as an overarching framework. In doing so, I am able to draw out and emphasise different elements of the practices being discussed.

Despite its challenges, Goffman's work provides an apt lens for analysing discursive negotiations of messaging availability for several reasons. Firstly, these practices are deeply quotidian — they are precisely the kind of seemingly-mundane everyday interactions that Goffman addressed. Further, his work is particularly suited to a discussion of discursive practices (as opposed to technical or temporal ones) as his analysis of interactions often focuses on their content. In other words, while Goffman occasionally addressed issues of timing and context, his work — particularly those sections that I draw on below—is primarily focused on understanding the discursive elements of interactions: what we say to each other, how we say it, and why. Lastly, his view of interactions as both reliant on and constitutive of people's understanding of themselves and others provides me with a way of unpacking my participants' discursive practices that is in keeping with the Symbolic Interactionist framework outlined in Chapter Two. Indeed, Goffman is frequently referred to as a central figure in the history of Symbolic Interactionism, despite his own misgivings about such a label (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2010).

³⁸ Goffman himself hinted at this intention, apparently once stating, "I snipe at a target from many different positions" (Jacobsen, 2010, p. 19).

Applying Goffman to Digital Contexts

An important difference between Goffman's work and this thesis is that he was largely disinterested in mediated interaction (e.g., Goffman, 1971, p. 70). On the rare occasions that he raises the subject of mediated communication it is largely restricted to brief asides (e.g., 1983, p. 2; see also Meyrowitz, 1990, p. 86; Rettie, 2009, pp. 423-4). It is therefore necessary to consider how his work can encompass technological concerns, in order to reconcile it with the sociotechnical approach used across this thesis.

Many scholars have applied Goffman's work to digitally mediated interactions, particularly as the domain of everyday interaction that Goffman studied has become heavily mediated. Some scholars have focused on extending Goffman's metaphors so that they better encompass the qualities of digital media. For example, Hogan (2010) expands Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor to include the different forms of self-presentation afforded by social networking sites. To Goffman's metaphor of "performances" that occur in synchronous "situations", Hogan adds the metaphor of "artefacts" that are displayed in asynchronous "exhibitions", arguing that this additional metaphor enables social media scholars to more accurately describe practices of online self-presentation.³⁹

Taking a different approach, other scholars have set aside Goffman's misgivings about the differences between mediated and face-to-face communication, applied his concepts to their empirical studies of mediated communication, and noted any necessary extensions or revisions that result. Marwick and boyd, for example, draw on Goffman in their seminal work on social media and self-presentation. They employ Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor to describe performativity within Myspace (boyd, 2006), Twitter (Marwick & boyd, 2011a), and Friendster (boyd, 2006; Marwick, 2005), and as demonstrated by online celebrities (Marwick & boyd,

³⁹ Meyrowitz (1986) is another example of this approach. Meyrowitz observes that electronic media structure behavioural situations in unique ways. To update Goffman's approaches to fit these new situations, Meyrowitz pairs Goffman with McLuhan, arguing that McLuhan's attention to the materiality of different media forms mitigates Goffman's disinterest in how media impact the variables he is studying.

2011b). In this work, the aim is not to extend Goffman's concepts but to employ them as tools to unpack social interactions that happen to occur online.

In a third approach, scholars have argued that Goffman's work has always involved technologically mediated contexts. Pinch (2010), for instance, positions Goffman as an unwitting sociologist of technology by highlighting the role that technologies and other material artefacts play within his examples, such as the surgical tools that are involved in Goffman's description of surgery as a team performance. Similarly, Meyrowitz (1990, p. 88) reviews Goffman's discussion of social interactions within a restaurant to argue that the situations he studied are not defined by spatial fields, as Goffman claims, but rather by perceptual fields. Thus, for Meyrowitz, Goffman's ideas can be easily applied to mediated contexts as they too are defined by perceptual fields.

In applying Goffman to the messaging interactions of participants, I draw primarily on these latter two approaches. Like Marwick and boyd, I begin with my own empirical work, applying Goffman's approaches and concepts to illuminate the experiences of my participants and allowing extensions of Goffman's ideas to develop out of these observations. I do so, however, in the knowledge that scholars such as Pinch have reframed Goffman's work as already applicable to mediated relations. I do not draw heavily on scholars who have revised and extended Goffman's work, such as Hogan, as much of this work has focused on social media or on conceptualising mobile-mediated presence rather than absence, neither of which are of direct relevance for my discussion.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ A full account of how Goffman has been applied to digital media is beyond the scope of this thesis, however it is worth noting that his ideas have been used in early studies of online message boards (Ross, 2007) and dating sites (Ellison et al., 2006) through to more recent studies of social networking sites (Lincoln & Robards, 2016) and influencer selfies (Abidin, 2016). Goffman has been particularly instrumental in the study of mobile communication. As Ling (2010, p. 277) notes, "it is hard to find another theorist who has been so liberally applied to the study of mobile communication." Initially, much of the work applying Goffman to mobile communication concentrated on the performances involved in making and receiving phone calls (e.g., Fortunati, 2005; Ling, 2004, 2008). Other significant studies employed Goffman's ideas about presence to analyse how mobile communication enables new kinds of social encounters between physically distant individuals (Ito & Okabe, 2005; Rettie, 2009). In another key example, Ling (2008) draws on Goffman's discussion of ritual interaction to argue that mobile interactions can foster social solidarity by enabling people to perform small, reciprocal

Ritual-Closers

Ending Conversations Through Phrases, Abbreviations, and Images

To end conversations, participants often employed some kind of conversation closer: a statement or symbol that signalled the end of the interaction. This practice was also observed by Birnholtz et al. (2017) in their study of messaging meta-data and content. Specifically, they note that people often begin with subtle closing phrases (e.g. “I’m getting sleepy”) but follow up with more explicit ones if the initial efforts fail (e.g. “Goodnight!”). In this section, I expand on their observation by offering my participants’ accounts of when, how, and why they use conversation closers and using Goffman’s concept of ritual to highlight the relational dynamics at play.

In contrast to Birnholtz et al.’s (2017) observation, many participants described using quite explicit conversation closers without first providing subtler versions:

Let’s say it’s late at night, like 11, and I want it to end I’ll say something like, “I’m going to sleep, I’ll talk to you later”. Basically like, “Sorry but I have to go to bed now. I’m about to crash, I’m tired” . . . That’s kind of how you abruptly end it without it being rude to the other person. [If it’s during the day] I’ll say something like, “Oh anyways, I gotta get back to my essay”, or, “Gotta get back to work, my break just ended.” (Z, 20, M)

If I do want to end a conversation it’ll just be like, “Talk to you later.” (Bill, 23, M)

There’ll be times where I explicitly tell someone you know, “I’m going to do this now — I’ll talk to you later” . . . A relatively short, blunt-ish message. You know, “Gonna go off and do this. ttyl.” (Matthew, 20, M)

These conversations closers are explicit and direct; they clearly explain that the interaction is ending.

Another variation, evident in Matthew’s comment above, was using colloquial abbreviations to end conversations, particularly ‘ttyl’ meaning ‘talk to you later’ and ‘gtg’ meaning ‘got to go’. One participant, Erin (22, F), frequently used ‘ttyl’ and ‘gtg’ and the phrase ‘gotta go’ to end

communicative acts..

conversations. When Erin typed these phrases into the search bar of her messaging apps it returned a long list of examples, including: “Okie, I gtg do my work now”; “I gtg send stuff”; “gotta go for class now”; “kk, gotta go find beds now”; “ttyl woodworking”; “ttyl me gonna go nap”. She explained the advantage of these expressions by saying, “Your gtg’s and your ttyl’s, it comes so naturally! It just like, slips out of your fingers.” For Erin, these go-to phrases lowered the cognitive burden of figuring out how to wrap up a conversation.

Participants also used images to signal the end of a conversation, including emoji, stickers, and Facebook Messenger’s thumbs up button. These images were typically sent alone, without accompanying text, and provided a way of acknowledging the previous message without inviting further discussion. For example, Jasmine (19, F) explained that she would send an emoji or a thumbs-up when ending a conversation because:

I feel bad if I don’t reply to their message completely and so the thumbs up thing sort of rounds it off. Or I’ll send just an emoji or something . . . ‘cause like, it shows that I’m not ignoring them, but also I’m not really adding anything to the conversation.

Studies have shown that people use stickers and emoji (and the emoticons they evolved from) as substitutes for words (Danesi, 2016, pp. 140-147), for clarifying tone and conveying emotion (e.g., Lo, 2008; Stark & Crawford, 2015), and as a way of smoothing communication by maintaining a friendly tone (Danesi, 2016, pp. 18-21).⁴¹ In this latter role, emoji serve a phatic function — they support pleasant interactions by enabling people to present a positive attitude. As Danesi (2016, pp. 18-21) notes, emoji are often used in this way at the start of a message where they set a warm tone, at the end of a message where they soften departures, and during lulls in conversation as a way of avoiding awkward silences.

Using stickers and emoji as conversational closers introduces an additional category of phatic use. As closers, their primary purpose is to end a conversation politely and warmly rather than to convey a specific symbolic or affective meaning. One participant, Bill (23, M), raised this point directly, describing how he would finish a conversation with a thumbs-up or a smiley face because it “gives you that positive image”. Emoji fulfil this phatic function because they depict a

⁴¹ When used to encode emotion, emoji provide companies that mine user data with economically valuable insights into their users (Stark & Crawford, 2015).

smiling face, human or otherwise, and/or by virtue of their “cuteness” (Negra et al., 2016). That said, emoji can also convey symbolic meanings in their use as conversation closers. Facebook’s thumbs-up sticker, for example, ends a conversation politely by not encouraging a reply while also signalling agreement through the approval connoted by a thumbs up. Similarly, ending a conversation with a sticker of two animals hugging, as one participant recalled doing, discourages further responses while also conveying intimacy and fondness.

A final form of conversational closer that participants described was sending an ‘x’ either alone or at the end of a final message. Closing conversations between friends with an ‘x’ was a highly gendered practice, mentioned primarily by female participants and in reference to messaging female friends. As Maisie (30, F) noted:

A lot of people put an x at the end . . . like ‘kiss’, so you kind of know that’s the end of the conversation. It’s as if like in real-life, you kiss goodbye. That happens a lot, especially with female friends.

Maisie’s comment is typical of participants’ descriptions in that she observes the practice as gendered and in that she explains the practice through reference to kissing goodbye. All participants who discussed sending or receiving ‘x’s explained it as the equivalent to a hug or kiss goodbye.

Conversation Closers as Ritual Interaction

Drawing on Goffman, these conversational closers can be understood as a form of ritual interaction — an idea developed across much of Goffman’s work but addressed most comprehensively in his book of the same name, *Interaction Ritual* (1967). In this book, Goffman extends Durkheim’s (1912/1995) thesis that rituals are the building blocks of social cohesion within religious societies to argue that similar cohesion-building rituals can be found in the mundane interactions between people in contemporary secular societies (Goffman, 1967, p. 47). Goffman sees ritual interactions in a wide range of everyday situations, essentially wherever two or more people are engaged in a moment of mutual engagement and recognition. Goffman describes ritual acts as involving deference, whereby one or more participants in an interaction displays respect and appreciation for the other. These ritual interactions can be as formal and explicit as a military salute or as quotidian as expressing sadness at a goodbye or

acknowledging a stranger who has moved aside to let you pass on the street. While Goffman largely presumes that ritual interactions can only occur face-to-face, Ling (2008) argues that communication technologies — particularly mobile technologies — can facilitate ritual interactions that are every bit as meaningful as those that occur face-to-face.

Understanding conversation closers as forms of ritual interaction highlights the fact that they take place in contexts where messaging partners are seeking to foster, or maintain, a positive impression. They do not occur in situations where people are not concerned about fostering a positive impression and would, for instance, happily ignore or block the other person's messages without warning or explanation. It also highlights the fact that these small acts have a cumulative effect of building social solidarity. Conversation closers were used to demonstrate regard for an interlocutor's situation by ensuring that they were aware the conversation was ending, thus demonstrating investment in the relationship. This also illustrates the entanglement of availability and unavailability: by making their unavailability explicit, a person signalled the value they placed on being available and connected to that person.

Conversations closers can be further understood through a specific subset of Goffman's ideas about ritual interaction. He repeatedly notes that the beginnings and endings of interactions are typically marked by practices that signal a transition in availability and attention (1971, p. 79, 1974, p. 250-251, 1979, p. 2). His most substantial discussion of these practices occurs in *Relations in Public*, where he describes greetings and farewells as "ritual displays that mark a change in the degree of access" between people (1971, p.79). He initially labels these actions "access rituals" (p. 79), though he later also refers to them as "ritual bracketing" or "ritual brackets" (p. 80). These access rituals play an important role in bookending an interaction by beginning and ending interactions with displays of mutual respect and positive intention. They are also important in signalling and clarifying expectations about when to engage, or not engage, the other person, thereby smoothing over otherwise awkward transitions in focus and attention.

Conversational closers fulfil this function of signalling a change in availability and do so in a way that fosters a positive tone by demonstrating regard for the other. These functions are important for the same reasons they are important in face-to-face interaction — that is, they end the interaction on a positive tone that can then be carried over into future interactions.

However, the smooth execution of *messaging* endings is perhaps even more important, or delicate, than those in face-to-face interactions because of the lack of embodied social cues in messaging and subsequent potential for misunderstanding. This means that ending conversations can be fraught as people do not have additional cues at their disposal to understand why someone is no longer responsive.

Goffman (1971, pp. 82-84) also observes that access rituals are performed differently depending on contextual factors, such as how intimately people know each other and, when ending interactions, how long it will be until they next interact. Likewise, participants described how closers within messaging conversations often depended on contextual factors. One example of this is that, as suggested previously, sending an 'x' was a common practice between female friends or romantic partners, but not between friends of other genders. For some participants, the relationship between interlocutors also determined whether a ritual closer was required. Erin, for example, described how she would just "ghost" — that is, abruptly stop replying — in conversations with acquaintances but would use 'gtg', 'ttyl' and other ritual closers with closer friends. This was because, for Erin, "you care enough [about close friends] to let them know you're still interested in the conversation [and] you'll come back to it later".

Participants' use of ritual-closers also differed depending on situational factors. For example, when two people were messaging to coordinate a face-to-face interaction that would happen shortly, there might be no need to close the conversation, or the ritual-closer might refer to the impending face-to-face interaction, by taking the form of a comment like "see you soon". In other instances, the closers would refer to important events happening in the lives of one or all messaging partners, such as using phrases "all the best" or "happy studying" during an exam period. As well as signalling the end of a conversation, closers like these demonstrated deference by reinforcing a shared experience or demonstrating awareness of and empathy for the experience of another.

The Technical Shaping of Ritual Closers

There are two aspects of mobile messaging that enable any discursive practice. The first, is that for people with the required physical and technical abilities, messaging has an affordance of

alphanumeric communication. The second is that, as discussed in Chapter Three, messaging also has an affordance of selection — that is, it allows people to communicate with people selectively. In combination, these affordances allow for the deployment of discursive strategies as a means of managing availability with specific individuals or groups. More meaningfully, however, there are other qualities of messaging apps and mobile devices that shape specific kinds of discursive practices.

In his accounts of ritual interactions, Goffman largely focused on situations where interactions were bound to a time and place and had a clear beginning and end. Messaging interactions are more complicated; they can take the form of brief, highly synchronous exchanges that are similar to face-to-face conversations, but they can also take the form of asynchronous exchanges that stretch over long periods with gaps of varying lengths and no clear beginning or end. Messaging can also take the form of brief instrumental interactions that lack sufficient length or depth to be considered a conversation, such as a single question and answer. Consequently, where face-to-face interactions have clear endings that can be marked with access rituals — a wave, a hug, picking up keys, putting on a coat — many messaging exchanges do not require ritual-closers either because they do not have a clear end or because they were not understood to be a *conversation* in the first place.

For example, when I asked Kevin (21, M) how his messaging conversations ended, he explained that my question was irrelevant: “‘Cause with my friends it like, it never ends. You’ll never say ‘bye’; it just continues. Like there’s no end, so you wouldn’t have to say ‘Oh, I’m going now, bye.’” This is not to say that Kevin was literally messaging his friends constantly but rather that he and his friends perceived gaps in the conversation as “pauses” rather than endings. Similarly, Octavius Maximilian VII (18, M) did not think ritual-closers were required for SMS because he used it for “shorter correspondences” than other messaging platforms. This meant, “there’s less of an expectation to reply continuously . . . it’s usually a short statement or a question and then an answer.” Consequently, Octavius did not view his messaging interactions as “conversations” and so did not feel a need to end them via ritual-closers. These examples demonstrate how participants felt that different kinds of messaging exchanges — synchronous conversations vs never-ending flows vs brief instrumental exchanges — involved different expectations about availability which made ritual closers more or less relevant. Participants mostly felt the need to

use closing-rituals in messaging exchanges that involved a short period of highly synchronous interaction. These involved higher expectations of ongoing responses making it more important to signal a change in their availability to respond.

Beyond mobile communication in general, there are also specific aspects of smartphone messaging apps that shape the performance of ritual-closers. Previously, the much higher costs of messaging, the more common practice of allowing phones batteries to run flat, and the lower expectations that a mobile phone was always on hand, led to lower expectations of a prompt reply. As smartphone messaging apps have changed these conditions, expectations of reciprocal availability have increased (Ling, 2016). At the same time, it has become easier to have extended highly synchronous exchanges as keypads are easier to use and costs are much lower. Several participants also referred to the convenience of using messaging apps on laptop computers when having extended conversations. In these conditions, there is a greater likelihood that a person will perceive it negatively if their messaging partner stops replying and so there is a greater need to manage their impression by clearly ending the conversation.

Messaging apps have similarly shaped the form that ritual closers take. It is, for example, more viable to send a message just containing a sticker or emoji now that these visual elements are integrated into messaging keyboards and sending and receiving messages is essentially free. Using the Facebook Messenger thumbs-up button is even more strongly encouraged as it is a default button on the main typing screen of Facebook Messenger. The button disappears once you begin typing, meaning that the thumbs up can only be sent alone. This convenience encourages liberal and therefore increasingly standardised and reciprocal use.

Dissuasion

Another discursive tactic that participants used in negotiating availability was to adopt a dissuasive messaging style. This messaging style is characterised by short and/or blunt messages that dissuade an interlocutor from continuing a messaging interaction. Participants used this dissuasive style in three distinct modes.

The first mode involved avoiding or ending specific conversations. In this context, participants adopted a dissuasive style to indicate that they were disinterested in or unable to continue an

interaction, and thus discourage the other from responding. For example, Matthew (20, M) explained:

When I want to wind down a conversation, generally my responses will become a lot shorter and sharper — “Yep, keep me posted”, you know, “No worries”. Just no substance to it . . . Just the bare minimum response I guess . . . [reads out examples from recent conversations] “Keep me posted”, “Sounds good” . . . “We’ll figure it out”, “We’ll be alright”, “Thanks”, “Thank you”, “Good luck”.

Another participant, Maisie (30, F), provided a similar explanation:

[If you want to end or avoid a conversation] you could be very like: “Cool.” “Okay.” “Great.” ‘Cause I think you *can* set a tone in text messages, as much as it can get quite hazy. One worded replies are quite good . . . quite dismissive. There’s no asking questions to show interest . . . One-word replies are just kind of direct and there’s no expansion [on the topic] to indicate that you’re interested in any way.

By sending a reply with “no substance to it”, participants signalled to messaging partners that a conversation was ending. As Maisie explained, there’s nothing to show you’re interested in continuing the conversation and the brevity of the message suggested inattention. In this way, dissuasive messages are akin to, or even overlap with, conversation closers, but are distinct as they are often used prior to the eventual end of the conversation as it can take some time for an interaction to wind down.

Dissuasion is also distinct from conversation closers because participants used it in a second mode whereby the aim was not just to dissuade the other person from continuing the conversation but to also dissuade them from continuing the relationship. In these contexts, a blunt messaging style was used consistently throughout all messaging conversations with a particular person to indicate that the message sender was not interested in establishing or maintaining a relationship with them. For instance, Bill (23, M) explained:

If I don’t want contact [from a particular person] I’ll tend to limit my exposure to them in various ways. Like one [way] can be that if they ask me something it’ll just be a one worded answer, ah, just be really boring and blunt so that they sort of ah, go away [Laughs] . . . Yeah, sorta hope they get the message.

Danielle (19, F) also spoke about this form of dissuasion, highlighting the role of questions in showing interest:

I think a really easy way to convey disinterest is just by replying like short and straight to the point. And then not asking a question back. So after a while they kind of get the hint if they're always the one asking the question. Yeah, I think that's, like, the easiest way.

This form of dissuasion was often combined with the practice of rhythmic manipulation described in the prior chapter, whereby the speed of responses is intentionally slowed. In the context of this form of relational dissuasion, slowing response times reinforced the message of disinterest in the relationship.

For example, Z (20, M), often used both these techniques together when responding to people who he wanted to distance himself from. When these people messaged him to start a conversation or to arrange spending time together, Z needed a way to communicate that he was not interested in developing or maintaining intimacy. He did not want to ignore the message altogether because he felt this would make him appear "rude" or "antisocial" so, instead, he limited the frequency and content of his messages to demonstrate that he was not interested in maintaining or fostering a close relationship:

I will delay my responses. I'll reply really sporadically so it kind of looks like I'm just busy and unattainable. Which is my way of subtly saying 'it's probably not going to happen. And the way I will reply is different too. So if they're sort of really enthusiastic and that, even though it sounds really horrible, I will be quite short in my replies . . . And I'll use punctuation. It just sort of gives off the air that you're a bit- not cold but, like, stand off-ish. And if the responses are delayed then it's kind of the nice way of showing someone, "Well look, I have other things that I'm doing with my time. It's not going to work out."

Z described using this approach to wind back relationships with people he had known in high school who wanted to remain close but who he felt he had grown apart from. He also described using it to distance himself from classmates who he felt wanted a closer friendship. He summarised this practice as acting "neutral and not being too enthused or too rude as a way of showing that that's where the connection stays and that's where its gonna stay."

So far, I have addressed how the tactic of dissuasion is motivated by and directed towards specific messaging partners, either to end conversations or to limit relationships. There is, however, a third mode of dissuasion whereby people cultivate a blunt messaging persona across all, or most, of their messaging activity, regardless of recipient. One example of this was Steve (21, M), who intentionally crafted a minimal, inexpressive messaging style across most of his communication. For Steve, this was largely driven by his dislike of messaging: he felt the medium was superficial and distracting and hoped that his messaging style would dissuade people from initiating substantive conversations with him. One way of achieving this was avoiding emoji, which he felt would show “that I’m just using [messaging] functionally, in a practical sense, just to get my message across.” He also limited the written content of his messages in most day-to-day exchanges.

I’ll be very curt and short sometimes. If someone gives me heaps of text and a few smileys, I’ll just give them a quick answer. Unless it’s something where they need a decent answer. Like if they’re asking me an important question then I’ll give them some time or like a long answer.

Steve drew on the discursive features of messaging to craft a communication style that was intentionally unexpressive.

In doing so, he hoped that people would “see the difference between how I talk in person and on social media or messaging apps” and adjust their behaviour accordingly. He explained the two key outcomes he was hoping to achieve:

Well, firstly that they just don’t get offended that I don’t give them detailed answers . . .
Second, I just want to get bothered less. I just find it– I find it pretty annoying when I get heaps of messages that weren’t really necessary because it’s a distraction.

The intention here, as with other similar participants, was to reduce his overall messaging availability by cultivating an image as a “bad texter” — an image that could be produced by rejecting the full expressive capacity of messaging platforms and, instead, limiting message content and length to connote reluctance and distance. As above, this form of dissuasion could also include temporal elements: intentionally responding slowly further minimised the time spent messaging and reinforced to others that messaging was not the most effective mode of getting in touch. While Steve’s aim was partly to influence the perceptions and actions of others

through his use of messaging, ultimately this practice was informed by his relationship to messaging itself. As such, it provides another example of Ihde's (1990) alterity relations, whereby a technology takes on the properties of a quasi-other. For Steve, messaging is a superficial and distracting other, the use of which needs to be carefully managed.

While Steve was recruited as part of Cohort A, his approach to messaging was similar to participants from Cohort B who likewise limited their messaging availability due to their resistance to messaging and mobile devices more broadly. Unsurprisingly, the practice of dissuasive messaging he used was fairly common among Cohort B participants. One participant from Cohort B, who chose the pseudonym Jeff Styles (18, M), found messaging to be a frustratingly inefficient mode of communication. Rather than sending messages back and forth, Jeff preferred to talk in person or over the phone as issues could be discussed more quickly and with greater clarity. When I asked Jeff if he did things to reduce the amount of messaging he received he explained, "When people do message me I reply pretty bluntly. If they ask me 'How's it going?' I just say, 'I'm good.'" As with Steve, Jeff used these dissuasive responses to encourage people to call him rather than messaging if they wanted an extensive conversation.

Dissuasion as Impression Management

Each of these dissuasive messaging techniques can be understood as acts of impression management. Impression management is one of Goffman's (1965) fundamental principles of interpersonal interaction whereby individuals are cognisant of the impression that others are forming of them and seek to convey a specific impression through their behaviour. When trying to discourage someone from continuing with a specific conversation, dissuasion is used to create an impression of busyness or disinterest. When trying to discourage someone from continuing a relationship, dissuasion is used to create an impression of aloofness and distance. When trying to discourage someone from expecting fast or detailed responses, dissuasion is used to create an impression of being an inexpressive and reluctant user of messaging.

However, this process of impression management is complicated by the fact that, from the receiver's perspective, different modes of dissuasion appear the same despite their different intended meanings. In particular, the two forms of dissuasion that are continuous—i.e. not just about ending one particular conversation—both involve essentially the same behaviour but

have very different meanings: one is an attempt to avoid developing a relationship while the other is an attempt to avoid and limit messaging interactions. In other words, Steve's attempt to discourage people from messaging him because he prefers other forms of communication involves brief and sporadic messages, as does Z's attempt to avoid particular people because he does not want to develop a friendship with them.

Goffman's discussion about the definition of situations provides a framework for thinking through how participants and their friends negotiated this issue. One of Goffman's central concerns throughout *The Presentation of Everyday Life*, (1959) is how people understand the situations that they are in and act accordingly. He describes this as "the definition of the situation" and notes that there are often multiple possible definitions for any given situation (1959, p. 9). When engaging in an interaction, people are usually trying to advocate for a particular definition that suits their purpose (1959, p. 9). Importantly for understanding dissuasion, Goffman describes how, in trying to establish a particular definition, people are often attempting to control the responses of others. He explains:

Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his [sic] motive for having this objective, it will be in his [sic] interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him [sic]. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he [sic] can influence this definition by expressing himself [sic] in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his [sic] own plan. (1959, pp. 2-3)

This dynamic is central to the use of dissuasion as it is an action that primarily seeks to influence how messaging partners behave. In the second mode of dissuasion described above, the intention is to discourage the other person from continuing to pursue the relationship, while in the third, the intention is to train others to expect only minimal replies and to reserve longer conversations for in person or over the phone whenever possible.

For this attempt at influencing behaviour to succeed however, the other party needs to understand and accept the intended definition (Goffman, 1959, pp. 9-10). The accounts of participants suggest that, despite the outward similarity between these two practices, people are fairly adept at recognising which form of dissuasion a messaging partner is intending to

convey. While participants did not discuss the overlap between these two practices, they often discussed each one individually, indicating that they generally understood when other people were trying to discourage them from initiating or pursuing a friendship or when people preferred not to message. Danielle, for instance, felt people generally understood when someone was trying to dissuade them from pursuing a friendship:

I think the young generation is pretty familiar [with it] in that sense, like you can tell when someone doesn't want to talk to you, and you can also tell the methods of how to convey that you don't want to talk to someone . . . I think a really easy way to convey disinterest is just by replying like short and straight to the point, and then not asking a question back. So after a while they kind of get the hint.

Participants also described having friends who would respond very slowly and/or bluntly because they disliked messaging. Gen (19, F), for instance, explained how one of her housemates "just never replies to anything". Everyone was aware of his limited responsiveness, however, and it was widely accepted as a quirk of his personality rather than an effort to distance himself from others.

As these examples suggest, there was often other contextual information that helped participants understand the intended 'definition of the situation'. Dissuasion was more likely to be relational in situations where participants did not have a close relationship with the other person or where their relationship had changed significantly, such as having spent a lot of time apart. In contrast, dissuasion was more likely to be about disliking messaging in contexts where the participant knew the other person used a similar messaging style with other friends, where the person was warm and engaging in person, or where they knew the person well enough to have explicitly discussed their communication preferences and practices with them.

Goffman also notes, however, that while a working consensus about the definition of the situation is required for an interaction to proceed smoothly, there are many events that can threaten or undermine a proposed definition, with disruptive implications. This will be discussed in Chapter Seven, where I return to the use of dissuasion to limit a relationship and discuss situations in which female participants described people apparently willfully ignoring their attempts to end the relationship.

The Technical Mediation of Dissuasion

Conveying a dissuasive tone via messaging has arguably been made easier by recent changes to messaging technologies that have broadened the expressive capacity of messaging communication. Earlier forms of SMS had limitations, like per-message costs, character limits, and awkward keypads, that made brevity practical. As these limits have been removed with the shift to smartphones and messaging apps, the expressive capacity of messaging has expanded; while still primarily alphanumeric, messages can be longer, are cheaper or practically free, mobile keypads are more user-friendly, and images, gifs, stickers and emojis can be easily added. Many messaging apps can also be used on devices, such as tablets and computers, that are even easier to type on than smartphones. As a consequence, longer and more elaborate messages have become much more common and short, blunt messages are no longer the standard mode of messaging expression. This means that keeping messages short and their content blunt and banal can function as a subtle expression of unavailability because, when brevity is no longer the norm, it becomes conspicuous and can take on meaning as a signal of unavailability.

It is also worth noting that because messaging is primarily a written form of communication, people have few other options for communicating that they are disinterested in a conversation or a relationship, or that they need to shift their attention elsewhere. In person, for instance, we have a range of cues for suggesting the current interaction is no longer our priority, such as picking up a jacket, digging out car keys, and checking the time. Similarly, the positioning of our body, such as whether we stand or sit, can indicate that we are not committing to an interaction in the first place. With messaging, the lack of body language and vocal cues leave only the timing and content of messages as factors that can be modified to signal a reluctance to engage. Consequently, while they are relatively blunt tools compared to the subtleties of body language and facial expression, they are used heavily in the context of messaging where these more delicate modes of communication are unavailable.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the idea of discursive practices — behaviours that are designed to manage and resist availability and are executed primarily through the content of messages. It

has outlined two categories of dissuasive practices — conversation closers and dissuasion — and explained how and when participants used these practices in limiting and negotiating messaging availability. These two categories are similar in that both can relate to the ending of conversations and can be fairly indirect techniques for negotiating unavailability. However, dissuasion is also used to achieve other relational and communicative outcomes, namely, limiting intimacy and conveying a general dislike of messaging.

This chapter has introduced the work of Goffman as a framework for unpacking the relational dynamics of discursive practices and applied concepts like ritual, deference, and impression management to highlight their relational dynamics. In keeping with the methodology of this thesis, the chapter has also addressed the role of materiality in shaping these practices by considering how conversation closers and dissuasion are enabled, or even encouraged, through particular features and qualities of messaging apps and mobile devices.

The next chapter introduces two further forms of discursive practice. It follows the same analytical approach, pairing Goffman's concepts with an affordances-informed reading of how materiality likewise shapes these interpersonal performances.

Overall, this chapter has added to the findings of the prior two chapters by illustrating further practices through which young people negotiate mobile-mediated unavailability. As will be discussed further in the following chapters, discursive practices in particular highlight the complex social and relational dynamics that are at play in these negotiations.

CHAPTER 6 — Written Tactics: Strategic Ambiguity and Deception

This chapter outlines two further discursive practices that participants used in managing their availability to others. These practices are strategic ambiguity and deception. Where the practices outlined in the previous chapter — closers and dissuasion — were used for ending conversations, participants used strategic ambiguity and deception in a wider range of contexts. These contexts included managing availability for messaging communication, and availability for face-to-face interactions that were organised through messaging. As in the previous chapter, I employ Goffman's work as an analytical framework for unpacking the relational dynamics of these practices. In this chapter, I outline strategic ambiguity and deception in turn before ending with a brief discussion about the significance of discursive practices as a category.

Strategic Ambiguity

When negotiating availability, participants described using vague, ambiguous, or open-ended statements to restrict their connections to others. This practice took two primary forms. In the first, participants sent intentionally ambiguous messages when a messaging conversation became uncomfortable, awkward, or confusing. Jiya (21, F) for instance, would send a message saying "haha" when she felt uncomfortable about a conversation or uncertain about how to respond. She explained: "I just use a lot of 'Haha that's funny.' And then if they don't reply, I just don't reply. But then if they do reply, I just continue being like, 'Hahahaha'." When I asked Jiya why she used 'haha', she emphasised the ambiguity of the phrase, saying that "It can mean anything . . . It seems like you replied to them, but you didn't actually reply directly, but they think you replied." Responding with "haha" allowed Jiya to preserve the appearance of engaging in the conversation without contributing in a meaningful way or, she hoped, revealing her discomfort. This restricted her emotional availability by limiting the transparency and connection in the interaction. She also hoped that her lack of substantive reply would reduce the conversation's momentum, potentially bringing it to an end.

The second, more commonly discussed form of strategic ambiguity occurred in messaging conversations about face-to-face interactions. Here, participants used vague phrases like “I might swing by”, “I’ll let you know”, “I’ll see how I feel”, or “Yeah, maybe” to avoid explicitly accepting or rejecting invitations to meet in person. These phrases allowed participants to delay making a decision about their availability or to avoid committing either way by never following up. For example, Steve (21, M) explained that when he sent “maybe” messages, it means:

I’m unsure at the time . . . I’m not in the emotional state of mind to do it but I think that I might be later. So I’m unsure of my emotional state. And also . . . there could be something on, or there’s a clash of events possibly, and I have to choose one or the other, and I don’t know what to choose at the time.

For Steve, using vague language enabled him to keep his options open in situations where he was not ready to make a definitive statement about his availability.

Participants also described situations where they, or their friends, used ambiguous responses despite being certain that they would *not* be attending a gathering. In these contexts, being ambiguous enabled them to avoid or at least delay having to say no. Belinda (25, F) for example, described a typical messaging scenario between her and a male friend who she had previously dated. She explained that he often messaged her to ask what she was doing. When Belinda responded that she was at home, the friend would message back asking her to “come out”. Belinda explained her usual response:

I know I’m going to say no, but instead of saying “No” or just not responding, I’m like, “Yeah, nah, I’ll let you know.” And then 20 minutes later I’ll be like, “Sorry, I can’t”, even though I already knew I was going to say no.

Belinda did this partly to delay the discomfort of saying no and partly to let her friend down more softly by hinting that the answer was no before saying it directly. As she explained, “hopefully he’ll already know that I’m saying no” because if she was wanting to see him, she would have responded with more enthusiasm.

Another participant, Gen (19, F), felt similarly. She explained:

It's difficult to be straight up "no" — it's too hard, for me. It's easier to be like, "Oh, maybe." "Oh, I'll let you know how it goes." Like that kind of maybe, wishy-washy — it's like a soft, softer— it's like a really bad thing.

Gen, like several other participants, noted that conversations about availability are usually franker between close friends: "You can tell who your closer friends are though. They're the people who just say straight up 'No' and that's fine." The difference, she felt, was that with closer friends there was less chance of either party taking offence that the other was unavailable because there would be many more opportunities to spend time together. Consequently, the strategic use of ambiguity was more commonly applied to weaker ties, where open discussions about unavailability were perceived as riskier and more awkward.

In situations like Gen's and Belinda's, strategic ambiguity is used not to keep options open but rather to mitigate the discomfort of saying 'no' by avoiding or delaying having to say it. They both hoped that the vague response — saying they *might* attend — signalled that they were not going without them having to say it outright.

Ambiguity as Impression Management

The processes involved in maintaining smooth social interactions are at the core of much of Goffman's work and several of the behaviours he observes are at play in these strategic uses of ambiguity. In particular, we can interpret these practices through his framework of impression management. One impression management strategy that Goffman (1953, pp. 332-334) outlines is hedging: a "preventative strategy" in which people avoid committing themselves to a clear position or stance, particularly in situations where future communication may make that position untenable or contradictory. Using strategic ambiguity within messaging conversations is a form of hedging as it involves withholding a definitive impression of the sender's thoughts, particularly one that may become untenable as the conversation progresses. For instance, when Jiya uses "haha" during awkward messaging interactions, she maintains a "margin of safety" (Goffman, 1953, p. 333) by sending a message with multiple possible interpretations. We see these same dynamics playing out when participants use ambiguity to manage or avoid face-to-face interactions. Responses like "Yeah, maybe" or "I'll see how I feel" are likewise a form of hedging: they enable people to keep their options open by neither committing to, nor

declining, an invitation. Ultimately, this means that they can avoid contradicting themselves later, either by attending an event when they had said they would not, or, more treacherously, by not attending when they had said that they would.

Ambiguity can be further understood through Goffman's related concept of face-work. He discusses this idea at length in *Ritual Interaction* where he explains that a person's "face" is not wholly owned or controlled by them but rather exists in relation to others (1967, p. 7). He emphasises that a "person's face clearly is something that is not lodged in or on his [sic] body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them" (1967, p. 7). In other words, a person's face is their standing within an interaction, as judged by the other people involved, and face-work is the labour of trying to manage the impressions of these others.

As a form of face-work, conversational ambiguity is primarily an attempt to obscure the fact that a person is uncomfortable or uncertain about a conversation as this may lead to the other person forming a negative impression of them, and thus a loss of face. It's a form of "avoidance face-work", as the risk to face is mitigated by avoiding the situation in which it could be lost (1967, p. 15). As Goffman notes, avoidance is a common approach to face-work: "The surest way for a person to prevent threats to his [sic] face is to avoid contacts in which these threats are likely to occur" (1967, p. 15). For instance, by sending "haha", Jiya avoids having to explicitly engage with the topic at hand or raise her feelings of the awkwardness about the interaction — two possible responses that she felt certain would risk her face. The use of ambiguity in conversations about coordinating face-to-face interaction is likewise an impression management strategy designed to avoid risking face — by avoiding a future contradiction, participants hoped to avoid being perceived as disorganised, flaky, or unreliable.

Face-work is also central in situations where participants used ambiguous responses to avoid saying that they would not be attending an event. Many participants expressed similar sentiments to Gen who felt that saying no was "too hard". Through Goffman's lens, we can reframe "too hard" as "too risky" — declining an invitation put the faces involved at risk and was thus seen as something to be avoided. To take Belinda's interaction as an example, by initially responding "I'll let you know", Belinda hoped that she was implicitly declining the

invitation through her lack of enthusiasm. This was partly about protecting the face of her friend. By hinting that she would not meet with him before making it explicit, Belinda was recognising that her decision could disappoint or embarrass and it might be easier for him to accept if she let him down slowly. Saying “maybe” also helped Belinda protect her own face. Explicitly declining the request could create tension and threaten her standing in relation to her friend. They may be surprised or angry about her refusal and question what it said about their relationship, or even ask her why she did not want to spend time with them. It is revealing that many participants noted they could only give straight-forward refusals to a few close friends. With these friends, refusal involved less risk to the face of either party as the friends could be trusted to take the refusal well, not being offended or pressing for more information.

At times, ambiguity approached a kind of mutually-understood signal of unavailability that was accepted by messaging partners. For instance, Steve described receiving “maybes” from friends in response to his invitations to spend time together or attend events. He explains that, especially with close friends, he understood and accepted that sometimes this actually did mean ‘maybe’ while other times it meant ‘no’, and said that, with close friends, he could generally tell which meaning was intended. He felt that a ‘maybe’ which was actually a ‘no’ was sometimes an attempt to turn down the invitation politely: “sometimes they just don’t wanna hurt your feelings or they don’t wanna seem too closed off so they say ‘maybe’ even if it’s really a ‘no’.” This is an instance of what Goffman (1959, pp. 231-233) describes as “collusion”, whereby people support someone in their efforts to save face by accepting, rather than challenging, a performance they know to be somewhat contrived or faulty. In situations like the ones Steve described, accepting an ambiguous response and accepting it as a statement of unavailability, rather than pushing for clarification, allows the message sender’s face-work to succeed.

The Technical Mediation of Strategic Ambiguity

So far, I have described how participants’ use of ambiguity in messaging is informed by principles that are also common in face-to-face interaction. Their use of ambiguity is also, however, shaped by the materiality of the mobile devices and messaging apps. As with all discursive practices, these actions are enabled by the writing functions within messaging apps. More significantly, however, strategic ambiguity is shaped by the kinds of information that

messaging apps do not convey — namely, physical expressions such as body language, facial expression, and tone of voice, and signs of physical context such as background noise.

Participants were acutely aware of the semantic instability that resulted from messaging's lack of meta-textual cues, something that has also long been noted by scholars (e.g., Daft & Lengel, 1986). Participants spoke frequently about how messaging provides fertile ground for miscommunication and spoke in detail about situations where a misunderstood tone or meaning had put a relationship at risk. When wanting to maintain distance, avoid obligations, or postpone making commitments, participants used this same semantic instability to their advantage. For instance, messaging's lack of meta-textual cues enabled Jiya's "haha" to mask her uncertainty and carry a range of possible meanings from agreement to dismissal. Among these possible meanings, Jiya hoped her interlocutor would assume she intended a meaning that aligned with the reaction they were seeking. When using ambiguity to avoid saying no, the lack of meta-textual cues in messaging made it easier for participants to feign interest or uncertainty because there was no body language or tone of voice that could reveal their disinterest.

Likewise, when using ambiguity to avoid committing to face-to-face interactions, participants were also leveraging the mobility of mobile messaging. The anytime, anywhere nature of mobile communication enables people to coordinate in a flexible manner, refining or adjusting the time and location of an event in the days and hours leading up to it (Ling & Lai, 2016; Ling & Yttri, 2002). Consequently, participants could give an ambiguous response because they and their interlocutor knew that they could get back in touch later once they were more certain about their mood or availability. Thus, this use of strategic ambiguity was both drawing on the mobility of mobile communication and the norms that have developed around it: people have a greater expectation that coordination will happen iteratively and on-the-fly, making ambiguous responses more expected and readily accepted.

Deception

A final form of discursive strategy that participants used in managing their availability was deception. Having previously studied the use of deception in managing availability (Mannell, 2017), I was not surprised to see this emerge as a strong theme in my participants' messaging

practices. As with ambiguity, this strategy was used to manage availability for messaging as well as for face-to-face interactions that were being organised through messaging. Participants often strongly identified with the practice, recognising it as either something that they regularly did or as something they regularly observed among friends and acquaintances:

I know I do it all the time. (Belinda, 25, F)

We're all guilty of that right!?! (Erin, 22, F)

Everyone does that. (Ferdinand, 18, M)

It's so common. (Silvia, 22, F)

Happens all the time. (Chelsea, 20, F)

As noted in Chapter One, an existing body of literature has established that deceptive messaging is a common form of availability management (Birnholtz et al., 2010; Birnholtz et al., 2013; Reynolds et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2014). This literature describes the practice of lying about availability via messaging as “butler lying” in an allusion “to the social buffering function that butlers provided for their employers” when lying to visitors about whether family members were home (Hancock et al., 2009, p. 519). However, as discussed previously, this literature is situated within the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) — a multidisciplinary field focused on improving the usability of computing technologies. Accordingly, these studies are primarily interested in using understandings of butler lying to inform the design of messaging technologies (Hancock et al., 2009; Birnholtz et al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2013; Birnholtz et al., 2013). I use this literature on butler lying to contextualise some of the findings in this chapter, and then build on it more substantially in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Contexts of Use

Participants used deception to manage their availability in a variety of situations. One such situation was ending or avoiding messaging conversations that the participant was not interested in having. Jocelyn, for example, described how she sometimes used deception when “the conversation’s not going anywhere, like, it’s not worth continuing.” To end these conversations, Jocelyn (18, F) explained, “I’ll be like “Oh, I’m having dinner now.” And then I’ll start a conversation with someone else [Laughs].” Similarly, Matthew (20, M) explained that he

would often use deception to avoid messaging people at night: “I’ll be like ‘Alright, I’m gonna head off to bed now.’ But I’ll stay awake longer.”

Participants also used deception to avoid conversations altogether by accounting for their lack of response after-the-fact. Hannah (21, F), for instance, described how a friend had seen “a dude that she liked” at the races. The friend began messaging Hannah about it, however Hannah did not respond as she “didn’t really care”. To later account for her lack of reply, Hannah sent a follow-up message the next day saying “Hey buddy, sorry I didn’t reply to you last night. I was so exhausted from spending that long in the library and I was in a bad mood because Claire” — one of her other friends — “was pissing me off”. Where Hannah’s deception was designed to explain why she had not responded immediately, participants also used deception to account for much more extended delays, such as days or weeks. For example, Danielle recounted a situation where she took ten days to respond to a message from a friend asking how she was. When she eventually responded, she claimed that her slow response was because she had been busy with her exams when in fact she had simply not been interested in responding.

Participants also used deception to avoid face-to-face interactions that were being organised through messaging. Steve, for instance, asked a friend to text him the next time they were going to the gym so that Steve could join him. The friend messaged Steve one morning, saying that he was planning to go to the gym around 1pm that day. Steve responded at 11.45am saying “Yo, 1 works”. Shortly after, however, he changed his mind:

I think I’d woken up at around 11.30, or something like that, so I was still feeling groggy. I thought, 1pm works. But then about one hour later, it was 12.30, I said, “No, it doesn’t actually. I’m really sick man.” I was still in bed. That’s what was happening; I was actually just in bed and tired. Then he sent a sad face [emoji, and a message saying] “Get better. How did you get sick?” I said, um, “Hay fever. I’m getting there.” So, I did have a bit of hay fever, but it was mainly just me in bed being really tired. So I said “I’m really sick” but I wasn’t very sick.

When I asked Steve why he had originally committed to going at 1pm, he explained that he had thought that committing to his friend would motivate him to get up. As it got closer to 1pm,

however, he realised that he lacked sufficient motivation and that telling his friend this would make him look flaky and lazy.

While the above accounts are primarily about avoiding particular events or conversations, participants also used deception to avoid or limit interaction with particular people. Jocelyn, for example, described how a person she knew from high school added her as a friend on Facebook and then sent her a message via Facebook Messenger asking her to accept the request. When Jocelyn did not reply, the person messaged again saying they hoped she was well. Jocelyn eventually replied three weeks later, saying, “Hey!! Sorry about the late reply! I sort of limit how much I go on Facebook so I can do work! How’ve you been?” Jocelyn explained that the actual reason she had not replied sooner was that she did not want to develop a closer relationship with this person: “I just didn’t feel like replying to her straight away . . . Because then she’d want to be friends with me and catch up all the time kinda thing.” Another participant, Z (20, M), described using deception in a similar situation: when a school friend invited him to hang out, Z lied, telling the person that he was too busy with schoolwork:

I said something like, “I’m really swamped with assignments at the moment” even though it actually wasn’t exam time, but anyway, he’s not to know that. So I said, “When I’m more free I’ll let you know, but right now I’m focusing on an assessment because it counts for my whole grade.” And that was the sort of lie. It was the first week so I didn’t have any assessment but he’s not at this uni so how can he know?

While Z’s lie was about his availability to interact in person, rather than his availability to interact via messaging, his underlying reason for lying was the same as Jocelyn’s: it helped him to avoid rekindling a relationship that he did not want to maintain.

Participants also described using deception in situations where they were occupied with something but wanted to keep it private. Hannah, for example, described how she would often stop messaging people when her boyfriend came over so that she could focus on spending time with him. However, she explained that she “tends not to mention that he’s over” and will instead “be like, ‘Oh sorry, mum needs me’.”

I always tell my friends how annoying it is when people don’t hang out with you, or spend less time with you, because they’ve got a boyfriend. And so I don’t wanna be a hypocrite so I’m like, “Ahh, just doing stuff! Not hanging with my boyfriend!” [Laughs].

Although Hannah's deception in this example was designed to obscure an activity that limited her availability for mediated communication, participants also described using deception to obscure activities that limited their availability for face-to-face interaction. In one example, a participant asked a friend if they could meet half an hour later than planned because he had been "held up" when he was actually eating breakfast at home. For him, this was an important way of saving money, but he felt that they might see it as trivial or silly. In another example, a participant cancelled plans to have coffee with a friend claiming that they needed to urgently apply for a travel visa when they actually had made plans to see another friend.

Lastly, participants noted that they used deception more frequently in one-to-one messaging conversations than in group chats. Silvia (22, F), for example, explained that:

It feels like you have more responsibility in a one-on-one chat rather than a group chat 'cause it spreads the responsibility in a group chat . . . You can just leave in a group chat without saying anything, but in a one-on-one chat it's either you or them, so it feels like a responsibility.

With less obligation to respond, participants did not feel that they had to give a reason for not responding, especially when a group was primarily used for chatting rather than more instrumental purposes, like organising events or gifts.

Tactics and Techniques

When using deception to account for unavailability, participants often used one of several common excuses. If the lie was about not being available for calling or messaging, the excuse was often that they did not check the app regularly, needed to get back to another task (usually, study or work), that they thought they had replied, or that they were sleeping when the message arrived or were about to go to sleep. If the lie was about not being available for a face-to-face interaction, the excuse was often about feeling unwell, needing to study or work, not having enough money, having a conflicting family event, or being prohibited by parents.

Participants had different rationales for choosing particular lies. Some participants emphasised the importance of choosing something that was "half true" or "partly true." For instance, when Steve lied about missing the gym because of his hay fever, he chose to say that he was unwell because he *was* having mild hay fever symptoms that morning and this half-truth helped him

feel less guilty. For Z, the most important factor when developing a lie was its specificity. He explained that when he legitimately could not attend an event, he would always give a very detailed explanation of why, so, when giving a false excuse, he was careful to provide the same degree of detail so that “it actually seems plausible.”

On the Receiving End

As well as describing their own deceptive messaging, participants spoke about being on the receiving end of messages that they suspected were deceptive. For instance, Belinda recounted a conversation that she had with a friend who had recently become a mother. The conversation took place shortly after the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015:

I messaged my friend, who now has a baby, and I was like, “Are you up to going to the night noodle market?” This is a good one. Even I was like, man, she came up with a really good one . . . She goes, “Hmm, I dunno. I’m paranoid about being out in big crowds at the moment.” So I thought maybe because of her baby . . . And I go, “Well why?” And she goes, “All these bombings and terrorists. Screw that.” And I’m like, *wow*. [Laughs] I’d never even *think* of that as an excuse — like are you really that paranoid? I had nothing to say. I said, “Lol really? You can’t—” I had to say something nice [Laughs]. I’m like, “Oh you can’t live in fear like that. If anything I think there’d be an attack in Sydney over Melbourne.” But she goes, “Just being cautious.”

When I asked Belinda if her friend could be telling the truth, Belinda noted that it was possible, particularly as her friend’s new baby could be making her more cautious. She was sceptical, however, because this conversation coincided with a tense period in their friendship where they had been quarrelling and she felt that this tension was the more likely reason that her friend declined her invitation.

Other participants also described being suspicious about people’s reasons for their unavailability, both in terms of mediated and face-to-face interactions. Often these suspicions were based on relational factors, as in Belinda’s situation where tension with her friend motivated her suspicion. In other cases, the circumstances surrounding the excuse were the primary cause for doubt. Octavius Maximilian VII (18, M), for example, was often doubtful when people cancelled an hour before an event claiming to be sick as he felt it was unlikely

they had become ill so suddenly and severely. This reinforces the findings of a prior study which similarly found that people assess the truthfulness of messages about availability on the basis of their understanding of the situation and/or messaging partner (Reynolds et al., 2013).

The Interpersonal Dynamics of Deceptive Messages

When giving false reasons for their unavailability, participants engaged in a form of face-work designed to avoid unfavourable impressions. For instance, when Hannah told her friends that she was going to stop responding because she needed to help her mum, rather than because her boyfriend was coming over, she was trying to avoid her friends forming the impression that her boyfriend was a higher priority than them and that she was being hypocritical when accusing others of the same behaviour. Similarly, when Steve lied about not joining his friend at the gym because of hay fever, he was concerned that the truth would have made him seem “confused” or “very silly”.

In some cases, deception was also designed to protect the face of the person on the receiving end as much, or more so, than the person telling the lie. For example, when Jocelyn and Z used excuses to explain why they had not responded to, or agreed to meet up with, people they had known at high school, their deception was largely driven by a desire to let the person down gently. They wanted to hint that they were not interested in continuing the relationship while also leaving open the possibility that their unavailability was purely circumstantial. As Z explained, “I’ll be direct, but I won’t be direct to the point where it’ll actually hurt someone, if I can help it.”

While it is clear in these examples that giving false reasons for unavailability is a face-saving measure, it is less clear how often this strategy is successful — that is, how often the lie is believed. When the reason a person gives for being unavailable is not believed, or is received with scepticism, their attempts to save face are likely to fail. For instance, if Kevin’s gym partner does not believe that he is suddenly experiencing severe hay fever, they may perceive him as unreliable or suspicious. Likewise, if Z’s school friend is sceptical about his heavy study load at the start of the semester, they may feel hurt or embarrassed that Z is making up excuses.

Given the implausibility of some of the lies, it seems likely that attempts to save face through deception do not always succeed. Indeed, when participants were on the receiving end of messages about availability, they often described being sceptical about the truth of those messages. A study by Reynolds et al. (2013, p. 773) supports the conclusion that deception is not always an effective means of saving face as they found that people expect a considerable proportion of the messages they receive about unavailability to be deceptive and are able to correctly identify the honesty or deceptiveness of 78.9% of such messages. Their study does not, however, consider how this fact impacts the efficacy of deception as a mode of availability management.

Goffman provides a plausible explanation of why deception is a common and effective means of managing availability despite lies not being often believed. Early in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) describes the various ends that a person might be seeking when trying to control how they are perceived, such as wanting someone to form a favourable impression. After listing several such objectives, Goffman concludes:

Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his [sic] interest to *control the conduct of others*, especially *their responsive treatment of him* [sic] [emphasis added]. (1959, p. 3)

Here, Goffman is noting that while impression management is partly about trying to control how you are perceived, it is also partly about trying to control how you are *responded to* within a given interaction. Following this logic, deceptive messages are not just about creating a particular impression but also about seeking, or avoiding, a particular response. We can see this in Maisie's description of why she gives false excuses to some friends and not others: "It all depends on who it is and how they're going to react." Her concern is not just how she will be perceived, but whether the interaction will unfold smoothly. Thus, while Hannah lied about her Mum needing her to avoid being perceived as a hypocrite, she also lied to prevent criticism or teasing about being a hypocrite. And while Z lied to avoid embarrassing his school friend, he also lied to avoid an awkward and possibly confrontational interaction about why he does not want to maintain the relationship.

Goffman explains that the control of responses is "achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate" (1959, pp. 3-4). It is easy to see that when

a false excuse is believed, it comes to define the situation and thus shape the response of the person on the receiving end. For example, when Steve says that he cannot join his friend at the gym because he is sick and his friend believes this statement, the situation becomes: Steve is messaging to say he cannot attend the gym because he is sick. By defining the situation in this manner, Steve is seeking to control his friend's response to avoid any kind of interrogation or confrontation about why he has changed his mind. This attempt appeared successful, as Steve's friend responded in accordance with the situation by replying "Get better."

Critically, however, Goffman explains that a performance can be successful in defining the situation *without* the audience believing the performance to be authentic. Put differently, a deceptive message can be successful in shaping the messaging exchange without the respondent wholly believing the message to be true. This is because, for Goffman (1959, p. 6), if an interaction unfolds with the appearance of consensus, then the person working to shape the situation has succeeded. He further suggests that this "veneer of consensus" is much more common than deeper forms of consensus that require greater honesty, arguing that a consensus based on full honesty "is an optimistic ideal and in any case not required for the smooth functioning of society" (1959, p. 9). What is required for the smooth functioning of society is people reaching functional agreements within the majority of their interactions such that those interactions can be carried out with minimum disruption. While this may not involve a "real agreement as to what exists", it will involve "a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured. Real agreement will also exist concerning the desirability of avoiding an open conflict of definitions of the situation" (1959, pp. 9-10).

While we cannot know how often participants' lies were believed, in almost every situation participants described, deceptive messages were successful in producing a working consensus about the situation that enabled the interaction to proceed smoothly. For example, while Belinda was sceptical about her friend's reason for not joining her at the night noodle market, she accepted it for the purposes of their messaging conversation, explaining that she "had to say something nice" and had responded with a reassuring message. She did not believe her friend's definition of the situation, but she accepted it for the purposes of their interaction and agreed that it would be better to avoid an open conflict about the definition of their situation —

that is, about whether her friend was genuinely afraid or whether, as Belinda suspected, her friend's response was a symptom of the tension in their relationship.

As further evidence that the “audience” (Goffman, 1959) of a lie generally accepts it to maintain a smooth interaction, there was only one instance where a participant's account involved a lie about availability being directly questioned. The situation involved the two housemates of a participant named Gen (19, F). One housemate, Fiona, had been watching a TV show at night. The episode was sad, and so, wanting company, she messaged the other housemate to ask if he was still awake. This other housemate was in his room, immediately adjacent to Fiona's. Through the wall, she heard him walk across the room to his phone and then back to his bed. He did not message back. The next morning he apologised for not responding to her message, saying that he had been asleep. Rather than accepting this definition of the situation, Fiona openly challenged it, saying that she knew he had been awake because she heard him cross the room. Her comments were jovial and teasing, though, and did not lead to conflict. Thus, while Fiona challenged the proposed definition of the situation, this did not create tension in the relationship as the deception was not covering a serious wrongdoing. In all other cases, the fact that there were higher relational stakes and/or less evidence of deception appears to have prevented those on the receiving end from openly challenging an excuse.

Lastly, as I will discuss in Chapter Seven, participants often described relying on the knowledge that even if their friends did not believe their reason for being unavailable, they would understand and accept the lie as a sign that they were unavailable for reasons they did not want to discuss. In other words, participants felt that, in some circumstances, deceptive messages functioned as a form of etiquette — a polite and mutually understood signal for unavailability. This further supports the argument that deception is as much, if not more, about controlling how the interaction proceeds by generating a veneer of consensus, as it is about trying to foster a positive impression.

The Technical Mediation of Deceptive Messaging

Using deception to manage availability has long been a social practice (Hancock, 2009, p. 519) and, as discussed above, it involves many of the same interpersonal dynamics as co-present interactions. However, participants use of deception is also shaped by the affordances of

mobile devices and messaging apps. Most significantly, deception is enabled by the ambiguities inherent to messaging, which largely stem from the fact that messaging partners are not physically present when communicating. This is a central focus of the existing literature on butler lying which notes that the limited information available to message receivers makes certain lies more plausible (Birnholtz et al., 2010, 2013; French et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2013). In particular, Birnholtz et al. (2010) observed three categories of messaging ambiguity that participants drew on when telling lies about availability. The first, temporal ambiguity, refers to the fact that a message receiver is generally not aware of what a message sender has been doing previously or is going to do in the future, allowing for lies about when messages were received or why someone is not available for a future interaction. The second category, activity ambiguity, refers to the fact that a message receiver is generally unaware of a sender's current activity, which allows for lies about why messaging conversations need to end or be delayed. The final category is location ambiguity. Birnholtz et al. (2010) note that location and activity often overlap, but that lies sometimes explicitly relied on the receiver not having information about location, as in cases where the sender was running late and lying about being on their way.

A later study by French et al. (2015) adds two further categories of ambiguity which are commonly used in lies about availability. One is infrastructure, which enables people to lie about having technical issues with their mobile device or messaging service, for example, by telling someone that they had not responded to a message sooner because their messaging app had been playing up or their phone had run out of battery. The other category is personal information, which describes how people lie about their beliefs, preferences, and intentions. French et al. (2015) give examples of lies such as, "I really want to see you", "That party will be great" and "Yep I'm planning on going". As French et al. (2015) note, ambiguity about personal information is not linked to the materiality of messaging as lies about thoughts and feelings are equally plausible face-to-face — a point I will return to shortly.

My participants' accounts reiterate the findings from this literature about how the ambiguities inherent to messaging technologies and devices shape the kinds of lies that people tell via messaging about their unavailability. The lies that participants told were very similar to those observed in these prior studies and often drew heavily on the ambiguities that Birnholtz et al.

(2010) and French et al. (2015) describe. Some of these parallels are evident in the examples provided throughout this chapter. For instance, when Steve claimed to be sick, and Hannah claimed that her mum needed her, they both drew on the situational ambiguity of messaging that made their lies about current activities plausible. Similarly, when Danielle claimed to have been busy with her exams, and Matthew claimed that he was about to go to bed, they drew on the temporal ambiguity of messaging which means that messaging partners are generally unaware of each other's past or future activities.

As well as reiterating that the ambiguities of messaging shape the lies people use, participants' accounts build on the existing literature by highlighting two additional ways that the materiality of messaging technologies shape deceptive availability management practices. Firstly, while the existing literature focuses on how communicating through a written medium while physically distant creates informational ambiguities, my participants emphasised that these conditions also made it physically and emotionally easier to lie. They described messaging as creating a "wall" or "barrier" which meant that they did not have to worry about their tone of voice or body language while lying. For many participants this "wall" also meant that they felt insulated from the impact of their words and actions, making it emotionally easier to use deception.⁴²

For instance, when I asked Bill (23, M) whether he would use the same "half-true" excuses that he uses in messaging when talking over the phone, he responded:

More messaging, I'd say. Just because I don't think you have that, ah, emotional connection, if that makes sense? Because when you call someone and you want to reject them on the spot you feel sort of inclined not to. Whereas over messaging you feel that distance and you can just, you know . . . reject them and not feel as bad.

This was a common sentiment among participants, many of whom said that they would be very unlikely to use the same kind of deceptive excuses in person or over the phone, even when the lies were still plausible via these mediums, because it would be so much more difficult to tell

⁴² It is worth noting that this feeling of being behind a wall does not automatically equate to callous behaviour. Some people spoke about how it made them more emotionally available because it was easier to discuss difficult issues.

the lie without the barrier afforded by messaging. This suggests that even when lies are not dependent on the ambiguities of messaging to be plausible (as with the “personal information” lies described by French et al. (2015) for instance), the insulation offered by messaging still strongly influences their use. I discuss this further in Chapter Six where I note that ambiguity is similarly central to historical practices of deception, and in Chapter Seven where I describe participants’ concerns about how easy it is to lie via messaging.

The literature on butler lies notes that the ambiguity central to telling butler lies is “under threat” as designers add features, such as location awareness and read receipts, that increase awareness between interlocutors (Reynolds et al., 2013, p. 776; see also Birnholtz et al., 2010; Hancock et al., 2009). These studies recommend that designers preserve some of the ambiguity that people rely on when lying, but it is outside the scope of their studies to consider how people are already navigating these features within their deceptive practices. This was, however, something participants often discussed. In particular, participants often took online/offline status indicators and read receipts into account when using deception. Z, for example, explained that he would avoid appearing ‘online’ within messaging apps when he had given particular excuses for being unavailable:

Especially if I say I have to go to work, I’ll do things like I won’t be online on WhatsApp or Messenger during that time because then if they’re online and they can see, like, the green dot [that shows I’m online], they’ll think “Hang on, he’s not at work at all.”

Similarly, many participants described being careful not to open a message if they were going to later claim that they had not seen it or had been too busy to respond. If they opened the message, the read receipt would undermine their excuse. Lastly, participants described being careful about their activity on other communication platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat, to avoid undermining lies about why they were unavailable. For instance, a couple of participants explained that when they were wanting to use being asleep as an excuse for not responding to messages at night, they would be careful not to like or comment on social media posts as this would make it obvious that they were still awake. For some participants, their caution stemmed from seeing other people undermine their own lies through activity on other platforms. Hannah, for instance, described how a friend had feigned being too busy to respond to her messages while simultaneously posting on Snapchat about being bored. The friend had,

presumably, forgotten that Hannah would see the snaps and know that she had been lying about being busy. While these scenarios are not strictly about how deceptive practices are shaped by the *messaging apps* people used, they do indicate how deceptive practices were informed by the broader ecology of communication platforms that a person uses.

Conclusion

This chapter completes the discussion of discursive practices that I began in the prior chapter. It introduced two further discursive practices — ambiguity and deception — which, together with closers and dissuasion from the prior chapter, represent the key discursive practices that participants used to negotiate and limit availability through mobile messaging. Compared to closers and dissuasion, which are primarily used end conversations, ambiguity and deception are employed in a wider range of contexts including limiting connections within conversations and avoiding future face-to-face interactions. As in the prior chapter, I used Goffman's work on interpersonal interactions as a framework for unpacking the relational dynamics of these practices, while also noting how the materiality of messaging and related technologies contributes to these practices.

It is important to note that while they have been presented separately and across two chapters, the four categories of discursive practice that I have outlined are not mutually exclusive. For instance, a person might use strategic ambiguity and deception together when giving a false excuse like, "I might be able to make it tomorrow. I have something else on but it could end early." Similarly, conversation closers sometimes involve strategic ambiguity, as in the case of stickers and emoji which participants used when they were seeking to end a conversation but felt it was unnecessary or undesirable to declare that intention outright. Thus, while they have been presented as distinct for the sake of analytical simplicity, the various forms of discursive practice described in these chapters can overlap. Further, as I discuss in the conclusion of this thesis, discursive practices can also be used in combination with the technical and temporal practices described in prior chapters.

This chapter contributes to the thesis in the same way as the previous three chapters: by supporting the central argument that young adults have a diverse range of nuanced strategies for managing their availability and that these strategies constitute a significant part of their

messaging activity. However, while this chapter contributes to the central argument of this thesis, it also presents evidence that suggests avoidance comprises a strong theme within the discursive practices of young people. Dissuasion, deception, ambiguity, and at times, closers, all involve managing availability through indirect techniques rather than direct, transparent communication. On the surface, this observation would seem to reinforce popular concerns about young adults lacking social skills and avoiding commitment, in large part because smartphones allow them to hide behind screens (e.g., Twenge, 2017). However, as I will discuss in the following chapter, looking at historical availability practices suggests that people have long been avoidant and indirect in communicating about unavailability.

Chapter 7 — Etiquettes of Disconnection: Continuities Between House Visits, Telephone Calls, and Mobile Messaging

One approach that scholars use to understand digital media is to look to the past for parallels and precedents. By investigating earlier media technologies, scholars have generated insights into the nature of technological change and clarified what is distinct about digital media and what is an evolution or continuation of historical values and practices (e.g., Gitelman, 2006; Marvin, 1988). As noted in Chapter One, this approach has been used in literature on digital disconnection in order to understand the discourses of digital media resistance that have become increasingly prevalent over the past decade (Gomez et al., 2015; Syvertsen, 2017).

In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I use historical comparison to clarify what is distinct about participants' experiences of negotiating communicative availability and what is a continuation of prior attitudes and practices. Specifically, I compare their experiences with 19th century practices of exchanging house visits and calling cards and early- to mid-20th century practices of making and receiving domestic landline telephone calls. Further detail about the rationale behind this approach, and the methods used in executing it, can be found in the final section of Chapter Three.

I begin this comparison by considering the continuities between historical and contemporary media practices. In the following chapter, I extend this comparison by looking to discontinuities between historical and contemporary practices. Beyond just comparing practices, however, I also look to the etiquettes that surround them — that is, the broader system of social norms that determine which practices are appropriate in which situations. In the preceding chapters, while outlining the technical, temporal, and discursive strategies that participants used for managing availability, I began to demonstrate that these practices were often shaped by participants' ideas about what constituted socially acceptable behaviour. In this chapter and the one that follows, I want to analyse these etiquettes more deeply by comparing them with similar etiquettes from earlier contexts.

There are two reasons for this focus on etiquettes. One is that etiquette plays a central role in the often-delicate process of negotiating availability. While I have argued that people have developed mechanisms for managing and reducing connection, the broader success of these practices as mechanisms for creating space within relationships depends on whether they are understood and accepted by the people they are directed towards. The other reason for addressing the issue of etiquettes is that it enables a broader perspective than the descriptions I have offered in the preceding chapters. In describing affordances and practices, I have focused on the interaction between two, or a few, people as mediated through a mobile device. Considering the etiquettes, or perceptions of etiquettes, that inform these practices allows me to consider the broader socio-cultural contexts that these interactions are embedded within.

That said, broadening my view to include etiquette is still in keeping with the affordances framework used in the preceding chapters. As noted in chapter three, affordances are not simply the properties of a technology, or even the actions a technology enables, but rather are possibilities for action that stem from the *relationship* between a technology and specific users. Such relationality is central to recent theorisations of affordances — theorisations that highlight the role that contextual factors, including social and cultural contexts (Costa, 2018; Davis & Chouinard, 2017; Faraj & Azad, 2012; Treem & Leonardi, 2012), play in shaping affordances. Davis and Chouinard (2017), for instance, note that issues of cultural and institutional legitimacy often play a powerful role in determining how affordances operate. They use the example of historical gender norms that discouraged women from driving to illustrate that affordances are always situated “at the intersection of history, biography, and culture” (p. 245). In recognition of this fact, these chapters shift focus to consider not just the actions participants took in negotiating availability, but how those actions are situated in broader systems of social etiquette.

I begin this chapter by briefly reviewing literature on mobile communication etiquette in order to demonstrate that while scholars have long been interested in mobile etiquette, this has rarely included etiquettes about negotiating unavailability in mobile communication. I then introduce the 19th and 20th century media practices used as comparisons and explain that, like the development of mobile messaging, these contexts involved dealing with new availability challenges. In the second half of the chapter, I focus on three areas of etiquettes that involve

strong continuities between historical and contemporary contexts. Throughout the chapter, I draw on both secondary sources as well as an analysis of historical etiquette manuals, as described in Chapter Two.

Mobile Communication Etiquette

Before considering the existing literature on mobile communication etiquette, it is important to note that there is a wealth of sociological research on etiquette, manners, and social norms. Some of this work considers how manners are an expression of the broader socio-political structures in a society (e.g. Elias, 2000; Foucault, 1990; Ardit, 1999). Other work focuses on understanding how different manners characterise social groups, often reifying the differences between groups and making it difficult for people to move between them (e.g. Bordieu, 1984; Durr & Wingfield, 2011; Jensen, 2012). Another key interest — one that is of particular relevance to this thesis — is how manners structure social interactions (e.g. Durkheim, 1982; Parsons, 1971; Garfinkle, 1967; Goffman, 1971). This work highlights how etiquette and other aspects of mannerly behaviour are critical to the smooth functioning of interactions, and thus to social relationships more broadly, as they establish common frameworks for understanding social obligations and expectations.

More specifically, there have also been many studies of mobile etiquette. Most of this literature has focused on the etiquette for using mobile phones in public spaces — specifically, when and where it is appropriate and how to behave when doing so (Arminen, 2005; Axelsson, 2010; Baron & Hard af Segerstad, 2010; Humphreys, 2005; Hjorth, 2008, pp. 61-62; Ling, 1997, 2004; Lipscomb et al., 2007; Shuter & Chattopadhyay, 2010). These studies find that the injunctive norms for public mobile use include not speaking too loudly (Baron & Hard af Segerstad, 2010; Ling, 1997), avoiding highly personal subjects when calling (Hjorth, 2008, pp. 61-62), and not engaging in calling or messaging in contexts where it is disruptive or unsafe (Lipscomb et al., 2007; Ling, 2004, pp. 123-132; Axelsson, 2010). These studies also note that while there is broad agreement about the etiquette for public mobile phone use, views can vary across cultures (Baron & Hard af Segerstad, 2010; Shuter & Chattopadhyay, 2010) and age groups (Axelsson, 2010).

Scholars have also observed that there are etiquettes for making and receiving mobile phone calls while co-present with others. When someone receives a phone call, they make efforts to minimise the disruption to those around them by turning away, distancing themselves from the group, or integrating the group into their phone conversation (Plant, 2001, p. 31; Ling, 2004, pp. 132-138). The people they are with also adhere to a set of normative behaviours: giving the other person privacy by turning away, moving aside, or signalling that they are not listening by visibly occupying themselves with something else (Humphreys, 2005; Ling, 1997, p. 82, 2004, pp. 132-138). The focus on public mobile phone use within studies of etiquette reflects concerns, common at the time, about the intrusion of private communication into shared spaces.

While these studies clarify the etiquettes of public mobile phone use, much less attention has been paid to the etiquette for communicating *through* mobile communication. In terms of calling, there has been some research on the linguistic norms of making and receiving calls. This research notes that most calls begin with openings that are common in face-to-face interaction, rather than openings that are common in landline telephone conversations (Fortunati & Baron, 2017). In terms of messaging conversations, much of the research into etiquettes has concentrated on message content. Baym (2015), for instance, describes how etiquettes developed around the use of emoji and emoticons, abbreviations and colloquial spellings, and conveying tone and emotion. In their cross-cultural study of mobile etiquette, Shuter and Chattopadhyay (2010) observed that many people in their survey, especially Indian women, felt that swearing in a text message was a breach of etiquette.

Among this literature on messaging and calling etiquette, there have been a few observations about availability. In Ito and Okabe's (2005) study of Japanese young people, participants explained that their peers generally expected to receive messaging responses within half an hour. If a response took longer, participants and their peers expected that it would include an apology in recognition that messaging etiquette had been violated. Humphreys (2005) found that while some participants used caller ID to screen their mobile calls, most felt it was impolite. As noted in Chapter Six, there is also a small collection of literature on the practice of lying about availability via text message (Hancock et al., 2009; Birnholtz et al., 2010; Reynolds

et al., 2013; Birnholtz et al., 2013). This literature suggests that lying is a socially sanctioned means of politely restricting availability.

These observations illustrate some of the etiquettes around mobile availability but leave scope for developing a more comprehensive understanding of the etiquettes that govern how unavailability is negotiated.

Availability in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Challenges and Etiquettes

Mobile phones are often viewed as enabling unprecedented degrees of interpersonal availability. However, there have been other historical moments where people have been similarly subject to new forms and degrees of contact. Below, I briefly describe the availability challenges encountered in England and the United States during the 19th century, and in many 'developed' countries during the early- and mid-20th century. This illustrates that the challenges of mobile connectivity are not entirely unprecedented and provides context for the comparisons that follow.

In the 19th century, social and technological changes enabled more interaction between social classes that had previously been highly segregated. These changes included the growth of the middle classes due to the Industrial Revolution (Plante, 1997, p. 106; Pool, 1994, p. 66; Wildeblood & Brinson, 1965, p. 247), rapid increases in urban populations, the development of more public spaces (George & George, 1993, pp. 6, 45-53), and improved transportation which made travel more common, particularly among wealthy families who travelled from the country to the city for 'the season' of social events (Curtin, 1987). These changes increased the potential for contact between people of different backgrounds, including between social elites and members of the aspirational middle-classes who sought entry into high society (George & George, 1993, p. 53). This posed a challenge for elites who saw their increased accessibility as a threat to their social position. Accordingly, one purpose behind the intricate system of Victorian etiquettes, including calling cards, was to shore up the class distinctions that were at risk of eroding (Curtin, 1987, pp. 56, 140-141).

In the late-19th and early-20th century, the development of home telephones again created new challenges around availability by allowing physically and socially distant people to

unexpectedly enter the home, a previously highly private space, and request attention (Fischer, 1994, p. 225; Stern & Gwathmey, 1994, pp. 45-55). While a person could always choose to *not* answer the phone, the possibility that a call might be important, together with the general expectation that calls would be answered, made it difficult to ignore a ringing phone (Ball, 1968, p. 63). Thus, telephone communication was widely seen as intrusive and unpredictable. Calls could arrive at any time, from anyone, particularly as costs reduced and the telephone directory was established (Stern & Gwathmey, 1994, pp. 45-55). Additionally, the identity of the caller or the subject they wished to discuss could not be assessed in advance and, having answered the phone, the receiver was obliged to contribute to the conversation (Ball, 1964, p. 63-64; Katz, 2003, p. 152). There was also concern that once a call had been accepted it would be very difficult to end as, on the telephone, you could not “cut a man off by a look or a gesture”, leaving you stuck in tedious conversations (“Telephone Cranks,” 1897, p. 37).

In both of these historical contexts, sociotechnical shifts produced new possibilities for interaction that seemed to undermine people’s ability to control their availability. This is akin to early observations about the constant contact enabled by mobile communication and the challenges it posed for regulating interactions (see Chapter One). Further, in both historical contexts, new practices and etiquettes were required to re-establish a system for negotiating the limits of social availability. I briefly describe these below before turning to further continuities between these historical etiquettes and those of participants.

The Etiquette of Cards and House Calls: A Brief Introduction

Adopted from France in the late 18th century, the exchange of calling cards and home visits had become commonplace among English middle and upper classes by the early 19th century (Wildeblood & Brinson, 1965, p. 254) and American middle classes by the mid-19th century (Plante, 1997, p. 123). Exchanging cards and calls was primarily women’s work as they were perceived as having sufficient free time for visiting (George & George, 1993, p. 10; Pool, 1994, p. 69).

The system of cards and calls worked as follows. A woman could only develop an acquaintance with someone to whom she had been formally introduced. After being formally introduced, the

first step was to leave a calling card at their house.⁴³ If the person who received the card reciprocated by leaving their card, the woman was then free to call upon her new acquaintance during the designated visiting hours (usually 3pm-6pm), thereby solidifying their social connection. This initiated a chain of reciprocal visits that had to be maintained if the acquaintance was to continue. If either woman was to find the other not at home, they would leave their calling card as a sign that they had visited, folding a corner down to show that they had left it in person.⁴⁴ Fastidiously attending to this process of social exchanges was central to improving, or at least preserving, a family's social standing (Plante, 1997, p. 104).

The system functioned as a response to the new challenges of availability described above by regulating who was admitted to a person's circle of friends and acquaintances and clearly demarcating the degree of familiarity and intimacy they could claim within that circle (Curtin, 1987, p. 140-1; *Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, p. 30; Post, 1922; Pool, 1994, p. 64-8).⁴⁵ This in turn dictated the kinds of access that people had to the homes and social gatherings of elites. For instance, a person would only be invited to dinner, the most exclusive social engagement, once they had clearly established a close relationship through regular house calls. Organising and regulating these domestic social engagements was particularly important as the social lives of elites retreated from public spaces in a further effort to maintain class divisions (Curtin, 1987, p. 148; George & George, 1993, p. 53).

In addition to managing access and intimacy, the etiquette surrounding cards and calls also controlled availability by regulating the timing and duration of other people's visits. For instance, despite being called 'morning calls', visits were paid during the afternoon and never

⁴³ Typically, she would leave one card for the mistress of the home. If she had a husband, she would leave two of his cards also: one for the mistress of the house and one for the master. In certain circumstances, she would also leave cards on behalf of her grown daughters and any close relatives that were staying with her (Wildeblood & Brinson, 1965, p. 255).

⁴⁴ There were many other conventions for communicating additional information by folding the card in particular ways.

⁴⁵ The complexity of Victorian etiquette also achieved this by making elite social practices difficult to emulate, creating an additional obstacle for those who sought to rise through the social ranks (Curtin, 1987, p. 56; George & George, 1993, p. xvii, 116).

on Sundays (*Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, pp. 29-30; Plante, 1997, p. 123; Pool, 1994, p. 68). Etiquette also dictated that calls were to last between 15 and 30 minutes (Curtin, 1987, p. 139; Plante, 1997, p. 123; Pool, 1994, p. 68) and that when multiple people called on someone at the same time, the first to arrive should depart shortly after the second (Hale, 1866, p. 219; *Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, p. 34; Pool, 1994, p. 68).

The Etiquette of Landline Calls: A Brief Introduction

Despite widespread concern about the disruption telephones would bring, by the mid-20th century people had developed a set of socially-sanctioned practices for regulating telephone conduct. For instance, to mitigate the risk of imposing on someone at an inopportune time, callers were expected to ask at the beginning of the call whether the receiver had time to talk, particularly if they sought a lengthy conversation (Barber, 1953, p. 90; Culkin, 1962, p. 124, Free, 1960; Mitchell & Briggs, 1964, Haupt, 1963, p. 130).⁴⁶ People were also encouraged to avoid making calls at times that they knew would not suit the person they were calling, such as meal times, early in the morning, or late in the evening (Free, 1960; Mitchell & Briggs, 1964). It also became broadly accepted that the person receiving a call could excuse themselves if the call interrupted an activity like eating dinner, bathing a child, or leaving the house for an appointment (Barber, 1953, p. 90; Cuming, 1965, p. 104; Haupt, 1963, p. 129; Sprackling, 1944, p. 175; Shaw, 1952, p. 33).

In response to the problem of ending calls, protocols were developed around who should end calls and how. Etiquette manuals noted that it was the caller who usually ended the phone call as they knew when their reason for calling had been fulfilled (e.g., Barber, 1953, p. 90; Haupt, 1963, p. 131; Nelson, 1957, p. 19), but that the person receiving the call could also end it as long as they did so tactfully. In either case, the intention to end the call should be clearly signalled through phrases like “It has been good talking with you again” (Cuming, 1965, p. 104).

Etiquette manuals emphasised the importance of both people saying the word ‘goodbye’ and of

⁴⁶ For instance, *The Luella Cuming Studio Course in Social Awareness, Poise, and Gracious Living* states, “Immediately after identifying yourself (if the telephone is answered by the person with whom you wish to speak) inquire whether it is convenient to talk. This is one of the most important rules in telephone etiquette. If your call is ill-timed it cannot be effective” (Cuming, 1965, p. 103).

hanging up the phone gently rather than slamming it down (e.g., Barber, 1953, p. 90; Random House, 1967, p. 40; Sprackling, 1944, p. 190). The conventions of telephone closings have also been noted in academic studies. In particular, Schegloff and Sacks (1973, p. 312) note that some ‘pre-closings’ that are specific to the role of caller or called, such as a caller commenting, “Well I’ll let you go. I don’t want to tie up your phone”, or the called person commenting, “This is costing you a lot of money”. They also note that some pre-closings draw on material from earlier in the telephone conversation, such as making a comment about letting the other person return to what they had said they were doing prior to the call.

These etiquettes for making and receiving calls provided a means of structuring the unpredictability of telephone availability. They enabled people to collectively manage the new and unpredictable forms of availability that the telephone enabled by laying out accepted pathways for regulating, limiting, and avoiding interactions.

By looking to the etiquettes that governed house visits and telephone calls, we can see that changes in sociotechnical contexts have often produced new forms of availability that people have sought to limit and control, just like with the development of mobile communication. We also see that, in doing so, people develop practices for regulating interactions and come to rely on etiquette to provide socially sanctioned methods for regulating connection. In the context of messaging, the practices described in the prior chapters are likewise a response to the challenges posed by mobile messaging. In addition to these broad parallels, however, there are other, more specific continuities between the etiquettes espoused by my participants and those surrounding visiting practices and landline telephone use. I turn now to a description of three examples of continuities: polite white lies, winding back connections, and severing connections by cutting and blocking.

Polite White Lies

In Chapter Six, I described how participants used deceptive messages to smooth over their unavailability. Prior research on this practice has established that it is similar to the 19th century practice of having butlers lie to visitors about the availability of their employers (Birnholtz et al., 2010; French et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2009; Reynolds, et al., 2013). As noted earlier, this literature describes lying about availability via mobile messages as “butler

lying” in reference to the lies told by these butlers. As evidence of this historical parallel, Hancock et al., (2009, p. 519) quote from an 1827 manual for servants, that instructs them to know in advance whether their employers wish to see a particular visitor and, if they do not, to tell the visitor that the person they wish to see is unavailable. Hancock and his colleagues argue that texting a false reason for being unavailable provides a similar mechanism for politely avoiding an interaction (Birnholtz et al., 2010; French et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2009; Reynolds, et al., 2013). In the discussion below, I build on this comparison by identifying further continuities between these historical and contemporary practices.

Using deception to avoid or restrict interactions was (and likely still is) also common in the context of landline calls. Etiquette manuals from the early- and mid-20th century demonstrate that deception was a common, and largely accepted, form of managing availability in the context of telephone calls. Deception was used to avoid or end phone calls (Barber, 1953, p. 90; Bracken, 1964, p. 76; Haupt, 1963, p. 131). For instance, *The Seventeen Book of Etiquette & Entertaining* explained to its young female readers:

Much as the phone is part of your life, there are times when you want to end a call quickly and get back to what you were involved in when the phone jingled. Polite white lie excuses will spare your caller’s feelings:

“Have to go now, Jill. My father’s waiting for a long-distance call.”

“Mother just told me she’d like to use the phone. I’ll see you later.”

“I have some cookies in the oven. I think they’re burning. Meet you at five.”

(Haupt, 1963, p. 131)

Lies could also be delivered by an intermediary, such as a secretary or servant, who could screen calls by finding out who was calling and then lie about the availability of the person they were seeking. As well as using them to end or avoid calls, etiquette manuals also recommended that people use white lies to decline unwanted invitations delivered via telephone (Bracken, 1964, p. 83). Thus, as with mobile messaging, deception was used via telephone calls to both limit availability for telephone interactions and for face-to-face interactions coordinated through telephone conversations.

Beyond just being a common practice across messaging, telephone calls, and house visits, there are further specific continuities in the execution and justification of deception across these different contexts.

“Spare the Feelings”

Twentieth century etiquette manuals do not expand on why a person would lie rather than give the true reason for their unavailability, however, the common refrain that lying would “spare the feelings” of the caller (Barber, 1953, p. 90; see also Bracken, 1964) suggests that the true reason would imply dislike or disinterest. As one etiquette manual notes, there may be times when people “deem it necessary to resort to some small subterfuge or harmless ‘white lie’ in order to spare the feelings of an inopportune telephone caller” (Barber, 1953, p. 90).

The rationale that lies are polite because they spare other people’s feelings is a point of historical continuity. Participants similarly described lying about availability via messages as a being “polite” towards other people, a way to “let them down nicely”, to be “easier on their feelings”, and as “the nicer thing to do”. These sentiments mirror 20th century telephone etiquette manuals that deemed lying acceptable on the grounds that it preserved goodwill. In both contexts, the idea that deception is justified also likely stems from a perception that it was necessary in order to regain control in the face of a technology that made unruly claims on time and attention. As mentioned in Chapter Five, participants were forthcoming about the fact that lying was also a means of saving face and avoiding conflict — a rationale absent from 20th century discussions though they were likely also important factors.

“Lying but Not Really”

A further parallel between historical and contemporary uses of deception is that in both 19th century house calls and in participants messaging practices, lies about availability are further justified by a belief that they are not intended to be deceptive.

An etiquette manual published in 1888, for example, explains that having staff declare that you are ‘not at home’ during visiting hours is “not intended to imply an untruth, but rather to signify that for some reason, or reasons, it is not desirable to see visitors” (*Manners and Rules of*

Good Society, 1988, pp. 38-39). Writing some thirty years later, Post (1922, pp. 207-210) makes a similar case:

When a servant at a door says, “Not at home,” this phrase means that the lady of the house is “Not at home to visitors.” This answer neither signifies nor implies — nor is it intended to — that Mrs. Jones is out of the house. (1922, p. 207)

Post acknowledges that some people might see the phrase as deceptive but dismisses these people as “over-literals” and suggests that “anyone who talks about this phrase as being a ‘white lie’ either doesn’t understand the meaning of the words, or is going very far afield to look for untruth” (1922, p. 208). Thus, falsely claiming to not be home is justified on the basis that it is not really deceptive but rather is a widely accepted social cue.

Several of my participants likewise argued that the lies they told via messaging about their availability were not really deceptive. For them, this practice had become so commonplace that lies were easily recognisable and often accepted as a cue for avoiding or ending interactions. Jocelyn (18, F), for example, explained:

When other people do it, or when I suspect other people do it, it’s sort of like, whatever, I do it too. So it’s just, like, this social norm. Like it’s just like expected for us to use it, to be polite, even though we know the other person knows that it might be a lie.

Danielle (19, F) felt similarly, explaining, “I think everyone does know that you might not be doing those things [that you’ve said you’re doing], but it’s like whatever, cause everyone does it and gets that done to them too.”

The Importance of Tact

Participants also echoed the 19th century sentiment that, despite not really being deceptive, it is still important that lies about availability are plausible and communicated tactfully. For instance, after stating that ‘not at home’ is a “sufficient explanation” for being unavailable, the 1888 manual quoted above qualifies this statement by saying:

...provided always that a servant is able to give a direct answer at once of “Not at home” when the query is put to him [emphasis added]. If a servant is not sure as to whether his mistress wishes to see visitors or not, it is almost a direct offence to the lady calling if he hesitates as to his answer, and leaves her either sitting in her carriage or standing in the

hall, while "He will see if his mistress is 'At home'. (*Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, pp. 38-39).

By pretending to check if his mistress is at home (information a servant would have already known) the servant ruins the plausibility of the lie that follows (that she is not home) and makes it explicit that she is avoiding the visitor, thus undermining the social-smoothing function that the lie was intended to serve.

Post (1922, p. 209) similarly argues that people must always tell their staff before visiting hours whether or not they intend to be 'at home' to avoid the situation described above. For her, the plausibility of the lie is crucial despite her insistence that the phrase is not deceptive. For instance, she argues that the phrase 'not at home' is far superior to the occasionally used 'not receiving' because the latter makes it clear that the person is home, while the former provides the "pleasant uncertainty that it is quite possible she is out" (1922, p. 207).

Participants likewise emphasised the importance of tact when lying about unavailability. They often described this in terms of needing to provide a "good" excuse: one that was believable, even if it might not be believed, and that sufficiently justified a person's unavailability. Chelsea (20, F), for instance, felt that the practice of butler lying was generally acceptable unless the lie was "a blatant lie", in which case it would be hurtful. Another participant, Richard (26, M), emphasised the importance of using a butler lie that adequately justified your unavailability, regardless of whether you expected the lie to be believed. He described how it is important to "give appropriate and acceptable reasons" such as, "I'm sick", "I need to go with my family", and "I need to go with my girlfriend". When a lie referenced doing something with other people, he felt it was crucial that it "related to people who are more important than the person who you are talking to" in order to properly justify an absence. By following these principles, Richard explained that the other person would "still respect" your answer, even when that "person sort of knows that you are lying".

Enabled by Ambiguity

Across these examples from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, white lies are enabled by the ambiguity afforded by the communication channels being used. In the 19th century, communicating through a domestic servant preserved ambiguity around whether a person was

at home or not. In the 20th century, the disembodied nature of telephone communication similarly let people claim they were engaged in activities that they were not. When using others to screen landline calls, communicating through another person further heightened this ambiguity. In the 21st century, mobile messaging preserves ambiguity about where a person is, what they are doing, and perhaps even how they are feeling, as discussed in Chapter Six. Being asynchronous, messaging also creates ambiguity about when a message was received, although read receipts have reduced ambiguity around when messages are *read*, making it more difficult to lie about messages being missed.

Comparing Deception Across Historical Contexts

To summarise, across messaging, landline calls, and house visits, deception is justified as a polite means of sparing other people's feelings and, in some cases, social cues that are not intended to deceive. More broadly, lying is justified as a necessary means of reasserting control over availability in communicative contexts where availability is otherwise difficult to restrict. Across these contexts, lies are told by leveraging the ambiguities of the medium through which they are told, and tact is required to make the lie go over smoothly.

These historical continuities demonstrate that using deception to manage availability is not unique to mobile messaging. Rather, deception has long been a valued (and often socially approved) means of avoiding, delaying, and ending unwanted interactions without having to broach the difficult topic of why a person does not want to be available. That said, it is possible that, as some participants suggested, the rate of lying about availability has increased due to mobile messaging as people have more occasions in which to lie and can do so relatively easily. This claim would be near-impossible to test empirically, especially due to the unlikelihood of finding data about historical rates of white lying about availability. There is, however, a clear difference between the earlier contexts and participants' experiences in that there is less consensus among participants about the conditions in which lying is appropriate than there appears to have been in earlier periods. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Winding Back Connections

Another set of etiquettes with strong historical continuities are etiquettes relating to intimacy. Participants' messaging practices and 19th century practices of cards and calls both involve techniques for politely reducing or limiting relational intimacy by reducing availability for social interactions.

Limiting Intimacy

In the context of 19th century cards and calls, there were three main mechanisms for winding back a friendship. One mechanism was to reduce the frequency of calls or cards as this signalled that a person desired less intimacy (Curtin, 1987, p. 141). Consequently, it was important that women kept a log of how frequently other people called or left cards (Curtin, 1987, p. 141). By keeping track of the timing of cards and calls, women and, by extension, their families could remain aware of the status of different relationships and act accordingly (*Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, p. 17).

Another mechanism for winding back a relationship was to reduce the length of house calls to the minimum amount of time permissible (Curtin, 1987, p. 144), usually fifteen minutes (e.g., *Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, p. 147). If a relationship had previously been intimate, the duration of calls could be reduced gradually over several visits in order to smooth over the change (Curtin, 1987, p. 144). Reducing the duration of calls could also be combined with the above technique of reducing frequency; by extending the length of time between visits while also reducing their duration, a person could clearly signal that they wished for a more distant and formal relationship.

The final option was to change from calling in person to just leaving a card. The act of leaving a card at another person's home had two possible meanings. The first was that someone had called on them but, finding them not at home, had left a card to show they had visited. In this case, it was common for the caller to turn down one corner of the card to indicate that they had left it in person (Plante, 1997, p. 124).⁴⁷ Leaving a card could also, however, mean that a person

⁴⁷ In the highly regimented system of house calls, this act had the same meaning as if a caller had actually seen and talked to the person they were calling on. According to the reciprocal logic of calling

had sent a servant to leave a card on their behalf (*Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, p. 53). In this situation, the corner of the card would not be folded down, indicating that the card had not been left in person and thus was not equivalent to calling in person. Sending a card was a more formal and guarded action than calling in person (Pool, 1994, p. 68). If two people had previously been exchanging calls, sending a card instead clearly signified that one party was pulling away and reducing the relationship to a more distant and formal acquaintanceship (Curtin, 1987, p. 144). These three mechanisms, used independently or together, enabled women (and men, to some extent) to limit and reduce the intimacy of relationships by modulating their availability for social interactions.

Among participants, there was an equivalent etiquette for limiting or reducing intimacy by restricting availability. Participants used two techniques to signal that they wanted to limit or reduce the intimacy of the relationship. The first of these techniques, described in the Chapter Four section on rhythmic manipulation, is slowing down the speed of messaging responses. The second technique, described in the Chapter Five section on dissuasion, is responding with minimal or blunt messages. As noted in the previous discussions of these practices, participants sometimes used them in a one-off manner to end specific interactions. When used repeatedly, however, these practices conveyed a more substantial, relational meaning: that a person did not want to develop, or maintain, a close relationship with their interlocutor. Some participants used these two techniques together in the same interaction. For instance, in Chapter Five I described how Z (20, M) limited the frequency *and* content of his messages in situations where he did not want to rekindle or strengthen a friendship. He described this approach as “like, sly.” He added, “It is. But it’s more polite than just going ‘I’m not going to catch up with you.’ That’s just not socially acceptable.”

As well as using these techniques to regulate their intimacy with others, participants also described being subject to other people’s use of this etiquette. For instance, during our interview, Hadiya (20, F) scrolled back through her messaging history with a particular person and observed that she, Hadiya, was “way more into” their conversations than the other person as they sent much shorter messages. Hadiya explained that “when you’re replying like huge

etiquette, they had completed their turn and the other person now owed them a call.

chunks to someone, and they're replying like two word, three-word answers" it was a clear sign that they were not invested in the interaction. At times, participants would show me their phones during our interviews, scrolling through conversations to demonstrate how the comparative size of messages indicated that one person was much more interested in pursuing the friendship than the other. For Hadiya, her friend's lack of investment was also evident in their delayed responses: "I'm trying to suggest something on the 27th of May, and she replied on the 5th of June [Laughs]."

Ending Relationships

In the examples described so far, availability is reduced in order to limit or reduce the intimacy in a relationship. However, a slightly modified version of these same practices could be used to essentially end a relationship. In the 19th century, this was achieved by initially following the protocols to reduce intimacy described above with the critical difference of eventually not reciprocating a calling card when one is due, thus ending the acquaintance (Humphry, 1897, p. 126; *Manners and Rules of Good Society*, 1888, p. 22). Similarly, participants described ending relationships by using exaggerated delays and extremely minimal content, and eventually not responding at all. Participants were also unanimous in declaring that the most unambiguous signal for ending relationships with weak ties was to open a message so that it would be marked as 'seen' and then never respond. To have "seen" a message was significant because it indicated that the lack of response was intentional. As Danielle (19, F) explained, to open a message and not respond is to make sure that the other person "knows that you've seen it but chosen not to reply." Especially when done repeatedly and in addition to the actions described above, opening messages without responding was the closest equivalent to not returning a calling card as it most clearly indicated that a person wished to end an acquaintance.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Participants never described this process as 'ghosting' despite there being some similarities. Ghosting is a term used to describe abruptly cutting off all communication with someone, including not responding to any calls, messages, or social media contact and potentially blocking the person on one or more platforms. There are a few differences between ghosting and the actions I describe here that likely explain why participants did not use the term. Firstly, the term ghosting is used when someone cuts off contact very abruptly, whereas the tactics participants described for winding down and ending relationships generally involved gradually reducing contact or limiting but not ending contact. Secondly, ghosting involves people who were previously in frequent contact, whereas the situations described by

The continuity between these contemporary and historical etiquettes demonstrates that the mechanisms for restricting availability often have the further function of regulating intimacy when they are deployed consistently and in exaggerated forms. In these situations, communicative unavailability becomes a stand-in for relational unavailability.

A Discontinuity: Willfully Ignoring Etiquette

An important distinction, however, between historical visiting practices and participants' messaging practices is that the latter appear to involve more instances where people seemingly ignored other people's attempts to wind back or end a relationship. Despite a consensus among participants that persistent use of the above actions indicate a desire to end a relationship, several participants had deployed these actions only to find that their interlocutor persisted in contacting them.

For example, Danielle described a situation involving a high school friend with whom she no longer wished to maintain contact. This person had messaged her unexpectedly several months earlier looking to start a conversation. She initially replied but, in an attempt to signal that she was not interested in continuing the conversation or the relationship, quickly stopped responding. The last few messages she received included a question about how she was doing. Danielle intentionally opened this message so that it would be marked as 'seen' and then did not respond. She hoped this would make it obvious that she was intentionally ignoring the question as she did not want to interact, but the person messaged again a month later saying hello and again asking how she was. Danielle found this "really awkward" because "normally when you don't reply they get the hint." A few other participants had similar experiences and, like Danielle, found it complicated and uncomfortable to have etiquette so firmly ignored.

It seems likely that one factor contributing to this distinction between messaging and calling cards is the slightly greater ambiguity involved in messaging practices. Not reciprocating a calling card was unambiguous in its meaning; it definitively ended a social connection. In

participants involved people they interacted with fairly infrequently. Thirdly, while the term ghosting is used in the context of friendship, it is more commonly associated with dating, which is perhaps a further reason why the term was not raised in these discussions.

contrast, responding minimally and then not at all to mobile messages is widely recognised as a cue for ending acquaintances, but other explanations are always possible: perhaps the person was busy when they initially read the message and forgot to respond; perhaps the person always uses a brusque messaging style because they do not like messaging, and so on. While it seems likely that the person persisting with contact is aware that the other party is trying to end the relationship, this sliver of ambiguity gives them sufficient cover to ignore those attempts without being definitively rude or aggressive.

Notably, both historical and contemporary etiquettes involve indirect techniques for managing intimacy in the sense that neither approach includes explicitly discussing the fact that the relationship is changing or why this change is occurring. Rather, changes are signalled through reducing availability. Being indirect, however, leaves space for the other party to ignore or reject attempts to change the relationship. This was mitigated in the context of cards and calls by the highly codified meanings of actions but produced much more complicated outcomes for participants.

“Harsh” Methods of Disconnection: Cutting and Blocking

In the 19th century and in participants’ messaging practices, the above methods for politely reducing intimacy were often contrasted with less advisable methods that were described as “harsh” (Handbook of Etiquette, 1860, p. 13; Ferdinand, 18, M). These methods — cutting and blocking — ended relationships by severing the possibility for future communication. Both involve high stakes and could only be justified in select circumstances.

The Cut

In the 19th century, to ‘cut’ someone was to sever your acquaintance with them by refusing to acknowledge them in public. A cut was generally executed by ignoring a person when coming across them in public, perhaps even turning away in a pointed refusal to bow or make eye contact (F.W.R & Lord Charles X, 1867, p. 39; *Habits of Good Society*, 1894, p. 317). Other variations included ignoring people by stooping down to adjust one’s shoes or staring upwards, feigning admiration for a tall building or pattern of clouds, until the person passed (Brewer,

1898, p. 320). However it was executed, cutting someone effectively reduced them to the status of a stranger and meant they could no longer interact with the person who had cut them.⁴⁹

Cutting was condemned by most etiquette writers as uncivilised (e.g., Martine, 1866, p. 59; *Mixing in Society*, 1870, p. 140; Post, 1922, p. 26). For instance, Humphry (1897, p. 126) declared that “if a man should wish, for any reason, to courteously end an acquaintanceship, he can do it without any of the intolerable ‘cutting,’ a method resorted to only by the rough and uncultivated.” Etiquette writers cautioned against using cutting too liberally (Cooke, 1896, p. 30; *Habits of Good Society*, 1864, p. 315; Houghton, 1883, p. 68) and reserved particular disdain for people who used it to snub people of lower social status (e.g., *Habits of Good Society*, 1864, p. 317). They also noted that cutting could have “dangerous consequences” (*Handbook of Etiquette*, 1860, p. 13) as it irreparably damaged relationships and could end up harming the reputation of the ‘cutter’ if their act was perceived as unjustified or motivated by snobbery (*Habits of Good Society*, 1864, p. 315-6).

That said, etiquette writers acknowledged that cutting could be a “necessary social weapon” (*Habits of Good Society*, 1864, p. 77) in circumstances involving “notoriously bad conduct” (Houghton, 1883, p. 68). It was most clearly justified in situations where a young woman sought to end a “troublesome” male acquaintance (F.W.R & Lord Charles X, 1867, p. 39; see also *Mixing in Society*, 1870, p. 140). For instance, *Habits of Good Society* states:

A girl has no other means of escaping from the familiarity of a pushing and thick-skinned man . . . He requires so little to encourage him that even a recognition would be sufficient to bring him on. She has nothing left but to cut him dead. (1864, p. 316)

In these situations, cutting was excusable because young women had legitimate cause to end the acquaintance and no other means of doing so. It was critical, however, that even when

⁴⁹ According to the rules of 19th century society, a person was only allowed to interact with people to whom they had been formally introduced. Once two people had been formally introduced, they were considered acquaintances. This meant they could interact in public and, if desired, begin forming a more intimate relationship through the exchange of calling cards and home visits. Without a formal introduction, people were considered strangers and had little or no ability to acknowledge or speak to each other. Refusing to acknowledge someone in public returned them to the status of a stranger, severing the possibility of future communication.

cutting was warranted, it was not used until all other avenues for ending an acquaintance had been attempted (*Handbook of Etiquette*, 1860, p. 13; Houghton, 1883, p. 68; F.W.R & Lord Charles X, 1867, p. 39; Martine, 1866, p. 59; *Mixing in Society*, 1870, p. 140).

Blocking

The etiquette around cutting has strong parallels with participants' descriptions of blocking. Blocking someone on a messaging app is a method of cutting off interaction by preventing messages they send from being received.⁵⁰ I previously discussed blocking in Chapter Three where I explained that participants generally saw blocking as "harsh" and had few accounts of using the feature. Bill put this in the strongest terms, explaining that he would never use the block feature because "if you block someone, or shut someone out totally, it reflects really badly on you . . . Like, in a real-life scenario, just absolutely ignoring someone is very rude. So that's why I don't block anyone." In the few situations where participants had used it, or considered using it, the other person was someone the participant knew little or not at all, and whose messages were "incessant", "creepy", and/or annoying. Richard was the only male participant who had used the feature and had only used it in relation to "spam" messages from unknown numbers. As with cutting, the situation that appeared to most clearly justify the use of blocking was women who were subject to repeated, unwanted contact from a male acquaintance. As noted in Chapter Three, for example, Erin (22, F) described the block feature on WhatsApp as "quite useful" because "guys can get quite creepy!"

Even in these situations, however, some participants were still reluctant to use blocking. One participant, Hannah (21, F), had a particularly evocative example that began when a person who had recently joined her hockey club added her as a friend on Facebook. She described thinking, "Well I've seen him around, he's added all of my other friends, so I'll accept." He then began messaging her everyday despite the fact that they had never properly met in person. His messages ranged from banal ("I'm doing lots of homework") to sexually suggestive ("My girlfriend's out. I'm gonna be really lonely for the next five days.") She initially tried to

⁵⁰ Interestingly, participants saw blocking as substantially different to muting. To block someone was a severe action designed to end a relationship while muting was largely used for group chats that generated a lot of notifications.

discourage him by not opening or responding to his messages, but he continued messaging frequently. To make her disinterest more explicit, she began opening his messages “so he could see that I’d read them” while still not responding, but again “they just kept coming through.” By this stage, her friends had begun encouraging her to block him: “People were telling me to block him but I just feel mean, I feel bad. Cause he hasn’t really done anything to me, it’s just annoying. So I just kept opening [the messages] and not responding.” Over time, his messages eventually became less frequent and the situation ended.

Hannah had experienced similar situations in the past but had never blocked any of the men involved, despite some of their messaging becoming sexually explicit and despite her friends regularly encouraging her to block these people whose behaviour clearly constituted harassment.

My friends tell me that I should block people who annoy me but I just- I just feel bad. I feel like a bitch if I block someone . . . So I just ignore them. That’s probably as far as I’d go. [If I blocked them] they’d hate me [Laughs]. They’d be like “Aw, what’s this girl’s problem?”⁵¹

Hannah’s concern that blocking someone would reflect poorly on her and attract disdain from the other person was shared by several other participants who similarly described blocking as risking one’s own reputation.

Hannah’s account highlights another common theme in participants’ discussions of blocking: that the more polite methods for limiting intimacy described in the prior section were preferable to blocking and, unless the person was a stranger, should always be used first. In Hannah’s example above, for instance, she initially tried not opening the other person’s messages before moving on to the more ‘direct’ method of opening them and still not responding. Similarly, Bill (23, M) described how rather than blocking someone, he would find

⁵¹ Given that Hannah mostly referred to Facebook Messenger in her discussion of unwanted messaging contact, it is likely that people would know she had blocked them. In Facebook Messenger, when blocked contacts try to send a message they receive a notification stating, “Message Not Sent: This person isn’t receiving messages at this time”, which is a fairly clear indication that they have been blocked.

other ways to “limit” his “exposure to them” such as giving a “one worded answer” and generally being “really boring and blunt so that they sort of go away.”

Comparing Cutting and Blocking

Both cutting and blocking end an acquaintance by severing the possibility of future communication. There are striking parallels between the etiquettes surrounding these actions. Both were widely viewed as “harsh” practices that should be used sparingly and only in circumstances where they were clearly justified. To use them improperly would be to risk damaging a person’s own reputation. Where possible, it was preferable to try other, more polite methods for ending relationships first, but if these were ineffective and the circumstances were severe enough, the more harsh method would be justified. While these methods should always be used with caution, they were more readily excused when used by young women to stave off unwanted male attention.

A key difference, however, is that while etiquette writers clearly sanctioned the use of cutting by young women who faced persistent, unwanted male attention, there was less clarity among female participants about whether similar use of blocking was justified. This is a curious finding. Among the rigid, etiquette-obsessed Victorian elites, otherwise rude behaviour was permitted if it was being used by a young woman to shut down unwanted male attention, yet young women in my study, who lived in a context of more relaxed social norms and greater gender equity, were extremely reluctant to take an equivalent action. Blocking is certainly seen by some as a very legitimate response to messaging harassment. This is evident in the fact that Hannah’s friends implored her to block the men who harassed her via messaging, and that other participants reported using blocking in these same circumstances. However, it appears that concerns about potential backlash or reputational damage prevent some women from seeing blocking as a viable action.⁵² Overall, this is illustrative of a wider uncertainty about the etiquette of avoidance in messaging — an issue I discuss in the following chapter.

⁵² On Facebook Messenger, when blocked contacts try to send a message, they receive a notification reading “Message Not Sent: This person isn’t receiving messages at this time.” On WhatsApp, people can infer they have been blocked by someone because all messages they send to them will only show one tick beside them, indicating the message has been sent but not received. On iMessage, there is no way for

Conclusion: We Have Long Been Avoidant About Availability

In this chapter, I have outlined the availability challenges experienced in earlier historical periods and noted that, in response, people developed practices and etiquettes for regulating availability. In doing so, I have drawn out the continuities between these historical contexts and the experiences of participants.

A key finding that arises from these continuities is that being evasive when limiting availability is not unique to mobile messaging nor to today's young adults. Across the practices described in the prior chapters, managing availability through frank and open discussions is conspicuously rare. This might lead some to argue that mobile messaging encourages avoidant behaviour or that young adults lack the soft skills to manage their availability to negotiate availability in an open and frank manner. This would tie in with familiar popular narratives about millennials having underdeveloped social skills, likely as a result of their reliance of digital communication. However, the continuities identified in this chapter provide an important reminder that we have long been avoidant in communicating about our unavailability. We have long relied on hints, signals, and even lies, to smooth over the process of limiting and negotiating contact. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind that while the practices described in this thesis are often evasive, that is not necessarily a quality that makes them historically distinct. In making this case, this chapter contextualises the argument made in the preceding chapters' thesis' argument — that young adults have developed a range of nuanced strategies for managing and limiting mobile-mediated availability — and provides a foundation for the argument of the following chapter about the lack of etiquette that can complicate these strategies.

In conclusion, it is also important to note that historical etiquettes around house visits and telephone calls were heavily classed and gendered. House visits and calling cards, for instance, were explicitly tied to notions of genteel femininity and a woman's obligations to her family, and always gave the person of higher social standing greater control in determining the terms of an interaction. While etiquette is always tied to power, hierarchy, and social norms (Bordieu,

someone to tell they have been blocked, but participants often seemed unaware of this.

1984; Duncan, 1970; Foucault, 1990; Geertz, 1972, Parsons, 1971), participants did not have accounts of messaging etiquettes being so explicitly classed or gendered (although, as noted, there was a gendered element in female participants' experiences of male harassment and, particularly, the persistent nature of that contact). It is notable that overall, participants relatively privileged as almost all were tertiary educated, many had the economic resources to travel interstate or internationally for study, and all appeared able-bodied and without primary care responsibilities. Consequently, participants across the sample had similar abilities to manage connections to and through mobile communication. Elements relating to social structure might have been more readily apparent if, for instance, the sample had included people who were engaged in gig-work, had complex health conditions, or were caring for a family member (Portwood-Stacer, 2013) as these conditions would make restricting and negotiating availability more difficult. This would be worth further investigation, as would broader issues around the role of power and hierarchy in the etiquette of messaging availability.

Chapter 8 — Contested Etiquettes: Heterogeneity and Instability of Mobile Messaging Etiquettes

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that there are significant parallels between historical and contemporary modes of availability management. In this chapter, I complicate that account by arguing that my participants' experiences were also, at times, characterised by a lack of clear, stable etiquettes around availability. As I discuss below, this became apparent in two ways. Firstly, while participants often had strong ideas about the etiquette of messaging unavailability, and in some cases these ideas were common across participants, there were many other occasions where one participant's ideas were not shared with other participants. At times, participants even had directly contradicting views on the etiquette of messaging availability. Secondly, some participants had experienced conflict within friendships due to differing views about messaging etiquette. These stories provided further evidence that there are areas where etiquette about messaging availability is unclear and illustrated that, at times, this can have severe consequences within relationships. In making these observations, the chapter completes the thesis' argument that young adults have a range of strategies for managing and limiting mobile-mediated availability but that these are complicated by a lack of widely accepted etiquettes.

I begin this chapter by recounting examples where views about messaging availability etiquette varied significantly across participants. I focus on three particular areas: views about triaging, read receipts, and deception. I then discuss the relational implications of these contested etiquettes by describing situations where it caused conflict within participants' friendships. In the following section, I suggest reasons for this lack of clear etiquette and argue that the newness of messaging and the destabilising effect of continual technology updates are key factors. I also note that because messaging is a private medium, people have limited opportunities for observing the conduct of others, which has likewise complicated the development of etiquette, as has the erosion of a widely shared sociotemporal order that used to provide an anchor for availability etiquettes. I close the chapter by considering the broader theoretical significance of these findings.

Examples of Contested Etiquettes

In this section, I illustrate that some etiquettes for managing messaging availability are contested by describing three areas where views varied significantly across participants. The first example involves a temporal practice, the second involves a technical practice, and the last involves a discursive practice.

Temporality: Assessing Triaging Factors

In Chapter Four, I described how participants used a triaging process to determine which messages need to be responded to immediately and which could be responded to later. This process involved assigning priority to messages by assessing the content, sender, platform, and message type. Participants across Cohorts A and B were in broad agreement about how some of these factors should be assessed — there was wide acceptance that group messages were a lower priority than one-to-one messages and that messages with urgent content should be responded to quickly. Participants in Cohort B also widely agreed that all non-urgent messages could be deferred until much later or ignored entirely. Participants in Cohort A, however, had varying ideas about how priority should be assigned across other factors.

These participants gave contradictory accounts of which messaging apps connoted more or less urgency and therefore called for more or less prompt responses. Bill (23, M), for instance, felt that WhatsApp required faster messaging responses than Facebook Messenger, explaining: “I just feel like it’s more of an instant message if it’s WhatsApp compared to Facebook [Messenger].” In contrast, Hadiya (20, F) would always respond to Facebook messages the fastest. She explained, “If it’s a text [through SMS] then it’s not such a huge priority to respond immediately . . . But yeah, definitely on Facebook [Messenger] I try and go for a speedier reply.” Taking a third position, Octavius Maximilian VII (18, M) felt that SMS required the fastest response, saying, “SMS is almost more personal and direct. There seems to be a greater desire to have someone to respond quicker if you message them through SMS than if you message them through Facebook.” As these quotes illustrate, participants had different ideas about which messaging apps were associated with the need for faster or slower responses.

Participants often explained these interpretations by referencing the history or design of messaging apps. Bill, who felt that WhatsApp required the fastest replies, suggested that this was because WhatsApp was a mobile native app that had always been dedicated to messaging, whereas Facebook Messenger was a spin-off from the Facebook social media platform and initially used through computers rather than mobile devices. As a result, he felt that Facebook Messenger was perceived as less immediate, saying, “It’s not really instant — it’s not *for that*.” Following a similar logic, Octavius Maximilian VII, who saw SMS as more pressing than Facebook, suggested that this was because to send someone an SMS you needed their phone number, whereas a message could be sent via Facebook Messenger by finding a person on Facebook. He explained that with SMS:

You already know the person who’s messaging you — you’re more likely to appreciate the effort that they’ve put into sending you a private SMS message through a channel that’s exclusive, almost exclusive in form. I definitely reply to texts quicker than I reply to Facebook messages for that sort of reason.

While the history and design of different apps informed how participants viewed them, their recourse to these ‘objective’ factors stands at odds with the fact that participants had such contrasting views. It seems likely, then, that the norms within their friendship groups had an equal or greater impact on their perceptions. This would explain why their views varied and why, despite this, they presumed that their views were widely shared. In developing localised understandings about messaging apps, participants displayed what Gershon (2011) terms “idioms of practice” — understandings of a technology and how it is to be used that are specific to a small group, such as family members or close friends. She argues that idioms of practice are common in contexts where the use of digital communication technologies is still being negotiated, as appears to be the case with mobile messaging.

In their accounts of triaging, participants also had contradictory views about how to factor in the relationship between sender and receiver. In Chapter Four, I noted that many participants felt that messages from intimate friends should be responded to more quickly than messages from less intimate friends. For these participants, reply speed reflected a person’s commitment to and interest in their messaging partner. According to this logic, the closer you are to a person,

the more important it is that you reply quickly, and the higher priority their messages should be given.

Other participants, however, felt that the opposite rule applied. For these participants, the foundation of trust, respect, and familiarity in close relationships meant that fast replies were less important than in weaker relationships, where there was a greater chance of causing offence or misunderstanding. According to this logic, the closer you are to a person, the less important it is that you reply quickly, and the lesser priority their messages could be given. One participant who held this view was Maisie (30, F). When I asked Maisie about the people she felt least pressured to respond to, she listed four of the people closest to her:

Probably boyfriend, and then Mum and Dad. My housemate as well. She's actually one of my good friends. Just people that you know well . . . Unless it's like a matter of urgency that you reply, you can leave it for a little bit. Not 'cause you don't want to reply, but if you're busy or something you don't feel the need to. There's no pressure to reply straight away . . . I guess it's cause you know you'll see them soon, or you'll actually talk to each other on the phone, or see each other at home or something. Or you're busy. We all know our patterns and our schedules.

For Maisie, the people she was closest to were less likely to read into or misunderstand a slow reply because they had a sense of when the other person was busy. She was also more likely to be in contact with them regularly, so conversations could be picked up later if she did not get around to responding.

Another participant, Matthew (20, M), felt similarly, explaining that he would be “more inclined” to respond to someone he did not know well, as compared to someone he did know well:

If you're friends with someone already, especially good friends, for example, they might understand that you're not talking to them, not because you don't think you're good mates but because you've got other things to do . . . other people, they might perceive it as offensive and you want to avoid that as much as possible.

Like Maisie, Matthew felt that the foundation of trust and good-will in more established relationships made it less important to respond quickly as people were less likely to perceive a

slow response as an indication that something was wrong within the relationship. For participants like Maisie and Matthew, the closer a person was, the lower priority their messages were.

Read Receipt Notifications

As previously discussed in this thesis, most messaging apps contain read receipt features that indicate whether a message has been opened. The specific versions that participants encountered most were the 'blue tick' feature in WhatsApp and the 'seen' feature in Facebook Messenger.⁵³ In Chapter Three, I described how these features discourage people from replying slowly. For many participants, the etiquette around this feature was clear — once a person knows that you have read a message, you must respond quickly to avoid giving the impression that you are ignoring them. As described in Chapter Three, for many participants, pressure to respond to opened messages was significant and shaped many of their messaging practices.

There were, however, other perspectives among participants. Some felt that it was impolite to not open a message, regardless of whether they intended to respond soon after, because to not open it inferred a lack of care and attention. These participants felt that it was always better to open a message because the read receipt would communicate to the other person that you acknowledged their message. One participant who felt this way was Danielle. Danielle (19, F) mostly used WhatsApp and spoke about being 'blue ticked', meaning, to have someone read your message and not respond. This term references the blue ticks that are used within WhatsApp to signal that a message has been read. At one point in our discussion, she explained that she would much rather be 'blue ticked' than have someone not open the message:

Oh I'd rather someone blue ticked me! Because then you know they've read your message and they will reply eventually. Whereas [otherwise] you're wondering, are they busy? When are they going to see my message? Are they purposefully avoiding me? . . . Blue tick is like, you know they'll reply eventually. And it's not as if they're ignoring you, and even if they are ignoring you it's like totally okay . . . [because they're not] ignoring you in the sense that "I don't want you to know that I read your message."

⁵³ These features are described in more detail in Chapter Three.

For Danielle, being blue ticked was entirely acceptable. She felt that it signalled acknowledgement and an intention to eventually reply, whereas to not open a message left the sender wondering about the recipient's intentions.

Other participants felt that read receipts had no social significance and should not dictate people's messaging practices. As Kevin (25, M) explained: "I don't see it as a big deal . . . It doesn't really matter to me." Kevin did not avoid opening messages and felt no additional pressure to respond once he had opened them. Another participant, Steve (21, M), held a similar view. He felt there was a growing awareness about the difficulty of managing mobile availability and that people understood that their friends might not respond for a range of benign reasons. He explained, "I can understand how people can get bombarded [with messages]. And it often happens to me that someone will just drop out [of a conversation] so, yeah, I don't see it as a big deal if I drop out of a conversation." Participants like Kevin and Steve were aware that the feature was widely perceived as creating additional pressure to respond but felt that this was an unhelpful or unnecessary expectation. They avoided reading into whether people had opened messages and rejected the idea that they themselves were obligated to respond immediately to messages they had opened.

A final group of participants had mixed feelings about the etiquette around read receipts. At times, they felt that opening a message was socially significant, while at other times they rejected these social meanings as overblown and passé. They sometimes acted in contradictory ways that reflected each of these impulses. Belinda (25, F), for example, described racing to mark a message as 'unread' if she had opened it accidentally: "Like, I will literally run and mark it unread if I really don't want the person to see I read it."⁵⁴ Then, in the next breath, she explained, "But also I'm at the point where, I don't care anymore. [Laughs] So I just open it. The person sees I've seen it. Life goes on." When I asked her why she no longer cared as much, she responded, "I used to feel bad before but now, not so much. I don't know why that's changed. But then, if I see someone's read my message and they haven't responded, I'm like, '*Excuse*

⁵⁴ Interestingly, despite a few participants mentioning this strategy, it does not actually work. The message changes to 'unread' in the receiver's app but remains 'read' for the sender.

me!?” Belinda alternated between viewing read receipts as socially meaningful — something to feel guilty about and offended over — and something of no meaning that could be disregarded.

Read receipts provide an especially lucid example of the displays of difference that are central to etiquette in which one person recognises and enacts their social obligations in relation to another. When functioning as intended, this process provides a way of buffering interactions and reducing the risk of the other person taking offence. Yet, the breadth of views among participants illustrates how complex social interactions can become when people’s interpretations of etiquette differ. What is the correct display of deference between a message receiver and sender when read receipts are present? What happens when one persons attempt at buffering is read by their interlocutor as neglecting their social obligations?

Deception

Previously in this thesis, I have discussed the use of deceptive messaging as a strategy for managing availability. In Chapter Five, I noted that this was a common practice among participants and their friends — an observation reinforced by research that has used quantitative methods to establish that people frequently lie via mobile messaging to manage and restrict their availability (Birnholtz et al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2013; French et al., 2015). On this basis, the practice could be described as a descriptive norm, that is, a widely used action. The question of whether it is also an injunctive norm — an action that is typically approved or disapproved — is more complex. In Chapter Six, I described how many participants saw deceptive messaging as a socially-sanctioned act that could be defended on the basis that it protected other people’s feelings and that, in some situations, it was not actually deceptive but rather served as short-hand for unavailability. I showed how these views mirrored the injunctive norms around deception in earlier communicative contexts, where it was similarly accepted as a form of politeness.

There were, however, a range of perceptions among participants about the extent to which, or the conditions in which, deceptive messaging was permissible. A few participants were very concerned about how widespread the practice was and felt that it would be better if people were more upfront about their availability. One such participant, Jose (24, M), was concerned

that the barrier afforded by messaging apps was encouraging people to avoid difficult conversations about availability. He explained:

That's got me thinking about whether these other forms of communication — forms other than phone calls — are teaching us to hide behind things. To find other alternative ways of communicating when we've got something serious to say, or there's some anticipation of hurting someone, or that sort of thing. It's teaching us different ways of getting around being genuine, getting around knowing how it feels when you let someone down. [Pause] So we sort of find other ways of getting around that and, yeah, I guess it doesn't feel good to me to do that.

Octavius Maximillian VII (18, M) felt similarly. He appreciated the social function of deception, noting that it “certainly it helps us smooth over that awkwardness of social availability”. He was also sceptical, though, adding:

but I don't think in general it's a good thing. I think it would be better for people to be more direct. And I think the only reason they have to have recourse to butler lying is precisely because they're being bombarded with so much information. They don't know how to deal with it, so they have to develop these heuristics, or these tools, but it just means they're not being genuine with people.

Like Jose, Octavius felt that mobile messaging made people more inclined to lie. Rather than pointing to the barrier it affords, however, Octavius focused on the ease of contacting other people through messaging and the many requests for interaction that people often received as a result. He explained that people needed “a coping mechanism” for dealing with unwanted messaging interactions, particularly in situations where they wanted to stop messaging with some people but continue with others. He felt that these conditions encouraged people to lie, which was encouraging bad habits of being deceptive.

Another view that some participants held was that deceptive messaging was permissible and benign but only under certain conditions. Some felt that it was acceptable unless the recipient was a close friend or family member. Leonard (21, M), for instance, explained that it was “a matter of principle” that you should not lie about availability to close friends. Others felt that, when lying to avoid an event, it depended on the nature of that event. For example, Jasmine (19, F) felt that it was “not a big deal” to use a lie “unless it's something important . . . Like, [it's

fine to lie] if it's just a casual catch up." Some participants found it hard to articulate to a coherent position on the issue of deception, wavering between a sense that these lies were simply part of "human nature" and feeling uncomfortable about condoning deception. This kind of conflicted view is evident in the following comments from Chelsea (20, F).

Like, I don't know if they're a good thing to use, lies. I think it's just universally accepted that people do that. And maybe it's not a good thing, like I have no idea. I don't know what life would look like if we didn't use them. It probably wouldn't be as pleasant. I mean it's a little bit fake, using them, and insincere. But then would people really be able to handle the truth? I don't know.

The ambivalence that some participants felt about deception was further evident in the words they chose to describe it. They were often reluctant to use words like 'lying' because they inferred doing harm, but had difficulty coming up with alternative terms.

These varied perspectives about if and when deception was permissible demonstrate that even when a strategy for managing messaging availability was widely practiced, views on its use still varied considerably across participants. Perhaps one contributing factor is that in the 19th century, the phrasing of lies about availability was highly standardised (i.e. "not at home") making it clear what constituted an acceptable lie. The same can broadly be said for mid-20th century telephone calls, where acceptable lies were used in select situations and involved a fairly narrow range of excuses. In comparison, deceptive messaging is much less standardised and covers a much wider range of situations, perhaps making it more difficult to generate a broadly applicable rule about acceptability.

Implications of Contested Etiquettes: Flexibility and Conflict

The instability of availability etiquettes had several implications for participants and their friendships. In some contexts, the lack of widely held etiquette provided space for them to work out their own shared norms. This is perhaps most evident in the instances of intimate asynchronicity described in Chapter Four, whereby participants rejected the immediacy encouraged by mobile devices and messaging platforms and instead developed messaging rhythms that were characterised by mutually-accepted periods of delay. Participants in Cohort A also often described being aware and respectful of the different degrees to which their

friends were available for mobile communication. They described people as having different “messaging styles” and noted that some friends were “less attached” to their phone and therefore less readily contactable. Among close friends, these differences in responsiveness and expressiveness were often accepted, and adjustments were made to accommodate them. Participants in Cohort B provided more detail about the perspective of these “less attached” phone users, describing how their close friends accepted their limited availability for messaging. This is perhaps most evident in the situations, discussed in Chapter Four, where friends would contact these participants individually to invite them to events, as they knew they would not have noticed the event being planned in group chats. In cases like these, the openness and flexibility of messaging etiquettes gave people room to find systems that worked for them. This is in marked contrast to the stifling specificity of 19th century etiquettes which provided little room for individual preferences and were especially restrictive for women and the lower classes.

At the same time, however, the uncertainty about aspects of messaging etiquette also led to tension and conflict between friends. Several participants described situations where a friend felt that they had violated etiquette, while they felt they had acted appropriately. These stories provide further evidence that there is a lack of widely accepted etiquettes for negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability and illustrate that this can have serious implications for relationships.

One example of these stories involved Erin (22, F), an international student from Singapore, and several of her close friends. In Chapter Four, I described how Erin often took up to a week to reply to messages from her close friends back home. This was partly because they talked about “deep” issues, which meant that Erin needed time to respond thoughtfully, and partly because, as her close friends, Erin felt they would know that the delays were circumstantial rather than a reflection of their relationship. In explaining this to me, Erin repeatedly stressed that she and her friends had a “mutual understanding” about her slow responses. During our second interview, however, she told me that she had been mistaken. Shortly after our initial interview, her friends “kinda got mad” with her and questioned why she had become “complacent” with her responses. From her friends’ perspective, Erin’s delayed replies

indicated that she was becoming less invested in the friendships. They felt she was drifting away:

They said I'm just not there, you know. . . My friend said, when I didn't reply [to] her, she was upset. She was like, "How would we know that you're still there for us when we can't see you physically and you don't even reply [to] our texts, and we can't tell you what's been going on back home?"

Erin had assumed that the intimacy of these relationships meant that her delays were appropriate and understood, while her friends felt that the intimacy between them called for a greater effort from Erin to respond promptly. Resolving this conflict involved several Skype conversations and a promise from Erin that she would respond more quickly. She was now very careful about noting which messages needed responses and always replied within two days.

Erin's experience suggests that friendships where messaging is the central form of interaction might be especially prone to disagreement over messaging etiquette. If Erin had been living in the same place as these friends and seeing them regularly, messaging speed may not have been such a meaningful signifier. Fortunately, by recognising and discussing their different perspectives, Erin and her friends repaired their relationship. It is not difficult, however, to imagine situations where opposing perspectives are never recognised or openly addressed, or are addressed but not resolved as neither party is as willing to capitulate as Erin.

Another participant, Ella (19, F), had experienced this latter scenario. Ella was part of Cohort B. She used messaging, "but only for important things" where it was hard to avoid, such as group projects at university. She did not value messaging as a form of interaction and was especially reluctant to use it for casual chatting or sharing small elements of everyday life, which she felt was an unnecessary and somewhat irritating practice. However, these views sometimes caused trouble, and she recounted one situation in particular where they led to the breakdown of a friendship. It involved someone who she had met and become close to quite quickly, describing them as a "best friend". Initially, Ella and this friend had messaged "quite a lot" but as time passed and the friendship deepened Ella began to respond less frequently. She explained:

Because that's not my nature to talk to people all the time, I started to stop talking with her, stop responding that much, stop responding immediately because I have stuff to do,

obviously. She mistook it, saying, "Why are you taking so long to reply to my message? What's wrong with you? Am I doing something wrong?" She thought that I didn't like her anymore, like, there's something wrong. So she just started to distance herself as well, but I told her, "Hey. It's not like that. It's just who I am."

Ella's friend, who seemed to enjoy and value messaging much more, struggled to understand why she was less responsive. Ella tried to explain that she felt it was normal for people to message more at the beginning of a friendship and that, with time, it "subsides a bit." Ella also felt that as they grew closer and built trust she should be able to return to her usual approach to messaging. She tried to explain that "this is just how I am with messaging" but her friend was convinced that the change in Ella's responsiveness signalled a change in her feelings.

When I asked Ella about the outcome of this disagreement, she explained that the friendship quickly "drifted apart". She expressed frustration that it had ended and said she found it "crazy" that her friend could not understand her reasons for responding slowly. She had also, however, begun to question her approach to messaging and friendship.

I realised that probably she's right, probably like, I should reach out more often. Now, I'm just trying to message and reach out a bit more than I used to, like I used to be very bad at that . . . [It made me ask] "Am I wrong?" "Is there something wrong with me?" And then I tried to message people more, but I feel that it's not authentic. I feel like, oh, I'm just being fake.

Because of the irresolvable difference of opinion with her friend, Ella was confronted with the question of whether it is more important to be true to her own views about messaging, or to be more available and responsive for the sake of others. Her experience demonstrates that the beginning stages of a friendship may be particularly vulnerable to disruption that is caused by differing perceptions of messaging etiquettes, as the two parties must come to a consensus about what messaging availability means within their friendship.

This experience of misunderstanding was regularly noted by participants from Cohort B. While their close friends generally understood and accommodated their limited messaging availability, it could cause problems with acquaintances and newer friends who expected them to be more responsive. Laila (21, F), for instance, disliked messaging as she found it frustratingly slow and prone to miscommunication. She greatly preferred to speak to friends in

person or over the phone. Her closer friends understood this but other people were often confused or frustrated by her unresponsiveness. She explained:

Some people just think I'm mean because I don't want to talk to them. I've gotten a few people that are like, "Do you just not like me or something?" I'm just like, "No. I just don't like messaging." Then, I'll be really upfront [and say] "To be honest, I'd rather just not message you, but how about we go get lunch instead?"

This usually helped but, overall, Laila felt that people had very different perspectives about acceptable reply times and that even after upfront discussions, some people continued to be frustrated with her slow responses.

Sabrina (21, F) was another participant from Cohort B who made similar observations. As discussed in Chapter Four, Sabrina tightly controlled her phone use in order to minimise time-wasting and maintain greater control over her availability. She had several friends who also disliked messaging and, in some cases, were even less responsive than her. While discussing these friends, Sabrina explained, "I notice that people get frustrated with them. They're like 'Oh, she didn't reply to my message for three days.'" Sabrina felt that, at times, these friends *were* a little too unresponsive, but she also understood that it was because they saw messaging as unimportant, not because they saw people as unimportant. She felt it was "unfortunate" that some people, "who are obsessed with their phone and checking it constantly" saw their slow responses as signs that they were unreliable or "not as good a friend". As with Ella and Laila, this experience highlights that while close friends often come to understand and accept each other's idiosyncratic views on messaging etiquette, these same idiosyncrasies can be difficult to negotiate in less intimate relationships.

Overall, these accounts demonstrate that while the young adults in my study had a wide range of practices for managing their availability and were often able to establish norms within their friendship groups, negotiating unavailability could also be a fraught endeavour with significant consequences. These fraught negotiations highlight the fact that while widely-held etiquette smooths over social relations, uncertain or unstable etiquette is often a space where power relations are worked out and adjusted (Duncan, 1970; Foucault 1990; Goffman, 1971). In Erin's case, she was willing to be disciplined by her friends and adhere to their expectations around reply time, firming up norms within their group; in Ella's case, neither party was willing to

capitulate resulting in the end of the friendship. Overall, the lack of widely held etiquette in areas such as reply speeds, read receipts, and deception mean that expectations around messaging etiquette can become flashpoints for relational tension and conflict.

Drivers of Conflicting Etiquettes

The examples discussed above demonstrate that while participants had opinions about the etiquette for negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability, these ideas were not always widely held across participants or shared between participants and their friends. Indeed, there were often substantial differences in opinion that, in some cases, led to conflict. These differences of opinion were also often about fairly fundamental issues, such as the relationship between intimacy and reply speed.

There were, of course, disputes over etiquette in earlier periods too. In the previous chapter for instance, I noted that Post (1922) felt that the phrase ‘not at home’ was better than the phrase ‘not receiving’, while others felt the opposite. Etiquette manuals also sometimes noted areas where etiquette was contested but these were generally very minor, like the finer points of dining table etiquette (Plante, 1997, p. 114). Further, as noted in Chapter Two, while etiquette manuals provide some indication of everyday practices, they are primarily records of normative etiquettes. Thus it is likely that, in practice, there was greater variation in perspectives and practices than these texts suggest. Still, these etiquette manuals together with the other secondary sources that I have drawn on suggest that, during the periods I discuss, the negotiation of availability through calling cards and landline telephones was subject to a more standardised set of normative etiquettes than is currently the case with mobile messaging.

While my research is not designed to make definitive judgements about why the etiquette for negotiating messaging availability is unstable, I am able to suggest several likely contributing factors.

The Newness of Messaging Technology

One likely reason for the unstable etiquettes observed among participants is that mobile messaging is a relatively new technology. Social norms around technology use clarify and solidify over time (Marvin, 1988; Silverstone & Haddon, 1996; Winston, 1986), so it is possible

that messaging is not yet old enough to have stable, broadly accepted etiquettes. This might seem like an unusual claim given that mobile messaging is deeply embedded in the lives of millions of people. However, it is still in the early phases of its domestication when compared to calling cards and landline telephones.

Mobile messaging has been in common use as a means of social communication for approximately the past twenty years. Mobile phones first began to support messaging in the form of SMS in 1993 (Trosby et al., 2010, p. 125). While initial growth rates for SMS were slow, adoption rose sharply in the late-1990s when usability improved and network operators began to allow the transmission of messages between networks (Taylor & Vincent, 2005, p. 81; Trosby et al., 2010, p. 126). Despite being marketed as a tool for business communication, people began to use SMS for social communication — particularly teenagers who drove much of the initial demand for SMS services (Goggin, 2006, p. 73; Taylor & Vincent, 2005, p. 79; Trosby et al., 2010, p. 127). Although rates of texting grew more quickly in some countries than others, it was in common use as a means of social communication by the turn of the millennium (Goggin, 2006, pp. 73-74), with use rates then rising rapidly in the early 2000s (Mercer, 2006, p. 124). Thus, while mobile messaging has been available for the past 27 years, it has been in common use for, at best, 20 of those years.

In comparison, when discussing the etiquette of calling cards and house visits I have drawn primarily on sources relating to England in the late-19th century. At this time, these practices had been in common use for over a century. Calling cards originated in France in the mid-17th century and were adopted by social elites across Europe, including in England, towards the end of the 18th century (Wildeblood & Brinson, 1965, pp. 254-255). Visiting practices had a much longer history within England — ceremonial visits were common in the 17th century and social visits became common in the 18th century (Wildeblood & Brinson, 1965, p. 228). The practice of calling, and the associated use of the calling card, remained common throughout the 19th century and into the first quarter of the 20th century (Wildeblood & Brinson, 1965, pp. 254-255). By the late 19th century, then, these practices had been in common use for the better part of a century and were yet to be destabilised by changing social norms and the introduction of the telephone.

Similarly, when discussing the etiquette of landline telephone calls, I have drawn primarily on sources related to 'developed' Western countries during the 1960s, with a few sources from the 1950s or early 1970s. While the telephone was available to those who could afford it from the early 19th century, it was not until the 1920s that telephone companies embraced social conversations as a legitimate use (Fischer, 1994, p. 75, 183). As with SMS, this shift reflected a recognition that people were already using the technology for social purposes as much, if not more, than the intended commercial purposes. Thus, by the 1960s, the telephone had been in common use as a form of social communication for around 40 years. Perhaps, then, it is simply the case that mobile messaging, despite becoming ubiquitous quickly, has not yet been in common use long enough for etiquettes to have entirely stabilised.

Other scholars have similarly noted that some messaging etiquettes are yet to stabilise, and likewise suggested that it is due to the technologies' relative youth. As described in Chapter One, Mascheroni & Vincent (2016) interviewed children and teenagers about their experiences of being constantly available to their peers via mobile communication. They observe that for many young people, normative expectations of constant availability are associated with negative emotions, like anxiety and obligation, and that they are developing ways to resist and rework norms around availability. They note that this finding "suggest[s] that mobile social networking and instant messaging are currently being domesticated and that children are still working out the rules governing reciprocal availability and the texting etiquette" (2016, p. 19). Similarly, in her study of digitally-mediated relationship break-ups, Gershon (2011) noted that agreements often develop among friends, classmates, or colleagues about the meanings of different digital communication technologies and how they should be used. As noted above, Gershon found that these "idioms of practice" often varied substantially between different groups. She suggested that this was likely due to the newness of digital communication technologies, which meant that people had not had time to develop widespread consensus about how to use them, particularly for "relatively rare communicative tasks like breaking up" (2011, p. 39). The findings of this thesis add further weight to these suggestions that there are areas where messaging etiquette is yet to stabilise. According to this reasoning, greater consensus should emerge over time around the etiquettes of mobile messaging availability, however, as I discuss below, there are additional factors that may hinder this process.

Continual Technological Change

One factor that likely hinders the development of mobile messaging etiquette is the high degree of ongoing change in messaging technologies. While it is common for technologies to undergo a lot of change early in their development, messaging apps and mobile operating systems have been subject to continual changes well after becoming mundane, everyday technologies. These continual changes can destabilise etiquettes that are forming or require the development of new ones.

One of the most significant technological changes affecting messaging availability was the launch of smartphones, which, in turn, led to the development of mobile messaging apps in the late 2000s and early 2010s. As noted in Chapter One, smartphone messaging apps had significant implications for the way that people experienced and negotiated mobile availability. They reduced the cost of messaging to almost nothing, allowed for longer messages, and had greater storage capacities — all of which contributed to increased expectations of availability and responsiveness.

Even more significantly, however, the shift to smartphones has meant that messaging technologies and mobile operating systems can be altered through software updates rather than changes to hardware or infrastructure, which are more expensive and difficult to upgrade. The continually rolling nature of these updates can be illustrated by giving a brief account of significant changes to the Facebook Messenger app, which was the most commonly used messaging service among participants. As noted in Chapter Three, Facebook first launched Messenger as a stand-alone app in 2011. In 2012, Facebook made two substantial changes: introducing read receipts and a location feature that stated where messages were sent from.⁵⁵ In 2013, it added voice messages, voice calling, and stickers, including the ‘thumbs up’ sticker that became part of the app’s main keyboard. In 2014, Facebook made Messenger compulsory, forcing users to switch to it whenever they attempted to use the messaging feature within Facebook’s social media app. They also updated the read receipt feature, making it more accurate and introducing a new ‘FacePile’ design. FacePile replaced the prior text-based read

⁵⁵ This was a default setting but could be turned off by the user.

receipts with a visual system in which a user's profile image moves down the messaging thread, stopping next to the most recent message they have read. This makes it easier to see at a glance whether messages have been read, especially in a group chat.

In 2015, the year I began data collection, Facebook introduced a web-browser version of Messenger. They also added video calls, enabled people to sign up for Messenger without a Facebook account, and replaced the prior location sharing feature with a new feature that enabled one-off location sharing between individuals. In 2016, Facebook introduced 'secret' conversations that are end-to-end encrypted and can be set to disappear after a specified period. After my data collection ended in late-2016, Facebook has made the following changes to Messenger: launched a children's version of the app, added the ability to tag people in messages, added the ability to react to messages via a selection of emoji, introduced an AI assistant called M Suggestions that recommends features based on message content, integrated Facebook groups with Messenger, and, in 2019, introduced the much anticipated delete feature.

Some of these changes are more immediately relevant to availability etiquettes than others. The introduction of read receipts, for example, is highly relevant as it impacts the etiquette around response times. Similarly, participants often spoke about group messages involving less obligation to follow or engage in conversations, however the introduction of 'tagging' means that people are now alerted when their name has been mentioned, effectively summoning them to the group chat. This likely increases feelings of obligation to participate. Further, even features that are less obviously related to availability can destabilise etiquettes or create new ones. Adding the 'thumbs up' sticker, for instance, gave people with a new way to end conversations, as noted in Chapter Four, while adding or removing location sharing features impacts the kinds of lies that people can tell about being unavailable.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This continual flow of updates is likely to continue. Facebook recently announced that future updates to Messenger will include the launch of a desktop app, a feature that allows joint video watching, and substantially reducing the app's download size so that it's available to people with less storage or slower internet speeds. They also announced new features that are designed to encourage people to make 'offline' plans, namely by enabling people to designate specific contacts as 'close friends' and pairing this with an emoji status feature that enables people to tell close friends what they are currently doing, or feel like doing.

In addition to changes within messaging apps, such as those listed above, device operating systems are also subject to continual updates that can likewise have implications for messaging availability etiquette. This can be illustrated by considering the evolution of the ‘Do Not Disturb’ feature within Apple’s iPhone operating system (iOS). Apple introduced Do Not Disturb in 2012. When turned on, the feature disables all notifications related to incoming communication. It includes an option to allow notifications from ‘favourite’ contacts and can be scheduled to turn on and off at a specific time. In 2013, Apple made the feature more visible by including it in the ‘Control Centre’ that was introduced as part of iOS7.⁵⁷ In 2016, Apple added an emergency bypass option that allows notifications from selected contacts even if they are not marked as favourites. In 2017, Apple introduced a version of Do Not Disturb designed for use while driving. It can turn on automatically once the phone connects to a vehicle’s Bluetooth and, among other things, sends an auto-reply explaining the person will respond once they finish driving. In 2018, Apple added an option to automatically turn the setting on during predefined ‘bedtime’ hours. Changes such as these can affect the options people have for reducing their availability and shape their perceptions of other people’s unavailability by providing plausible reasons why someone has not seen or responded to a message.

While the telephone and calling card were also subject to technological changes after they had entered common use, these changes were slower and had less bearing on availability etiquettes. The calling card of the late 19th century was subject to changes in printing technologies, however these had aesthetic rather than functional implications (Banfield, 1989). Similarly, changes in transportation technology during this era made visiting easier but appeared to have little overall impact on visiting and calling card etiquette.

By comparison, the landline telephone was subject more changes after it had entered common use. These changes did, at times, affect availability etiquettes. During the period that the prior chapter focuses on — the 1950s to the early 1970s — availability-related changes included the gradual replacement of party lines with private lines, improvements in network capacity and reliability, and an overall reduction in costs (Mercer, 2006, p. 76). These changes meant that

⁵⁷ Control Centre is a customisable menu of frequently used settings that people can access by swiping up from the bottom of any screen.

people could talk on the phone for longer, likely making unavailability harder to negotiate by removing barriers that had provided convenient excuses for ending calls. These changes were not, however, as constant as mobile software updates and the basic technology of the telephone remained stable during this time. As Mercer notes:

The post war period until start of 1970s represented an era of ongoing stability for the users of the telephone and its basic meanings and functions and, for this reason, the telephone during this time can be thought of as “the standard” telephone. (2006, p. 85)

Technologies like voicemail, call waiting, and car phones would have substantial implications for availability etiquette but these were not in common domestic use until later.

The brief review of selected changes to Facebook Messenger and the Do Not Disturb feature within iOS illustrates that a much greater degree of ongoing change is occurring in messaging technologies. This is in large part because app developers can make continual adjustments to software without requiring changes to hardware or infrastructure. There is also a commercial imperative involved. In an increasingly crowded market where mobile messaging apps and smartphones share the same basic functions, introducing and refining features helps developers differentiate from their competitors. These continual changes, however, can have the unintended side effect of hindering the development of broad consensus about how messaging availability should be negotiated. To state it plainly, the continual technological change that results from Silicon Valley’s relentless pursuit of innovation drives uncertainty around the correct use of messaging apps, particularly in terms of negotiating unavailability.

The Privacy of Mobile Messaging

While the newness of mobile messaging and the continual technological change it undergoes are likely the main reasons for some availability etiquettes being unstable, these are complicated by other factors that make it additionally difficult for etiquettes to solidify. One such factor is that messaging is largely a private form of communication — it occurs between two individuals, or a small group of individuals, in a space that is not easily observed by others. Participants did, on occasion, report discussing their messaging practices with friends. These discussions were often about the content of messages during significant exchanges, like a fight between friends. In a few cases, the discussions touched on issues of unavailability but again

only in contexts where there was something significant at stake. In the previous chapter, for instance, I discussed how Hannah's friends told her to block someone who was harassing her via Facebook Messenger.

Aside from these rare conversations, however, participants' ideas about availability etiquette were largely formed through one of two mechanisms. Firstly, following the principles of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) which proposes that new behaviours are acquired through observing and imitating others, they took lessons from the actions of people they messaged. Erin, for instance, recalled that when she first began messaging "boys" she noted that they were often slow to respond and took this as a cue that she could also respond slowly if she wanted. Secondly, participants generated ideas about messaging etiquette by following the 'golden rule' of treating others how they would like to be treated. We saw this, for instance, in Chapter Three, where Z explained that he finds it frustrating when people open messages but do not respond, and so was careful not to do the same to others.

Overall, these methods for developing messaging guidelines were limited. In observing their messaging partners, participants had a relatively small sample from which to assess normal or correct practice. Rather than building toward a broad consensus, this contributed to the development of idioms of practice (Gershon, 2011), whereby groups of friends established their own norms. Likewise, drawing from their own preferences did not provide a way of generating a broad consensus given that personal preferences differed. Due to the privacy of messaging, however, participants had few other opportunities to observe or discuss everyday practices of availability management. Some participants were highly aware of the possible idiosyncrasies of their own messaging practices and expressed uncertainty or concern about it during the interview. In one particularly memorable example, I ended my with Belinda (25, F) by asking my usual wrap up question: "Is there anything you'd like to ask me?" She began to respond by saying that she had nothing to ask but then paused and said, "Are other people like me? With texting? Or, can you not talk about it?" She appeared relieved when I explained that I could talk about it and that many of her experiences were similar to other participants.

The practices of house visits and calling cards were, by comparison, much more easily observable. Visiting practices were semi-public as multiple people often happened to call on the same person at the same time. People could thus observe each other's actions, noting how

particular situations were negotiated and which behaviours garnered admiration or disapproval. Further, friends or relatives sometimes conducted their visits together — for instance, mothers would take their daughters with them on their visiting rounds, thereby training them in the correct behaviours. Even the practice of exchanging calling cards was semi-public as cards were often displayed in hallways to be subtly viewed as a visitor entered or left their own card. Lastly, etiquette manuals, such as those drawn on in this thesis, explained the most widely accepted practices.

Landline telephone calls were also public in the sense that people who were physically nearby could hear at least one side of the conversation. People could thereby observe how other people conducted calls and dealt with issues of unavailability. Some forms of telephone etiquette also required the direct involvement of other people, such as having a third party lie on behalf of the intended recipient by saying they were unable to take the call. Lastly, as with visiting etiquette, guidelines for managing availability were published in etiquette manuals and user guides provided by telephone companies. While there were other factors that contributed to the development of robust etiquettes around house visits, calling cards, and landline telephones, the fact that these practices could be observed by others would have made it easier for people to establish a consensus about how to negotiate unavailability.

This argument is also supported by the fact that etiquettes have developed more quickly around digital and mobile media practices that are publicly observable. For instance, at the beginning of this chapter, I noted that prior research on mobile etiquette has focused on the use of mobile phones in public or shared spaces. This research often found broad consensus about the injunctive norms of mobile use, including norms for when it is acceptable to use mobile communication in public and how to behave when you or someone you are with receives a call (Baron & Hard af Segerstad, 2010; Humphreys, 2005; Plant, 2001). Similarly, research on social media platforms has found that they develop distinct “platform vernaculars” — conventions and styles of communication that emerge through negotiations between affordances and users (Gibbs et al., 2015). For instance, Meese et al. (2015) note that the funeral selfie has become part of the platform vernacular on Instagram and Matamoros-Fernández (2017) argues that platform vernaculars shape how racism plays out on different platforms. In these contexts — public mobile use and social media platforms — interactions

take place in spaces where they can be easily observed by others. People thus observe and learn from people's behaviours and the responses they garner, leading to consensus about acceptable behaviour (Burke et al., 2009; McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012).

Fragmented Schedules: A Lack of Common Sociotemporal Order

Another likely compounding factor is the greater variation in participants' schedules as compared to the 19th and mid-20th century. In the 19th century, the temporality of everyday life, including social interactions, was highly standardised. As mentioned, house calls usually took place from 3pm until 6pm, Monday to Saturday. In New York, people were assigned a day of the week to receive visitors depending on the neighbourhood in which they lived (Post, 1922). House calls were also structured by annual rhythms. In cities, the exchange of calls and cards happened primarily during the 'season'— a period when elites travelled to the city from their country homes to attend social events and engage in politics. The London season, for instance, ran from the start of April to late July (Horn, 1992). Outside of these times, people were not expected to be available for interactions in the city. These guidelines, of course, largely applied to middle- and upper-class people; working class people could be called on at any time by people of higher social standing (George & George, 1993, p. 116).

Daily life in the early- to mid-20th century also ran according to widely shared schedules. The working week provided a relatively fixed structure around which social life was organized. In a diary study comparing daily routines of people in 1937 and 2000, Southerton (2009) notes that the diarists of 1937 wrote about eating lunch at the same time, with children and husbands returning home to eat. They also documented regular schedules of socialisation, such as lunch with the neighbours every Sunday. As well as providing routines for social interactions, a further consequence of these widely shared rhythms was that etiquette around telephone calls often relied upon common touchpoints in daily schedules. In particular, people were encouraged to avoid calling at times that were inconvenient for most people, such as mealtimes, late at night, and very early in the morning (Barber, 1953, p. 98; McAndless, 1943, p. 15).

In the decades since, however, there has been an "erosion of institutionally fixed routines" leading to increasingly individualised daily schedules (Wajcman, 2015, p. 76). One large reason

for this shift is changes to work practices. Deregulation of the labour market and greatly extended trading hours has meant that the 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday working week is no longer standard (Bittman, 2005; Wajcman, 2015). Added to this is increased casualisation, particularly in Australia, and the rise of so-called 'gig' work, both of which make work hours less predictable (Campbell, 2004; Wajcman, 2015). This fragmenting of work schedules has flow on effects for other schedules, such as sleep and meal-times, which must be shifted accordingly. As Wajcman (2015, p. 75) notes, the sum total of these shifts is a "weakening of the shared sociotemporal order and a corresponding fragmenting of activity."

As Woodward (2012, 2013) observes, young people are particularly affected by these changes as they typically work in highly casualised industries and often work weekends or evenings to accommodate study commitments. These study commitments also contribute to fragmented schedules, particularly as many Australian universities have expanded in size, creating more complexity and variation in class timetables and course structures (McInnis et al., 2000). This means that even when people are in the same course, they are likely to have very different class schedules. Participants themselves frequently noted the complexity and variation in their schedules and those of their friends. As noted in Chapter Four, this sometimes leads to intimate asynchronicity whereby close friends learn each other's schedules.

Another outcome of these fragmented, individualized schedules, however, is a lack of common touchpoints that can anchor messaging etiquettes. Where earlier etiquettes about unavailability relied on common understandings about the timing of daily routines, participants had no such standardised reference points for gauging their expectations of others. Even something as fundamental as sleep varied widely among participants: some reported messaging people as late as 3.00am or 4.00am in the morning while others stopped checking their phones after 9.00pm or 10.00pm and went to sleep shortly after. Some participants missed messages during the day because they were taking naps or sleeping in, while others were awake and checking their phones regularly from 7am. This is one example of how variation in daily schedules makes establishing widely held etiquettes around unavailability more challenging.

Lastly, it is worth noting that as well as acting independently, these factors can also compound to further complicate the formation of etiquette. For instance, participants and prior research

note that the fragmenting of schedules makes it more difficult for young adults to arrange time to spend together face-to-face. This means that more time is spent interacting via messaging, both to socialise and to coordinate face-to-face interactions, thus compounding the destabilising impact of continual changes to messaging apps. Overall, these various factors suggest that the etiquette for negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability may remain unstable for some time.

A Process of Dual Mediation: How Messaging is Implicated in the Negotiation of Availability

In the introduction to this thesis, I stated that my aim was to provide a nuanced account of the role of mobile messaging in young adults' social lives by examining how it is *implicated* in the negotiation, reduction, and avoidance of social interaction among friends. For most of this thesis, I have described how mobile messaging is implicated in these actions by focusing on its role as a technological mediator. I have done this by outlining the affordances it provides for restricting availability and explaining how participants used these affordances to enact practices for limiting and negotiating connections.

However, mobile messaging is also implicated in the negotiation, reduction, and avoidance of social interaction in an additional way, which I have, so far, only signalled briefly. That is, mobile messaging is also implicated in these actions through the meanings that it holds. These meanings shape how people act toward messaging and thus toward its affordances, influencing which actions are seen as viable or worth taking. I elaborate on this point below by highlighting how such meanings have been key in mediating the actions described in this thesis. In observing that mobile messaging mediates the negotiation of availability through both its technological affordances and its meanings, I return to the methodology outlined in Chapter Three which draws on principles from postphenomenology and symbolic interactionism. I discuss this connection further at the end of the following section.

The Role of Meanings in Mediating Availability Management Practices

The role of meanings in shaping how people negotiate mobile-mediated unavailability is perhaps most evident in situations that involve alterity relations (Ihde, 1990). As highlighted in

the preceding chapters, these are situations where participants focus on managing their availability *to* their phone, rather than to other people *through* their phone. In these contexts, mobile phones and messaging apps take on the quality of a quasi-other to whom one must relate. As a result, the role that perceptions of messaging play in shaping actions becomes particularly apparent. Crucially, the meanings that mobile technologies hold for participants in these moments of alterity relations are often informed by the resistance discourses highlighted in Chapter One. In accordance with concern about the harms of unfettered smartphone use and its impacts on concentration, presence, and wellbeing, many participants viewed mobile devices and messaging apps as potentially destructive quasi-others whose demands for attention must be tightly managed and often resisted. These views were especially pronounced among Cohort B but less intense versions were also very common among Cohort A.

Alterity relations were first raised in Chapter Three during the discussion of disentanglement and jamming. Participants often used disentanglement and jamming in order to reduce distractions, focus on tasks, and have “me-time” away from the imperative to stay connected. In these contexts, participants were focused on negotiating and reducing their connection to their mobile phone, rather than to other people. Through their emphasis on regaining control over attention and availability, these actions indicate an internalising of the self-discipline discourses discussed in Chapter One, which emphasise the need to mitigate risks associated with smartphones by regulating their use. In viewing mobile devices and messaging apps through these narratives about distraction and self-regulation, disentanglement and jamming become valuable action-possibilities for participants.

Alterity relations are also present in other chapters where they likewise highlight the role of meanings in mediating the negotiation of unavailability. In Chapter Five, for instance, I described how some participants who dislike messaging use a dissuasive messaging style across their messaging interactions to reduce time spent messaging. This practice often involves an element of embodiment relations (Ihde, 1990) in the sense that participants were acting *through* messaging to discourage others from responding or from expecting detailed responses from them. However, this dissuasive messaging style is underpinned by alterity relations as it is ultimately driven by a desire to reduce engagement with messaging itself. This can be illustrated with the example of Steve (21, M) who, as I explained in Chapter Five,

regularly used dissuasion across his messaging. Elaborating on this approach, Steve explained that he views mobile technology “not as a form of communication in itself but as a tool to aide communication” by coordinating phone calls and face-to-face interactions. More specifically, he saw it as a tool to be wary of as it had the potential to negatively impact cognitive processes if not used carefully. He had come to this view largely as the result of taking a media studies course at university that discussed the potential for digital technologies to be disruptive and distracting. He explained:

They did bring up the point that it’s hard to focus on one thing and think it through thoroughly when we are distracted by so many different things, lots of tabs open, messages on Facebook texts. Your brain is scattered. That was an argument that resounded with me and I felt like that was the case sometimes.

In accepting these narratives, Steve began to view messaging as a technology that negatively impacts cognitive function. This framing changed the way he acted towards it, including motivating his adoption of a dissuasive messaging style.

According to the principles of symbolic interactionism, it is through social processes that things come to hold particular meanings for particular people (Blumer, 1969). The data gathered from participants does not allow me to provide a comprehensive account of how they came to associate particular meanings with messaging, however Steve’s account illustrates that education is one possible source. Elsewhere in the thesis I have mentioned friends directly discussing the meaning of particular aspects messaging or drawing conclusions by observing one another’s actions and responses. This indicates another pathway through which meanings develop. A third pathway is described by Wade (18, M), a participant from Cohort B who disliked messaging and instead used calling, emailing, or speaking face-to-face whenever possible. Wade explained, “there’s always all this stuff in the news and everything about people being zombies on their phone. That’s another thing I want to avoid.” For Wade, media discourses played a key role in shaping his understanding of phones and his subsequent engagement with their affordances. As discussed in the conclusion, it would be revealing to investigate these processes further.

So far, I have focused on how the meaning of messaging shapes availability negotiations when those negotiations occur in the context of an alterity relation — that is, when the emphasis is

on restricting availability *to* the technology. As noted, these situations make it particularly clear how acts of negotiating unavailability are shaped by the meanings that messaging holds for people because they involve reacting directly to messaging technologies. However, meanings also shaped how participants negotiated availability to others *through* messaging. In these contexts, where engagement with messaging occurred via an embodiment relation, the meanings that people attached to messaging again shaped their actions.

The role of meaning in these negotiations is evident firstly in situations where there was fairly broad agreement about the meaning of particular messaging actions. For instance, in Chapter Seven, I described the etiquette for winding back or ending relationships by limiting messaging availability. These actions are informed by a common understanding about the meaning of messaging availability — that it is a proxy for relational and emotional availability. This same meaning informs the caution with which people approached blocking. It was seen as a ‘nuclear option’, to be used sparingly and only when all else failed because it meant a complete rejection of the other person.

Lastly, the mediating role of meaning is also evident in situations where the meaning of messaging was contested. Earlier in this chapter, I described how participants often held differing views about messaging etiquette. In some cases, these differing views were driven by differing ideas about the meanings of messaging. For instance, for some participants’ messaging was a meaningful gesture that signified attention and interest, a meaning that drove their habit of responding more quickly to people who they were closer to or valued more highly. For others who did not attach this meaning to messaging, there was no need to respond more quickly to closer contacts. Likewise, the different meanings that read receipts held for people drove different actions in relation to them. For participants who saw them as socially meaningful, it was critical to respond quickly after opening a message, while for participants who saw them as meaningless, it was not. In the middle, participants who struggled to choose between these available meanings and apply them to their own actions took a range of sometimes contradictory actions — ignoring read receipts in some cases but letting them drive their actions in others. In each of these cases, the contested meanings of messaging complicates people’s engagement with its affordances, driving different sets of actions or creating uncertainty and ambivalence about which actions to take.

Methodological Implications of Dual Mediation

Highlighting the two modes of mediation present in the findings of this thesis (that is, mediation by material features and by meanings) not only responds to the aim I began with, but also demonstrates the value of my methodological framework. Put simply, a postphenomenological perspective highlights the process of *technological mediation* by emphasising the role that materiality plays in shaping availability practices; while the principles of symbolic interactionism highlights the process of *interpretation* by emphasising the role that meanings play in shaping availability practices.

As observed in the examples above, these two perspectives fit together as the meaning that messaging holds for someone shapes their responses to its material affordances. This is not a radical suggestion. As I emphasised in Chapter Two, postphenomenological philosophy and the theorisation of affordances both stress that context plays a critical role in shaping the influence that materiality has within a given situation. My contribution here is to suggest that adopting an explicitly symbolic interactionist lens provides a way of acknowledging the role that meanings play within these contexts, and highlighting the processes of interaction and interpretation that produce these meanings.

This contribution, along with the other contributions of this thesis, are summarised and contextualised in the conclusion that follows.

Conclusion

This thesis offers a critical investigation of how mobile messaging is implicated in the negotiation of social availability among young adults. In doing so, it addresses the following research questions:

What affordances do mobile messaging technologies provide for people to limit, reduce, and otherwise manage their availability to and through mobile communication?

How, and in what circumstances, do young adults engage with these affordances? What *practices* do they employ when limiting, reducing, and otherwise managing availability to friends?

How do these practices compare to the availability-management practices used in other techno-historical contexts?

These research questions emerged from the observation that research into voluntary disconnection has focused largely on social media, while studies of mobile availability have focused more on the sensations involved in constant connection than on the practices people use to manage it. In addressing the first research question, I drew on participants' accounts of messaging practices to describe the affordances that mobile devices and messaging apps provide for managing and restricting availability. In addressing the second research question, I described how young adults engage with these affordances in order to enact a range of availability-management practices that include technical, temporal, and discursive tactics. I outlined the various circumstances in which they deploy these practices and the social and technical dynamics that inform them. In addressing the third research question, I argued that these practices are often a continuation of those used in other historical media contexts, but that there is a lack of reliable, stable etiquettes to guide young adults when negotiating unavailability. I conclude that messaging is implicated in the negotiation of social availability in two ways: through its technological affordances which shape action, and through the meanings that it holds for people which shape their responses to those affordances.

Overall, I argue that young adults have developed a range of nuanced strategies for negotiating and limiting their mobile-mediated availability, particularly as managing unavailability has become central to mobile communication, but that a lack of stable etiquette can complicate their attempts to regulate social availability.

The rest of this conclusion proceeds in three parts. In the first, I describe these findings in greater detail by tracing their emergence across the thesis. In the second, I make a case for the significance of these findings by explaining how they contribute to existing research and popular discourses. In the third, I close by noting the limitations of this research and the directions it opens for future studies.

Summary of Findings

In PART 1 (Chapters 1 & 2), I situated the current study in relation to existing literature and outlined the methodology and research design. This began in Chapter One where I outlined the two key bodies of literature that this thesis draws on and contributes to. The first is literature on voluntary disconnection from digital technologies. This literature highlights how growing sentiments of distrust, disenchantment, and ambivalence towards digital media have led to the proliferation of discourses and practices of voluntary disconnection. There has been a growing recognition among scholars that these disconnections can be temporary or partial and can include both disconnecting *from* a technology, as in taking a temporary break from technology use, as well as disconnecting *through* a technology, as in defriending or unfollowing contacts. This literature informed the thesis by illustrating the importance of studying how people negotiate or resist connections when using digital media. It also outlines the environment of digital media scepticism that participants' messaging use occurs within. Lastly, this literature illustrates the value of using historical comparisons to contextualise voluntary disconnection by noting continuities and discontinuities in media resistance across history. This approach informs my decision to employ a similar comparative element within this thesis. Key sections of this literature, however, focus on social media more than mobile communication. As I discuss below, this thesis builds on this literature through its focus on mobile messaging.

The second body of literature that I outlined in this chapter is literature on mobile communication and availability. I noted that mobile communications scholars have long

acknowledged that the continual contact promised by mobile technologies is complicated by people's limited availability. I described how the evolution of mobile technologies and their embedding in everyday life have made negotiating unavailability an increasingly necessary and complex part of mobile messaging. I explained that this is especially the case for young adults and their friends given the importance and complexity of friendship during this period of life, and the central role that messaging plays within these relationships. While this literature illustrates that negotiating and limiting availability is a central and complex aspect of messaging, there has been limited research into the practices people use to navigate these conditions. This provides the impetus for my investigation of how young adults negotiate availability to, and through, mobile messaging.

In Chapter Two, I described the research methodology and research design. I began by outlining the methodological frameworks that inform the research. The first, symbolic interactionism, is an approach to the study of social phenomena that focuses on how people act in the world. Its key premises are that people act towards things based on the meanings those things hold, and that these meanings are produced through social interactions and applied to situations through an active, interpretive process. Symbolic interactionism thus advocates for the use of interpretive qualitative methods that investigate how actions occur in the context of people's everyday lives. I explained that, following this perspective, this thesis focuses on understanding what messaging technologies, practices, and partners mean to participants, and on how those meanings are produced and negotiated. What symbolic interactionism lacks, however, is a methodology for approaching the relationships between people and technologies. Given that this thesis is focused on a *techno*-social phenomenon, I outlined a second methodological framework — postphenomenology — that is concerned with understanding how technologies mediate human experiences. I explained that postphenomenology is important to this thesis as it provides a framework for analysing the role of mobile phones and messaging apps in mediating practices of availability management.

In the second half of Chapter Two, I outlined the methods used to conduct and analyse interviews with young adults about their messaging practices. These methods follow an inductive, interpretive model of research that is in keeping with the methodology I outlined earlier. In describing these methods, I noted the challenges involved in interviewing people

about messaging practices, particularly the issue of limited or inaccurate self-reporting on quotidian behaviours. I described the procedures I used for collecting messaging samples to mitigate these issues, and the careful consideration of participants' privacy that this involved. Lastly, I explained the process used to conduct a historical comparison of the etiquette for limiting in order to contextualise participants' experiences.

In PART 2 (Chapters 3 - 6), I drew on the interview data to argue that young adults have a wide range of practices for managing and limiting their availability and that these practices form a regular part of their messaging activity. Rather than being constantly in contact, participants were frequently limiting and negotiating contact as they sought to balance the need to stay in touch with the need to attend to other tasks and priorities.

This argument began in Chapter Three where I outlined five affordances that mobile messaging provides for managing availability, particularly in terms of limiting, delaying, or avoiding interactions. In doing so, I drew on and added to recent developments in the theorisation of technological affordances. Two of the affordances I outlined — disentanglement and jamming — are relatively simple. These affordances allow people to reduce or avoid notifications, or cut off their connections to telecommunication networks, and were primarily used in situations where participants wanted to reduce distractions or have time to themselves. The other affordances — modulation, delay, and expression — are more complex as they lead to a much wider range of practices for managing and negotiating availability. Consequently, while I introduced them in this chapter, I expanded on these affordances in later chapters. Overall, this chapter argued that while mobile devices and messaging apps do *allow* for people to limit, delay, or avoid messaging exchanges, it does not *encourage* these actions and instead often *discourages* them. Thus, in negotiating their availability, young adults use the affordances of mobile technologies but this often involves working against features that make limiting availability more difficult. Being conscious that affordances are a property of the relationship between a technology and a user, I emphasised that these affordances are not necessarily available to all messaging users, as their availability depends on a user's abilities, literacies, and surrounding circumstances.

In Chapter Four, I elaborated on the practices enabled by the affordance of delay. Drawing on Lefebvre's work on rhythmanalysis, I outlined how participants and their friends used the

affordance of delay to enact a range of temporal practices for limiting and negotiating availability. The first practice, triaging, involves weighing factors in order to determine required response speeds. Another practice, intimate asynchronicity, involves situations where friends did not expect fast responses due to the intimacy between them. This illustrates that, under conditions of constant availability, having a mutual understanding about unavailability can be an important signifier of intimacy. A third practice, affective arrhythmia, involves situations where affective obstacles caused people to depart from their usual or desired response patterns. This shows that changes in availability are not always rationally calculated but can be more about sensations and feelings. The final practice, rhythmic manipulation, involves strategically altering messaging timing in order to achieve specific ends or convey specific meanings, demonstrating the broader instrumental and relational outcomes that can be sought through altering messaging availability. Across this chapter, I outlined how each of these temporal practices is shaped by the materiality of messaging and by the rhythms of participants' daily lives, such as their friends' routines or the scheduling of study and work.

In Chapters Five and Six, I analysed how participants used messaging's affordance of expression to engage in discursive practices for limiting and negotiating availability. I outlined four discursive practices across these two chapters and drew on Goffman's concepts of ritual, facework, and impression management to unpack the interpersonal dynamics they involved. In Chapter Five, I outlined ritual and dissuasion — two techniques that are used to end messaging exchanges. Ritual closers involve using statements or symbols to signal the end of an interaction while dissuasion involves the use of short and/or blunt messages to dissuade an interlocutor from continuing a messaging interaction. Drawing on Goffman, I explain how these are generally carefully calibrated actions designed to manage the sometimes delicate transition from availability to unavailability while preserving a positive impression between messaging partners.

In Chapter Six, I outlined two further practices: strategic ambiguity and deception. These practices involve carefully controlling the information available to others by using either vague statements or white lies. In doing so, participants managed different forms of availability including their availability to meaningfully participate in a conversation, their availability to respond to a message, and their availability for face-to-face interactions negotiated via

messaging. Drawing on Goffman, I describe how these practices are often deployed in order to save face and to preserve the face of messaging partners. Across both chapters, I also outline how each practice is shaped by specific elements and features of messaging technologies, beyond just their affordance for expression.

In PART 3 (Chapters 7 & 8), I offered an analysis of what is distinct about participants' experiences and what is a continuation of practices used in earlier modes of communication. This follows an established approach in media studies involving direct comparisons between specific contemporary and historical media contexts. In Chapter Seven, I introduced the two earlier techno-historical contexts I draw on: 19th century house visits and calling cards, and mid-20th century landline telephone use. These are constructive points of comparison because during these periods social and technological changes made people available to each other in new kinds of ways, which, as with messaging, required people to develop new ways of limiting interactions. In conducting this comparison, I broadened my perspective to look not just at the practices people used, but also at the etiquettes around those practices. In Chapter Seven, I note that there are some strong continuities between etiquettes across these contexts. In particular, there are commonalities in the use of deception to account for unavailability, in limiting availability in order to limit intimacy, and in terms of the contexts in which severe modes of disconnection were and were not permitted. These continuities are notable because many of the practices that I described in Part Two of the thesis involve indirect or deceptive techniques for managing and limiting interactions. The similarities identified in this chapter provide an important reminder that these qualities are not specific to young people and messaging but rather have long been a feature of how people limit and negotiate availability.

That said, in Chapter Eight, I noted that, in contrast to the stable normative etiquettes presented in historical etiquette manuals, the etiquette around messaging availability appears unstable. This was evident in the conflicting views held by participants and in their accounts of disagreements with friends. I argue that there are several factors driving this instability: the newness of messaging technologies; the ongoing changes to messaging apps and mobile operating systems; the private nature of messaging, which prevents people from broadly observing the behaviour of others; and a lack of widely shared sociotemporal order on which to build availability etiquettes. I close by noting that across this thesis, messaging is implicated in

the negotiation of avoidance in two ways: as a technology that materially mediates practices and as a cultural object imbued with meanings that shape action.

Significance of the study

In offering a critical investigation of how mobile messaging is implicated in the negotiation of availability among young adults, this thesis makes four key contributions.

Firstly, it provides a more nuanced view of the messaging practices of young adults than those that presently dominate much public discourse on the subject. Popular discussions about the messaging practices of younger people are often characterised by hyperbole, alarm, and technological determinism. These tendencies are perhaps best illustrated by the title of Twenge's (2017) widely read article in *The Atlantic*, 'Are Smartphones Ruining a Generation?' As this title suggests, Twenge argues that smartphones are indeed to blame for a range of concerning trends in the behaviour of younger people. Further, as noted in the introduction, concerns about the impact of messaging on the relationships of young adults often tend to centre around two particular concerns. On one hand, there are concerns that mobile communication, particularly messaging, ties younger people together too tightly, making them tethered, distracted, and lacking the solitude needed to develop resilience and maturity. On the other hand, there is concern that mobile communication keeps younger people too far apart, making them avoidant and lacking in social skills.

This thesis challenges these discourses by providing a more nuanced account of the role of messaging in young adults' social lives. It illustrates that, on the whole, young adults do not mindlessly succumb to the 'always on' logic of mobile communication but rather continually and actively negotiate their mobile connections. They often engage in these negotiations with care and consideration. This thesis also counters the deterministic tendencies of popular accounts by grounding its analysis in an affordances framework, thus emphasising that actions are shaped but not wholly determined by the features and qualities of a given technology. Indeed, this thesis continually reiterates that the messaging practices of young adults are informed not only by the features and qualities of messaging technologies but also by broader social, relational, and circumstantial factors. Lastly, this thesis counters the hyperbolic tendencies of these accounts by providing much needed historical perspective. In comparing

messaging practices with those of landline telephone calls and calling cards, this thesis illustrates that while young adults employ many avoidant practices when limiting their availability, these practices are often a continuation of actions common across history.

This thesis also offers contributions to the two key bodies of literature outlined in Chapter One. The first of these addresses voluntary disconnection and non-use. As noted in Chapter One, this literature describes the practices and discourses of disconnection that have become increasingly mainstream due to rising sentiments of disenchantment and distrust towards digital technologies. However, much of this literature has focused on social media platforms. This is particularly the case with more recent studies that consider how people limit their connections to other people *through* digital platforms. This thesis extends these discussions by illuminating how people limit connections in the context of mobile messaging.

This extension is important because mobile messaging has many differences from social media. Broadly speaking, it is more private, intimate, associated with stronger ties, and involves more frequent interactions. Consequently, managing and limiting connections plays out differently across social media and mobile messaging. Literature on limiting connections to other people through social media highlights actions that involve completely severing ties (such as unfollowing contacts or muting them to prevent their content being visible), whereas this thesis demonstrates that managing connections to others on mobile messaging is more centred around modulating degrees of availability. Further, on social media, actions used to limit connections to others, such as hiding posts and lurking, generally do not attract attention. In comparison, the frequency of interaction typical of young adults' mobile messaging use means that efforts to limit connections via messaging are typically visible to others. The speed of a response, for instance, will be noticed by a messaging partner. This means that managing and limiting mobile connections requires greater consideration about how such actions might appear to others and, in many cases, taking steps to mitigate offence or misunderstanding. At the broadest level, in adding to the literature on voluntary disconnection, this thesis amplifies the growing call for attention to themes, discourses, and practices of disconnection within the study of digital media.

This thesis also contributes to literature on mobile messaging and availability. As discussed in Chapter One, scholars researching the constant connection enabled by mobile communication

have begun to amass a small body of evidence about how people negotiate these conditions. This evidence is limited, however, as studies rarely focus specifically on how people *restrict* availability and are often oriented towards generating suggestions for technology design, with limited discussion of more sociological concerns. This thesis broadens the evidence by providing a detailed analysis of how young adults negotiate mobile-mediated unavailability, particularly in the context of friendships. In doing so, this thesis outlines a range of previously unobserved practices used to limit availability for mobile messaging, and availability for face-to-face interactions that are organised via mobile messaging. It also expands existing observations about practices such as triaging and deception by providing a deeper analysis of their implications beyond technology design. Ultimately, this thesis highlights the central role that limiting and negotiating availability plays in the social lives and everyday messaging use of young adults. It shows that these practices are bound up in a range of interpersonal processes involving attention, intimacy, commitment, and attitudes toward technology use.

This thesis also extends literature on mobile communication by contextualising the discussion of mobile availability through a historical comparison. This was achieved by comparing the availability management etiquettes of mobile messaging with those of mid-20th century landline telephone calls and 19th century calling card and visiting practices. Historical comparisons have been important in the literature on voluntary disconnection, where they have provided an important reminder that resistance to new technologies is a common occurrence across history. To studies of mobile availability, this thesis provides a similar reminder that negotiating availability has often been difficult and delicate, particularly during periods of sociotechnical change.

In pursuit of these findings, this thesis also makes a methodological contribution by illustrating the utility of combining symbolic interactionist and postphenomenological perspectives in the study of digital media use. As described in Chapter Three, there is a productive tension between these two perspectives as each emphasises a different dimension of sociotechnical phenomena. At its most simple, where symbolic interactionism emphasises how actions are mediated by socially produced meanings, postphenomenology emphasises how actions are mediated by the materiality of technologies. Both approaches, however, encourage the study of actions as they occur in the context of lived experiences. The utility of combining these

perspectives is highlighted by their use within this thesis to investigate mobile communication. As acts of mobile interaction always involve both technical and interpersonal elements, using an approach that highlights how actions are mediated by both technologies and meanings is particularly fruitful. However, the combination of these approaches has value beyond the study of mobile communication as the productive tensions between these two approaches could be used in the investigation of other forms of digital media and sociotechnical phenomena more broadly.

Limitations and directions for future research

Like any qualitative project, this thesis has limitations in terms of its generalisability. In particular, it is important to note that while participants were from a range of genders and living situations, the samples were relatively homogenous in that most participants were tertiary educated, and all were young and lived in or near an urban centre. While the aim was never to employ a representative sample, these limitations should be kept in mind when considering the findings of this thesis. For instance, as noted in Chapter Two, people from older age groups may negotiate mobile-mediated unavailability quite differently based on their differing life stages and histories, and/or degrees of technological literacy.

Also of significance is the fact that participants did not appear to have circumstances that made limiting their availability especially difficult. They did not discuss needing to have their mobile phones nearby because of caring responsibilities or for reasons relating to their own wellbeing, such as using health monitoring apps. The only minor exception is that several participants were casually employed or did gig work in the arts sector and had to remain active on certain apps in order to receive work offers. As other scholars have noted, limiting digital connections is not feasible for some people, or comes with heavy costs (Portwood-Stacer, 2013, p. 1054). It would therefore be constructive to investigate the experiences of people for whom restricting messaging availability is especially difficult.

This thesis also has a limited technological scope in that it focuses primarily on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and SMS apps. As noted in Chapter Two, this is due to situating the interview study within Australia and due to the countries from which non-Australian participants originated. While WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and SMS apps are very popular

globally, it is important to note that there are other popular messaging apps that are not included in this thesis. For instance, encrypted messaging apps, such as Telegram, rose in popularity during the period in which this thesis was written but are not discussed as they were not raised by participants (Statistica, 2018b). Even more significantly, the Chinese messaging app WeChat has the third-largest number of monthly active users of any messaging app but is also not discussed (Statistica, 2019). WeChat is different from most messaging apps as it includes many functions beyond messaging and is therefore embedded in a wider range of everyday actions, such as ordering and paying for goods. Due to these broader functions and associated cultures of use, it is likely that the negotiation of unavailability would operate differently on WeChat.

Consequently, it would be illuminating to study how mobile-mediated unavailability is negotiated in other cultural contexts. This is an important direction for future research not only because different messaging apps are popular in different regions, but also because culturally distinct attitudes towards factors like friendship, availability, and scheduling will impact how mobile-mediated unavailability is understood and managed. Farman (2018, p. 74), for example, notes that the experience of waiting varies across cultures. This kind of cultural variation was also evident in my own research. While all participants lived in Melbourne, they came from a range of cultural backgrounds (see Appendices A and B) and occasionally discussed how these backgrounds influenced approaches to mobile availability. One participant noted that her friends back home in Singapore responded much faster than her friends in Australia. Another participant noted that people in her home city of Hong Kong preferred calling over messaging because they wanted information quickly, whereas Australians seemed to prefer messaging as it enabled a more relaxed pace of communication. Another participant noted that her friends and family in Africa were much more direct when coordinating face-to-face meetings via messaging and more willing to commit to meeting up than her friends in Australia. Participants like these often noted that, while in Australia, they switched into what they saw as a more Australian mode of messaging use. While I cannot verify the generalisability of these observations about cultural trends, they provide further support for the case that negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability involves culturally specific elements and that it would be revealing to conduct similar research in other cultural contexts.

Another question that this thesis has raised, and that would benefit from further investigation, is how the broader structural conditions of 21st century life shape the negotiation of availability between friends. A few of these conditions and their effects have been noted, namely, how discourses of self-responsibilisation inform practices of media resistance and how the fragmented schedules that result from changed labour practices contribute to the unclear etiquette around messaging availability. There is, however, scope to take this analysis much further. Many other commonly observed conditions of late modernity, such as individualisation, reflexivity, and uncertainty (Bauman, 2000; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991) are likely to shape how people understand and negotiate unavailability. It would be particularly worthwhile to consider how the greater freedom and flexibility that people have to begin and end relationships (Bauman, 2000, 2003) influences contemporary perceptions of the responsibilities involved in friendship, and what this means for the experience of negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability between friends.

A third question that this thesis raises concerns the meanings that people attach to mobile messaging, and to mobile communication and devices more broadly. Given that these meanings shape how people negotiate unavailability, how do people come to hold these meanings? In the previous chapter, I observed that university education, interactions with friends, and media discourses all contributed to the meanings that messaging held for participants. However, the process is likely much broader and more complex than these brief observations. For instance, studies of media resistance discourses have noted the proliferation of these discourses online in blogs, memes, articles, and social media content. It would be instructive for future research to look more deeply into the connections between these kinds of discourses and the perceptions and behaviours of individuals. From what sources do people take meanings about mobile communication? Through what processes? And with what eventual impacts on their practices?

It is also worth noting that, as I complete this thesis, the world is experiencing mass disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One effect of this event is that mediated communication has become even more central to daily life as people isolate themselves to slow the spread of the virus. The pandemic has also led to unprecedented numbers of people working from home, further increasing reliance on mediated communication. As a result of these changes, practices

of negotiating availability for social and professional communication, and the boundaries between these spheres, have changed drastically in recent weeks. While the longer-term outcomes of the pandemic are difficult to predict, particularly as the event is ongoing, it is possible that this may be a watershed moment that inaugurates changes to mediated social interaction. These changes may profoundly impact on the issues discussed in this thesis and thus on directions for future research. To give one example, there has been a drastic increase in the use of video calling platforms for both social and work-related interactions. It may, therefore, be instructive for future research to consider how availability is negotiated in relation to video calling, particularly if these technologies remain a feature of everyday interactions due to the length of the pandemic or to more permanent changes that the pandemic instigates.

Lastly, given that I have identified a lack of stable etiquettes around negotiating mobile-mediated unavailability, it would be worth conducting similar but more longitudinal research in the future to establish whether etiquettes have solidified over time. This would help to establish how much the current instability of etiquette can be attributed to the newness of messaging technologies as compared to other factors.

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Appendix A: Cohort A Demographics

Name	Age	Nationality	Gender	Living situation
Joselyn	18	Australian Vietnamese	F	Home
Bill (s)	23	Singaporean	M	Home
John	18	Australian	M	Home
Belinda	25	Australia	F	Home
Silvia	22	Australian	F	Student Accommodation
Gen (s)	19	Australian	F	Residential College
Kevin	21	Australian	M	Home
Jasmine	19	Australian Chinese	F	Home
Erin	22	Singaporean	F	Sharehouse
Steve (s)	21	Australian	M	Home
Jiya	21	Australian	F	Home
Octavius Maximillian VII (s)	18	Australian	M	Sharehouse
Shabooboo (s)	20	Australia	F	Home
Hannah (s)	21	Australian Vietnamese	F	Home
Hadiya	20	Sri Lankan Australian	F	Home
Z (s)	20	Australian, mixed heritage	M	Home
Min	25	Singaporean (Australian PR)	F	Renting alone
Masie (s)	30	Australian	F	Sharehouse
Danielle	19	Malaysian (Australian PR)	F	Home
Matthew	20	Australian	M	Home
Leonard (s)	21	Australian	M	Home
Richard	26	Indonesian (Australian PR)	M	Sharehouse
Jose (s)	24	Australian	M	Home
Josh	18	Australian	M	Home

Appendix B: Cohort B Demographics

Name	Age	Nationality	Gender	Living Situation
Sabrina	21	Australian	F	Home
Elyne (s)	23	Australian	F	Home
Vanessa (s)	20	Indian	F	Sharehouse
Mila	18	Colombian	F	Home
Laila (s)	21	American	F	Sharehouse
Ella (s)	19	Indonesian	F	Apartment, own
Melati	20	Malaysian	F	Sharehouse
Calvin	21	Indonesian	M	Renting
Aamir	20	American	M	Sharehouse
Darryl	28	Malaysian	M	Sharehouse
ratherbeatMU2017 (s)	28	Australian	M	Renting
Oliver Sanders (s)	18	Indian	M	Sharehouse
Aadesh	24	Indian	M	Student Accommodation
Jeff Styles (s)	18	Australian	M	Home
Wade	19	Australian	M	Renting

Appendix C: Instructions for Messaging Sample

Providing Your Messaging Sample

YOU WILL NEED:

- > Your phone
- > A laptop/computer
- > Approx. 1 hour
- > An internet connection

CHOOSING THE TIMEFRAME

The sample needs to include all messaging (minus whatever you wish to remove) within a **24hr** timeframe. You may choose when this timeframe is, but ideally, it will include some messaging!

PRIVACY

For you: You are welcome to remove or alter any messages you wish.

If there is a whole conversation you wish to remove from the sample you are free to do so. Just make a note of it in your email to me. For example:

“There are four Facebook conversations provided. There were six that took place within the timeframe but two were removed entirely from the sample”.

You will not be asked to explain anything that has been removed from the sample.

For your conversation partners: If their messages contain mundane, ordinary communication, and no identifying features, please remove their names and, if necessary, replace with a pseudonym (according to steps outlined below).

If their messages are of a personal or extraordinary nature and/or contain identifying features, please replace their names with a pseudonym, remove the message from the sample and, if possible, loosely paraphrase its content.

SENDING YOUR SAMPLE

Attach documents to an email (or several emails, if this is easier) and send them to kmannell@student.unimelb.edu.au Most file types will be fine (.pages, .word, .pdf and.txt).

Collection Procedures

FACEBOOK MESSENGER

STEP ONE: Copy and Paste Messages

Log in to your Facebook account on computer or tablet and copy and paste the previous 24 hrs of conversations into a word/pages document. You should end up with something that looks like this:

June 15th, 12:18pm



Tomorrow !! Xx

June 15th, 2:19pm

yus! What time suits?

June 15th, 9:27pm



maybe afternoon?? or 8.3?

June 15th, 10:30pm

8.30am or pm?

Can do later in the week if its better. I know you are under the pump, as they say!

STEP TWO: Remove your partner's profile picture.

For example:

JANE

June 15th, 12:18pm

Tomorrow !! Xx

June 15th, 2:19pm

yus! What time suits?

JANE

June 15th, 9:27pm

maybe afternoon?? or 8.3?

June 15th, 10:30pm

8.30am or pm?

Can do later in the week if its better. I know you are under the pump, as they say!

STEP THREE: Stickers and Emojis

Text and images will transfer but stickers and emojis will not. If there are only a few stickers/emojis in your conversation please indicate where these were (using E for emoji and X for sticker) and describe what kind of emoji/sticker it was (see example below). If there are too many for you to do this (i.e. 10 or above in your sample) just indicate where they were using the letters (E or X).

June 15th, 10:30pm

8.30am or pm?

E Smilie face

X Dancing Cat

X Cat eating pizza

Can do later in the week if its better. I know you are under the pump, as they say!

STEP FOUR: Remove any information you wish.

Please indicate that text has been deleted by inserting two arrows '>>' and, if you feel comfortable to do so, provide a brief summary of what has been removed. For example:

JANE

June 15th, 12:18pm

Tomorrow !! Xx

June 15th, 2:19pm

yus! What time suits?

JANE

June 15th, 9:27pm

>> two times suggested

June 15th, 10:30pm

8.30am or pm?

Can do later in the week if its better. I know you are under the pump, as they say!

STEP ONE: Export

Export your messaging histories by following the steps below. You only need to export conversations that you have used in within the 24 timeframe of your sample. These steps will send you an email with your chat history attached as a .txt document.

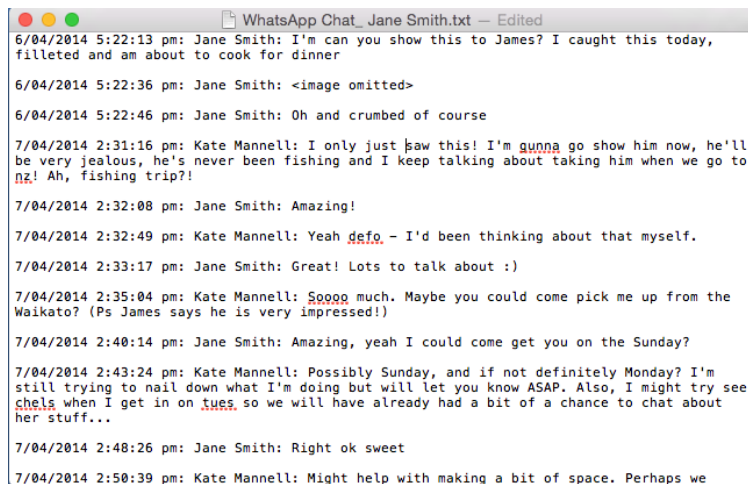
Android

1. Tap and hold on the conversation or group.
2. Select **Email chat**.
3. Select option for sending the conversation **Without Media**.

iPhone

1. Open the WhatsApp Conversation you want to email.
2. Tap the contact's name or group subject in the navigation bar.
3. Scroll to the bottom and tap **Email Conversation**.
4. Select option for sending the conversation **Without Media**.
5. Enter your email address and tap **Send**.

Download and open the .txt file you have just been emailed. It will look something like this:



```
WhatsApp Chat_Jane Smith.txt - Edited
6/04/2014 5:22:13 pm: Jane Smith: I'm can you show this to James? I caught this today,
filleted and am about to cook for dinner
6/04/2014 5:22:36 pm: Jane Smith: <image omitted>
6/04/2014 5:22:46 pm: Jane Smith: Oh and crumbed of course
7/04/2014 2:31:16 pm: Kate Mannell: I only just saw this! I'm gunna go show him now, he'll
be very jealous, he's never been fishing and I keep talking about taking him when we go to
nz! Ah, fishing trip?!
7/04/2014 2:32:08 pm: Jane Smith: Amazing!
7/04/2014 2:32:49 pm: Kate Mannell: Yeah defo - I'd been thinking about that myself.
7/04/2014 2:33:17 pm: Jane Smith: Great! Lots to talk about :)
7/04/2014 2:35:04 pm: Kate Mannell: Soooo much. Maybe you could come pick me up from the
Waikato? (Ps James says he is very impressed!)
7/04/2014 2:40:14 pm: Jane Smith: Amazing, yeah I could come get you on the Sunday?
7/04/2014 2:43:24 pm: Kate Mannell: Possibly Sunday, and if not definitely Monday? I'm
still trying to nail down what I'm doing but will let you know ASAP. Also, I might try see
chels when I get in on tues. so we will have already had a bit of a chance to chat about
her stuff...
7/04/2014 2:48:26 pm: Jane Smith: Right ok sweet
7/04/2014 2:50:39 pm: Kate Mannell: Might help with making a bit of space. Perhaps we
```

STEP TWO: Delete all the messages that don't fit within your 24 hr timeframe.

With the ones that are left, change your partner's name and change the name of the file (it will have automatically been titled their real name).

STEP FOUR: Remove messages.

As with the Facebook messages, feel free to delete or change any messages you wish and indicate this using '>>'.

WHATSAPP - Blackberry 10

To export a copy of the history of an individual chat or group, you can use the Email Conversation feature:

1 Tap and hold on the individual or group conversation.

2 Select  **Email conversation.**

3 Tap on **Send**.

An email will be composed with your chat history attached as a .txt document.

SMS/iMessage

STEP ONE: Select your messages.

Scroll through each of your conversations that have been active in the past 24 hours. Screen shot any instances where the conversation is:

a) organising a future interaction

e.g. 'Coffee at 10am tomorrow?' OR 'Just leaving now, see you in 20' OR 'Give me a call this evening and I'll run you through it'

b) negotiating an interaction

e.g. 'Hey I can't make it tomorrow, are you free on the weekend?'
OR 'Better go to sleep, talk soon' OR 'Busy! Call me back in an hr!'

c) explaining a past, present or future absence

e.g. 'Sorry I missed your call, was sleeping!' OR 'Hey sorry I didn't make it last night! We got caught up in the city til late' OR 'Tram isn't running, I'm gunna be another half hr. See you soon.'

STEP TWO: Email the screen shots to yourself.

If there are any that you wish to edit, download the images and open them on a computer. You can then blank out the content.

On a mac, this can be done by opening the images in 'preview', selecting the area you wish to blank out (fig.1), and then hitting delete. This will cover it in a grey square (fig.2).

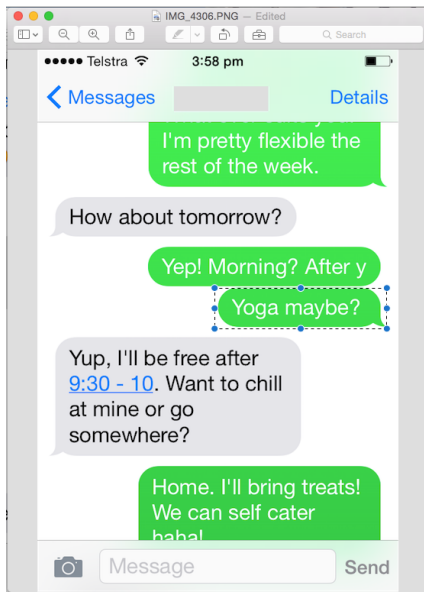


Fig1

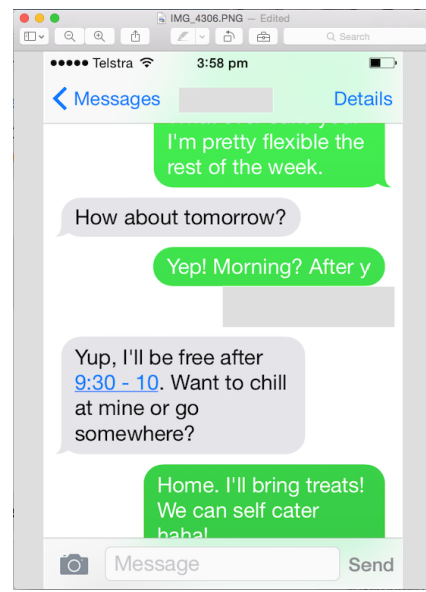


Fig2

STEP THREE: Anonymise your sample

If any of your contacts include a full name you can either 1) change the name before you screen shot the messages OR 2) blank it out once you have emailed it to yourself.

Appendix D: Interview Outlines

Cohort A: First interview

Warm Up

Tell me a little about the types of mobile communication you use.

Specifically, what messaging apps?

How do you decide which to use? Let's start with — . When might you use -- over the other options? Who do you contact through --? What about?

Organising face to face interactions

Let's talk about how face-to-face interactions get organised.

When it is something that you are suggesting or organising, what is the process usually like?

A bit more specifically - think of someone you are close to, and a recent time when you saw this person. How was it organised?

Repeat with less well known person.

Address relevant content from messaging sample.

Let's swap to talking about when other people invite you to do things. What is the process usually like?

Address relevant content from messaging sample.

Now I want you to consider what you would do in a particular situation. Imagine you've been invited to something (intimate) and you don't want to go. Could you describe for me what might happen in this type of situation?

How might some of these situations play out without messaging?

Do you ever run late? Why?

At what point do you decide you're late?

What do you do when you realise you'll be late? e.g. inform/when?/wait til you arrive?

What do you think you might do if you didn't have messaging?

Are there situations organising things has been difficult?

Managing mobile interactions.

What sort of things impact how quickly you reply to a message?

> Is this approach shared among the people you message?

Tell me a little about times when you don't want people contacting you.

What about when it's just specific people you don't want to hear from?

Address relevant content from messaging sample.

Final questions

If there's one thing you could change about the way we use messaging, what would it be?

Address any remaining content from messaging sample.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Cohort A: Second Interview

Interviews began with follow up questions from the last interview that were particular to each participant.

In phone availability

What happens if you are in a messaging conversation and you want it to end?

Examples of you ending intentionally – examples of ending unexpectedly

Who do you feel the most pressure to reply to?

Who don't you feel any pressure to reply to?

How do you convey that you're not interested in a conversation?

(what about face to face?)

What does an 'ongoing' conversation look like?

How do you know if someone wants a conversation to be ongoing?

What do you do if you want a conversation to be ongoing?

What happens when someone messages you and you accidentally trip the read receipt?

How do you signal someone that you are interested in the conversation you are having?

F-2-F availability

What do you do if you've committed to something and then your availability changes?

Tell me about mobile messaging and rescheduling?

Tell me about mobile messaging and cancelling?

General topics if relevant

Messaging Habits

Forgetting to reply

Use of phone changed over time? How?

Discuss messaging, or a message, with friends?

Butler lies

What was your response to reading my description of butler lies?

Could you describe the behaviour for me in your own words?

Typical scenario where you'd use it?

What do you think about it more generally?

Reflection

Could you tell me a little about how you've found participating in this research?

Did our previous conversation change your thoughts or behaviours at all?

How do you feel about how available you are to others?

Discuss messaging examples

- The conversation ended unexpectedly,
- The conversation ended intentionally,
- You really wanted someone to reply to your message,
- You think someone else really wanted you to reply to their message,
- You had committed to meeting up but then your availability had changed,
- Someone else had committed to meeting up and their availability had changed,
- You are telling a butler lie,
- You think someone else is telling a butler lie.

Questions or anything to add?

Cohort B Interviews

Warm Up

Could you tell me a bit about your relationship with mobile communication?

For both mobile and non-mobile communications media:

What media do you use?

Why those media?

Who do you contact them with?

Mediated communication – for various communications media

What kinds of things would make you stop communication?

What happens if you are communicating and you want it to end?

How does it feel?

Who do you feel the most pressure to reply to?

Who don't you feel any pressure to reply to?

why? feelings?

When do you feel the most pressure to communicate? When do you feel the least?

When do you feel the most like communicating?

When do you feel the least?

Face-to-face

Things you organise - when you suggest interactions what is the process usually like?

what strategies do you employ leading up to the event?

when other people invite you to do things/instigate meeting up, how do they usually do it?

How do you respond? What is the process like?

Organising to meet face-to-face - What makes it easy? What makes it hard?

Think of someone you are close to, and a recent time when you intentionally met up with this person. How was it organised?

Next ones are about particular situations

Imagine you've been invited to something and you don't want to go. Could you describe for me what might happen in this type of situation?

What would typically happen if you found you were running late?

Why would you be late?

What kinds of things would you be late too?

How does it feel?

What do you do if you've committed to something and then your availability changes?

Anything you'd like to add?