

## **Framing public mobile phone use (PMPU): A question of perspective and projection**

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Does observing public mobile phone use (PMPU) change the social meaning of face-to-face interaction? Promotions used by service providers encourage PMPU. “New artifacts”, like mobile phones, enhance the ambiguity of social situations until shared cultural norms have been developed (Mantovani, 2002). This ambiguity can be the source of psychological stress. Observers to PMPU often feel embarrassed, disrespected, and ignored (Cumiskey, 2003). It is through the experience of psychological discomfort on the part of the observer that the social demands of face-to-face interaction are revealed.

People make different attributions about PMPU, depending on whether they are the user or the observer to someone else’s use (Cumiskey, 2004, in press). This paper is based on a follow-up study that was conducted in New York City to investigate the impact of perspective taking and message framing on the social meaning of face-to-face interaction in the presence of mobile phones. Data were collected based on how people responded to an image of mobile use that was taken, and used with permission, from an actual mobile phone advertisement. Participants were asked to tell a story based on the picture. They were asked to take one of three perspectives in telling the story; either that of the user, the direct observer to the use, or no perspective. Role expectations were investigated as a factor that influenced the perceived “appropriateness” of PMPU. A difference was found in how PMPU was interpreted based on whether one played the role of the user or the observer.

For those telling the story from the user’s perspective, attributions for why the mobile phone was being used directly related to the situation. For those telling the story from the observer’s perspective, attributions related to the disposition of the user were made. The “no perspective” condition served as a vehicle through which participants revealed a third, almost omniscient view on PMPU. An understanding of these results from a deeper psychological perspective will be explored in this paper.

### Biographical Sketch:

Dr. Kathleen M. Cumiskey is an Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department at the College of Staten Island, which is part of the City University of New York. She was granted her Ph.D. from the Social-Personality Psychology Program at the City University of New York's Graduate Center in 2003. Dr. Cumiskey received a PSC-CUNY grant to investigate the social meaning behind public mobile phone use, or PMPU, and acronym she coined to aid in the discussion and understanding of new psychological phenomenon related to the use of mobile technology in public. Her past research will soon be published in two international volumes: *A Sense of Place: The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*, edited by Kristóf Nyíri, and *Mobile Communications: Renegotiation of the Social Sphere*, edited by Rich Ling and Per Pedersen.