

## Unfaithful: Reflections of enchantment, disenchantment ...and the mobile phone

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever,  
One foot in the sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never.  
(Shakespeare, *Much To Do About Nothing* II, iii, 62.)

*Anna (Australian, age 31)*<sup>1</sup>

We have been living together for five months now. The burning, flooding stage of new love has turned from midsummer euphoria to the colors of Indian summer: magenta, burnt amber. We are more routine now, more in harmony. I am happier with our domesticity and everyday closeness than those beginning colors so bright—lime green, electric pink, when things were thrilling, but utterly uncertain.

Before deciding to live together, Michael worked in Europe for the months of June, July and August. We communicated the regular ways—long phone calls, emails—and what became a favorite, almost secret pleasure, through texting. Because of the time difference between us, I would wake up in the morning and there would be texts from him waiting for me—‘morning sweetpea’—and other times, more mischievous ones: ‘don’t wear panties today.’ This text... fetish, continued upon his return. I liked that the phone was with him at all times, close to his body, close to me. We would text each other when we were at work, when we were out with friends, even when we were in the same room at social functions: ‘Anna, my vixen, meet me upstairs, come quickly.’

He began receiving late night texts about a month ago. At first, I thought nothing of it. Michael is an honorable man. But last night, when the phone buzzed like a twitching mosquito, I rose out of bed. Michael is a heavy sleeper. I used to joke that the house could burn and... Careful that his breathing remained steady, I felt along the inner pockets of his jacket and jeans. Once finding his phone, I grabbed my housecoat and quickly

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<sup>1</sup> To protect the privacy of research participants, much information in the case studies herein are a mélange of interviewees’ voices and experiences.

went down the stairs, opening the side door which leads to our balcony. Moonlit. How could an innocuous text message produce such mistrust within me, make me sneak bandit-like through our house built solid by labor of love?

Her name is Helen. The name rings a small bell; did he mention her before—a client, a colleague? *Missing you*, she texted. *Luv H*, she texted. My body choking. Losing breath.

I sit on our balcony. Sit on our balcony until the stars fall and the inevitable, unfortunate morning comes. By this time, I've read their history. Their shared messages passed back and forth, ones he's saved like a treasure to read again. The call log that records the length of their stolen words, their guilty, forbidden words. The little phone in my hands: my dark little unwelcome friend, bearer of bad news, the footprints of his infidelity.

Stories of infidelity hold fascination for many. Among our neighbors, our heroines, our celebrities and our politicians, infidelity is the central topic of many great novels and films, of gossip passed at kitchen tables and newspaper headlines. Debate exists about the nature of adult sexuality, whether we are essentially quasi-monogamous or quasi-polygamous, and anthropologists such as myself explore how the sexual norms of different cultures inform the behavior of its members. In the contemporary era, much discussion has taken place in “first world” countries about increasing divorce rates. Despite ideals of sexual monogamy, divorce is often linked to the high rates of adultery within institutionalized partnerships. This has led to radical questioning of salient markers of normative heterosexual forms: sexual monogamy, marriage and couplehood (see Heaphy, Donovan & Weeks, 2004). Examining how affairs are socially constructed and the range of meanings assigned to them by social actors across different historical periods and different cultural milieus can increase our understanding of changing ideologies and practices concerning marriage, sexuality and gender relations. As can exploring the dynamic relationship between infidelity and technology provide insight about the direction of this human proclivity.

Numerous cross-cultural studies have replicated findings that the cell phone provides its users a site to explore their desires, versus traditional face-to-face communication which may act to restrain such expression (Ellwood-Clayton 2003, 2004;

Kasesniemi and Rauntianen 2002; Pertierra et al. 2002).<sup>2</sup> Texting removes aural, visual and vocal signals, which can act to instill bravery among communicators, particularly in the beginning stages of romantic relationships, particularly for women (Byrne and Findlay 2004: 4).<sup>3</sup> As indicated in the case study above, wireless communication also inspires innuendo and sexual play among its users. Texting affords flexibility, (crafted) spontaneity—and perhaps most significantly—a great deal of privacy for romantic communicators. Moreover, unlike email communication, texters have the ability to contact one another at any given time: they are almost always “online.” These factors work together to position texting as a tool of *enchantment*, and illuminate why texting is increasingly becoming a central component of romance-building for people in different geographical and cultural locations.

This paper is about *reflections*. It is not a summary of one research project, nor does it provide analysis of particular survey findings. Rather it mirrors my own movements as researcher (continental shifts from Asia, to Australia, to North America), cell phone user, reader, listener and observer. Indeed, in the Philippines, where I conducted most of my research, the cell phone has become a chief player in the courtship, maintenance and termination of romantic relationships. I discovered that it had also become a central conduit for extradyadic affairs. Upon return to Australia, through reading cross-cultural accounts of the changing sphere of wireless communication and by listening to the stories of my counterparts, reading the magazines left open at coffee shops, and screening Hollywood films, it has become apparent that adultery and texting are often played out hand-in-hand. Investigation of the relationship between advanced technology and intimate relationships in light of sexual transgressions illuminates how technology is altering intimacy. According to Rome-based private eye Miriam Tomponzi, there are three prerequisites in order to “cheat” successfully: “delete your phone records

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<sup>2</sup> For example, a recent survey of young Asian cell phone users found that about one out of two Filipinos expressed their affection through mobile phone communication (Ho 2003: A4), with 58% of respondents saying “I love you” by SMS. The Philippines topped “the most expressive in love” category and was heralded “Asia’s text Casanova” (Ho 2003: A4).

<sup>3</sup> In a study about romantic communication channel preference among unmarried heterosexuals, O’Sullivan (2000) found that mediated communication, such as texting, provides a “buffer effect” in terms of impression management. Physical distance negates potentially negative face-to-face rejection signals e.g. facial expressions, intonation.

from the phone memory, delete text messages and learn to fake a work conversation if a lover calls when a spouse is present” (Dow 2002: 18).

Although infidelity is a common element of human experience, the area has not received significant scholarly treatment (Morgan 2004: 15);<sup>4</sup> as has it generally been examined as tangent events rather than a social phenomena. With the growing popularity of the World Wide Web, however, a plethora of studies in the communications field were published regarding the relationship between the Internet, cyber versus embodied infidelity (and associated complexities), and identity experimentation (Dodge and Kitchin 2001; Gray 2002; Turkle 1995). Yet, to date, almost no research has explicitly examined the role of the cell phone role in initiating, aiding and terminating romantic extradyadic affairs.

Before I reflect further on these ideas, I must first provide the reader with some discussion about infidelity. I define infidelity within “Judeo-Christian tradition,”<sup>5</sup> map its various configurations, and explore how it is customarily viewed. This is followed by a discussion about the consequences of infidelity, which will help elucidate why secrecy is a defining feature of a traditional affair and how a cell phone can enhance such deception. I then discuss disenchantment: discovery of an unfaithful partner. Finally I explore future technologies in terms of maintenance and discovery of infidelity.

## **unfaithful**

In their own way affairs are just as much a part of everyday life as marriage itself.... People have affairs because marriage doesn't work.... Officially we are a monogamous society, unofficially we are polygamous.  
(Lake and Hills 1979: 172).

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a striking omission in scholarly work about infidelity is lack of discussion about the relationship between affairs and sexually transmitted infections STIs (Harrison and Marsden 2002: xv).

<sup>5</sup> Although not the focus of this paper, polygamous marriages, whereby romantic love and emotional intimacy are deemphasized, are the norm for many current societies (e.g. Bedouin culture of Israel, the Yoruba of Niger) (Tuch 2000: xx).

When exploring infidelity we encounter issues related to trust, secrecy, deception, power, control, commitment, intimacy, and the “enterprise of love” (Tuch 2000: xi-xii). In North America, as well as in other western countries, emotional intimacy, companionship and sexual exclusivity are the predominate ideals which the institution of marriage provides (VanderVoort and Duck 2004: 1; Shrage 1994: 38). Yet growing disillusionment concerning whether marriage can meet these traditional relationship goals is rife. At this juncture, I wish to define infidelity and explain why I use ‘infidelity,’ ‘affairs,’ and ‘unfaithful,’ as interchangeable terms throughout the paper. Infidelity is no longer linked solely to marriage. Rather, it encompasses monogamy and exclusivity within committed couple relationships (Harrison and Mardsen 2004: xi). Thus, the article treats infidelity among participants in heterosexual relationships ranging from boyfriend-girlfriend dyads, to cohabiting couples and those partnered by institution.<sup>6</sup> From my reading, infidelity generally is a breach of trust or relationship agreements (Pittman 1989: 20), and can be defined explicitly as *transgressions of previously negotiated commitments among couples, specifically sexually exclusive monogamy (often involving deception)*.

There are nevertheless numerous types of infidelity, which possess relative significance. As Shrage (1994: 37) notes “...sex can have different degrees of seriousness.” Affairs are nominally constructed as triadic relationships: a couple and the lover of one of the partners.<sup>7</sup> I combined and reworked Lawson’s (1988: 27) and Pittman’s (1989: 35) classification of heterosexual extramarital relationships. First there is *the incidental encounter*, which occurs under unusual circumstances, is considered somewhat accidental, or structured as a brief fling, and is based on immediate pleasure, risk, and colored overall by a sense of meaninglessness. Then there is *the open affair*, whereby marital arrangements allow for mutual sexual experimentation; and *philandering*, continuous or recurrent infidelity whereby affairs are not necessarily conducted in secret, with some spouses actively cooperating. Finally, the affair type which will be the focus of this paper, is *la grande passion*, characterized by desire, betrayal, and danger. This affair type is considered an intense passion which may threaten

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<sup>6</sup>The inclusion of children certainly adds to the complexity of an affair, but is not differentiated upon explicitly throughout.

<sup>7</sup> However, as Morgan (2004: 24) notes, by looking at the workings of gossip, affairs are rarely dyadic, but rather sets of intersecting triangles.

the primary relationship; it involves significant “depth of feeling” (Hunt 1969) and is based on emotional intimacy, sexual chemistry and the third party being unaware of the affair for some duration. As Pittman (1989: 35) argues [my emphasis]: *The infidelity in not in the sex, necessarily, but in the secrecy. It isn’t whom you lie with. It’s whom you lie to.* Furthermore, secrecy and lies are more likely to end a partnership than sexual acts (Pittman 1989: 22). Thus, maintaining secrecy is a central component in the structuring of an affair and, how the mobile phone aids such deceit, a central focus of this paper.

People view adultery differently depending on their cultural background and, as Shrage (1994: 50) contends, their gender, religion, political positioning, or whether they have more libertine viewpoints.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, despite the “sexual revolution” of the 1970s and high accounts of infidelity in many cultural settings, affairs are often conceptualized in terms of morality and receive negative evaluation by way of disapproval (and gossip) (Buunk and Dijkstra 2004: 103; Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 2004: 99). Attitudinal surveys in Britain, for example, found that approximately four-fifths of both men and women from varying age groups agree that extramarital sex is “always or mostly wrong” (Wellings et al., 1994: 249). For many, “cheating” is judged as a failure of romantic love, signifying disloyalty, dishonesty and disrespect (Shrage 1994: 38-39). However, sexual hypocrisy concerning infidelity is widespread. Kinsey (1948) found that most people would be unfaithful if guaranteed their acts would not be discovered.

Infidelity is rarely rewarded and the consequences may be intense (Pittman 1989: 29). Adultery is the primary disrupter of families and the most universally accepted reason for divorce (Betzig 1989). Infidelity impacts personal relationships, with partners of adulterers often experiencing depression, jealousy, anger and humiliation (Lawson 1988). Statistics concerning infidelity are highly unreliable (Kipnis, 1998). Yet research

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<sup>8</sup> Shrage (1994: 50) writes: “If Carol Gilligan is right and women tend to be concerned with maintaining relationships in resolving moral problems, then women are likely to see the consequences of adultery in terms of its effects on the romantic and familial relationships involved. If men are socialized to take a more atomistic approach to morality, then they may be likely to see the effects of adultery in terms of the personal freedoms and pleasures gained and lost. Those with particular ideals of religious worship may see the effects of adultery in terms of their relationship with God, or in terms of their spiritual development. And persons with a stigmatized minority sexual orientation, and who see the sexual and marital practices of American society as repressively restrictive, might see mass acts of adultery and casual sex as effecting a destabilization of hegemonic social institutions.”

suggests that marital infidelity is relatively common (Vangelsti and Gerstenberger 2004: 59), with about half of couples being unfaithful, and with men being historically more adulterous. Buunk and Dijkstra (2004: 104) argue that in all cultures men are more unfaithful than women. For example, a study by Carael, Cleland et al. (1995) found that in Hong Kong 8% of the men and 1% of women had extradyadic sex in the past year and in Guinea Bissaus, 38% of men, and 19% of women did. American research suggests that 30% to 60% of American men and 20% to 50% of American women will have extramarital sex (Glass and Wright 1992; Thomson 1983).

There is however a growing convergence between men and women in terms of their attitudes toward, and practices of, extramarital sex (Buunk and Dijkstra 2004: 105; Morgan 2004: 25; Pittman 1989: 34). Some recent studies also suggest that married women are better at disguising their affairs (Morgan 2004: 25). This likely relates to historical and cross-cultural evidence that female infidelity, which compromises reproductive exclusivity of marriage, accrues harsher judgments and consequences than parallel acts of men (Thompson 1983; VanderVoort and Duck 2004: 2).<sup>9</sup> For women, particularly mothers, having an affair heralds much greater risks of stigma, guilt (Meyering and Epling-McWerther 1986), financial loss (Lake and Hills, 1979), and threat to personal safety. Adultery—actual or suspected—is a primary cause of domestic violence and spousal homicide (Daly and Wilson 1988). In some cultures, suspicion alone is justification for severe punishment, including death (Betzig 1989; Pittman 1989: 33). As Kinsey et al. (1948: 592) wrote: “Husbands are much less inclined to accept the nonmarital activities of their wives. It has been so since the dawn of history.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As L. DeSalvo (1999: 59-60) warns, ‘If a husband discovers his wife has been unfaithful, the marriage will far more likely end than if a woman discovers her husband has been unfaithful... So. If you are a woman, the next time you feel like confessing, unless you want to end your marriage, bear that in mind.’

<sup>10</sup> This sexual double standard plays out historically and cross-culturally. For example in many ancient Eastern cultures (such as the Chinese and Japanese) and Mediterranean cultures (e.g. Egyptians, Hebrews, Romans, Syrians, and Spartans) only women’s infidelity was punished by law (Buunk and Dijkstra 2004: 106). Until recently, in Belgium, only a wife’s infidelity was legally recognized as reason for divorce (ibid.).

## secrecy and subterfuge

Everybody lies about sex.  
(from Robert A. Heinlein's *Time Enough For Love*, 1973)

### before the affair

Communication is the primary way individuals begin, embody and terminate extradyadic relationships (Vangelisti and Gerstenberger 2004: 61). The ways in which affairs are initiated, however, have received little scholarly attention. Before an affair begins, the couple must “meet” and exchange communication signals which indicate their openness toward having an intimate relationship or encounter. A second meeting must thus be scheduled, as is discussion necessary about how to contact the other individual again (unless the person is part of their close social network e.g. a friend or coworker) (Vangelisti and Gerstenberger 2004: 62). A recent study by Australian researchers Byrne and Findlay (2004) found that SMS technology affects the way romantic relationships are initiated. Due to strong gender scripts, it is the preferred communication conduit for women who are interested in contacting an attractive other.

SMS is a convenient conduit to feel out a given situation, that is, to work to determine the other parties' interest: i.e. Text Fishing. It is also a fairly non-threatening way to initiate communication with someone versus a phone call or face-to-face methods which demand greater bravery and often, directness of intention. For example, if after a convention, a man sends an innocuous text message to one of the colleagues he had met while there and she in turn replies quickly and with warmth, the communication process of exchanging messages (similarly to emailing) may grow in familiarity—and innuendo. Opening the door of communication this way would also allow for making future embodied meetings obviously more possible. The next case study, recounted by a young Catholic man in the central Philippines named Joel, speaks to this beginning communication process:

Irene is a Muslim girl who lives in a small island in the southern Philippines. We were pen-pals for nearly 2 years. Then she suddenly just stopped responding to my letters. I didn't hear from her for many months. But on Valentine's Day, she sent me a card with a picture of her and her cell phone number. She is very sweet and beautiful; I can tell from her picture. I called her one morning and we talked. She's showing her sweetness by texting me always. She always puts "I love you" in her texts. Sometimes I send her 20 texts in one day.

I began to feel like I really liked her. I asked if she would be my girlfriend and she said yes. We made many plans to meet, but because I do not have enough money to take care of our food expenses and lodging, I keep putting it off.

Everything was going really well until she told me she had a confession to make. She said she love me very much and that's why she's going to tell me this. She began crying on the phone and told me that she was already married. That's why she didn't communicate with me for those many months. She said she didn't like her husband, he was just a suitor, but her father caught him stealing a kiss from her and because they are from a very conservative culture, he quickly arranged their marriage.

I was very disappointed about this. I can't bear listening to her talk, so I hang up, despite her crying. I was so cruel: she keeps texting me but I never reply; she calls me but I don't answer the phone. She even calls me from different phones, but when I hear her voice, I hang up.

Finally, she stopped trying to reach me. I feel bad about hurting somebody, but I am hurt also.

This case study provides some insight into the complexities of modern love: intersecting religious customs, attachments born from the evolution of love letter to cyber correspondence, diverging expectations and subterfuge through mobile phone use. Although usually the practice of Filipino men, Irene hid her married identity and instead worked to deepen her cyber relationship with another (Joel) with the aim to eventually embody these transgressions. In the Philippines, married men frequently pretend that they are single and woo unsuspecting women by text. Often by the time the texting parties have met, the duped woman is already in "in love" with the married man, making physical indiscretion more probable. Owning multiple SIM cards is a popular way to simultaneously maintain numerous clandestine relationships, a fact which is not lost upon

most Filipinas. Indeed, one young couple I encountered during fieldwork exchanged cell phones “for an entire week” in order to demonstrate their fidelity to one another.

Commercial markets now offer numerous sites whereby one can pay to chat with other eager strangers. For example, the last pages of Australian women’s magazine, *Cleo* (June, 2004) lists advertisements such as this:

Hot Text Chat: Girls & guys online now, waiting to chat with you!  
Text us anything you want! Guys to chat with girls text the word  
**babes** to 188 7472.

Also, in the back of Vancouver-based newspapers, personal ads are now also available under the banner “SMS Chat” e.g.:

Cheeky SMS Chat, 2talk2 women, txt Cheeky to [given number]  
\$3.95 msg snd.rcv.

Indeed, the implications of such services, in terms of extramarital liaisons, are high.

Moreover, one needs only to consider the much publicized and highly suspect British phenomenon of “toothing” to imagine the nature of future of sexual liaisons. Bluetooth software, available in most mobile phones and PDAs enables two devices to communicate with each other over short distances, thus allowing users to automatically locate other such devices in their vicinity (Terdiman 2004). This wireless technology is put to use by strangers on trains, buses, bars and concerts seeking anonymous sexual encounters, whereby text messaging provides the means of initial contact (*ibid.*).

### **enchantment: during the affair**

Secrecy is indeed a defining element of the traditional affair.<sup>11</sup> Adultères are threatened by exposure (Pittman and Wagers 1995), as the entire dynamic of both the primary relationship and the extradyadic relationship would ultimately change upon discovery. Adultères fear that if their infidelities became exposed they would have to face their partner’s despair, wrath or abandonment (Pittman 1989: 65), as would continuing the extradyadic relationship become more difficult due to their partner’s suspicions (Tuch 2000: 157). Moreover, as discussed previously, the ramifications of disclosure can be

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<sup>11</sup> As Shrage (1994: 48) argues: “In the typical case, the adulterous transaction is imposed on the faithful spouse without that party’s consent.”

severe, including possible loss of marriage, friendships, respect of coworkers, and relationships with children (Vangelisti and Gerstenberger 2004: 67-68).<sup>12</sup>

Many adultères thus actively work to withhold information from their partner, family and/or other members in their social network (Vangelisti and Gerstenberger 2004: 67). As Pittman (1989:22) comments: “A lie may be a more direct betrayal than keeping a relevant secret, but the two ultimately amount to much the same thing—the deliberate effort to disorient your partner in order to avoid the inevitable conflict about some breach of marital agreement.” Maintained by secrecy, affairs exist in another world alongside the manifest world whereby lovers attempt to conceal their relationship and retain normalcy with their primary partners (Morgan 2004: 21). Lying by way of text demands less performance than face-to-face betrayal as facial and voice indicators may give deception away. According to a study conducted in Britain, 45% of people have lied about their whereabouts by text (Theobald 2004: 137). For example, upon receiving a phone call from a spouse, the infidel could simply not answer the telephone call, but rather text back a few minutes later something along the lines of ‘at grocery store, huge lines, home in an hour’ when in fact he or she could be at a nearby bar sharing wine with an attractive stranger or at a hotel making love to a long-time lover. Texting grants users the ability to craft their communication, to position their spatial and temporal locations so to impact favorably upon impression management. Negotiating dual communication desires—normalcy to one’s primary partner, and connection to one’s lover—is enhanced by the silent, flexible, on-body cyber device: the cell phone.

As Tuch (2000: 11) asserts: “Affairs that are conducted clandestinely place tremendous constraints on a couple with regard to where they can go, how often they can meet, and what others must be told about their periodical disappearances.” Yet, these shared secrets act to further bind infidels: guilt, secrecy and isolation can enhance the excitement of the affair dyad; engaging in the forbidden, whilst trying to keep this hidden is colored by danger and frequently, excitement. The centrality of secrecy in affair management usually relies upon circumspect communication, planning and meeting (Vangelisti and Gerstenberger 2004: 67). Here, the cell phone becomes a central player in

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<sup>12</sup> In other cases, however, individuals may find rewards in disclosing their marital infidelity, for example, to “get back” at a spouse, or for men, as a status enhancer among peers (Vangelisti and Gerstenberger 2004: 68).

the workings of an affair: a communication medium between infidels which makes transgressions and concealment more effortless. These notions are illuminated in my informal interview with Tracy, a 28 year-old woman who lives in the outer suburbs of Vancouver:

It is Thursday night. Tracy has come over to my house with wine and red cheeks. Come, directly from his apartment. Her husband has been away for two weeks, providing her with uncommon occasion to be with her new lover Martin. This is her first affair and one she feels she cannot stop from continuing.

*Tell me about how it started, the ways that you communicated?*

We work in related fields, so every few weeks we would end up on the same project and, we just, flirted a lot, you know talked about our life...

*And how did your communication extend to outside of work?*

He had a contact for me in relation to work and gave me his email address. So, we started emailing back and forth, friendly messages, but with a sense of, playfulness, compliments.

*Were you also texting?*

Not yet. We just emailed and would see each other every so often for work.

*OK. And when did things progress beyond flirtation?*

I couldn't stop thinking about him, right? And I'd written him this sort of suggestive email and he hadn't replied, so, I texted him. He'd given me his number sometime before. And he called back immediately. Luckily Rob [her husband] wasn't around. And we talked, and he invited me over for coffee, and I went over and it all just happened.

*So, what was your main form of communication after that?*

I totally stopped emailing. Rob would sometimes, you know, want to check his messages while I was on line, or, I don't know, it seemed too dangerous. Usually Martin and I text each other first, because you never know who's going to be around if you just call. And then after determining that it is safe, we talk on the phone and plan to meet up. But sometimes things come up and I have to, you know, quickly text Martin and be like, I can't make it.

*Has your husband ever contacted you while you were with Martin?*

Just a few times thank God; I'm not a good liar. In the very beginning when he'd call, I couldn't answer, not in front of Martin. So I'd just text something back about being in a meeting or whatever. And nowadays, sometimes I, you know, just walk away

from wherever Martin is and have the phone call and act like everything is normal.

Despite ideals of happily ever after, commitment and fidelity are often difficult to maintain as couple relationships become mundane, routine and sexually monotonous (O'Neill and O'Neill, 1972; Vandervoort and Duck 2004: 4). In contrast, affairs often possess a utopian edge (VanderVoort and Duck 2004: 5), whereby passion with another offers halcyon respite from everyday domesticity.<sup>13</sup> Dual desires for passion and stability are at odds.<sup>14</sup> Infidels are risk takers. As VanderVoort and Duck (2004: 6) argue:

Part of the thrilling significance of adulterous affairs is that they are not the subject of the mundane ubiquity of trivial life but take place in settings removed from the regularities of ordinary existence—hotels, resorts, conferences, fast cars, back rooms, snatched moments of meretricious bliss separated from the context of an orderly, predictable and repetitive life...

As discussed previously, snatching such moments is enhanced through reliance on text communication (as flexible, transportable, silent). Liberated temporarily to reinvent themselves, DeSalvo (1999: 107) claims that adulterers are essentially trying to regain autonomy lost in marriage; that is “to reclaim the ability to do whatever he chose to do whenever he chose to do it and at whatever cost.”

### **disenchantment: discovery of the affair**

As Vangelisti and Gerstenberger (2004: 69) argue, since infidelity is often hidden, the suspecting partner faces a dilemma. By directly confronting their partner, they risk appearing insecure, insulting their partner (potentially damaging their relationship), or, if through confrontation they find out about the affair, they may face major relationship change. Thus, many who are suspicious look for behavioral clues, or increasingly, I believe, work to secretly get a hold of their partner's email or cell phone, that is, to play *cyber detective*. According to my informal research, this is indeed a widespread

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<sup>13</sup> As writer DeSalvo (1999: 47) so eloquently describes: “In my adultery story, there is no cooking, no dishwashing, no fights, no one ignoring you (reading the newspaper, looking at television, listening to the radio when you want to share a feeling or idea). There are no raised voices, no bitterness, no rancor, no sorrow, no leaking toilet or sinks, no lousy landlords, no obnoxious neighbors, no work, no bills, no boring or bad sex, no children present ... In my fantasy of adultery (in everyone's fantasy of adultery) there is no real life. Which, I have come to realize over the years, is precisely what *drives* people to commit adultery.”

<sup>14</sup> As VanderVoort and Duck (2004: 6) note: “An affair transports its actors, if only temporarily, from ordinary life, while assuring that ordinary life will be there waiting when they return, as long as they succeed in hiding the transgression. The transformative allure of an affair is heightened by this contradiction—everything changes yet nothing need change.”

phenomenon, particularly for women. “Sometimes I look in his inbox when he’s in the shower; that’s the only time I look because he takes his phone everywhere, and he’s a light sleeper” said Rhonda (age 25, Australian). If not finding incriminating evidence of an affair, some women continue to sporadically check their partner’s cell phone as it gifts them a feeling of reassurance that nothing wayward is occurring.

Sandra Davis, partner and head of family practice at the UK law firm Mishcon de Reya, which represented the divorce case of Diana, Princess of Wales, says that one quarter of her clients cite Internet or text dalliances as contributing factors to the downfall of their marriage (Theobald 2004: 136). This finding led Davis to commission a national survey about technology and adultery. Davis found that 30% of survey participants used electronic communications to flirt with potential partners or to nurture an affair, with 22% communicating every day with the said person and 62% once a week. The study also unearthed that one in seven had surreptitiously read their partner’s emails and texts, of which one in five discovered flirtatious communiqué (Theobald 2004: 136).

Although new information technologies, particularly texting, are increasingly relied upon to maintain extradyadic relationships, according to Australian private detective David King, owner of the infidelity specialist agency Lipstick Investigations, information technologies are also the chief way infidels are exposed (Dow 2002: 16). In his Sydney-based agency, King oversees 300 infidelity cases per year. Cases usually originate from a dyad member spying unrecognized numbers on a partner’s cell phone or telephone bill (ibid.). These findings are replicated elsewhere. An informal study conducted by a private eye agency in Italy, for example, found that cell phones were involved in 90% of discovered affairs (ibid.). We also see public examples of this in celebrity-focused scandals, e.g. in England, the highly publicized text sex messages of David Beckham to Rebecca Loos; in Australia, the repeated text sex scandals of cricketer Shane Warne; and in Italy, the breakup of actress Deborah Caprioglio and her partner, director Geppy Gleijeses, due to her discovery of his illicit text messages to another. Indeed, text messages, voice messages and call register are now admissible in the court of law in infidelity cases in numerous countries (Dow 2002: 16). Affairs and the mobile phone have become increasingly hand-in-hand. Ironically, the same medium that enhances the workings of an affair also causes *disenchantment*: i.e. discovery.

In order to thwart discovery, new technologies are available for the discerning infidel. Makers of new-style video mobile phones in Hong Kong, for example, are working to create a special setting on 3G phones whereby users can select a background of their choice prior to answering a phone call (*The Herald Sun* 2004: 31).<sup>15</sup> This technology is specifically targeted at philandering spouses: the foreground image is live video, while the background remains static. This would allow a wife at a bar to answer her phone with a photograph of her sister's house in the background, or a husband to project an image of himself in his living room when in fact he is at a hotel with a lover. (*The Herald Sun* 2004: 31). Phone owners could perhaps use this device alongside a software program from Simeda called SoundCover. Downloaded into one's mobile phone to provide fake background sound (Dow 2002: 18), the audio choices provided by SoundCover include: traffic jam; at the dentist; on the street; in the park; heavy machinery; thunderstorm; circus parade; ring 15 seconds; own pre-recorded sound.<sup>16</sup> Along this line, although now obsolete, in 2000, the UK Alibi Agency and the Ace Alibi agency established websites solely to disorientate partners, providing fake invitations to non-existent functions, ticket stubs for non-attended concerts and receptionists to take phone calls (Dow 2002: 18).

In conjunction with these types of technologies, however, there is a growing market targeted for the reverse: catching a cheating partner. For example, signing up with "Text Cheats" on the U.K website *Mobtastic* (see <http://www.mobtastic.com/sms/cheating/index.asp>) provides young texters with an innovative way to determine a partner's fidelity:

**Do you trust your lover or want to make them squirm?** Here's a fun way to find out. Set him or her up for our wicked fidelity test and an artificial agent will chat them up by anonymous text messages. Then we will send you a report with his/her fidelity score to your mobile. We can't be responsible for the consequences!

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<sup>15</sup> At present, 3G customers can answer calls on "voice only" mode, or a by choosing a still picture of themselves on a screen. By picking one of these options however, a partner may become suspicious (*The Herald Sun*, 2004: 31). See also <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/02/28/1077677011905.html>.

<sup>16</sup> For more information see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3498714.stm>.

In the Philippines, using a cell phone to catch an unfaithful partner is becoming institutionalized. In late 2003, the Philippines began a “report-a-mistress” campaign. Established to promote anti-corruption, a hotline was created so that citizens could report any extramarital affairs conducted by government officials, soldiers and/or policemen. According to the BBC, on the first day of the campaign, “report-a-mistress” received approximately 500 calls, e-mails and text messages from the public.<sup>17</sup>

Advanced technology promises enhanced partner tracing. Soon the betrayed may take advantage of global positioning system (GPS) satellite tracking, where, by slipping a tiny device into a partner’s car one can monitor their whereabouts (Dow 2002: 18). For those suspicious of Internet dalliances, KeyCatcher can be acquired from an American company: a device which when plugged in between a keyboard cable and computer has a memory chip that records every keyboard stroke (Dow 2002: 18). Expensive “spy phones” can also be purchased whereby a SIM card in the phone can be dialed from afar, accessing another pre-programmed number, to tape record the entirety of another’s cell phone calls (Dow 2002: 18). In the US, one can buy numerous sorts of wireless covert recording devices and obtain car trackers and computer spy software at Chatcheaters.com or Infidelity.com websites.

## **conclusion**

Technology is altering the way we construct, live and reflect upon our lives, and no where is this more evident than in terms of interpersonal relationships and intimacy. The cell phone generally, and texting specifically, provide a unique communication conduit, which, perhaps some may argue unfortunately, lends well to secrecy and deception and thus to the maintenance of extradyadic relationships. Yet although texting enables infidelity, it too provides a main means by which infidels are exposed: users often leave *cyber footprints*. Through enchantment to disenchantment, the cell phone plays a significant role in modern love.

Although the ways in which texting is appropriated are culturally specific, as Riviere and Licoppe (2005: 114) state, within a wider historical framework, localized findings can also generate overall insights about the direction of interpersonal

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<sup>17</sup> For more information see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3143018.stm>.

communications. Indeed, after finishing my fieldwork in the Philippines, I was struck that my findings about the role of mobile communication in Asia were not so very different than my experiences and observations when back in the “west:”

*Before arriving in the Filipino archipelago, I had never owned a cell phone. Research imperatives and practicality meant my daily life in the field became immersed in the strange and at times exciting world of SMS. This actuality followed me in my return to Australia. As an unmarried woman traveling through the complex area of love and romance myself, the cell phone has become an indisputably significant part of my social and romantic life. Not surprisingly, yet also surprisingly, many of the findings about cell discourse that I (as anthropologist) discovered among young women in the Philippines were experienced firsthand by myself (as a woman) during the aftermath of research.*

*I too have expressed my affection, my humor and my individual communicative style to another by text and have felt the rewards of receiving the same in kind. I have felt the pleasure of private communication that texting affords as well as the frustration of not having my texts responded to. I too have experienced the rush of a suggestive message received late at night and the emotional solace borne from a friend's unexpected text received from continents away. I have been stalked by text; laughed by text; as have I fought with intimates by way of text. I too have been weary of texts received by my boyfriend at strange hours and felt the shameful compulsion to read his inbox when unaware. Having embodied many of the same technosocial experiences as my informants, which are married to wider cross-cultural findings about mobile*

*use, I pose that although mobile telephony is bound to specific cultural milieus, it also reflects human proclivities to commune.*<sup>18</sup>

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