

Siri-ous business

An app-titude for modern-day intimacy

- My husband has a new woman in his life. She wakes him in the morning, keeps track of his appointments, even reminds him to shop for my birthday present. She's deferential and submissive. Sometimes, she's the last thing he touches before falling asleep.

Apple calls Siri the "intelligent personal assistant" in the new iPhone 4S who, using voice recognition, obeys your every command. Me, I call her the Antiwife.

I don't know what she looks like (if she's flashing coy pictures of herself to my husband, he doesn't share). She sounds sultry. When he asks her a question, Siri hesitates as if flipping unruly blonde curls from her eager brow.

My husband can't get enough of her.

"Siri!" he says, marching about the bedroom in his boxers, waving his toothbrush for emphasis. "Call my office."

There's a beguiling pause as Siri mulls this request.

"Okay," she intones, "I think you want me to call your office."

"Yes!" my husband cries, elated, like he's just taught the dog to sing Handel's *Messiah*.

We did well for years, my husband and I, at keeping our bedroom to ourselves. No television, no computers, the ringer on mute.

I couldn't say when the smartphones crept in, but I'll admit they're handy for checking the next day's yoga schedule or scanning urgent emails before rolling out of bed in the morning. Now, if I'm sleepless at 2 a.m., what better way to pass the time than trolling my Twitter account or watching *Just for Laughs* classics on YouTube?

But Siri is tipping the balance. Her first night in our home, my husband dawdled in the walk-in closet before bed, murmuring things like "Siri: who's your daddy?" and "Siri: who do you love?"

According to a 2011 poll conducted by the US National Sleep Foundation, electronic devices are a leading cause of disrupted sleep, with 95 per cent of people surveyed saying they regularly use some kind of communications technology within the hour before bed.

Not only do email, texts and social media keep us awake, the close-proximity light the devices emit appears to suppress the release of melatonin necessary for sleepiness. Add to that a torrent of studies looking at the adverse impact of mobile devices

on human interaction and intimacy and you'll understand why I begrudge Siri's trespass into the marital bed.

"Siri!" my husband commands from his side of the duvet, "Reset the alarm for 6 a.m.!"

Pause.

"I'm sorry," Siri replies. "Did you need me to set a new alarm?"

Husband: "No. Please change the alarm from 7 a.m. to 6 a.m."

Siri: "You want me to set an alarm for 7 a.m.?"

Me: "Why say, 'please'?"

Husband: "Shhhhhhh! It's confusing for her to hear two voices."

Siri: "Would you like me to look this up on the Internet?"

Husband: "No! Set the alarm for 6 a.m."

By now we could have manually set every alarm in the house, including the sundial in the garden.

"Siri!" I bellow. "Smother my husband with a pillow!"

"I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to do that."

I content myself with searching iTunes using the term "romance" turning up 180 apps ranging from Erotic Dice and Cupid's Love Tester to (intriguingly) *Zombie Minesweeper*. My husband, meanwhile, is grilling Siri about her birthplace and formative years. This, I know, is not how a committed couple should close out the day.

I snatch the iPhone from my husband. "Shut up and see if you can learn something," I tell Siri. Then I reach up and dim the light. **OL**