

Technoferences in Couple Relationships and Gender: Qualitative Findings¹

Las technoferencias en relaciones de pareja y el género: hallazgos cualitativos

Tecnoferências nas relações de casal e gênero: resultados qualitativos

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This article reports qualitative findings on technoferences or partner phubbing, showing the multiplicity of experiences that they generate. The analysis places the phenomenon in the dynamics of the onlife world and highlights gender differences. It stands out that the interruptions caused by the partner are more annoying than their own, that men make more demands and have greater power to influence their partner's uses. The conclusion is that the most tolerated or justified technoferences are those related to paid work, and that they are not always involuntary or unavoidable, but show communicational agency.

KEYWORDS: Gender, onlife world, couples, phubbing, technoference.

Se reportan hallazgos cualitativos sobre las technoferencias o phubbing en relaciones de pareja heterosexuales, mostrando la multiplicidad de experiencias que generan. El análisis sitúa el fenómeno en las dinámicas del mundo onlife y destaca diferencias de género. Sobresale que las interrupciones propiciadas por el otro tienden a ser más molestas que las propias y que los varones tienden a reclamar más y a tener mayor poder de influencia en los usos ajenos. Se concluye que las technoferencias más toleradas o justificadas son las que tienen que ver con el trabajo remunerado y que no siempre son involuntarias o inevitables, sino que expresan agencia comunicacional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Género, mundo onlife, parejas, phubbing, technoferencias.

São relatados resultados qualitativos sobre technoferências ou phubbing nas relações de casais heterossexuais, mostrando a multiplicidade de experiências que geram. A análise situa o fenômeno na dinâmica do mundo onlife e destaca as diferenças de gênero. Destaca-se que as interrupções causadas por outros tendem a ser mais incômodas do que as suas próprias e que os homens tendem a reclamar mais e a ter maior poder de influenciar os usos dos outros. Conclui-se que as technoferências mais toleradas ou justificadas são aquelas que têm a ver com trabalho remunerado e que nem sempre são involuntárias ou inevitáveis, mas sim expressam agência de comunicação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Género, mundo onlife, casais, phubbing, technoferências.

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INTRODUCTION

In beginning or established couple relationships, digital communication practices permeate everyday life, involve expectations and emotional reactions, as well as conflicts and normative regulations (Rodríguez, 2019). Cantó-Milà et al. (2014) showed that electronic communication within a couple is the object of expectations and desires that may or may not be fulfilled, which are associated with joy, but also frustration, anger or sadness.

On the other hand, Duran et al. (2011) observed that as the relationship progresses, couples regulate the timing and amount of calls and texting, which set the rules for cell phone use. They also identified that low satisfaction with cell phone use is linked to feelings of restricted freedom and a greater desire to control the partner. Finally, Casado and Lasén (2014) suggest that cell phones create tensions between personal and relationship desires and that they have become a source of conflict and new obligations.

The findings cited above make it clear that intimacy and life as a couple face new challenges and opportunities in the digital age, or in what Floridi (2015) named as the *onlife* world. This world that challenges the *online/offline* dichotomy, in which there is an overabundance of information and technological dependence on multiple ordinary activities, among other things, and which also has the potential to challenge our attention spans and time control possibilities (Floridi, 2015).

Attention and time are resources that in the digital society are increasingly competed for. For more than a decade, Cornella (2008) has warned that the more continuous information users receive, the greater the demand for time to process it, and this will affect the capacity for “personal attention”. Accordingly, Floridi (2015) suggests that, in a context of information overabundance, the competition for attention between companies, institutions and individuals is greater.

In the *onlife* world, the technological colonization of time is a condition that affects cultural valuations about social times and threatens the demands of synchronizing the time of others with one’s own and vice versa (Sharma, 2016). Wajcman (2015) has emphasized

that the ability to choose how we use our time is basic to freedom and autonomy, as well as a measure of equality.

For this reason, it is important to point out that technologies tend to take over people's time. Gregg (2011) argues that online distractions have colonized our time, including the time we spend with others. Wang (cited by Barassi, 2020), for his part, states that social networks were designed to generate addiction, so that they are key devices for "controlling people's time" (p. 1 546). But, above all, online work, widely pervasive in times of confinement because of the global pandemic by the COVID-19, has normalized the intrusion of work into the home space (Rodríguez, 2023; Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2020).

In the context of the challenges of the onlife world, the phenomenon of technoconferences makes sense as a key process through which disputes, conflicts or agreements for attention or time are produced in any kind of relationship, although this article deals with heterosexual couple relationships.

The purpose of this paper is to present qualitative findings that show that technoferences constitute an important dimension in contemporary couple agreements, especially, but not exclusively, among young adults. Interviewees' accounts of technoferences reveal how couple ideals and norms are agreed upon, transgressed or restored, and how strategies are created to manage distance in the face of abuse or disaffection in relation to gender.

TECHNOFERENCES, PHUBBING AND GENDER: DEFINITIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Technoferences or phubbing refer to the distractions or annoyances usually caused by technological devices when they interrupt a face-to-face interaction. They would be a result or consequence of a hyperconnected, mobile and challenging world in terms of time and attention control. The concept of phubbing is limited to interruptions caused by smartphones, whereas technoference encompasses a broader spectrum of technologies that have the potential to disrupt daily life, such as computers and television. All phubbing is a technoference, but not all technoferences are phubbing. In this article phubbing practices

will be considered as cell phone technofereces and the analysis will seek to identify gender inequalities.

The uses of technologies in couple relationships have become a fertile ground for the investigation of gender inequalities within the couple, which manifest themselves in a surreptitious manner (Casado, 2014). According to this author, irrational or abusive use, if not “engaging”, are associated with subaltern positions (women, young people, etc.) who “talk just for the sake of talking”, and their spheres which are also subordinated, such as the domestic versus the professional, or ritual communication versus efficient information (Casado, 2014).

In this sense, the analysis of technofereces stories can help to detect the imposition or negotiation of communicative agreements, the inequities that arise from definitions of masculine and feminine uses, and the disputes or negotiations for time and attention in the dyadic relationship. These aspects are key to making visible gender inequalities that may go unnoticed, that are more subtle and common, but prove that power and hierarchy in couples (of any type, including heterosexual couples) are still in force and are very difficult to overcome.

Internationally, several authors (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019; Nina-Estrella, 2022; Utami et al., 2020) have warned of the abuses, addictions and complexities that come with the expansion of mobile devices and their use in large amounts of time within couple relationships, especially from the field of psychology. One of these problems is precisely being connected to the net, but disconnected from immediate reality.

According to Roberts and David (2016) phubbing is a composite term between phone and snubbing. It occurs when in a conversation with someone, the other person answers the cell phone instead of keeping the communication already started. As stated by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018), it is a 21st century phenomenon, which refers to the act of ignoring someone in different social situations for answering the cell phone instead of paying attention to the other person.

When cell phone intrusions and interruptions affect couple interactions, the phenomenon is recognized as partner phubbing (pphubbing), it is usually associated with conflict and an anxious attachment style (Roberts & David, 2016). For their part, Ekimchiky and Kryukova (2020) define it as a phenomenon of digital society that

manifests itself in partner rejection/denial through distraction with a device during an actual conversation. Their results show that more often men negatively see their partners' phubbing; that female phubbing is caused by their participation in social networks while men's phubbing is the result of Internet and gaming addictions.

For their part, McDaniel and Coyne (2016) introduced the concept of "technoference" to refer to "everyday intrusions or interruptions in couple interactions or time spent together that occur due to technology" (p. 85). These types of interference have the potential to cause people to become "intimate" with their electronic devices (to the detriment of real-life intimacy) or for people to become immersed in multitasking with technology while interacting with others.

According to McDaniel and Drouin (2019), technoferences are an important aspect in the day-to-day evaluation of the relationship: partners who report more technoferences also claim to have worse relationship quality. In those cases, there are more perceptions of conflict associated with technology, fewer positive face-to-face interactions, and more negative mood.

The feeling of "being alone together" (Turkle, 2012) is common in technoference experiences, which often negatively affect couple interactions and the relationship itself. These intrusions are caused by devices (calls, texts, notifications, etc.) and, in some cases, may involve problematic behaviors, but not necessarily so (MacDaniel & Coyne, 2016).

Research trends in this area are quantitative, based on scales for measuring phubbing or technoferences (Ekimchik & Kryukova, 2022). These are used to weight differences between groups and establish relationships with other variables, such as relationship satisfaction, relationship quality, Internet addiction or attachment style. In these studies it is common to analyze samples of students, rather than other populations (an exception is the work of Bröning & Wartberg [2022], which deals with established relationships). Findings from these types of studies have shown that phubbing or technoferences have the potential to be disruptive and bring up negative feelings that manifest with low partner satisfaction, depression, conflict, or estrangement (see literature reviews by McDaniel & Drouin, 2019;

Nina-Estrella, 2022; Utami et al., 2020). The results in the few Latin American studies on the subject converge with some of the trends noted in other countries. From Puerto Rico, Nina-Estrella et al. (2020) have observed that phubbing increases communication about technology within the couple and generates negative effects on the quality of the relationship.

In a large part of the studies, phubbing or partner technoferences are usually explained by individual variables such as cell phone, texting, social media, Internet or online gaming addiction (Karadag et al., 2015) or an attachment style (Roberts & David, 2016).

However, there are also studies that explain them from a normative and situational perspective (Bröning & Wartberg, 2022; Schneider & Hitzfeld, 2021). Among the situational conditions that have been established as causes of phubbing, Schneider and Hitzfeld (2021) identified the desire to be permanently connected in order not to miss what is happening in their online environments, as well as the absence of rules in the use of cell phones. When etiquette rules regarding cell phone use in face-to-face interactions emerge, phubbing decreases.

On the other hand, from a qualitative study, Klein (cited in Bröning & Wartberg, 2022) found other situational factors, such as: a) that reading incoming messages opens the opportunity to check other messages; b) the existence of a habit of frequently checking one's cell phone; c) the high need to communicate and promote oneself through social media; or even, d) feeling bored.

METHODOLOGY

From a sociological and communicational perspective of the experiences of techno-conferences, definitions or perceptions of their own and others' uses, distinctions between feminine and masculine uses, as well as between correct and abusive uses were assessed. These kinds of perceptions of technological uses in general, or of the smartphone in particular, are key for the actors to elucidate whether or not the interruptions of face-to-face interaction are annoying or problematic

in their daily lives, and above all, whether they cause an argument and the need to act.

Similarly, the analysis conducted involved socio-cultural considerations of a macro nature, based on theoretical premises on the valuations of social time (Leccardi, 1996; Sharma, 2016), on gender inequalities manifested in digital communication (Casado, 2014) and on the onlife world that, among other things, has placed challenges and disputes in the control of time and attention (Floridi, 2015).

The corpus of analysis was derived from a collective research project on intimacy and couple relationships in two States of the central-western region of Mexico. It was integrated from a sample of 35 semi-structured interviews with men and 46 with women with experience in past or present established relationships. The total number of interviewees were residents of the metropolitan areas of Colima and Guadalajara and were distributed in three age groups: young adults (32-49 years old), middle (50-64 years old) and older (65 years and older). These metropolitan areas share a historical past of urban modernization and socioeconomic transformation, marked by sociocultural elements such as the prevalence of the Catholic religion and the patriarchal and *macho* culture (Rodríguez, 2022). A precise description of the sample and the interview guide can be found in Rodríguez (2022). The semi-structured interviews were conducted from September 2019 to March 2020 by a fieldwork team made up of the main researchers and a group of interns. They were transcribed for coding and analysis. For this article we take up exclusively the axis of technologies and couple relationships.

It should be noted that the technoferences were not part of the interview guide. They were identified from an inductive analysis and considered as emerging categories that made it possible to identify a type of situation in which technologies affect the daily interaction of established couples.

The issue of techno-conferences showed up in most cases through questions about agreements or annoyances in their relationship due to technologies, as well as about the advantages and disadvantages of their use. Of the total number of interviewees ($n = 81$), the topic was addressed by 22 of them, distributed as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWEES WHO PROVIDED TESTIMONIES OF
TECHNOFERENCES, BY SEX AND AGE GROUP (FREQUENCIES)

Groups	Interviewees who discussed technoferences	Total respondents
Men	12	35
Women	10	46
Total	22	81
Young adults (32-49 years old)	12	29
Middle adults (50-64 years old)	6	29
Older adults (65 years and older)	4	26
Total	22	81

Source: Prepared by the author based on the matrix of codes by groups of documents obtained in MAXQDA 2020, project “Intimacy and couple relationships in contemporary Mexico” (2018-2023).

Together, the interviewees contributed a total of 32 interview fragments categorized as technoferences. The qualitative analysis followed the classic model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which stipulates three stages: 1) data reduction based on selection and condensation processes; 2) data presentation aimed at encouraging the researcher’s reflective perspective; and 3) preparation and verification of results based on the identification of common patterns, exceptional cases and comparison. The operation of this model was carried out using the MAXQDA 2020 software.

All segments coded as technoferences ($n = 32$) were compared by gender and age group and analyzed as autobiographical micro narratives. The aforementioned experiences were evaluated based on eight categories: a) situations of occurrence; b) unilateral or mutual nature; c) reasons; d) emotions; e) positions of rejection or tolerance; f) reflections on communication; g) self-regulation strategies; and h) capacity to influence the regulation of the use of other people’s devices.

The testimonies cited throughout the article were chosen for their empirical and narrative richness (involving, for example, direct

discourse) and the age and city of residence of the interviewee were referenced by pseudonym.

TELEVISION AND CELL PHONE TECHNOFERENCES: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Cell phone technoferences were the most discussed or the most implied in the stories that made up the corpus of analysis. However, some older and middle-aged adults reported experiences that allude to television technoferences.

The following testimony shows the resignation and willingness of Magdalena (79, Guadalajara) who joins her partner in a television viewing that she does not enjoy. In this case, the interruption of their daily coexistence because of television is not recognized as a problem. Rather, Magdalena can be seen granting companionship, as a tacit agreement of living together and contrasting her experience with other women who interrupt such bodily accompaniment:

He loves boxing... every Saturday... I hear many ladies who say “Oh, he’s watching his boxing and I’m on my cell phone chatting, talking with friends or whatever. And I don’t do that...” We have that TV there. My husband sits on the couch, all neatly arranged so he is comfortable and I sit next to him and fall asleep.... But there I am next to him, I don’t separate from him; I don’t even have a phone.

Sergio (90, Guadalajara), in contrast to Magdalena’s account, narrates that when he and his wife watch television together and she does not like the program, she has the alternative of using her cell phone:

If she doesn’t like the program I’m watching [on TV], she grabs her phone and plays videos of a priest, a Catholic priest.

In these stories we can see how cell phones increase women’s possibility to manage their own uses. Women can be with their partners when they consume TV programs that they do not like and decide to

accompany them without interruptions or make use of the freedom offered by the double screens.

A similar situation was reported by Octavio (62, Colima), who states that watching television delays joint couple activities:

I just watch movies.... And sometimes she says to me: “Hey, aren’t you going to eat? And I say: “When it ends” ... It’s the same with her. Sometimes she sends messages to her children or talks to them through messages, and sometimes I feel that she has been on the cell phone for a long time, but that’s as far as it goes.

In these stories, it was noted that the television technofereces were not perceived as conflictive, although Octavio drew a parallel with the interruptions caused by the cell phone. Likewise, it was noted that mobile devices have enabled new options for being physically together, although cognitively and emotionally apart. For McDaniel et al. (2020) joint use of technology in leisure time is a predictor of pleasure and relationship satisfaction, whereas separate use of technology in the presence of a partner was a predictor of conflict and low satisfaction. However, the aforementioned stories show that the uses, shared or separate, make cohabitation options more flexible and offer an alternative for when the partners do not coincide in enjoying the same media consumption or content.

The technofereces that reported daily affectations, which tended to generate annoyance, accusations, recriminations or questionings are those coming from smartphones and were reported mainly by young adults, although not exclusively. This result stems from the fact that smartphones are the most widespread technology in the contemporary world. These are devices that integrate other technologies and are the object of expectations, identity expressions and emotional intensities (Gómez Cruz, 2022; Serrano-Puche, 2016).

The narrative fragments analyzed show that cell phones have become distractions in daily life and can interfere in daily coexistence in multiple ways and with diverse consequences. Native expressions such as “being glued to the cell phone”, “being addicted to the cell phone”, “getting stuck in the cell phone”, “being more interested in

the cell phone” were common in the interviewees’ stories. These expressions carry a negative judgment about the excessive or irregular uses that themselves or their partners make of cell phones. And, in turn, they imply tacit reflections on the permanent connection and the need to implement disconnection strategies.

Tobías (38, Colima), notices his wife “very glued to the cell phone”, which surprises him, but she tells him that he does that too, he just doesn’t realize it. This memory makes him reflect on how technology disconnects people from their environment and from face-to-face relationships:

I think that... technology disconnects you... When you get home, you don’t even need to talk to each other because you are glued to your cell phone. So, you have to be aware of that, you have to look for strategies to leave it aside. My strategy in the face of that disadvantage is to turn it off on the weekend or leave it aside, but the temptation... [These are] disadvantages if one is disconnected from personal interactions, which are truly valuable, and that is quite serious.

According to this testimony, technology carries the risk of “disconnecting” from personal interactions “that are truly valuable”, it is involved in disruptive moments of the daily communicational order. Technology is experienced as a “temptation” to be resisted through concrete strategies: “turn off the cell phone on the weekend” or “put it aside”.

In general, technoferences cause expressions of annoyance and arguments within the couple that lead to the creation of agreements or rules on the use, especially of cell phones. Some of these rules are responses to manifested or latent conflicts, and involve reflection on what the use of technologies implies in moments of couple or family interaction.

In the episodes narrated, it can be observed that these agreements were a response to the conflict, although the struggle seems to be latent all the time in the face of the great temptation that cell phones are. This is present in multiple stories.

Augusto (32, Colima) states: “if you are sharing breakfast or lunch with your partner, we take it for granted that the cell phone is off the table”, although he immediately creates an exception: “You can take it or check it for two, three, five seconds and leave it aside and continue to attend to your partner”. In the same vein, Arturo (36, Guadalajara) also accounts for the explicit agreement with his partner: “No cell phones while eating”, but also states that they forget the rule. So if someone is using it, they reproach each other: “‘We’re at the table, the phone...’. ‘Oh yes, of course, I forgot it’. We put it down immediately.” Andrea (61, Guadalajara), on the other hand, points out that because of “being on the cell phone there is a lack of attention” and that is why she charges her husband and son 50 pesos if they use the cell phone during family time. Aurora (43, Colima), on the other hand, talks about the agreement that “No cell phones at breakfast, neither at lunchtime nor at bedtime”, as well as the strategies to leave them away, to self-regulate and to raise awareness in the family about excessive use.

Overall, these testimonies show that the most established agreements in couples and families have to do with not using the cell phone at mealtimes, that struggles are hard and that granting less time of use implies agreements, sometimes unilateral, sometimes reciprocal, but above all it implies self-regulation and strategies. The latter include turning it off or leaving it away, so as not to be tempted to check for news or answer messages or calls. The concessions made in the face of established norms have to do exclusively with work practices and emergencies, as will be seen below.

TECHNOFERENCES AND GENDER INEQUALITIES

The analyzed stories of male and female technofereces emphasized both their own experience and that of their partners, and were key to detecting gender inequalities.

Bröning and Wartberg (2022) identified three mechanisms through which pphubbing impacts the couple relationship: 1) quality couple time is reduced as a consequence of a displacement hypothesis; 2) the quality of communication between the couple decreases; and 3) partner expectations regarding eye contact or attention are hindered from being met.

In the analyzed stories it was observed that these mechanisms are present causing the recognition of technoferences as meaningful experiences and explaining why they are annoying in couple interactions.

In general, male annoyance is because it interrupts daily coexistence and interaction, or in other words, it diminishes the quality of personal interaction, whether in terms of attention or time. In this sense, Tobias (38, Colima) expresses his feelings about his wife “being glued to her cell phone”. He complains to her because “she doesn’t pay attention to him” and this “annoys him a lot”. The expression of annoyance, it can be inferred, is a resource to try to regulate his wife’s use of her cell phone.

Juan (33, Guadalajara) also recognizes his feelings of annoyance when his partner “is more on the cell phone than with him”:

... I don’t like it, that [my partner] spends more time on the cell phone than with me. For example, when my friends send me certain memes or so, she says to me: “Why are they sending you those things?” or “Why is such a person writing to you?” or that kind of thing.

In his testimony, Juan points out a difference between himself and his wife. He’s annoyed by the amount of time, while she worries about the content and the person that he interacts with. It can be deduced that this difference converges with a sociocultural predisposition of women to be more jealous (Rodríguez, 2022).

Similarly, Pablo (37, Guadalajara) complains about the time his partner spends on social networks due to work issues. He points out that she answers messages at night, and even interrupting common activities:

She spends more time on social networks, because her sales, literally, are through social networks... But there are cases when it’s 10:30 at night and she’s still going on. And she tells me: “Wait a little, they are asking for information”. I tell her: “But it’s 10:30” ... At that time we are watching a series or something together, which is our quality time. And it bothers me, sometimes. I mean, I think it can wait.

Here we can see that the discussion about “quality time” implies a dispute for attention in the face of an online work that does not distinguish between leisure and work time. In the sample studied, it was men who tended to complain more about the interruptions caused by women’s use of cell phones.

In general, men tend to be more critical of other people’s uses than of their own. While some men recognize the effects of being on the cell phone while daily coexisting with their partners and children, they refuse to be persuaded to use it less. In these cases, the annoyance arises from the fact that their wives call attention to their use of the device. In this sense, Braulio (56, Colima), points out that the cell phone “isolates”, but he can be annoyed when he is asked to leave the cell phone aside. He says:

We isolate ourselves, we do, sometimes it’s hard for us to leave it. If they are telling you: “Hey, put the cell phone down for a while!”, sometimes irrationally, instead of saying: “You’re right” [you get annoyed].

His position is ambiguous, given that he rejects being asked to put down the cell phone, although he accepts that it “takes time away” from family life and recognizes that it is necessary to set rules for not using the cell phone at special moments of family life. Another part of his account identifies a “permanent struggle” to stop using cell phones, with looks and direct requests:

When we are eating and one of us is using the cell phone, we just look at each other as if to say: “Stop it. We are eating”.

This ambiguity denotes the force of the modern imperative of permanent connection, even among those who are convinced of the need to disconnect.

Demián (35, Colima), on the other hand, is the subject of his wife’s complaints:

She told me that I spent a lot of time glued to my cell phone. Sometimes even when I was with her, I mean, not hiding from her, but I was there next to her, she was talking to me and I was using the cell phone... and she told

me: "Hey, leave the cell phone, I'm talking to you!"... Now I don't do it at home, [although] I do have to keep an eye on it because of my [work] schedule.

In this case, his wife's annoyances have led to less use of the cell phone at home, except for work coordination issues. Paid work is an activity that does not stop in the onlife world and is considered the priority activity of those who participate in the world of work, but above all of those who assume the role of main household providers.

Fabiola (37, Colima) reproaches her partner for using his cell phone during times of group socializing, but ends up accepting his behavior as inevitable:

...my husband is more impatient about it, when he receives a message, he wants to answer right away. And when we are at a dinner party, or having lunch or talking or watching a series and suddenly he gets a message, he checks who it is from and then I say: "Oh, leave the little device there!" I mean, sometimes you can see who it is from, but only when it is an urgent matter you answer it. There are certain moments –I think– that you do have to let go, and yes, at the time it caused some arguments, but in the end, well, that's the way he is... if he gets a call, he immediately answers, he wants to check...

Fabiola's story illustrates how ineffective women can be in influencing their partners' cell phone use and their resignation to interruptions as if it were inevitable or unchangeable because it has to do with the "way they are".

In cases where the couple's relationship is unequal and it is assumed that the woman must above all be respectful to her partner and be attentive to his needs, technologies operate as emotional refuges in which to escape abusive situations. There, technological uses, including technoferences, offer spaces of greater freedom from the demands of the roles assigned to each gender. For example, Celia (35, Colima) narrates that on some occasions the use of cell phone has caused her problems with her partner, because it has kept her from attending his requests immediately:

Well, let's say he asked me for something and I didn't give it to him in time because I was on the phone. Or something I was watching and I didn't show it to him when he wanted to watch it, yes.

This fragment of the interview shows that the husband's annoyance is because the cell phone use has slowed down the fulfillment of his requests. In cases of greater gender inequality, the cell phone gives women the possibility of getting away, even if only for a moment, from interactions that seem abusive. In this sense, cell phones open up opportunities for women in subordinate roles (at the service of their husbands or partners, for example) to temporarily disregard male demands and reproductive work. The cell phone gives them the opportunity to delay, to neglect their husbands' needs, to distract themselves from the domestic burden, although they are not free from the reproach.

Women's experiences with teleconferences are very similar to those of men, except that women seem to be less effective in reaching agreements that limit their partners' use of their cell phones, and that they seem to be more strongly criticized when they are the ones who use it excessively or who express their annoyance. This can be seen in this account by Romina (52, Guadalajara):

He used to complain about my cell phone use... I carry my office here in my bag. And of course, as I think it happens to many, many human beings in this world, I too have a certain addiction to the cell phone [And that bothered him?] A lot. That it would ring, as it has been ringing right now: [quoting shouts] "Enough, shut up your phone, now, now!" [sigh]... and he is super addicted too. He is super addicted, but no, the addict was me [laughs].

Recognizing "addictive" technological uses only in women is a sexist belief that joins others identified by Casado (2014) that women's uses are less important than the uses of men. In this fragment of an interview we can also observe an interaction in which the reproach for technoference involves accusations of waste of time or banal uses. Saúl (59, Colima) cites a conversation with his partner:

“I am giving you a very serious criticism. I know that you are at the university and you are on the computer for eight hours, and of those eight hours you spend six hours on Facebook posting pictures of yourself and feeling beautiful. I also think you are very beautiful, but this obsession of yours with yourself is pretty fucked up. ... And then you come home to work”. “Stay out of it” [his partner replies]. I say, “ No, I am getting involved because it’s my time and the family’s time and that’s why I’m complaining to you.”

The uses that women tend to make are stereotypically more associated with social networks (“gossip networks”, according to one interviewee), selfies, family communication, and less with study or work, which are the uses that have the greatest acceptance in any circumstance or situation. Male interviewees reported being the ones who use technologies for “work stuff” and minimized the work or study uses of their partners. Technoferences that were even associated with women’s work were little tolerated by men, as were recreational or family uses.

On the other hand, in moments of conflict, women were forced to explain their work-related uses of cell phones or had to defend their right to use and appropriate technologies autonomously without accepting the limits that their partners tried to impose on them (for example, testimonies of Romina and Saul citing the conversation with his wife).

Aurora (43, Colima) has also received complaints from her partner about her cell phone use, although she feels that the reproach is unfair because he does it too. However, in this case, she is annoyed, but does not express it:

Or, for example, he used to complain a lot that I was using my cell phone and when I said: “Oh, you do it too!”, he said: “No. I wasn’t using it” or “I was using it for other things”. In other words, when he doesn’t accept what I think he is doing, that part makes me angry and I pretend it doesn’t. So I treat him the same way.

In the same sense, there is the story of Fatima (65, Colima), who recognizes that both use the cell phone a lot of the time, but the

difference is that she is the one who usually agrees to turn it off for the sake of peaceful coexistence, but not him:

[They say to each other] “Put the phone down for a while, let’s chat”. But if I keep it close because I get a call, a message, this or that... Sometimes I tell him: “I’m going to turn it off for a while” and I turn it off. But he doesn’t.

Other female interviewees have also been in the situation that their partner does not interrupt their cell phone activities when they meet, regardless of whether it is lunchtime, bedtime or the weekend. Marcela (34, Guadalajara) narrates that her husband does not interrupt his text interactions when she arrives: “... he is chatting on WhatsApp, I arrive and he continues chatting. But now the agreement is: ‘Hey, this bothers me!’ If we are together, we are going to watch a program, or share something”. Carolina (35, Guadalajara), on the other hand, recognizes that her partner works all the time and so she has to keep reminding him: “Hey, it’s Saturday, don’t answer”, “Rest”, “Don’t fall asleep with your cell phone in your hand”.

Generally, both men and women are more critical of other people’s uses than their own, although both recognize some problematic uses. Women’s excessive use of cell phones, however, can be more easily questioned, even when they serve work or study needs.

Otilia’s story, on the other hand, is the only one of older adults who express annoyances regarding the technofences associated with cell phones and computers:

... he has a job right now where he depends a lot on his phone and the computer. So lately it is like I am not present, he spends his time on the computer, he spends his time on his cell phone. And I have felt... a little bit unheard, ignored, not taken into account for some things. And he says to me: “But you didn’t tell me”. “Of course I told you, like ten times” [she says].... I don’t feel it as violence, because I know it is just some moments, they are part of the job, so I don’t feel he’s being violent, but I do feel bad. I feel... I don’t like it... I feel ignored and not listened to (Otilia, 65, Colima).

Upsetting feelings caused by technofences are clearly expressed, although they tend to be tolerated, or even minimized, especially when

associated with paid work. This result matches with McDaniel and Wesselmann's (2021) finding which states that having a "good reason" to use a cell phone in an interaction decreases the negative effects of dissatisfaction or social exclusion. Moreover, it supports Bröning and Wartberg's (2022) conjecture about the fact that associating phubbing with work makes it less hurtful for women in long-term relationships.

TECHNOFERENCES: BETWEEN NORMALIZATION, QUESTIONINGS AND COMMUNICATIONAL AGENCY

Some interviewees are beginning to normalize cell phone use. This is the case of people who are no longer annoyed by the time their partners spend on the Internet or who, even if they are annoyed, agree that interrupting their daily coexistence with the use of cell phones is something that is done by both partners. This is the case of Andrés (55, Guadalajara) who accounts how he and his partner get online on their cell phones before going to sleep:

... Well, before going to sleep, we both used to be on our cell phones each. But that didn't particularly bother me, that she was on Facebook or just watching [something on her cell phone], no, because it was the same with me. So, how could I get upset about something that I was also doing?.

Likewise, technoferences may be accepted as inevitable if they have to do with work issues. Contemporary work culture has created an implicit obligation to be available all the time and this is accompanied by the conviction that the imperatives of work take priority, even at home (Gregg, 2011).

In this logic, Arturo (36, Guadalajara) states that when it is a work related issue he makes exceptions to the rule of not answering the cell phone during meals. He says: "... if they call me out of the blue, as I keep it close, well, if they call me I answer; if I am waiting for an urgent message I say: 'I am sorry, I need to answer, it's work'. But I try, as far as possible, not to answer it while I'm at the table.

Similarly, Aurora (43, Colima) admits that she became "addicted" to her cell phone because she was constantly receiving calls due to her work:

... I was always answering, at lunchtime and breakfast, I mean, I didn't even eat, nor did we talk, because I was checking on my phone. Then he would say to me: "Hey, we don't even talk". "I am dealing with matters of the association". "Well, yes, but this is too much" [Rodolfo would reply]. And also my children would tell me at lunch time: "Mom, enough" and I would say: "Wait a little because I have to solve whatever it was".

In these stories, the female and male experiences are very similar, both recognizing that there is a problem when the cell phone cannot be put down during family time.

However, there are also stories in which being online and interacting with others, even if they are together, is "normal" because of the type of work they do. These are people who have adapted to the multiple technological interferences in their daily coexistence, and normalize them as part of the activities of one or both partners, and are tolerant of these interruptions. In these cases it is a relatively shared use, rather than separate or isolated, at some times for work and at others times for common entertainment. This is how Daniel (45, Colima) describes it:

... sometimes when I'm driving and she's on the cell phone answering, it doesn't bother me... And we are regularly very busy and we have to answer a lot of calls or a lot of messages, we get it.

The stories analyzed showed that communicational uses are subject to rules, attempts –successful or unsuccessful– to influence the behavior of others, as well as self-regulation efforts. All these aspects show communicational agency, i.e. the capacity for purpose-oriented action, under specific rules, that takes advantage of its margins of freedom to bring about changes or transformations in own or others' uses of technologies. Communicational agency is observed when strategies are established, rules are created and habits are transformed to reduce unwanted or irrelevant content and directly manage attention and time.

In couples, it was also observed that technological interruptions are not always unexpected, but can be intentionally managed to express annoyance, displeasure or disaffection. In this sense, technofences do

not occur only in relatively unavoidable situations, in which decisions to answer to an interaction or a content notification come as a surprise, without directly fostering it. Technoferences are also managed by the users themselves to create absence or artificial distance. What was observed matches with the results of Vaterlaus and Tulane's (2019) qualitative study which states that interactive technologies facilitate both distractions and connection.

Here the difficulties in living together as a couple are not associated with technological interference per se but with daily dynamics and distance management. In some cases, relational shortcomings are manifested through routines (which operate strategically) to reduce interaction, despite living together. This is the case of María (32, Guadalajara) who says that "there is not much coexistence" with her husband, that "the relationship is not very cordial" because she wants to separate and he has suspicions that "she is seeing someone else". In this type of cases, in which the couple's relationship no longer exists, technoference is a way of creating distance with the partner; it is a resource that men and women use to keep relational barriers in the face of forced cohabitation.

The following testimony is similar. Berenice narrates episodes of technoference caused by her partner, which rather than being an unexpected surprising interruption of daily coexistence, seem to be a strategy to deal with the contact forced by the co-residence in the same space of an unsatisfied couple:

... at the end of the day he was always on his cell phone. The last day I was with him, when he arrived ... around 6 or 7 o'clock, he sat down and was on his cell phone until he went to sleep, he didn't say a word... We were both there in bed; each one on our own... Well, at the end, I think he was messaging with someone else [laughs] (Berenice, 42 years old, Guadalajara).

The cell phone, for Berenice's partner, became a kind of barrier against interaction that was unwanted or presumed to be problematic. In these cases, it can be recognized that some couple's technoferences are manifestations of lack of love, indifference or disregard for the other.

This type of technology interference is managed not only to isolate, but also to show indifference; it could even be interpreted as aggression or a manifestation of violence. Here it can be observed that the most dissatisfied couples resort to the cell phone to deal with their relational shortcomings.

CONCLUSIONS

Mobile devices, digital interactions and consumption are the main competitors in face-to-face coexistence because of their potential to interrupt everything and because of their leading role in daily disputes for attention and time. Cell phone use by both members of the heterosexual couple has become an activity that generates mutual annoyances, either because there is a feeling of being unattended when the other is immersed in the device or because a request to stop using the cell phone has been received from the partner.

Technoferences or phubbing in the stories analyzed appear to generate annoyances in one of the partners, and they are followed by agreements regarding the cell phone use when they are together as a response to the conflict. But also as a strategic instrument to create absence even being present, to disconnect from the immediate environment. Finally, we also detected couples who have common or relatively shared uses of cell phones, who are not bothered by the interruptions associated with it, or who see in the cell phone the possibility and freedom to be together but entertained with what each of them likes. The stories show reflexivity on the subject, greater tolerance to work-related technoferences and a gradual normalization, especially among the youngest.

Technoference situations also bring into play the power resources that each partner has. In the face of technological interruptions, men claim greater permissiveness for their phubbing practices under the assumption that their activities on their cell phones or other devices are more important. They also assume that the interruptions generated by their partners are less justified. They do this by negatively defining female technological uses as associated with leisure, entertainment or vanity.

Men criticize more strongly the technological interruptions caused by their partners and tend to get their partners to agree to disconnect.

In contrast, women have less power to get their partners to adjust their behavior based on their complaints about the attention they give to and time they spend on their cell phone activities.

Both genders are willing to regulate/limit the technological uses of their partners and families, although men often seek exceptions for themselves. Work-related technoferences tend to be more tolerated precisely because we live in a society that hypervalues productivity and continues to assume that the most valuable time, as Leccardi (1996) has pointed out for more than two decades, is that of paid work. In any case, technoferences due to work-related issues are less reprehensible and less painful than those related to daily socializing with family and friends, or entertainment.

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PROFILE

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