



Texting everywhere for everything: Gender and age differences in cell phone etiquette and use



Deborah Kirby Forgays*, Ira Hyman, Jessie Schreiber

Department of Psychology, Western Washington University, 516 High St, Bellingham, WA 98225-9172, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 22 November 2013

Keywords:

Cell phone
Texting
Gender
Age

ABSTRACT

The majority of research on cell phone use has focused on adolescent and young adult users with less attention on cell phone use by those older than 25 years of age. In this study, adult participants from 18 to 68 years completed a survey about their own use of cell phones and the contexts in which they considered cell phone use appropriate. There were age and gender differences in beliefs about the etiquette as to when cell phone use was appropriate. Older participants and women advocated for more restricted cell phone use in most social situations. Men differed from women in that they viewed cell phone calls as more appropriate in virtually all environments including intimate settings. Across all age groups in all communication settings, cell phones were used to text. The only exception was that romantic partners were more likely to receive a call than a text. In the younger age groups, texting communication is so normative that over 25% had dumped or were dumped by a romantic partner. The preponderance of gender similarities point to cell phone usage as a stable communication vehicle for maintaining social contact.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Cell phones initially provided the luxury of immediate contact with others in one's social network any time, any place. However, the cell phone has morphed from a luxury into an appendage. In addition, the relatively new ability to text has dramatically changed the usage landscape in a very short time period. With respect to cell phone ownership and usage, 85% of US adults own a cell phone and 90% live in a household with a mobile phone (Zickuhr, 2011). Among those adults, 18–24 year olds text and call the most – 1299 text messages and 981 call minutes, on average, per month. Texting drops precipitously in subsequent age groups from 592 to 32 texts per month. Call minutes drop more gradually from 952 to 398 monthly minutes (Wicklin, 2010; Zickuhr, 2011). Despite the prevalence of cell phones, little is known about differences and similarities in cell phone use across gender and age when both calls and texts are taken into account. In particular, despite frequent popular press articles on cell phone etiquette (Bowers, 2011; Cenicola, 2011), it is unclear if there are generally acknowledged rules about where, when, and how to use one's cell phone in any of its many capacities.

Much of the literature on cell phone use has focused on university-aged individuals (Harley, Winn, Pemberton, & Wilcox, 2007; Lee & Robbins, 2000; Thomson & Murachver, 2001; Walsh & White, 2007). There are good reasons to focus on this age group beyond

their easy accessibility for research. These 18–22 year olds are the first adult generation that has grown up with cell phone access. In a sense, this age group could be considered cell phone “natives”. They not only own a cell phone but have grown up with cell phones and spend a substantial portion of their time either calling or texting. Thus, phone use has quickly shifted from a grounded landline in a specified room to complete mobility to any and all social environments. This rapid shift to cell phone reliance in US university students is mirrored in research from other parts of the globe. Walsh and colleagues have studied Australian university students' cell phone use extensively (Walsh, White, Cox, & Young, 2011). Japan has led the world in cell phone ownership and researchers have noted the shift in utilization patterns from calling to texting, with similar patterns emerging in China (Igarashi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2005; Li, 2009). The increased prevalence of cell phone use has also prompted examinations of links between such use and health behaviors as well as quality of face-to-face contact in European communities (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012; Sanchez-Martinez & Otero, 2009). Clearly, there are cell phone natives world-wide with concomitant concerns about the impact of the promise of constant contact.

This rapid intrusion into potentially all social interactions has led some researchers to focus their inquiries on the social etiquette of cell phone use (Lipscomb, Totten, Cook, & Lesch, 2005). Lipscomb and colleagues (2005) found substantial agreement regarding the places in which it would be inappropriate to make a cell phone call such as in a place of worship and while driving. Some researchers have suggested that adolescents and young

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 360 650 6510.

E-mail address: Deborah.Forgays@wwu.edu (D.K. Forgays).

adults may display signs of addiction to their cell phones because they feel the need to constantly check for and respond to text messages and because they define themselves in terms of their cell phones (Atchley & Warden, 2012; Walsh, White, & Young, 2010; Walsh et al., 2011). Other researchers have concentrated on concerns about cell phone usage causing divided attention errors during driving and walking (Hyman, Boss, Wise, McKenzie, & Caggiano, 2010; Strayer & Drews, 2007; Strayer, Drews, & Johnston, 2003), the social irritations of “forced eavesdropping” to calls in public (Emberson, Lupyan, Goldstein, & Spivey, 2010; Monk, Carroll, Parker, & Blythe, 2004); the impact of multitasking on classroom learning (Kuznekoff & Titsworth, 2013; Wood, Zivcakova, Gentile, De Pasquale, & Nosko, 2011); or the disruption of face-to-face social interactions by even the mere presence of a cell phone (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012).

Although some researchers pay minimal attention to gender and cell phone use (Walsh & White, 2007), when gender is considered, the results mirror land phone use. That is, females spend more time using the phone to connect with friends and family while males use the phone to obtain information (Wei & Lo, 2006). This pattern also exists in the few studies that have focused on cell phone texting. It appears that university women utilize texting as a means of expanding their social networks more than men and that by 2005 texting had eclipsed calling (Igarashi et al., 2005). However, gender differences that have been identified in cell phone use in university samples face generalizability constraints given the homogeneity of the university population. In addition, it is unclear whether these gender differences extend to older age groups.

Thus, a thorough examination of cell phone use by gender across the adult developmental span is warranted. There is substantial research comparing men and women in traditional written and oral communication although the magnitude and type of differences vary depending on context (Cameron, 2009; Carli, 1990; James & Drakich, 1993; Mulac, 2006; see Leaper & Ayres, 2007 for a meta-analytic review). Across developmental periods, girls and women have been socialized to be more attentive to social cues and feedback than boys and men (Langer, 2010). This socialization leads to high reliance on affiliative language which seeks to maintain relational ties. In contrast, men’s language tends to be more task-oriented and goal directed, which may lead to less sensitivity to social environment (Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001). These identified gender differences in communication style may be also be evident in the “social rules” for cell phone use. For example, there may be differences not only in how men and women use their cell phones but also differences in the contexts in which they see cell phone use as acceptable.

In searching for information about cell phone use in adults older than university aged persons, recruited sample age groups often span 25–30 years. Epidemiological data (Zickuhr, 2011) readily divides “older” adults into the media anointed groups – Young Boomer (47–56 years); Older Boomers (57–65 year); Silent Generation (66–74 years) and GI Generation (75+ years). However, researchers often collapse their samples resulting in age spans such as one group of 55–75 aged individuals labeled as the young old (Kubik, 2009). This common label belies the substantial differences in developmental tasks. For example, those aged 55–67 are likely employed, often in careers that demand they keep up with current communication technology. In contrast, persons 68–75 years are more likely focused on retirement and may have a different view of cell phone utilization. Thus, we need information about cell phone use across all adult age groups, with attention paid to the developmental variability that exists even among the young old, the old and the old old.

The information that is available on older adults is derived from research focused on comfort level with as well as perceived

barriers to utilization of cell phones and other forms of communication technology (Gilly, Celsi, & Schau, 2012; Mori & Harada, 2010). There is also a body of literature on the ways in which the cognitive demands of cell phone use present health and safety risks for older adults (Howland, Bibi, English, Dyer, & Peterson, 2012; Neider et al., 2011). These older users are often perceived as resistant to cell phone technology and access, viewing ownership of a cell phone as a necessary evil. These users could be viewed as “reluctant immigrants” especially when compared to younger adult groups – 35–40 year old and 41–55 year olds who might be viewed as “motivated citizens”.

It seems clear that there is a need for information about cell phone users – callers and texters alike – across the adult developmental span. The gender differences in type of cell phone use found in university samples are consistent with communication style literature but it is unclear whether these gender differences continue across older age groups. Further, the limited age comparisons have been between young adults and much older adults with little attention paid to the many age groups between 25 and 60 years. Finally, in addition to time and place usage, it is worthwhile examining the role that the cell phone plays in peoples’ lives – are they omnipresent, how do people view cell phone etiquette, what are individuals’ emotional responses to their phones, and are cell phones used for important relationship decisions? In this exploratory survey, participants were asked about their understanding of the social rules for cell phone use. We also asked about the frequency of their own use as well as their expectations for cell phone responsiveness from those closest to them. Finally, to explore the extent to which individuals rely on their cell phones for even the most delicate of contacts, we asked about whether they have ended relationships by cell phone text message. In effect, does a cell phone text offer an electronic version of a Dear John letter?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The 662 participants with cell phones ranged in age from 18–68 years. The majority of the participants were female (471). This was a well-educated sample with only two men having less than a high school diploma 86% were either enrolled in college or had obtained a bachelor’s or higher degree. The majority of the participants were in the 18–24 years age group. See Table 1 for a breakdown by age and gender.

3. Measures

The on-line survey was developed by the authors and their research assistants. Given the online format, with the exception of certain demographic questions, all survey items were either forced choice or Likert scales. Items focused on the social etiquette of cell phone calling and texting as well as anticipated time frames for a response to a call or text. Participants also indicated the estimated number of texts and calls they made and received in a typical day. Further, participants reported whether they turned off their cell phones, their emotional responses to an inability to use their cell

Table 1
Participant gender by age groups.

	Age group				Total
	18–24 years	25–34 years	35–49 years	50–68 years	
Female	286	76	60	49	471
Male	102	44	22	23	191
Total	388	120	82	72	662

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6839494>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6839494>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)