Mobile Phone Etiquette

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INTRODUCTION

We define *mobile phone etiquette* as a commonly agreed upon set of customs, rules or manners by people in society for the use of mobile phones in both public and private spaces, including restaurants, cinemas, libraries, bathrooms, public transportation, and the work place.

A search of the literature revealed very few "official" definitions of mobile phone etiquette. Most articles just define *etiquette* and then get into rules for mobile phone usage. *WeddingConsultant* did define cell phone etiquette as "proper cell phone usage in social and business settings" (WeddingConsultant, 2010).

OVERVIEW

Mobile phone research in general grew from the efforts of various information and communication technologies (ICT) companies primarily located in Europe (due to the early start of mobile phones there). Social scientists at France Telecom, Telenor (Norway), British Telecom, Vodafone UK, Telecom Italia, and Westel (Hungary) produced many journal articles and books on the usage of mobile phones (Green & Haddon, 2009, pp. 9-11).

One of the areas of research by the social scientists dealt with the concept of public and private space and how mobile phones have disrupted conventional rules regarding those spaces; i.e., etiquette. "The particular difficulty in dealing with relations in public space is partly in managing conflicting demands for privacy whilst being in public, amongst others, who are *also* managing privacy and being in public at the same time" (Green & Haddon, 2009, p. 55). And, sadly, it can lead to tragedy, as we witnessed with the killing of a mobile phone user in a Tampa-area theater by a retired policeman in January 2014 (Knight, 2014).

Dr. Richard Ling of Telenor (Ling, 1997, 2001, 2004) and Dr. Leslie Haddon of the London School of Economics and Political Sciences (Haddon, 2004; Haddon & Vincent, 2007; Green & Haddon, 2009) would be considered the pioneering scholars of mobile phone etiquette research. Dr. James Katz with the Center for Mobile Communications Studies (Rutgers University) also was an early contributor to this field of research (Katz, 2003; Katz, 2006). Drs. Scott Campbell of the University of Michigan (Campbell, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008), Thomas J. Lipscomb (University of Southern Mississippi), Jeffrey W. Totten (McNeese State University), Roy Cook (Fort Lewis College) and Bill Lesch (University of North Dakota) are among the leading experts on mobile phone etiquette, especially as it pertains to college students (Lipscomb, Totten, Cook & Lesch, 2005).

CURRENT SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN MOBILE PHONE ETIQUETTE

Mobile phone etiquette has primarily been discussed in consumer and trade publications such as newspapers, magazines, books and online over the past 30 years. Academic research on etiquette has focused on the use of mobile phones in public and private spaces and finding out people's perceptions of proper and improper places for mobile phones to be used. Ling (2004) made a good point when he noted that "the misuse of public space is in the eye of the beholder." The authors will summarize the issues and results in the following two subsections.

Mobile Phone Etiquette in the Public Press (Written and Online)

A number of academicians, companies, and etiquette experts have offered suggestions for proper mobile phone etiquette. For example, Brantley and Miller (2003) recommend that "people take priority over a phone call," "respect the rules," and "focus on safety." Cohen (2003) offered a six-question quiz on phone etiquette. Krotz (2003) offered five "don'ts" and five "do's." Siemens offered eight rules of business etiquette, including "Have your mobile off or on silent in meetings," "If you are expecting an urgent call apologise and warn others in advance," and "Hold private calls in private places" (House, 2004, p. 11). Jacqueline Whitmore, a renowned expert on etiquette and protocol, offered these tips via Sprint's website: "Speak in your regular conversational tone," "Don't display anger during a public call," and "use discretion when discussing private matters" (Consumer Tips, 2004). We attempt to summarize the basic rules of mobile phone etiquette in Table 1.

Consumer articles have also addressed the appropriate and inappropriate places/locations where mobile phones should or should not be used. Wireless retailer LetsTalk reported on 2002 survey findings on a number of topics; e.g., 47%

Table 1. Basic etiquette rules

Do's	Don'ts
Lower your voice when taking calls in public (i.e., don't yell).(1)(2)(3)(5)(6)	Avoid texting during a face-to-face conversation (respect).(1)(4)(5)
If you do take a call, ask permission of the people with you.(1)(3)(7)	Avoid taking calls when you're already engaged in a face-to-face conversation.(1)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)
Put your phone's ringer on "silent" in theaters and restaurants.(1)(2)	Don't light up your phone's screen in a dark theater. (1)
Hang up/don't text and drive.(1)(5)(6)	Avoid personal topics when others can hear you and don't fight.(1)(2)(5)(6)(7)
Apologize and acknowledge any phone connection problems.(1)	Don't use Google voice call screening with family and close friends.(1)
It is your responsibility to use your mobile phone inoffensively.(2)	Don't blame the other person for a dropped call.(1)(7)
Turn your phone down or off when asked.(2)	Avoid looking things up during a conversation.(1)
Stay away from others while talking on the phone (10-foot distance recommended).(2)(5)	Don't put your phone on speaker and consider your ring tone/volume.(2)(7)
Learn to text (may be acceptable in certain circumstances).(2)	Avoid making calls while doing anything else that involves interacting with others (e.g., waiting in line).(2)(3)(7)
Know where not to use your phone (universal quiet zones).(2)(3)(6)(7)	Don't use your phone or text when having a meal with someone.(2)(3)(4)(5)(8)
Sources: (1) Elgan, 2010; (2) "How to Practice," 2014; (3)"The do's and don'ts," 2013; (4) Mayne, 2014; (5) Eyring, 2013; (6) Post, 2014; (7) Debretts, 2014; (8) Bowman, 2009.	

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