

## LIFE

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# One rude turn deserves a SWAT

*With the proliferation of technological devices such as MP3 players and cellphones, it seems Joe Public has become rudder, and the disapprovers more vocal in expressing their distaste for bad manners*

BY DOUGLAS QUENQUA  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

**DO** two rudes make a polite? Amy Alkon, a syndicated advice columnist and self-described “manners psycho,” certainly thinks so. Just ask “Barry,” a loud cellphone talker she encountered recently at a Starbucks in Santa Monica, California.

“He just blatantly took over the whole place with his conversation, streaming his dull life into everybody’s brain,” Alkon recalled in a telephone interview.

Among the personal details Barry shared that day — errands to run, plans for the evening — was his phone number, which Alkon jotted down.

“I called him that night and said, ‘Just calling to let you know, Barry, that if you’d like your private life to remain private, you might want to be a little more considerate next time,’” she said.

So there. These days it seems that as the rudes have gotten ruder — abetted by BlackBerries, cellphones and MP3 players — the scolds have gotten scolder. True, many people have grown complacent about having to endure others’ musical tastes or conversations — or more accurately, half of their conversations. But among the disapprovers, withering glances and artfully worded comments have given way to pranks and other creative kinds of revenge.

On Broadway, the actors Daniel Craig and Hugh Jackman took turns breaking out of character during a September performance of their show, *A Steady Rain*, to admonish an audience member who refused to silence his cellphone. Patti LuPone, too, has recently garnered some of the most enthusiastic ovations of her career for stopping shows to publicly berate people for similar offenses.

Celebrities have also been on the receiving end.

Last month, the Argentine opera singer Gabriela Pochinki was arrested at a French bistro on the Upper West Side of Manhattan

when she allegedly scuffled with the restaurant’s manager after several customers had complained about her loud cellphone chat.

Bravo, say people like Vinnie Bartilucci, a computer programmer from Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania. Among his methods for countering loud cellphone talkers is to place a small recording device he carries for work on the table next to the offender.

Bartilucci did just that last summer at a McDonald’s in Lower Manhattan, soliciting the logical question: What are you doing? (Which was punctuated by an expletive.)

“I said, ‘Well, since you obviously want me to hear your conversation, I’d better keep a copy of it,’” Bartilucci recalled.

The ploy worked: the man got up and walked away — but the victory felt Pyrrhic.

“We’ve learned so much about personal freedom that we sort of work under the assumption that everything we do is perfectly acceptable, and God help the person who tries to limit us in any way,” Bartilucci said.

Historically, great thinkers have offered suggestions for dealing with irksome people. Usually, they have advised leading by example.

“The test of good manners is to be patient with bad ones,” wrote Solomon ibn Gabirol, the Jewish philosopher, in the 11th century.

“Never express anything unbecoming, nor act against the rules moral before your inferiors,” advised George Washington in his *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and in Conversation*.

But just as there is nothing new about rude people, so too is there nothing new about public shaming — or fighting rudeness with rudeness.

Shannon Stamey, an administrative professional in Washington, has dubbed herself the “etiquette vigilante” on her blog, Disaffected Scanner Jockey.

Among her more popular posts, she said, were those in which she recounts her confrontations with rude people, like the time she asked a guy on the Metro who was blasting offensive hip-hop music from his

iPod to turn it down, please. He briefly complied, but conspicuously cranked the volume again as he exited the train.

“I can’t blithely ignore misogyny before I’ve had my coffee, even if it does have a catchy beat,” Stamey wrote. “The Metro needs more people who are obnoxious enough to correct the rudeness of others.”

Not so, say some manners arbiters. Those who subscribe to the age-old advice of our forefathers look very askance at this kind of antic.

“It’s been the plague of my life,” said Judith Martin, who is better known as Miss Manners. “People very proudly tell me how rude they were to someone who was rude to them, and they expect me to pat them on the back.”

Such behavior only “doubles the amount of rudeness,” in the world, she said. Worse still, she said, it’s not likely to work: usually the revenge-seekers just alienate the offenders, making them defensive about whatever they were doing.

Better to fight rudeness with sticky sweetness, said Anna Post, a great-great-granddaughter of Emily Post and a spokeswoman for the Emily Post Institute (yes, there is such a place).

“You catch more flies with honey than vinegar,” Post said. “Just because someone is rude, you still have a standard to hold yourself to.”

On the Web site for the Emily Post Institute, which is in Burlington, Vermont, recommendations for talking on a cellphone include “watch your volume” and “don’t say anything personal, private or confidential if you’re in a place where others might be able to overhear you.”

But some people say that the “lead by example” mentality is too genteel for the 21st century, when handheld technologies make people noisier and less aware of their surroundings.

Below: Amy Alkon, a self-described “manners psycho,” believes in affirmative action when she encounters people too rude to turn down the volume of their cellphone conversations.

ILLUSTRATION AND PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE



she had no qualms about accosting people for breaches of cellphone etiquette. “I get rude just because it will stop them from using the phone,” she said.

Alkon, the advice columnist, shares this philosophy. Extreme shaming can work, she said, adding that the next time she saw Barry, the guy from Starbucks, he was talking on his cellphone outside the store rather than in it. She likes to think she had something to do with that.

“There are people in this world who just don’t care about you or anyone else,” said Alkon, the author of *I See Rude People* (McGraw-Hill Companies) coming out this month. “They are going to inflict themselves on you, and the only way to stop them is to show them there’s a cost.”

Alkon often posts the personal information shared by loud cellphone talkers on her blog, where they will get calls from her fans. Her site is one of many where the affronted can gather online: at CaughtYa.org, people can post cellphone pictures of drivers who illegally occupy handicapped parking spaces, and Holla Back NYC lets women post pictures of men who harass them on the street. Holla Back struck such a nerve when it was introduced in 2005 (and led to more than one arrest) that now there are 20 Holla Back sites.

Of course, most people aren’t built for public confrontation, fearing an awkward moment or perhaps a fist in the face, which is why people like Alkon are probably doomed to fight a losing battle.

But there is hope: For those who prefer a more passive-aggressive form of shaming, there is a company called Pardon Moi that makes cards you can hand to strangers with sayings like, “Can you please take your conversation elsewhere, like the corner of ‘polite’ and ‘appropriate’?”

## Media vampires, beware

*For Kristen Stewart, star of the hit ‘Twilight’ franchise, though life is not easy as a teen idol, she has learned to deftly dodge the limelight*

BY BROOKS BARNES

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, LOS ANGELES

We know, courtesy of *Us Weekly*, that Kristen Stewart spreads butter on her blueberry bagels. *People* magazine just chronicled her alleged romance with her *Twilight* co-star, Robert Pattinson, in an entire issue devoted to the movie franchise. And everyone from *Access Hollywood* to the *New Zealand Herald* has chewed over her supposedly “moody,” “mopey,” “melancholy” demeanor. What hardly anyone outside Hollywood knows — or at least recognizes amid the tabloid frenzy, hyperventilating fans and cheesiness of the *Twilight* movies — is perhaps the most interesting thing about her: At 19, Stewart is considered one of the most promising actresses of her generation, with Oscar winners like Sean Penn and Jodie Foster lining up to offer praise.

“I do wish that people would focus more on the work, and I can’t say that I don’t take it personally,” said Stewart, who reprises her role as Bella Swan, an ordinary high school girl who falls in love with a sensitive vampire, in the forthcoming film *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*.

“But I understand it because what you do as an actor is so tied up in who you are as a person,” she continued with a deep sigh. “What really kills me — it really rips me up — is when people think I’m abrasive, inconsiderate or ungrateful because I don’t go outside in a bikini and wave to the paparazzi. Come on!”

Life as a teen idol has never been easy. But navigating the obsessive attention of young fans amid today’s media landscape — all Twitter, all YouTube, all TMZ, all the time — can be particularly harrowing. And Stewart in some ways has it even harder.

Because of the grip the *Twilight* franchise has on young girls — the first movie raked in US\$384 million at the global box office and the books, by Stephenie Meyer, have sold more than 70 million copies — she is not just an actress playing a popular role. Instead “Twi-hards” have come to project their version of romantic love on her; Stewart’s shyness and hints of awkwardness make her accessible to fans in a way Megan Fox is not.

Stewart has coped with the suffocating attention by giving off an air of inapproachability, a tough exterior that Chris Weitz, the director of *New Moon*, said she has methodically adopted. “If she didn’t, every teenage girl would see her as their best friend,” he said. “They would tear her completely apart.”

In contrast, Pattinson, who plays the too-tender-to-suck-blood Edward Cullen, acts sheepish and “tries to implode in on himself and turn into a human mumble,” Weitz said.

The actors of Stewart’s generation — Zac Efron, Chris Pine, Selena Gomez, Shia LaBeouf — have witnessed the carnage that fully embracing the limelight in the digital era can bring: Britney, Paris, Lindsay. As such, they have tried to reclaim some of element of mystery, something that results in a lot of foot stomping from a nonstop celebrity news machine.

“The key is not to become a reality show,” said Foster, who co-starred with Stewart in David Fincher’s *Panic Room* and was herself a teenage star. “That kind of attention might seem fun right now, but it won’t in 10 years.”

Smoking a cigarette on a 14th-floor balcony of the Four Seasons here last week, Stewart was animated and funny — until a question about whether her family really keeps wolves



as pets. Her eyes narrowed and she nodded warily. She calls people who demand to know aspects of her private life “fends.” As to whether or not she is dating Pattinson, she recently told *Entertainment Weekly*, “I’m not going to give the fiending an answer.”

Sure enough, it took only about an hour for her cigarette break, captured by a telephoto lens, to be splashed across the Web site PopSugar.com.

The *Twilight* series reflects a new super-strain of entertainment born of Hollywood’s desire to build movies around existing brands, whether books (*Harry Potter*), comic book characters (*Iron Man*) or toys (*Transformers*). *Twilight*, which Summit Entertainment is rereleasing in theaters for one night only on Thursday, is the No. 1 DVD of 2009, with over 8 million copies sold. The

While the entertainment media salivate over the minute details of Kristen Stewart’s comings and goings, Oscar-winning actors are lining up to sing her praises.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

sound track has sold more than 3.5 million copies worldwide. And the *New Moon* sound track, released four days early because the songs were already leaking, had its debut as the No. 1 album in the US.

You can now buy *Twilight* makeup (staining lip balm, US\$18); a Barbie-like Bella action figure; and the themed Volvo (the pitch: “What drives Edward Cullen May Soon Drive You”). *New Moon*, which opens on Friday in the US and had already sold out more than 1,000 screenings, is expected to be one of the biggest movies of the fall. But the success of *Twilight* has blurred if not buried Stewart’s blossoming reputation as a skilled actress. Aside from the overtly commercial nature of the franchise, the subject matter — vampires that sparkle, gym-sculptured werewolves and computer-generated effects — tends to turn the noses of cinema’s auteur elite skyward.

“I realize that it may seem funny to be discussing her seriousness as an actress in the context of the *Twilight* saga, but the kinds of things she has to do are kind of amazing,” said Weitz, whose credits include *About a Boy* and *The Golden Compass*. “It’s not easy to make falling in love with a vampire look real.”

Stewart said she handles the fantasy elements of the movies in part by imagining that the “creature” characters are different not because they have supernatural powers but because they have human afflictions — that Edward is not a vampire, for instance, but rather a heroin addict. “You give them

issues that a normal person might have and play off that,” she said.

Stewart picks characters that are, almost without exception, difficult or damaged. In *Speak* she played a high school freshman who becomes a selective mute after being raped. Mary Stuart Masterson cast her in *The Cake Eaters* as a terminally ill teenager. Even in *Adventureland*, a dramatic comedy directed by Greg Mottola (*Superbad*), Stewart found a way to add a dark depth to her sexually adventurous carné. “It’s not because I’m a miserable person or sad or whatever,” she said. “The honest, complex roles tend to be serious.”

Honesty is a theme she returns to repeatedly. “I’ve worked with actors who are just professional liars, and it eats away at them, and they are miserable people by the end of their careers,” she said. “If you’re ever needing to lie when you’re acting, that’s just because you’re having an off day and your mood is getting in the way of really playing your character.”

Stewart recently finished filming *The Runaways*, directed by Floria Sigismondi and based on the true story of Joan Jett’s groundbreaking first band. She had only two weeks to learn songs like *Cherry Bomb*, something that she described as “so enormously scary.” (She also plays electric guitar in the movie.) Her next indie project is *K-11*, a film directed by her mother, Jules Mann-Stewart, about a special prison dorm. Stewart plays a transsexual named Butterfly.

But long before *K-11* reaches theaters, Stewart will be back with the third *Twilight* movie: *Eclipse* is scheduled to open on June 30. (A date for the fourth installment, *Breaking Dawn*, is expected in the coming weeks.)