

The dialectics of mobile communication in South African romantic relationships

Abstract

Communication technology such as the mobile phone often presents a double-edged sword in romantic relationships. While the mobile phone can enhance the quality of communication, it can simultaneously become a source of conflict. The dialectic framework of Communication Privacy Management presents a nuanced lens from which to investigate the rules for the use of the mobile phone in the dyad of romantic relationships. This study sought to investigate mobile phone usage rules that are negotiated by South African adolescents and young adults in their romantic relationships and the factors that influence the negotiation. The study specifically focused on rules around mobile privacy management. Findings from survey data indicate that the negotiation of mobile phone usage rules is a crucial part of young adult relationships' health. Variables of gender and length of relationship were important factors in the rule development process. Implications, limitations, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: *Romantic Relationships; Disclosure; Mobile Phones; Communication Privacy Management*

1. Introduction

More and more social interaction is being facilitated by means of mobile phones. These devices are altering the interpersonal communication options available to people, thereby enabling those who use them to form new ways of understanding and negotiating social lives (Louw and du Plooy-Cilliers 2003; Caron and Caronia 2007; Berger 2009: 260, 269; Mäenpää 2001: 122; Duck 2007; Duck and McMahan 2009: 247) with both pragmatic advantages and unforeseen disadvantages to the user (see Ling and Donner 2009).

In romantic relationships, mobiles may be used inappropriately to “keep tabs” on partners (Miller-Ott, Durant and Kelly 2012: 18). Andrejevic (2005) coins the term “lateral surveillance” to describe this kind of privacy invasion. This

lateral surveillance, or peer-to-peer monitoring, [can be] understood as the use of surveillance tools by individuals, rather than by agents or institutions public or private, to keep track of one another, [and] covers (but is not limited to) three main categories: romantic interests, family, and friends or acquaintances (Andrejevic 2005: 488).

Such forms of surveillance may invariably present opportunities of conflict in romantic relationships. Yet it is possible that through the use of negotiated rules for mobile phone use, romantic partners can effectively negotiate to manage privacy issues and concerns (Miller-Ott et al. 2012).

There has been little research on how the tensions that come with mobile communication and surveillance in romantic relationships are negotiated by romantic partners (see for instance Miller-Ott et al. 2012). The study on romantic relationships and mobile phone usage rules by Miller-Ott et al. (2012) is one fruitful study that has investigated the relational dialectic of expression/non-expression from the context of mobile communication. It showed that rules are negotiated by university students in romantic relationships for the use of the mobile phone. Using a Cell Phone Rules Scale [CPRS] as the data collection tool, the study yielded results that aided in a better understanding of privacy management in romantic relationships (Miller-Ott et al. 2012).

Drawing on lessons from the Miller-Ott et al. (2012) study, this paper seeks to understand what mobile phone rules are negotiated by heterosexual adolescents and young adults in their romantic relationships as well as the variables that contribute in the rules development processes. The paper therefore adapts from and goes beyond the work of Miller-Ott et al. (2012) by looking specifically at gender, culture as well as length of romantic relationships to see if these criteria play a prominent role in the development of privacy rules for adolescent romantic relationships from a South African context. It specifically asks the following questions:

RQ 1: Are mobile phone usage rules negotiated by South African adolescents and young adults in their romantic relationships to specifically co-ordinate communication privacy management?

RQ2: Do variables of gender, culture and length of relationship influence the negotiation of mobile phone communication privacy management rules in the romantic relationships of adolescents and young adults?

2. Mobile Privacy Management in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Despite romantic attraction and affiliation being triggered early on by puberty (Connolly and McIsaac 2011: 185), the changes in interest to the opposite sex become more pronounced in late adolescence (Bouchey and Furman 2003: 316). Relationships formed at this stage mark the first important steps in the journey to establishing lasting romantic relationships in adulthood (Connolly and McIsaac 2011: 180; Bouchey and Furman 2003: 314). Increasingly, mobile phones are playing a fundamental part in how these adolescent intimate relationships develop, and are becoming an integral part of relationship maintenance in the universe of young people (cf. Stump, Gong and Li 2008).

Mobile phones make it possible to arrange each day according to the events it brings, allowing romantic relationships to become less bound and more spontaneous (Mäenpää 2001 : 119). Instead of making an almost fixed agreement as to when or where to meet each other, partners often get involved in iterative planning (Ling and Donner 2009: 93). This type of relational interaction on the mobile phone is made possible by its facilitation of “perpetual contact” (Katz and Aakhus 2002). As a result of this expectation that the mobile phone be

always switched on, a spill-over of private and public personal boundaries can take place, often resulting in conflict (Ling and Donnar 2009: 94).

One source of the tension around privacy can be caused by misappropriation of mobile phones in romantic relationships (Khonou 2012). Such conflict can occur when, as may be expected, partners have different perspectives and expectations of each other and of the relationship (Connolly and McIsaac 2011: 191). From this point of departure it is plausible to argue that because mobile phones are an enduring feature of romantic relationships in the lives of young people, they can often be the source of this enduring conflict. This does not mean that young people are victims of technological determinism because they do display the ability to choose to allow mobile technology into their lives (Caron and Caronia 2007: 159). Technological determinism cannot be relied upon to aid in understanding the role of mobile technologies on youth because the relationship between technology and society is more complex than the theory asserts it to be (Mäenpää 2001: 121). The study ultimately argues that the active negotiation of mobile phone usage rules on the part of adolescents and young adults gives evidence of the agency in shaping how technologies are used in their relationships.

Managing the relational tensions that arise from misappropriation of mobile phones through negotiated rules thus becomes a prominent feature of emerging adult romantic relationships. The theory of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) which is deeply rooted in the relational dialectic framework (Afifi 2003: 731), can be used to conceptualise how misappropriations of the mobile phone in romantic relationships are managed. Indeed, it is when conflict negotiation is handled through compromise and active listening, that romantic partners can be brought together and an increased sense of closeness fostered (Connolly and McIsaac 2011: 192). Importantly, dialectical theory attests to the existence of tensions in relationships by asserting that in any relationship there are inherent tensions between impulses, or dialectics regarding intergration/separation, stability/change and expression/privacy (Wood 2004: 173).

The theory of communication privacy management suggests that people feel forces pushing and pulling them to either reveal private information or to conceal it from others (Serewics and Petronio 2007). As such it anticipates the finding that mobile communication

technologies create a “consistent strain to manage competing needs for connection and autonomy” as well as a “struggle to define appropriate boundaries between public and private” (Katz and Aakhus 2002: 316). This is because communication privacy management theory shows that romantic partners are fundamentally challenged to enact and coordinate often complex communication boundaries through the enactment of rules (Afifi 2003: 734).

When using mobile phones, communication privacy management theory suggests that romantic partners must establish and manage rules to manage boundaries by setting parameters on privacy (Petronio 2004; Miller-Ott et al. 2012). It hence offers an understanding of the rules in play when partners conceptualize decisions on disclosure which emphasize that disclosure is not just about self but it includes others (Petronio 2001; Serewics and Petronio 2007).

Dialectical processes elucidate on privacy rule foundations, which stipulate that people develop rules to regulate when and under what circumstances they will reveal rather than withhold information. Secondly, the boundary coordination operations, refers to the process of negotiating privacy rules between partners and lastly, what happens when attempts to coordinate the boundary fail (Child, Pearson and Petronio 2009).

Culture and gender may be used as criteria in creating rules for revealing and concealing information (Petronio 2002). Each culture has values that help determine what constitutes appropriate levels of disclosure or privacy (Petronio and Caughlin 2006). Thus, through cultural expectations, privacy boundaries are opened or shut off to varying degrees. There are, secondly, gender norms idiosyncratic to men and women which may contribute to alternative rule structures (Petronio and Durham 2008). Although the theory does not specifically account for the relationship length of a particular dyad, this study also investigates this particular variable. It thus becomes crucial to investigate if indeed these three variables (gender, culture and length of romantic relationship) play a significant role in the rule development processes as romantic partners seek to negotiate mutually agreed on mobile phone usage rules.

Through interaction, those coordinating boundaries mutually determine the rules that will regulate the collective privacy boundaries (Petronio 2002: 76). In order to control further dissemination beyond the newly formed dyadic boundary, the disclosers may feel compelled

to engage each other in a pact. According to Petronio (2002: 77) “as negotiations proceed, people work through several sequences of conversational turns trying to arrive at a reasonable set of rules for protecting or accessing the private information that is revealed”. The discloser as owner of the information may feel they have the right to either explicitly or implicitly articulate the rules that should be used in third party disclosures (Petronio 2002).

If the rules are explicitly stated, the discloser will state these rules in a direct and unencumbered way (Petronio 1991). In this manner, there is no ambiguities expectation in which the confidant is expected to treat the information. But there may be instances where rules may be personally held but implicitly stated or not stated at all. Implicitly stated privacy rules are strategies that are more ambiguous in nature, and rules are less clearly articulated (Petronio 1991). This may lead to problems when the uncertainties of hinted rules result in misunderstanding and hurt when the rule is not applied in the way the discloser intended (Petronio 2007). Besides hinting, individuals may also prompt a suggestion from the confidant to articulate a rule. In instances where the rules are not articulated and consequently breached, the turbulence that results often requires the interlocutors to realign old rules or renegotiate new rules (Petronio 2000). It is important to investigate the manifestation of this phenomenon and to attempt to account for its existence in romantic relationships. The negotiation of mobile phone usage rules therefore cannot be simply argued to be etiquette, since the process is ultimately an explicit agreement on set do’s and don’ts rather than being polite preferences which have no repercussions.

3. Methodology

From a population of 1555 undergraduate communication students at a Johannesburg comprehensive university, 215 voluntarily took part in this study. The respondents were in romantic relationships and owned a mobile phone as per the voluntary criteria. Of the respondents, 27 were male and 185 female. This uneven gender distribution was taken into consideration in the analysis. The average age of the respondents was 21.00 ($SD=1.847$), with the minimum age being 17 and the maximum being 33.

In terms of race, 159 of the respondents were black, 31 were white, 15 were coloured and six were Indian or Asian¹. The distribution of race is conversant to the greater cultural dynamic of South Africa, but not representative, as according to the 2011 South African census results (2012: 23) 79.2% of the population consists of black Africans, 8.9% coloured, 8.9% of white people and 2.6% of Indian people. The multiplicity of the racial groups will however serve as an interesting point of analysis when the responses to the Likert scale are discussed later. Different perceptions across cultures of privacy were earlier mentioned in the literature.

In terms of the length of relationship: 17 respondents reported that they have been in a relationship for less than a month, 39 said they have been in a relationship between one to six months, 44 said six to 12 months, while 111 said more than a year. Therefore a majority (51.6%) have been in a romantic relationship for a significant amount of time (more than a year).

As adapted from the Miller-Ott et al. (2012) study, a survey instrument was used to collect the data. The Miller-Ott et al. (2012: 23) study consisted of a three-part survey: part 1 asked demographic questions about respondents, the target relationship, and the importance of the mobile phone as a means of communicating with their partner; part 2 was a Likert-type measure with 24 items to assess mobile phone rules (the Cell Phone Rules Scale [CPRS]); and part 3 consisted of a measure of mobile phone satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Similarly the current study had a survey design that consisted of three parts with some deviation from the Miller-Ott et al. (2012) study.

Section A consisted of demographic questions, length of romantic relationship and level of academic study. Section B contained a 5 point Likert-type ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) designed to assess participants' perceptions of mobile phone rules in their romantic relationships. There were modifications in the wording and number of survey items in order to prevent negative bias (see Baxter and Babbie 2004; Fink 2009). So as to retain consistency and ensure validity, the modified Likert scale was kept conversant with the six Factor/dimension design of the Miller-Ott et al. (2012) study. These six

Factors/dimensions are; Factor 1: Contact With Others, Factor 2: Call Times, Factor 3:

¹ The racial classification system of the apartheid regime of "black", "white", "Indian" and "coloured" will be used throughout as borrowed terms for the purposes of this study. This is done with the disclaimer that these terms are highly contentious and their use is in no way intended to cement their validity.

Availability Expectations, Factor 4: Relational Issues, Factor 5: Repetitive Contact and Factor 6: Monitoring Partner Usage. The last factor was the key point of focus for the study.

Section B was meant to gauge the extent to which the respondents agreed that the survey items presented should be a rule about mobile phone usage in their current romantic relationship. Section C on the other hand explored the extent to which the survey items presented were a mutually negotiated rule about mobile phone usage in their current romantic relationship. Consistent with the description of this statistical method of analysis by Allen et al. (2009: 179), exploratory factor analysis was used to identify underlying structures of relationships between and among various items from Sections B and C. This factor analysis was used to yield insights as regards the use and development of implicit and explicit rules in romantic relationships as suggested by the theory.

Section C of the survey also consisted of one open ended item which asked for any additional mobile phone usage rules that have been mutually negotiated in the romantic relationship between the partners. Because the questionnaire cannot possibly exhaust all item possibilities, the open ended question served, as advocated by Allen et al. (2009: 178), as an avenue for further analysis that may lead to future research, while also giving clarity to the first research question. The open ended section was analysed thematically according to the themes that emerged from the data, with specific focus on privacy.

RQ1 sought to investigate if indeed mobile phone rules are negotiated in young adult romantic relationships, with a specific focus on rules for the co-ordination of privacy management. In order to answer this question, the item mean values were assessed factor by factor against the Cronbach Alpha values of each factor. Although the sixth factor dealt specifically with the privacy dimension, the other five factors ensured the reliability and validity of the scale (Miller-Ott et al. 2012). The open ended section was used to confirm findings from the factor analysis. The final step was to do a comparative analysis through a cross tabulation of section B and section C in order to establish whether negotiation of mobile phone rules does indeed take place in romantic relationships. A movement from implicit to explicitly negotiated rules would indicate that negotiation of the rules had taken place.

4. Findings

The item mean for contact with others of 3.366 and an Alpha reliability of .762 indicates that rules for contact with others were significantly negotiated by romantic partners. For the items concerning call times, the item mean was 2.031 while the Alpha reliability was .871, again indicating that rules for call times were negotiated by partners. In the items for availability expectations, a minimum item mean of 3.029 and an Alpha reliability of .780 shows that all the items in this factor have been negotiated. In the responses for items on relational issues, although Alpha reliability was low (.348) the statistical item mean was still high (3.081) showing that the three items in this factor were negotiated by a majority of romantic partners. Factor 5, which dealt with repetitive contact, had the most number of items (three) with neutral responses. The item mean value of 2.917 and Alpha reliability of .603 suggests that these were the least consistently applied rules negotiated by partners in the entire scale.

The items that pertain to monitoring partner usage also had high percentages of respondents who indicated that they had negotiated these rules ($M=3.629$). These were the most positively sided items and therefore the most consistently applied.

The open ended section on the other hand, mainly contained rules that relate to the surveillance dimension of the scale. When analyzing the open ended section, 100 individuals of the 215 participants in the survey, filled in the open ended section with a multiplicity of answers. The types of surveillance rules pertained not only to the use of social networking sites but specifically to the mobile phone itself. Participants said that “We agreed to not to go to each other[’s Facebook page or wall”, and “We do not Facebook each other[’]s enemies”. Not only do romantic partners engage in checking each other’s phone logs and text messages, but they also have rules to help them know who is calling or where the other partner is. Respondents also reported that: “We don’t walk out of the room if our phone rings and we are together”, “Do not leave the room to take a call”, Respondents either said that they mutually surveilled each other’s mobile phones (“You can look through mine, if I can look through yours” and “He knows my password and I know his”) or agreed not to monitor each other’s phones at all (“My cellphone is my property so is your cellphone” and “We also don’t go through each other’s phones”).

Cross tabulations between Section B and section C were conducted in order to ascertain whether participants who felt implicitly strongly about certain items still indicated the same response in the negotiated rules section of the scale. Comparisons were made between items b5 and c32; b6 and c33; b7 and c34; b8 and c35; b9 and c36; b10 and c37 as well as b13 and c40 (see Appendix). These items were chosen as a result of their high mean values. The findings show a shift in the items from the implicit and the negotiated. This suggests that negotiation does indeed play a role in establishing rules for mobile phone usage in romantic relationships as proposed by the literature. Thus the study can deduce that all of the 27 rules in section C of the survey scale were negotiated by couples.

RQ2 pertained to the variables that influence the negotiation process in romantic relationships. Group comparisons were conducted to quantify the statistical significance for answering this question. The demographics section of the survey was compared to the responses to the negotiated items. The variables of gender, culture as well as length of romantic relationships were the main focus in the comparison.

The first group comparison done was to see if there was a significant difference in responses between males and females. The items that were excluded in these comparisons were based on the outcome of the unidimensionality and reliability tests (Palant 2007). As the table below indicates, there were no significant differences in how male and females responded to the items.

Table 1: Gender group comparisons

Group Statistics					
A 1 Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
F1 Contact with Others	Male	23	3.2696	1.02416	.21355
	Female	165	3.3146	.80730	.06285
F2 Call Times	Male	24	2.2556	.90664	.18507
	Female	166	1.9750	.86824	.06739
F3 Availability Expectations	Male	24	3.0313	1.08953	.22240
	Female	165	3.4838	.93848	.07306
F4 Relational Issues	Male	23	3.1304	1.21746	.25386
	Female	168	3.2946	1.07827	.08319
F5 Repetitive Contact	Male	24	3.0833	1.21285	.24757
	Female	159	2.9245	1.01910	.08082
F6_1 Monitoring Partner Usage	Male	23	3.1957	1.39593	.29107
	Female	154	3.6688	1.26700	.10210
F6_2 Monitoring Partner Usage	Male	23	2.5870	1.52742	.31849
	Female	162	2.8426	1.41254	.11098

The factor mean values are similar except in cases where the distribution was skewed on one side. The uneven distribution indicated a similar orientation in mobile phone usage across genders. Caution should also be exercised in light of the fact that more females responded to the survey.

The next set of group comparisons were between the white, black, colored and Indian categorical variables. Contrary to the literature, there is no difference in perception of privacy across differing cultural backgrounds in this sample.

The last comparison of significance was done to see if there was any correlation between the length of the romantic relationship and the adoption of mobile phone usage rules. Although some groups within the categories in the length of relationships were small, the parametric tests did show significance in the correlation between the factor 'contact with others' and length of relationship. The table below shows a $p=.020$ in the factor contact with others, which is statistically significant.

Table 2: Difference between means

		Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
F1 Contact with Others	Brown-Forsythe	3.413	3	107.764	.020
F2 Call Times	Brown-Forsythe	13.18	3	109.211	.272
F3 Availability Expectations	Brown-Forsythe	1.102	3	120.133	.351
F4 Relational Issues	Brown-Forsythe	.593	3	97.119	.621
F5 Repetitive Contact	Brown-Forsythe	1609	3	111.866	.191
F6_1 Monitoring Partner Usage	Brown-Forsythe	.166	3	96.759	.919
F6_2 Monitoring Partner Usage	Brown-Forsythe	1556	3	102.918	.205

5. Discussion

Determining that a majority of survey respondents negotiated mobile phone usage rules in their romantic relationships offers imperative but expected evidence of the importance of mobile phone appropriation rules in South African adolescent and young adult romantic relationships.

Rules that pertain to repetitive contact had some of the highest mean values in the scale. The repetitive contact being permitted may possibly echo the observations about the mobile phone being a source of ‘perpetual contact’ (Katz and Aakhus 2002). The mobile phone has indeed been said to be an instrumental tool in relationship maintenance (Walther and Parks 2002; Gibbs, Ellison and Heino 2006; Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig and Wigley 2008). On the other hand, the argument can be made that it is easier to monitor the other partner’s whereabouts if these types of rules hold true. In this way, an acute form of electronic lateral surveillance can be said to take place (Tokunaga 2011).

The rules that pertain to the privacy regulation dimension (Factor 6) also had high percentages of respondents who indicated that they had negotiated these rules. For instance, the items ‘we don’t check each other’s smses’ and ‘we don’t check each other’s phone logs’ showed 34.7% and 35.1% of agreement figures respectively. The argument can be made that individuals are aware of the privacy invasive aspects of mobile phones in relationships through its perceived inappropriate use. In this particular scale, the privacy invasion would take the form of monitoring a romantic partner’s mobile phone usage. This current study argues that although the mobile phone itself can be privacy invasive in the way it is used,

rules can enhance privacy, seeing that the desire for privacy is inexorably tied to romantic relationships as well. What this ultimately evidences is that privacy is an important human need which is manifested in a number of different ways in a variety of situations, the satisfaction of which leads to effective individual functioning (Pedersen 1999).

Findings from the open-ended questions indicate that respondents further isolated the crucial role of the mobile phone in surveillance. The mobile phone was implicated as a central tool that afforded the respondents to monitor their partner's online and offline activities. Inventive uses in these forms of monitoring were reported by the respondents. From this comes a realization that surveillance can be facilitated by the technological affordances of the mobile phone. This then means that a mobile phone could indeed be thought of as a privacy invasive tool (PIT) (Kim 2004; Bélanger and Crossler 2011) in the way it is used by romantic partners. Within the lateral surveillance focus of this study, PIT's represent a self-cultivation in the effective management of personal relationships, where ordinary citizens are invited to become do-it-yourself private investigators (Andrejevic 2005: 487).

To insist that privacy management rules be part of a relationship routine could very well be precipitated by some catalyst of suspicion which results in this "spy culture". The dissemination of surveillance tools and practices has to be read alongside a climate of generalized, redoubled risk in contemporary society (Andrejevic 2005: 493). This may derive from reflexive skepticism that comes with the participatory promise of the market though the injunction not to trust in discredited social institutions and traditional practices, but to take matters into one's own hands (Andrejevic 2005).

A comparative analysis of the two sections shed further insight on the first research question posed in this paper, by providing insights into the differences between explicit and implicit rules. Cross tabulation as well as mean inter-item correlations did indicate evidence of negotiation playing an important role in the adoption of mobile phone usage rules. A significant shift from implicitly held rules to the acceptance of previously undesired rules gave further evidence of this. It is possible to also argue that negotiation may disorder the perceptive abilities of those in romantic relationships when it comes to responding objectively about rules they perceive should apply to the relationship versus the rules that actually apply to the relationship.

The findings show a shift in many of the items from the implicit and the negotiated. This means that negotiation does indeed play a role in establishing rules for mobile phone usage in South African youths' romantic relationships. Where there was no significant shift from implicit to negotiated rules may be explained by the nature of that specific item itself. In other words, there are specific items on which the individuals are not prepared to change once they have implicitly decided them.

When looking at the second research question (dealing with variables of gender, culture and length of relationship as influencing the negotiation process), more insight into the rule development process emerges. Although there was no correlation between gender and culture with the negotiation of mobile phone rules, the same was not true for length of relationship. From the above evidence, this paper argues that rules for mobile phone usage in romantic relationships are not stagnant as the relationship progresses, but may change according to varying circumstances in the dyad. What this finding may ultimately indicate is that rules for mobile phone usage may not necessarily be stagnant as the romantic relationship grows. This is not accounted for in the literature on this topic, but is more clearly evidenced in the data presented in this study. This is also a significant step in advancing the empirical understanding of CPM as a dialectic theory.

With specific reference to gender, the statistical results showed no difference in responses between males and females. Due to more females responding to the survey, it was not possible to say with empirical certainty whether this could have biased the results. The surveys suggest that females were more likely to allow their privacy to be invaded by their male partners in order to preserve harmony in the relationship. This was a surprising finding because educated females in South Africa have been thought to have more bargaining power in romantic relationships.

6. Concluding Remarks

Two limitations that set the tone for future research are worth mentioning before concluding the discussion. Firstly, due to the limitations of time, only a cross sectional survey could be conducted in order to investigate respondents' mobile usage rules at one point in time. A more longitudinal survey would allow for more definite results to be obtained regarding participants' views over a longer period of time. This would allow for investigations into the

types of rules that are more likely to become obsolete as the relationship progresses. Secondly, due to the nature of the sampling used, the aim was to find out the perceptions from one person about their romantic relationship. A more complete picture could be gained by investigating the responses from both romantic partners in order to more meaningfully understand the apparent misunderstanding in the relationship regarding the appropriate use of the mobile phone. Despite these minor limitations, the study has successfully developed pioneering work within the field of privacy management in the context of mobile communication and romantic relationships in South Africa.

When considering the survey findings in their entirety, it can be said that mobile phone usage rules are an important part of modern romantic relationships. The study has shown that mobile phone usage rules are not only part of the relational repertoire of adolescent and young adult romantic relationships within the given population. This attests to the dialectic nature of the contradictions that permeate many romantic relationships, where competing needs must be simultaneously negotiated. Two of these dialectics were apparent in the findings, separation-closedness as well as stability and change.

The first dialectic was evidenced by the desire to accommodate privacy as seen by the negotiation of rules surrounding the monitoring of mobile phone usage patterns and in the desire to not set call times in order to enhance perpetual closeness through perpetual contact. The second dialectic of stability and change was seen in both the desire to adhere to negotiated rules while at the same time giving room for the negotiation of new rules as the relationship matures. The awareness by the respondents that the rules needed to change as the relationship progressed attests that they are savvy mobile phone users and skilled negotiators of their own privacy and disclosure needs. Partners are not victims of mobile technology.

Respondents also seem to have developed other means of monitoring their partner's whereabouts through the mobile phone. Instant messaging applications were one prominent way of knowing whether a romantic partner was online or not. Partners can not only monitor when last the other was online but can actually have expectations for the other partner to 'chat' with them if they are online. These kinds of expectation may be a source of conflict if and when they are not met. Future studies may need to investigate the role of instant messaging applications in facilitating what seems to be an acute form of lateral surveillance.

Thus the negotiated rules did not only focus on privacy-disclosure but on maintaining the health of the relationships as a whole. The invasion of privacy through asymmetrical monitoring of a romantic partner's phone was however also seen as an important way of maintain relational well-being by warding off any potential extra dyadic threats. This panoptic form of monitoring demonstrates that even lateral surveillance is itself layered by complex forms of surveillance. This type of surveillance blends together forms of conspicuous monitoring where a partner is unaware that they are being monitored by their loved one, as well as self-monitoring where the partner who is undertaking the monitoring must make sure they do not get caught.

Therefore, as much as the mobile phone can be intrusive and a source of conflict in the relationship through misappropriation, the negotiation of rules for appropriate mobile phone usage can minimise this conflict. The conflict can only be minimised and not resolved completely because of the dynamic nature of romantic relationships and the equally dynamic nature of the circumstances that influence the relationships themselves. How the conflict is negotiated when it arises seems to be the fulcrum on which the future of the relationship management process in a mobile environment pivots.

Appendix

			rc32 We don't sms others at all when we are together		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rb5 Don't sms others when we are together	Disagree	Count % within rb5 Don't sms others when we are together	55 83.3%	6 9.1%	5 7.6%
	Neutral	Count % within rb5 Don't sms others when we are together	31 56.4%	18 32.7%	6 10.9%
	Agree	Count % within rb5 Don't sms others when we are together	22 39.3%	18 32.1%	16 28.6%
			rc33 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to sms each other		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rb6 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to sms message each other	Disagree	Count % within rb6 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to sms message each other	113 79.0%	18 11.2%	14 9.8%
	Neutral	Count % within rb6 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to sms message each other	3 27.3%	6 54.5%	2 18.2%
	Agree	Count % within rb6 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to sms message each other	6 40.0%	6 40.0%	3 20.0%
			rc34 After a certain time at night, it is not ok to call each other		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rb7 After a certain time at night, it is not ok to call each other	Disagree	Count % within rb7 After a certain time at night, it is not ok to call each other	107 82.9%	13 10.1%	9 7.0%
	Neutral	Count % within rb7 After a certain time at night, it is not ok to call each other	8 47.1%	6 35.3%	3 17.6%
	Agree	Count % within rb7 After a certain time at night, it is not ok to call each other	5 20.8%	4 16.7%	15 62.5%
			rc35 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to call each other		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rb8 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to call each other	Disagree	Count % within rb8 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to call each other	103 79.2%	10 7.7%	17 13.1%
	Neutral	Count % within rb8 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to call each other	7 46.7%	5 33.3%	3 20.0%
	Agree	Count % within rb8 Before a certain time in the morning, it is not ok to call each other	7 29.2%	5 20.8%	12 50.0%

			rrc36 We can call each other whenever we want to		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rb9 It is ok to call whenever we want to	Disagree	Count	4	4	7
		% within rb9 It is ok to call whenever we want to	26.7%	26.7%	46.7%
	Neutral	Count	1	9	9
		% within rb9 It is ok to call whenever we want to	5.3%	47.4%	47.4%
	Agree	Count	3	7	136
		% within rb9 It is ok to call whenever we want to	2.7%	4.8%	93.2%
			rrc37 We can sms each other whenever we want to		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rb10 It is ok to sms whenever we want to	Disagree	Count	3	2	6
		% within rb10 It is ok to sms whenever we want to	27.3%	18.2%	54.5%
	Neutral	Count	0	5	6
		% within rb10 It is ok to sms whenever we want to	0.0%	45.5%	54.5%
	Agree	Count	11	12	136
		% within rb10 It is ok to sms whenever we want to	6.9%	7.5%	85.5%
			rc40 We must have our cell phone on whenever we are not in class or not at work		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rb13 Have your cell phone on whenever you are not in class or at work	Disagree	Count	8	5	11
		% within rb13 Have your cell phone on whenever you are not in class or at work	33.3%	20.8%	45.8%
	Neutral	Count	8	10	6
		% within rb13 Have your cell phone on whenever you are not in class or at work	33.3%	41.7%	25.0%
	Agree	Count	11	27	89
		% within rb13 Have your cell phone on whenever you are not in class or at work	8.7%	21.3%	70.7%
			rC52 We don't check each other's phone logs		
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree
rB25 Don't check each other's phone log	Disagree	Count	24	2	8
		% within rB25 Don't check each other's phone log	70.6%	5.9%	23.5%
	Neutral	Count	6	16	10
		% within rB25 Don't check each other's phone log	18.8%	50.0%	31.3%
	Agree	Count	11	11	86
		% within rB25 Don't check each other's phone log	10.2%	10.2%	79.6%

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