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1-1-2012

Becoming a functioning member of the collegiate culture: how cellphone communication affects first-year college students' self and identity in college transition.

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BECOMING A FUNCTIONING MEMBER OF THE COLLEGIATE CULTURE: HOW CELLPHONE COMMUNICATION AFFECTS FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS' SELF AND IDENTITY IN COLLEGE TRANSITION.

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2012

MAJOR: COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Approved by

Advisor	Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Masatoshi Miyazaki,

mother, Kuniko Miyazaki,and all other growing family members

who are always in every single chapter of my life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

absolutely not least, I would like to express my appreciation and love for my parents and family members who supported me from Japan for the entire journey of my academic pursuit in the United States.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We have utilized different devices for human interactions for a long time. Now, such communication practices have become more diversified and multi-layered, if not *advanced*, owing to the prevalence of different forms of information communication technologies (ICTs). Among these newly popularized technologies, the cellphone has reshaped our everyday practices, reconstructing the meanings and the dynamics of human communication in today's society. This is now a worldwide phenomenon.

Acknowledging its significance in our everyday life as well as in academia, the goal of the study at hand is to further explore cellphone communication in the American context. Specifically, this study focuses on the meanings of cellphone communication among first year students in their college transition and how cellphone practices affect the ways in which they make sense of their self and identity.

Nearly a decade ago, Townsend (2002) stated that the speed of the diffusion of a cellphone was the fastest among existing technologies in history. At the end of 2002, says Srivastava (2008), the number of cellphone subscriptions overtook that of landlines (or fixed phones) and cellphones became a crucial medium in people's everyday lives on a global scale (p. 15). Katz (2005) also notes that the number of cellphone subscribers has reached more than one out of six people worldwide (p. 91). The numbers likely have changed since the publication; however, this indicates the rapid growth of cellphone communication at the beginning of the 21st century. Rice and Katz (2003) state that

cellphones became one critical communication device in many developing countries; in such places, landline phones cost people more than cellphone subscriptions (p. 602). Such a rapid growth of cellphone communication, however, has not occurred uniformly around the world, nor has it completely replaced conventional landlines, note Castells, Fernaldez-Ardevol, Qiu, and Sey (2007). Rather, Katz (2008) claims that cellphones and other ICTs "interact across platforms" and "the mobile device is seldom used as an isolated technology" (p. 10).

As a personal communication device, one unique aspect of a cellphone is the continued physical attachment to its users, which augments the private nature of a cellphone. It is personal in that our cellphone is always within our reach, and each device usually belongs to a certain individual, different from the way we use landline phones that are usually shared by multiple people. This has changed the contour of telecommunication and established its own realm in our life. Differentiating cellphone communication from its predecessors such as online interactions that have also affected the way people network with each other, Campbell and Park (2008) summarize cellphone communication as "a nuance and accession of the network society of the 1990s" (p. 372). Telecommunication is no longer confined within a certain physical and geographical location, nor is it limited solely to task-oriented communication among business people. It has become a mundane communication tool of a majority of members of society. Such a private nature of cellphone communication reshapes the dynamics of social order, creating both intended benefits and unexpected by-products.

Cellphone's immediate, frequent, and direct contact amongst individuals allows users to engage in what Ling and Yttri (2002) label *hypercoordination* and *microcoordination* that the conventional, physically-fixed landline telecommunication is not capable of. Hypercoordination is where people continue to engage in social interactions and maintain their relationships through cellphones anytime and anywhere. Different from task-oriented communication—which used to serve as a primary purpose of cellphone use but is now not the only purpose—hypercoordination indicates that cellphones now work as a means for relational management. Such relational coordination is carried out through small talks that contain many personal as well as emotional characteristics.

Through microcoordination, phones are used for more practical and task-oriented purposes, such as adjusting schedules for the near future, depending on the status of ongoing activities. This is, however, slightly different from the conventional function of landline telecommunication. Ling (2004) introduces three types of cellphone microcoordination: rescheduling, softening of schedules, and iterative coordination. Rescheduling is a midcourse adjustment in which people can rearrange or redirect the plan that has already begun. For example, a daughter rehearsing dance at school can send a text-message, asking her father to pick her up one hour later than the scheduled time because of the extra practice. They are engaging in rescheduling via cellphones. Softening is similar to rescheduling but is employed to help both parties reduce unnecessary frustration and uncertainty about the situation when the plan deviates unexpectedly. Just one text-message helps both a daughter and a father from the same example feel assured

about the situation and their plan. Once she received a reply from her father, she can focus on her practice. In iterative coordination, everything is determined progressively and accumulatively in the course of interactions. A good example of iterative coordination may be observed in the way college students decide their plan for a night out. At school, they simply agree that they will go out to a club on Friday night after their work, without planning which club to go or where they will meet prior to the club. After they leave their work, they start exchanging text-messages to know who is already out of work, to ask others' whereabouts, and to decide what to do next.

Through microcoordination, says Ling (2004), people can "add slack to the more precise nature of [conventional] time-based agreements" (p. 73). This is a new trend that has grown amongst cellphone users. Even though such a relaxed attitude toward punctuality may cause some problems in certain social situations, this could never be widely accepted without the popularization of cellphone interactions.

Such ongoing coordination results in two contrasting evaluations of a sense of punctuality and politeness. Plant (2002) warns that the idea of microcoordination, or in Plant's term, "approximeeting" (p. 61), via cellphones can cause a sense of insecurity rather than of assurance because everything is now in flux and uncertain. Since punctuality is considered a very important part of politeness in relationships (in certain cultural perceptions of time), some people may regard such midway changes as "a lack of 'commitment to appointment,'" says Plant (2002, p. 64). On the other hand, Ito and Okabe (2005) argue that, especially for young cellphone users, rather than being rigorously

punctual, their "presence in the virtual communication space [through cellphone interactions] is considered an acceptable form of initial showing up for an appointed gathering time" (p. 268). They regard this space as a "technosocial situation" (p. 259) where they experience virtual co-presence of others. A new social norm exists to at least notify others about our whereabouts in a timely manner.

The social and physical personal attachment of a phone has also redefined other aspects of human communicative conduct. The architectonical boundaries once associated with those of landline telecommunication divided space into either the public or private sphere. This is why landline telecommunication is assumed to be physically connected to certain social locations. Further, a landline telephone number is thought to represent a certain place, not a person (Tomita, 2005).

Freed from such temporal, social, and geographical constraints, however, we come to enjoy our cellphone interactions everywhere, and with anyone who is digitally approachable. Such mobility of a cellphone has redefined a sense of place and time as well as boundaries between conventional private and public spheres. A physical place is delocalized, say Caron and Caronia (2007), where both the privatization of the public and the publicization of the private continuously occur owing to portable communication devices, like a cellphone. Caron and Caronia also mention that a sense of *where* has been multilocationzed, and we situate ourselves, in a way, in multiple places at the same time during cellphone interactions, moving from one place to another and playing different social roles accordingly. For this, Caron and Caronia provide an example of grocery

shopping, where we situate ourselves both in the public and private realms by holding a work-oriented phone conversation with a colleague (who is at the office), while simultaneously selecting groceries for family meals. Owing to a cellphone conversation, this shopping situation becomes multilocalized, evidenced by the interplay between an act for private life and a business interaction. Many public situations, say Caron and Caronia, are now "targeted for new communicational possibilities" (p. 18), and it has become more and more challenging for us to handle these multiple social situations as well as social roles we perform accordingly.

Such blurred boundaries in society call for redefinitions of social norms in contrast to phone use at certain social sites where we are expected to follow "the norm of silence" (Okabe & Ito, 2005, p. 205). Scholars have identified various social situations where this becomes a critical issue. Examples include, but are not limited to, at a restaurant or a theater (Ling, 2004), in public transportation (Campbell & Russo, 2003; Okabe & Ito, 2005), in educational settings (Campbell, 2006; Katz, 2005), and in relationships (Plant, 2002). In these instances, not only do ring tones violate the norm of silence, but verbal phone conversations also put people in the situations in which they cannot escape from "forced eavesdropping" (Ling, 2004, p. 140). In a more intimate and personal situation, the presence of a phone itself or simply checking text-messages can be perceived to be "as powerful and distracting as that of a third person" (Plant, 2002, p. 30). Even though the degree of tolerance of and expectations about phone use vary culturally (e.g., Campbell, 2007) and individually (e.g., Palen, Salzman, & Youngs, 2001), it is now clear that the

presence of a cellphone in essence calls for reconsiderations of conventional social norms in public as well as in different private situations.

Understanding Cellphone Communication

It is important to note that defining cellphone communication has become a complicated task for scholars, owing to its rapid technological as well as infrastructural changes. In addition, internet capability has now expanded the horizons of interactions over the phone. For this, the study at hand regards cellphone communication as a platform in which multiple communication practices can also occur depending on the device, service, and personal preference the user holds.

Though the area of inquiry is relatively new, several scholars have proposed different perspectives to understand cellphone communication worldwide. Richard Ling is one of the leading scholars and theorists exploring cellphone communication in the European context in its earlier stages. Ling (2004) details how scholars from sociology—most of them are European scholars—have applied their theories and discussed strengths and weaknesses of their applications. Having been regarded as an extended form of the landline telecommunication system, two major theories have been developed based on people's adoption and use of cellphones. The *affordances approach* examines "how the physical characteristics of an object interplay with the way in which we perceive and interpret the use of the object" (Ling, 2004, p. 24), and the *domestication perspective* focuses on five steps (i.e., imagination, appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion) in which technologies are incorporated into everyday life situations through

people's negotiations of "acquisition, display, function and consumption of particular objects" (p. 28).

Acknowledging the limitations of the applications of these theoretical frameworks, which have predominantly been developed based on more conventional media such as a television, however, Katz (2003)—another leading scholar of cellphone communication studies—contends that "it is time to move on to pursue new theoretical perspectives [to address] the relation between the externally created machine and internally created reality" (p. 18). Elsewhere, Katz and Aakhus (2002) develop a new theory that attempts to examine the dynamics that certain technological capabilities, or a lack thereof, have on human conduct. They named their theory *Apparatgeist*, with a combination of the terms *apparat* (meaning "machine") and *geist* (meaning "sprit" or "mind"), that explains "the spirit of the machine that influences both the designs of the technology as well as the initial and subsequent significance accorded them by users, non-users and anti-users" (Katz & Aakhus, 2002, p. 305). With the sociologic of *perpetual contact*, Katz and Aakhus explain the way people across cultures are drawn to technology in a somewhat similar way, motivated by the desire to communicate with others with little physical and social constraints, as exemplified in the idea of perpetual contact. One of the goals of this emerging theory is to reconcile the technology-determinist-and-social-constructivist dichotomy. "In fact," argue Katz and Aakhus, "technology does not determine what an individual can do; rather, it serves as a constraint upon possibilities" (p. 307). Their discussion guides scholarly attention to both the uniqueness of technology that provides users with varied opportunities

of interactions and the people's actual practices with a device.

Such a fundamental human need as maintaining perpetual contact has been augmented by one kind of cellphone activity—text-messaging—which received much scholarly attention in the earlier stages of the inquiry, especially before today's popularization of the use of the internet with cellphones. The next section further explores this unique communicative behavior people have obtained with the help of cellphones.

Text-Messaging: Perpetual Contact

Perpetual contact via cellphones is now achieved through two primary sources: phone calls and text-messaging or so-called *texting*. (The term *text* is now used either as a verb or a noun colloquially, referring to text-message exchange or a message per se. For instance, people say "I don't like to text this person" instead of saying "I don't like to exchange text-messages with this person," or "I got a text from my mom" instead of saying "I got a text-message from my mom." Likewise, *texting* is used to refer to the act of text-messaging.) Though short message service (SMS), which is somewhat different from text-messaging transmission, is still available, texting has been widely accepted to refer to any form of text-based interaction via cellphones. Though there may be exceptions depending on the service offered, texting is not only much cheaper but also less obtrusive than making a phone call. The asynchronous nature of texting frees users from the pressure for an immediate response and offers both parties "the relaxation of time constraints" (Walther, 1996, p. 24) that is commonly observed in email interactions. Such flexibility provides users with savoir-faire and allows them to conduct interactions in a more mindful

and strategic way (Ling & Yttri, 2002). The nature of text-message interactions also tends to be less formal and more casual. Wording becomes thus colloquial, encouraging people to "be candid, frank, informal, even cheeky … all without the risk of embarrassment" (Plant, 2002, p. 56). These are the primary reasons for the significant popularity of texting.

Social networks developed through texting also differ from the ones fostered via emails. Email interactions tend to be used for much wider networks with less acquainted people from different geographical locations (Ishii, 2004). On the other hand, cellphone communication, especially texting, is predominantly used for dyadic interactions with persons we already know or have met face-to-face (Igarashi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2005), as well as with those who are physically nearby and emotionally close (Miyata, Boase, Wellman, & Ikeda, 2005; Sooryamoorthy, Miller, & Shrum, 2008). Such a difference may derive from the frequency of interactions conducted through emails and a cellphone. People usually carry their cellphones around, allowing them to maintain perpetual contact, whereas they use emails for much more specific reasons such as writing a relatively long message or exchanging digital files.

Matsuda (2005) has noted that regardless of the number of names registered in their phones, Japanese undergraduate students (often 18- to 22-year-olds) mindfully select with whom they interact via cellphones and develop intensive relationships with these selected few. This in turn develops a "full-time intimate community" (Nakajima, Himeno, & Yoshii, 1999 as cited in Matsuda, 2005, p. 133) or telecocoon relationships (Habuchi, 2005) in which they engage in continual interactions via texting all day long. Thus, rather

than diversifying relationships, Matsuda claims that texting intensifies relational connections with persons met face-to-face on a daily basis. Similarly, Sugiyama and Katz (2003) argue that those who have the larger amount of social capital develop closer ties and more intensive relationships with cellphones within their own personal and local networks, or in their words, within "personal endogenous networks" (p. 384), rather than expanding networks to include those they do not know.

Interestingly, such contiguous texting does not necessarily carry any valuable or personal information, but creates an ongoing lightweight awareness of connection with others or "an ambient virtual co-presence" of others, say Ito and Okabe (2005, p. 261). Contiguous texting gives individuals the "peripheral background awareness" of others as if they are sharing the same social space via the frequent exchange of texts (Ito & Okabe, 2005, p. 264). Combined with the continuity of the interaction, the quick-paced text-message exchange reinforces this sense of peripheral awareness of others.

Given that texting requires more frequent interactions to maintain the peripheral background awareness of others, it is understandable that such an enthusiastic behavior tends to be perceived as socially inappropriate and even problematic. Newly populated technologies often provoke concerns among people, such as tendency of users to become addicted to the technology. Thurlow, Lengel, and Tomic (2004) introduce the idea of *moral panics*, "the feeling, held by a substantial number of the members of a given society, that evil-doers pose a threat to the society and to the moral order as a consequence of their behaviour …" (Goode & Ben-Yahuda, 1994: 31 as cited in Thurlow et al., 2004, p. 145).

However, studies to date have not provided solid evidence for this argument, especially for the notion of addiction (e.g., Caplan, 2003; Kraut et al., 1998; Kraut et al., 2002). Though the negligence of the experience is not acceptable, and the problematic and pathological use of ICTs *is* indeed a social problem with which to be concerned, such a technological deterministic perspective does not help foster a comprehensive understanding of current human interactions.

In this regard, Taylor and Harper (2003) also demonstrate how one deeply-rooted conventional social norm, gift-giving or *gifting*, explains contiguous text-messaging behavior. Technologically speaking, a text-message is a mere aggregation of digital data made of a combination of 0s and 1s. This is not true relationally, however. A message is a *gift* exchanged interpersonally, and the act of gifting signifies "feelings such as thanks, caring, love and trust, and is, in turn, meant to result in pleasure or well being for the recipient," say Taylor and Harper, and this behavior "embodies something of ourselves" (p. 272). In gifting, there are three types of obligation: to give, to accept, and to reciprocate. As well as other interpersonal situations, reciprocity, or "mutual dependency" (Taylor & Harper, 2003, p. 282) plays a significant role in texting to establish and reinforce relationships. Things exchanged are not free of charge but they carry certain values or embodied meanings, and such values are determined relationally. Feelings such as allegiance, commitment, and trust towards the recipients of the message become tangible through texting, which in turn reinforces and reassures the connections between people.

Acknowledging the power of gifting and the importance of reciprocity in

relationships, it is understandable why users make efforts not to breach this interpersonal agreement and occasionally become preoccupied with texting. In other words, there is an expectation on the part of a sender that her/his text-message will be returned by the recipient within a certain length of time after the message was sent—an expectation of reciprocity. The failure of reciprocity and its consequences can be highly detrimental. Based on their research on college undergraduates, Smith and Williams (2004) suggest the idea of "imagined ostracism" (p. 291) where those who do not receive text-messages in return for any reason experience anxiety and eventually respond to the situation in a defensive, problematic manner. Smith and Williams note that provocation is sometimes even unconscious and results from a precognitive reaction toward ostracism. In order to maintain our psychological well-being, explain Smith and Williams, "humans have evolved to detect even the slightest hint of ostracism and to experience it negatively, to warn that something must be done in order to be reincluded and prevent a threat to survival" (p. 300).

The more frequently we engage in texting with various people, the more complicated the issue of interpersonal agreements will become, depending on with whom we interact. It is also important to acknowledge that excessive text-messaging behaviors do cause serious, life threatening problems such as texting or/and talking while driving, and cyberbullying (e.g., Davie, Panting, & Charlton, 2004; Plant, 2002). Such issues, however, cannot be explained with a monolithic, technological deterministic scope such as addiction. Thus, the meanings of cellphone communication and its effects on interpersonal relationships need to be examined from multifaceted perspectives. Literature discussed here

clearly shows the necessity of such a comprehensive understanding of cellphone communication.

As apparatgeist theory suggests, a cellphone has been developed socially as well as technologically where human desires and technological advancements converge. The addition of internet capabilities has further changed the nature of cellphone communication. A cellphone is one representative device that helps expand the possibilities of human communicative conduct with pre-existing and newly emerging constraints. It is here necessary to reiterate that a cellphone is not anything magical. Quite obviously, phone interactions become technologically infeasible once connections are lost or a phone "dies" after the battery runs out. Also, a range of phone activities highly depends on an individual's financial status and what services are affordable. Everything combined, however, cellphone communication symbolizes the emergence of diversified communicative practices that have changed the dynamics of human conduct and relational developments.

Studies of Cellphone Communication in the United States

In the United States, a cellphone has currently become a highly popular digital device people own across all generations (Zickuhr, 2011). Ranging from teenagers to college students to business people, a cellphone has now established its place in our everyday life, reshaping the contours of social as well as communicative practices.

Compared to the amount of studies conducted on predecessors such as the internet and interactions via personal computers, however, it was not until recently that cellphone

communication as a whole gained much scholarly, as well as public, attention in the United States (Baron & Ling, 2007; Castells et al., 2007). Most studies focus on cellphone communication in European or Asian countries (e.g., Boase & Kobayashi, 2008; Butt & Phillips, 2008; Contarello, Fortunati, & Sarrica, 2007; Davie et al., 2004; Faulkner & Culwin, 2007; Igarashi et al., 2005; Igarashi, Motoyoshi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2008; Ishii, 2004; Ishii & Wo, 2006; Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2005; Leung, 2007; Ling, 2001: 2004; Perry & Lee, 2007; Sooryamoorthy et al., 2008; Wei & Lo, 2006; Wilska, 2003), Canada (Campbell, 2006; Caronia, 2005; Caronia & Caron, 2004), or other developing countries (e.g., Katz, 2008; Perry & Lee, 2007; Rouvinen, 2006).

To date, a limited number of U.S. studies has addressed such issues as American college students' attitudes toward cellphone communication (Aoki & Downes, 2003), cellphone influences in the classroom (Campbell, 2006; Katz, 2005), a new form of ostracism through texting (Smith & Williams, 2004), the development of social capital with cellphones (Sugiyama & Katz, 2003), and the desire for and tactics of control through texting (Mahatanankoon & O'Sullivan, 2008). This is the fundamental reason for the current study of cellphone communication in the American context. It focuses on the meanings of cellphone communication in college transition, and the cellphone's impact on first-year students' sense of self and identity.

Youth Cellphone Communication

While the popularity of cellphone communication now exists across all generations worldwide, the younger generations in particular tend to receive a lot of social as well as

scholarly attention. Among them, current college students are a unique social cohort in that they have been both socially and academically close to various technologies since their childhood. (Unless otherwise noted, college students throughout this discussion refer to those who are 18- to 25-years old attending college.)

Recent studies examining the relationship between undergraduate students and ICTs also clearly show the increasing ownership of personal computers as well as cellphones among college students (e.g., Junco, 2005; Salaway, Caruso, & Nelson, 2008). The ownership of ICTs is now considered a social norm. Several reports published by Pew Internet and American Life Project indicate that between 2004 to 2009, the ownership of cellphones as well as the use of cellphones, especially for texting, increased dramatically among teenagers in the United States. For instance, Lenhart (August 2009) states that the ownership of a cellphone among teenagers (aged from 12 to 17), regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, increased from 45% in 2004 to 71% in early 2008, claiming that this is a significant increase in comparison with that of adults. Along with the increase of ownership, another survey conducted in 2009 emphasizes the increasing interactions via texting among teens, claiming that "texting is the form of communication that has grown the most for teens during the last four years" (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010, p. 44). Similar findings are reported in the research conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation (Rideout, Foeh, & Roberts, January 2010).

The mastery of these new ICTs also affects students' academic success owing to the increasing incorporation of digital materials into learning. Media literacy and media

education have now become critical components of the school curriculum. The closer technology becomes physically and socially to students' everyday lives, however, the harder it becomes for them to balance being tech-savvy without exceeding social expectations, particularly those of adults, or most often of their *parents*. Social pressures for teenagers to cultivate media literacy predominantly for educational or social benefits, not for their own pleasure, grow. Though adults were once the early adaptors as well as active users of new technology, current ICTs have changed this dynamic (Thurlow & McKay, 2003). The conventional top-down structure becomes inapplicable, and it is now common for children to own and master more advanced technology than their parents do. This applies as well to cellphone acquisition and usage. Ling (2004) laments that "while some teens are objectifying the device, incorporating it, and giving it a position in their everyday life, their parents are still far back in the adoption process" (p. 97).

Several historical factors proliferated the prevalence of cellphones among youth. In the early 90s, the technological advancement from analog (1G) to digital (2G) helped phone carriers to produce smaller and lighter handsets and to achieve more enhanced data transmission with less cost, making cellphone communication a worldwide phenomenon (Rouvinen, 2006, p. 2). Thanks to such digitalization and cost reduction, the dominant perception towards cellphones shifted from a rich business tool for executives to a personal everyday communication tool for everyone (Katz & Aspden, 1998). Accordingly, the phone carriers adjusted their marketing to target housewives and young people. The role young people played in the proliferation of cellphone communication was quite significant in this

regard. In conjunction with the popularization of cellphone communication, Wilska (2003) states that "the lifestyles and consumption patterns of young people determine the consumption trends of the *whole population*" (p. 441). Especially among youth, phones not only serve as a means for communication but as a way to display their esthetic sense and creativity. They personalize their phone as if the device is a part of their fashion statement, or in some sense, of their body (Katz & Sugiyama, 2006).

More importantly, the early phone acquisition among youth is closely related to a more functional and practical result. Enthusiasm about ensuring the safety and security fueled parents' willingness to allow their children to own phones from a very young age. Now, children's acquisition of a phone is often times parents-led (Campbell & Russo, 2003), and parents appreciate reasonable cellphone service such as the pre-paid phone that satisfies their need at minimum expense (Ling & Yttri, 2002; Miyaki, 2005; Wilska, 2003). It is reasonable to say that the desire to ensure the safety, or "a passion for security" (Garcia-Montes, Caballero-Munoz, & Perez-Alvarez, 2006, p. 67), was a critical driving force that facilitated the growth of cellphone communication. Even though many K-12 schools in the United States at first vehemently banned students' possession of the phone at school, tragedies such as the shootings in Columbine in 1999 and the terrorist attacks on September 11 in 2001 resulted in the abandonment of the state laws that previously regulated phone use at schools (Katz, 2005).

Contrary to parents' intention to maximize children's safety, however, the ownership of a cellphone can cause several problems both inside and outside the classroom.

Though the possibilities of the instructional and educational applications of various portable devices cannot be ignored, many teachers see the presence of cellphones in the classroom as a disturbance (Campbell, 2006; Katz, 2005). Also, children often see their cellphones as a tool to escape from the surveillance of parents (Davie et al., 2004; Ling & Yttri, 2002). Especially with texting, it is now possible for children to secretly develop and maintain relationships with someone they would not interact with otherwise. Though this is not necessarily a problem, such personal and direct connections fostered some sexual misconduct among young people. Tomita (2005) introduces a case of young Japanese girls who utilized their phone to find a partner for whom they could provide paid sexual favors. Such a form of paid-date is not a new social problem at all but has long been prevalent, and the technology of the time, including a landline phone and a pager, facilitated the efficacy of this *business*. Cellphones are considered more efficient and effective to engage in such misbehavior, even though it is socially unacceptable.

Once technology became capable of handling larger data transmission such as images and pictures, the nature of *text*-messaging also changed and created a new social problem called *sexting*. Sexting is a colloquial term often utilized in media, referring to an act where people share sexually-themed messages or nude or nearly nude images via text-messaging. Now these images even include videos, and a number of young people, including teens, got involved in such an act. Casual and intimate exchange of sexually explicit images can lead both parties involved to the legislative charge for child pornography as well as to life-threatening tragedies. With the internet capability of a phone,

the issue of the management of such personal information, whether textual or visual, has challenged parents to be more media literate rather than blindly relying on the media to ensure children's safety (Lenhart, December 2009).

Younger generations' relationship with new media, as shown in examples of paid-dates and sexting, is consistently a sensitive matter, which certainly needs close attention from the public to prevent any further unwanted problems. Yet, young people's media use tends to be overly exaggerated when combined with mass media sensationalism. The aforementioned discussion about the notion of addiction is also another example. People—which is to say adults who are believed to be in the *mainstream* of society—often seek simple and easy explanations about something new or incomprehensible to them. And young people and their behaviors tend to be marginalized and victimized by such a hasty generalization.

In a discussion of the way in which public discourses address the relationship between new media and young people, Thurlow (2007) criticizes the homogenized understanding of the notion of *youth* and claims that "it does seem striking that the current generation has come to be one-dimensionally epitomized ... by the technologies it uses" (p. 219). They cannot *not* own a cellphone because, in conjunction with the aforementioned safety concern, most young people in this digital age are supposed to be media literate to *fit in.* A cellphone carries with it a certain amount of social capital. Such skills and knowledge acquired by youth, however, have to be exercised *appropriately* so as not to go beyond the imagination about and appreciation for youth's media use shared within the mainstream, or

by adults. No matter on which end of the continuum young people fall, they are doomed to be lambasted by the mass media (Thurlow, 2003; 2005; Thurlow & Bell, 2009). Thurlow (2005) argues how the media (both in the United States and Britain in this case) have constantly portrayed young people in a stereotypical or even prejudicial way. The discourse regarding this social cohort presents them as being non-communicative or communication-inept (Thurlow, 2005, p. 7). Thurlow fiercely criticizes such problematic representations of young people among adults as well as in the mainstream media and emphasizes the importance of speaking *for*, not *about*, them in order to properly understand their relationship with new communication technologies:

> *It seems hard to imagine that for any other major social group defined, say, by race, age or sex, would it nowadays be acceptable to seek explanations for interpersonal and interactional differences on the basis of biology or anatomy* [emphasis added]. In many ways, therefore, young people may be rightly viewed as a social group routinely misunderstood and even mistreated by adults. [Y]oung people are a group whose communication capital … is always greatly devalued or denied. (Thurlow, 2005, p. 7)

Thurlow's statement clearly illustrates the implicit power structure existing in the discourse surrounding young people and their relationship with media, especially with communication devices.

Literature discussed thus far sheds lights on how cellphone communication comes to be integrated into various aspects of youth's everyday life and how their attachment, or a lack thereof, is evaluated by the mainstream media and adults. The ownership and usage of ICTs at different stages in life bring different meanings respectively. Thurlow (2005) further suggests that scholars who address issues about youth, also engage in

"advocacy—speaking as experts *for* others— … to *empower* people by doing research *with* them and arising from their own agendas and needs" (p. 9). Following Thurlow's forceful criticism against the prejudicial representations of youth and the essence of advocacy, the study at hand explores how in fact young people interact with ICTs, especially cellphones, in their everyday life. Specifically, the current study focuses on one distinct life period where young people experience geographical, relational, and communicative transitions all at once. The exploration of cellphone communication in conjunction with college transition will reveal a great deal about the ways in which young people understand communicative practices and themselves in relation to other individuals.

College Transition and Information Communication Technologies

Traditionally, the transition to college is considered to have a huge impact on students; however, newly populated ICTs have been changing the dynamics of this process (Nunez, 2005). For instance, online social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook in particular, have become an additional platform for students to meet new people and develop relationships even prior to college enrollment, while maintaining their old ties during transition (Salaway et al., 2008). Relational development or "meeting friends" does not necessarily follow the traditional, face-to-face conventions any longer. In their study of college students' Facebook use, for example, Aleman and Wartman (2009) contend that the use of SNSs is "a fundamental component of [students'] lived experiences, and an important element of the phenomenology of campus life" (p. 42).

Due to the limited number of studies of cellphone communication in the United

States, it was not until recently that college transition has gained scholarly attention as an important place for cellphone communication studies. For instance, Hofer (2008) claims that American students' cellphone communication with parents has changed the way they build their sense of autonomy. Elsewhere, Hofer and Moore (2010) examine the dialectical tensions between parents and children through the idea of *electric tethering*; i.e., children are being connected or "tethered" to parents through cellphones even after the physical as well as geographical separation. Parents consider cellphones as a means for ensuring their children's safety under the name of electric parenting or surveillance, whereas children believe that they finally gain autonomy from their parents through college transition. Since the prevalence and importance of cellphone communication in college transition have become more salient, more scholarly attention needs to be given to this aspect.

As mentioned, a gap still exists between the studies about the internet interactions via personal computers (i.e., computer-mediated communication [CMC] studies) and cellphone communication in an American context. The study at hand is a solid contribution for bridging this gap by exploring the meanings of cellphone communication in college transition, including its effects on students' sense of self and identity and how existing as well as newly developed relationships affect such a sense-making process.

Dissertation Outline

Literature suggests the importance of cellphone communication studies in the American context, as well as of understanding youth's engagement with the ICTs in today's society. The following section provides an outline of the dissertation.

Chapter Two, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS, will review two fundamental theoretical frameworks for the current study: A theory of transition, and symbolic interactionism. The former informs of the issues associated with first-year college experiences, including successful college transition, relational development and management, and the implications of communication with current ICTs in transition. The latter provides a theoretical scope for the construction of self and identity, as well as for human communicative conduct that affects the way we understand ourselves in relation to others. This chapter will justify the analysis of college transition and students' use of ICTs, especially cellphones. It will further provide richer understandings of college students' engagement with one critical life transition point—the transition from high school to college—and their understanding of their self and identity. In conjunction with the review concerning cellphone communication studies presented in this chapter, as well as with the applied studies of symbolic interactionism, Chapter Two will provide three research questions for the current study.

Chapter Three, METHODS, will discuss the rationale for an ethnographic approach to collect narratives concerning participants' ideas about their cellphone communication in conjunction with college transition. This chapter will also detail the recruitment procedures, participants, the data collection strategies employed for the study (electronic journaling, focus groups, and individual qualitative interviews), the outcomes of data collection, and the overview of data analysis.

Chapter Four, DISCUSSION, will first provide the researcher's reflections on the

study that illustrate the challenges the researcher came across in the course of data collection. This discussion will provide insights into the analysis of narratives. This chapter will then present overarching themes emerging from the data analysis and discuss the implications of cellphone communication during the transition on participants' sense of self and identity. Participants' efforts to present their selves as functioning members of a collegiate environment will be detailed. This chapter will also address three research questions developed and presented in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five, CONCLUSION, will discuss implications for future research, the limitations of the current study, and conclusions for the issue at hand. The final note will provide reflections on the whole project, including the themes discussed in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

We as human beings continuously engage in a sense-making process. The path of this pursuit varies individually; however, communication with other individuals, no matter what forms it takes, certainly plays a significant role in our understanding of self and how we situate ourselves in relation to others in society. This is the principle of understanding the following discussion about cellphone communication in college transition.

The study at hand employs two theoretical frameworks to explore how cellphone communication affects a certain turning point of life, and its subsequent impacts on our sense of self and identity: one is a theory of transition, and the other is symbolic interactionism. The former renders a lens to examine the dynamics of college transition and first-year college experience. The latter provides sociological understandings of human communicative conducts and our relationships to other individuals in society. Both theories focus on human communication and personal relationships with others for a sense-making process we engage in at different stages in life.

First-Year College Experiences

In contemporary industrialized countries where pursuing higher education and obtaining a college degree have become assets for youth, college enrollment serves as one critical life event for the entire family of a new student. This is also a particular time where both parents and their children experience a dialectal tension in which they negotiate the degree of closeness and attachment through integration and separation (Baxter &

Montgomery, 1996). Different individuals experience different kinds of college transition, and a student's personal and familial backgrounds are highly influential for her or his successful validation experiences in a new collegiate environment (Terenzini et al., 1994). Validation, in this sense, is "a self-affirming process" where students "come to feel accepted in their new community, receive confirming signals that they can be successful in college and are worthy of a place there" (Terenzini et al., 1994, p. 66) both in- and outside of the classroom.

College is not only conceived of by prospective students as a place for education but also for self-exploration and freedom. Owing to such perceptions about college life reinforced by the mass media, first-year college students tend to hold what Baker, McNeil, and Siryk (1985) call the "matriculant myth," the overly idealized expectations about their college experiences, including social, academic, and environmental. College transition thus highly depends on successful adjustments to the collegiate environment through negotiations between the pre-established expectations about social and academic involvements and actual experiences at college.

Understanding college transition. The first-year college experience is one critical life event many young people go through in which they come across various changes, ranging from geographic to academic and social, and develop more self-reflective understandings of themselves through interactions with other students with similar or different backgrounds. Addressing the issue of the high college dropout rate in the United States, Tinto (1988; 1996) develops a theory of transition in conjunction with the social

anthropological concept of the rites of passage developed by Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep. Van Gennep's discussions about the rites of passage are, says Tinto (1988), concerned about the life crises individuals experience in the course of their lifetime. A life is filled with a series of passages such as birth, the entrance to adulthood, marriage, and death that are all accompanied by the transition from one social and relational place to another. It is this movement of individuals from membership in one group to membership in another, along with tribal ceremonies and rituals, that fascinated Van Gennep (Tinto, 1988, p. 440).

Tinto (1988) considers the college transition as a contemporary rite of passage where students move from their old community to a new collegiate community. With cautions against the homogeneous understandings of the process that have long been assumed to be invariable, Tinto argues that college transition involves three phases students go through to become a member of a new community. In this regard, Tinto's theory of transition applies Van Gennep's three stages of the rites of passage: stages of separation, transition, and incorporation.

The first step, students' *separation* from their home geographically, socially, and emotionally, is a threshold of the entire transitional process. There is the tension between maintaining old, established social ties from their precollege or childhood home and developing new ones in a new, collegiate environment. Tinto (1996) contends that "the process leading to the college necessarily requires some degree of transformation and perhaps rejection of the norms of past communities" (p. 95). It is not hard to imagine how

much burden and disorientation students go through in this process especially when they leave their family and past community for the first time.

The second phase, *transition*, is a contiguous learning process where students experience many hardships and challenges and "come to learn the knowledge and skills required for the performance of their specific role in a new group" (Tinto, 1988, p. 441). This is also a complicated process in which students have to negotiate their previous relationships with those forming with newly developed associates. Students are somewhat forced to accept a certain degree of transformation so as not to fail to be incorporated into a new environment. Owing to a lack of social as well as cultural knowledge of a new group, as well as to a pressure for acquiring new social norms and beliefs shared by the members of the new environment, however, they become vulnerable and face challenges such as critical decision-making regarding whether to stay in or leave a new community, namely, college.

The final stage, incorporation, is a phase where they acquire full membership into a new community through special ceremonies or rituals. Their relationship with the old communities still remains; however, they interact with members of these past groups as a member of a new community. A key move from transition to incorporation is whether students successfully handle their own "temporary normlessness" (Tinto, 1988, p. 442) in a new environment. Successful participants thus learn norms to survive and to receive validation from other members of the community and become integrated into a new environment as a member of a new group. Different from the traditional understandings of

the rites of passage in Van Gennep's term, however, college transition may not necessarily accompany the ceremonies or rituals that institutionally determine the completion of students' incorporation in the first year. Rather, this can be established in a more gradual manner through managing both past and new relationships and achieving their academic goals, such as earning desirable grades on exams or passing classes.

With such a structural understanding of college transition, Tinto's (1996) theory is based on the explorations of student departures, *leaving* college for any reason. Tinto aims at increasing the student retention and understanding the factors that prevent students from achieving their desirable and successful first-year college experiences. Departure can occur at any point of these three stages of college transition. Varied degrees and kinds of involvement affect student retention and persistence (Tinto, 1998). As of his writing in 2001, Tinto states that more than 47 percent of American college students will fail to earn a degree, and more than 56 percent of dropouts leave college before the beginning of their second year (Tinto, 2001, p. 1). Given such a high rate of student departures, Tinto (2001) emphasizes the importance of the establishment of effective retention programs to make students' first-year experience valuable and manageable.

The important point here is, as these statistics indicate, that college transition is such a complicated and dynamic process where a number of social, interpersonal, and environmental elements interact with each other. It is also worth noting that Tinto's theory sheds light on students' "loss" of, or a lack of, relational and communicative ties as well as physical and geographical detachment from their homeland or old communities. This

crystallizes the importance of relational communication students engage in and social networking they develop in order to cope with various hardships in a transitional process. The reasons for dropout, withdrawal, or stop-out—meaning that students simply stop attending school without making any official decision owing to their external commitments—vary from academic, institutional, financial, to relational. And such unsuccessful transition cannot be understood with a singular causal explanation. Rather, Tinto (2001) contends that joining and establishing a successful tie with a community where students receive social and academic support are quite important for retention or survival in a new collegiate environment.

College transition and ICTs. As briefly discussed in the preceding chapter, examining the communicative as well as relational aspects surrounding college transition, along with how the current prevalence of ICTs among college students has changed its dynamics, thus illustrates the contours of today's college transition. The importance of relational negotiations students go through in transition is a recurring theme of the literature of college transition, specifically those closely related to friendships from precollege and those newly developed in college.

For instance, Ishler and Schreiber (2002) identify four key steps in the successful adjustment of female first-year students into a new collegiate environment: 1) leaving old friends behind, 2) comparing new friendships to old ones, 3) building new friendships, and 4) easing adjustment with new friendships. Based on these elements, Isher (2004) elsewhere focuses on a sense of guilt in particular that first-year students experience when

they attempt to develop new friendships, resulting in obstacles for a successful transition. Students need to overcome relational as well as geographical detachment from old ties and accept themselves as having two different social ties simultaneously. Similarly, Paul and Brier (2001) claim that some may experience *friendsickness*, which they describe as "a pressing relational challenge for new college students that is induced by moving away from an established network of friends" (p. 77). These studies indicate the significant impacts such close relational ties have on college transition.

Along with their relationships with old friends, students' residential status in a new collegiate environment—whether or not they live on campus or commute to school—also brings up a wide variety of challenges to successful transition. Clemons, McKelfresh, and Banning (2005) find that the more students living on campus feel like being *at home*, the less likely they are to withdraw from the new collegiate environment. For this, students effectively socialize with other peers who live in close vicinity to establish a sense of belonging and to develop a sense of group cohesiveness (Kaya, 2004). Personalization of their residence hall room, says Kaya (2004), also "serves as an expression of the individual's personality" (p. 113) and self-presentation. Such coping strategies help newly enrolled students feel more *at home* in a new social as well as architectural environment.

On the other hand, those who choose not to live on campus utilize different strategies to survive their transition. Krause (2007) challenges a common myth that commuters are apathetic and less enthusiastic about their academic life. Based on a case study of Australian first-year college students, Krause points out the relatively small

number of studies regarding commuter students' transition in the United States. Krause claims that commuter students maintain a sense of social cohesiveness and belonging by developing new ties with friends on campus as well as maintaining connections with "associates," those from the area in which they reside (Krause, 2007, p. 36). Krause's study is important in that it suggests the complicated dynamics of transition and emphasizes the context each student experiences as her or his *own*.

Tinto (1988) also addresses this point in his discussion. Those who stay at their home may not experience as intense a separation from family and their old ties as others who live away from their hometown. On the one hand, this relieves the various stresses associated with college transition. On the other hand, however, this obviously hinders the necessary distancing that helps students grow as persons in a new environment. This problem becomes salient when family and other close individuals hold an opposing view toward college education. Thus, both students who live with and away from their family respectively share benefits and risks in their transitional process.

The degree of closeness with family members, whether or not it is relational or geographical, is one important indicator of a student's successful transition. Through her study about college transition of the first generation students, Nunez (2005) suggests that her participants—first generation female college students of color—engage in more complicated adjustment strategies than Tinto's (1996) stage-by-stage understanding of transition to survive in a collegiate environment, due primarily to a lack of guidance provided by their family. Nunez claims that the process of separation is not independent

from other phases but more overlapping and intertwined. The recurring renegotiations of relational ties between old and new are frequently observed among her participants. Nunez states that "*maintaining* or *renegotiating* ties with past communities and *connecting* with the new college community may be a more accurate way of describing the college transition process for these students" (p. 111). Different from the way traditional rites of passage are conducted, where older adults have more skilled experiences and matured understandings of the ritual, such an overlapping process of Nunez's participants' transition is quite understandable due primarily to a cultural knowledge about college transition shared by parents. As discussed, such closeness works in both positive and negative ways for students.

Considering the changing context in which today's first-year students go through this critical life moment, it is important to acknowledge the implications of ICTs and to explore this aspect further to better understand how they experience their college transition. Not surprisingly, students use the internet and email to collect information as well as to make contact with faculty members even before their enrollment (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). The use of SNSs such as Facebook also facilitates students' networking outside the traditional face-to-face realm.

For parents, on the one hand, these new paths that lead their children in different geographical places allow the parents to establish a new form of parenting—what Hofer (2008) calls *electric tethering*. They no longer need to rely on a traditional, physically and socially fixed landline phone to get in touch with their children. This applies to both sides,

of course. Both parents and children can be anywhere outside their house to engage in check-ins. More importantly, however, parents maintain an electric tether that allows them to monitor and control their children's campus life. On the other hand, students (or children) obtained many ways to facilitate communication with peers and to be freed from their parental control or surveillance with the creative use of ICTs. As discussed, children are more media literate than their parents, changing the dynamics of parenting and the relational dialectic tensions both parents and children experience in college transition.

More important, transitions we experience in different points of our lifetime have long been considered as having significant influences on self and identity. From an interactionist perspective, Strauss (1962) argues that turning points or the rites of passage work as milestones of life where people come to engage in reconstruction of self and identity, especially in relation to and through interactions with other group members in a new environment. The transition into college is also conceived as one of the critical turning points in this regard. Smith, Carmack, and Titsworth (2006) emphasize the implications of interpersonal interactions and relationship management for first-year students' self and identity construction. Drawing on the concept of socialization (Giddens, 1979), Smith et al. claim that students negotiate the tension of *in(ter)dependence* with others, which is "a desire for independence and a continuing need for dependence" (p. 83), and engage in continuous negotiations and redefinitions of their self and identity in relation to others from old and new communities.

Examining transitions renders effective perspectives to explore the impact of

human communication and interpersonal relationships on the process of reconstruction and renegotiation of self and identity within such a crucial life passage. The next section further discusses this connection through the literature of symbolic interactionism, which describes how people make sense of themselves and the world around them in relation to other members of communities they belong to in different life periods.

Symbolic Interactionism

As human beings, we rely on symbols, ranging from the tangible to the invisible, to create meanings both deliberately and unconsciously. We use languages—a form of symbols—including verbal utterances and nonverbal as well as textual expressions, which become constructs of meanings. We also constantly engage in sense-making by deciphering such meanings in relation to other individuals in society. It is through such *symbolic interactions* that "the personal self develops in the crucible of interpersonal relationships with certain significant others" says Harter (1999, p. 677). The principle of symbolic interactionism is to both consider and define "the self as a social construction" (Harter, 1999, p. 681).

Symbolic interactionists traditionally see situations in which face-to-face communication takes place as a critical context where individuals engage with themselves in relation to others. This in turn results in the construction of the self (Callero, 2003). Historically, there are three scholars who established the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism through the observations of human communicative conducts (Harter, 1999). Here, Harter's (1999) detailed review of their scholarly works is highly instructive to

understand this theory's development.

The three: Baldwin, Cooley, and Mead. Through the research of child development, James M. Baldwin (1897) focuses on the imitative process where children come to learn social standards and acquire linguistic as well as behavioral varieties from close individuals such as parents or/and caregivers, namely, *the significant others*. Harter introduces Baldwin's understanding of the self: "My sense of myself grows by my imitation of you, and my sense of yourself grows in terms of my sense of myself. Both ego and alter [Baldwin's term for "the self"] are thus essentially social; each is a *socius* and each is an imitative creation" (Baldwin, 1897, p. 335 as quoted in Harter, 1999, p. 678).

Baldwin's discussion is founded primarily on children's intuitive motives for their subjective imitations of *significant others* whose presence has direct and continuous impact upon children's psychological development and self construction. Through imitations, children learn standards and incorporate behaviors, social roles and value judgments exercised by significant others into their own self-definition. Some of these imitations eventually come to be internalized and become the foundation of their self itself, and this process continues after children step out of their domestic sphere and meet other individuals. At these early stages, children learn what is right and what is considered socially unacceptable and behave accordingly not to (or deliberately in order to) violate social expectations. Imitations vary from context to context and relation to relation, and children explore different social roles and values and construct multiple selves based on the situations and individuals they interact with. Owing to such recurring changes of the self,

Baldwin's understanding of the self is not something fixed or singular but more fluid and variable.

With this fundamental understanding of the development of multiple selves in childhood established by Baldwin, Charles H. Cooley (1902) further examines the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism. Cooley considers significant others as the mirror through which an individual understands others' evaluation of and opinions for her/himself. In other words, other people work as a means through which an individual imagines "an evaluation of one's worth as a person" (Harter, 1999, p. 680). As we can see and learn about our physical appearance or facial expressions objectively though a mirror, we imagine how others would think of us, in terms of the physical as well as emotional traits. "So in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, characters, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it," says Cooley (1902, p. 152).

Varied degrees of self-esteem are formed consequently based on the individual's judgment upon how she/he imagines that the others think of her/himself. Cooley (1902) explains the process of this imagination of the looking-glass and its three principles as follows: "the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his [or her] judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification" (p. 152). What's significant about Cooley's approach to the self is his focus on the reflected appraisals of others, which could potentially work for and against the reflected-self. Some of these evaluations are internalized as part of one's self and become

persistent even without the presence of others. "We always imagine," says Cooley, "and in imagining share, the judgment of the other mind" (1902, p. 153). Thus, the self is considered to be constructed in relation to others. Compared to the childhood where individuals' reflected self is highly susceptible to external factors, says Harter (1999), "it was [Cooley's] contention that once the attitudes and affective reactions of others are incorporated into the self, they are not buffeted about by potentially transient or disparate views of significant others" (p. 680).

Based on the behavioral aspects extensively explored by his predecessors that had been assumed to affect the self, George H. Mead (1934) examined how the self and mind are constructed through the language process (i.e., symbols and symbolic interactions) within the environment people are in, namely, society. Mead explained *the self* as

> a character which is different from that of the physiological organism proper. The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his [or her] relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process. (p. 135)

Mead's understanding of the self is highly relational, and the self can only exist within the relationships with other members of the society in which an individual resides. "Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves," says Mead, and "our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also" (p. 164).

Mead's (1934) claim regarding the implications of relationships on the self is further illustrated by his metaphorical description of two developmental stages children go

through to attain the sense of "self-consciousness": *play* and *game*. In the first stage, play,

they engage in the imitations Baldwin discusses. "This takes place because the child is

continually exciting in himself [or herself] the responses to his [or her] own social acts,"

says Mead (1925, p. 269). Whereas play is more of an act conducted individually in relation

to significant others, the second game stage involves more participants, or what Mead calls

"generalized others." Here children learn "the various roles of all the participants in the

game, and govern his [or her] action accordingly" (p. 296). It is because of the presence of

generalized others that children learn how the others play, the way they are supposed to

play, and the dynamics of relationships with others in a certain situation, or, metaphorically

speaking, within a "game." Generalized others become a source of reference upon which

children attempt to reflect their own self, and thus the self is constructed by adopting "the

perspective of a more generalized group of significant others who share a particular societal

perspective on the self" (Harter, 1999, p. 681).

Regarding the self as something that develops rather than an inherent property,

Mead (1934) contends that an individual is a self-conscious organism that understands his

or her being in relation to others, so that a person "become[s] an object to one's self in

virtue of one's social relations to other individuals" (p. 172). A prominent student of Mead,

Herbert Blumer (1962), later puts this much more clearly: "the human being can be the

object of his [or her] own actions. He [or she] can act toward himself [or herself] as he [or

she] might act toward others" (p. 181). This is called *reflexivity* of the self, and Mead

(1934) explains it as follows:

> The individual experiences himself [or herself] as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he [or she] belongs. (p. 138)

To explicate the reflexivity of self, Mead (1934) argues that there are two phases of the self: the "I" and the "me." The self is developed only through the negotiations between them. For this negotiation to be established, Mead emphasizes the importance of interaction with others and the different natures of "I" and "me," as follows:

> The "I" is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself [or herself] assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized "me," and then one reacts toward that as an "I." (p. 175)

The "me" is, in a sense, an objectified self that is constructed through both direct and indirect interactions with other members of society. After the preparatory stage in which children react to their parents based on mere intuitions, the construction of the self (both the "I" and the "me") becomes more of a social activity (Charon, 1995).

The perspectives developed by Baldwin, Cooley, and Mead become the theoretical foundations of symbolic interactionism and inform us of how we develop a sense of self from our childhood in relation to others in society. The self-definition is constructed and negotiated at the varied stages of development, as well as with different groups of people such as significant others and generalized others. This model of development of the self is further refined as symbolic interactionism by scholarly successors.

Goffman's understanding of human interactions. Closely related to the perspectives developed by these three scholars, yet quite distinct, it is worthwhile to introduce Erving Goffman's frameworks of self-presentation and impression management

to explicate the importance of others in the understanding of the self. Goffman (1959) focused on the "expressive component of social life," which is both strategically and unintentionally exchanged through the presence of and interaction with others, and examines such dialectic tensions existing in everyday encounters (p. 248). Individuals attempt to *give* strategic, deliberative messages to manage impressions, whereas some impressions are *given off* beyond one's control, predominantly through nonverbal cues. In this way, Goffman's framework emphasizes the importance of nonverbal aspects of human communication and the definition of the situation in which such impression management takes place.

Through the dramaturgical analyses of everyday interactions, Goffman (1959) metaphorically explained the self as a product of an individual's performance (i.e., self-presentation and impression management) on the stage (i.e., a social situation) that is constructed in relation to the audience's (i.e., the others') judgments (p. 252). This performance is characterized by a *character* performed by the individual (i.e., the "me" of the self) in relation to others that in turn shapes him or her as a *performer*; namely, the "I" aspect of the self. The outcomes of this performance can be both positive and negative or even stigmatic (Goffman, 1963). Individuals may fail in self-presentation, and their image could be overly exaggerated or underestimated. For this reason, members of society engage in the pre-established, institutionalized rituals that guide them to engage in strategic impression management to maintain their ideal representation as well as to maintain their *face* (Goffman, 1967).

These works clearly illustrate how we define and situate ourselves in the world through verbal and nonverbal interactions with other individuals in face-to-face settings. It is through this sense-making process where we create, understand, and interact with meanings in society. This is what symbolic interactionists examine through their analytical scopes, and this is how they understand human beings and our communicative conduct, which the current study follows.

Principles of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism, according to Herbert Blumer who coined the term, provides "a relatively distinctive approach to the study of human group[s] and human conduct" (Blumer, 1969, p. 1). As previously noted, Blumer's idea of symbolic interaction has its roots in the studies of Mead. Explicating the fundamental, unique characteristics of this approach to human behavior that distinguish it from those of psychology and social science, Blumer (1969) lays out three premises of symbolic interactionism:

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. … The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified though, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [or she] encounters. (p. 2)

Blumer provides examples of those *things* in society, such as physical objects, other human beings, institutions, guiding ideals, the activities of others, and social situations (p. 2). Thus, symbolic interactionism embraces almost everything we *interact with* in everyday life situations.

The first premise emphasizes the notion of *meanings*, which has been taken for

granted in the traditional sociological and psychological studies that follow the positivistic understandings of reality. In such traditions, language is considered transparent and is thought to reflect reality as it is; in Blumer's sense, however, language contains nothing in itself. As indicated in Blumer's second premise, meanings are developed, negotiated, and modified through the interactions people have with other individuals as well as with social symbols. Thus, meanings are "social products" that result from social interactions (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). This in turn invites an interpretive sociological view, which argues that people actively engage in meaning-making by interpreting the meanings of a social situation. In other words, meanings vary from person to person as well as from situation to situation. Thus, symbolic interactionism provides scholars with the lens through which they observe society and human behaviors differently from traditional, more positivistic worldviews that presuppose reality resides as it is "out there." Furthermore, seeing individuals and the social situations in which they behave, rather than society as a whole, as the unit of analysis, Blumer (1962) claims that the concept of self brings up the constructionist turn in sociology. From this perspective, society is not an entity that determines the behaviors of actors within it; rather, it is a group of individuals who possess a self and who actively engage in a process of meaning-making through interactions with symbols according to different situations.

Analyzing social situations or settings is a key factor in understanding human behaviors (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). Thomas and Thomas (1928) discuss how individuals interpret and make sense of what is happening in a particular social

situation, or the way they understand reality in their own terms. This results in *the definition of the situation*: the subjective reality of a social setting. Individuals define a situation based on subjective interpretations rather than following objective, universally shared evaluations. "If men [and women] define situations as real, they are real in their consequence," say Thomas and Thomas (1928, p. 572). This is also known as the *Thomas theorem*. Thomas and Thomas' argument is crucial in that it embraces the possibility of multiple realities based on subjective interpretations of a situation, a possibility that is often neglected by scientific behaviorists in the positivist tradition. Such multiple realities or *definitions* of the situation can influence a sense of self individuals develop in relation to others. For instance, if we interpret the message—be it verbal or nonverbal or both—sent from others as a criticism, even though it is meant to be a compliment (in the sender's terms), our misunderstanding and subsequent false evaluations can nevertheless be true in our own terms.

The construction of the self is thus highly complicated, owing to the multiplicities of the definitions of the situation we embrace. By acknowledging the multiple realities of a social situation and treating members of society as the unit of analysis, symbolic interactionism has fostered constructivist understandings of self and identity, and the next section discusses this in greater detail.

Symbolic interactionists' understanding of self and identity. Self and identity have been conceptualized differently, yet remain closely related to each other in the symbolic interactionist tradition. It is necessary to note that symbolic interactionists employ

two distinct approaches to explore these concepts: the Iowa School and the Chicago School. The former advocates a structural approach based on an understanding of the self and identity, which is rooted in a positivist paradigm. Scholars in this tradition believe that the self and identity are inherent properties that can be explored and found through empirical research. One of the most famous experimental tools structural interactionists employ is the Twenty Statements Test (TST), which comprises questions that ask participants to list responses to the question "Who am I?" Vyran, Adler, and Adler (2003) introduce representative scholars from this tradition such as Manford Kuhn, Sheldon Stryker, and Peter Burke. They focus on the development of measurements for their analyses rather than theorizing concepts (Weigertm & Gecas, 2003). In this tradition, the self is also seen as a set of role-identities, and the self-concept is structured with such role-identities that work as building blocks. In short, the self and identity are regarded as products in this perspective.

On the other hand, the Chicago School approach considers the self as a socially constructed process rather than as a product of the social structure. In other words, this perspective is more "processual" than structural (Weigertm & Gecas, 2003, p. 269). All of the scholars discussed in this section fall under this tradition. To further develop the concept of the self within the symbolic interactionist tradition, Stone (1962) details the understanding of *meaning* proposed by Mead. Although Mead assumes that meaning is established when the symbol is perceived as it is between individuals, Stone (1962) argues that "*meaning is always a variable*" (p. 88). Stone points out the imbalance within symbolic interactionism in this regard, claiming that it places too much focus on human discourse,

namely verbal communication, and emphasizes the importance of the impact of one's appearance on self and identity. Obviously, Stone's intention, as shown in Goffman's studies above, is to direct more scholarly attention to the nonverbal aspects of human communication.

Emphasizing a person's visual images through his or her appearance, specifically through clothes, Stone (1962) analyzes negotiations between *announcements* and *placements* in a process of *identifications*. Stone contrasted the nature of identity with that of the self in relation to appearance as follows:

> Almost all writers using the term [identity] imply that identity establishes *what* and *where* the person is in social terms. It is not a substitute word for "self." Instead, when one has identity, he [or she] is *situated*—that is, cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of his [or her] participation or membership in social relations. One's identity is established when others *place* him [or her] as a social object by assessing him [or her] the same words of identity that he [or she] appropriates for himself [or herself] or *announces*. It is in the coincidence of placements and announcements that identity becomes a meaning of the self, and often such placements and announcements are aroused by apparent symbols such as uniforms. (p. 93)

In this sense, identity is considered to be constructed within a social structure and a social life in which one is situated. One's position is determined based on the tension between cohesion and separation among members of society, so that "*identity is intrinsically associated with all the joining and departures of social life*. To have an identity is to join with some and depart from others, to enter and leave social relations at once" (Stone, 1962, p. 94).

Stone's (1962) argument is well applied to the discussion of the rites of passage and transition developed in the preceding chapter. Also, considering identity as a social

construct, it is quite natural to think of it as transformable and ever-changing throughout one's lifetime. For instance, Strauss's (1962) discussion about the effects of turning points on the development of identity emphasizes the fact that identity is progressive and continual rather than static within certain stages of childhood.

The discussion regarding a sense of self and identity thus far clearly indicates that they are socially constructed in relation to others, and this process continues for a lifelong period. Yet, symbolic interactionism clearly differentiates these two concepts. Following Meadian definitions of the self, Weigertm and Gecas (2003) compare the self with identity and claim that the self is "an object [the *me*] to itself [the *I*]," so that it is "two things simultaneously" (p. 267). As identity refers to typifications of the *me* aspect of the self, Weigertm and Gecas put this relationship as "selves account for identities, not identities for selves" (p. 268). Based on this duality, Weigertm and Gecas argue that the most unique aspect of the self is reflexivity, as discussed above.

In comparison with the Meadian understanding of self, Vyran et al.(2003) state that identity is more of a public aspect of the self. As opposed to self-conception, identity is a social conception that is associated with social role expectations of others. Again, this contrast is clearly shown in the notion of announcements and placements suggested by Stone (1962). However, expected roles are not the same as identity (or identities) people embrace in practice because "identities consist of *internalized* role expectations" (Vyran et al., 2003, p. 368). In short, although people may be expected to play certain roles in society, we may not necessarily accept such prescribed expectations, and may simply pretend to

perform those roles without identifying ourselves with (or internalizing) them. This is particularly true in terms of the idea of collective identity because it is all too often imposed on individuals based on their shared demographic and categorical terms.

Narrating self and identity. Sociology has experienced three "turns," according to Cerulo (1997), when the conceptual framework for self and identity was challenged and redefined. As Blumer's principles indicate, a shift from the essentialist perspective to the social constructivist understanding of self and identity was the first turn. Self and identity are regarded as social constructions developed through everyday interactions and relationships with other members of society rather than inherent properties of a person. Thus, the construction of self and identity continues and is always in flux. In the second phase, such a constructivist understanding broadens the scope for collective identities such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. The third and most recent turn in sociology occurred when scholars incorporated the diversity of the modality of human communication into their discussion. Because of the prevalence of communication technologies, human interactions are no longer constrained physically, geographically, or temporally. Such a shift calls for more attention to the technology-mediated contexts in which interactions take place. This turn is indeed crucial in that most of the foundations of symbolic interactionism have traditionally and predominantly been developed in relation to face-to-face interactions. As the current study pursues, human interactions must now be viewed within different social spheres in conjunction with conventional face-to-face settings.

Similarly, representation and symbolization gain more scholarly attention in sociology and psychology in the 1980s where scientific and positivistic perspectives were lionized in the intellectual fields. Manning (2003) acknowledges the contributions of Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* in this regard, which opened up a new way for qualitative research, including ethnography, narrative analysis, and autoethnography. This handbook encourages scholars to "celebrate diversity, voice, and standpoint rather than to dwell on technique, reliability, or reproducibility of results or findings," notes Manning (2003, p. 1036). Such a constructivist turn invites scholars onto a new path for their research inquiries. Social constructivist perspectives on identity have broadened the scope of symbolic interactionism, as well as of the self and identity. As illustrated, in the constructivist tradition, the multiplicity of reality is possible, and so is the self. Gergen (2009) describes the standpoint social constructivists take in regard to reality as follows: "If everything we consider real is socially constructed, then *nothing* is real unless people agree that it is" (p. 4). Gergen continues to note, "whenever people define reality … they are speaking from a particular standpoint" (p. 4). Coupled with the fact that reality is a social construction, examinations of the self are better understood from a constructivist point of view rather than as something essential.

This constructivist turn illustrates the importance of narratives to the construction of self and identity (e.g., Gergen & Gergen, 2001; Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001; Warhus, 2001). Given that recounting is an act where people contemplate their existence and tie their past, present, and future together, narrating the self is a highly important and reflexive

conduct. Narratives are, says Polkinghorne (1988), "the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite expressed in story form" (p. 13).

Likewise, Plummer (2008) categorizes various kinds of narratives that we develop for different reasons. Some narratives are developed for the purpose of personal life records in everyday life situations without any intention to make them public (i.e., naturalistic life stories); some are elicited and documented by ethnographers in their interviews (i.e., researched life stories); and some are written reflexively for the purpose of making one's personal experiences and worldviews public (i.e., reflexive and recursive life stories). When narratives are recounted reflexively, we are aware of our own writing or narrating. Such a reflexive process of narrative involves two roles of self: a protagonist of a story on the one hand and a storyteller on the other (Eisenberg, 2001). People become who they believe they are supposed to be by telling stories. Polkinghorne (1988) states that individuals express and narrate the self so that "the self is the concept defined as the expressive process of human existence, whose form is narrativity" (p. 151). Ochs and Capps (1996) emphasize this connection and state that "personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience. In this sense, narrative and self are inseparable" (p. 20). Hinchman and Hinchman (2001) also claim that in this paradigm researchers should see:

> personal identity as that which emerges in and through narratives … we
> continuously create and reinforce our sense of self by linking our present plans,
> actions, and states for both the future (as "project") and the past, as the already

articulated story of our lives to that point. (p. xviii)

Furthermore, Gergen and Gergen (2001) claim that narratives are "reciprocal," meaning that individuals cannot construct the self without others' narratives; rather, they situate themselves in the nets of others' narratives, and vice versa (pp. 178-179).

The analysis of narratives thus provides researchers with *narrative truth*, which is not synonymous with the positivist sense of Truth or reality. For instance, narrative is not the past itself but is "*always a story about the past*" (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 219). It is not about the factuality of the past but how a narrator recounts his or her past based on the retrospections and interpretations of the past, which lead to the constructions of the present sense of self and identity (Chase, 2008; Ochs & Capps, 1996; Plummer, 2008). Gergen and Gergen (2001) follow the same paradigm, arguing that our self and identity are not something static and achievable, nor are there any *true* states of them. Instead, there is "a potential for communicating that such a state is possessed" (p. 173). The narrative truth is very contextual and personal and is constructed *within* a story told. Thus, the narrative approach appreciates "the plurality of stories" (Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001, p. xiv), recognizing and emphasizing the subjective understanding of self through storytelling. Different life stories yield different narrative truths so that the pluralities of personal stories about the same event are accepted and appreciated in the narrative tradition (Chase, 2008; Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001).

It should be noted, however, that such construction of narrative truth never completes a sense of self, but is always constructs a sense of a fragmented self. Ochs and

Capps (1996) note that "regardless of their elaborateness, tellings of personal experience are always fragmented intimations of experience," so that personal narratives only provide "an opportunity for fragmented self-understanding" (p. 21). Narratives are often highly personal, situational, and contextual. This fragmented construction of narrative truth invites researchers to see "the versions of self, reality, and experience that the storyteller produces through the telling" (Chase, 2008, p. 65). As the Thomas theorem suggests, reality is highly personal in this regard. What people narrate is not necessarily what actually happened but what the narrator believes to have happened, as well as her or his subsequent feelings and understanding of reality.

An important aspect of narrative is its "outer pragmatics" (Plummer, 2008, p. 401). In other words, narrative analysis attempts to examine how a story is recounted and what role it plays in society as well as within the narrators themselves, rather than assessing the validity or truthfulness of the story. It is not a matter of generalization across cases but of, if at all, generalization within a case (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). In exploring such complicated and fluid concepts as self and identity, narratives provide social constructivists an effective ground for analysis. Chapter Three provides a more in-depth discussion of narrative analysis as a concept and as a research method.

Applied studies of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism founded on the social constructivist tradition provides an approach for understanding the concepts of self and identity in relation to interactions with and the presence of others in face-to-face settings. Perspectives of symbolic interactionism discussed thus far have been developed

primarily on the observations of and presuppositions rooted in face-to-face interactions. In fact, Goffman (1967) addresses early mediated interactions such as written statements and word records and their implications for the self. However, throughout his studies, his primary focus is on the physical co-presence of others in a face-to-face situation and its influences on one's self-presentation, impression management, and face work. Goffman expresses his skepticism about the ways in which face work takes place in a mediated context and states that ritual factors of face work are "present in an extreme form" in the mediated context (p. 33), eliminating the possibility of applying his conceptual framework to non-face-to-face contexts.

As previously mentioned, however, the prevalence of new communication technologies today has diversified definitions of situations in which we interact with others. Responding to the increased use of technology for everyday communication, scholars have now turned their attention to the application of symbolic interactionism as well as Goffmanian analyses to mediated contexts where a traditional sense of physical *presence* of others is challenged and redefined. To illustrate such applications and to situate the current study within, five representative studies are reviewed below.

Study I: Strangers and self-conception. As discussed, the concept of the generalized other is one of critical components in symbolic interactionism, and encounters with people from different communities invite redefinition of the self. Owing to the prevalence of communication technologies, the boundaries between communities have been blurred, which in turn creates new relationships with strangers across different cultures and

societies. Meyrowitz (1997) discusses the competing notions of *them* versus *us*, or *strangers* versus *familiars*, that have shifted according to the implementation of communication technologies. Although Meyrowitz does not provide a specific definition of the term "familiars," his reference is rather obvious: individuals we are familiar with or have enough knowledge about based on a history of face-to-face interactions. Especially, Meyrowitz invokes this term in regards to familiar members of the same community.

Meyrowitz (1997) emphasizes how the recognition of various strangers of outside communities has proliferated negotiations of inclusion and exclusion to maintain the cohesiveness among familiars. In Meyrowitz's argument, television and email communication have diluted boundaries between communities and further increased interactions with distant strangers who have the influence to shape an individual's self.

Meyrowitz's (1997) discussion is instructive in that generalized others do not necessarily have to be physically present as in the traditional sense, nor do they need to be in the community within which an individual resides. In effect, the notion of the generalized other has been further extended. Considering the context where Meyrowitz constructs this argument about strangers and familiars in relation to email communication, however, today's interactions with ICTs may take a significantly different form since the time Meyrowitz developed his argument. For instance, cellphone communication creates a social situation where people engage in interactions through communication technologies while having a physical presence of others. This cannot be explained with Meyrowitz's argument and needs further exploration based on the current modifications of the form of

human interactions.

  Study II: Popular culture and mediated generalized others. Similar to the discussion made by Meryrowitz (1997), the prevalence of the mass media has also redefined the concept of the generalized other. Altheide (2000) emphasizes the influence of popular culture, particularly in media such as television, whose existence is defined temporally rather than spatially. In other words, the proliferation of popular culture in the media has increased more distant and anonymous generalized others so that the presence of the other can be mediated. People no longer engage in what Altheide calls an *identity process*, which is quite similar to the aforementioned idea of identification discussed by Stone (1962), in a conventional, face-to-face oriented manner. Altheide (2000) puts this transformation as follows: "Identity exists in interaction. But situations have changed. Media communities and audiences are more temporally located than place bound; experiencing 'it' even when they can't tell you where or when they 'saw it'" (p. 14).

  Altheide's (2000) discussion deals predominantly with the images presented in mass media such as television and advertisement (i.e., anonymous generalized others). The important point Altheide makes here is the fact that such images are captured, stored, and then later retrieved by or distributed to the audience. Altheide suggests that the relationship of human interactions and consequent identity construction may not be delimited by the conventional socio-temporal and geographical boundaries. This implies the need as well as the potential for applying symbolic interactionism to mediated contexts. Also, this is significant in the context where even individuals can produce and distribute information to

a mass as well as to their interpersonal circles with the help of ICTs.

      Study III: Online self-presentation. The practice of self-presentation is no longer confined to conventional, face-to-face contexts. Criticizing arguments made by postmodernists who differentiate the online self from the offline self, Robinson (2007) forcefully claims that *the cyberself* (i.e., the self presented online) and *cyberself-ing* (i.e., the online self-presentation and impression management and consequent self construction) are not something different from what people used to do in the offline, face-to-face world. Robinson claims that arguments developed in early CMC studies on the cyberself (e.g., Turkle, 1995) are no longer valid and need reconsideration because they do not (or could not) consider *interactions* among people in cyberspace owing to technological constraints at the time. Current online activities are more interactive, and applications and services are designed to encourage interactions. In other words, interactions are taken for granted in the current online context.

      Suggesting the potential of the theoretical application of symbolic interactionism to the online context, Robinson (2007) concludes that "the symbolic interactionist framework is crucial to understanding the cyberself-ing process because the cyberself is formed and negotiated in the same manner as the offline self" (p. 94). In such a highly interactive online environment, people take others' reactions or feedback for granted. For instance, the creation of personal homepages and blogs presumes the presence of "the virtual 'generalized other,'" which in turn develops the sense of *cyber-me* (Robinson, 2007, p. 104). In the cyberself-ing process, the use of unique language, including lingos and

emoticons (or smileys) and specific email domains (e.g., .edu, .org, or .com) provides others with certain impressions that are both *given* and *given off*. Thus, Robinson's study shows the value of the theoretical application to the online context, suggesting how nonverbal as well as non-visual—things we simply presume about someone or imagine online—could also affect the self-ing process.

The importance of the findings of this study is twofold; first is its focus on one's presumptions about someone else's evaluations of him- or herself; it does not necessarily need to be verbalized or expressed but can simply be assumed. Another significant issue is the granted reactions or feedback from others that can be obtained through interactions. Different from Meyrowitz's (1997) and Altheide's (2000) studies discussed above, Robinson's (2007) discussion is based on direct interpersonal interactions between people in a solely mediated online context. The scholarly attention is further directed to non-traditional interactions and implications of such communication on a process of selfing.

Study IV: The digital self. Similar to Robinson (2007), Zhao (2005) utilizes the symbolic interactionist approach to examine the development of *the digital self*, the self considered to be constructed through mere linguistic interactions with people solely online. Zhao (2005) claims that it is necessary to "differentiate between the *presentation* of self and the *conception* of the self" (p. 389). According to Zhao, the former is influenced by "whether we believe others can directly see us or not," whereas the latter is about "whether we are able to directly see others and how they respond to us" (p. 389). Apparently, both

aspects become unclear in the online context. Within such disembodied interactions, one cannot assume the co-presence of others that provides visual and immediate nonverbal feedback. However, Zhao argues that people can reflect on themselves based upon the appraisals given through the *telecopresence* of others. In other words, as the suffix *tele-* indicates, one's co-presence can be mediated through linguistic information. This allows people to engage in the construction of the digital self because "our sense of self is based primarily on what we believe others think of us, rather than on what others actually think of us" (Zhao, 2005, p. 401).

Zhao's (2005) discussion complements Robinson's (2007) in that they both focus on individuals' *subjective* interpretations about the others' evaluations. This further informs the implications of the application of a symbolic interactionist approach to cellphone communication. Cellphone communication is unique in that we continuously stay in two different social situations with two on-going interactions while engaging in both face-to-face and cellphone or text-message interactions simultaneously. Following Zhao's claim about the differences between presentation and conception of the self in interactions, it is necessary to further explore this uniqueness and how we assume others think of us.

Study V: Cellphone communication and symbolic interactionism. While an increasing number of studies has been conducted to explore self and identity online from a symbolic interactionist perspective, there are few that attempt to discuss cellphone communication. Oksman and Turtiainen's (2004) study is worthwhile in this regard. Their study examines how Finnish teenagers make sense of their cellphone communication,

proposing the notion of *F-I-F* (face-to-interface-to-face) communication. Specifically, their argument points out the proliferation of interface-based interactions. An interface can be the screen of a personal computer (e.g., Skype) or a cellphone, and the critical implication of the idea of F-I-F communication is properly acknowledging *someone* behind another screen, which often becomes highly interpersonal.

Oksman and Turtiainen's (2004) discussion can be regarded as a criticism against the notion of virtual interactions of the mediated context. Such a notion of virtualness associated with the online or mediated interactions ignores the fact that interactions occur between or among people, even though the issue of online anonymity may pose several social concerns. F-I-F communication emphasizes the fact that online or cellphone communication maintains the essence of human interactions carried in a face-to-face context. As to cellphones, communication is mediated with the help of technology, while maintaining both telepresence of and the co-presence of others in two spheres. Conceptually speaking, F-I-F interactions can be an extension of the conventional face-to-face communication, if not the same in its nature or quality.

As discussed, cellphone communication invites the popularization of textual communication among youth, namely, texting. Similar to the discussion presented by Altheide (2000), within such disembodied, merely textual communication, an "imagined other" is constructed whose images are all too often idealized and exaggerated (Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004, p. 330). This might be also true for interactions with someone already known from previous face-to-face interactions. Borrowing the concept of the digital self

developed by Zhao (2005), users may also construct their digital self particularly when they communicate with others through textual interactions. Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) suggest a theoretical reconfiguration of symbolic interactionism, claiming that text-based communication "serves to reshape our opportunities for social communication and the presentation of self" (p. 336). The examination of Finnish teens' cellphone communication also implies "the interrelatedness of different media" (Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004, p. 321). Contrasting different media usage of teens with that of older generations, Oksman and Turtiainen argue that "teenagers' use of the new communication channels is intersecting and selective, and the wealth of possible viewpoints inspires them to multimedial communication" (p. 322). The current study will benefit from this multimedial aspect of young people's communication style.

Each medium still has its own place for specific interactions, yet the notion of interrelatedness among different media has become more critical today once many online interactions have been shifted to and transformed for a "mobile" format, sparked by additional applications for and internet capability of cellphones. Furthermore, these media are now used for social, relational, professional, and even educational purposes. In such a context, the implication of cellphone communication demands further exploration based on the symbolic interactionist understandings of the self and identity.

The Focuses of the Study at Hand

These representative applied studies discussed here demonstrate a need for the theoretical reconsideration of symbolic interactionism in today's context. The study at hand

is unique in that the phenomena examined are a combination of both face-to-face and textual as well as mediated interactions. A focus is placed on the specific life period where young people experience one of the critical turning points, or the rites of passage, of their life. College transition involves myriad new encounters with people from different communities, which create quite fascinating dynamics for their self and identity. Furthermore, as pointed out, communication technologies such as cellphones and the internet have been interwoven into college students' transition due to their versatility for social and professional interactions. With these needs in mind, the current study poses the following three research questions:

> **Research Question (RQ)1:** *How does first-year students' cellphone communication affect their sense of self and identity in transition into college?*

> **RQ2:** *What theoretical implications does the analysis of college students' cellphone communication in transition provide for the symbolic interactionist understandings of self and identity that have been traditionally developed upon conventional face-to-face interactions?*

> **RQ3:** *How do cellphones impact family and friend relationships of first-year students during their college transition?*

To explore these research questions, the next section details the ethnographic methods employed for the current study, and then chronologically explains the data collection procedures.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

As Tinto's (1996) theory, along with the other relevant studies discussed, indicate, transitions occur continuously rather than sporadically, and so does construction of self and identity. With this view in mind, the purpose of this study is not to seek something generalizeable across different situations but to identify locally and contextually specific meanings cellphone communication has on college transition. A longitudinal ethnographic study provided the foundation for an exploration into the implications of cellphone communication in relation to new participants' students' sense of self and identity. The study took place over the course of the first academic year (i.e., two consecutive semesters) of participants. Admittedly, this may seem relatively short in terms of the nature of the so-called "longitudinal" study. However, following Tinto's (1996) discussion about the importance of the first half year of college enrollment on retention and successful transition, it is justifiable in consideration of the valuable experience of the first year of participants' college transition. Also, in relation to the constraints and resources available for this study, while it might not be ideal, this is a realistic time frame for the study at hand. The current study employs an ethnographic approach to examine and interpret the people and phenomenon in question. Drawing upon Creswell (2003), the following chapter (1) explicates research paradigms, (2) outlines qualitative and quantitative approaches available for ethnography, (3) explains the ethnographic approach the current study employs, and then (4) presents a detailed outline of data collection procedures and analysis. Before the

discussion, justifications for the ways current study enacts voice and uniquely applies ethnography are provided.

Research Paradigms

Researchers situate themselves in different paradigms for their inquiry. Clarifying their own standpoint within any academic pursuit is quite important in that it determines what defines their worldviews and how they understand what is considered to be true and real. In terms of the concept of *reality*, for instance, the positivist paradigm follows the "naïve realism" that assumes that reality is *out there waiting to be found*. Such a position further takes generalization and reproduction of research results for granted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 293). On the other hand, naturalism or constructivism—under which the current study falls—values "a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 32). In such a tradition, different assessment strategies are employed to ensure the value of findings.

First, trustworthiness or rigor of a research project is built into the study through four criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, which are different from the positivist's notions of internal and external validity, objectivity, and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, as opposed to true value or validity, is built into the study through triangulation; namely, according to Rock (2001), "checking everything, getting multiple documentation, getting multiple *kinds* of documentation, so that evidence does not rely on a single voice so that data become embedded in their

contexts, so that data can be compared" (p. 34). Triangulation is "not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7) that can be achieved through the combination of theories, methods, and sources (Tonso, 2006).

In addition to triangulation, Lincoln and Guba (1985) detail a number of sources through which credibility is established. These sources include, but are not limited to, prolonged engagement with the culture and people under the study to minimize the misunderstandings and any possible disturbances; persistent observation to deepen and refine researchers' understandings of people and the culture studied; peer debriefing processes that provide researchers with opportunities for dealing with those who are disinterested in or have opposing views toward the subject matter; member checks in which members from the culture studied assess interpretations; and research vignettes where researchers themselves self-reflectively record the events, findings from fieldwork, and emotions or feelings they come across at the site that can be reviewed later. Fetterman (1998) claims that the success of an ethnographic report indeed depends on if it is sound to both the natives being studied and the colleagues in the field.

Given that a positivist paradigm assumes a value-free, objective inquiry where researchers are able to exclude biases and to control any outside influences, positivists aim to achieve objective reality about the people and phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2003). In contrast, Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that the use of the term *objectivity* is inappropriate in the naturalist paradigm since it is deeply rooted in such positivist axioms as naïve realism. Rejecting such a quantitative sense of objectivity, they emphasize the

importance of the dependability of the study to satisfy and persuade "the *consumer* of inquirer reports" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 328). Different from the ideas of objectivity and reliability, naturalists attempt to make their research findings as dependable as possible by properly transforming the raw data into text and by establishing the aforementioned credibility of the study through triangulation. As naturalistic inquiry does not seek generalization, nor is it an ultimate goal, researchers following this paradigm attempt to establish transferability of the findings that are thick and rich enough to be applicable to other sites.

Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

Though not necessarily mutually exclusive, research is oriented toward either a quantitative or qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) discuss five major differences of qualitative research from quantitative inquiry based on contrasting research styles, epistemological assumptions, and different forms of representation. These are: 1) uses of positivism and postpositivism; 2) acceptance of postmodern sensitivities; 3) capturing the individual's point of view; 4) examining the constraints of everyday life; and 5) securing rich descriptions (pp. 14-17).

As discussed, subjectivity and fluidity involved in qualitative research—including ethnography—often face criticism from positivists whose assessments of the accuracy of analyses have historically been refined to generalize findings and enhance the possibilities of prediction. Qualitative scholars also acknowledge the fact that, similar to the risks associated with naïve realism, some qualitative approaches may suffer from "naïve

humanism" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 17). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) point out that not all qualitative research necessarily achieves holism or a holistic worldview since "studies using qualitative methods often focus only on a partial set of relationships in a scene. Whether this is specificity or reductionism becomes a matter of debate" (p. 18). However, qualitative research has its own virtues, engaging scholars and allowing them to produce richer and more complex descriptions of the people and phenomenon they try to understand. Qualitative researchers may be seen as *bricoleurs*, or those who produce "a *bricolage*—that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). Such representations may not be generalized but certainly provide more in-depth and context-specific descriptions of people.

As opposed to the reductionism appreciated in quantitative research, a holistic approach appeals to most qualitative scholars, including ethnographers. For this purpose, they seek local meanings and "polyvocal texts, or stories told in the voices of many different people or constituencies" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 49) to make sense of what is happening in the scene.

Ethnographic Approaches

Ethnography is a distinctive approach to studying people through observation, interaction, and engagement. As its name suggests, ethnographic inquiry pursues writing (-*graphy*) about people (*ethnos*). Spradley (1980) emphasizes that ethnography is not performed *to study* people but *to learn* from them with an attitude of *complete ignorance*. Based on the understandings of *cultural behaviors* (i.e., what people do) and *cultural*

knowledge (i.e., what people know) about *the cultural artifacts* (i.e., the things people make and use), ethnography, says Spradley, "implies a theory of culture" (p. 5). To achieve their goals, ethnographers keep thick descriptions of cultural members and their cultural practices through prolonged engagement and immersion into the culture under study (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Significantly, ethnography is not something used exclusively in one disciplinary tradition such as anthropology or sociology, but it has been utilized in various traditions so that "contemporary ethnographic research is often characterized by fragmentation and diversity" (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001, p. 2).

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) detail seven characteristics of ethnography and define its principles as "***theories of cultures—or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave—that are situated in local time and space***" (p. 8). These seven criteria are helpful for understanding the nature of ethnography. One of them, however, requires reconsideration because of the prevalence of ICTs. Here, six criteria that are applicable in today's context are briefly reviewed, and one critical aspect—the close relationship of ethnographic studies with face-to-face contexts—is discussed in detail.

As emphasized in LeCompte and Schensul's (1999) definition, first of all, ethnography cannot be separated from the context of *culture*. The idea of culture should not be delimited by geographical boundaries or any demographics. But ethnography is, in essence, a way to discover locally specific meanings of the culture studied through cultural members' eyes. This leads to the second characteristic: ethnography needs to be informed

by the concept of culture. Through an ethnographic lens, ethnographers approach cultural knowledge and cultural behaviors that people preserve in their everyday life, which are not otherwise available to researchers. Third, ethnography is not an attempt to produce one single, master story about the culture from a researcher's point of view but should present respectful representations of cultural members' multiple voices about and diverse perspectives toward the world. Fourth, ethnographic research is conducted inductively, yet findings are analyzed and refined recursively until researchers confirm a stable pattern. Fifth, ethnography is not synonymous with qualitative inquiry, as some ethnographers do employ surveys to collect numerical data and analyze statistical as well as textual materials quantitatively according to their research goal (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Ethnography is indeed an encompassing methodology. Chambers (2003) provides distinctions between ethnography and qualitative research, and contends that "ethnography is principally defined by its subject matter, which is *ethnos*, or culture, and not by its methodology, which is often but not invariably qualitative" (p. 390). Sixth, ethnography is a naturalistic inquiry; ethnographers observe and analyze events occurring in natural settings, not in laboratories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is why the concepts of space and local time, as noted in LeCompte and Schensul's (1999) definition, are considered crucial in ethnographic understandings.

This leads to the final and critical characteristic of ethnography; it has historically been assumed to be conducted in both natural and face-to-face situations. Considering the deeply-rooted exercise of participant observation widely employed in ethnographic studies

(Spradley, 1980), this is not surprising. In today's context, however, human conduct is no longer limited to a single, conventional face-to-face context but is also extended to computer-mediated situations where researchers may not physically *participate* and *observe* in a traditional sense. The act of documentation of human activities and narratives has changed its modality owing to the use of technology, especially those constantly created online.

Technologies can no longer be separated from our everyday conduct. In attempt to study technology in everyday life, Kien (2008) proposes the term of *technography* where "users network and interface with technology directly to produce a common text, much like having a group of individuals each equipped with chalk and eraser gathered at a blackboard to produce a text" (p. 1102). Boundaries are deconstructed, and there has been increasing attempts to utilize ethnography to explore culture and people outside of the face-to-face context.

Similarly, in a study of what she calls *virtual ethnography*, Hine (2000) suggests redefining the sense of place and time through ethnographic study on the internet and online interactions. Hine presents two changes that the internet has brought to the realm of ethnography: 1) ethnographers now come to see the internet, or so-called *cyberspace*, as a kind of cultural site that can be examined through an ethnographic scope, and; 2) the internet can be considered a cultural artifact, namely "a product of culture" (p. 9) that can be subject to ethnographic research. Hine contends that contemporary ethnographic studies are no longer tied to the notion of physical boundaries due to the emergence of cyberspace.

Drawing on Castells' (1990) concept regarding a new sense of space—*the space of flows* in contrast with a traditional sense of *the space of place*—Hine (2000) claims that the internet is comprised of the space of flows that is "organized around *connection* [emphasis added] rather than location" (p. 61). A sense of time has been challenged as well. The internet is governed by *timeless time*, says Hine, due to a combination of both asynchronous and synchronous, or almost real-time, interactions. Thus, interactions and social experiences online occur without following the conventional chronological order. As Hine explains, "Timeless time does not replace chronological time but coexists with it, providing an alternative way of structuring social relations" (p. 85).

Based on these newly developed concepts, Hine (2000) conducted a virtual ethnography of the case of Louise Woodward. In 1997 in Massachusetts, an 18-year-old female au pair was convicted of killing an eight-month old child she had been taking care of. Hine observed how public discourses developed and changed over time in cyberspace and maintained her *fieldnotes* of websites where she was conducting *online participant observation*. She participated in newsgroup discussions and contacted the webmasters of the official sites for the case who would work as key informants (Spradley, 1980). Through her virtual ethnography, Hine (2000) concludes that, in contrast to the assumption that people behave and communicate in disorderly ways online:

> The Internet (and the offline world) are simultaneously performative spaces and performed spaces. They are performative, in that people try to behave appropriately within them. They are also performed spaces, in that they are shaped and sustained by the social practices through which people interpret and use them. (p. 116)

Hine's study is crucial in that it provides a possible application of ethnography to human

interactions that are not tied to conventional physical or geographical boundaries. In particular, the concepts of the space of flows and timeless time can also be applied to examine current cellphone communication through ethnography. Seeing the flows of interactions or connections as a space enables researchers to define a research site in a different sense from the traditional one.

Although ethnography provides researchers with the means to closely examine how people and culture behave in everyday contexts, it does not necessarily make a researcher's task easy. It is too often challenging for the researcher to find an ideal research site and cooperative key informants for study. And, owing to the intensive and prolonged engagement with the cultural members under the study, ethnographers often face myriad ethical conflicts throughout the course of inquiry. "Every ethnographer," says Spradley (1980), "whether students or professional, must consider a number of ethical issues in doing fieldwork" (p. 20). Likewise, Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) forcefully caution against the doomed obtrusive characteristics of ethnographic research:

> The interactive, membership-oriented researchers *are*, by definition, intrusive – not in the negative sense of the word, to be sure, but they are still deeply involved in the lives and activities of the communities they study, a stance fraught with all sorts of possibilities for "harm." (p. 137)

This is a fate ethnographers must live with and handle in order to achieve their ethnographic goals. Ethnographers not only need to accept this fact but appreciate such possibilities because this is what differentiates their research from most aforementioned positivist-oriented research. As long as we are dealing with human beings for study, we should not avoid facing any humanistic issues.

Such a participant-led approach is also a pivotal element of an ethnographic inquiry. The principles of ethnography inform the significance of learning from participants under study through close engagement with them in their everyday life situations, and this is well applied to various inquires which may, at first glance, not be considered "ethnography." For instance, Caronia and Caron (2004) conducted their research on Canadian young people's relationship with cellphones by utilizing *an ethnographic approach* to discourse analysis. Caronia and Caron details how their study benefits from the ethnographic approach, which may not necessarily take the traditional paths of ethnography:

> [W]e adopted an ethnographic approach to discourse analysis. What makes the specificity of an ethnographic approach to discourse analysis are not the methods used (interviews, naturally occurring conversations, situated speech events, etc.) but the analytical perspective on the collected talk. The very aim of this approach is to figure out and work with *emic categories*: that is the ones people use to account for their practises and to reconstruct the topics of the discourse at hand. (p. 32)

Their emphasis on the categories being emic is critical in that it attempts to see the phenomenon through the eyes of people under study, rather than imposing worldviews held by the researcher.

Current Study: Longitudinal Ethnographically-oriented Study of Cellphone Communication

Owing to the contextuality of the research at hand as discussed in Chapter One, the current study attempts to capture a picture of cellphone communication during the college transition year and to examine its implications on new students' sense of self and identity.

Considering the rapidly changing nature of this communication phenomenon, generalization in a quantitative, positivist sense is not what the current study attempts to achieve. The meanings of technology in society are not fixed or rigid either, but they are more in-flux. Fulk and Gould's (2009) remark is worth presenting in this regard:

> Technology is not independent of context (users, situation, economics, etc.) nor is it "neutral" (Winner, 1986) in relation to those who design, implement, and use it. Furthermore, most technological artifacts continuously evolve so that technologies vary across time as well as contexts. (p. 764)

Since the study at hand deals with a relatively new communication technology of the time, it is important to situate it in a realm of inquiry. "Chasing the next innovation is futile," says Baym (2009). "Unless it is grounded in theory and history much wider than the present moment, *it will be outdated by its publication date* [emphasis added]" (p. 720). Also cellphone communication is somewhat more complicated to explore than are internet interactions in that it occurs sporadically and spontaneously without being delimited by boundaries of private and public or of on- and off-line. As noted, however, the concept of the space of flows is instructive in this regard.

In order to capture such a flow of cellphone communication and its implications, an ethnographic *approach*, rather than traditional rigorous ethnography, to cellphone communication has several advantages. A good example of this is the aforementioned Caronia and Caron's (2004) ethnographic framework in their study of Canadian young people's relationship with cellphones. Through this applied, ethnographic approach, their study yields significant findings regarding interpretations of cellphone culture in relation to negotiating a sense of self and identity. Although their primary data collection strategy is

limited to what they call *peer conversation focus groups*, Caronia and Caron's findings

show how a relationship with the device might affects a sense of self and identity:

> Being or becoming competent with respect to a CT [communication technology] is not only a matter of acquiring and using technological knowledge, it also involves acquiring and possessing social knowledge concerning when, where, for what purposes, to whom and how to use the technology. In other words, it is a matter of developing a specific form of *communicative competence*, the main consequences of which seem to affect the identity-making process. (p. 55)

Caronia and Caron also emphasize how their participants theorize about "the social world,

social identities, norms and rules of social action" (p. 55) through discursive conversations

with their peers in focus groups. This in turn co-produces *culture* by participants, and does

so in their own terms. Thus, this study reinforces Spradley's (1980) idea that ethnography is

not to study people but to learn from them.

Elsewhere, Caronia (2005) conducts her ethnography of Canadian teenagers' use

of cellphones as a means for sense making. Through the analysis of transcribed phone calls

and participant observation at their home and school, Caronia claims that the use of

cellphones produces new meanings for *no-where-place* and *no-when-times* in everyday life

situations. These are the times and places with no significant meanings (e.g., waiting for

someone). Thanks to cellphones, however, says Caronia, "these places and times start to

have a sense" (p. 97). Caronia discusses how teens use their cellphones to create their own

private space within the household where the presence of family members implicitly

increased a sense of public on the teen's own terms. On the contrary, most calls are made in

public contexts, namely, at school, blending private space into public. Thus, both use and

possession of cellphones have come to be "culturally defined and socially shared practices

through which teenagers construct their selves and their community" (Caronia, 2005, p. 102).

These studies conducted in a Canadian context suggest the potential of the application of ethnographic research to examine the meanings of cellphone communication and the interplay between its culture and young people's everyday lives. More important, these studies demonstrate that ethnographic inquiry enables researchers to obtain *users'* definitions of cellphone communication rather than imposing scholarly understandings to them.

Site and Participant Selection for the Current Study

The current study examines reports of cellphone communication in conjunction with the college transition that takes place at a university located in a metropolitan area in the United States. In addition to this particular geographical site, and in Spradley's (1980) terms, the current study follows the *actors-linked* and *activities-linked* perspectives (pp. 40-44). First, it is actors-linked since the study is conducted on the same individuals longitudinally. Second, it is activities-linked to observe how participants of the study engage in *cellphone communication* as a whole, and the term *cellphone communication* encompasses all the activities associated with the device. There are important reasons why this study intends to include *all* the cellphone activities. On the one hand, for instance, the physical presence of a phone, or a lack thereof, has significant meanings in certain social situations (e.g., in a romantic or intimate relationship). Unanticipated events such as buying a new handset or losing a phone by accident may be counted as crucial events associated

with one's *cellphone communication*. Thus, cellphone communication can encompass those phone activities even when one's phone is not in practical use. On the other hand, examples of other phone *activities* in a more literal and practical sense are making and receiving a phone call, exchanging text-messages, taking pictures, browsing the internet, listening to the music, and so forth. This is why this study sees cellphone communication in an encompassing manner, and such an approach directs the attention to interactions rather than certain locations that can be seen as a *site* for the study

Cellphone communication could occur at anytime and anywhere in participants' everyday life. Spradley (1980) provides six criteria for the research site selection: 1) simplicity, 2) accessibility, 3) unobtrusiveness, 4) permissibleness, 5) frequently recurring activities, and 6) participation. Considering the fact that the study takes more activities- and actors-linked perspectives, as well as that the researcher attends the same university, some criteria are met with little difficulty. With regard to accessibility and participation, some social situations where participants actually engage in cellphone communication may not be readily available to the researcher. A combination of different data collection tools is employed to complement this lack of access to participants' private lives. Taking a longitudinal approach also minimizes the disadvantages of limited full participation in every aspect of participants' lives. Still, it is important to note here that this study may not be able to take the traditional ethnographic approach predominantly conducted through participant observation. This will be addressed in detail at the end of this chapter, explicating how the current study borrows the principles of ethnography for the purpose of

its inquiry.

Participants. Participants in the current ethnographic study are first-year college students who attend a university located in a large metropolitan area for the first time in the Fall semester of 2009. The age range of participants is between 18 and 25, which provided the study with a wide range of first-year participants with different backgrounds. No minors are included. Among them, students who attend college right after their high school or with a short time lag (one- or two-year) are referred to as *traditional students*. Those who are older within the age range (close to 25-years-old) are referred to as *nontraditional students*. Transfer students who attend the same school for the first time are also eligible for the study as long as they meet the other criteria.

Students' eligibility for this study is not affected by their ethnic or cultural background, nationality, race, gender, student status (i.e., part- or full-time), religious beliefs, income level, residential status (i.e., whether living in an on-campus residential hall or commuting to campus), or organizational affiliations. Though a principal investigator (PI) of the current study (i.e., the author himself) acknowledges the fact that some of these factors may have significant implications on cellphone use—income level, for instance, may affect the choice of a device and service—they were not employed as a means for exclusion for the sake of assuring the number of participants for the study. For the same reason, participants' phone carrier, the type of phone they own, or the length of their previous phone ownership also did not affect the decision for inclusion, either.

Recruitment. Recruitment was conducted at the beginning of the Fall semester of

2009 through four different paths: 1) direct, face-to-face recruitment by the PI at the new student orientation days on August 31 and September 1, 2009; 2) snowball sampling by asking potential participants to forward the recruitment information to their friends; 3) recruitment flyers posted in campus dormitories; and 4) another direct face-to-face recruitment by the PI in the classroom during the first two weeks of the semester.

During recruitment, those who showed interest in the study were asked to complete a short questionnaire regarding their demographics and past cellphone experiences (see Appendix A). All the activities required throughout the study, incentives they would receive for each activity, and the prizes they could win with the completion of the entire study were clearly explained to prospective participants in person. A very popular item among college students, the iTouch (Apple Inc., worth approx. $300), was selected as the first prize as it would encourage active participation as well as the completion of the entire study. The second and third prizes were gift cards for the university bookstore (worth $25 and $50, respectively).

Recruitment initially yielded 112 prospective participants who showed interest either by signing up for the study at the orientation or by making contact with the PI directly. Of these 112 students, 41 (13 males and 28 females) met the PI in person, completed the consent process, and agreed to participate in the study. The rest either informed the PI of their withdrawal from the study due to conflicts with school schedules or simply did not respond to follow-up emails. The PI continued to send follow-ups until the second week of the semester when the first data collection was planned to take place.

Considering the astonishing number of sign-up requests new students receive at orientation, in addition to subsequent emails they receive at the beginning of college life, it is quite understandable that follow-ups for this study did not catch the attention of more than a half of the 112 students.

Twenty out of 41 participants were those who had signed up for the study at orientation, and the others were recruited after the semester started through either of the aforementioned recruitment paths. The PI had anticipated a high rate of dropout because of the nature of students' voluntary participation in a longitudinal study. Thus, it was the PI's initial objective to have approximately 40 participants at the beginning of the study, with the hope to ensure 24 students at the end of the entire study.

Completion and withdrawals. Of these 41 participants, 23 students (ten males and 13 females) completed the entire study, resulting in a retention rate of approximately 50%. Of these 18 participants who had withdrawn from the study, six students were very early withdrawals because they did not complete anything after the consent form. One female participant found out conflicts with her academic schedule and notified the PI of her withdrawal. Another female participant volunteered, but did not complete anything due to the difficulties of handling everything at the beginning of the semester. She later made contact with the PI near the end of the first semester, expressing her apologies for her unexplained withdrawal. One male participant volunteered with his friend who also participated and completed the study. He did not respond to follow-ups after completing the consent form. Three other female students volunteered for the study together but did not

respond to emails at all after completing the consent form.

The remaining 12 withdrawals varied from the earlier stages to close toward the end of the study. Eleven participants withdrew from the study during the first stage of the study; that is, during the Fall semester of 2009. Eight withdrawals of these 11 either did not return the second journal entry or could not adjust their schedule for the first focus group. Two participants could not participate in the second focus group conducted later in the Fall semester. One participant did not return journals after she participated in the second focus group, yet completed almost everything at the first stage of the study. One female participant completed everything during the first stage of the study, but could not participate in the third focus group conducted in the Winter semester 2010 even after two attempts to reschedule.

The PI made every effort to make adjustments for each student and retain the higher number of participants until the end of the study. Considering the duration of the entire study as well as the emphasis on voluntary participation, the dropout rate is considered reasonable, resulting in enough data for the analysis. An overview of the data collection process, including students' participation and withdrawals, is detailed in the next section.

Data Collection: Narratives

In an attempt to capture a comprehensive picture of participants' cellphone communication in college transition along with their first-year experiences, the current study was conducted over the course of the first academic year following enrollment. Data

collection took place in two consecutive semesters, namely, in the Fall of 2009 and the Winter of 2010. The PI collected narratives of participants regarding their cellphone communication as well as other forms of interactions with ICTs in relation to college transition and first-year experiences.

As illustrated in Chapter Two, narratives not only reveal an individual's life story but also inform how she or he understands positionality, or a sense of self and identity through sense-making (Eisenberg, 2001). The current study utilizes multiple methods to collect narratives from participants regarding their college transition and cellphone communication in a longitudinal manner. The following first discusses narrative analysis as an ethnographic tool to obtain an overarching theme across narratives developed by participants, and then details three collection tools employed for the study at hand: (1) electronic journaling and ethnographic interviews, including (2) focus groups and (3) individual interviews.

Narrative analysis is both a concept and a research method. As a concept, narrative analysis explores how stories are told, in what contexts they are developed, and for what reasons these stories are narrated. The term *narrative* is often used interchangeably with *story* but embraces different cultural artifacts ranging from oral accounts, written and textual documents, autobiographies, personal diaries, and even digitalized visual and auditory documentation (Plummer, 2008). Chase (2008) details six categorical terms of narratives or stories, both spoken and written, upon which researchers rely: life history, life story, personal narrative, oral history, testimonio, and performative narrative (p. 59). In

addition, Chase claims that the examination of narratives is regarded as *narrative inquiry* that embraces "interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods" (p. 58) that help researchers explore how stories are developed in a certain social, cultural, and historical context. Following the *interpretive turn* in social science, narrative analysis as a concept recognizes diverse interpretations we hold about the world, seeing self and identity as social constructions rather than being inherent from birth. A narrative understanding of human beings "emphasizes the active, self-shaping quality of human thought, the power of stories to create and refashion personal identity. Narrative seems to offer a way out of the reification that 'mechanistic' models of human behavior may unwittingly impose" (Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001, p. xiv).

Narrative inquiry is the study of *meaning*, and meanings are constructed through language (Polkinghorne, 1988). Different from the positivist assumption that considers language as a transparent medium and being independent of human existence that reflects the reality as it is, narrating inquiry is rather a "display" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 22) through which experiences and human reality are constructed. In such a narrative paradigm, claims Denzin (1997), a researcher views "culture as a performance and privileges the linguistic and textual basis of knowledge about society. That is, things are known through textual, narrative representations and performances" (p. 158). This is why interpretations of meanings play a key role in narrative inquiry. Such a narrative turn has occurred in other disciplines as well. Warhus (2001) discusses how the psychoanalytic emphasis on the human mind has shifted to language and discourse in the therapeutic tradition. In a

constructivist view, language is, says Warhus, "relational and pragmatic, generated not within but between persons in their relationships" (pp. 105-106). Thus, narrative analysis as a concept contributes to different paths for understanding human beings and how meanings are co-constructed in interactions.

As a method, narrative analysis is conducted in order to interpret subjective meanings of stories developed by persons under study. Polkinghorne (1988) argues that it is a search for *narrative meaning* that

> functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units. It provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful. (p. 11)

Narrative analysis, says Riessman (1993), differentiates itself from social scientific textual analysis in that it takes subjectivity into account and calls for subjective interpretations of texts. As emphasized, the goal of narrative analysis is not the search for the absolute Truth but to find narrative truth about what is narrated as well as how and why it is told in the way it is told.

Historically, narrative analysis has been utilized in different fields for different purposes. Chase (2008) provides a helpful overview of this application. In the early 20th century, sociologists—mainly those from the Chicago School tradition—collected life histories of immigrants and criminals, whereas anthropologists collected life histories to understand people of different cultures, mostly native Americans. Since anthropologists see culture as a unit of analysis, they are more likely to use narratives from particular members

or key informants of the culture to "discover regularities in how people tell stories or give speeches" (Bernard, 2006, p. 475) as well as to "*typify* the behaviors and beliefs" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 86) of a certain cultural group.

Narrative analysis is likely to be employed when the thoughts or voices of people are not obtainable or otherwise heard by the public. A feminist approach to narrative, for instance, attempts to focus on silenced voices and challenges the traditional narrative inquiries where voices are predominantly male. It is necessary to understand that narratives need to be analyzed because they are not independent from culture, social structures, and social contexts in which they are produced. Atkinson and Delamont (2008) contend that "we should not collect and document personal narratives because we believe them to have a privileged or special quality" (p. 289). Narrative analysis needs to untangle narratives of different people that construct multiple realities. Therefore, it is necessary to "*analyze* narratives and life materials so as to treat them as instances of social action, that is, as speech acts or events with common properties, recurrent structures, cultural conventions, and recognizable genres" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2008, p. 290).

Electronic journaling. Given that narrative analysis is an effective means to capture voices of people, the current study utilizes multiple tools to collect college students' narratives. As discussed in Chapter Two, young people, including college students, constitute a particular social cohort that tends to be misunderstood by other social groups. In short, their voices are often unheard or mistreated. To obtain their narratives, this study employs three data collection tools: electronic journaling, focus groups, and individual

interviewing.

Periodic journaling is useful for obtaining reflexive responses of the writer, as well as to build a relationship between the writer (i.e., participants) and a reader (i.e., a researcher) of journals. As a means for outside classroom interactions between student and instructor, for instance, Corley (2000) claims that electronic journaling can be a potential instructional tool that allows students to engage in reflexive thinking about the subject matter they discuss in class. Corley suggests that students are more likely to engage effectively in journal writing when topics or questions are provided by an instructor. Feedback provided individually to students also helped Corley foster a student-instructor relationship.

Journals or diaries have been utilized in cellphone communication research also, especially those employing ethnographic or qualitative approaches in order to get thick descriptions of young people's cellphone behaviors (e.g., Caronia, 2005; Caronia & Caron, 2004). Also, a number of studies exploring the issues related to youth ask participants to engage in *writing*, even though data collection is likely to not take place in an electric form as it does in the current study. For instance, in their pursuit of understanding college students' personal histories of and their perceptions about media use—the internet in particular—McMillan and Morrison (2006) collected autobiographic essays from 72 American college students (both undergrads and graduates who were born between 1975 and 1980) and found "the duality of feelings that interactive media technologies evoke for young adults" (p. 76). Personal narratives provided by participants suggest that the internet

has become an integral part of everyday life, but in a different manner than the way the public discourse assumes it to be. Their stories reveal that there are differences even among family members, or among siblings who are only a couple of years apart, and their perceptions vary generationally and in a highly ramified manner.

O'Connor (2006) also utilized autobiographic essay writing to understand how Ireland youth (aged from 14 to 17) identify themselves and make sense of their gender identity in the modern era. Their writing was part of a larger project called "Transition Year in Second Level in Ireland," intended to be produced for future generations. O'Connor finds this method effective for grasping specific cultural influences that affect a sense of self and identity.

Addressing juvenile delinquency in the United Kingdom through a five-year long longitudinal study, Thomson et al. (2002) discuss how their youth participants (aged 16 to19), who were excluded from the mainstream educational system, reflect upon their lives and discover several critical moments of *their own* that draw different pictures of diverse transitions. Their narratives are collected in a form of autobiography, and Thomson et al. state that

> the descriptive concept of the critical moment provides us with a way of seeing how social and economic environments frame individual narratives and the personal and cultural resources on which young people are able to draw. Its use demonstrates the centrality of identity and subjectivity to an understanding of transitions, without reducing the analysis to individual psychology. (p. 351)

These studies show the efficiency and advantages of journaling or other forms of reflexive writing (e.g., collecting narratives) to obtain and understand voices of their participants. For

the current study, following Coley's (2000) suggestion, each journal entry contained various questions to elicit participants' responses to the issue at hand (see Appendix B). Though semi-structured, all of the questions were open-ended and participants always had a space for sharing any thoughts relevant to the study. The process of electronic journaling was conducted entirely via email in a digital form. The PI sent out a "Journal" Word document with questions to participants; responses were written in a document, and returned to the PI as an attachment of an email by the due date. Participants were asked to keep their journals every other week during their first semester at college, eight journals in total.

Compared with interviewing, electronic journaling is an act of writing that involves more self-reflective writing. It also allows participants to maintain control over the degree of disclosure of personal information and, because of the private nature of journal exchange, participants feel less intimidated to share something personal that they may not disclose in interviews. In fact, several participants shared with the PI very personal stories regarding their close friendships and/or romantic partner, which were not disclosed in focus groups, whether or not they meant to keep the stories secret. Such information helped the PI grasp a clearer picture of participants as individuals, even though these stories were not necessarily significant for the focus of the current study. In addition, during the data collection stage, peripheral issues, such as their punctuality of submission and writing styles, provided additional information, allowing the PI to also better understand the participants. The entire electronic journal project yielded eight journal entries in total per

student.

Due to the duration of the current study, several strategies were employed to encourage participants' continuous participation and to ensure their completion of the first stage of the entire study; that is, their first semester at college with eight journals and two sets of focus groups. First, incentives for their participation, including the completion of journal writing, were made clear for participants in the consent process. For journal writing, they received a $5 gift card for every two journals they completed. The study was designed in this way so that the amount of work and the compensations would be perceived as rewarding and well-balanced.

Second, the number of journal entries—eight entries in total in the first semester—had been carefully selected in order for participants to have enough time for their reflection between entries and for the PI to have a chance to both meet them in person for the incentive and to develop a rapport. Though the amount of writing varied among participants, eight journals per student yielded a sufficient amount of narratives.

Third, the structure of journals was designed to obtain a wide range of aspects of participants' college transition from general to more personal. Also, two entries sent after two sets of focus groups during the first semester were intended to provide participants with room for reflections about the meetings as a group and to encourage them to discuss anything that may not have been shared in the presence of other group members.

Finally, the PI kept reiterating throughout the study that nothing shared in journals would be disclosed to other students unless participants themselves would voluntarily

decide to do so in their focus groups. In this way, privacy and a degree of rapport between the PI and participants were maintained. Twenty-three participants completed the entire study, resulting in 227 pages of journal entries combined, excluding those submitted by participants who withdrew at the second stage of the study.

Focus groups. In parallel with electronic journaling, two different forms of ethnographic interviewing were conducted to obtain more diverse and detailed thoughts about the subject matter. One consisted of sets of focus groups, and the other was an individual interview. Morgan (1998) emphasizes three fundamental strengths of focus groups: "(1) exploration and discovery, (2) context and depth, and (3) interpretation" (p. 12). First, researchers explore and discover both anticipated and unexpected themes that emerge within and across focus groups and how such themes are constructed by group members so that they can learn from participants about the issues at hand. Second, unlike surveys or strictly structured-interviews, discussion is open-ended, resulting in more in-depth and context-specific responses from participants. Finally, by observing such interactive discussions, researchers examine how participants interpret others' responses and express their own points of view accordingly. Thus, in focus groups, researchers play the role of moderator or facilitator of discussions rather than controlling the flow of conversation for the sake of efficiency.

In comparison to individual interviews, Morgan (1998) also identifies the characteristics of focus groups as "the use of group discussions to generate the data" (p. 32). Interactions among participants play a key role in this regard. It is important to let

participants discuss topics and express themselves and their ideas as they do in everyday life situations *in their own language*. This is similar to the aforementioned approach by Caronia and Caron (2004), who contend that in such an interactive situation as peer conversational focus groups, participants engage in "joint discussions, co-constructed reasoning or reflexive thinking on the topics that are *relevant from the informants' point of view*" (p. 33). They also compared peer conversation focus groups, whose structure is more open-ended and less structured, with researcher-led focus groups, and found that the former had yielded more narratives and stories of participants.

Focus groups are often employed in studies regarding the relationship between young people and cellphones, like Oksman and Turtiainen's (2004) study of Finnish youth's intersecting use of communication devices discussed in Chapter Two. Similarly, Green and Singleton (2007) conducted focus groups with Pakistani-British Muslim youth in the United Kingdom, ranging from 15- to 25 years old, trying to examine their "mobile selves" (p. 507). (In studies conducted in European and some Asian countries, cellphones are often referred to as *mobiles phones* or *mobiles*.) Mobile selves, namely selves associated with the use of cellphones, are constructed through the personalization of phones and international interactions in which diaspora Pakistani-British Muslim youth engage with their local friends and family members. Cellphones are "not neutral objects, but embody and articulate social and cultural relations" (p. 522) and construct multi-faceted identities of users, claim Green and Singleton.

These discussions also support the effectiveness of focus groups for the inquiry of

such deeply-rooted concepts as self and identity. Following the precautions exhibited in the literature, all three sets of focus groups in the current study were designed in a semi-structured manner to create a place where participants engage in interactive discussions with the PI and their peers. They were semi-structured because of the need for consistency among groups in terms of questions and discussions. The PI also managed the flow of interactions among participants to avoid any excessive deviations from the intended discussion. Necessary adjustments were made in order to cover the questions planned within a designated time frame, about an hour, for each focus group.

Focus groups procedures. Three sets of focus groups were conducted in total: two during the first half of the study (Fall 2009) and one in the consecutive semester (Winter 2010). The first set of focus groups was designed to obtain an overall impression of college transition, participants' pasts as well as current interactions with ICTs, and academic as well as relational challenges experienced in college transition. The first set was scheduled in the middle of the first semester (in November), after the first three journals were collected. The second set was conducted near the end of the semester (in December), with a shorter interval from the first, due to participants' busy schedule at the end of the semester. More personal questions about friendships and about identity and self were discussed in the second set. The final set of focus groups was conducted in the middle of the second semester. Participants were asked to share their reflections about college transition and ideas about themselves as college students as of the second semester at college.

By the time the first set of focus groups was scheduled, six participants had withdrawn from the study either with or without notice. Focus groups were formed based on residential status (either living on-campus or commuting to school), which reflects the literature discussed in Chapter Two about the relationship between students' residential status and transition strategies. Those who fell into a category of non-traditional students (namely, older transfer students who started attending the school in 2008) were placed in their own focus group. Originally, 35 participants were to be assigned to focus groups. Of 35, eight participants (one male and seven females) did not participate in their focus groups because of either an emergency or simply not showing up at the scheduled date. Although adjustments and rescheduling had been made for those who could not attend their original focus groups, they did not show up for the second time, either.

First set of focus groups. Consequently, the first focus groups were conducted with 27 participants, with six focus groups in total; three groups (Groups A, B, and C) of on-campus students (five males and ten females), two groups (Groups D and E) of commuter students (four males and five females), and one group (Group F) of non-traditional students (two males and one female). The first meeting predominantly focused on participants' perceptions about their interactions with ICTs and their adjustments to college transition. Due to time constraints, the PI limited the number of questions in order for the discussion to be more interactive and participant-led (see Appendix C for the questions for the first set of focus groups). In addition, some members of Group D did not show up on the date originally scheduled, resulting in two different

meetings with a smaller number of participants (Groups D1 and D2).

Second set of focus groups. Of 27 participants who attended their first focus group, two students (one male commuter student from Group D, and one female on-campus student from a Group B) failed to attend their second focus group conducted near the end of the Fall of 2009. During the second set of focus groups, participants were encouraged to share their ideas specifically about themselves as cellphone users in comparison to people they met in a new collegiate environment (see Appendix C for the questions). Due to the conflict between schedules for this study and their classes and work, some students participated in a different focus group according to their residency.

Third set of focus groups. The third set of focus groups was conducted in the second semester of college, during the Winter of 2010, between the end of March and the beginning of April. Of 25 students who had completed both the first and the second sets of their focus group, one female participant from a Group A did not return her last journal and decided to withdraw from the study. One female participant from a Group F withdrew from the study because she could not participate in her focus group even after multiple rescheduling attempts. Also, two groups for on-campus students had to be regrouped and combined together because many of them did not show up to their meeting, resulting in two focus groups of on-campus students instead of three. One of these focus groups had ten students, making it quite challenging for the PI to hold a productive meeting. For the third set, the PI provided scenarios where people use their cellphones with others present in different social and relational situations (see Appendix C for the scenarios).

Three sets of focus groups resulted in 18 meetings in total. All focus groups were audio- and video-recorded and transcribed by the PI afterwards. This yielded 282 pages of transcripts in total. For all focus groups, none of the information shared in participants' journals was disclosed by the PI as clarified in the consent process. Only when students voluntarily shared the same information, did the PI facilitate a discussion based on these stories. Those who had completed all three focus group meetings (23 participants) were scheduled for the individual interview with the PI at the end of the entire study.

Individual qualitative interviews. Focus groups can yield valuable data, yet they are not a panacea. Even though individual participants were given an equal opportunity to share their ideas and encouraged to speak up as much as other members did, the amount of utterances varied from participant to participant. Certain participants tended to speak more than others, leaving small room for further elicitation from the quieter participants. Also, it is quite understandable for some to take more time to articulate their thoughts, and the presence of others might hinder such a process during meetings. As Morgan (1998) notes, it is inevitable that focus groups "sacrifice details about individuals in favor of engaging the participants in active comparisons of their opinions and experiences" (p. 33).

To offset this lack of detail, two strategies were employed. The first strategy, as discussed above, was electronic journaling. Knowing that all of their journal entries were shared solely with the PI should have encouraged participants to disclose additional personal information they may have otherwise felt reluctant to share in interviews. The PI never disclosed anything private elsewhere so that privacy was maintained. The second

strategy was to conduct an individual interview with each participant at the end of the study. This ensured both the PI and each participant an opportunity to exchange ideas that had been shared neither in journals nor focus groups.

Interviewing is a place for knowledge co-construction. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) consider interviewing, metaphorically speaking, a form of "traveling" where a researcher—or a traveler—learns new knowledge about people and culture through conversations with interviewees. Different from the positivist approach to reality through interviewing, or what Kvale and Brinkmann call *the miner metaphor* where reality is buried so that it is thought to be *found* through mining, the traveler metaphor leads to a view of "interviewing and analysis as intertwined phrases of knowledge construction, with an emphasis on the narrative to be told to an audience" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 49). Such a postmodern attitude toward knowledge is critical especially when a conversation, or interviewing, takes place only between a researcher and a participant.

The PI interviewed 23 participants individually who had completed all journal entries in the first semester and attended all of three sets of focus groups (see Appendix C for the questions). All interviews were conducted right after the second semester was over, between the end of April and May 2010. Specific responses shared in journal entries as well as focus groups were probed for clarification. Interviews varied in length due to time afforded by participants, ranging from approximately 40 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the PI, yielding 308 pages of transcripts in total.

Summary of data collection. In summary, the study at hand employed three

different methods for collecting narratives from participants. Of those who completed the study, the first method was electronic journaling conducted in Fall 2009, which yielded 227 pages from 23 participants, eight entries per student. The second method was three sets of focus groups conducted over two consecutive semesters in the Fall of 2009 and the Winter of 2010. Eighteen meetings were held in total, resulting in 282 pages of transcripts. The third method was one set of individual qualitative interviews at the end of the entire study. Twenty-three participants remained in the study until the end of the second semester, completing all the requirements, and participating in an individual interview with the PI. All combined, the interviews yielded 308 pages of transcripts.

Data Analysis

Although it has been a continuing process since data collection began, the PI's next step was to analyze the data and engage in coding. Coding of data is, say Lofland et al. (2006), "the process of sorting your data into various categories that organize it and render it meaningful from the vantage point of one or more frameworks or sets of ideas" (p. 200). Codes constitute data that answer questions asked in the research. Analyzing ethnographic data is indeed to tell a "story" based on materials collected in the research process (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 148). Following the interpretivist tradition, the current study attempts to seek locally specific meanings of the phenomenon under study (Denzin, 1997), rather than achieving generalization of the research findings.

Though the terminologies vary from scholar to scholar, Lofland et al. (2006) mention that a coding process takes two steps: the first one is called initial coding or open

coding, and the second one is called focused coding. These steps are, however, not independent but "overlapping sorting and categorizing processes" (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 201). Through an opening coding process, say Strauss and Corbin (1998),

> data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Events, happenings, objects, and actions/interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts termed "categories." Closely examining data for both differences and similarities allows for fine discrimination and differentiation among categories. (p. 102)

This in turn allows researchers to conceptualize what exactly is going on in the data by grouping, creating subcategories, and labeling these chunks of data. Focused coding, as its name suggests, is more conceptually and narrowly specified analysis. Based on the categories or codes found through open coding, researchers "knit together larger chunks of data" (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 201) and then use these focused codes to ask more specific questions.

Such codes are nearly equivalent to what Spradley (1980) calls a cultural domain, "a category of cultural meaning" (p. 88). Founded in participant observation, Spradley details three analysis steps: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis. Each cultural domain is comprised of three elements: a cover term, included terms, and a semantic relationship that link these two categories. The cover term is a label or a name of each domain. Once data are sorted into chunks, each chunk or domain is labeled with a cover term that contains the included terms, which constitute a domain. The cover term and included terms then need to be semantically linked together.

Once these domains are determined through domain elicitation, a *domain analysis*

is conducted to discover sameness or similarities and overarching cultural patterns in cultural behaviors, artifacts, and knowledge across domains. Second, based on the domains found through domain analysis, *taxonomic analysis* is deployed to identify connections across domains. By refining domains, categories can be combined with one another or transferred into more encompassing domains. Strauss and Corbin (1998) call this phase *axial coding,* which is "the act of relating <u>categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions</u>" (p. 124). The final step is *componential analysis* where contrasts or differences among domains are scrutinized (Tonso, 2006). These contrasts work as "attributes or components of meaning" (Spradley, 1980, p. 131). This whole process of analysis needs to be continued recursively until researchers reach a consistent pattern or saturation point (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Successful analysis should lead to a *cultural theme*, which Spradley (1980) defines as "*any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning*" (p. 141). Once a cultural theme emerges, triangulating data from multiple sources ensures the credibility of data analysis.

An Ethnographic *Approach*

It may be noticeable that, while labeled "ethnographic," this study is not an ethnography in the traditional sense, as is evidenced, for example, by the lack of participant-observation. It is important to note that the current study takes a more ethnographically-oriented qualitative mixed-methods approach (utilizing journal entries, narratives, and focus groups), similar to Caronia and Caron's (2004) study. Different from

Nathan's (2006) ethnographic study, for instance, where she (a professor as well as a researcher) attended college *as* a freshman and examined the dynamics of first-year college experience, the resources available for the current study are somewhat limited. The focus here is on "ethnographic" as an adjective used to describe the approach, rather than to describe the method. Informed by Caronia and Caron's inquiry, the current study takes an ethnographically-oriented approach to examine the emic accounts provided by participants (i.e., the actors of the culture) about cellphone communication in conjunction with their college transition (i.e., the phenomenon under study). Maintaining the principles of ethnography—learning from the cultural members under study regarding the ways in which they name, practice, and make meaning of their behaviors—the current project draws upon ethnographic practices to conduct a qualitative multi-methodological study.

Situating Researcher's Voice in the Study

The next section, Chapter Four, presents the findings and discusses the themes that emerged within narratives provided by participants. These themes address three research questions for the study at hand. Such findings will be discussed in conjunction with the researcher's reflections on the data collection as well as analysis process since a researcher's standpoint indeed affected the understandings of narratives and interactions with participants. In addition, in the following two chapters, I, the PI, will use the first person in order to situate my own voice as well as myself within the realm of this study, rather than attempting to distance myself from the interpretations presented in the discussion. This is important in that my relationship with participants significantly affected

the interpretations of data; using the third person will hinder this ethnographic study from enacting its voice.

I also include direct quotations from the focus groups, my individual interviews with the participants, and their journal entries. When I quote from the focus groups, I will indicate in parentheses using the following technique: (name, FG [focus group]#, focus group letter code, and utterance numbers from the transcript). Quotes from individual interviews will be shown as follows: (name, Individual, and utterance numbers from the transcript). When I quote from the journals, I will indicate as: (name, journal #, page # from the journal document of that participant). All proper nouns are replaced by generic terms in brackets: [city], [high school], [university], [hometown], etc.

All of names used here are pseudonyms. Some participants chose their own, and I randomly selected one for those who provided no preference by using a pseudonym generator. When using the participants' journals, I corrected some of their grammatical as well as spelling errors, only when my corrections did not change the meaning of their words and when the corrections would help the reader to make sense of their words. For quotations from focus groups and individual interviews, emphases are indicated by capitalizing or italicizing the utterance; capitalization indicates the emphasis made through the volume of their voice, and italics are used when words are nuanced. Some peripheral information such as laughter is also included as, for example, [*Laugh*] in the transcript in order to help a reader feel the tone of their utterance. Where necessary, I added italicized clarifications in brackets in order for readers to better understand an utterance. Ellipses in

parentheses (. . .) will be used to indicate omissions for the sake of readability. When not parenthesized, ellipses at the end of each utterance indicate a pause or an overlap of the subsequent utterance made by other participants. The overlap within the utterance is indicated in the parentheses with the name.

In the next chapter, I will first present my self-reflections on the current study, especially on the rapport building process with participants. Presenting such self-reflections is crucial in that it will clarify how the discussions drawn from the analysis reflect upon Spradley's principles of ethnography, that it is an act of learning from the cultural members under the study, not to impose researcher's pre-established assumptions about them. This also enacts participants' voices—namely, emic categories identified through analysis. Followed by the reflections, I will address three research questions for the study at hand. First, the tactics of identity-switching in order to present a functioning self in different social situations will be discussed, which addresses the first two research questions (i.e., RQ1 and RQ2). Here, the theme of becoming a functioning member of a collegiate culture will be discussed in detail. Second, the implications of relational development and management in transition (i.e., RQ3) will be examined. Finally, I will present a summary of findings.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Conducting an ethnographic study with first year college students was as exciting, eye-opening, and challenging for me as was experiencing college transition for the research participants. Yearlong longitudinal research yielded a vast amount of narratives from participants regarding cellphone communication in conjunction with college transition. It was my pleasure to work with 23 students (and with those who had to withdraw from the study) and to become a part of their first year experiences. The fact that they were willing to volunteer their time and efforts for extracurricular activities like this study was impressive, and I am quite thankful to them. It was also encouraging to hear some students say that they recognized the importance of this study for *me* as well as for my academic pursuit. (Obviously, they were interested in knowing why I was conducting this study, and it was not possible for me, nor did it seem to be appropriate, to hide the purpose of the study.) They indicated that they would try their best to manage schedules and complete everything. Indeed, many of the participants did.

Building a Rapport with Participants

Owing to the nature of prolonged engagement with participants, some aspects of the study gradually became more relational and personal, which resulted in both positive and challenging consequences. Although I continued to pay close attention to my role as a researcher throughout, I sometimes could not help feeling relieved and even happy about being "accepted" by participants as a person, or as *myself*, rather than being perceived as a

strange researcher trying to approach them only for the sake of scholarly pursuits. Knowing that I am coming from a different country, speaking English as a second language, and conducting research for my degree, many participants approached me in an increasingly friendly manner as the research progressed.

Compared to having a senior researcher who might look (and sound) like their parents or teachers, my demographics and background (such as being a relatively young-looking, novice researcher, as well as being recognized as both a graduate student of the same school and an instructor of one introductory course they recognize) might also have appeared less intimidating when it came to their sharing ideas for this study. I interacted with participants in recognition of these advantages as a researcher, and I felt more encouraged to work with them for the study.

Also, since more than half of the participants were living in on-campus residential halls like I did (though in different buildings), it was quite natural to come across each other at various locations at school. Though comparatively less frequently, it was also true for commuter students. This helped us see ourselves as members of the same community. It is fair to say that the encounters with those who had withdrawn from the study sometimes created an awkward moment. Overall, however, establishing a rapport with participants went smoothly and successfully at the earlier stages of the study.

Dilemmas

Admittedly, however, there were a number of challenging moments in the course of data collection where I faced physical, emotional, and relational burdens. Given that the

research was conducted mostly by myself, for instance, it was physically challenging because interview schedules tended to become tight and several meetings were crammed into the same day, leaving me little time to be physically, and psychologically, fully-prepared for each focus group or interview conducted on that day. This is, of course, not to disregard various forms of support and encouragement provided by my colleagues throughout the study. Yet, managing students' intense schedules and organizing these meetings were sometimes exhausting to the degree to which I could not function as effectively as I would have liked. Due to such frequent rescheduling, it also became much more difficult to ask colleagues for constant support.

In addition, it was emotionally challenging and even frustrating when participants missed due dates for journals and/or paid little attention to the punctuality of participation. Especially for the focus groups, despite my timely reminders, some students shifted their priorities in the last minute and did not attend meetings without any notice. Accumulatively, it became an emotional burden to contain myself in order to show respect for their voluntary participation, as well as to follow ethical standards for ethnographic research, while managing schedules for all activities in a timely manner and making follow-ups and sending reminders *appropriately*. Fortunately, I succeeded in containing myself on the surface and taking responsibility as a researcher throughout. However, this really affected the perceptions of my relationship with participants.

The more frequently we interacted in conjunction with the research activities, the more casual and the friendlier our relationships and communication became. On the one hand,

as noted above, this was a necessary step in order to develop and establish a rapport with them. Such a shift was also a positive indicator because they became more cooperative and came to interact with me as if we were friends supporting each others' college life, rather than maintaining a rigorous researcher-researched relationship. On the other hand, I came to perceive the repeated breach of commitment more personally, especially when they had already made a promise with an apology for the initial breach. Gradually, it became confusing for me to know how to manage our relationships that seemed to exist in two completely different realms; namely, one is in a research-participant relationship and the other is in our friendship. Occasionally, it even felt painful to engage in small talk, or non-research related conversations, knowing that they had not finished the previously required or promised activity. There also were moments in which I felt like I was interacting with two completely different persons when I was working with certain participants. With limited leeway to manage all of these adjustments, follow ethical ethnographic standards, and show respect for them, I came to hold a biased attitude toward the interviews during the latter stages of the data collection. I tended to find, and *feel*, contradictions between what they did and said (to me) outside the research realm and what they shared in interviews and journals. I continued making efforts to manage my frustrations and confusions, while realizing my researcher eyes became gradually biased as the study progressed.

Catharsis

The main reason for revealing my struggles and frustrations here is not to make complaints about my participants behind their back, nor is it for making excuses. Instead, it is

my contention that these incidents and feelings experienced during the data collection turned out to be critical in revisiting such notions as independence, maturity, growth, responsibility, and politeness repeatedly mentioned by participants in both journals and focus groups. Due to my researcher bias, I took these notions—growth and maturity associated with college transition—for granted. I paid little attention to how their responses in this study related to their transitional growth and maturity. Such notions were also mentioned in relation to their discussions about *proper* cellphone communication. Admittedly, as confessed above, I came to feel uncomfortable and even frustrated when these notions emerged because I found some participants to behave in a less responsible or mature manner, which seemed to conflict with *my* definitions of maturity or growth. My bias hindered my scholarly lens, and kept me from identifying this key theme they shared in our discussions.

It was an epiphany to realize how much I relied on my own definitions in understanding participants. Also, as I did not realize the importance of these issues during the data collection process, I felt as if I was not finding anything significant about the issue, which augmented my frustrations. It was not until the latter stages of data analysis in which I began focusing on the relationship between college transition, participants' cellphone communication, and a notion of *emerging adulthood*, which led me to identify the critical theme for the current study.

Emerging adulthood. The idea of emerging adulthood was not the primary focus of the current study, nor did I even pay enough attention to this aspect of college transition before the initiation of the study. As shown in the discussion about researcher's dilemmas,

however, realizing the connections between narratives shared by participants and the notion

of emerging adulthood turned out to be a critical moment of analysis for me.

A theory of emerging adulthood was first proposed by Arnett (2000) based upon

the survey of American college students aged from 18 to 25, regarding their perceptions of

transition into adulthood. Acknowledging the fact that his discussion is rooted in the

Western tradition (more specifically, in the American culture) and that emerging adulthood

is highly cultural and diverse, Arnett (2000) asserts that this life period is

> neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is theoretically and empirically
> distinct from them both. Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative
> independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the
> dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring
> responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a
> variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. … (p. 469)

Arnett (2004) continues explaining that "adulthood and its obligations offer security and

stability, but they also represent a closing of doors—the end of [dependence], the end of

spontaneity, the end of a sense of wide-open possibilities" (p. 6). Thus, the term emerging

adulthood indicates a more complex life period spent before the historically regarded sign

of entrance into adulthood.

Arnett (2004) contests that existing social scientific terms such as *late adolescence*,

young adulthood, and *youth*, are insufficient for adequately describing this life period in the

current context. Even though the definition above indicates that emerging adulthood is

somewhat interwoven into the other contiguous life stages, Arnett (2007a; 2007b)

emphasizes that these stages are not necessarily independent from one another, but rather,

overlap each other. Based upon such a conceptual bearing, Arnett (2004) details five

distinct aspects that characterize emerging adulthood: the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities (p. 8). This is a useful framework for understanding participants' college transition in conjunction with Tinto's (1996) theory of transition.

Thus, the theme identified in the current study is that cellphone communication creates social situations where participants—who can be considered *emerging adults* (Arnett, 2000; 2004)—engage in identity exploration and strategic impression management by switching their social roles in order to properly present their self as a *more* independent, mature, and responsible member of a new community. This, hereinafter, is referred to as an effort to become *a functioning member of a collegiate culture*. The next section first details this idea based on the narratives of participants, and then further explores how such a notion of becoming a functioning member of a collegiate culture informs the implications of cellphone communication on their college transition. I will also address the three research questions in detail.

College Transition and Emerging Adulthood

Juxtaposed to the institutional transition from high school to college, a lot of narratives suggest participants' strong desire for psychological transition into adulthood, while struggling with the various tensions associated with college transition. Throughout the data, participants—mostly, the traditional first year students—regarded their college transition and the first year college experience as a place where they became more mature and grew up, as well as gaining more freedom as a sign of independence. Such notions of

independence and freedom are, however, inextricably linked with the pressure for taking

responsibility for their own actions and disciplining themselves to succeed. They do

recognize that such freedom does not come down to them free of cost, and that they need to

be *functioning* appropriately and efficiently in order to survive in a new collegiate

environment. The following excerpts come from journals written in first semester of their

college life. Some mentioned independence at the very beginning of the first semester, and

others reflected on the first semester and named it a turning point in college transition

where they gained an increased sense of independence:

> My experience so far as a college student, I have [to] learn to [become] mature so
> quickly because you have [no] parental supervision, which means you have to rely
> on yourself for everything and be very independent… (Jolene, Journal#1, p. 1)

> I am enjoying the college experience greatly. The independence, responsibility, and
> freedom are very appealing to me. There is some anxiety present because, after all,
> this is an all new experience, but I look forward to the challenges, triumphs, and
> what I can learn [from] any mistakes I make along the way. In a social sense,
> college is very stimulating and demanding, but it is a demand I am willing to
> oblige with pleasure. But it is definitely a balancing act between my
> responsibilities as a student and social demands. (Ted, Journal#1, p. 1)

> As a freshman I feel that I was very fortunate to have met the right people.
> Transition for me was not difficult at all. I had met a good group of friends the first
> night moving in and I am still very close to them. On top of that I really love the
> freedom I feel at college being on my own, and lastly I really enjoy [the city]. I
> love college. (Lakisha, Journal#1, p. 1)

> College compared to my high school life has been great so far; at [university]
> everyone around me seems geared toward having a successful education and
> accomplishing something, whereas at [high school] kids wouldn't even try to pass.
> When I am on campus I am usually enjoying myself, I treat campus as a

microcosm and enjoy exploring and exploiting the various utilities available to me. College has also had a freeing experience on me, I feel much more independent and capable than in high school. (Brent, Journal#1, p. 1)

It has been somewhat difficult to have this new and different lifestyle because I have been living with my parents for my whole life and living without them and not being able to see them every day seems quite hard. Also I have learned to become more independent since I usually had my parents do everything for me from doing my laundry to making my food, both of which I have to do now. (Mathew, Journal#6, p. 6)

I realized that I didn't need my parents any more. (…) It gave me total and complete independence to make my own decisions without worrying if it would affect my mom. It made me feel really good. (Karina, Journal#8, p. 8)

This [*moving into a dorm and living away from family*] is probably the biggest step towards independence I have ever taken. Before this I would never have thought to try to live away from my family. (Ann, Journal#8, p. 12)

When I moved out of my house, and into my dorm, I felt finally like I was becoming an adult. I was on my own, and responsible to only myself. I had to start making [my] own decisions and knowing how to survive on my own. (Kelly, Journal#8, p. 9)

Though the degree of their avowed independence before college varied from participant to participant, the departure from parental supervision—whether or not they lived with or away from their parents—provoked mixed feelings of excitement and ambiguity among some participants about their college life, whereas others were more welcoming towards a new start to their life as college students.

The more freedom they obtain, the harder it becomes to manage everything in a timely manner and to discipline themselves to sufficiently fulfill their responsibilities. In

exchange for becoming independent, time management and self-disciplining become critical since, as Bettie puts it elsewhere, parents no longer "baby" them as they would do pre-college. This was also shared in the first sets of focus groups of traditional students living in campus dorms. Following are two excerpts from two different focus groups of on-campus students conducted at the beginning of the study:

> Cherie: It wasn't necessarily an easy process for me because college life was nothing like my high school life at all. Here, you gotta have a will to learn, cuz you have so much freedom here. And no one's gonna tell you, "Go to class," or "You'd better do your work." So you have to be more independent here than in high school. Like in high school, the majority of kids lived with their parents, so they have to go to school because even they… Well, you can still skip, cuz people do it whether their parents say to go to school or not. But here, it's all on you. Whether you have an ambition to learn or not. Cuz it's just all on you. Professors' not gonna beg at you, and if you don't go to the class, or fail.
>
> Ted: You paid for it.
>
> (…)
>
> Lakisha: Um, honestly, it was kinda easy transition for me. And I think it's just because I've been really independent for my whole life, and my family. They've never really pushed me to do something. I just kinda did it myself. They were good parents I guess. But I was really lucky to… I was fortunate cuz the first day, I met a whole group of friends. So it's just, all happened to be on the same floor. You know, from that time on I've also met a lot of people but I guess I've ever just been really fortunate. I really enjoy my room, my roommate. Everything was just great. I really like college life. It was pretty much what I expected.
>
> Ann: I've never been this independent in my life. So it's weird like, knowing…
>
> [*Anna's utterance was interrupted by Jolene who was texting and started laughing suddenly, and others also started laughing.*]
>
> Ann: I've never been able to, if I wanna go to a restaurant or something and just go, it's always been like "Can I get a ride?" or like, "I have to go to the school at the time?" you know. Here, whenever you go to the class it's all over the place. And you

keep your own timings, so I feel less connected to other people to make my own decisions for me. So I guess, that's kind tied back here. It was kind of shocking at the beginning, but I've definitely gotten used to that independence.

PI: How shocking was that? What kind of…

Ann: It's like, wow! Like, if I don't do this myself, I will miss my classes, you know. I never realize how much I depended on school timings or my parents to say "Come and eat" or even "EAT!" you know. I've never had to say to myself, okay I'll just go and eat. You'll be, my mom is like "Okay, Ann. Your dinner is getting cold." You know. So, I was really kind of shut in my house most of the time. But now it's like my responsibility, but it's also, now that I've gotten used to it, I don't think I can go back. When I go back on the weekends, it's like "I'm locked in my house! I wanna go do something!" You know. It's something you get used to but once you get used to it, it's hard to go back.

Stefanie: I don't think it was much of a transition or anything for me because I kind of had a weird growing up setting. I went to a weird school where basically all, they kinda told you to do what's work… Stuff like that. So I was already… I've already… How can put this? I can say that I was never, I don't know, I have never had a reckless phase or anything. I kinda grew up too fast so, like already when I came here, obviously workload was more but I already knew what I needed to do.

Jolene: It's not really big but I did depend on my parents a lot. I'm kinda independent now so then from high school to college, you actually have to do the work. High school is like, you can go to the class early, come back without doing a homework, and stuff. You can't do that here.

Ted: You *can*, but you get screwed on the test.

Others: [*Laugh*].

Jolene: When you take the test, you actually have to study. You can't be like look around. Like, you gotta like do it.

Clyde: For me, the transition was actually pretty small.

PI: How so?

Clyde: I grew up really independent. My parents both work whenever I came home. So I'd do cleaning and chores or something. I'd always cook for myself. So I was

always independent. And the only time that my parents actually intervened was when I was out too late or something, friends. But that doesn't happen any more so, that's like the only transition for me.

Ann: Wow.

Ted: For me, in an academic sense, the transition was relatively small because I'd always have to be taking advanced classes. So that was relatively small. Um, but in regards to the "independence thing" that was a little bit different because I came from the house like where everything was taken care of for me, I still to this point make my mom do my laundry.

Lakisha: Oh my god.

Ted: Yes.

Jolene: Are you serious?

Ted: I go home and my mom does it for me.

Lakisha: You are kidding me… (FG#1, B, 373-396)

Roslyn: Yeah, when I lived at home, it was, you have to do these things. I'd have to tell them where I was, all the stuff. (Kelly: Curfews.) And now I have no curfews, I can do whatever I want. But like, it's bouncing it. You have to make, you don't have to be stupid with it, you know. Cuz now you can be on anytime you want to.

Kelly: It's a balancing thing.

Roslyn: Yeah, but you have to make sure that you've got classes, you gotta take all these classes…

Kelly: You don't have to let your parents say, "Are you done with your homework? Are you done?"

Karina: Even like, "You need to do this. You need to do this."

Kelly: Or even high school professors, more personal like, everyday you need to get this homework done and if you are having a problem you wanna 30 words.

Whereas, here,

Roslyn: 300. Yeah.

Kelly: So, nobody's gonna be responsible for you except *you*.

Karina: You need to make sure that you pay attention and you get this good.

PI: How do you think about that?

Lonnie: As far as independency from high school and now, for me, it's like, yes, it is more independent. It's also not boring because, I wanna say this. Just a transition, as far as you saying college, that's an independent thing. But you are still not paying all of these bills anything else at home, you know. You have contributed a little bit more but your parents pay for it. So I had basically some of the same freedom now, like leaving the lights on something like that.

PI: How about you?

Mathew: Yeah, it's more independent from my parents, cuz they were always like, "Did you do this? Did you do that?" But like now you need to, I guess the personal motivation is actually, clean your room, do your homework, do your work, pay attention. (FG#1, A, 389-401)

Commuter students who lived with their parents also noted that they had obtained more freedom along with the increased responsibilities on their own actions. Most of the traditional students emphasized their growing experiences at college at the end of their first year in their individual interview, no matter how they initially described their college transition.

Since many of them were still financially dependent on their parents, this might not necessarily mean their "complete" or "actual" independence but more of a *perceived* independence. It is fair to note that some obtained scholarships for school, worked part-time for their everyday expenses, or paid for their phone bill. Also, some maintained

strong mental dependence on their parents, so their avowed independence is not anything that would *replace* dependence, but is something growing within themselves in their terms. They appreciated changes accompanying college transition and welcomed the fact that they were *becoming* a college student or a functioning member of a collegiate culture whose social status would broaden possibilities for their new life. In what follows, I will further discuss how participants understand their relationship with cellphone communication, which seems to be significantly linked with such notions as a functioning self, a sense of independence, and growth in transition.

College Transition, Cellphone Communication, and Becoming a Functioning Member of a Collegiate Culture

The first research question explores the relationship between participants' cellphone communication and their sense of self and identity in college transition: *How does first-year students' cellphone communication affect their sense of self and identity in transition into college?* It is helpful first to grasp an overall image of the ways participants thought about their cellphones during transition. At the beginning of this research (and in effect, of their college life at the school), participants described their emotional attachment to their cellphones in extremely varied ways, from little to extreme. For instance, Carolina said it was "nothing" but a tool to have for her everyday communication. Ted called it an "annoyance," while emphasizing that it was "a necessity in today's society." Ricardo said that his cellphone was "a good thing and a bad thing," which provided him a means for communication with his romantic partner, as well as a source of distractions. Lakisha's

view is similar to Ricardo's, saying that she had "a hate and love relationship with it." Clyde's view is somewhat neutral, but it makes him feel right to always have the "extra weight" in his pocket.

Comparatively, some expressed their strong emotional attachment to the device, emphasizing its importance for their communication as well as in their life. For example, Keisha called it a piece of her skin, and Bettie and Ola said that they would feel "naked" without it. For Joanna and Kelly, it is like a "baby" to take good care of. Calling hers "a source of the air," Alisa described her cellphone as a reflection of her self like this:

> I guess you can say my phone kinda is *me* in a way. Because I'm a really glamorous person. I'm a pretty, glamorous person, and this is phone is kinda glamorous in a way with those jewels. Pretty cute like me. (Alisa, FG#1, C, 15)

No matter how much emotional attachment each participant had to their cellphones initially, their actual first-year experience augmented its importance as a necessity for their college life. During the individual interviews conducted at the end of their first year, many participants recalled that not only did they use cellphones for social interactions, but their practical cellphone use (such as scheduling, microcoordination, or arranging meetings for their class projects) increased significantly, resulting in the intensified dependency on the device even though this does not necessarily intensify their *emotional* attachment with a device.

A sign of growth and cellphone communication. It is important to acknowledge that most of participants regarded their cellphones as a necessary tool or a lifeline to *function* in college. The practical use of a cellphone also affects the way participants

associate it with their growth. In some cases, it is about how they utilize this electronic device for organizing their school life such as for time management, scheduling, and/or punctuality. For this purpose, a cellphone is used as a means for communication, but works also as an alarm, a watch, a calendar, a planner, and a GPS that helps them make their college life work. In other cases, their control over the use of cellphones affects the way they evaluate their growth. While they value the utility of a cellphone for their relational and academic benefit, they also admit that a cellphone tends to become a source of distractions. In an attempt to embrace their responsibilities as college students (e.g., completing school work in a timely manner,) they feel that it is a sign of maturity to be able to put their pleasure aside, such as constant texting, and to stay focused.

They also put more value on the "meaningful" use of cellphone communication and considered it a sign of growth. When they emphasize the necessity of cellphone communication, it is basically to function, and to live as a college student who they believe has various kinds of responsibilities for their academic, social, and familial matters. There are several narratives that laid this out nicely, and an excerpt from Janette's journal concerning the changes in her communication style gives a good summary of this:

> (…) I've noticed that I have been using my cell phone more and more in order to keep in touch with family, friends and other potential social contacts. I have come to accept and feel comfortable with these changes in communication that are part of the college experience and becoming a fully independent and functioning adult. These changes in communication are important because they are good preparation for life post-grad. (Janette, Journal#3, p. 4)

Though Janette emphasized elsewhere that her life did not revolve around her cellphone (rejecting any extreme emotional attachment to her cellphone), her response clearly

illustrates how a cellphone has gained a new position in participants' college life. Another

one is from an individual interview with Bettie, and we were talking about her cellphone

use in relation to the other communication tools and how her communication developed

more meanings:

> Bettie: It was very natural, actually, like I mean, if I needed something I would text them [*her college friends*]. And if I wanted to hang out, I'd text them. I wouldn't have to just like, have a formal conversation with them, just to stay friends with. You know what I mean?

> PI: Is that like content?

> Bettie: Yeah it's the content change. Definitely. Especially from the last semester [Fall of 2009]. Last semester it was just unmeaningful. Like, it was just like ventures, having fun. And then this semester was really, "Oh do you wanna hang out?" And just like, stuff like that. Updates, like, "Oh, we're still on for Saturday." Like, you know what I mean? So it had more meanings to the content in the text messages, and the same as Facebook too.

> PI: Okay.

> Bettie: I really think, because I would just, put some of random links and stuff that I thought was funny or, like to the videos and music. And now I would just like, I would say, "Oh, do you wanna volunteer with me?" Or something. You know.

> PI: And you feel comfortable with…

> Bettie: I feel fine with it. Actually I like it a lot better than, maybe it's just because I CHANGED as a person when it comes to, in terms of my preferences.

> PI: For?

> Bettie: Texting, and Facebook, I guess. So.

> PI: So you prefer to use them…

> Bettie: I prefer to use it less because I just got annoyed with it, I guess. Like I would just, it was too distracting, and it wasn't really… It was just like… I'm

mature. That's what KIDS do, like, you know what I mean. Like just texting all the time. You know, it's just like a really immature thing.

PI: And when you do, it's for making plans, and…

Bettie: Yeah. Yeah. It's like, like, I'm an adult. I use it for business. I'll use it to text, to talk to my friends occasionally if I need to talk to them. You know. I'm not just going to, like, you know, you have kids who… Like when I was in the middle school, like instant messaging was a huge thing. I had a cellphone, but I didn't have unlimited texting, so that was a big difference. And once I get to high school, everyone had. Especially when I was in like, 10th grade, everyone had unlimited texting so I start doing it. You know. So... Yeah. I guess it's a maturity thing. (Bettie, Individual, 166-178)

Likewise, Lakisha pointed out the link between her cellphone use and growth, recalling the fact that she was primarily using texting for "stupid things throughout the entire day" in high school. Now that she is in college, instead of having less frequent cellphone interaction through both phone calls and text-messaging, the content of cellphone communication has become much more important for her. Lakisha continued describing this as follows:

Lakisha: It definitely changed. Definitely. Cuz I think like, in high school I texted more like silly conversations to people. I'm like, "I'M IN CLASS. IT'S SO BORING!" Something like that. And that's why I think I texted a lot. Because… I'd be texting during school all the time. [*Laugh*] Pretty much. Just like meaningless things, whereas now that I'm older. Like, *a year* older. [*Laugh*] So much more mature now, you know! [*Laugh*] Yeah. [*Laugh*] Now that I'm NINETEEN! [*Laugh*] Not, you know, um I guess, like, I just don't feel the need to… I don't know. It's just like things get old to you, like having those kinds of conversations just got old, now I'd rather see you. And maybe that's because, um, like I did see those people everyday. But now I'd be rather like, "Hey! Do you wanna talk this? Since I haven't seen you for a little bit so hang out." Maybe that's why. So. Yeah. It has changed towards like, um… I don't see it as, um... I see it as more of a means to get someone… Texting for me is usually just to be able to see them eventually. Cuz if I didn't have my phone, I would never be able to talk to them at all, so we never see them. So that's pretty much how my usage of it has changed.

PI: You mean, like, making an appointment?

Lakisha: Kind of! Yeah.

PI: Or, as far as you're gonna talk to them in person later, you're gonna text them, that kind of stuff?

Lakisha: Yeah, kinda, I would say that making an appointment, maybe not like as formal, like, "MEET ME AT 4!" [*Laugh*] But um, usually just like, "Hey. How have you been? How's college? How's life? I'm coming up this weekend. What are you doing?" And then usually it leads to seeing that person. That's usually what I use it for. Like, a little bit of a small talk and then you know, just see them. But nothing extreme like, "Tell me about…" I don't usually have very important conversations over texting at all.

PI: Now you could have that kind of important conversations, especially with your close friends.

Lakisha: Yeah. The use of a phone tends to become more practical and pragmatic, for scheduling and completing school works. (Lakisha, Individual, 218-224)

Both Bettie's and Lakisha's narratives indicate that the perceptions about certain cellphone use has become very generational, or age-based, along with a sense of maturity, and a certain pattern of usage tends to be associated with a specific social cohort, as well as with certain stages in emerging adulthood. For instance, like Bettie and Lakisha, some of the other traditional students emphasized the different cellphone use compared to *their own* in high school and mentioned that they would use texting for more practical reasons in college. In high school, their cellphone communication—texting in particular—was just for fun or for *nothing*, such as sending a message to a friend who is in the same room or trying to prank others. They claimed that their cellphone use became more practical or meaningful, which carries certain values. This was further reinforced with the fact that some participants introduced the cellphone use of their (usually younger) siblings for comparison, and

emphasized how those *younger* generations would use cellphones for less meaningful purposes *in their eyes*.

Similarly, nontraditional students often referred to cellphone behaviors of undergraduate students at college as typical examples of *young people's* use, and lamented how these "kids" are nonstop with their cellphones:

> Antonio: That's just crazy. Like he's [*Ricardo in the same group*] saying, you watch some of these kids…! It's almost to the point where it's a pet peeve for me to see this people just NONSTOP! Like... Yeah, man. I'm single so I'm still, I watch the women, and I observe the little things, and it would just drive me crazy still. The girls were nonstop like in class, click, click, click [*making clicking sounds*].
>
> Others: [*Laugh*]
>
> Antonio: Walking to another class, click, click, click, and in the bathroom, click, click, click, out of the bathroom walking and then they don't even look forward. (FG#1, F, 132-134)

Ironically, these nontraditional students also introduced stories where their parents were concerned about their cellphone behaviors, simply because they also fit in a category of *young people* in a parents' sense. Keisha's mother was worried about her constant, "addictive" texting behavior that Keisha had to explain. Antonio had a very similar experience. Ricardo also said that he was "accused" of dangerous cellphone behaviors by his parents who had watched a TV program concerning young people's cellphone use while driving. Though he actually did not engage in such a behavior, he was questioned just because he fit into the age range of people who would most commonly engage in the behavior in question:

> Antonio: My parents had said something I need to think of it. I can spend 10

minutes out of three or four hours with them texting. And, they just, it's like the new thing. I was here without it. They see kids doing it all the time, so they see me and my brother and like, "You guys are always texting!" [*Laugh*] I'm not always texting, not even close to *always texting*. I spend more time on the phone. And you won't say a thing about it! You know. [*Laugh*]

Ricardo: I've been accused of texting while driving. Just because I fit into that age range of people who are most common to text while they're driving.

Antonio: Who accused you?

Ricardo: My parents, because they saw that on TV. They are like, "You are not doing that, are you? Don't do that. That's not right." I'm like, "I don't." They're like, "Okay." Like, all the sudden there's another scene on TV and they will have again, I'm like…

PI: What was it?

Ricardo: It was like a 20/20 special about kids texting while they are driving, how long it takes to write the average text message, and how much road you cover in that time. They are like, "Do you know all about this stuff?" And, I'm like "No I don't care really."

(…)

Keisha: This is funny because my mother, she asked me to hand over my cellphone because she doesn't want me to use it. She is nervous, "So many things' happening. You have to be careful!" I'm like, I'm going for my phone or reach around in my bag while driving. She's like grabbing it and, like, "You are not about to use this phone!? So many things' happening. You are gonna get into the accident! You have to focus!" I'm like, just driving three blocks to the CVS. (FG#2, F, 109-113)

Though so-called generation gaps—especially those pertaining to technology or media literacy—may still exist as broadly as they used to, these examples suggest how fine these gaps have become when it comes to cellphone behaviors or any sort of value judgment such as ownership, usage, functions, services, or/and frequency concerning cellphone communication. Also, interestingly, like Ricardo's story suggests, these cellphone behaviors

are relatively "new" for their parents or older generations, which make them concerned about *their* children's cellphone use. Contrarily, as shown in Lakisha's response above, what used to be fun and novel in high school, such as random texting, quickly grew "old" for her, as well as for other traditional students. This indicates how certain aspects of cellphone communication suggest a sign of growth for some, whereas they can also be regarded as a sign of immaturity by other.

With this in mind, the discussion drawn from the study at hand attempts to further extend the idea that cellphones help them *function* in a new collegiate culture in light of emerging adulthood. Here, the idea of "functioning" is an encompassing term that embraces cognitive, behavioral, and relational realms of their growth associated with college transition, though they are not mutually exclusive. The acknowledgment of their social status as a college student also suggested implications for their cellphone usage. It is an effort to properly present their *functioning self* in different social situations, cognitively, behaviorally, and relationally. Two critical social situations—though they were hypothetical for the sake of discussion—were identified in this regard though the analysis. The first is when students are asked to provide or *give up* their phone numbers to professors. And another is where they engage in cellphone communication with someone else's physical presence. The following section will detail how their ways of thinking and behaviors in these situations illustrate their negotiation in presenting their self as being functional. These two cases will address the first two research questions.

RQ1: *How does first-year students' cellphone communication affect their sense of*

self and identity in transition into college?

RQ2: *What theoretical implications does the analysis of college students' cellphone communication in transition provide for the symbolic interactionist understandings of self and identity that have been traditionally developed upon conventional face-to-face interactions?*

And the third research question will be discussed based on an entire scope of college transition.

RQ3: *How do cellphones impact family and friend relationships of first-year students during their college transition?*

Media selection, social statuses, and self-presentation. The first set of focus groups was intended to understand participants' general ideas about information communication technologies, including cellphones, and their college transition. Though it was not originally planned, I decided to add one more question about the participants' ideas regarding exchanging their phone number with professors for texting. This topic happened to be discussed in the very first focus group of the first set (i.e., Group E) while talking about their media selection for everyday interactions with different people. Participants explained how they had been utilizing various kinds of internet communication styles such as email, online chat, and Facebook or/and other social networking services to interact with family members and friends. They also emphasized how cellphones had helped them maintain communication with people and create new bonds with those they met in a new

college environment.

   Phone number exchange with professors. With my curiosity, I randomly threw in

a question asking if they would feel comfortable interacting with professors through texting.

Once a question was introduced, there was short, yet very tense silence of confusion,

followed by a blast of nervous laughter. To my surprise, participants started discussing the

idea fanatically as if they were trying to reason with themselves. Comparing the personal

nature of cellphone communication, especially of texting, with emails, Brent expressed his

idea as follows:

> I mean, for emails, I kinda compare it to texts, most of them you can answer about
> in your own leisure, rather than, if I text someone on the phone you're kinda
> constantly more pressured to answer, cuz I reach on your mobile device. The last
> line of defense, really. (Brent, FG#1, E, 226)

Brent's notion of "the last line of defense" indicates the direct connection between one's

cellphone number and a certain individual as illustrated in Tomita's (2005) discussion about

the "*real me*" of the user. Tomita argues that the fixed landline phone numbers are

connected with certain geographical as well as physical locations or places, tying one's

original self with a public domain and social positions one holds, which Tomita refers to as

original me. However, a cellphone number represents a certain individual—*real me*—,

making the meaning of a phone number more private and personal. Email is, in one sense,

separated from one's personal sphere, creating a quasi-public space for formal or

school-related interactions. Though it is becoming more common to check emails with

cellphones, it is still assumed that email interactions are more formal and that the frequency

of interactions is different from that of texting. Accepting the idea of "texting with

professors" could potentially threaten their privacy, and eventually their selves. Joanna

from the same focus group agreed with Brent and made a clear point in this regard:

> Like, I think it's kinda weird because… It's just weird. So like, to communicate with professors via phone? I guess it's like, I guess you see them as *teachers*. You communicate with your friends on your phone, not with teachers. (Joanna, FG#1, E, 232)

This discussion turned out to be critical for the analysis in that the reactions from

participants indicated that the content of such a question was out of place and violated their

norms. Recalling Spradley's (1980) notion that doing ethnography is learning from the

members of the culture the researcher tries to explore, I decided to ask the same question to

all of the subsequent focus groups.

Though participants' reactions are not identical but vary from moderate to extreme

disgust, it shows consistency that cellphones are not usually regarded as a means for

student-professor communication. Or, if any, it is always *with conditions*. For instance, it

has to be limited to school-related matters, and participants hold significantly clear

expectations about the purpose of phone number exchange and its usage. Stefanie

expressed mixed feelings of her openness for and hesitations about the idea as follows:

> Um, not really. In terms of a professor, if he did ask my number, I would probably give it to him as long as they are just on the school basis. Obviously texting would be weird, unless you are really good friends. If so, it wouldn't be such a big deal. But I don't have any rules for how I give out my number. It depends, whether I like that person or not. (Stefanie, FG#1, A, 194)

Bettie also expressed her acceptance of the idea, pointing out the benefits of instant

communication in the emergent situation such as class cancellation, yet with the strong

emphasis on the higher expectations about its clear purpose and appropriate usage:

> I mean, they are working at the professional level. They are not using it for their own… If they are using it for other reasons, then yes. I wouldn't be comfortable. But so far, as a freshman, I haven't encountered anything like that at all. (Bettie, FG#1, D1, 127)

Such expectations about the appropriate use of their phone numbers by professors seem to derive from different social statuses between them. Considering the time of the interview conducted at the beginning of the very first semester at college, it is likely that students held some ambiguous idea about *professors* based on their pre-established image of the authoritative figure, as well as based on their actual experiences with professors at college. The way participants picture a "professor" is somewhat conventional or even stereotypical, as evidenced by the way they often refer to professors as "he," indicating their assumption about *a-typical-old-male* authoritative figure. This also implies their assumptions about cellphone communication with people of different social statuses and of different ages. Interestingly, Carolina and Dean in the same focus group expressed their extreme discomfort with the idea and explained the hierarchy of social statuses associated with certain media:

> Carolina: I just think texting is one of kind of things. Like I said, there's a level of respect that you have. Professors are here, friends are here. [*Carolina uses her hands to show the hierarchy of the level of respect. Professors are higher, and friends are lower than professors.*] And texting is here [*Lower*], and email is here [*Higher*]. So I'm not going to text *you* who's all the way up here. Just, it's disrespectful. And it feels you are the one who's, if the professors say, "Hey let me text you" or whatever. It's kind of like, "Why are you lowering yourself to *this*?" It's just not socially normal.
>
> (…)
>
> Dean: I think it's inappropriate because… One, especially professors as educators, you know, they are held up their higher standard. They are known for their

intelligence. So I don't think, it makes them *lose* that respect level sort kinda, when you are texting another student about some random issues. I think it's really unnecessary. (FG#1, D2, 75-85)

Their contentions clearly illustrate the layers of social statuses to which each communication medium is assigned by its user.

The degree of formality and informality, or professionalism and unprofessionalism, associated with different media was also emphasized by participants across all focus groups. Nontraditional students also expressed the same concerns regarding the idea, indicating that such expectations about politeness are widely shared by all participants regardless of their age:

Keisha: Uh, just the whole thing about being professional. That's always the way to go. It's nothing about, I don't mind like, if he said, my professor would want to have my phone number, you know. But it's just you know, email seems more professional.

(…)

Antonio: I just don't feel the need to communicate with my professors through text message. Unless it's something urgent that I need to talk to, I don't need to send a message and have an instant response [*Snap*]. If I do, I'd probably email or call his office at the same time, take care those two things. (FG#1, F, 147-154)

Also, despite his openness to the idea, Kelly, from another group of traditional students, provided a more practical rationale for the use of email over texting for student-professor communication:

Kelly: It's just, for a more professional relationship, you use email. This is more casual, cellphones. Cellphones are more personal too. With the people I meet out, friends or people I give my number to, in a social situation, then it's fine to text me because it's a more social, personal thing. Rather, you feel like, professors, you need a degree of professionalism.

(…)

Kelly: And plus! Everybody at [university] has their [university] email account that you can use for professors.

(…)

Kelly: I say a lot of people are texting, but *not* everyone has texting, *not* everyone has their cellphone. But we can *guarantee* that if you are a student at [university], you have at least [university] email. (Kelly, FG#1, A, 250, 277, and 279)

When asked in the third electronic journal about how participants would use different communication media such as the internet and a cellphone, email was selected primarily for school related communication including interactions with professors and classmates for class- or assignment-related issues. Comparatively, cellphone communication was regarded as a primary means for personal, private, and intimate communication where no such authoritative figures as professors are allowed or even welcome.

Among those who are in the higher social status than participants, the degree of closeness—most often, age-based—is also strongly tied with participants' decision in terms of phone number exchange. Lakisha recalled her experience in high school where she gave her phone number to teachers and said that

I just don't have professors' phone numbers. I have, like office phones. In high school, I had some of my teachers' phone numbers cuz, but I was like, for instance, the band teacher, or the foreign language teachers, like… *Cool teachers*. [*Laugh*] Like in keep contact with students. Cuz a band is more of a close group. (Lakisha, FG#1, B, 170)

Age also plays a significant role in their perceptions toward the idea, due primarily to the diversity of instructors at college. In some case, younger teachers are privileged and regarded as less intimidating or threatening for them to hold personal interactions over their phones. Bettie's and Janette's responses illustrate this clearly:

Bettie: *Only* one of them. That's the thing. Yeah. So, all of my other professors use email, including the one that I text. But the one that texts, she specifically told us at the beginning of the year that if she had our phone numbers she would be able to text us immediately because so many people use texting now, she would text me if we didn't have a class. Or, something was wrong.

PI: Is she a younger professor?

Bettie: Yeah. Um… I don't know how old she is. She's probably in her 30s, late 20s. I'm not sure. But she's in a communications major actually. She's in an honor's college, though. She asks to write on the index card phone number so she could communicate with us through the phone.

PI: How did you feel about that?

Bettie: Oh, I thought that was a great idea because I really get annoyed, oh I don't get annoyed, but I think it's just convenient. She *knows* as a communications major and *a young person* that so many people use texting. So. (Bettie, FG#1, D1, 115-119)

And Janette says that

[p]lus, if my professor, if it was his preference and he didn't really email, like my psyche TA. He doesn't have his office hours. He never uses them. He's too cool? I don't know. He listed his phone number and email for us. But if that's the best way to reach your professor, absolutely. I wouldn't have any problems. I wouldn't probably text them. I would pick up the phone and call out of respect. Unless it was a casual relationship. Like a TA is more like a *friend*. Then, yes. It's completely acceptable. It depends on the level of casual… (Janette, FG#1, C, 219)

Like these examples show, participants seem to regard phone number exchange and subsequent communication with certain individuals as a domain where they attempt to perform their social role in an appropriate manner and strategically control their self-presentation as a functioning member of a collegiate culture.

Hesitations also derive from the fear of failing to conduct proper self-presentation to an authority. Due to the constraints accompanied by texting for the formal interactions (such as the limited number of characters per message), participants regard cellphone

communication as a less ideal means for their proper self-presentation for that particular purpose. For instance, with his strong preference for email as a means for student-professor communication, Ricardo, a nontraditional student, explained how limitations or the structure of texting would hinder him from conducting proper self-presentation to professors:

> But, for me, sending a text message to a professor, I would feel compelled to like spell every word out, which is not what text messaging is set up for anymore. It's like you're supposed to use this, abbreviations and all that stuff. I still don't know half of them. (Ricardo, FG#1, F, 152)

Like Ricardo, some traditional students also emphasized that spelling words out was one way to engage in a more formal, mature writing style. Polly and Alisa shared another reason for not texting with professors. That was because of their registered signature—a signature developed by the sender automatically placed at the end of each message. Reserving their use of texting for those within their private, personal circle, they showed reluctance to include their signatures under the eyes of adults such as professors and their parents:

> Polly: It depends. Like, I email my teachers. And we talk or make a basis to go out. But if I was texting one of my teachers, it'd be weird. It would be weird to text professors. First, they are an adult. There's our signatures on our cellphone [*She actually means on her text-messages*].
>
> Alisa: Oh yeah.
>
> PI: What did you say?
>
> Polly: There are signatures on a lot of text-messages. I change my signatures like every three days. It's always something weird. Not professional. It's always something weird.

Alisa: Mine is [*her signature*]. (FG#1, C, 191-195)

They continued talking about the origins of their different signatures, and some of them were highly personal with the reference to their boyfriends' names. Polly also shared her experience where she had once mistakenly sent a text-message to her father without removing the signature, causing a problem for *her* proper self-presentation to adults.

Cellphone use and identity-switching I. Such aspects discussed thus far indicate how participants strategically negotiate their selves as functioning members of collegiate culture in relation to their cellphone usage by switching their identities associated with certain social roles. On the one hand, cellphones function as a place where they can exhibit a more private self with little constraint on their communication style with a familiar other. Their phone number is shared freely with others so long as they maintain control over their self-presentation. As indicated, participants' cellphone communication also came to carry value and meaning specifically due to the situation of being in college. They are no longer in a high school mentality in this regard. On the other hand, when someone *foreign*—usually someone older—steps in to this sphere, they are forced to renegotiate their self by switching their identity as a functioning member of a collegiate culture to present themselves in a socially acceptable way. It is still *too much* for them to see cellphones as a means for student-professor communication, which could potentially help them carry more meaningful and professional interactions with someone in higher social statuses. They still stay in-between, like Arnett suggests (2004).

Professors and other adults can be regarded as the generalized other upon which

participants reflect their emerging adulthood. Participants hold a strong desire to behave and present themselves in a more mature manner and manage their impressions strategically. It is also intriguing to find that professors were the only exception for the phone number exchange. Though not many participants had a job, it seemed to be a norm to provide an employer or a boss with their phone numbers due to the efficacy for job-related communication. Quite obviously, sharing their phone numbers with parents is natural even though, as Alisa's and Polly's stories indicate, they do employ different strategies for avoiding inappropriate self-presentation. It is reasonable to understand that the use of cellphones is closely tied with their self-presentation strategies according to the social roles they perform depending on the interactants' social statuses.

Also, it is important to understand that their strategic media selection and self-presentation help them survive in college transition. The "stage" on which they are performing their role as a functioning member of a collegiate culture is a school setting, and their relationship with professors highly affected their successful transition into as well as survival within college. Considering the entrance into college as one of the thresholds for their emerging adulthood, it is reasonable to understand why professors are regarded somewhat uniquely compared to other adults in society.

The example of phone number exchange with professors demonstrates a *cognitive* realm of the functioning self who negotiates social roles in order to present the self in a professional manner. Having examined the way participants handle their phone numbers with different individuals, now the discussion turns to their perceptions about their and

others' appropriate cellphone *behaviors* with someone else's presence. Along with the discussion about phone number exchange and identity switching, it provides insights into newly developing social norms among college students owing to the prevalence of cellphone communication. Importantly, such norms would have never been observed before the popularization of cellphones among young people like participants in this study.

Becoming a hinge of two social situations. The identity switching tactics for the purpose of proper self-presentation become more salient in another social situation where participants have to handle ongoing multiple interactions and relationships—both synchronously and asynchronously—via cellphones. The discussion here illustrates a more *behavioral*, along with a cognitive, aspect of the functioning self.

As discussed in Chapter Two regarding the applications of symbolic interactionism, the modality of current human communication has diversified, especially with portable communication devices such as cellphones. In some situations, face-to-face interactions are carried out in conjunction with other forms of mediated communication such as a phone call, text-messaging, or online activities with certain devices. With a particular interest in the dynamics of such communication and people's perceptions about it, as well as in its implications for one's self, the third set of focus groups was devoted to the discussion about social situations where face-to-face and cellphone interactions take place simultaneously.

Cellphone communication with others' physical presence. During focus groups, three scenarios were provided in which either participants themselves or their friends are forced to engage in a combination of synchronous face-to-face conversation and

asynchronous cellphone communication—either a phone call or text-messaging—and to manage each relationship simultaneously. (In fact, there was one more scenario with a different focus, which did not yield significant responses in this regard. See Appendix C for all scenarios.) The setting for these three scenarios was a causal gathering with several friends on campus during lunch time. This setting was explicated before presenting each scenario like this: *You are having lunch with your "good" friends at the university cafeteria. Your conversation is casual and this lunch gathering is one of everyday routines you enjoy with them.* However, the issue I experienced was that the discussion questions seemed to be so intriguing for participants that they often re-constructed the setting for the sake of their discussion by saying "It depends on the situation." (The same scenarios were presented to maintain consistency across groups, but such re-construction of the setting happened frequently in all focus groups.)

Still, participants shared similar ideas about the politeness for both, or multiple, parties involved in those scenarios and expressed their strategies for not making themselves look rude, while holding certain expectations of the others' phone behaviors also. Though their opinions and the degree of acceptance or rejection of such behaviors varied (partially owing to the re-construction of the setting), *the locus of responsibility* was emphasized, and they reiterated how they would, or others also should, handle the situation without making behaviors in question *stand out*. Thus, their discussion illustrated the dynamics of *two* social situations where intersecting self-presentation is carried out by three individuals: 1) the participant herself or himself, 2) a friend who engages in the phone behavior in question,

3) and a person on the other end of the line. In what follows, the responses and strategies shared by participants for each scenario will be discussed. Then, two sociological concepts, neutralization and accounting, will be introduced to present justifications for why such coping strategies are associated with their effort to present their *functioning self* in relation to cellphone communication, especially behaviorally.

    Scenarios. The first two scenarios dealt with the situation where one of their friends engaged in either texting (i.e., Scenario one) or a phone conversation (i.e., Scenario two) while having a face-to-face conversation with the participant. Participants were asked to share their reactions to their friend's cellphone behaviors. They were also asked to share how they would handle the situation when *they* had to respond to either text-messages or a phone call in the same situation (i.e., Scenario three). Each scenario has probing questions to better understand participants' ideas, and I will present these scenarios here in order to make the discussion easy to follow:

    <u>Scenario 1 (Other's texting behavior)</u>

    One of your friends started texting while having a conversation with you and others. His/Her texting continues throughout although he/she maintains conversation simultaneously. You realize that this kind of behavior has become common for everyone in this gathering.

    1) What impressions do you have on your friend'(s') texting behavior during the gathering?

2) What impressions do you have on the person who texts with your friend?

Scenario 2 (Other's phone conversation)

In the same situation, one of your friends started engaging in a phone talk while having a conversation with you and others. His/Her phone conversation continues throughout although he/she maintains face-to-face conversation simultaneously. You realize that this kind of behavior has become common for everyone in this gathering.

1) What impressions do you have on your friend'(s') phone behavior during the gathering?

2) What impressions do you have on the person who talks with your friend on the phone?

Scenario 3 (Your cellphone behaviors)

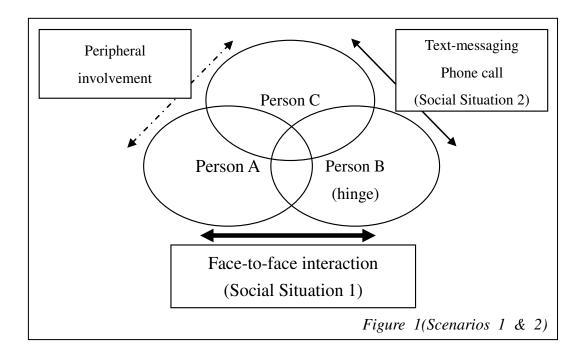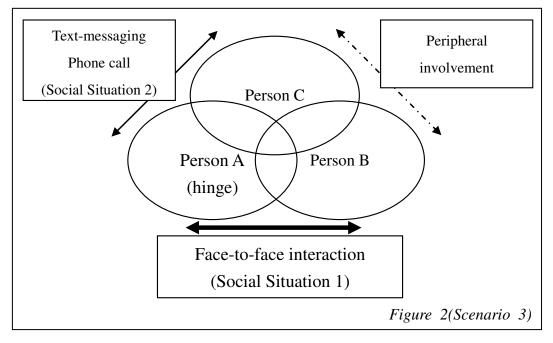You constantly receive text-messages and phone calls in the same situation that you cannot simply ignore.

1) Do you have any rules for your cellphone use when you are with someone else?

2) How do you manage ongoing multiple conversations and relationships in such a situation?

3) How do you control your impressions to your friends face-to-face and to the person conversing through your phone?

These scenarios should be better understood with visualization, and two figures are provided below. To make the discussion easy to understand, each individual involved in this situation is referred to as follows: Person A (the participant), Person B (a friend who engages in a phone behavior in question), and Person C (a person on the other end of the line) in Figure 1. In Figure 2, Person A becomes the one who engages in a phone behavior in question.

In both Figure 1 and Figure 2, the center where the ovals overlap is the place in which two social situations are intertwined together, owing to cellphone communication. The bold, thick arrow indicates a face-to-face conversation between Person A and Person B (in Social Situation 1). The solid, thin arrow shows a mediated, cellphone interaction (i.e., Social Situation 2) that intervenes the face-to-face situation. The dotted arrow suggests the circumstantial, peripheral involvement of the mediated social situation into Social Situation 1. In Scenarios one and two, *Person B* becomes a hinge that ties two social situations together (as shown in Figure 1), and *Person A* becomes a hinge in Scenario three (as shown in Figure 2) since participants in turn become the person who needs to handle multiple interactions.

Figure 1(Scenarios 1 & 2)

Figure 2(Scenario 3)

First, I will discuss Figure 1. As to texting, their opinions were split into two across groups: some considered it very rude, and some considered it okay primarily because they had also engaged in such a text-messaging behavior before. Especially in the first

scenario, they claimed that a face-to-face interaction usually takes precedence over cellphone communication, and that Person B needs to be considerate of the two parties with which she or he is involved. And participants believe that it is Person B's job to handle the situation. Once Person B's text-messaging interactions take place, Person A is also forced to be peripherally involved in two social situations (i.e., Social Situations 1 and 2). The excerpts below show the ways locus of responsibility is assumed by the participants for such a social situation.

> Carolina: Like the other side of the…? Um, they don't like, a lot of it is on, like, get a text, you could say, "Hey I'm with somebody right now." If it's like the person on the other end of the line is like, "Oh you are with that person." Usually the people would be like, "Hey I'm with my brother," and you know, "Do you guys watching a movie?" Okay I'm done. I don't have to text you. Like, I personally won't text you anymore if you tell me you are with someone because it's like I know how annoying it is, if you don't wanna to talk to somebody while you are doing something, like, I'm working on the paper and if I just keep getting these texts from people, like I just told you that I'm working on the paper. Could you just STOP TEXTING ME!? (Others: [*Laugh*]) It's that sort of the thing, if they tell me, personally being the person that's on the other end of the phone they tell me, I just stop. So like the person who keeps texting, if you are like, "Hey, I'm with this person." It's usually the person on the other end should like, "Okay, what are you doing? Are you doing that? Okay, fine. I get it, I won't text." So it's kind of annoying, you need to be thoughtful for another person.

> Bettie: Yeah, technically… Um… Hypothetically if the person that on the other side is gonna ask that person, like, obviously it's gonna be like "Oh hey what's up?" And like ask them what they are doing, and if the person says, "Oh, I'm just hanging out with a bunch of friends right now, talking to them." Then, like what she said, the person should be considerate enough to be like, "Oh, okay, you can go and hang out with them." Like, "Pay attention to them instead of talking to me." If they just keep going on and it's not, maybe they don't really know what's going on or something like that. Maybe the person who's with the people is just like, pushing it, trying to talk to them, so it's not like… Honestly it depends, like how would I have any idea what he is texting about to this friend. A lot of people like to keep their text secret, sometimes even lie. "Oh, who are you talking to?" "Oh… my mom, my sister." You

know what I mean? Like, they are like ashamed of talking to someone else. I don't know, to be honest. Human nature. Just if it isn't a call for, you would really never know what's going on. Unless it's like, "Oh, who are you talking to?" "Oh, my boyfriend. He just did this thing." Then *maybe*. If that was in the scenario, maybe that person, they could talk about with that people while she was texting him, right? So I mean, honestly, it really does depend on what's going on. It could be pranking someone. Who knows? I guess it just depends on the situation.

Trudy: But if the person on the other end isn't told what they are doing, I mean, that would change the impression that, you know, they have no blame on them. If they are not told, "Okay, I have a couple of friends, blah blah blah." Or, you know, so.

Carolina: And there's blame on the person who didn't tell them. If they're the one who obviously, they don't feel that everybody else around them is not important enough so, just they just keep going at it. I don't know.

(…)

Sam: To the original question? It's really not their [Person C's] call. Cuz, I mean, you text someone to see what they're up to. If they don't tell you that they're actually doing something, or busy, you are not gonna know so you keep texting them. So until they tell you, "Hey I'm busy. I'm at the movie theatre" or something. You are not gonna stop texting them but if you do then, if they texting like they say "I'm at the movie theatre. I'm busy." And then you don't directly say, "Stop texting me." And if they'll keep texting you, that's rude. I mean, you should, I guess, like courtesy. (FG#3, D, 16-27)

The following excerpt comes from a group of nontraditional students, who emphasize the

locus of responsibility of the situation:

Ricardo: I have no assumptions about them [Person C]. I would, however, recommend the person *at* the lunch texting should ask them to come and meet us at lunch.

PI: So the first question was about your idea about the people in front of you, and the second one was about someone talking or texting with your friends.

Antonio: Yeah, I was just talking about the person in front of me. The person out there, I mean, I can only assume that they don't really know what the person at the lunch table is doing so. That's it.

PI: And did you say that it's your friend's job to tell them what's going on?

Ricardo: Yeah, that they are at lunch, and they either need to come over and meet us for lunch, or they'll text them later.

Antonio: Yeah. (FG#3, F, 12-17)

Another participant, Matthew, from a different group put this very clearly:

Mathew: I was gonna say, it's not their [Person C's] fault. If they don't know this guy is having a conversation with you or not. This guy [Person B] is who is responsible, not the guy who is texting. It doesn't matter. I don't have any, (Karina: No.) That would be different. (Matthew, FG#3, A, 21)

As expressed in such terms as "blame," "fault," "responsibility," and "courtesy" associated with Person B's texting behavior, the intervention of text-messages provokes such negotiation. As mentioned, participants often added other hypothetical elements to the situation, such as the degree of importance of the messages, the frequency of text-messages, and who the person sending messages is. Though the consistency with the original setting was not maintained as much as I would have intended, taking their re-construction into account is important in that I could observe such re-constructions with similar elements across all groups.

Cellphone use and identity-switching II. The newly reconstructed situations also provided insights into the ways participants would behave in order to fit different social roles they perform depending on the person(s) who send(s) a text-message. Such identity-switching became much clearer in the third scenario (i.e., Figure 2) where participants (i.e., Person A) become the ones to handle text-messages in the same situation. For instance, it is more acceptable to respond to a message either when it is from someone important—most often from parents, other family members, a boss, or a romantic

partner—or if the content is seemingly urgent or important. If a message is from a parent, then it is okay for them to prioritize that text-message conversation *as a child* rather than maintaining a conversation *as a friend* in a social group. The same is true for a boss because everyone understands that it is important to carry out the role of *an employee*. The key here is that they negotiate and switch their identities for different relationships to maintain a functioning self to avoid inappropriate behavior within two different social situations:

> PI: Okay. Is it okay for you to ignore text messages?
>
> Lonnie: It depends on the person [*Person C*] that's texting. If that's the person I'm interested in, I still want that person know that I'm interested in [*him or her*]. If that person is that, just a random friend, they can wait. It depends on who the person is text messaging me.
>
> Mathew: And depending on *what*. Like if I get the text message saying "What's homework?" you just reply back and come back. If they have a question or they wanna discuss something over texting, then I will text them let them know "I'm busy. And I'll talk on the phone later."
>
> PI: So you do read the text message and you decide…
>
> Lonnie: Sometimes reading text message tells you whether it's important. So you kinda get a feel of what they wanna talk about. If they want you to breeze, it's like, okay, I'll just talk to you later. If you get a text message from your girlfriend or parents, okay I have to take care of this. Or, end up forgetting about taking back to it. You get busy and you're not always in a comfortable position. This person doesn't know what kind of situation you are in when you are text messaging. You might be, I got annoyed to have text messages! [*Laugh*] So there's a guideline.
>
> Karina: Yeah, just friends with there, again, I guess, I would look at the text before I would decide to respond or not. If it doesn't, if it's not dire then I would definitely not text until after I was finished. But if it was something that they needed a response right away and I knew they needed a response right away, then I would say, "Excuse me." Real quick. Done. (FG#3, A, 99-104)

As these excerpts show, many participants hold relatively lenient attitudes toward their own as well as other's texting behaviors. Still, the attention to the roles they perform according to the sender of a message was emphasized throughout.

On the contrary, there was a consensus that a phone interaction would rarely be allowed in such a situation, and that they would have to make necessary adjustments to handle ongoing interactions (i.e., Scenario 2 and Scenario 3). Different from texting, almost all participants agreed that it is not acceptable or the right thing to do to answer a phone call while participating in a face-to-face conversation. Meanwhile, they emphasized that the attention to who the caller is remains a critical issue in determining the appopriateness of phone behaviors. For this, they expressed more specific strategies they would employ and expectations for others to follow to handle the two social situations. Answering a phone call without making any excuses is not acceptable. In an effort not to ignore anyone involved in the situations, it is rather expected to *acknowledge* the importance of the conversation going on, while excusing themselves before answering the call. The following two excerpts illustrate this strategy nicely:

> Ola: Well, there was a time in which I was with my friends and my mom called me and she wanted me to pick something up, something like that. So I was like "Oh, hold on. This is my mom." And I stepped out to a different area, just answered the phone, and come back. So like, "Who were you talking to?" "Oh, I'm sorry."

> Brent: Usually I do something like that, you know. If I have to take it, let them know. "Oh hey, it's a boss calling me I guess. I gotta take this." So they know *why* I have to take it at least. Then I usually excuse myself, go outside the room or whatever. And when I get back, "Sorry guys. I gotta take that." Make sure that they know that I'm not just doing that to ignore them but I had to do that for some kind of a rigid reason.

Joanna: Yeah. This past weekend I was at the dinner. And I was talking to my friends, and I was walking *in* on my phone. I had to use it cuz I had to give her directions. And like, you know, I was on the phone for a while cuz she got lost, and they [*her family members*] were getting mad, "Oh, so just can't you say hi to anybody when you come in?" So I just tried to tell them the situation and apologized. And when I get up the phone, talk to them, and whatever. I just tried to explain it. (FG#3, E, 136-138)

Carolina: I think I can usually do about ten things at the same time. But I think that it's, you *should* really have one real, the person you are with at a time. That is the person you need to give your time to because they are, it's like… They are giving you their time. They are there with you, giving you their time. You need to show, your time is valuable to me. I enjoy being with you, therefore I'm going not to have a conversation on the phone. You shouldn't ever put yourself in the situation where you do need to deal with multiple conversations going on at the same time.

Trudy: I think it would be difficult, though. I mean, you'd have to have a certain conversation going on here, and 75 % going on here. It's what's actually going on in a conversation so I guess I think anyone cannot manage 100%.

Bettie: If like, if you were to hold those two conversations, then honestly it depends, the relationship with the person on the phone. If it was my mom, yeah, obviously, I'm gonna take my time to talk to her. But I don't think the scenario calls for, like me being involved in this conversation with others as well, and like, that would never happen. Like he [*Tim, who just mentioned right before Carolina that he would answer a call from his father and that no one should question him for answering a call from his father*] said, he would step out of the room to take his dad's call. I would never put my mom in the situation, "Oh sorry. I was talking with someone else." She would kill me, like, "How rude are you?" That's what's she'd probably say. You know, you should…

Trudy: Oh, do you mind if I take this call? [*She received a phone call from her mother and left a room*]

Bettie: That's funny.

Others: [*Laugh*]

Sam: Example one.

Tim: Yeah the evidence of,

Carolina: She did it in a right way.

Bettie: Yeah. [*Laugh*] You shouldn't *have to* deal with two conversations and put yourself in the situation like that.

Sam: I guess it's basically the same thing I have to say. Like, if you are having a conversation with someone, and someone calls you that you need to talk to, you can tell them "Hey I need to talk to this person." If you don't think you need to answer, whenever you talk to that person. You shouldn't answer your phone cuz you are with whoever you are talking to. Engage with them. You shouldn't, I'm not trying to have another phone conversation.

[*Trudy returns*] (FG#3, E, 60-71)

Trudy's behavior was, though surprisingly coincidental, a great example of participants' perceptions about the situation. Acknowledging the importance of the ongoing face-to-face interactions and peripheral involvement, they engage in the discussed behaviors. They hold expectations that their friends (i.e., Person B) should understand the cellphone behavior in question because of the social role a participant (i.e., Person A) needs to play in that moment. This is why participants also expect their friends to do the same when they have to take a seemingly important phone call. Such strategies can well be explained with two sociological understandings: neutralization and accounting.

Neutralization and accounting. The recurring notion of appropriate cellphone behaviors with others' presence—of cellphone etiquette—indicates that it has become quite mundane or *normative* for even young people, like participants in this study, to consider and handle two social situations for their ideal self-presentation for all parties involved. An increased sense of politeness or considerations for others is often associated with a sign of

maturity and growth. Their responses introduced above suggest that they, as emerging adults, need to understand and follow the implicit social norms regarding cellphone use with others' presence. The violations of expectations can be regarded as deviance and hurts their functioning self. Even though many examples participants used for their discussion were hypothetical and varied from something personal to professional, the identity-switching tactic and acknowledging other people's peripheral involvement can be understood as a means for neutralization of the situation for the sake of their cellphone communication.

Such a tactic finds its bearing in Sykes and Matza's (1957) theoretical framework of techniques of neutralization employed by juvenile delinquents to justify their "untoward" behaviors that violate the law but can be acceptable and justifiable in their own eyes. "It is by learning these techniques that the juvenile becomes delinquent, rather than by learning moral imperatives, values or attitudes standing in direct contradiction to those of the dominant society," say Sykes and Matza (p. 667). Certainly, cellphone use in the aforementioned situations does not violate any law. However, participants who engage in cellphone interactions with others' physical presence acknowledge that their behaviors possibly act against the norms or expectations, if not against the law, mutually shared in a certain community or a culture. Yet, they manage to handle the situation by means of neutralization techniques that can be accepted by other social actors.

Neutralizations are achieved, or at least attempted, verbally by explaining the reasons and justifications for their action in question. In other words, people *account* for

their own behaviors, usually for the ones that are not considered socially acceptable or

appropriate. For the theoretical development and application of the techniques of

neutralization, Scott and Lyman (1968) define account as

> a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior –
> whether that behavior is his [or her] own or that of others, and whether the
> proximate cause of the statement arises from the actor himself [or herself] or from
> someone else. (p. 46)

Accounts appear as a form of talk, so a social actor who violates social norms or

expectations somewhat provides reasons for the action in question in an effort to bridge

gaps between them.

In light of these frameworks, participants' "accounts" or excuses regarding their

cellphone behaviors in question can also be regarded as a means for neutralization that

would help them save their face for different relationships they have to negotiate.

Importantly, these relationships exist in both a face-to-face social situation and a mediated

context owing to cellphones. Participants often emphasized the importance of "excusing

themselves" and how critical it is to be able to account properly in order to avoid causing

any conflicts in two social situations, as well as in two relationships. Though there were

several instances where participants actually received a phone call during focus groups or

interviews, all of them (except for one participant) excused him or herself and stepped out

of the room to answer the phone.

In addition to Trudy's case introduced above, there was another exemplary

instance where excuses and acknowledging (i.e., accounting) worked as neutralization

strategies. During the first two sets of focus groups, Ted received a call from his mother and

responded to these calls during the meeting, explaining how a call from his mother was the

only exception.

> [*Ted's phone rings and he said it was from his mother*]
>
> Ted: Hey, mom. I'm in the interview right now. (Others: [*Laugh*]) It's a communication interview, I need to go. Okay bye.
>
> Lakisha: Hi mom! [*Laugh*]
>
> Ted: My mom, this is the only reason I answered my phone. If it was anyone else I would have ignored it. [*Laugh*]
>
> PI: Why could you *not* ignore her?
>
> Ted: Because my mom, she freaks out. She's a worry wart. If I hadn't answered, she would have probably called six more times consecutively. (Others: [*Laugh*]) And then, four voice messages. And then, she'll end up being down there. As I walk there [*by pointing at a street through the window*] she would smack in my face.
>
> Others: [*Laugh*] (FG#1, B, 209-215)

He later in this meeting explained how much he owed her for her help in his high school

and called himself "a mother's boy." The same incident happened in the second focus group

meeting also, and Ted intentionally answered a phone in the room, knowing that everyone

would recognize his relationship with his mother by that time:

> [*Someone's phone vibrates*]
>
> Clyde: That's not me?
>
> Lakisha: Your mom? [*Laugh*]
>
> Ted: It is my mom! [*Laugh*] [*Ted answers his phone*] "Hello? Hey mama, can I call you back? I'm in the middle of something. (Others: [*Laugh*]) Alright I'll call you back in a little bit okay? ... Everything is fine. Don't worry. (Others: [*Laugh*]) I'm in the interview right now. (Others: [*Laugh*]) Okay, bye mom." [*Call ends*] She's

like, "Why everyone's laughing!?" [*Laugh*]

Others: [*Laugh*] (FG#2, B, 265-269)

In this example, he invites him mother's presence into a face-to-face situation deliberately, knowing that that would contribute to a positive atmosphere among group members who had developed a good understanding of him and his relationship with her. Other group members also accepted the mediated co-presence of his mother in the situation, pleasantly enjoying watching him playing a role of a "mother's boy."

Summary of research questions 1. The discussion thus far detailed how participants' ideas about appropriate cellphone usage inform their growing sense of functioning self in college transition. Narratives indicate that certain cellphone behaviors are closely associated with particular generations or social cohorts, in a much finer way than before. This in turn affects how participants evaluate certain cellphone behaviors depending on the life stages, or even ages, they live at. They are highly aware of what is considered appropriate as college students or emerging adults in terms of their media selection for different relationships and purposes. In this regard, the discussion about cellphone number exchange with professors showed their increasing attention to social statuses affecting their ideal self-presentation, while illustrating competing tensions between desires for becoming mature and hesitations for leaving their adolescence. This discussion focuses on how they think about such appropriateness in a college culture, namely, the cognitive aspect of the functioning self.

The discussion about the cellphone use with someone else's physical presence shows widely shared strategies employed by participants to keep the untoward cellphone behaviors from standing out depending on the interactants involved in person or/and via cellphones. It is important to emphasize that neutralization behaviors, such as excusing oneself or handling multiple interactions through accounting, have become (or come to be shared as) norms even among young people, including participants in the study at hand, for the sake of their relationship management and face work. What is critical here, however, is that these neutralization behaviors are no longer limited to their self-justification or self-defense. Their responses demonstrate their considerations and care for *others*, not only those in front of them in person but also someone involved either directly or peripherally by cellphones. Such functioning strategies represent their growth and maturity associated with their cellphone behaviors.

Implications for symbolic interactionism. The discussion about the functioning self developed for the first research question is closely related to the second research question about the implications of such negotiations for the symbolic interactionist understanding of the social situation. The second question asks: *What theoretical implications does the analysis of college students' cellphone communication in transition provide for the symbolic interactionist understandings of self and identity that have been traditionally developed upon conventional face-to-face interactions?*

The current study is unique in that it focuses on the dynamics among two social situations (as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2) where three individuals negotiate ongoing,

yet spontaneous, relationships via cellphones. The intervention of another relationship into the face-to-face context can be considered inappropriate or even rude by others unless handled or accounted for properly. This becomes more salient especially when one receives a phone call from someone. It is critical for a receiver of a message (i.e., either text-message or a phone call) to handle situations appropriately so as not to fail proper self-presentation for the both parties involved. This shows a good example of behavioral adjustments to become functioning in relation to their cellphone communication.

Participants' narratives and the discussion about the functioning self presented above well illustrate these dynamics. The current study found that participants engage in strategic identity-switching in order to properly manage their self as a functioning member and to become considerate of others in different social situations. Such efforts are not mutually exclusive but are closely tied together. Even peripheral involvement of other individuals affects the way participants manage tensions existing in these two social situations.

The discussion in Chapter Two about symbolic interactionism indicates that this theoretical framework has long been developed and refined based solely upon traditional, face-to-face interactions. Along with the changes in our communicative conduct with the help of ICTs, five studies exploring the different kinds of mediated situations with symbolic interactionism suggest the possibility and efficiency of the theoretical framework for communicative behaviors conducted in mediated contexts. Also, as the Thomas theorem indicates, our subjective interpretations and subsequent evaluation of the social situation

can reinforce our subjective reality, which might have significant impacts on our self and identity. The discussion developed here is a good contribution for this, suggesting that we now engage in more complicated human conduct in order to properly develop, maintain, and negotiate our sense of self and identity.

Summary of research questions 2. Owning to the frequent and various reconstructions of scenarios, the discussion about the theoretical implications drawn from the current study may not have been as powerful as I would have liked them to be. Still, the findings about identity-switching and the functioning self suggest that symbolic interactionism provides a useful scope for further exploring such intersecting social situations that cellphone communication creates. Detailing relationships involved and the nature of interactions might further provide specific strategies people employ for their self-presentation and face work. This should be further explored in future research.

Relational transition and cellphone communication. As illustrated, college transition involves various shifts ranging from institutional, to psychological, to relational. The discussion thus far details how college transition (i.e., institutional transition) is linked with a sense of independence, growth, and emerging adulthood (i.e., psychological transition), which also affects the ways participants think about appropriate cellphone usage and behaviors as a functioning member of a new collegiate culture. College is like a crucible of relational dynamics, and the third research question attempts to understand the role cellphone communication plays within participants' relational transition: *How do*

cellphones impact family and friend relationships of first-year students during their college transition?

Participants' relational transition is critical in that this is one of the first steps they need to make to find support for their everyday life, as well as for their academic success. Meanwhile, they start negotiating how they situate themselves within a network of social ties that carry varying degrees of history and psychological attachment. For some, college transition is a relatively painful experience in that they are forced to leave relationships that share a long, memorable history, and to dive into a new community in which they barely have foundations for social support. For others, however, it is like an emancipation from the relational constraints and privation of freedom deeply rooted in their high school life, or in adolescence. In addition to parental supervision that governs their pre-college life, peer groups in high school often dictate students' life, owing to the limited choice for social circles they maintain—even with reluctance or by constraint. For instance, clarifying his journal response that he was becoming *more of himself* in college, Ted explained the way he viewed the differences between high school and college:

> Oh yeah, because, you know, it's not high school anymore. I'm trying to, as much as I hate to say, you know, in a high school you tried to fit a social, you tried to follow social norms, right? In college, you don't really have to do that anymore because you are on your own. You have a new page, just go whichever you like. And um, I feel the way I started college, I presented myself in my most pure way. So, the people that are around me or I attracted to be my friends were attracted to me for *me*, not for some front door somewhere I was trying to act to, to be a part of a social clique or whatever. So that's why I said that, it makes me feel good because I know they like me for who I am. (Ted, Individual, 108)

As Arnett (2004) notes, a characteristic of emerging adulthood is the exploration of new identities, and participants often regard college transition as a place for gaining more choices and possibilities for their social life, as well as for their self-presentation. Likewise, Brent recalled that his college transition was like "a freeing experience" where he could *be himself* more because he would meet people who would have little information about him. Alisa expressed her excitement at being freed from "cliques" that governed social dynamics in high school:

> Yeah. I was a lot less social in high school. I really didn't have as much friends as I do now. It goes pretty much, my two or three friends back in school, cuz there were always like, *cliques* back in school. Like there's jerks, pretty girls. I was in more so *a smart girl group*. So I really didn't have to meet new friends cuz I was like the nerd, and geek group, stuff like that. (…) I mean, and I met a lot people here. Like I've met *a lot of* people here. And it's not any *cliques*. I mean, like, mostly they are a lot more *adults* here. And it's not like young cliques back in high school, so I'm a lot more social now than I was back in high school. (Alisa, Individual, 90)

Alisa continued by saying that it was not allowed for her in high school as "a smart girl" to act like "a class clown" who would be able to casually ask for someone else's cellphone number. College transition gives her more freedom, without worrying about the labels inscribed on her like in high school. Similarly, Kelly emphasized that the friends he made in college were "real people" who would not be there simply for face value. Claiming that he no longer maintains any high school relationships in college, Kelly described his relational transition as follows:

> Just like, senior year, like, I don't know. In high school, I hung out with people I shouldn't have, people that made stupid decisions. But I mean I've learned from that. And it's not like high school in college. High school, you have a certain amount of people you *have to* hang out with, you have to see everyday. And there's not much choice. In college, you can hang out with whoever you want. Through that, I mainly

> also used a cellphone more to this, hang out with and find out what people we like or people we don't like. I'm naturally a more social person. I'm always with people, always socializing. (Kelly, Individual, 148)

Many participants still maintained their high school friendships after entering college. Still, in conjunction with college transition, those who had had difficulties getting along with high school peer groups became entitled to "sift" through their old relationships, while developing new ones in college. Thus, successful relational transition is another critical aspect of the functioning, surviving self in college.

As discussed in Chapter One concerning the contextuality of the current study, participants in this study had utilized their cellphones since pre-college, and this allowed them to have a certain degree of experiences with cellphone communication by the time of their college enrollment (though these experiences significantly varied from participant to participant). Some participants carried over their pre-college relationships into college life with the help of cellphones and other ICTs, while facing challenges in maintaining and balancing previous social ties with newly developed social ties. In what follows, I will identify two primary realms of participants' relational transition: friendships and communication with parents, and discuss how varying degrees of closeness with these people affect their relational transition. I call such closeness *the vicinity of friendships* and *the vicinity of parenting*. This is not to disregard the implications of romantic relationships some participants engaged in during their first-year experience. However, because of the fact that not all participants engaged in a form of romantic relationship, the following discussion focuses on these two specific aspects.

Vicinity of friendships. Obtaining membership from the other members of a collegiate community and achieving successful integration into a new environment is a key for successful college transition. Relational transition in friendships is a critical challenge participants have to cope with during this process. Narratives suggest that many of them successfully developed a new social network with those who they met on campus and somewhat managed to balance old and new ties.

Still, participants' residential status plays an important role in this regard. On the one hand, most of the students living in on-campus residential halls said that their living situation made it easier for them to foster new relationships in the first-year experience. Knowing that living on campus would provide them with the authentic "college experience," it was their choice to live on campus—and some even argued with parents for it. Along with the freeing experience mentioned above, their experiences involved both excitement for meeting a whole diverse group of people and a sense of struggle in balancing the expanded social networks. Living with someone else in a dorm often provokes problems, and some participants (mostly females) actually had to go through hardships to handle the roommate situation. Overall, however, they recalled at the end of the study that their on-campus residential experiences indeed helped them foster new friendships that in turn made them feel assured in a new environment.

On the other hand, experiences of commuter students varied significantly. Although participants' residential status is indeed one of the important aspects in this regard, especially for traditional students, narratives suggest that it was not the only determining

factor for successful relational transition. This provides insights into the unique dynamics of relational transition for participants in this study, and it is my contention that it rather depends on *the vicinity of friendships* that affects two relational aspects of the functioning self.

The idea of the vicinity of friendships refers to (1) the degree of physical closeness, and (2) the degree of communicative closeness with friends the participants maintain, both pre-college friendships and newly developed college friendships. As for pre-college friendships, some students are lucky enough to continue to attend the same school with the same friends, which significantly makes their relational transition smooth and easy. In this case, their continuing social ties remain physically and geographically close, which satisfies the first aspect of the vicinity of friendships. Contrarily, it becomes quite challenging for others to maintain the same degree of physical closeness after moving out from a hometown and living both geographically and physically away from old ties. Regardless of the amount of geographical distance between them, cellphone communication and other forms of online interaction bridge the gap to some extent by maintaining a line of communication. This, however, does not necessarily compensate for a lack of the second aspect—communicative closeness—once they start living with different schedules and friends at their own school. Due to the different social groups they newly develop in college and to corresponding changes in the pace or schedule of everyday life, it becomes harder to share the same topical or relational bases for small talk, which keeps them from maintaining communicative closeness in their friendships.

For instance, Sam, who lived off campus at his grandmother's house, recalled the first semester of his college experience and expressed his frustration for not having been able to develop sufficient social ties on campus and to maintain the same degree of closeness with pre-college friends:

> Sam: Yeah, which is why I feel kinda missed out on it. Because I didn't really, like, I talked to people in classes and stuff. But I mean it's hard to, once you leave classes, everyone is, kind of splits off into their own directions. So, I don't know. It's kinda hard to meet new people. Like I said, in the dorm, you're kinda forced to, like, maybe not really being forced to, but I mean, it's, I *would*. If I was in the dorm, I would talk to people around me. Just like, meet friends, and stuff like that. Like after class, people go to different ways. Some people, I don't know, feel like going somewhere else. I don't know.
>
> (...)
>
> Sam: Cuz there are people that I wanna talk to outside of classroom, but like, you just wouldn't because they had their class after or, they just left different time or they just left before you left or something. I don't know. For any reasons. It was more frustrating at first than later on. It's like "Alright. Well this is how it's gonna be until I live here." Or something like that. So it's kinda accepted. [*Laugh*]
>
> PI: Was that frustrating or sad, or did you feel lonely?
>
> Sam: Um, I'd say it was more frustrating. Cuz I mean, I still have friends from high school I would talk to and hang out with. It was just like, *I wanna meet people from college*. Like, *college friends*. Cuz I'd feel some of my high school friends, they'd talk about like their college friends and stuff, cuz they all, like I said, five of them go to [another university], so I mean, they see each other at school and talk to each other at school. I'm like, "Ha! It's lame. That's what I want, too." (Sam, Individual, 224-232)

Since Sam did not participate in any organizations or clubs that would have provided him with reasons for staying (not necessarily *living*) on campus for long enough to hang out with new friends, it was quite difficult for him to have the college experience he had imagined. Sam in fact made some new friends on campus. Yet, it was not as strong and

close as he wanted them to be. Interestingly, another commuter student, Tim, did not make many college friends, either, not because of the hardships like Sam experienced but because he had a number of high school friends who also attended the same school. Tim recalled that this kept him from being "by himself" and having more chances to talk to new people. Another factor, carpooling, also significantly limited his social life with college friends. Still, Tim's situation may not be as challenging as Sam's since he always had friends around to hang out with on campus.

In Sam's case, neither his college life nor hometown provided him with the vicinity of friendships. His high school friends were physically away and had different schedules. As his narrative suggests, he could maintain only ad hoc college friends in classes, which did not provide sufficient foundation for the communicative closeness. Though he mentioned that cellphone communication was utilized to maintain ties with high school friends and that they held occasional gatherings, a lack of physical and communicative closeness made it quite difficult for him to reach the satisfaction point of college experience. In Tim's case, however, the vicinity of friendships was maintained with the continuing friendships with those who also attended the same school, and with almost the same schedule, both inside and outside the realm of his college life. Though neither Sam nor Tim made many new friends on campus, the overall evaluation of their relational transition differs significantly because of the vicinity of friendships they established.

Comparatively, other commuter students had a quite different experience, primarily because of their affiliation with campus-based organizations. Joining a forensics

team, Carolina said that she was always on campus, preparing for the tournament and hanging out with teammates. Even though she commuted throughout the first-year due to monetary reasons, she said that her home was just a place to sleep and that it was quite easy for her to spare time for socialization with new friends on campus. Especially graduating from a small high school (with 17 graduates she had known for almost her entire life, which made her feel reluctant to maintain ties with them after graduation) and becoming a member of a forensics team, the vicinity of friendships in Carolina's case was sufficiently established on campus. The communicative closeness with new friends was also quite manageable for her in that she was always with teammates/friends who followed almost the same schedule as hers. Carolina's case exemplifies the interactive relationship between physical and communicative closeness with new friends on campus.

Coming from another state, Joanna mentioned that joining an organization at college helped her connect with new friends on campus, while efficiently maintaining old ties via cellphone and other online interactions. Also, the majority of her new friends happened to be commuters, which helped her maintain the vicinity of friendships quite successfully both inside and outside the college context. Looking through the scope of the vicinity of friendships, Bettie's relational transition turned out to be the most successful, or the *richest*, among commuter students. Not only did she belong to various organizations on campus and made a lot of new college friends she often hung out with, but she also had several students from her high school who had already attended the same school—some a year earlier and some the same year as she. She had utilized her cellphone to establish

connections with these students before and during college transition and always stayed in the flow of these relationships. Bettie had various kinds of sources to establish the vicinity of friendships no matter if she was on campus or in her hometown, making her relational transition quite manageable.

The implications of the vicinity of friendships also apply to on-campus students' relational transition. Those who had to geographically leave their high school friendships struggled at first with balancing their expanded relational ties. It was also challenging for them to deal with the communicative closeness with pre-college friends owing to different schedules. Yet, with having new friends readily available in their everyday life on campus, as well as in the same residential hall, the vicinity of friendships remained highly manageable for them. Similar to Tim, some of them were fortunate to have continuing friends from high school, allowing them to maintain the higher degree of the vicinity of friendships.

The idea of the vicinity of friendships is helpful in understanding the relational transition associated with college transition. Looking at the dynamics of relational transition through a dichotomy between *high school friends* and *college friends* may not suffice to understand the diversity of college transition and students' survival. This also becomes highly important in today's context in that almost all participants in this study utilized cellphones and other ICTs for relation development and maintenance in college transition. Their cellphone number, along with their school email address and Facebook account, were relatively casually exchanged through the course of the first year. On the one

hand, this helps them develop some ad hoc connections with a wide variety of people in a new collegiate environment. Also, having pre-college friends' numbers registered in a cellphone allows them to have something tangible that leads to their old, historically established relationships. On the other hand, instead of facing a complete separation from old ties, participants in this study experienced more gradual, peripherally ongoing relational tensions existing in multiple locations due partially to cellphone communication. When the individual interviews were conducted at the end of their first year, many of them, both on-campus and commuter students, looked forward to the reunion with high school friends during the summer break, while feeling somewhat confused with feelings of being (tentatively) away from newly developed friendships.

Vicinity of parenting. Another important aspect of relational transition is concerned with participants' parents. Participants regard cellphones, along with other forms of online communication such as email, Skype, and Facebook, as a key means for staying in touch with their parents in college transition, and so do parents. Given the fact that the primary reason for obtaining (or being given) their first cellphone pre-college was for communicating with parents, it is quite natural for them to maintain this line of connection during college transition. The media selection for family communication depends primarily on how media literate parents are, and it seems like cellphone communication, especially calling, was perceived as the easiest means for this particular purpose.

Accepting shifts in the patterns of communication and the increased mediated communication with her family members, Janette eloquently describes these changes as an emerging adult:

> (…) I have come to accept and feel comfortable with these changes in communication that are part of the college experience and becoming a fully independent and functioning adult. These changes in communication are important because they are good preparation for life post-grad. (Janette, Journal#3, p. 4)

Further, departing from the parental supervision provides participants with a greater sense of independence and substantiates their emerging adulthood. This, however, may not necessarily prove their actual independence from their parents, but rather affects the way participants think about themselves as an emerging adult and their functioning self. Not only do participants negotiate the vicinity of friendships for one aspect of successful transition, but balancing relational as well as psychological closeness with their parents during college transition is also highly influential for their functioning self. This may well be referred to as *the vicinity of parenting*, which has significant implications on the interplay of varying degrees of dependence, independence, and interdependence between parents and participants. Importantly, this idea is not solely parents-led, but is more descriptive of interaction between participants and their parents.

Similar to the vicinity of friendships, the idea of the vicinity of parenting also addresses two realms of closeness among them: 1) One is relational, and 2) the other is psychological, whose dynamics have significant implications for participants' functioning self and independence. Relational closeness refers to the degree of physical closeness; namely, whether or not participants live with (or very close to) or away from their parents.

This may sound quite similar to the idea of the physical closeness as appeared in friendships—and the phenomenon, the degree of physical closeness, is the same. However, the ways the phenomenon plays out in the different relationships may not have the same meaning since a parental relationship is very less likely to exist in two physical locations as friendships do; hence, the term *relational* is employed instead. A lack of the relational closeness does not necessarily mean an unhealthy family relationship. Rather, the term "relational" emphasizes how participants' residential status does or does not allow frequent face-to-face interaction with and direct support from parents. Again, this is not one-sided, but provides a means for assurance for parents also. Psychological closeness refers to how much interference of parenting is negotiated between participants and their parents in the course of college transition. The following examples detail the idea of the vicinity of parenting in conjunction with their relational transition.

For those who lived on campus, the degree of relational closeness is certainly limited owing to the physical separation from parents, and they emphasized that living away from parents (or living by themselves) was a legitimate reason to claim their growing independence. However, when the psychological closeness is taken into account, the idea of independence seems to become more multi-faceted. For instance, Karina, whose mother strongly opposed her living on campus because of safety concerns, explained how she negotiated the opportunity to live away from her parents in exchange for becoming financially responsible for her own housing; this augmented her independence and functioning self. Though she engaged in sufficient family communication via cellphone

during the first year, she limited her visits to parents, which resulted in both limited relational and psychological closeness to them. Importantly, this is not to say that her relationship with family became estranged, but shows how she handled her relational transition with her parents, while appreciating her independence and managing the vicinity of parenting effectively.

For another instance, Ted (who explained the reasons why he would consider himself "a mother's boy" and accepted his close emotional attachment with her in narratives introduced above in page 150) maintained strong psychological closeness to his parents, especially to his mother. Claiming that his college transition was also a transition for his entire family, he described how his mother continued engaging in regular checkups with him via cellphone at least twice a day, everyday, throughout the whole first year of his college experience. Though his case is highly parent-led, he also accepted her continuing, mediated supervision, without letting it dilute a sense of his functioning self.

Comparatively, those who commuted from their home relatively easily maintained the relational closeness, allowing them to continue daily face-to-face engagement with their parents. In order to effectively manage relational transition, however, they needed to handle the vicinity of parenting by managing psychological closeness in particular. Carolina's and Bettie's examples provide good illustrations in this regard. Both of them were quite active in participating in on-campus activities, as well as in socialization with other peers, and made a nice college transition by balancing both their academic and social lives. In Carolina's case, she handled her growing independence by establishing sufficient distance

from her parents, including being financially responsible for almost all expenses besides

housing and a phone bill. Also, she said that she managed to deal with the psychological

closeness to her mother who had a hard time accepting her daughter's transition:

> Carolina: And parents. My parents are like, "We don't want you to go yet." I'm like, "LET ME GO PELEASE! LET ME GO!" "NOOOOO!" "Yes, I'm…"

> PI: So what are you gonna do in the Fall?

> Carolina: Um, I'm looking for apartments right now.

> PI: Okay.

> (…)

> Carolina: Yeah, my mom, I think it's more of, my dad's like, "I don't care." My dad's gonna be like, "Whatever. You're an adult now. Go ahead." But my mom's gonna like, "No." I did a lot for them. I stayed a lot for them cuz I was ready to move out. I was ready to move out in the last fall. Like, I was ready to go. Obviously apartments on here are more expensive because they know the students are coming in, and they assume that their parents are paying for it. So, they can charge you through them.

> PI: Yeah. They *do* know that. [*Laugh*]

> Carolina: [*Laugh*] Yeah. So that's one thing. That's probably the only thing that's been keeping me back as the fact that I've got enough of financial base. Because I picked up a new job so that's gonna be helping. But like, financial base to be able to move out on my own, that's pretty much it. Cuz I've been like preparing my mom, "You know. I'm moving out! You know, I'm moving out, right? You know!? You know, it's coming!" Just kinda over and over, kind of reinforcing it, as the fact that I'm gonna be gone next year whether or not you want me to, I'm gonna be gone next year, so she's become a little bit more accepting of it.

> PI: But still?

> Carolina: But still she's like, "I don't want you to go…" I was like, I'M NEVER BE HOME AS IT IS, because I'm down here all the time, or at elsewhere. So, it's like, I don't understand. I was like, you don't understand because I don't care who

you are fabulously getting along with parents. You're gonna fight with parents, you know. And you just get along better when you're NOT living at home, or you are NOT home a lot, because you don't have as much as your parents mug you out. So, I've noticed that I've been able to, since I've been on campus, I'm getting college more, because I'm home just to sleep. THAT'S IT. That's all about it. I'm sorry. But that's like where I sleep, it's just home. (Carolina, Individual, 132-144)

The way Carolina managed to make her mother ready for the anticipated detachment of her daughter symbolizes her strategic negotiation of the vicinity of parenting while staying at home. In her case, her cellphone works as a tool to provide immediate and constant updates, such as her whereabouts for her family members so as not to provoke unnecessary anxieties among them.

Bettie also had a similar experience. Knowing that her family felt somewhat reluctant to let her leave home, her narrative indicates that she was trying to prove her functioning self to her parents by managing the psychological closeness and acknowledging her own responsibility as an emerging adult:

Yes, I actually do [feel obtaining more freedom even living with parents]. Um, my dad, my parents have even told me that they're like, cuz I asked them, "Oh, can my friends come over?" And they're like, "You don't need to ask. You're almost 19." Like it's not that big of a deal any more. If I need to go somewhere, if I need to run for errands, I don't have to tell. Well, I'll TELL them but I don't have to ASK. Like, it's more of just like a responsibility. I have to take my responsibility for myself. If I have many things that I have to turn in, I have to turn in on time, like deadlines. Especially with financial aid bills and everything. It's my responsibility to let MY FATHER KNOW that he has to sign this. You know. It's not HIS job to go search for what I haven't done. You Know. So instead of him doing everything for me, I do it. You know. I'll get the paperwork ready and everything. Like, um, I give it to him and I'll drop it off the office, you know. So it's really, they don't baby me any more. Like, I remember, especially my senior year, I really think they were getting used to the idea of like, I didn't know I was gonna come to [university]. Like, I initially thought I was gonna go to [another university] so they thought I was leaving. Like, my mom would always, you know, she was really clinging. And she was trying to hold on to the fact I was, you know, hold on to me while I was still at home. But then,

they found out that I wasn't ready to go away. So I mean, they dealt with it. And they'd given me that freedom and, they still don't want me to move away. But eventually I will. Like maybe, next year. Like my dad's talking about buying a house down here, fixing it up or something. So, the apartment, or whatever. But. You know. So they're *slowly*, they've been able to deal with the fact that I'm going to leave. (…) (Bettie, Individual, 28)

Throughout her other narratives, Bettie's cellphone use with family members also demonstrates her strong awareness of her growing independence and sense of responsibility. Though she no longer needs to get permission from her parents for her actions, she takes the initiative to inform them of her schedule, rather than letting her parents interfere with her everyday life as they used to do pre-college.

Even with the higher degree of relational closeness maintained through staying in her parents' home, Carolina's and Bettie's examples indicate how they strategically handle the situation in order to maintain a degree of psychological distance from their parents. This in turn helps parents (primarily the mother) get ready for managing the vicinity of parenting from their side. Ted's case also illustrates how he strategically managed frequent—somewhat intense—interference of his mother's parenting so as not to harm their familial transition along with his personal transition. The vicinity of parenting thus shows the interplay between maintenance of mutual dependence and attempts for co-independence. Cellphone communication creates unique dynamics in this regard. Whether maintaining such a line of perpetual contact works positively for facilitating independence goes beyond the scope of the current study. Still, as shown in the discussion about neutralization and accounting, participants are aware of the constant intervention of continuing parental supervision via cellphone in various situations of their college life that would have barely

occurred before the popularization of cellphones in society. Thus, participants in this study strategically managed the vicinity of parenting in today's context in order to present themselves as functioning members of a collegiate culture.

> ***Vicinity constructs***. The examples of these varying degrees of the vicinity of friendships and the vicinity of parenting are highly helpful in understanding participants' evaluation of their relational transition. Considering such vicinity as constructs with degrees that play a significant role in transition would provide new insights into the dynamics of students' personal relationships. For example, as to the vicinity of friendships, Sam's transition was not as productive as he would have expected it to be because he experienced both *lower* physical and *lower* communicative vicinity of friendships. Comparatively, Tim, Carolina, and Joanna seemed to have experienced *higher* physical and *higher* communicative vicinity even though they were all commuter students in their first year. When accompanied with the higher degrees of vicinity, their relational transition in friendships seems to have a positive end result. For the vicinity of parenting, though Karina, Carolina, and Bettie all had *higher* relational vicinity because they lived at home with parents, they effectively maintained *lower* psychological vicinity. The importance of the degree of psychological closeness in evaluation of their relational transition with parents, as well as of their functioning self became evident in Tim's case, who lived away from parents, which provided the *lower* relational vicinity, but maintained quite *higher* psychological vicinity.

Quite obviously, these varying degrees always exist relative to one another. It is also important to note that the evaluation of their successful relational transition changes during the first-year experience. Many students revealed how they became gradually adjusted to their relational transition from the first semester and the second semester of college. The idea of the vicinity constructs thus provides perspectives through which we can better understand such shifting relational tensions in the first-year experience.

Summary of research question 3. The discussion concerning participants' relational transition provides critical implications for college transition, which should also add new insights into the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter Two. The discussion presented here suggested a more critical approach to the conventional understandings of relational aspects of college transition that rely heavily on the dichotomy of high school friends and college friends. Negotiating peripherally ongoing relational tensions existing in multiple locations through cellphone communication during college transition show a quite different picture of college transition in today's context. The ideas of the vicinity of friendships and parenting are quite helpful in dissecting participants' more nuanced relational transition. Experiencing and managing different kinds of vicinity with different individuals involve constant negotiations of interpersonal relationships, and communication plays a critical role in this regard. More importantly, varying degrees of relational transition are highly influential for how participants foster a sense of functioning self in a collegiate culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has illustrated the implications of first-year college students' cellphone communication on their perceptions toward their functioning self and identity, as well as on the dynamics of two primary shifting relationships in college transition. Considering the limited number of cellphone communication studies addressing the subject at hand in the American context, the discussion presented here certainly contributes to the more nuanced understandings of this unique communicative conduct with cellphones during one critical rite of passage young people go through in today's society. The following will reflect upon the current study by presenting the summary of findings that contribute to the related literature and presenting four limitations that would provide significant directions for future research on this important issue. Finally, the final researcher's notes for the entire study are provided.

Summary of Findings and Contributions

First, as forcefully claimed by Thurlow (2005) that any research on young people needs to follow the principle of advocacy, the current study attempted to make the participants' voices enacted through an ethnographically-oriented approach. Although the primary focus of the current study was not to assess their actual communication competence (which tends to be questioned by the mainstream in relation to their communication technology use), the discussion about the functioning self and students' competing desires for growing maturity and becoming emerging adults well illustrated their

keen attention to their avowed appropriate communication behaviors with cellphones, as well as to different relationships involved in college transition. It is clear through the discussion of the functioning self that they are aware of the meanings of cellphone communication in their successful college transition. The discussion concerning the relationship between young people and communication technology would thus benefit from listening closely to their voices, rather than imposing the monolithic view toward the phenomenon.

Second, the current study provided significant implications of cellphone communication on students' relational transition in conjunction with their college transition in today's context. As suggested in the literature, communication technology has changed the dynamics of the current college transition by providing different means for relationship development and maintenance, as well as for their academic and professional pursuit. Transition today does not necessarily take a conventional, linear path, where students move from one place, or one relationship, to another. But every stage of transition overlaps each other because they continue to manage recursive tensions of separation and integration, of existing relational ties and newly developing social networks, and of dependence and independence.

The concepts of the vicinity of friendships and the vicinity of parenting have provided an effective scope through which we can further explore the highly nuanced implications of relational transition in college transition. As to friendships, for instance, cellphone communication helps students stay connected with anyone they wish to maintain

relationships with even after geographical separation. It also helps them facilitate their social networking in a collegiate environment. But this does not necessarily guarantee their successful relational transition since the degree of satisfaction varies depending on how well they achieve the communicative closeness in conjunction with the physical/geographical closeness. Similarly, the idea of the vicinity of parenting suggests competing desires both students and parents hold in transition. Related to the discussion of electric tethering (Hofer, 2008), the degree of psychological closeness is highly influential for college transition no matter how much relational closeness students maintain with their parents, and this dissertation illustrated the implications of cellphone communication in this regard. Considering the importance of students' relational transition, Tinto's (1996) theory of transition would benefit from such a discussion in that current communication technology not only impacts students' relationships but also affects their academic success in college, which may have significant influences on students' retention the theory primarily explores.

Third, the concept of the emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) would be further developed through the examination of young people's perceptions about and use of cellphones and other communication technology. Narratives showed that students came to hold quite generationally-specific perceptions about the appropriate technology use. They often associate certain cellphone behaviors with specific age-groups, or with social statues, which in turn become the basis of their evaluations of the others, as well as of themselves as functioning adults. Since the concept of emerging adulthood is a critical aspect to be

further explored in conjunction with the first-year college experience research, this dissertation has provided important insights into the interplay of transitional growth, college transition, and students' technology use.

Fourth, the applied symbolic interactionism approach the current study employed has illustrated participants' strategic identity-switching in order to maintain their functioning self, while carrying out cellphone communication with others' physical presence. The idea of the functioning self suggests that students are highly aware of the peripheral involvement of the "Others" that cellphone communication provokes, which results in more active negotiations of their "proper" self-presentation to all parties involved in "two" (or more) social situations. Symbolic interactionism is a powerful and effective framework in exploring how human beings understand themselves in relation to the other individuals. However, as illustrated in this dissertation, cellphone communication creates social situations that call for the reconfiguration of this theoretical framework because the boundaries of human communicative conduct in today's context are no longer delimited by such a conventional label as "face-to-face," which the symbolic interactionism tradition has historically embraced.

Following the precedent theoretical applications conducted by both Zhao (2005) suggesting the idea of the tele-presence of the others through cellphones and Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) who claim that young people's communication style has been diversified with the help of cellphones, the theme identified in this dissertation is a great contribution to the development of this theoretical application. Since the time when Goffman expressed

his strong skepticism about the possibility of self-presentation and impression management in the mediated contexts, it is clear that we have now come to live in the society where human communication occurs at varying, yet quite significant levels. Although this study primarily focused on cellphone interactions, especially on phone calls with other's presence, the findings of the current study would work as an important stepping stone for further exploring other forms of cellphone communication such as cellphone-online interactions in different relational situations.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

While the current study has made highly significant contributions for the issue at hand, there are four limitations that would have prevented further exploration of this inquiry. Identifying and presenting these limitations would provide directions for future research on this critical issue. First, the current study employed an ethnographically-oriented qualitative mixed-methods approach instead of conducting a traditional ethnography of the issue at hand. Through this applied approach, I discussed how participants narrated or reported their ideas about cellphone communication, rather than observing their actual cellphone behaviors in situ during their first year college experience. The virtue of ethnography is to learn from cultural members about the issue that might not have yet been understood and considered critical by the ethnographer. Having occasional conversations or cellphone interactions with participants in the course of data collection helped me as the PI better know them as well as their cellphone behaviors to some extent. There were also several occasions where participants indeed engaged in the discussed cellphone behaviors during

meetings. This, however, is different from actually observing such behaviors through participating in their everyday life. Nevertheless, this ethnographic study showed a contour of the themes identified, and provided foundations for the future research. Understandings of cellphone use—and technology, in general—may be augmented through more of a traditional ethnographic approach that includes methods such as participant-observation.

Second, though the discussion about their relational transition, including the vicinity of friendships and the vicinity of parenting, is helpful in further fostering our understandings of college transition in today's context, I had to redirect my approach to this aspect in the midst of the study. I was originally trying to understand how their cellphone use would affect their identities and a sense of self in relationships with others. As I got further into the study, however, I realized that their cellphone use contributed more to the ways they evaluated their relational transition in college transition than to their shifting selves and identities. Since this was a theme emerging from the participants in the study, I as a researcher decided to follow this theme in keeping with an ethnographic, emic approach. This can be further explored in future research by focusing specifically on the relational transition and its implications on self and identity in college transition.

Also, the inquiry concerning human relationships and interpersonal communication in varying contexts has its long, rich history in academia. Such a discussion about the concepts of the vicinity of friendships and the vicinity of parenting would benefit from their scholarly frameworks, which the current study could have employed in a greater degree. For instance, though these two aspects of relational transition highly affect students'

relationships, students might take quite different relational strategies between their friends and parents. Also, the implications of interactions with a romantic partner should be highly significant. The inquiry concerning closeness or distance in relationships (e.g., Ben-Ari, 2012; Hess, 2002; Lavi & Ben-Ari, 2007) and how we embrace the notion of the presence of others has also become critical after the popularization of communication technology. The discussion about identity-switching in handling multiple interpersonal relationships through cellphone communication fits well with the scope of these scholarly frameworks. These areas can be explored in the future research further in order to understand relational communication in today's context.

Third, the pursuit for generalizations is not the goal of this study; however, the demographics of participants can benefit from diversification. An attempt to ensure a higher retention rate cost me a lack of diversity and consistency in the participants' demographics, such as the gender ratio, their pre-college cellphone experiences, phone carriers, and the service they subscribed to for their cellphone. For instance, there are certain phone carriers that provide more reliable connections at the college site, which affected their evaluation of their and others' cellphone service. Also, some carriers offer certain devices such as an iPhone (Apple Inc.), a highly popular, cutting-edge item of the time among college students, whereas others offer something relatively cheap that might be chosen according to students' economic status. Thus, the selection of service providers might have had significant implications on the way they think about themselves as cellphone users.

Related to the issue of diversification, some on-campus students developed very

close ties with those who lived in the same residential halls and also participated in this study. On the one hand, this was helpful for me during focus groups to make the situation comfortable for everyone to share their ideas with peers. On the other hand, there were a number of instances where our discussion got sidetracked, primarily because of in-group talks such as pranking each other or making fun of other participants, which prevented the flow of our group discussion on the table. This may have hindered obtaining more consistent or sufficient amount of responses from all participants, and having more diversification might have minimized this problem.

Fourth, a one-year-long research timetable was sufficient to collect substantial data and afforded plenty of time for building and maintaining rapport with participants. Still, a longer pursuit of the identified themes would provide more fruitful insights into their college transition and cellphone communication. For instance, as to journal entries kept in the first semester, many participants could explicate their ideas better in the individual interviews conducted at the end of the first year in college. In other words, their journal entries eventually became situated within the horizon of their larger narrative about their first-year college experience, properly tying chronological connections between their past, present, and future. Similarly, there were instances where participants had a hard time putting their thoughts or feelings into words, and recalled and clarified it in detail later. So, their first year experience also might be better reflected once they move towards the end of their academic pursuit at college. This also speaks to the importance of becoming sensitive to the use of words such as "change" in this type of inquiry. I often observed varying

degrees of reactions from *resistance* to *fear* among participants for using this term in their narratives. It seemed that they regarded the use of this term as "losing" their current self or identity and accepting transformation into something unknown. Considering the sensitive nature of emerging adulthood and the instability these emerging adults live with, it is worth paying keener attention to such a term in future research.

Researcher's Final Notes

As revealed in the researcher's reflections presented in Chapter Four, working closely with first year students was both exciting and quite challenging for me as a novice researcher. This was especially true given the ethics of ethnographic study. Similar to the ways the participants negotiated the vicinity of friendships and parenting in my discussion about *their* relational transition, I also had to negotiate "closeness" with participants during the course of data collection. I found this to be enormously difficult. In addition, my perceptions about my own demographics often became a source of confusion. There were many instances where my mind wondered "Are they acting in this way because of *me*?" or "Are they not following the directions because my explanations were not clear enough (English-wise)?"

Indeed, employing an ethnographic approach is plunging into others' lives. Even with sufficient amount of training for ethnographic inquiry prior to this study, it was a reaffirming experience for me that working with participants (i.e., other *people*) cannot escape the dynamics of human relationships, and that becoming a part of their rite of passage inevitably involves varied degrees of intrusions and interventions. Such an inquiry

is highly emotional and personal, and becoming determined to make oneself as a researcher also vulnerable is an inextricable part of this type of academic pursuit. As an ethnographic work, the discussion drawn from this study may benefit from further investigation. However, the acknowledgment of the limitations discussed above does not necessarily degrade the findings and themes identified in the current study. The implications suggested here should work as a guiding light for future inquiry. I am also sure that the discussion illustrated the dynamics of the participants' college transition, and will contribute further for those who would also embark upon studies of college students and emerging adults.

It is also important to note that the quick-paced changes in technology as well as in our relationship with communication technology might show a quite different picture in the near future. Even while working on this project, the modality and meanings of cellphone communication have changed significantly, both technologically and socially. Future researchers should be aware of the importance of situating their studies within a broad net of inquiries related to the issue at hand. I am grateful to have captured a piece of this phenomenon through this study, and to contribute to inquiry for this quite fascinating form of human communication.

Finally, as narratives of participants in this study have shown, it is a widely shared human desire to better ourselves and grow into successful, functioning members of communities we join at different stages in the course of life. Communication is, at any given moment of our lifetime, critical in this regard. And more importantly, we cannot *not* think about others when it comes to thinking about our growth, our positionality, and, of

course, ourselves. It may no longer be possible to live or communicate with others without utilizing some kind of communication technology. No matter what form it takes, and no matter where we are, however, it is all about how we think about others and how we connect to them though human communication.

APPENDIX A

Participant's Information Sheet

If you choose to participate, please submit this form along with the consent form.

Name: _____

Age: ❑18 ❑19 ❑20 ❑21 ❑22 ❑23 ❑24 ❑25

Gender: ❑Female ❑Male

Ethnicity: ❑American Indian/Alaskan Native ❑Arabic ❑Asian/Pacific Islander

❑Black,Non-Hispanic ❑Hispanic,Mexican/Chicano ❑Hispanic,Other

❑Hispanic,PR Mainland ❑Non-Resident Alien ❑White,Non-Hispanic

❑Unknown ❑Other ( )

Student Status: ❑In-State ❑Out-State ❑International (Country:)

Full/Part-Time: ❑Full-Time Student ❑Part-Time Student

Residency: ❑Living On-Campus ❑ Off-Campus (time to commute: approx. mins)

Are you a transfer student?: ❑NO

 ❑YES: If checked, how long did you spend in the previous institution? _____year(s)

Your Cellphone Information

Phone Carrier:❑ AT&T ❑ Alltel Wireless ❑ Cricket ❑ Sprint-Nextel

❑ T-Mobile ❑U.S. Cellular ❑ Verizon Wireless ❑Other ( )

How long have you owned your current phone?:

❑less than a year ❑1-2yrs ❑2-3yrs ❑3-4yrs ❑4-5yrs ❑more than 5 yrs

Your total cellphone experience?

❑less than a year ❑1-2yrs ❑2-3yrs ❑3-4yrs ❑4-5yrs ❑more than 5 yrs

Do you subscribe the internet service with your phone?

❑ YES ❑NO

APPENDIX B

Electronic-Journaling Prompts

Purpose:

I am interested in how your idea about yourself (a sense of "self") and identity changes over the course of the first year experience at college. I am particularly interested in what kind of impacts cellphone communication and your relationships with your friends, family members, and significant others have on your self and identity. You are being asked to keep your journals electronically to express your idea on this theme.

Procedures:
1) You will receive a word document via email including some questions twice a month. Please write your journal and return it to me via email within a week. Please do not feel overwhelmed, though. According to your academic schedule, any necessary accommodations will be made.
2) I would like you to develop your idea at least one paragraph (approx. 5-7 sentences) for each bullet point. You are welcomed and encouraged to write more if you would like.
3) I highly respect your privacy of any personal information. Please do not feel obligated to reveal everything. You may use pseudonyms if necessary.
4) Should you have any questions regarding the topics provided, please do not hesitate to email me. (*email address*)

Definitions of key words:

In this journal, the term "cellphone communication" refers to any activities related to your cellphone including, but not limited to, texting, making voice calls, using the internet on your cellphone, and the term "the internet communication" refers to anything related to your online interactions such as email, blogs, chat, social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace etc) and so forth.

Journal#1
- Tell me about your feelings to become a college student now.
- Please introduce yourself, including your overall characteristics and the way you think both who you are and you as a cellphone user.
- Tell me about your general idea about and usage of both cellphone communication and the internet communication.
- How did you use your cellphone and the internet in a precollege life? How do you think it will change at college?
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

Journal#2
- Having gone through the first month of the first semester of college, what was/were the most challenging aspect(s) thus far? (Academically? Relationally? Others?) Any your own strategies?
- What kind of roles have your cellphone and the internet communication been playing to manage your new relationships at college and those from precollege?
- Do you have any interesting or memorable stories you could share with me about your cellphone experiences this month (September)?
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

Journal#3
- Tell me about your everyday communication with different relationships. What kind of changes did you find in terms of your communication patterns (e.g., frequency, amount or time you spend, contents, conversation partners, etc…) with friends, family members, and your significant other respectively?
- For what purposes have you been mainly using cellphone and the internet communication respectively in your college life?
- Do you have any interesting or memorable stories you could share with me about your cellphone experiences this past two weeks?
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

Journal#4
- Having gone through a half of the first semester at college, did you find any difference in your current cellphone and the internet use from the way you used to use them precollege? If so, how? If not, please tell me how things are NOT changed.
- How have you been using your cellphone and the internet communication with your old friends from your precollege life and with those newly developed at college?
- Do you have any interesting or memorable stories you could share with me about your precollege cellphone experiences this month (October)?
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

Journal#5
- After having discussed this issue with other group members in the interview, what kind of idea do you have on cellphone and the internet communication respectively now?
- Do you have anything that you could not share in the interview and would like to add here?
- Do you have any interesting or memorable stories you could share with me about

your precollege cellphone experiences this past two weeks?
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

Journal#6
- Do you think that you are becoming more accustomed to the new relationships, a new college learning environment, and different life styles from precollege? If so, please explain them in detail. If not, please tell me why you think so.
- Compared to "others" (please specify those people in your words), how different is your cellphone and the internet use? Please tell me about the differences and the similarities with specific examples or cases.
- Do you have any interesting or memorable stories you could share with me about your precollege cellphone experiences this month (November)?
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

Journal#7
- You are about to finish the first semester at college. What kind of strategies did you follow to "survive" in a new environment, academically, relationally, socially (socializing with others) and so force?
- Please tell me about respective summaries of your cellphone and the internet use throughout the first semester of college.
- Do you have any interesting or memorable stories you could share with me about your precollege cellphone experiences this entire semester (Fall 2009)?
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

Journal#8
- Please recall any moments in the first semester at college in which you believe you experienced some "turning points."
- When did they happen?
- What exactly was happened?
- What meanings did they have on you?
- How did you react to them?
- Let's pretend that we met for the first time now. Introduce yourself to me as a college student and to explain what type of cellphone user you are.
- Please feel free to include anything you would share with me here.

APPENDIX C

Focus Group and Interview Prompts

Focus Group #1
Grand Tour

I am interested in finding out about your experiences with a cellphone and what kind of role cellphone communication plays in your transition to college, particularly how it affects your sense of self and identity through the first year college experiences. Students meet new people with different backgrounds and manage tensions between their old, precollege friendship and new relationships. They become independent from parents while maintaining dependency on them to some degree. Communication is one of crucial aspects in this regard, and I would like to know how cellphone communication affects your identity construction and the way you think about yourself.*

1. Tell me about your overall cellphone experiences thus far (probe for the length of the ownership of your current phone, the number of phones you have owned, the reasons why you decide to own a phone for the first time, a regular usage of a phone, a phone carrier, phone model, type of subscription plan, appearance of a phone, decorative aspects of a phone, texting, the mobile internet, etc)

2. Could you describe yourself as a cellphone user (probe for frequency of phone use, enthusiasm and impressions about their cellphone communication, use of voice calls, texting, mobile internet, in comparisons with others' phone use, etc)?

3. Could you tell me how you use other digital communication devices differently from cellphone communication (probe for their use of the internet with personal computers, idea about social networking services such as Facebook and MySpace, online activities, online interpersonal communication, different social networking strategies between cellphone communication and the internet interactions, etc)?

4. What are your primary concerns in a transition into college?

5. How do you plan to use your cellphone and other digital communication tools in the first year experiences?

6. Do you have any memorable or interesting stories regarding your or others' cellphone communication?

Conclusion: To summarize, could you explain your relationship with your cellphone as well as with other digital communication devices?

This script is developed with the reference to Andrade, M. S. (2005). International students and the first year of college. *Journal of The First-Year Experience*, 17, 101-129.

Focus Group #2

Grand Tour:

You are about to finish the first semester at college. I would like to know how/ if your new academic, social and relational experiences have affected the way you think who you are as a cellphone user as well as a college student.

1. Tell be about the strategies you used to deal with obstacles you came across in a new environment (probe for their academic success, relational management, work-related activities, etc).
2. Tell me about your cellphone experiences in relation with the topics discussed now (Q#1). How did cellphone communication work in those situations?
3. After spending about four months at college, how do you see yourself as a cellphone user as well as a college student?
4. Do you have any memorable or interesting stories regarding your or others' cellphone use at college?

Conclusion: To summarize, could you tell me your overall changes and things that did not change through the first semester experiences in general as well as cellphone communication in particular? How do you think about the way you will use your cellphone communication after this?

Focus Group#3

Situation You Are In

You are having lunch with your "good" friends at the university cafeteria. Your conversation is casual and this lunch gathering is one of everyday routines you enjoy with them.

Scenario 1 (Other's texting behavior)

One of your friends started texting while having a conversation with you and others. His/Her texting continues throughout although he/she maintains conversation simultaneously. You realize that this kind of behavior has become common for everyone in this gathering.

1) What impressions do you have on your friend'(s') texting behavior during the gathering?
2) What impressions do you have on the person who texts with your friend?

Scenario 2 (Other's phone conv.)

In the same situation, one of your friends started engaging in a phone talk while having a conversation with you and others. His/Her phone conversation continues

throughout although he/she maintains face-to-face conversation simultaneously. You realize that this kind of behavior has become common for everyone in this gathering.

1) What impressions do you have on your friend'(s') phone behavior during the gathering?
2) What impressions do you have on the person who talks with your friend on the phone?

Scenario 3 (Your cellphone behaviors)
You constantly receive text-messages and phone calls in the same situation that you cannot simply ignore.

1) Do you have any rules for your cellphone use when you are with someone else?
2) How do you manage ongoing multiple conversations and relationships in such a situation?
3) How do you control your impressions to your friends face-to-face and to the person conversing through your phone?

Scenario 4 (Texting)
You started developing a new relationship with a person you just met face-to-face. A primary way you can maintain contact with the person is through texting. How do you express yourself and how do you understand the person only via texting? (Two situations: the same sex partner and the opposite sex partner)

Individual Qualitative Interviews
Grand Tour
   You are about to finish (or have just finished) the first year at college. I would like to know how your first year college experience has affected the way you think who you are as a cellphone user as well as a college student.

1. What is your overall impression of your first year experience?

2. Do you see any changes in terms of the way you think about yourself, especially in relation to your cellphone communication?

3. Member Check (I will conduct a member check with a participant regarding responses he/she has provided in journal entries and interviews)

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ABSTRACT

BECOMING A FUNCTIONING MEMBER OF THE COLLEGIATE CULTURE: HOW CELLPHONE COMMUNICATION AFFECTS FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS' SELF AND IDENTITY IN COLLEGE TRANSITION.

by

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May 2012

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This longitudinal ethnographically-oriented study explores the meanings of cellphones and cellphone communication of first-year college students during their college transition and how such newly populated human communicative conducts affect their sense of self and identity during this life period. The findings from this study suggest that participants' perceptions about appropriate cellphone communication are closely tied with a growing sense of emerging adulthood that college students develop in conjunction with their college transition. Cellphone communication creates social situations where participants engage in identity exploration and strategic impression management by switching their social roles in order to properly present their self as a more independent, mature, and responsible member of a new community. Thus they continue to making efforts to become *a functioning member of a collegiate culture*. Participants in this study also handle varied degrees of relational dynamics by managing the vicinity of friendship and the

vicinity of parenting in order to maintain their sense of functioning self during college transition. Corresponding to the lack of literature regarding cellphone communication in the American context, the current study contributes to the understanding of cellphone communication among young people. Also, the findings of this study contribute to the theoretical development of symbolic interactionism that has long explored the concepts of self and identity based predominantly upon face-to-face contexts.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIC STATEMENT

Arata Miyazaki (PhD Wayne State University, USA) is currently a lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) in Japan. His research interests include communication studies, including interpersonal communication, mobile communication, and computer-mediated communication, communication pedagogy, and identity of nonnative English speakers. His recent publications include "Re-making cross-cultural re-presentations: "Foreign" + "Hollywood" films = new learning opportunities," "In defense of Wikipedia 2.0: Wikipedia as a researching/teaching resource in college basic courses," and "Interviewing your friends, discovering otherness: Audience analysis assignment for public speaking."