"One can talk about common manners!": The use of mobile telephones in inappropriate situations[1]

Evil communications corrupt good manners -*I Corinthians 15:33*

A man by nothing is so well bewrayed, as by his manners -*Edmund Spenser*

by

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Abstract

The use of mobile telephones in various situations has become an element in the definition of socially appropriate/inappropriate behavior. They are causing us to reconsider how we construct our social worlds. Their use demands a reevaluation of the taken-for-granted assumptions of everyday life. This paper examines how people deal with inappropriate mobile telephones use, particularly in restaurants. The data, that is the talk, was collected in focus groups and through participation in electronic discussions on Usenet. The participants from the focus groups included 50 persons, 34 men and 16 women. Of the respondents, 30 reported experience with a mobile telephone while the remaining 20 reported only limited experience. The paper has also drawn on Goffman's notion of drama and staging. From this basis it examines the reasons that restaurants are particularly sensitive to the use of mobile telephones. There is a discussion of, among other things, parallel front stages and coerced eavesdropping. Finally, there is a discussion of the management strategies available when "threatening" situations arise.

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1   Introduction

Not long ago I attended a church service in my wife's hometown, a small village on the West Coast of Norway. The church is a beautiful old stone building that was built around the year 1000. The inside of the building has white walls have the remains of drawings from the first part of the millennium. In addition there are beautiful pews and an altar that reflect a long tradition of intricate woodworking. I was sitting near the back of the church not really listening to the singsong of the preaching, only enjoying the sunshine through the windows. I was trying to take in the scene when suddenly, on the other side of the aisle I heard the telltale peeping of a mobile phone. The offender sprang out of the pew in which he was sitting and rushed out of the church. After exchanging glances with several others sitting near me, things settled down again and I retreated back into my inner thoughts.

By now, most of us have been in a bus, an elevator or a restaurant and have heard or seen somebody talking on a mobile telephone.[2] In addition to the locations mentioned above, I have seen, or experienced, people using mobile telephones in places ranging from art galleries to toilet stalls. In a 1937 *Readers Digest* article Smith noted that, "There is no room in the house so private that he (sic.) cannot crash it by telephone" (Smith cited in Fischer 1992, 225). This lament now seems to have been extended to the far corners of the known world. These sightings show just how widespread the technology has become while the awkwardness of these situations points to the ways in which we are having to reexamine, or perhaps re-exert our ideas of propriety.

In this paper I am interested in examining how it is that people are making sense of these changes and where people place the boundary between the appropriate and the inappropriate use of mobile telephones. I focus particular attention on the use of mobile phones in restaurants since it seems to have become a metaphor for vulgarity. The development of this metaphor is, however, not that surprising from a sociological perspective. After all, it is in restaurants that one sees quite clearly people dealing with the issues of self-presentation, boundary issues, etiquette, and "stage management."

This paper is a continuation of my work on the social boundary issues associated with the introduction of video telephony (Ling 1996). The mobile telephone, on many respects, represents the opposite of video telephones. Where videophones require one to be fixed to a specific location, one can roam with a mobile phone. Where one is forced to pay attention to their conversation partner with a video telephone, one is freer to carry out parallel activities with a mobile telephone. Where the video telephone conversation is a well-bounded event, the mobile telephone call is less well defined and can intrude while one is on the bus, in a restaurant. . .or in church.

The work analyses data from a series of focus groups held in the Oslo area in addition to data collected in other forums. The data was analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques and the results have been further illuminated through the use of Goffman's dramaturgical approach to small group interaction. The methods of the analysis will be discussed in the next section followed by an examination of Goffman's applicability to this work, an analysis of the social meaning of mobile telephones and finally by the examination of the inappropriate use of mobile phones.

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[2] In this article I use the term mobile telephone. This is a translation of the Norwegian term *mobile telefon* and refers to all radio based telephone devices aside from the cordless telephones whose coverage is usually less than 3-400 meters. In Norway the term mobile telephone refers to both devices that are mounted in cars and those carried about. In the US, the similar generic term is cellular telephone.

2 Method and theoretical background

2.1 Method

The work here represents an analysis of and reflections upon the information provided by informants in two different forua. The data, that is the talk, was collected in focus groups and through participation in electronic discussions on Usenet. The participants from the focus groups included 50 persons, 34 men and 16 women.[3] Of the respondents, 30 reported experience with a mobile telephone while the remaining 20 reported only limited experience. It is worth noting that men were far more likely to have reported experience with mobile telephones. The preponderance of men, ca. 75%, reported having used the devices while only slightly more than 30% of the women said the same.

The inclusion of information from Usenet is somewhat outside the traditional approach to social science and thus is worthy of special comment. In a way, this form of information gathering is a type of telephone survey in that there is an anonymous nature the interaction. None-the-less, this approach is useful in the collection of natural talk. The data used here was collected by posting a comment in the forum on restaurants asking for the opinions of other participants. The original comment clearly indicated that I was interested in a sociological analysis of the responses. Those who responded, four individuals, were thanked for their input and their comments were added to the database included here. The advantage of this approach is that one can easily take preliminary hunches and concepts, form them into additional questions and gather additional information on these specific questions. This interaction with the data follows in the tradition of qualitative research though through a new medium (Glazer and Straus 1967; Lofland and Lofland 1984; Spradley 1979).

It is important to be aware of the differences between the data gathered through the two approaches. The first is the degree to which informants felt pressure to respond. In the case of the electronically gathered information, the forum in which the text was produced is open to all with Usenet access. Thus, there is no specific responsibility to respond. By contrast, those who participate in focus groups and in other interview situations are participating in a somewhat unnatural setting where there is perhaps a certain social pressure to contribute. Thus, in the comments from Usenet one might get the loudmouths where in focus groups one may pressure people to formulate ideas that they otherwise would not have considered. Another aspect of the interaction on Usenet is that it is textual, not verbal. While this is a barrier to spontaneous remarks – that are often the most telling – it also means that the remarks are composed. That is, there is an element of reflection in the messages (though some that have read flame wars may be lead to wonder about the quality of the reflection). A final difference is that the focus groups were Norwegian where the Usenet input was more global, though dominated by the US. I mention these contrasts to clarify the data, not to assert one source as superior to another.

These two sources of data were examined using standard qualitative analysis techniques. That is, the text was examined, classified, re-examined and further classifications and concepts formed the basis for the material reported below (Spradley 1979 Glaser and Strauss 1967). It will become obvious to the reader that the work of Goffman is deeply integrated in this paper. I must be quick to point out however that this is an inductive analysis. The concepts and the taxonomy presented below arose out of the data. This paper is not an attempt to prove Goffman, an impossible task since he left no hypotheses to prove or disprove. Rather, Goffman's insights, along with others from the interactionist school, have shown themselves to be useful for illuminating the concepts and for setting them into relief.

2.2 Theoretical background: the contribution of Goffman

This paper makes use of Erving Goffman's contribution to sociology. It is Goffman, in the tradition of Mead and Blumer, who has focused on the dramaturgical aspects of every-day life. This approach is

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[3] The focus groups were conducted in Norwegian and the analysis of the talk was largely undertaken before the material was translated into English for inclusion in this paper.

particularly interesting in that he often gained insight into the structure of society by examining the situation when things went wrong or when there was stress. It is when our ability to maintain facade comes into serious disarray that we see people move to defend issues of importance. In addition, we also see the strategies used to deal with the situation. The results of the focus groups and other inputs have underscored that the use of mobile telephones presents us with a stressing of the normal situation in society.

Before accepting Goffman's work without question, however, one should also consider its shortcomings. At the most obvious level, many have criticized Goffman for what is considered a lack of scientific rigor. In the words of Giddens, Goffman's popularity "derives more from a combination of an acute intelligence and a playful style than from a coordinated approach to social analysis" (1984, 68). Meyrowitz notes that Goffman's work is considered by some to be "a stylistic merger of the scholarly monograph and the novel" (1985, 32).[4] By way of a response, his work seems to have been so evocative that it has been and continues to be a rich source of inspiration for others. Thus, in spite of the fact that his methodology is undocumented and his work is inaccessible, it has inspired others. This speaks to his success in observing and describing social interaction.

Another criticism is that Goffman focused his analysis on only face-to-face interaction. There was little or no analysis of mediated interaction in his work (Giddens 1984, 68-9; Meyrowitz 1985, 32, 345 n. 53). Like the previous point, this limitation has not prevented the reapplication of his insights to mediated situations, or as in this case, hybrid situations. His work has served as a point of departure for examining of various forms of electronically mediated interaction

Looking beyond the issue of style and the failure to examine mediated interaction there are two other criticisms leveled at Goffman. These include the sense Goffman, and the interactionist school to which he belongs, do not adequately describe the reproduction of social structure. In addition these theorists tend to ignore the idea of motivation by painting a picture of society as populated by cynical manipulators (Turner 1986, 459).

In relation to the first critique there is in Goffman an often implicit – but sometimes explicit – assumption of society's reflexive nature. Reflexivity refers to the mutual assumptions one carries into interaction that are built up and institutionalized over time. This is how interactionists, and to an even greater degree those using the closely related sociology of knowledge, describe the development and maintenance of social structure (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 47-128). For those using these perspectives, institutions, such as the way in which we eat dinner, or the way we speak on the telephone are events that include the reciprocal typification of habitual actions that have built up over time. This may seem like a "lite" version of analysis for those who see the structure of society in terms of large institutions such as the church, capitalism or kinship. None-the-less, the Goffmanian approach does not preclude the inclusion of these types of factors. Rather it is more concerned with every-day, micro-social issues.

The second point is well taken. To read Goffman is to read about petty schemes. One reads about people who try to present the best face but are continually hampered by masks that do not fit correctly, by irreverent children or naïve idiots who ask the wrong question or by the mobile telephone that rings at the wrong time. According to this reading of Goffman, if we were to take away these contrivances and face the naked ape as it were, there would not be much to take stock of.

There really is more to us than just petty facade management. After all, our very interest in reading Goffman, the empathy that we feel towards the ruses and characters he describes, speaks to a more complete individual than the simple cynical manipulator. In his defense, many disciplines have their more or less complete stick figures (or one might call them crash dummies) upon which they build their theories. There is the economic man of the economists, the Skinnerian response machine, etc. Each is an invention to make a point. Goffman's creation is the same.

While accepting the criticisms outlined here, I find in Goffman a useful and an evocative access point to the analysis of the data that is presented below. At the same time, I have been taken in. It is difficult not to be. Reading his analysis is one of those exciting adventures associated with being social

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[4] Both of these theorists draw on Goffman in their own work. Thus, this criticism seems to be more of a straw horse upon which one can beat with immunity.

scientists. The insight, the wit, the analysis and the conceptualization all come together in a rich and insightful analysis.

2.3   The dual nature of mobile phones

One last stop before the main analysis will be to consider the social meaning of the mobile telephone. This device has sprung onto the scene over the last decade. In Norway almost 25% of the citizens own a mobile telephone. The combination of access to the devices, the development of an adequate network and various other market related aspects have been important in the growth of this industry (Bakke 1996, 83 see also Haddon 1996b). In addition to the more traditional analyses of market forces, one can also examine the rise of mobile telephony from the perspective of its social meaning. What does the mobile telephone symbolize? In this connection, the work of researchers at the University of Sussex in the UK is of interest. That of Silverstone and Haddon (1996) and Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992) is particularly insightful.

When examining the social meaning of new technology, it is useful to consider how the various devices and services relate to pre-existing social structures. Silverstone et al. (1992) describe the dual nature of communication technologies. On the one hand, they are objects that occupy space and can be displayed as an example of the user's status and position in society. In addition to their status as objects of display, they also have a use value. It is the former in which I am particularly interested. Silverstone et al. note that:

> All technologies have the potential to be appropriated into an aesthetic environment (and all environments have, in some sense, an aesthetic). And many are purchased as much for their appearance and their compatibility with the dominant aesthetic rationality of the home as for their functional significance (1992, 23).

The introduction of a new technology into what Silverstone and Haddon call the moral economy of the home also means that they must find their functional role. This role is not necessarily that which the designers had intended.   Rather, it is through the combined display and use of the objects that the users come to understand the devices and it is through this process that the users weave them into a part of their own identity (Silverstone and Haddon 1996, 58 see also Marx 1994).

One might, for the moment, consider the mobile telephone a type of jewelry like a belt buckle, a watch, or a broach. That is, the device can have functional features as well as being a type of display. It can be appreciated or scorned. It can be the object of desire and interest or it can be seen as a symbol of vulgarity and bad taste. In order for the display to be successful, however, it must be done at the appropriate time, in the appropriate way with the appropriate élan.[5] The difference between a mobile telephone and a necklace, however, is that the former can be set into life by others who call in at the wrong time.

There are two final points to be made here. The first is that the adoption of new technology is a conservative process in that there is a prerequisite to incorporate the object into user's daily routines. There is in this process, however, a sense in that one can not go back home. Upon the domestication of the object, life changes, the new object and their attached routines nudge their way into the daily life of the user in both obvious and in not so obvious ways (Silverstone and Haddon 1996, 60; Stone 1994).   Finally, there is a focus on the domestication of devices such as the TV or the PC within the home in the work outlined above. A mobile telephone is slightly different since the device is, almost by definition, individual and not attached to a physical location. Thus, some of the aspects of the moral economy of the household need to be seen in a slightly broader form. It may be that the device is only used internally within the family, at the cabin or as an internal messaging system. Apart from these alternatives however, mobile telephones are not necessarily the same type of display or use object as, for example a TV or PC. This is expressed in both the use of the object but also in the reorientation of the user to the object itself.

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[5] These comments are reminiscent of the development of a social norm proscribing against the use of digital watches that "peep" each hour. When first on the market many people used the peep function causing a discussion around their use during films and other public gatherings.

3   Inappropriate use of mobile telephones

Now it is time to turn to the use and misuse of mobile telephones. The data from the focus groups indicated an almost visceral reaction to the inappropriate use of mobile telephones. The respondents were able to offer clearly formulated and well-rehearsed verbal sanctions against those who used mobile telephones inappropriately. At a broad level, the fact that these formulations were readily at hand indicates that the provocation is not at the level of the individual rather it is at the social level. In addition, it is evidence of the debate at a somewhat broader social level over the norms of telephone use. It indicates that we are in the process of sorting out our collective sense of how to deal with this issue (Haddon 1996a).

The respondents in the focus groups were quick to point out various situations where they felt it was inappropriate to use mobile telephones. These included airports, stores, meetings, on trains and busses, at various social functions and in theaters.

> It irritates me to go to airports and I think it is embarrassing and very pretentious and to sit there with that telephone. Sitting there with a cup of coffee with a man beside you with a PC in his lap. It simply irritates me. I think it is unreasonable.

> Once [my husband] had [a mobile telephone] in to town and we were in the town and were shopping and right as we came out of a store the telephone rang. I thought it was very disgusting to stand there outside the store and talk and he thought he was going to be so big and because and I saw that. I think that was very disgusting.

> Last week I was in a meeting and there were 10 or 12 in the meeting. Four of them had a mobile telephone. There was shuttle traffic out to the hallway. That is unacceptable.

> I was at a Christmas party the other evening and there was a lady who flew in and out of the ring [where children sing Christmas carols] 3-4 times. I can not understand why one will have a mobile telephone at a Christmas party. And this with meetings, there are five men each with their own mobile telephones. They ring just about continually, there should be a rule that one leaves their mobile telephone and pager in the reception area.

> I think you have to be considerate when you have a mobile telephone. For example, that you don't have it on when you are at the movies. It is not so nice when they begin to ring in the movies, it is not so pleasant and theater and several other places where you should not call. I think that people need to be considerate and turn them off.

In their defense, many users of mobile telephones understand that its use is not appropriate in all situations. Some respondents noted that it was embarrassing if the telephone rang in certain situations. Others were sensitive to the need to turn off the device when they were otherwise engaged.

> If I had it I would have turned it off now. It is not that important. In cinemas and such places as now, I would have turned it off. One can say that there are taboo areas.

The discussion here illustrates the development of a social norm proscribing the areas in which it is appropriate to use mobile telephones.

3.1   Restaurants as a special social situation

In addition to the situations outlined above, a common theme in among the respondents in the focus groups was the irritation over the use of mobile telephones in restaurants. To understand this irritation it is perhaps useful to examine the social meaning of eating at a restaurant. There are two elements that are of interest here the territorial nature of restaurants and Goffman's idea of face.

3.1.1 Boundaries in restaurants

Some of the things that makes a restaurant special from a social perspective are that one's use is temporary and it has elements of being both a public and a private space (Lipman 1967; Mars and Nicod

1984, 66-69; Silverstone 1996). The tables, booths and the portions of the lunch counter occupied by the patrons become theirs for the period of occupancy.[6] To claim a territory, however, we must go through the rituals of establishing and agreeing upon illusory perimeters or "symbolic fences" with our fellow patrons (Gullestad 1994).

> Some [territories] are "situational"; they are part of the fixed equipment in the setting (whether publicly of privately owned), but are made available to the populace in the form of clamed goods while-in-use. Temporary tenancy is perceived to be involved, measured in seconds, minutes or hours, informally exerted, raising constant questions as to when it terminates. Park benches and restaurant tables are examples (Goffman 1971, 29).

We become quite accomplished at ignoring others who are in quite close proximity through the use of a fictive curtain between tables that are, in reality, quite close to each other or even the very same table. These barriers allow each dining party to maintain the notion of a type of privacy that is, more or less open for all to see and hear.

Goffman goes on to note that there are often demarcations, based on architecture and the placement of furniture that stabilize claims to space. These conventions allow for the erection of easily observable boundaries between individuals and parties on an *ad hoc* basis (Goffman 1971, 33-34). In this way an individual or group can temporarily identify where it is that they belong and also determine their expectations as to where other patrons have the right to intrude. The waiters and waitresses, of course, enjoy a certain freedom of movement within through this complex of fiefdoms.

Within the stability there is also a flexible nature to these settings. Tables can be divided or combined in order to accommodate varying numbers of participants, groups can occupy adjoining tables or counter space and commandeer the area in between, etc. This notion of flexibility varies, however, with the class of the restaurant (Mars and Nicod 1987, 49). In exclusive establishments the tables are only adjusted "back stage," that is before the arrival of the customers. This minimizes the need for the patrons to readjust their "borders" with the entrance of other claimants. In other, more proletarian restaurants the customers often take the initiative to divide and re-divide the space as the need arises. While this allows for a more concentrated complex of groups – something in which the proprietor is interested – it also means that there is the need to adjust claims to territory, carry out cross border raids when the need arises for extra chairs or condiments, and in the worst case it may mean wars of attrition when two parties lay claim to the same territory.[7]

The notion of social boundaries has a particular resonance for Norwegians. Social anthropologists have identified what they call "managed unreachability" as a basic cultural trait. While seen with foreign eyes, behavior may seem cold and aloof. When judged from a Norwegian perspective, however, this is seen in a positive light. The management of contact with others in public situations, and more privately, is seen as a way to protect a sense of self (Gullestad 1994, 167; see also Haugen 1983).

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[6] For long term patrons, certain positions may become "theirs" whenever they are present. To dispute this claim can result in severe sanctioning (Lipman 1967).

[7] Singles bars and restaurants where one eats in order "to be seen" are in a class for themselves. In the single's bar, the barriers are there to be opened and closed as the attentions of others are sought or are to be avoided (Collas 1995; Giuffre and Williams 1994; Haavio-Mannila and Snicker 1980; Parker 1988). Common opening ploys – the purchase of a drink by a remote admirer, the use of the line "haven't we met somewhere before" etc. – are both inquiries as to the openness of the local landscape. In the case of restaurants where one appears to be seen, one may even use strategies to underscore their presence, that is they open themselves for observation, i.e. the grand entrance or sending a message to the management to page themselves over the PA system. This latter strategy seems somewhat similar to the characterization of the patron who uses the mobile telephone only as a way to draw attention to themself.

3.1.2 Maintenance of face

The second aspect of interest here is that of facade or "face." Goffman suggests that one is maintaining their face when their presentation and management of self is internally consistent. The development and maintenance of face is not a solitary activity rather it is a social production. The face one presents is only as good as the willingness of the audience to treat it as real. Thus, facades are a crystallization of our willingness to be integrated into society (Goffman 1967, 7). As Goffman notes:

> A person's performance of face-work, extended by his tacit agreement to help others perform theirs, represents his willingness to abide by the ground rules of social interaction. Here is the hallmark of socialization. If he and others were not socialized in this way, interaction in most societies and most situations would be a much more hazardous thing for feelings and faces (1967, 31).

Face helps us to integrate ourselves in society since we base and adjust our presentations on our perceptions of the situation. Without this, behavior would spin off in unpredictable directions and common intersubjective understandings of the interaction would be impossible.

If one considers a restaurant in this context, it can be seen as a dynamic stage upon which one's facade is displayed. It is a special situation where one is asked to combine etiquette and social finesse. It is where there is often a demand to celebrate social unity with one's family, friends or colleagues. At the same time there are many unexpected turns and twists that a restaurant visit can take. There is a well prescribed set of rules and rituals that must be observed – the correct use of utensils, the way in which one eats, the topics that are available for conversation, etc. There are many possibilities for personal adventure – meeting that special someone in a singles bar, closing an important deal, savoring a specially cooked meal, celebrating a birthday or other significant transition etc. Finally, there are many potential hazards – spilling the wine or the soup, making inappropriate remarks, the need to cover over the fact that one received a poorly cooked meal, having to deal with Uncle Fred after he has had too much to drink, meeting others who one had hoped to avoid in that situation, using the wrong knife and thus indicating unfamiliarity with "correct behavior" etc. (Chen 1990-91, Fine 1995; Giuffre and Williams 1994; Parker 1988). All of these demands require that one become fluent in the maintenance of face.

One can see that eating at a restaurant is an important social performance by examining the rules of etiquette (Jackson 1952, 325, Duncan 1970, 266-69). In every culture, the rules of eating decorum are extensive and often include quite precise orderings of events and prescriptions of the exact placement of eating equipment, drink and food (Mars and Nicod 1987 28-29; Rombauer and Becker 1964, 9-25). Manners also indicate status and hierarchy. It is through our use of manners that we indicate the way in which we expect to be treated. Thus, holding the teacup with the little finger extended in the proper way is in the words of Duncan, a "dramatization of the self" and a message to others that we expect a certain type of treatment (1970, 266). Geertz also comments on the way in which manners indicate status. He notes that etiquette is a recipocially built barrier that surrounds the individual. Etiquette protects the inner stability of the occupant and, as one goes up the social ladder, "the thicker the wall of etiquette protecting the emotional life" (1972 290; see also Gullestad 1992, 165). All of this attention to the process of eating, particularly when it is done in public, speaks to the importance of the event, as well as to the potential for problems. It also speaks to the importance of reaffirming the social order (Cahill 1990, 391).

The final aspect of face in restaurants is that a restaurant visit is an event with a clearly visible price tag. All participants know, with some clarity, the cost of eating out; it is listed for all to see on the menu. Implied in this is the assertion of status and the idea of gifting. Thus, to eat out is to give evidence as to one's position in society. To invite one to a restaurant is in some respects, to set a price on a social relationship. In a similar way, to accept such an invitation has the implication of indebting one to their host. Thus, untoward things that disturb the experience, such as the ringing of a mobile telephone, not only disrupts the work of maintaining facades, but also can depreciate the exchange between the dining partners. This sentiment was quite common among the informants who noted, for example "I have paid a lot of money for that meal." and "[Hearing a mobile phone in a restaurant] can make you feel like you've wasted money and made a bad choice about what you did that evening."

Thus, the development and maintenance of face in a restaurant is a delicate process. While there are benefits to be enjoyed by its successful achievement, there are also perils. The importance of the event

is underscored by the elaborate rituals of etiquette associated which have developed and by the clearly visible economic aspect of the event.

3.2   Use of telephones in restaurants

Against this backdrop not surprising that respondents in the focus groups cited the use of a mobile telephone in restaurants as a particularly galling social violation.

> It is awful to see those who go around, I could throw up! They use it even in restaurants, it looks so dumb.

> One can talk about common manners! When I was out at Mat & Vinhus [a local restaurant], it costs a lot of money to eat there, and the a mobile telephone rang for somebody sitting behind us that had a lot of time to talk and talk. That is not good manners, I mean he could have said, just one second and gone out.

> I think it is repulsive to sit there and talk with people on a mobile telephone in a restaurant.

With a point of departure in Goffman's concept of "face" and that of temporary "territoriality" one can begin to examine why the use of mobile telephones is so unpalatable. The most basic objection to mobile telephones has to do with the sounds associated with their use. When discussing the "modalities of violation" of personal space, Goffman brings up "sound interference." In this case the violator fills up his or her accorded space and then some. One can violate the territory of others by carrying out an encounter over a longer than proper distance and thus "obtruding" into the social space of others (1971, 33-34,51). An aspect of this discussion that Goffman neglects is the type of sound one makes. There are a whole family of sounds that are inappropriate, particularly in restaurants. The unwilling belch or flatulence are only the tip of the iceberg. Any parent, or member of a fraternity knows the variety and imaginativeness with which some diners can willingly create "inappropriate" noises. The ringing of a mobile telephone fits into this family of inappropriate sounds, almost regardless of its volume.[8]

In restaurants where it is the most difficult to make a long term claim to space, i.e. cafeterias, it is the easiest to use a mobile telephone. That is, a certain clash of personal space is taken for granted and people are called upon to manage barriers most actively. In addition, the background noise may be of sufficient volume to cover over the mobile telephone conversation. On the other hand in those restaurants where the boundaries between parties are the easiest to define, i.e. more formal restaurants where the individual is able to claim a table for a whole evening at the cost of a large bill, there is the assumption that the restaurant, and the other patrons, take responsibility for barrier maintenance.

3.2.1 Ringing

Several respondents noted the abruptness with which the mobile telephones rang. One person said that "They sit on busses and trams and on street corners and in restaurants and the telephones peep and peep." The most abrupt sound produced by the mobile telephone is often their ringing. The peeping or ringing is by nature an intrusive sound not unlike that of an alarm clock. One informant noted "The ring-ring of a phone disturbs the mood. Distracts the diner." While satisfying the demand to alert the attention of the user, the ringing can test one's ability to manage the social situation.

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[8] It needs to be noted that the acceptability of the mobile telephone is somewhat place dependent. In a restaurant where higher levels of noise are part of the setting and where one is not expected to treat their attendance as a particularly special occasion, a telephone is more acceptable because its use is covered by other activities. One can include children's restaurants, fast food restaurants and informal cafes and eating locales in, for example, shopping centers where there is what one might call active background sound, i.e. fountains or musak. On the other hand, in situations where one is expected to attend to the here and now, i.e. the vintage of the wine, the topic of conversation, the quality of the food, the look in her or his eye, etc. then the direction of attention to a telephonic partner would be a greater intrusion.

Many other Restaurant patrons have developed a set of responses with which they can cover over un-expected sounds. The crashing of glasses or plates is parried with the use of a smile; the interruption of a child is dealt with either through forbearance or a short scolding; a belch is either ignored or laughed at; the abrupt arrival of the waiter is tolerated and the ringing of a traditional telephone in a restaurant is ignored since it is not a signal of importance to the participants. The adroitness with which one can smooth over such social rough spots was called face work by Goffman.

> Each person, subculture, and society seems to have its own repertoire of face saving practices. It is to this repertoire that people partly refer when they ask what a person or a culture is "really" like. And yet the particular set of practices stressed by particular persons or groups seem to be drawn from a single logically coherent framework of possible practices. It is as though face, by its vary nature can only be saved in a certain number of ways (Goffman 1967, 12-13).

Through the use of poise and *saviour-faire* one minimizes the damage of embarrassing incidents to the social situation. It seems, however, that the ringing of mobile telephones is not adequately routinized such that their ringing causes difficulties in maintaining face. There is, in addition, a complicating factor with mobile telephones. The ringing is often such that it is not just the intended called who must interrupt their conversation to answer the phone. Rather, the growing pervasiveness of mobile tele-phones means that the ringing occasions the need for all of those with a mobile phone to check if theirs is ringing.

Finally, the ringing of a phone in an inappropriate situation draws attention to that which follows, namely a telephone conversation. The phone conversation will, in effect, take the user out of the social context in which he or she was and place them into another. Thus the ringing alerts others that the discussion which follows will be different in tone and subject.

3.2.2 Loud talk

The second type of sound that was irritating to the respondents was that of the person talking on the phone. It was common for the informants report that those who used a mobile phone employed "loud talk." One noted that "People talk loud on telephones. Louder than usual, at least. That is as annoying as having a loud party next to your table." This brashness violates territories and makes it difficult to maintain the face:

> When you have a loud person talking into a [mobile] phone and you (can't help but) hear only half of the conversation, that disrupts the coziness of the restaurant feeling.

While many attribute the volume of talk to a desire for display or a sign of vulgarity, one can also examine this issue from the perspective how the technology effects our form and style of interaction. At one level, when speaking on the phone there is the need to replace the visual gesturing of face-to-face communication with a form of verbal gesturing. The telephone conversation is a speech event with distinguishing characteristics. Several of these break with the style and tone of the speech events that are common in face to face communication. In face to face conversation quite nuanced body lan-guage has several functions. Through our use of nods, glances, small sounds and other gestures we indicate attention, the desire to speak, the desire to retain the floor and indicate pauses. We also use these devices to impart meaning and emphasis. All of these gestures are changed in a normal tele-phone conversation. Visual gestures are replaced by intonation and linguistic structure in "grounding" the conversation (Rutter 1987, 105, 126, Martin 1991, 95-97, see also Duncan 1972, and to Saks, She-gloff and Jefferson 1974). Instead of relying on body language to control turn taking, pauses, empha-sis, etc., these are done with what one might call verbal gestures. We use tones such as "uh" replace the lack of eye-contact that controls turn taking, phrases such as "ah ha" replace nodding and other signals of continued attention on the part of the listener, etc.

In addition to the different style of talk, one is often prompted to speak louder when using the phone. This is because of the need to be heard over background noise on the line and the general socialization that one speaks up on the telephone (Martin 1991, 95-97).[9]

Thus, the need to include verbal gestures and the habit of speaking up on the phone, in addition to the fact that the whole episode is announced by the ringing of the device, makes it easy for others to identify the talk as a telephone conversation. If the listener has preconceived problems with the use of telephones in restaurants the ease of identifying the talk allows them play out their prejudices.

3.2.3 The management of parallel front stages

Respondents talked about considerations that went beyond the directly audible aspects of mobile telephony. The first of these is that the combination of the private telephone call and the private dinner conversation means that one must juggle two parallel interactions. When one begins to talk on a telephone, they have, at least partially, removed themselves form the ongoing interaction in their physical location (Clark 1995). One informant in the focus groups expressed an annoyance with this potential. This person noted that "It is a little irritating when . . . you sit together with someone and they can not set [the mobile phone] down."

While it is possible to carry on parallel activity while eating at a restaurant or while speaking, but these possibilities are limited (Ling 1994, Lohan 1996a). With the intrusion of a mobile telephone call threatens the preexisting situation. At the first level, one must choose which conversation takes precedence. Goffman calls this accreditation.

> Messages that are not part of the officially accredited flow are modulated so as to not interfere seriously with the accredited messages. Nearby persons who are not participants visibly desist in some way from exploiting their communication position and so modify their own communication, if any, so as to provide interference (Goffman 1967, 35).

If the telephone call receives accreditation the mobile phone user has in effect two front stages,[10] that in the physical restaurant and the telephone conversation.[11] Quite often, the behavior appropriate in the one situation is not appropriate in the other. The different relationship that one has with one's dining partners and one's telephone partner mean that the negotiation of topics, the depth, passion and emotion with which one can address the one party and the range of common understandings will probably not be the same for the other (Garfinkle 1967, 35-75). The shifting front stages for the phone user makes it possible for others to see the user of the mobile telephone in a type of verbal cubism. While the face-to-face restaurant talk may be, for example, cozy, intimate and integrative, the talk on the mobile phone may be of power relations, fast deals and office politics. Another example of this that has been seen for its comic value is when one's intimate dinner with a lover is interrupted by a call from an irate spouse. The stage management can become quite complex. Like a cubist painting, the speaker on the mobile phone is seen from two perspectives. There is a certain dissonance when judged

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[9] According to Bakke (1996) we expect a certain level of background noise from the phone. If this is not to be heard one feels that the phone is dead and it reduces the sense of co-presence. This has led to the use of "comfort noise" in digital systems that are, by nature, more free from background noise.

[10] A later formulation was developed by Goffman in which he presents the idea of frames (1974). Framing refers to that set of conventions that define "what is going on here." While there are many alternative possibilities, social interaction requires that the participants in an interaction agree, at least generally on the same notion of an interactions content and form. This agreement frames the activity (Giddens 1984, 89-90).

[11] This is particularly true if the mobile telephone user has received the call. If he or she has initiated the call they can at least prepare their dining partners for the event, and they also avoid the noise of the ringing telephone. It is also worth noting that these two front stages are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is, in fact quite possible for others to participate quasi-actively in a telephone conversation. This is particularly true if the caller, the callee and the third person are all familiar with each other and are perhaps planning a common occasion (Lohan 1996a).

from the perspective of classical notions of talk, dialogue and narration that present a single perspective to the audience.

In order to manage the stage one can erect various types of partitions. One can, for example temporarily move from the "front region" of the restaurant to a reception area or other more removed location in order to allow the harmonious completion of the call. This strategy is, however, only partially successful if the offense to the decorum was done by the ringing of the telephone in the first place. A second strategy discussed by Goffman is that the original audience be granted a temporary back stage status(Goffman 1959, 139). Thus, they will be allowed insight into the staging of another performance. In the short term this allows the completion of the telephone call, however, once belief in the first performance is suspended, rebuilding its facade may be a difficult proposition, particularly if the original audience is only begrudgingly willing to accept its back stage status.

During the period of the call the dining partners are left in a particularly stressful sort of suspended status in that they are asked to wait. They are not dismissed, rather, they are left hanging. Only after the conclusion of the call can they resume of their earlier status. While waiting they must engage themselves in some type of waiting strategy that is easily discarded when the other summons them back. This is a particularly difficult social juxtaposition.

One possibility is to somehow acknowledge their presence to the caller – i.e. the mobile telephone user indicates the presence of the third person and may even make open side comments to them or, in some cases the third person may even make open side comments to the caller and the called. Another possibility is that the third person may be called on to indicate that they are not engaged in the conversation at all (Lohan 1996a). An informant described this latter situation for a daily restaurant patron and a frequent mobile telephone user. "He always has a companion with him who is left to peruse the alphabetized beer bottle collection behind the bar for five or ten minutes." Here the companion is left to maintain his own illusion of indifference.[12] This strategy for dealing with the situation will be discussed immediately below.

3.2.4 Coerced eavesdropping[13]

Another aspect of boundary management is the issue of eavesdropping. The common understanding of this problem is that those inside a conversation fear that those outside the conversation can become privy to secretes. There was a slightly different perspective reported here in that the informants feared that they would hear too much, a sort of coerced eavesdropping. The need to guard against this was seen as a problem.

Several of the respondents noted that the audience to a mobile phone conversation in the restaurant is not only one's immediate dining partners, but also those who are within hearing distance of the conversation. The placeless nature of the call (from the perspective of the remote caller) means that the talk may take up private issues not intended for others to hear. The information exchanged can be, or perhaps more importantly, it can appear to be revealing. Thus, the audience is provided involuntary access to portions of the phone user's life, a clear violation of Gullestad's managed unreachability (Gullestad 1994). Many of the respondents talked about unwittingly eavesdropping in on other's telephone conversations. In the words of one respondent:

> I think it is fine that the telephone is stationary at home. A conversation should be between two persons. I think it is unfortunate that others are there.

> [Hearing a mobile telephone at a restaurant] breaks up the enclosed social circle that a restaurant offers. Seeing people communicate and be social at different tables is part of the restaurant experience.

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[12] There are echoes of Simmel's discussion of the stranger in this situation (Simmel 1971, 143-149; Bogard, 1996).

[13] The word eavesdrop refers to the ground upon which rainwater drips from the eaves of a house. Presumably if one were to stand inside the eavesdrop they become privy to the communication inside the house.

In other cases the topic may judged to be superfluous as in the case reported by one informant "[The user of a mobile phone] yaks away about (obviously) trivial matters." Regardless, the need to guard against hearing too much was reported to have been disruptive.

3.2.5 The mobile phone as a vulgar metaphor

The fact that one carries on a telephone conversation may have become an inappropriate gesture in its entirety. Again and again the informants went beyond an analysis of the component elements and encapsulated the whole event by describing it as rude or disconcerting.

> Talking on a cell phone at dinner, in movies, (or at a seminar (yes, I've seen it)) **is just plain rude**. My family never allowed telephone calls at the dinner hour in my home, because when people are sharing a meal, it is the time to communicate and socialize. (emphasis added).

> I think it is a little impolite when people stand there and bellow in a mobile telephone. . . . For me it is not good manners. It is like standing there and whispering to somebody. That is not polite either.

There was not a discussion of the mechanics of body language or the non-contextual nature of the conversation, rather there was a reaction to the event as a whole. Almost as drinking coffee from a saucer, holding a wine glass from the base, eating from one's knife, or in some cultures eating with one's left hand have become a gloss or a characterization of a certain type of person, the use of a mobile telephone in a restaurant has become a metaphor for the vulgar breaching of manners.

3.3   Management strategies

Once the breach has been made, how do other patrons respond? When face has been threatened Goffman refers to the need to undertake "face work."

> By *face-work* I mean to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face work serves to counteract "incidents" – that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face. Thus poise is one important type of face work, for through poise the person controls his embarrassment and hence the embarrassment that he and others might have over his embarrassment (Goffman 1967, 12-13).

The mutual management of embarrassment illustrates the integrative function of face work. This is what Berger and Luckmann see as the reciprocal nature of society (1967, 47-91). In this way "one has an interest in a defensive orientation towards saving his own face and a protective orientation saving the face of others" (Goffman 1967, 14). Thus, we are likely to ignore minor infractions in the spirit of the occasion.

There are other situations, however, that go beyond the simple management of embarrassment. Setting this type of a situation aright is an important issue since its continuation can threaten the situation and can insult our sense of identity. Duncan, in fact, asserts that the flagrant ignoring of manners can be seen as a serious threat to order.

> Anger over ill manners of others arises out of the belief that not following our manners is a way of telling us that we are not really important in the eyes of the transgressor. We excuse a *faux pas* made out of ignorance (and soon corrected) because we still feel the importance of our manners as a social bond. We laugh at comic depictions of vulgarity so long as the majesty of what we hold important is not threatened. But we do not laugh at savage ridicule or continued vulgarity, because they endanger the social principle upon which our manners are based (Duncan 1970, 267).

When a breach has been made and there is the need for face work, the audience has several responses available to them. At the simplest level Goffman suggests that one employs studied non-observance. Beyond this one might challenge the offender or vilify the offender *in abstentia*.

3.3.1 Civil inattention

One of the most common strategies for dealing with a relatively minor offense, such as talking on a mobile telephone, is to engage in what Goffman calls "civil inattention" (Goffman 1963, 85-86). This is described as the willingness to turn a blind eye towards behavior that represents a potential threat to face. It is an attempt to gloss over the disturbance and to carry on.

Via socialization in manners and courtesy, we understand the intrusiveness paying attention to the conversations of others. Thus, the public use of a mobile telephone tests the courtesy of patrons in a restaurant. As discussed in the section on eavesdropping, those outside the conversation may fear that they will hear too much. The reaction is to become embarrassed for the potential embarrassment of the telephone user. Thus, we must parry our own interest and replace that with a set of staged stances that are socially defined e.g. making a display of reading the menu, looking at the decor, suddenly becoming engrossed in the papers one in carrying in their hand or, as reported above, looking at beer bottle collections. This is studied non-observance. As the mobile telephone becomes normalized we will likely need to develop a repertoire of suitable inattentive postures which we can assume.

The goal of this is to not disturb the scene.

> The combined effect of the rule of self-respect and the rule of consideratness is that the person tends to conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants. . . . A state where everybody temporarily accepts everyone else's line is established. This kind of mutual acceptance seems to be a basic structural feature of interaction, especially the interaction of face-to-face talk (Goffman 1967, 11).

The fact that we general give no outward sign of reacting to the use of mobile telephones indicates that the offense is not as significant as others.

3.3.2 Challenges and responses

Beyond civil inattention one has the ability to sanction others using various types of challenges. In the case of "Extreme impropriety. . . is likely to result in his being stared at or studiously not seen" (Goffman 1963, 87).

In these cases one may make a transition from civil inattention to the slightly stronger studied non-observance (1967, 17-18). The differences between the two seem to be the degree to which the observer acknowledges the existence of the observed. Civil inattention includes the idea of a token recognition followed by focusing on other matters. By contrast, studied non-observance seems to be making a great display of refusing to acknowledge that the observed exists. The former seems to be more of a strategy of interaction for those who are more or less in agreement on the agenda while the latter may indicate more of a disagreement as the nature of the setting. Civil inattention is a courtesy and studied non-observance is a negative sanction.

Beyond these relatively discrete sanctions one can also employ strategies such as glaring, sighs, poorly disguised comments etc. Further steps include direct confrontations, ask the waiter or other authority to intercede and the like. These strategies may or may not succeed. If the offender refuses to curtail their behavior in the face of the sanctions, then the ball moves back to the person who issued the sanction. It may be that their face has been put into question. This means that either they are left to bluster, they can retaliate or they "can withdraw from the undertaking in a visible huff–righteously indignant, outraged, but confident of ultimate vindication" (Goffman 1967, 22-23).

There is obviously a balancing point in all of this. If one begins to make more of a disturbance in their sanctioning than the situation allows, they may become the object of sanctions themselves.

> Improper conduct, however, does not automatically release others from the obligation of extending civil inattention to the offender, although it often weakens it. In any case, civil inattention may be extended in the face of offensiveness simply as an act of tactfulness, to keep an orderly appearance in the situation in spite of what is happening (Goffman 1963, 87).

3.3.3 Attribution

Judging from the responses of informants, a final strategy for dealing with the use of mobile telephones in restaurants and other public places seems to be *ex post facto* stereotyping of the offender. While not addressing the situation on the spot, these stereotypes help to form a general attitude toward mobile telephone use. These are the building blocks in the rise of new social norms. They are the formulation and rehearsal of preventative sanctions. It is as if to say "If you do this people like me will have a poor opinion of you." This follows in the tradition of Gluckmann (1963) who notes that informal discussion and gossip can function to hold a group together.

The stereotypes or attributions used by informants included the notion of over important status display, the pointlessness of the talk and finally, illusions as to the character of the offender. In terms of the first, it was common to hear that those who use mobile phones inappropriately were showing off or that they were some type of a status seeking yuppie (Haddon 1996a, 3).[14]

> I know a patron at my lunch time spot who apparently hires a school kid to call him at set intervals during lunch every time he is there, lest we be (blissfully!) unaware of his being the proud owner of a mobile phone.

The second type of attribution had to do with the non-instrumental nature of the discussions. This type of an assertion is well-grounded in commentaries from an earlier era of the telephone. When system capacity was limited and calls were expensive social talk was discouraged (Ling 1994, 13-14). Those who used the telephone for inappropriate calls were likely to be seen as gossips or wags. Similar glosses were applied to those who made open use of mobile phones. In the words of one informant.

> One sees people standing around on the street and there is a lot of baloney that is said there. Unnecessary discussions so I don't see the point with it.

Finally, some respondents went beyond rather neutral descriptions to the assertion that the mobile telephone was a device used to facilitate illicit activity. This is seen in the following sequence of comments.

> Person 1: It is a fact that more jobless have a mobile telephone now than those who have a job. And a large portion of these are as a matter of fact immigrants.
> Person 2: But how is it that you say that the jobless teens and youth have mobile telephones?
> Person 1: Jobless on paper. I would not say they are.
> Person 3: No.
> Person 1: I would suggest that there are many pushers that have mobile telephones. . . . Criminals, real criminals.
> Person 3: Oh, that doesn't sound too good.
> Person 1: No, but it is true. I come from Oppsal and there is big time crime and there are all the worst types and they go around with mobile telephones. They call all the time and there is no let up.

Here the use of a mobile telephone is not just a small social *faux pas*, rather it has become a symptom of, in the speaker's mind, dangerous social trends, i.e. immigration and drug use.

Regardless of the stereotype applied to the offender, the application of a gloss is an attempt to make sense of the way in which technology is being used. The necessity for this is being pressed upon us by the growing use of these technologies. In many respects, one can not remain neutral. They must take up a position on one or the other side of the barricade. It is here that the social bond is in danger of becoming unraveled and it is here that the most intense strategies of social maintenance need to be deployed.

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[14] In a brochure published by Telenor describing the use of mobile telephones in restaurants, there is the title "It is only dumb to be a Yuppie seven years too late."

4   Conclusion

In this paper based on the examination of focus group data, I have examined how people making sense of the inappropriate use of mobile telephones, particularly in restaurants. I have looked at the social meaning of mobile phones and restaurants. In addition, I have looked at how the use of the former in the latter presents both the user and others patrons with a difficult social situation. The analysis has drawn on the work of Goffman's notion of drama and staging in order to place the analysis in a larger framework. Goffman's concepts of social boundaries, face, front stage/back stage, civil inattention, studied non-observance and sanctioning via attribution have been used.

This paper is a further examination of the ways in which technology has shifted social boundaries. Devices such as the video telephone and Internet have meant that we need to reconsider how it is that we construct our social worlds. They have made demands on the taken-for-granted assumptions of everyday life. These developments mean that we can communicate in new ways at new times in new places. While there are unimagined possibilities there are also unimagined complications. In sorting these out we will starting to see technologies effects on power relations, gender and age differences.

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