



Virtually yours

reflecting on the place of mobile phones in romantic
relationships

Mihirini Sirisena
University of Edinburgh

Phones have changed how we conduct relationships

Thaaraka viyana ihala ahasin

Aetha indan

Hari hadissiyen

Oba aawa

Hanging on to an SMS

Aadaraye anshu maathrayak aran

(Shaded by the sky laced with stars, you came from
afar, hurriedly, hanging on to a text message, and
carrying a droplet of love.)

Phones have changed how we conduct relationships

With the entry of mobile phones in to our lives, we have redefined the meaning of relationships, taking them to a new level on which we extend ourselves beyond time and place. They have created new expectations out of relationships and new ways of being together.

It's all in a day's work

“We talk on the phone. It's like this, akka. In the morning, Ayya always calls. Wakes me up. Not these days, because he knows that I go to sleep late. Then, he doesn't bother me in the morning. Then, I am the one who lets him know that I am up. It's not like he ever tells me to ring him in the morning or to let him know if I am going somewhere ... When he wakes up, if not, before he leaves home, he would call me. I wake up around 5-5.15 in the morning. But I wouldn't get off the bed. I would stay in bed at least until about 5.30. ... It is at that time that ayya calls. He likes to sleep in. He wakes me, that is, he keeps the alarm and wakes up before I do, phones me and we talk for a while. Then he goes back to sleep ... I am the one, if I were to tell you the truth akka, I remember him all the time. If I start eating, I remember him. Wherever I go, I remember him. If I see a friend with her boyfriend, then you know, I remember him. Then, I feel lonely. But there is nothing I can do, no? I can't bring ayya in here and keep him, no? Then, because of that, I give ayya a 'ring-cut.' If I do that two-three times, he would call me. Calling meaning akka, we don't hang on the phone the whole day ... We talk in the morning. Then, if I feel like it, at night, if I feel I need to talk to him before night falls, I phone him during the day too. He has this habit akka, if he goes somewhere, he tells me. ... When I phoned him last night, I asked him what he is planning to do today. When we talk we ask what we ate.”

A word on reciprocation

Sharing the mundane, the consistency with which it is acted out makes it special, turns it in to an act of intimacy.

“the normal, mundane encounter is made special through the observation of ceremony. This ceremony is ritualising insofar as it results in the meaning of the message being thereby altered in ways that gives it semi-sacred values. These values are manifest in the desire to keep the message, to share it and to value it over and above its mere textual form; the text message comes to mean much more than merely an exchange of words, but becomes an offering of commitment to the relationship”

(Taylor and Harper 2002:. 441).

It's all in a day's work

a day revolves around finding ways to be with each other

being with – is about knowing what each other is doing during the day

‘being with’ needs to be reciprocated.

New expectations

Keeping each other in the loop



It's all about trust...

“There is this friend of mine. She has a lot of problems. Her boyfriend asks her not to ask him where he is or what he is doing. There is a big mismatch there. My friend is asking me “if I can’t ask my boyfriend these things, whom can I ask these things from?” I feel there is no point if he can’t change himself because of his girlfriend. Either she should change or he should.”

Exclusivity

There's a time and place for everything.

Monitoring is a two way process.

It comes with accountability.

Mobile phones and codes of conduct

Conducting private lives in public spaces

Walking the public/private line...

Does the mobile phone upturn our
'islands of subjectivity'?

Not so. We carve out private spaces
in public places.

Techniques of finding privacy

Walking away

Avoiding gaze

Mobile phones as a resource to enact private
lives in public spaces

To conclude

Mobile phones are about being connected, an alternate way of being with.