

PROOF

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Virtually Yours: Reflecting on the Place of Mobile Phones in Romantic Relationships

Mihirini Sirisena

*Thaaraka viyana ihala ahasin
Aetha indan
Hari hadissiyen
Oba aawa
Hanging onto an SMS
Aadaraye anshu maathrayak aran
(Sinhalese)*

(Shaded by the sky laced with stars,
you came from afar, hurriedly,
hanging onto an SMS,
carrying a droplet of love)
Popular Sinhala song

Introduction

During my fieldwork among university students in Sri-Lanka,¹ I met with Narada a few times. Narada hosts a talk show on love on *Derana TV*.² He did not hold himself back when it came to sharing opinions and, encouraged by this spirit of sharing, I decided to engage him with my impressions and observations. Having witnessed the gamut of flashy mobile phones at the university, I could not help but broach the subject of the place that mobile phones occupied in romantic relationships. With my invitation, Narada launched in and told me how mobile phones have radically changed the way Sri Lankans conduct their relationships, both romantic and other. He rather cynically noted that the relationships young men and women have with 'mobile phones inspire art too', and listed songs, novels and tele-dramas in which mobile

1 phones figure prominently, altering the life course of their protagonists
2 (Narada, 13 March 2008). His point is also well illustrated by the popu-
3 lar Sinhala song, cited in the epigraph.

4 The significance of this song, which resembled many other Sinhala
5 love songs, as Narada pointed out and I too was quick to note, was in its
6 reference to the 'SMS', Short Message Service. Mobile phone usage has
7 been on the increase in Sri Lanka since about the late 1990s.³ Service
8 providers operating in Sri Lanka offer a range of competitive rates, flex-
9 ibility and availability (when compared to fixed line connections), thus
10 enabling people from all walks of life to reap its benefits. Almost every
11 adult, ranging from late teens to people in their late 60s owns a mobile
12 phone, irrespective of their financial standing, and gender.⁴ Throughout
13 the time of my fieldwork, I saw that constant references to mobile
14 phones shower the world my research participants inhabited. Present in
15 the forms of 'lunchtime calls', 'missed calls' and 'midnight calls' and the
16 copious amounts of text messages that were exchanged, the mobile phone
17 had become a key instrument with which these young men and women
18 showed each other and the world around them that they cared for each
19 other. Its significance, it seemed, is in the particular form it takes in these
20 relationships, standing as a halfway thing, a thing between one's self
21 and the thing: an elucidation of intersubjectivity (Jackson 1998, 2002).
22 Mobile phones were a means through which my interviewees extended
23 themselves. Elaborating on the specificity of the *thingness* that distin-
24 guished it from other things that inhabited their lives, my research par-
25 ticipants showed me that mobile phones have opened up a new space,
26 in which they could be together, while managing their everyday lives,
27 away from each other. Reflecting on this presence and its implications,
28 I argue in this chapter that mobile phones have added another layer to
29 these relationships, in terms of how they understand the relationships
30 as well as their expectations of them. Mobile phones have enabled an
31 availability that has helped them travel beyond the spatial limitations
32 that have conventionally hindered their ability to *be with* the ones they
33 love. This kind of *being with*, while becoming expected of in romantic
34 relationships, has given birth to new expectations. This is not to hint at
35 any sort of technological determinism of human relationships. As Horst
36 and Miller (2005) have argued in the case of Trinidad, I too recognize
37 that the different uses that mobile phones have been put to in romantic
38 relationships indicate how we draw from technology to cater to existing
39 needs such as trust, mutuality of commitment, etc. My argument here is
40 that these new ways of addressing existing needs shape our understand-
41 ings of the existing needs and expectations. Seen in this way, I argue that

the mobile phone is used not merely to maintain weak relationships as pointed out by Miller and Horst and is not set against a 'real' context as Sunderland (1999) points out. Mobile phones, in contemporary romantic relationships among Sri Lankan university students, strengthen the relationships, weaving intricate webs between the lovers and deepening their involvement, both in their eyes and the eyes of the general audience. Romantic relationships engage in intersubjective relationships with mobile phones, which are managed by those involved.

In this chapter, I explore the relations between mobile phones and the affective fabric of 'being together' as everyday, lived experience. I will demonstrate how mobile phones become part of negotiating the terms of intimate relationships; how they mediate the feelings young lovers have for each other; and transform time and space into zones of intimate togetherness. In order to do so, I first present the different ways in which the young lovers I met during my research extend themselves beyond the immediate space they occupy to *be with* the ones they love. Then I proceed to focus on how these different ways of *being with* have fashioned their expectations of relationships. In the last section of the chapter, I look at how these young men and women shape the space they occupy by carving out private spaces in public places, through the enactment of relationships via their mobile phones. I also investigate the ways in which my research participants highlight that we incorporate new things into our lives by associating them with concerns and expectations we are already aware of. Through this process of familiarization, participants form a bond with the mobile phone, which becomes more than a means to get something done. Through this bond, the mobile phone becomes a part of their lives, a part that affects what they do, how they do it and the meaning of the things they do.

Everyday connections

My ruminations of mobile phones in romantic relationships began when I tried to dissect an advertisement for a mobile phone package known as 'KIT double'. The advertisement tells the story of a turn of events in a relationship between a young man and a woman brought on by the gift of a mobile phone connection. A gift of a supplementary mobile phone connection in this advertisement was quite similar to gifting a ring, in other, more conventional contexts. It is a statement of commitment. The 'couple packages' reminded me of those heart-shaped pendants that were once in fashion, those that were split into two, so that the two lovers could wear the two parts. The two pieces of the split

1 heart formed a statement of commitment, to each other as well to the
2 world outside; as is the mobile phone connection.

3 Zooming in to the lives of my research participants, I realized that it
4 was these very uses that they put mobile phones to, in their relation-
5 ships. Buttressed by the mobility that the phone offered, with the phone
6 they reached out to their loved ones beyond the immediate space they
7 inhabited. Let me elaborate with a conversation I had with Hishani, a
8 young university student.⁵ Hishani's boyfriend, Anish, is not a student,
9 and balancing university coursework, while following a course at the
10 Law College and managing extra-curricular activities at the college, they
11 do not have the luxury of spending as much time with each other as
12 they would like to. Hishani described how they overcame this obstacle,
13 extending themselves to each other, over the miles and the responsibili-
14 ties that stretched between them.

15
16 In the morning, *Ayya*⁶ always calls. ... He wakes me ... and we talk
17 for a while. Then he goes back to sleep. ... If I were to tell you the
18 truth *akka*, I remember him all the time. If I start eating, I remem-
19 ber him. Wherever I go, I remember him. If I see a friend with her
20 boyfriend, then you know, I remember him. Then, I feel lonely. But
21 there is nothing I can do, no? I can't bring *ayya* in here and keep
22 him, no? Then, because of that, I give *ayya* a 'ring-cut'. If I do that
23 two-three times, he would call me. ... We don't hang on the phone
24 the whole day. ... We have things to do during the day, no? ... We
25 talk in the morning. Then ... at night, if I feel I need to talk to him
26 before night falls, I phone him during the day too. He has this habit
27 *akka*, if he goes somewhere, he tells me. ... When I phoned him last
28 night, I asked him what he is planning to do today. When we talk
29 we ask what we ate.

30 (Hishani, 21 January 2008)

31
32 With this detailed description of her day, Hishani alerted to me the fact
33 that although she cannot physically *be with* her boyfriend throughout
34 the day, she bridges the physical distance through her mobile phone.
35 'We don't get to spend a lot of time with each other', she noted gloom-
36 ily earlier in our conversations. Through her phone, she wakes up to the
37 sound of her boyfriend's voice, keeps his presence alive through the day
38 and falls asleep to the comfort that his voice brings. They plan their day
39 together or inform each other what the other would be doing during
40 the day, where they would be going and at times, alert each other to it,
41 if there were a change to the plan.

Reciprocal binding

Listening to Hishani, I could not help but think that these relationships required hard work. Such being with is, quite evidently, a token of commitment. The commitment and the significance of that kind of sharing of each other's lives come from the fervour with which it is enacted. It distinguishes itself from sharing of information and turns itself in to a form of *being with* each other. Speaking of rituals of similar exchanges among teenagers living in London, Taylor and Harper (2002) point out that these rituals are imbued with the obligation of reciprocation. They are re-enacted daily, out of a 'moral obligation' to take part in them (ibid., 441). For instance, the good night texts that these teenagers exchange, Taylor and Harper say, are founded on the ideology that, though saying good night every night is a 'normal' thing, when enacted with such consistency and vigour, it turns itself into a display of intimacy. They argue that 'the normal, mundane encounter is made special through the observation of ceremony. This ceremony is ritualizing insofar as it results in the meaning of the message being thereby altered in ways that gives it semi-sacred values' (Taylor and Harper, 2002: 441).

The message is strengthened only when it is reciprocated and the process of reciprocation transforms the message into something more than a collection of words. This is not to suggest that the sharing of intimate details of each other's life is a mundane thing, but to highlight the fact that this kind of sharing is ceremonially re-enacted makes them significant. Such ceremonial and obligatory sharing gives the relationship meaning. As Cheal, quoted in Taylor and Harper (ibid., 426), suggest, 'reciprocal giving makes possible a shared understanding of the relationship as one that is founded upon mutual regard and cooperation'. On the one hand, such sharing is powerful enough to stand as a sense of an extension of self, which facilitates a kind of being with. On the other, it is binding and unending, thus, forming a cycle, which binds both the actors to the relationship. This lends to expectations, as such sharing becomes something that is expected of relationships. I shall return to a discussion of such expectations later in the chapter.

Speaking the language of 'ring-cut'

Mulling over the references to mobile phones' place in relationships, I witnessed two levels at which they engage with one another: content and meaning. The mobile phone is used to communicate and the content that is communicated is significant, as my research participants did

1 telling each other about what they did and would do in the course of
2 the day. At the level of meaning, the content of the telephone exchange
3 may not be significant. Though empty of apparent content, this kind
4 of engagement carries significant meanings in, as well as for, relation-
5 ships. 'Ring-cuts' is a prominent means through which meaning was
6 conveyed in mobile contact.

7 'Ring-cuts' or 'missed calls' speckled everyday exchanges in all forms
8 of relationships. Often used interchangeably, this referred to telephoning
9 a person one wishes to be in touch with, yet rather than waiting for the
10 person at the other end to answer the phone, the caller disconnects the
11 line. Thus, 'ringing' and 'cutting' or disconnecting is what happens, liter-
12 ally. These telephone calls are registered on the call log of the phone as
13 'missed calls'. This exchange of 'ring-cuts' is facilitated by the advent of
14 caller identification, where the recipients are alerted to the persons who
15 have called them, when they were not in a position to answer the phone.
16 Neither the caller nor the recipient gets charged in this exchange.

17 Drawing from my own interpretation of ring-cut, when Hishani and
18 her friends and colleagues referred to 'ring-cuts', I mistakenly associated
19 it with money concerns. Being students, and dependent on their parents,
20 financial worries were plentiful among the students. But it was not the
21 financial worry that was the main reason for ring-cuts. As other students
22 explained to me, ring-cuts were exchanged between those who were con-
23 sidered near and dear. For those who were in love, missed calls were also a
24 means through which they let each other know that they were thinking
25 about each other, when they are not together. As Hishani put it, loving
26 someone is like carrying them with you; mundane acts such as eating,
27 hearing a song or something you do, see, somewhere you go, gain sig-
28 nificance as these may remind you of that person that you are carrying
29 around. When you think of the person, it is important to let them know
30 as, through informing them, you are reminding them of the place they
31 occupy in your life and you in their lives. For example, Sayuri, another
32 young student, told me that her boyfriend gives her a missed call around
33 lunchtime, when he is about to have lunch, to let her know that he is
34 having lunch, so, that though they are not in the same place, they would
35 have lunch together, at the same time, if she were free to do so.

36 Ring-cuts urge us to reconsider our approach to the study of signifi-
37 cance of mobile phones in relationships of all sorts. Horst and Miller
38 (2005), looking at mobile phones and kinship networks in Trinidad
39 decide to abandon conducting content analysis as they soon realize that
40 calls are not sufficiently long to have a meaningful content. Yet, ring-
41 cuts that my research participants engaged in, though apparently empty

of content, are embedded in layers and layers of meaning. These layers of meaning could not be grasped without a deeper engagement, for that meaning is contextual and personal. It is in this very adaptability of the language of 'ring-cut' that lies its appeal.

Thus far, in this chapter, I have demonstrated that my research participants relied on mobile phones to bridge the distance they may feel when they cannot be with each other. The different uses they put the mobile phone to enabled them to *be with* their loved ones at all times of the day. This *being with* is founded on knowing what each other is doing during the day as well as knowing that the other person is thinking about you. The strength of this kind of 'being with' is in its reciprocity. The reciprocation is ritualized, not in the sense of normative repetition, but in the sense of an established performance. Or, as Taylor and Harper put it in their analysis of texting among teenage Londoners, the use of mobile phones '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).

Expectations

New things, we would like to believe, give rise to new needs and expectations. Yet, as many have pointed out, we often resort to new things to find new ways of dealing with old concerns. For my research participants, mobile contact has become a part of the relationship on its own, not a weak alternative to one's inability to be with their loved ones. It has created new ways of *being there*: to have lunch together, play the role of the provider through taking responsibility for call charges, etc. and through these ways, mobile contact attempts to address needs and expectations that fall under the umbrella of needs of trust, exclusivity and mutuality that today's romantic relationships in Sri Lanka seem to be founded on.

Being with through mobile phones forms a part of the relationship such that it is seen as a necessity rather than an option. Himali, for example, once told me that she gave her former boyfriend a mobile phone for his birthday because he did not have one. The motive driving her gift was because

it is something that's a must. Because, when I want to contact him, it is also my own selfish interest (laughs). I didn't give him that to make him happy. [It was] for me to find him when I wanted to.

(Himali, 22 June 2008)

1 While noting it as *her need*, Himali pointed out to me that maintaining
2 such mobile contact is a means through which they made themselves
3 available to each other. Such availability, it seems, was exclusive to
4 romantic relationships for the young people I interviewed. There were
5 rules of engagement that suggested who one could speak with, and at
6 what time of the day. Sayuri told me that once her boyfriend scolded
7 her when he found out that she had sent a text message to a male
8 friend around 9 o'clock at night to ask him for a set of lecture notes. He
9 had explained to her that it was too late to be texting male friends and
10 Sayuri added, 'he was right. I didn't have to text him that late' (Sayuri,
11 21 May 2008). As Sayuri explained, the reproach was not because she
12 was getting in touch with a male friend. Sayuri and her boyfriend both
13 have close friendships with members of the opposite sex and they do
14 not hide it. It was *the time of day* that she sent the message that brought
15 on the criticism. Calling or texting at night, and 9 o'clock is night, was
16 exclusive to lovers.

17 In their own analysis, my research participants saw 'being with'
18 through mobile phones as vital for trust building as well as sharing.
19 This intimate sharing of lives walks the thin line between surveillance
20 and trust. Green (2002) sheds light on the association between trust
21 and surveilling, arguing that with surveillance comes accountability.
22 When the phone rings, we must answer it. We have to explain what
23 we are doing and where we are, especially in personal and intimate
24 relationship. Such accountability is not seen as burdensome, because
25 it is not seen as monitoring and/or control. Green points out that the
26 meaning of monitoring and control are contextual. Surveillance, regu-
27 lation and mutual accountability are sites of struggle and negotiation,
28 and the meanings that we allude to these ideas shift. In a similar vein,
29 my research participants did not consider such sharing and knowing of
30 each other's activities and whereabouts as restrictive surveillance, but
31 rather, as an obligation and accountability to each other. Sayuri, for
32 example, told me that if there were any change to her daily routine, she
33 would send her boyfriend a text message to let him know. It was a time
34 when indiscriminate bomb blasts were rocking different parts of the
35 island and there was an air of uncertainty hanging over the country. In
36 such a context where one could come to harm in an unexpected way at
37 an unexpected time and place, it was particularly important to let some-
38 one who loves you know where you are at different times of the day.

39 It was not only notions of accountability associated with mobile con-
40 tact, however, that differentiated it from surveillance. Mobile contact
41 was about careful management of the relationship, preserving it from

1 falling into the abyss of 'becoming a pain'. Critical of some of her friends'
2 tendency to 'hang on the phone', Hishani told me that she resisted the
3 temptation of succumbing to a 'couple package'. 'Couple packages', she
4 told me, 'could get you into that situation where you have to let each
5 other know of every single move you make. It could become a pain'
6 (Hishani, 21 January 2008). She did not want to be a person whose life
7 was watched through telephone calls and she certainly did not want to
8 live her life on the phone. She did not expect her boyfriend to inform
9 her of the minute changes to his daily routine and appreciated the
10 fact that he did not expect that from her either. In Hishani's mind, the
11 distinction is clear. *Being with* is not about watching one's lover's life
12 through the phone. It was about living it, with your lover.

13 14 **Working on the private/public planes with mobile contact**

15
16 One of the significant concerns facing mobile contact is that, for these
17 interactions, one may not be able to create the same kind of privacy
18 that one may be able to create for face-to-face contact. But rather than
19 suggesting that mobile contact presents a merging of private and public
20 domains of our lives as some scholars have claimed (Cooper, 2002),
21 I argue that mobile phones can become a way we engage with the
22 spaces we inhabit, writing on them to carve out new spaces, and discovering
23 new ways of occupying the world. During my research, I watched
24 my interviewees make use of this public enactment of private aspects
25 of their lives to assert the presence and the validity of the relationships
26 that they were entangled in, and to exhibit intimacy publicly. At other
27 times, I watched them breaking up the public space, creating 'cocoons'
28 within which they could live the intimacy in private.

29 The intimacy, whether exhibited or hidden, was always carefully
30 managed. Though my research participants often allowed it to be
31 known to their immediate audience that they are in a relationship and
32 that they are loved and cared for, when needed, they carved out spaces
33 from the immediate space they inhabited to carry out their private
34 lives. Here is a story that illustrates my point. Once, in the middle of an
35 interview, Amintha received a phone call. He took his phone out of his
36 pocket, looked at me apologetically and told me 'I have to take this call'
37 (Amintha, 2 February 2008). I smiled and nodded and within seconds,
38 he walked away from where we sat to a corner, towards the entrance of
39 the gym canteen as he said '*hullo*'. When he came back, he apologized
40 and told me that it was his girlfriend, who had just returned from home.
41 Not having had much opportunity to talk to each other during the

1 weekend, he had to answer the phone. I nodded my head vigorously,
 2 implying empathy. Yet I was distracted, not because he answered his
 3 phone. It was the way he answered the phone. I wondered what made
 4 him want to get up from where he was and walk away, towards a busier
 5 end of the gym canteen. Ever since, I began to notice something I did
 6 as well as those who were around me, whenever we received a phone
 7 call. Stepping away from wherever we were came like second nature
 8 whenever we answered our phones in 'public' places, not necessarily
 9 looking for quieter places. I have often found myself walking up and
 10 down corridors, roads and other noisier, busier places. It was more a
 11 need to step away from the *immediacy of the public setting* we inhabited
 12 at that moment. Quite some time later, another encounter I witnessed
 13 of mobile contact enabled me to shed some light on my previous
 14 experience of Amintha's 'phone' conduct. This time, I was sitting in
 15 a crowded bus and sitting next to me was a man, probably in his mid
 16 to late twenties. Trapped inside a parked bus in the midday heat, I was
 17 edgy. The man sitting next to me shifted in his seat a few times, took
 18 out his mobile phone and dialled. He never introduced himself and
 19 straight away launched into a series of questions, beginning with 'did
 20 you have lunch?' followed by 'what did you have for lunch', 'did you
 21 take a shower'. Curiosity got the better of me and I discreetly paused
 22 my iPod and eavesdropped, for, at first, I could not make out if he were
 23 speaking to a child or a woman. The sweet nothings that were splat-
 24 tered throughout the conversation suggested that he was speaking to
 25 his girlfriend and I realized that I did not need to stop the music, for the
 26 man did not make an effort to keep his voice down. He did not seem
 27 bothered by the possibility of all the passengers in the bus becoming an
 28 audience to his conversation.

29 Privy to this intimate exchange of a stranger, I could not help but
 30 think of the time Amintha walked away to create a private space for his
 31 phone call. Comparing the two instances, I realized that it is the *irrel-*
 32 *evance of the audience* that determines the manner in which we engage
 33 with the space we occupy and the mobile contact. The need to walk
 34 away arises when the immediate audience is known, as was the case with
 35 Amintha. This also explained why he chose a crowded end of the gym
 36 canteen to answer his phone, rather than have me become a listener to
 37 his conversation. When the caller does not share any familiarities with
 38 his immediate audience, as was the case with the man who phoned his
 39 girlfriend while sitting in a crowded bus, the audience matters less. On
 40 our part, as the audience, we attempt to convey the message that we are
 41 not interested in being privy to his phone conversation, even if it could

1 be that we are entertained or curious about the exchange that is tak-
2 ing place. This polite distance that we attempt to convey is something
3 akin to what Murtagh (2002) describes as avoidance of gaze. Drawing
4 from his observations in trains, Murtagh writes that those who answer
5 mobile phones while travelling in the train avoid making eye contact
6 with the others around them. Borrowing Goffman's idea of civil inat-
7 tention (Goffman, 1963), he argues that through this mutual avoidance
8 of eye contact, we manage embarrassment caused by the fact that those
9 with whom we share the train carriage become an involuntary audience
10 to our conversations, through which they enter into our private lives.

11 Mobile contact gives rise to a new set of concerns over how intimate
12 relationships should be conducted in what is conventionally seen as
13 public places. The young men and women I met during my research
14 showed me that there are no fixed rules of engagement. It is the nature
15 of the audience that determined the extent to which the intimacies
16 were exposed to the public. At times, these concerns could be put to
17 different uses, such as asserting the place of the relationship in the
18 public eye.

20 To conclude ...

21
22 When reflecting on new technologies that come into our lives, we often
23 look for new ways in which they affect us. Thus, it is not surprising that
24 many popular as well as academic writings on the digital world concern
25 themselves with their newness and technological possibilities. Placing
26 emphasis on potentialities of new technologies, they tend to focus on
27 what these technologies do rather than what they mean to their users.
28 However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the ways in which new
29 technologies enter our lives does not necessarily imply newness. In
30 other words, change does not necessarily mean a departure from the
31 old ways and concerns of life. My research participants showed me that
32 *being there* virtually becomes a new expectation of relationships. Yet, by
33 being there virtually, what they tried to do was to address some expecta-
34 tions they saw as 'old' and 'necessary', such as trust, commitment and
35 understanding. Mobile phones, in other words, did not transform what
36 intimacy, love and partnership meant, although they did have an effect
37 on how these were negotiated through distance and newly offered dig-
38 ital connectivity. For example, while trust and commitment were and
39 remain central to intimate relations, young people's engagement with
40 mobile phones meant redefining what it meant to be trustworthy/trust-
41 ing and committed.

1 By saying that mobile phones did not alter the cultural foundations of
2 love and sexual intimacy I do not mean they had no effect on the *emo-*
3 *tional practice* of intimate relations. As my research participants taught
4 me, mobile phones offered them new ways of being with each other
5 and feeling for each other, transcending physical distance and other
6 spatial and temporal limitations. The phones, for example, can mediate
7 the practice of sharing which is based on a sense of moral obligation
8 and reciprocity, and is enacted through timing, length and content of
9 conversations. Such digitalized sharing entangles its actors, through
10 the use of the mobile phone, in cycles of caring and trust and stands
11 as proof of the exclusive places the lovers occupy in each other's lives.
12 Given this prominence, being there through mobile phones becomes
13 expected of relationships, not as a form of surveillance, but as a care-
14 fully managed aspect of togetherness. This aspect of relationships, in
15 the way it is enacted in private/public domains, works the space, carv-
16 ing, shifting and stretching domains of private and public sites of their
17 lives by marking some of them as sites of intimacy, but also asserting
18 the relationship's significance in the public eye.

19 The phone, therefore, becomes an affective extension of the self,
20 assuming a form of intersubjectivity (Jackson, 1998). But it also serves as
21 an affective mediator of spaces, relations and expectations. Understood
22 in this way, my research participants' use of the phone can be seen as
23 both similar to and different from the practice of 'link-up', observed by
24 Horst and Miller (2005) in their study of mobile phone use in Jamaica.
25 It is similar in that mobile phones, used by young people in Sri Lanka,
26 serve to network within a community and connect – 'link-up' – with
27 sexual partners. It is however different in that being 'virtually yours' is
28 always emotionally charged. In other words, it is not the mobile contact
29 itself that is significant, but rather, it is its affective mediation of old and
30 new expectations of what it means to be together.

Notes

- 31
32
33 1. This chapter is based on the research I conducted in 2007–8 for my doc-
34 toral thesis. My thesis focuses on the relationship between self-making and
35 romantic relationships among university students in Colombo, Sri Lanka. It
36 argues that, for these young men and women, the significance of romantic
37 relationships comes from associating them with notions of a worthy life. All
38 my interviews were conducted in Sinhala and the citations I have included in
39 this chapter are my own translations.
- 40 2. A privately owned television station in Sri Lanka.
- 41 3. A report compiled by the Economic Intelligence Unit describes the high prev-
alence of mobile phone usage among Sri Lankans in terms of the innovative

- 1 uses the phones are put to. They identify ring-cut to be one such innovative
 2 usage.
 3 4. The uses they might put the phone to as well as the type of phone and phone
 4 package, however, would differ along the lines of social demographics.
 5 5. All names I use for my research participants in this chapter are pseudonyms.
 6 6. It is quite common for Sinhalese to use kin terminology to address non-related
 7 individuals. *Ayya* (older brother) and *akka* (older sister) are such commonly
 8 used terms. In romantic relationships, the woman in the relationship refers
 9 to her lover as *ayya* (elder brother) and the man to his lover as *nangi* (younger
 10 sister). The actual age difference between the two people did not matter much
 11 in these usages.

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