

“IT’S COMPLICATED”: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN AND MOBILE INTIMACY

Larissa Hjorth
RMIT University
E: larissa.hjorth@rmit.edu.au

Abstract

In the burgeoning of emotional and affective labour within the rise of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), the significance of gender performativity cannot be ignored. Much of the research around ‘affective technologies’ such as ICTs and Web 2.0 have noted youth cultures and emerging forms of public intimacy. However, how do these forms of intimacy and labour differ when considering issues about age and ethnicity? And how do women of different ages relate to old and new media? This preliminary case study of 40 multicultural women aged between 20-50 years old living in Melbourne (Australia) aims to explore some of the motivations, pleasures and anxieties surrounding the participation in affective technologies in an age of personalisation media.

Keywords:

Women, Web 2.0, ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), affective technologies, emotional labour and personalisation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The role of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), as a lens for thinking about contemporary mobility, has provided much fuel for debates regarding the ways in which work and love, here and there, virtual and actual, are transforming. In an age determined by the public performances of intimacy both on and offline, we can find emerging forms of social, creative and affective labor. This has resulted in various scholars re-examining intimacy and the role of mediation — leading some to argue for new forms of contractual love [1] or bemoan the demise of traditional notions of intimacy [2]. Others again, assert contemporary forms of electronic co-presence rehearse earlier modes such as the nineteenth century visiting card [3]. Throughout all these debates about intimacy and mediation, gendered practices prevail.

The role of gender is particularly prevalent within the rise of affective technologies [4] such as mobile media and Web 2.0 and the associated deployment of personalisation. The politics of personalisation are integral in the emotional and affective logic of contemporary ICTs. It is impossible to avoid the emotional and social investments required to participate in a broadband society. These ‘cartographies of personalisation’ [5] shape degrees of engagement and participation. And yet, within this phenomenon that is overtly gendered in its formation, the issue of gendered personalisation is often overlooked despite the linkage of ICTs to domestic technologies whereby gendered modes of material and immaterial forms of labor are re-enacted [6], [7], [8].

For Leopoldina Fortunati [9], the increasing proclivity of mobile media to exploit social labor is inevitably informed by gendered roles of intimacy that, in turn, reflects a sense of belonging and home. Mobile media demonstrates that while domestic technologies can *physically* leave the home, they are still symbolic of socio-cultural notions of what constitutes a household economy and the attendant forms of intimacy. Far from intimacy being “mobile,” and thus impervious to place, it is the repository of the mobile that further amplifies localized practices of what it means to be intimate [10]. Thus, to explore intimacy we need to consider the role of place as informing our ‘communities of feelings’ [11] and ‘feeling rules’ [12] associated with ‘affective technologies’ [4].

Indeed the rise of affective technologies has impacted upon various practices — particularly social capital [13], [14], [15]. Initially outlined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his groundbreaking study *Distinctions* [13], the notion of social capital (whereby capital was viewed as a form of ‘knowledge’) was deployed along with cultural and economic capital to understand the ways taste was naturalized. However, this definition has been markedly revised in an age of late twentieth media [14], [15], [16]. My purpose here is not to reiterate the discussions but to consider the role gender plays in particular forms of social capital — specifically social, affective and emotional labor [12]. As sociologist Amparo Lasen has identified, the increasingly significance of

mobile media is predicated around its role as an ‘affective’ technology in which emotional and affective labor become the dominate currencies [4]. In this phenomenon, the gendered role of technologies and emotions is further augmented. Whilst social capital has been given much focus around changing notions of individualism [16], the role of gender in informing different types of social labor has been relatively overlooked.

One way to understand the creative forms of managing social labor and mediated intimacies — and its amplification by some media and dilution by other — is through the crossroads of gender at different ages. Young women have gained much attention within discussions of fashion and youth [17], [18]— but this conflation fails to recognize the diversity of experiences and contexts that inform women’s deployment of mobile media at different stages of their life. In particular, by stratifying gender with different age groups we can begin to understand more complex models of intimacy as well as providing great depth and rigour in conceptualizing women’s role in new and old media [18]. This can, in turn, complicate literary canons that romanticize old media epistolaries and demonize anything “new” without regards of their creative and innovative potential. In this light, it is important to remember that the content of new media tends to be older data, and that new media ‘remediate’ (adapts, translates, transforms) older media and vice versa [19]. Indeed, far from mobile media being “new” media, we must view these emerging forms of media literacy, labor and intimacy as rehearsing earlier gendered epistolary traditions.

In order to understand the role of gendered intimacy within increasingly social, affective and creative forms of labor, we need to identify the role of localized gender performativity. According to poststructuralist Judith Butler, gender is not innate but rather ordered by a set of repetitions and regulations [20]. However, Butler neglects to fully explore the way gender is performed, informed and transformed by different socio-cultural contexts and ethnicities. In this paper I deploy the notion of “gendered” performativity to discuss my female respondents experiences of intimacy and emotional labor that are produced by different media.

I begin by discussing some of the literature intersecting gender, intimacy and emotional labor. I then move to a study of 40 Melbournian (Australian) female respondents aged between 20 and 50 years old from various cultural backgrounds. In this study I inquire about the ways in which they utilize different modes of mediation to initiate and maintain intimate relations. Exploring the various forms of intimacy from familial, friends and lovers, respondents discuss the various modes of mediation they use — and why.

This study is the beginning of a longitudinal review into ongoing forms of gendered mediated intimacy. In this study we see some women’s views on mediation and consider the role of media in reflecting different types of intimacy. I consider some of the broad recurring spectres of earlier modes of co-presence such as letter writing as well as noting some of the emerging new forms of mobile media practices. As this is a preliminary study focussing upon a small group of respondents I do not intend this to be read as indicative of all women’s experiences in Melbourne. Rather, this study attempts to provide new ways of thinking through gendered social capital in the context of the emotional labor involved in new and old everyday media practices.

2 MOBILE FEELINGS: WOMEN, EMOTIONAL LABOR AND MEDIA

Mobility is part of the original sense of the notion of emotion as it refers to agitated motion, mental agitation or feelings of mental agitation. Emotions are those mental states called “passions” in the past. An important feature of the affects depicted by the category of passions is the idea that they entail ways of being acted upon, of being moved by other beings, objects, events, and situations. Nowadays people are moved and acted upon by their mobile phones. Mobile phone uses are the result of a shared agency [4].

Mobility, as a notion, has long been attached to emotion [4]. In the various forms of mobility — people, ideas, labor and capital — it is undoubtedly women (particularly in the context of developing countries) who are implicated the most [21]. Unquestionably, the role of the mobile phone as a technology of propinquity (temporal and spatial proximity) is both instrumental in, and symbolic of, the transnational flows of gendered modes of labor and consumption. For Judy Wajcman et al., the association with ‘affective or emotional work is part of the unequally distributed gender division of labor’ [22]. In ‘Intimate Connections: The Impact of the Mobile Phone on Work Life Boundaries’, Wajcman notes the mobile phone ‘characterizes modern times and life in the fast lane’ and has become iconic of ‘work-life balance’ — or lack thereof — in contemporary life [22].

Wajcman et al. observes that manipulating ‘the boundary between work and life was one of the principal ways that many people controlled their time’ [22]. These boundaries of time and space are determined, in part, by ‘debates about work/life boundaries’ that are imbued by traditional gendered divides ‘between the separate spheres for market work (male) and domestic work (female)’ wrought by industrialization [22]. However, Wajcman et al. observe, ‘there is no reason why the mobile phone should be seen as a gendered artefact, as it

does not carry the masculine connotations of, for example, computers that are still identified with hacker culture' [22].

Despite the fact that there is 'no reason' for gender divisions around technology to persist, they do. One way to map the rise of mobile media practices such as SMS (Short Messaging Service) is undoubtedly through gender differences. According to Fortunati since the mobile phone is one of *the* most intimate items in everyday life, it reflects particular gendered performativities and intimacies [23]. Indeed, Fortunati clearly identifies the way in which practices of intimacy are gendered — a fact that is augmented by the mobile phone and its role to reproduce gendered forms of social labor. For Fortunati,

... the mobile phone might be considered as a work tool for reproduction. That is, a tool that supports and facilitates almost all the aspects of immaterial reproductive labour, which are increasingly complex and exponential in influence... the mobile phone has become also a strategic tool of social labour.' [18]

The role of gendered spaces, practices and labor, in both material and immaterial forms, is amplified by mobile technologies.¹ Within the rise of UCC (User Created Content), gendered mobile media customization can be viewed as part of broader trends in the evolution of domestic and personal media technologies that exploit emotional, social labor as obligatory. However, it is important to contextualize this phenomenon as part of broader cultural practices of mobility and intimacy of media that have always involved elements of co-presence.

As Timo Kopomaa [24] observes, today's mobile media can be seen as an extension of nineteenth and twentieth century mobile media such as the wristwatch. Technologies such as mobile media re-enact earlier co-present practices and interstitials of intimacy: for example SMS re-enacts nineteenth century letter writing traditions [25]. As Esther Milne [26] observes, new forms of telepresence such as email are linked into earlier practices of co-present intimacy such as visiting cards. In this way, the intimate co-presence enacted by mobile technologies should be viewed as part of a lineage of technologies of propinquity [26], [27]. However, there are some striking differences too. Mobile media can be considered as part of shifts in conceptualising and practicing intimacy as no longer a 'private' activity but a pivotal component of public sphere performativity. As Lauren Berlant observes, intimacy has taken on new geo-imaginaries, most notably as a kind of 'publicness' [28] that is epitomized by the mobile phone [23].

For Airlie Hochschild, extending upon the pioneering work of Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [29], we not only change our outward expression to perform particular duties and functions require of us — we change our emotions. This is what she called 'feeling rules' [12] in which the type of 'emotion work' that is required varies according to numerous, often unspoken factors such as sensitivity towards cultural context. In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild focuses upon the women within the service industry and the types of 'right' emotional labor they must perform in order to fulfil their job. This theme is continued in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* in which Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich [21] argue that emotional labor is increasingly going global. Through a global process of care culture chains that takes a North-South movement women from the South (developing countries) must leave their family at home to service families in the North (developed countries) — a process whereby rich countries extract love from poorer ones. The pervasiveness of emotional labor as a major tenor in forces of globalization can also be seen from within developed countries — especially in the case of affective technologies and their growing compulsion to exploit labor under the maintenance of social capital. Within the deployment of affective technologies, a particular sub-genre of emotional labor — 'feeling rules' — can be found.

In the context of this paper, which focuses upon a developed country, Australia, this emotional labor is far less concerned with developed-developing care culture chains but rather the specific forms of unpaid emotional labor and 'feeling rules' that are becoming all-encompassing within contemporary technocultures and the associated affective technologies. By technoculture, I am referring to the notion that culture shapes, and is shaped by, technology. Different media require appropriate types of emotional labor — various forms of often unspoken feeling rules. Affective technologies such as mobile media compel us to be more perpetually responsive within a

¹As Melissa Gregg (2007) notes in her insightful study on the ironies of 'working at home', far from freeing us up, such flexible working practices result in further eroding the boundaries between work and life. However, one must be mindful that these so-called erosions of public and private boundaries have always been in flux and that mobile technologies just enhance this phenomenon in a different way. Gregg, M. (2007) 'Work where you want: the labour politics of the mobile office', presented at *Mobile Media conference*, University of Sydney, July, www.mobilemedia2007.net

logic of ‘perpetual contact’ [30] — creating a phenomenon of labor that has been defined as ‘wireless leash’ [31]. The gendered implications are striking. For example, Misa Matsuda has eloquently described the function of the mobile phone for Japanese children as ‘mom in the pocket’ [32]. In order to understand some of these gendered performativity around types of labor and intimacy, I will turn to my preliminary case study of Melbournian women and their various forms of mediated intimacies and feeling rules.

3 LABORS OF LOVE: A SAMPLE STUDY OF MELBOURNE WOMEN AND MEDIATED INTIMACY

Despite only recently gaining focus within the area of mobile communication [33], Australia was one of the first for early research into gendered mobile usage by scholars such as Ann Moyal, Patricia Gilliard and Wacjman. The obvious role that gender plays in technologies was, of course, spearheaded by discussions of mobile technologies as part of the *domestic* technology lineage [16], [34]. The first studies of mobile culture around the early 1990s highlighted the implicit role that gender functioned in the emergence and transformation of the business technology into a socio-cultural practice.

Moyal’s [35] study on gender and the telephone in Australia was not only one of the first studies in Australia but also an early pioneer in what would become mobile communication research. Gillard’s research in Australia in the 1990s (particularly with the Australian government) was significant in conceptualizing new models for studying telecommunications as a cultural practise. Michele Martin’s [36] eloquent study explored the transformation of the telephone from business tool into a feminized social and cultural artefact.² In the same year Wajcman’s wonderfully rigorous critique of technology in *Feminism Confronts Technology* [37] hallmarked the epoch’s feminist re-examination of the socio-technological tropes of cyberspace and politics of virtuality [38], [39], [40]. This era also saw the emergence of the concept of the ‘feminization’ of technology / telephony [41] and debates around the gendered body politics of mobile virtuality [42].

Despite the rise of mobile communication as clearly invested by gendered politics and the socio-cultural economies of the domestic sphere, and the fact that social labor is increasingly a currency and commodity in contemporary ICTs, studies of gendered usage tend to either focus upon narrow age demographics — conflating youth, women and new technology — or they focus on developed versus developing cultural contexts as part of globalization [43], [44]. Within these two polemic discussions, lies the relationship of generational gendered differences.

For example, do stereotypes about age, gender and choice of mediated intimacies prevail? Do young women prefer new media such as SMS and MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) while more mature women prefer older, remediating technologies such as letter writing? In order to begin investigating these questions about gendered generational mediated intimacies I decided to choose a multicultural context and one in which technologies such as SMS have dominated the popular images associated with female users, Melbourne, Australia.

Although not the capital of Australia, Melbourne is arguably the capital for fashion and thus a good barometer for the uptake of mobile phone trends in urban Australia. With a population of 3.5 million, Melbourne has a multicultural demographic comprising large numbers of Greeks, Italians, Chinese and Jews, among others, with residents coming from an estimated 140 different ethnic backgrounds. Settled in 1835, Melbourne has been subject to many influxes of immigrations, most notably the 1850s gold rush that saw the arrival of tens of thousands of immigrants.

One look at the mobile phone industry and usage in Melbourne and one is confronted by an array of cross-cultural synthesis; and far from being ruled by the fashions in Europe by such companies as Nokia, Melbourne is a smorgasbord of global brands. Throughout the bombardment of mobile phone advertisements that grace trams, buildings and printed matter, one cannot help but conclude that Melbournians are obsessed with their mobile

² In a similar vein as Martin’s study, Lana Rokow’s (1992) lucid study investigated some of the ways in which gender has informed conventions around telephonic practices. The issue of reproductive labour and the shifting politics of ‘care cultures’ that Hochschild (2000) details so vividly in her research is presciently outlined in Rakow’s and Vija Navarro’s (1993) ‘Remote Mothering and the Parallel Shift: Women Meet the Cellular Telephone’. Here, the role of the telephone as both a product and symbol of particular types of emotional and reproductive labour is emphasized.

phones — most notably through the practice of SMS. Whether voting on a TV reality program or keeping in contact with a friend, SMS rules. This texting — involving much playful deployment of the English language — cuts across various age, ethnic and socio-economic demographics [25].

In spite of this, one is left to ponder how mobile communications are being used to maintain various types of emotional intimacies with family, partners and friends. How, if at all, are cultural differences reflected in these practices? How do women of different ages relate to both old and new media in their maintenance of intimate relations? Can particular forms of feeling rules be associated with specific media despite differences in the users' demography? In order to explore these questions, during December 2007 I surveyed over 40 women aged between 20 and 50 years old. I began with disseminating written surveys giving respondents the option for a face-to-face, in-depth follow-up interview. For the final group of 10 respondents I chose the most multicultural diverse group of respondents that reflect some of the generational and cultural differences and similarities between women living in Melbourne. As aforementioned, this study is not meant to be indicative of all Melbournian women's experiences, rather, it aims to provide some insights into the relationship mobile communication — and associated forms of emotional labor — has for women of various ages.

Half of the chosen respondents were first generation migrants, with the other half being third or fourth generational. The respondents draw from a diversity of ethnicities: Chinese, Korean, Swedish, Croatian, German, Jewish and British — the obvious in terms of Melbourne settlement being a British colony. The sample group had differing relationship status from single, married, defacto³ and divorced. Moreover, the group of respondents consisted of one fifth of the respondents in same-sexed partnerships with two respondents being lesbians. Of the diversity of respondents' ethnic and generational backgrounds, little differences could be noted — almost all preferred the directness of voice calling (especially with family) while texting prevailed amongst friends. Interesting, the preference for hard copy media such as letter writing and postcards could be found in both young and more mature respondents, thus challenging conventions about new media and youth. One of the key factors was whether their family lived in Australia or not as to how frequently they contacted family at home.

Amongst the various voices what became apparent was the significance of co-ordinating various forms of mediation was an important part of maintaining intimacy. These various forms of mediation — some more direct (i.e. voice calling) whilst some where more indirect (texting or letter writing) — were seen as an integral part of the practise of intimacy, reminding us of Margaret Morse's [45] insightful adage that intimacy has always been mediated — even face-to-face is mediated by gestures, language and memories. When asked about to define 'intimacy', none referred to physical intimacy or face-to-face, instead they used emotional terms, quite clearly demonstrating the consequence of increasingly social labour in everyday life. For the respondents, intimacy consisted of: understanding; trust; philosophical closeness; personal; private; care; comfort; vulnerability; slow; intensive; melancholic; compassion; respect; honesty and genuine love.

So how has mobile communication reconfigured women's relationship to other, older media? For one married Swedish female respondent in her early thirties, the rise of mobile mediated communication only further highlighted the significance of the hard copy. As a university postgraduate, self-described 'family-orientated' mother of two young children, she noted that most of her familial relationships were maintained by voice calls and letters as opposed to partners which were preserved by emailing and letters. Friendships had a variety of forms of mediation from emails, letters, texting and postcards. When asked what was her preferred medium — amongst all — she replied, 'I prefer letter writing because I like a little from the person I'm writing to stay with me even after the conversation has ended.'

When asked about how her preference for particular media had changed over the last five to ten years, she replied,

I no longer like to use the telephone as often. I haven't got enough practice to sustain a conversation for very long! I maintain most friendship by regular texting and emailing... (ten years ago)... I used the post almost exclusively, as well as the phone. I particularly liked to decorate my envelopes and make them part of the "gift".

³ Many contemporary heterosexual couples choose to have a defacto relationship instead of the formal, traditional ritual of marriage. For same sex partners in a country where same sex marriage doesn't exist, a defacto relationship is the only method. In Australia, many couples choose to live in a defacto relationship — it is officially accepted in the eyes of law after a couple of years of the relationship.

Here the respondent highlights the significance of communication methods as a form of gift-giving. Within contemporary forms of media, gift-giving can take various forms — particularly the gift or ‘present’ of co-presence. Much of the literature around mobile media has identified the various levels of gift-giving [46] that involve pleasure, power relations and obligation — extending from the groundbreaking study conducted by Marcel Mauss [47]. So too the rise of Web 2.0 and its so-called “participatory culture” [48] has been imbued by the idea of the internet being operated by a gift economy that works to challenge the burgeoning commercialization. The role of customization differs dramatically between media — within the context of the older media, decorating is a pleasurable experience, whereas in newer, more frequently used media such as SMS, she is less likely to customize her language to the ‘feeling rules’ etiquette. Whilst SMS’s economy is forged around simplification and abbreviation, this respondent actively defies this etiquette choosing to write as she would in hard copy letters. In terms of mobile communication, her most notable usage and changes were reflective of her becoming a mother. She believed that the mobile phone was significant in negotiating this new role of motherhood, in which she developed new relationships with other mothers — via mother’s group — that she would in any other circumstance not maintain. She noted,

I would not have been able to provide my children with regular playmates without the contact I maintain with other parents through texting. These are people I have parenting in common with but little else.

For a new media designer, aged 30 and in a defacto relationship, she preferred voice calling above all other media. She stated,

I like to be able to speak to someone. It is so easy to misconstrue written communication. Being able to hear someone’s voice means you can hear what is behind what they are saying, rather than relying solely on dialogue.

For this respondent, synchronous mediated intimacy is preferred as a more honest and direct mode of communication. Here we see the collation between the directness of the medium as synonymous with directness in communication. This respondent was clearly aware of the time-consuming nature of various media and the types of ‘feeling rules’ involved. For this respondent, the push towards increasingly customization was another form of creative labor she tried to resist. Given that she is a new media designer — an area where people must be technological savvy whilst being subject to market trends and associated precarious labor — this respondent actively avoided further deployment of emotional and creative labor within her communication practices. While voice calling was clearly the dominant mode of correspondence at 60%, this respondent freely shifted between various media such as emailing, texting, letter writing and then postcards dependent upon the friend or family member. With both her family and partner, voice call was 90% of the communication medium, while texting dominated with her friendships as 60% of the time. When asked to discuss this, she said, ‘I have some friends that I communicate with solely via email. Others that are predominantly maintained via text.’ When asked about how — and why — her usage of media had changed she noted,

5 years ago I communicated almost entirely by email. I moved away from my friends and family to a new city and the cheapest way to stay in contact was via the computer. These days, with the introduction of phone caps⁴ I communicate a lot more via my handset. Lots of texting and phone calls...Ten years ago I had a phone that I couldn’t afford to pay for when I got my bills and it got cancelled. And I had never turned on a computer before... I think mobile technology has all but obliterated letter writing. It is an art form that has sadly fallen by the wayside. I would like to see it come back into vogue. It’s a bit hard to hold a long lost text close to your heart 30 years down the track.

In the above comment we see the respondent lamenting the demise of older media such as letter writing that she views as an artform. Here we see the way in which older technologies of communication quickly become re-classified or “remediated” [19] as an artform. For this respondent, the compulsion for perpetual customization within the feeling rules of new affective technologies was associated much more with overt forms of labor — unlike older media that she viewed as an artform. This high/low cultural association between new and older media was more prevalent in younger respondents. But factors such as profession and ethnicity also played a significant role in determining these associations. When asked to reflect upon how mediated intimacy can help face-to-face relations, she replied,

⁴ This is a type of post-paid system in which people can use up to a certain amount of calls and texts under a certain payment rate.

People feel a lot more comfortable communicating via text or email when they first meet someone. There isn't that face-to-face pressure and you can think about what you want to say before you do something stupid. Many a new relationship has been built via e-flirting.

For a married Korean designer in her late 20s, her preferred medium was 'texting... short and most of the times immediate and it's good for filling in times.' While she used voice calling for family and communicating with her husband, in all other relationships — personal and professional — she was clearly a texter (60%) and then an emailer (40%). For this respondent, her new media practices deployed in Korea were reappropriated in the context of Australia. This was partly a technological issue given that South Korea boasts the highest broadband rates [49] and new technological innovation whilst Australia still has uneven broadband coverage and technological uptake. But it also involved socio-cultural elements in which the 'feeling rules' of Australia were much more relaxed than the hierarchies of Korean culture as can be observed in her *even* texting her boss.

Five years ago, I used to use a phone call for friends and family, even looking for a job. But I now use text with even work colleagues, including my boss (especially on sick days!) SMS is very interesting... I almost find it easier to discover the 'true character' or 'the other side' of a person by the way they SMS and email.

For a married Anglo designer in her mid forties, she alternated between voice calling and emailing. For family she used voice calling 70%, email 20% and text 10% as opposed to friends, for which she predominantly used email 90%. For her partner she deployed emailing and voice calling equally. When asked why voice call was her favourite medium she replied,

The phone is convenient, I can use the mobile when walking or doing housework. I can catch people when they are out or doing other things. Phones are essential especially for women who are busy... I have a friend that I would text or email to continue the conversation when we are not together (physically) or to continue a conversation privately at work. Say if something happens on the news that we are both interested in or something happens at work, we text as if we are having a conversation, as if the other person was in the room.

When asked about the changes over the last five years she noted,

Text and email allow more choices. I can email or text to pass on a message that I know is private and that the person will receive when they have time. They can reply when they have time. Text is great for confirming arrangements, like leaving a little note. The mobile allows you to ring family and friends from the shops if you see something that the other person might want.

For one single Euroasian lesbian architect in her late thirties, for family, voice calling dominated, whereas for friends she evenly alternated between voice calling, texting and emailing depending on the situation. For this respondent, the choices in media were a result of,

Tone of voice seems to be very important in understanding what someone is saying and how they are feeling. We do not always say what we mean. Sometimes texting or email can be misinterpreted, but I am finding more and more it a form for sustaining and creating relationships... Texting definitely seems to reinforce bonds of intimacy with good friends. Several friends have particular ways of texting. Usually texting can provide an amusing exchange or shared experience. Often friends will text when something happens to them or they see something that reminds them of a shared experience I have had with them. I guess texting often conveys that you maybe thinking about the friend without necessarily having a voice call.

For a European social worker in her early 40s in a defacto relationship, when asked about her favourite medium she stated,

I love text and email and things like Facebook for the immediacy and the way one can stay in touch quickly and simply. I like postcards as well because its another way of sending a simple message but there is also something more special about it than the other means as one has to spend the time picking the card, writing, posting it, etc.

Interestingly, despite all respondents having at least one SNS (Social Networking System) such as MySpace (on the decline), LinkedIn and the increasingly popular, Facebook, only this one respondent used her SNS frequently. Equally deploying her Facebook in conjunction with voice calling for all of her correspondence with both family and friends, this respondent defied the adage of youth as early adopters of new. When asked to consider how these practises and patterns had changed since 5 years ago or more, she replied,

As a teenager and in my young 20s I used the telephone a lot — to stay in touch and to actually have conversations on. Now I find I have lost the art of chatting on the phone as I am so used to emailing and texting what I want to say until I next see that person... 10 years ago I was on the telephone every night taking up a storm with friends and family!

On reflecting upon how mobile technologies had changed her relationship to media and intimacy, she noted,

I NEVER write letters anymore, whereas even 6-8 years ago I still did. However, despite the loss of that type of communication I think my experience has been enhanced by having mobile and email technology in my life. I like the immediacy, the fact that if someone wants to tell me something or vice versa we usually can share that information.

For this respondent, part of her joy in using new, affective technologies is learning new forms of customization. Unlike some of the younger respondents, she viewed the customization around newer media as fun and that the newer media had enhanced her relationships. For one female Croatian immigrant aged 50 and in a defacto relationship, voice calling dominated her mediated practises. Over 70% of her communication was via voice call, as opposed to only 5% for texting and emailing. Interestingly, letter writing and postcards featured higher than texting and emailing at 10%. Her choice for voice call was simple, 'Immediate response; being able to 'read' clues by the tone of the voice'. As an immigrant, constant contact with family was either via voice call or letter writing, whereas for friends she alternated between voice calling and emailing. In five years is noted no difference in her modes of communication, and over ten years ago the only change being the introduction of emailing and texting. Although she writes more emails and text messages to her friends, her mode of communication with family remains unchanged.

For one Anglo female in her late twenties, in a relationship with another female, she used voice call for family, SMS and emails for friends and for her partner SMS, emailing and voice calling. When asked what her favourite medium in maintaining intimate relations, she replied,

SMS — Mobile phones are always on and always with people. That means I can instantly convey how I am feeling and know that the recipient will read and respond relatively instantaneously also. I love being restricted by character limits which dictate how I must communicate. I'm much more adventurous with SMS too because I feel that the message somehow is more private.

For this respondent, like the Korean immigrant, texting expressed inner subjectivities of the users and the particulars of their relationship. As she noted,

I have a friend who communicates via text and email with her own variation of English. She randomly replaces 'c's' with 'k's' — i.e. kontakt and kashless and aktion. I actually really like it. Helps me to hear her voice in my head whilst reading... Another friend and I will make up email addresses and role play stupid stories about random things.... For example, I created a character called Boris who was walking from Darwin because he was madly in love with a woman from Melbourne. I set up a unique hotmail name and used this to communicate with my friend as Boris. Silly... but fun.

Here we see the role in which particular media can amplify types of vernacular (the 'feeling rules') and playfulness, an important part of maintaining intimacy. This is what I have defined elsewhere as the ongoing process of 'imaging communities' [5]. By 'imaging' I refer to all the mobile media UCC practices that can take the form of the visual, textual, aural and haptic modes of expression. From SMS to camera phone images, these practices of imaging communities reflect forms of intimacy, labor and creativity which provide ways for configuring, and intervening, the region's 'imagined community' [50].

Rather than the Asia-Pacific being a sum of what Benedict Anderson calls 'imagined communities' — that is, nations formed through the birth and rise of printing press and print media — networked mobile media is best conceptualized as a series of ongoing, micro 'imaging communities' that can span visual, textual and aural forms. Moreover, contrary to Anderson's imagined communities that saw the rise of the nation lead to the demise of the local and vernacular, 'imaging communities' further amplify the local and the colloquial. In the case of 'imaging communities', each community shares, stores and saves their media in diverse ways reflecting localized gift-giving rituals and emotional labor. These 'imaging communities' are indicative of emerging forms of gendered labor, feeling rules and intimacy that are maintained through a variety of media practices. For this respondent, her imaging communities had changed concurrently with shifts in the availability of new convergent technologies. When asked about how her practices had changed over the last five to ten years, she noted,

Five years ago I was heavy mobile voice call user. I didn't rely on email as much to communicate with friends. I did text message but infrequently as far as I can remember... I had a mobile in 1998

and used to rely on it to keep in contact with family and friends. I didn't text at all and rarely used email. I used a landline and public phones more frequently. I never wrote handwritten letters but loved to send postcards.

When asked about how the mobile helps to nurture particular relationships over others she replied,

I think mobiles are perfect devices for building more intimate social relationships... The feeling of privacy and immediacy makes them great tools for flirting, for instance, or saying stuff that is harder to do face-to-face... The mobile has reduced the need to connect via email for me. I get so busy at work that email is a hindrance rather than an enjoyable form of connection with friends. I am also lazy and have a short attention span — so text messaging is perfect for me. Oh and I'm visual — so sending images via MMS is sometimes more engaging.

Here we see a perfect example of the pivotal role texting plays in maintaining of everyday relationships, a global phenomenon, but with particular ongoing prevalence in Melbourne. Not only is texting cheaper but it is more reliable in a country that still has inconsistent broadband infrastructure. However, there are socio-cultural reasons as well. As I have argued elsewhere, despite Melbournians being early adopters of new media, low-tech practices such as texting persist. I have argued that this relates to Melbourne's specific geo-political imaginary of the South that is framed by a 'postal presence' [25]. Rather than being made redundant by new technologies, the significance of texting continues unabated by new technologies and applications. In this way, texting has become so much part of the everyday that it 'makes sense' — that is, it is 'natural' part of communication and vernacular experimentation that continues to reinforce a sense of place and intimacy. For many of the respondents, both young and more mature, texting provided a vehicle to say things that could not be said face-to-face. It also provides a space for a convergence of social labor and capital, as noted by the interest in playing with language and phonetics to further reinforce, what Ichiyo Habuchi called 'telecooning' [51], already existing social bonds. For some respondents like the Korean immigrant, texting could be used in all situations — even texting a boss when sick!

4 CONCLUSION: IT'S COMPLICATED

In contemporary everyday life, there are a multiplicity of media that orchestrate to maintain, develop and enhance relationships between friends, family and lovers. In the rise of affective technologies such as mobile media and Web 2.0 we can see both new and older forms of feeling rules being played out, creating new spectres of mobile intimacy. Within the terrain of mobile media we can see both new and remediated forms of emotional labor. Far from 'new' media superseding 'older' media or 'young' users preferring new media whilst older favour more traditional media, it is far from that simple. Rather, age, class, and ethnicity — along with various forms of social and cultural capital — inform the complexity of 'mobile intimacy' on offer today. This phenomenon of affective technologies and the associated feeling rules of emotional, social labor is perhaps epitomized by the Facebook relationship status mantra as 'its complicated'.⁵

What could be noted in the respondents' comments was the way in which age, ethnicity and sexuality played little in difference between media usage. One woman in her late twenties preferred the old art form of letter writing, as did another woman in her late forties. Most respondents used voice call for family, undoubtedly due to the fact that distance was often a big factor for first generation migrants and thus the need to be more direct. The fact that parents and older generations might be less apt in new technologies was also apparent. However, in the study we can see the variety of ways in which a sample group relate towards both new and old forms of mediation; a situation which challenges stereotypes around youth and new media as well as demonstrating the importance of utilizing various forms of media to express and represent different forms of intimacy. It becomes apparent that the choice of media reflects various forms of intimacy between family, friends and partners. Divergent feeling rules and the associated forms of customization and labor give way to emerging imaging communities.

In an age of global 'participatory' and affective media we need to examine the emerging forms of emotional and social labor within the context of older, remediated modes of co-present intimacy. Factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality and class continue to inform the 'feeling rules' associated with older and newer media. In this paper I have provided a snapshot onto some of mediated intimacies in Melbourne in which the spectres of

⁵ This great observation was made by Ken Wissoker in his summarization of the *Digital Youth Media in East Asia* workshop held at Temple University, Tokyo, July 2008.

older media continue to haunt and locate mobile technologies. Within the rise of UCC with its deployment of affective creative labour around new technologies such as mobile media and Web 2.0, the picture painted by respondents is more ambivalent. It is not a matter of these new public practises of intimacy further eroding distinctions between work and leisure. It is neither simply exploitative nor purely empowering. Rather, individual women of various generations and ethnic backgrounds are deploying various old and new media to articulate and maintain numerous forms of intimacy.

By exploring some of the multivalent voices in choices around what Andrew Murphie [52] calls ‘technics of mobility’ we can see that the labor around mediated intimacy is both haunted by other (older) media just as it has ghosts of user’s previous experiences and memories. For Murphie, technics of mobility structure and organize contemporary life in which work, life and fused into one. As Murphie identifies, through mobile technologies we can a sense of the broader forms of labor and intimacy. Mobile technologies provide insight into ‘new technics of mobility’ — that is, arising social, collective and subjective processes of living in the contemporary world.

In contemporary culture, the technics of mobility demonstrated by new mobile media must be contextualized in relation to other media. As the respondents illustrate, contemporary forms of gendered generational flows of social, creative and affective labor manifest through a variety of concurrent media and relationships. These dual spectres of the old and the new feeling rules haunt various forms of media, amplifying different parts of subjectivity, intimacy and co-presence. In sum, ‘it’s complicated’.

5 REFERENCES

- [1] Giddens, A. (1992) *Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [2] Bauman, Z. (2003) *Liquid Love*, London: Polity Press.
- [3] Milne, E. (2004) ‘Magic bits of Paste-board’, *M/C journal* 7 (1), <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/> (10 June 2004).
- [4] Lasen, A (2004) ‘Affective technologies — emotions and mobile phones’ in *receiver* vol. 11, www.receiver.vodafone.com
- [5] Hjorth (2008) *Mobile Media in the Asia-Pacific*. London/ New York: Routledge.
- [6] Rakow, L. F. (1993) *Gender on the Line: Women, the Telephone, and Community Life*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- [7] Rakow, L. F. and Navarro, V. (1998) ‘Remote Mothering and the Parallel Shift: Women Meet the Cellular Telephone’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 (2): 144-157.
- [8] Wajcman, J. et al. 2008 ‘Intimate Connections: The Impact of the Mobile phone on Work Life Boundaries’, presented at *Mobile Media: An International Conference*, Sydney, July 2007, www.mobilemedia07.net
- [9] Fortunati, L. (2005a) ‘Mobile Phones and Fashion in Post-modernity’, *Telekronikk* 3/4: 35-48.
- [10] Hjorth, L. (2005a) ‘Locating mobility: practices of co-presence and the persistence of the postal metaphor in SMS/MMS mobile phone customization in Melbourne’, *Fibreculture Journal*, 6, <http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue6/issue6_hjorth.html>.
- [11] Hochschild, A. (2003) *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*, California: Uni of Cal. Press.
- [12] Hochschild, A.R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- [13] Bourdieu, P. (1984 [1979]) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- [14] Colman, J. (1988) ‘Social capital in the creation of human capital’, *American Journal of Sociology* 94: 95-120
- [15] Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

- [16] Ling, R. (2004) *The Mobile Connection*, San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.
- [17] Katz, J. and Sugiyama, S. (2005) 'Mobile phones as fashion statements: the co-creation of mobile communication's public meaning', in R. Ling and P.E. Pederson (eds), *Mobile Communications: Re-negotiation of the Social Sphere*, London: Springer, pp. 63-81.
- [18] Fortunati (2009) 'Gender and the mobile phone' in G. Goggin and L. Hjorth (eds) *Mobile technologies*, London/New York: Routledge, pp. 23-34. (31).
- [19] Bolter, J. and Grusin, R. (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- [20] Butler, J. (1991) *Gender Trouble*, London: Routledge.
- [21] Ehrenreich, B. and A. Hochschild (2003) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, New York: Metropolitan Books.
- [22] Wajcman, J. et al. (2009) 'Intimate Connections: The Impact of the Mobile phone on Work Life Boundaries', in G. Goggin and L. Hjorth (eds) *Mobile technologies*, London/New York: Routledge, pp. 9-22. (14), (9), (10), (10), (14).
- [23] Fortunati, L. (2002) 'Italy: Stereotypes, True and False', in J. E. Katz and M. Aakhus (eds) *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communications, Private Talk, Public Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 42-62.
- [24] Kopomaa, T. (2000) *The City in Your Pocket: Birth of the Mobile Information Society*, Helsinki: Gaudemus.
- [25] See [10]
- [26] See [3]
- [27] Hjorth (2005b) 'Postal presence: a study on mobile customisation and gender in Melbourne', in P. Glotz and S. Bertschi (eds) *Thumb Culture: Social Trends and Mobile Phone Use*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag: 53-66.
- [28] Berlant, L. (1998) 'Intimacy: A Special Issue,' in Berlant, L. (ed.) *Intimacy*. Special issue of *Critical Inquiry* 24/2 (Winter): 281-88. (281)
- [29] Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- [30] Katz, J.E. and Aakhus, M. (eds) (2002) *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [31] Qiu, J. (2007) 'The Wireless Leash: Mobile Messaging Service as a Means of Control', *International Journal of Communication* 1: 74-91.
- [32] Matsuda, M. (2009) 'Mobile Media and the Transformation of Family' in G. Goggin and L. Hjorth (eds) *Mobile technologies*, London/New York: Routledge, pp. 62-72.
- [33] Goggin, G. (2006) *Cell Phone Culture: Mobile Technology in Everyday Life*, London: Routledge.
- [34] Silverstone, R. and Haddon, L. (1996) 'Design and Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life', in R. Silverstone and R. Mansell (eds) *Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 44-74.
- [35] Moyal, A. (1992) 'The Gendered Use of the Telephone', in S. Jackson and S. Moores (eds) *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press.
- [36] Martin, M. (1991) *Hello Central?: Gender, Culture, and Technology in the Formation of Telephone Systems*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press; 'The culture of the telephone' in P. D. Hopkins (ed.) *Sex/Machine: Readings in culture, gender and technology*, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- [37] Wajcman, J. (1991) *Feminism confronts Technology*, Oxford: Polity Press.

- [38] Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on the Screen: identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- [39] Haraway, D. (1985/ 1994) 'A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology and socialist feminism in the 1980s', in Seidman, S. (ed.) *The Postmodern Turn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [40] Stone, A. R. (1995) *The War of Desire and Technology*, Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press.
- [41] Brunner, C. (2002) 'The feminization of technology', in Y. and A. Robin, (eds), *Ghosts in the machine: women's voices in research with technology*, NY: Peter Lang, pp. 71-96.
- [42] (Fortunati cited in Wajcman, J. and Haddon, L. (eds) (2005) 'Technology, Time and Everyday Life', Forum Discussion Paper No.7, London: Oxford Internet Institute.
- [43] Hochschild, A. (2001) *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, California: Holt Press.
- [44] Parreñas, R. (2001) *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- [45] Morse, M. (1998) *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- [46] Taylor, A. and Harper, R. (2002) 'Age-old Practices in the "New World": A Study of Gift-giving between Teenage Mobile Phone Users', in *Changing Our World, Changing Ourselves* (proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Minneapolis): 439-46.
- [47] Mauss, M. (1954) *The Gift*, London: Kegan Paul.
- [48] Jenkins, H. (2006a) *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Essays on Participatory Culture*, New York: New York University Press.
- [49] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006) *OECD broadband statistics*: <http://www.oecd.org/sti/ict/broadband> (accessed December 2006).
- [50] Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso.
- [51] Habuchi, I. (2005) 'Accelerated Reflexivity', in M. Ito, D. Okabe and M. Matsuda (eds) *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press: 165-182.
- [52] Murphie, A. (2007) 'Mobility, work and love', <http://researchhub.cofa.unsw.edu.au/ccap/2007/07/10/mobility-work-and-love/> (30 August 2007).

It's Complicated is a 2009 American romantic comedy film written and directed by Nancy Meyers. It stars Meryl Streep as a successful bakery owner and single mother of three who starts a secret affair with her ex-husband, played by Alec Baldwin, ten years after their divorce — only to find herself drawn to another man: her architect Adam (portrayed by Steve Martin). The film also features supporting performances by Lake Bell, Hunter Parrish, Zoe Kazan, John Krasinski, Mary Kay Place, Robert Curtis

Sex and Intimacy Regulate Hormone Levels for Women. Women suffering from depression and chronic stress usually have irregular periods. Sex can help as it improves mood by balancing out hormone levels. Similarly, it boosts fertility in women and can prevent issues like pelvic pain. In addition to the physical benefits, feeling loved, secure, and happy plays an important role in reducing stress levels in women. Sex and Intimacy Increase the Blood Circulation. Blood circulation is important to your overall health.