

## FEATURES

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# Mind your BlackBerry or mind your manners

For the first half-hour of the meeting, it was hardly surprising to see a potential client fiddling with his iPhone, said Rowland Hobbs, the chief executive of a marketing firm in Manhattan. At an hour, it seemed a bit much. And after an hour and a half, Hobbs and his colleagues wondered what the man could possibly be doing with his phone for the length of a summer blockbuster.

Someone peeked over his shoulder. "He was playing a racing game," Hobbs said. "He did ask questions, though, peering occasionally over his iPhone."

But, Hobbs added, "we didn't say anything. We still wanted the business."

As Web-enabled smartphones have become standard on the belts and in the totes of executives, people in meetings are increasingly caving in to temptation to check e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, even (shhh!) ESPN.com. But a spirited debate about etiquette has broken out. Traditionalists say the use of BlackBerrys and iPhones in meetings is as gauche as ordering out for pizza. Techno-evangelists insist that to ignore real-time text messages in a need-it-yesterday world is to invite peril.

In Hollywood, both the Creative Artists Agency and United Talent Agency ban BlackBerry use at meetings. Tom Golisano, a billionaire and power broker in New York state politics, said last week that he pushed to remove Malcolm A. Smith as the state Senate majority leader after the senator met with him on budget matters in April and spent the time reading e-mail on his BlackBerry.

The phone use has become routine in the corporate and political worlds — and grating to many. A third of more than 5,300 workers polled in May by Yahoo HotJobs, a career research and job listings Web site, said they frequently checked e-mail in meetings. Nearly 20 percent said they had been castigated for poor manners regarding wireless devices.

Despite resistance, the etiquette debate seems to be tilting in the favor of smartphone use, many executives said. Managing directors do it. Summer associates do it. It spans gender and generation, private and public sectors.

A few years ago, only "the investment banker types" would use BlackBerrys in meetings, said Frank Kneller, the chief executive of a company in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, that makes water-treatment systems. "Now it's everybody." He said that if he spotted six of 10 colleagues tapping away, he knew he had to speed up his presentation.

It is routine for Washington officials to bow heads silently around a conference table — not praying — while others are speaking, said Philippe Reines, a senior adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Although BlackBerrys are banned in certain areas of the State Department headquarters for security reasons, their use is epidemic where they are allowed.

"You'll have half the participants BlackBerrying



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BY ALEX WILLIAMS  
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each other as a submeeting, with a running commentary on the primary meeting," Reines said. "BlackBerrys have become like cartoon thought bubbles."

Some professionals admitted that they occasionally sent mocking commentary about the proceedings, but most insisted that they used smartphones for legitimate reasons: responding to deadline requests, plumbing the Web for data to illuminate an issue under discussion or simply taking notes.

Still, the practice retains the potential to annoy. Joel I. Klein, the New York City schools chancellor, has gained such a reputation for checking his BlackBerry during public meetings that some parents joke that they might as well send him an e-mail message. Few companies have formal policies about smartphone use in meetings, according to Nancy Flynn, the executive director of the ePolicy Institute, a consulting group in Columbus, Ohio. Flynn tells clients to encourage employees to turn off all devices.

"People mistakenly think that tapping is not

as distracting as talking," she said. "In fact, it can be every bit as much if not more distracting. And it's pretty insulting to the speaker."

Still, business can be won or lost, executives say, depending on how responsive you are to an e-mail message. "Clients assume they can get you anytime, anywhere," said David Brotherton, a media consultant in Seattle. "Consultants who aren't readily available 24/7 tend to languish."

Playful electronic bantering can stimulate creativity in meetings, in the view of Josh Rabinowitz, the director of music at Grey Group in New York, an advertising agency. In pitch meetings, Rabinowitz said, he often traded messages on his Palm Treo — jokes, ideas, questions — with colleagues, "things that you might not say out loud."

The chatter tends to loosen the proceedings. "It just seems to add to the productive energy," he said.

But business relationships can be jeopardized. Lori Levine, the founder of Flying Television, a talent-bookings agency in Manhattan, said that in an effort to be environmentally sensitive she instructed employees to take notes on BlackBerrys instead of paper during client meetings.

"Then I got a call from a client screaming that our vice president spent an hour on his BlackBerry during a huge meeting," Levine recalled. To soothe the client, Levine read aloud the notes the vice president had taken.

In Dallas, a college student sunk his chance to have an internship at a hedge fund last summer when he pulled out a BlackBerry to look up a fact to help him make a point during his interview, then lingered — momentarily, but perceptibly — to check a text message a friend had sent, said Trevor Hanger, the head of equity trading at the hedge fund, who was helping conduct the interview.

Very few companies have policies on smartphone use, which leaves it up to employees to feel their way across uncertain terrain.

To Jason Chan, a digital-strategy consultant in Manhattan, different rules apply for in-house meetings (where checking BlackBerrys seems an expression of informal collegiality) and those with clients, where the habit is likely to offend. There is safety in numbers, he added in an e-mail message: "The acceptability of checking devices is proportional to the number of people attending the meeting. The more people there are, the less noticeable your typing will be."

Beyond practical considerations, there is also the issue of image. In many professional circles, where connections are power, making a show of reaching out to those connections even as co-workers are presenting a spreadsheet presentation seems to have become a kind of workplace boast.

Brotherton, the consultant, wrote in an e-mail message that it was customary now for professionals to lay BlackBerrys or iPhones on a conference table before a meeting — like gunfighters placing their Colt revolvers on the card tables in a saloon. "It's a not-so-subtle way of signaling, 'I'm connected. I'm busy. I'm important. And if this meeting doesn't hold my interest, I've got 10 other things I can do instead.'"

Nadia Ries Shen, left, uses an iPhone at DMD, a marketing company in New York, while Amanda Huber works nearby.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE



[ HEALTH ]

## An emotional hair trigger that's often misread

BY JANE E. BRODY  
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IN the popular 1999 movie *Girl, Interrupted*, Winona Ryder portrays a young woman who tries to commit suicide, then spends nearly a year in a psychiatric hospital with a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder.

The film, based on a 1993 memoir by Susanna Kaysen, was gripping. But experts say it oversimplified this common yet poorly understood mood disorder.

Georges Han, a recovered patient now studying at the University of Minnesota for a PhD in psychology, describes borderline personality disorder as "a serious psychiatric disorder involving a pervasive sense of emptiness, impulsivity, difficulty with emotions, transient stress-induced psychosis and frequent suicidal thoughts or attempts."

Moods can change quickly and unpredictably, behaviors can be impulsive (including abuse of alcohol or drugs, reckless driving, overspending or disordered eating), and relationships with others are often unstable. Many patients injure themselves and threaten or attempt suicide to relieve their emotional pain.

People with the disorder are said to have a thin emotional skin and often behave like two-year-olds, throwing tantrums when some innocent word, gesture, facial expression or action by others sets off an emotional storm they cannot control. The attacks can be brutal, pushing away those they care most about. Then, when the storm subsides, they typically revert to being "sweet and wonderful," as one family member put it.

In an effort to maintain calm, families often struggle to avoid situations that can set off another outburst. They walk on eggshells, a doomed effort because it is not possible to predict what will prompt an outburst. Living with a borderline person is like traversing a minefield; you never know when an explosion will occur.

### MISLEADING LABEL

The name of the disorder was coined in the 1930s, in a misleading reference to the border between neurosis and psychosis. Experts say it has nothing to do with either condition.

Rather, affected individuals seem to be born with a quick and unduly sensitive emotional trigger. The condition appears to have both genetic and environmental underpinnings. Brain studies have indicated that the emotional center of the nervous system — the amygdala — may be overly reactive, while the part that reins in emotional reactions may be underactive.

As children, people who will develop the disorder are often "hyperreactive, hypervigilant and supersensitive," Valerie Porr, a therapist in New York, said in an interview. Typically they receive a host of misdiagnoses and treatments that are inappropriate and ineffective.

"Some children need more than others in learning to regulate their emotions," said Marsha M. Linehan, a psychologist at the University of Washington who devised the leading treatment for borderline disorder.

"These kids require a lot of effort to keep themselves emotionally regulated," Linehan said in an interview. "They do best with stability. If the family situation is chaotic or the family is very uptight, teaching children to grin and bear it, that tough kids don't cry, these children will have a lot of trouble."

Even in a normal family, such children need extra help. Linehan told of one mother who said: "I was an ordinary mother, and my child needed a special mother. I took training and became the special mother he needed."

Borderline personality disorder afflicts about 2 percent of the general population, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, and it is twice as common as a much better-known disorder, schizophrenia. (Other studies suggest the prevalence is as high as 6 percent.) Many borderline patients hurt themselves, and 10 percent die by suicide.

Yet as common and serious a problem as it is, Linehan said that patients often have difficulty getting the help they need — partly because therapists tend to regard borderline patients as manipulative and demanding of an inordinate amount of time and attention.

Porr, a social worker who specializes in helping families of borderline patients, said therapists with traditional analytic training often provide ineffective treatment, then experience feelings of failure and frustration. Psychotherapeutic drugs have not been effective in controlling the disorder. As a result, 70 percent of these patients drop out of traditional treatments, Porr said.

Porr tries to help families learn to handle the problem and not make it worse. She said in an interview that families need to understand why borderline patients act and react the way they do, then respond in ways that validate the patients' feelings and help them regain and maintain emotional control.

### TREATMENTS THAT CAN HELP

Experts say that even suicidal patients are unlikely to benefit from the kind of extended hospitalization depicted in *Girl, Interrupted*. More often, a few days in the hospital should be followed by psychotherapy directed at helping them learn to live more effectively with their cognitive misinterpretations and emotional instability.

Linehan practices dialectical behavior therapy, the only therapy that has been demonstrated to be effective in a number of randomized clinical trials. She said two other approaches, called mentalization and Stepp, were also likely to be helpful.

Dialectical behavior therapy, a derivative of cognitive behavior therapy, helps patients identify thoughts, beliefs and assumptions that make their lives challenging and then learn different ways of thinking and reacting. In effect, Linehan tells patients, "Your problem is that you don't know how to regulate yourself, and I can teach you how." She said thousands of therapists have been trained in dialectical behavior therapy, and many others practice it without special training.

But the value of the therapy can be thwarted if patients return to an environment that misunderstands them. Thus, Linehan said, it is important for others to recognize that people with borderline personality disorder are genuinely suffering. "They are in excruciating pain that is almost always discounted by others and attributed to bad motives," she said.

The idea is "to validate the person's emotional reactions, to say, 'I understand how you feel,' to pay attention, not to the situation, but to the emotion behind it," Linehan said.

Alan E. Fruzzetti, a psychologist at the University of Nevada, said that families have to learn how to "soothe themselves, to realize that though the situation is awful, not to blame or be judgmental of the person but to see the person as also suffering."

Reacting in a nonloving way magnifies the trauma tenfold, he said in an interview, adding: "You may have to leave a bad situation, but you must come back in a loving way, maybe say something like, 'That blowout yesterday, I really want to understand your experience.'"

Therapists trained in dialectical behavior therapy can be located through the Web site [www.behavioraltech.org](http://www.behavioraltech.org).