

AMERICAN ETIQUETTE: HOW TIME AND TECHNOLOGY HAVE CHANGED
SOCIAL INTERACTION

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Anthropology

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Date: _____ Spring Semester 2016
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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Spring Semester 2016
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my loving husband, Kevin. Without him I would not have had the courage to start this journey or the perseverance to finish it. I am grateful for his kind words of encouragement, his patience through this process, and his never-ending support for me with whatever I choose to set my mind to.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family for their ongoing support through this process. It has been a group effort for me to finish this research and to sort out my thoughts on paper. Kevin, Mom, Dad, Corey, and KK, and even my little Genevieve, have been so influential with advice, helpful opinions, and especially hugs when they were needed.

To the entire department of Anthropology at George Mason, thank you for all the inspiration and for teaching me what it means to be good anthropologist. The lessons I have learned in those stuffy classrooms will be lifelong and I am so grateful for the influence of each professor I was lucky enough to take a course from.

To my committee: Dr. Trencher, you are one of the most brilliant, kindest, and inspirational people I have ever known. It has been such an honor to have your help through this long process. Thank you for your insight, encouragement, patience, and especially for sharing your limited time with me. Dr. Seligmann and Dr. Scimecca, thank you for reading my thesis and offering valuable input as well.

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ABSTRACT

AMERICAN ETIQUETTE: HOW TIME AND TECHNOLOGY HAVE CHANGED SOCIAL INTERACTION

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This thesis describes how over time technology has changed what Americans view as polite behavior and the ambiguity of the common conception that etiquette practices are outdated, yet awkward encounters are causing embarrassment because of the lack of knowledge of common etiquette. Starting with the Victorian Era this thesis looks at common etiquette practices of that time and why people were so interested in understanding how to behave in most social settings. Moving forward, this thesis examines the impact technology has had with how Americans interact on a daily basis, especially paying attention to the affects of modern technology such as: cell phones, Internet, television, and the media. Etiquette practices and conceptions from the Victorian Era are compared to etiquette practices today in order to show commonalities and differences among the times, but to exhibit the need for modern Americans to accept the need for a common agreement that a shared belief of what acceptable behaviors are what is necessary to avoid the feelings of aloneness and awkwardness many face in social

settings. [Keywords: Etiquette, Manners, America, Victorian Era, Technology, Socialization, and Embarrassment]

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis describes how over time technology has changed what Americans view as polite behavior and the ambiguity of the common conception that etiquette practices are outdated, yet awkward encounters are causing embarrassment because of the lack of knowledge of common etiquette. Starting with the Victorian Era this thesis looks at common etiquette practices of that time and why people were so interested in understanding how to behave in most social settings. Moving forward, this thesis examines the impact technology has had with how Americans interact on a daily basis, especially paying attention to the affects of modern technology such as: cell phones, Internet, television, and the media. Etiquette practices and conceptions from the Victorian Era are compared to etiquette practices today in order to show commonalities and differences among the times, but to exhibit the need for modern Americans to accept the need for a common agreement that a shared belief of what acceptable behaviors are what is necessary to avoid the feelings of aloneness and awkwardness many face in social settings.

Men and women living in the Victorian period had a strict code of etiquette for every occasion. A woman knew if she had a dinner party whom to sit next to whom and why. Each person attending the dinner party would know what fork, spoon and knife to

use and when it was appropriate to stand, sit, eat more hurriedly, and even when it was time to depart. John Kasson says about the period between 1870-1900 this was the biggest period of time for the most intense interest in etiquette in American history. In his view, it is this time that "...[O]ffers a rich and largely neglected codification of standards that governed social interaction in the rapidly expanding and powerfully influential urban bourgeois culture (Kasson 1990:5)." Much has changed since this, in Kasson's view, a unique time in American history. Today most Americans face a social dilemma each time they come upon a social situation that requires socialization without the use of technologies that take away face-to-face interaction. With new technologies such as text messaging, email, and other social media sites used instead of face-to-face communication it can appear that there is no longer a desire on the part of Americans to learn how to communicate with each other in person. The standards of communication among members of American society that had applied in the past, despite regional and class differences, largely held in common across the country, seem to have dissipated and in some cases, disappeared. Where there were once simple cultural "oughts" regarding social behavior, changes have led to common cultural confusions and moments for many Americans that evoke embarrassment, lack of confidence, and perpetuate the desire to partake in more solitary activities, as a means to refrain from what is now often viewed as intimidating social interaction (Blyth 2009:40).

Overview of Chapters

In this Chapter I situate the purpose of the research for this thesis and the means I

went about to conduct it. A topic as fascinating as American etiquette and manners must be looked at in a multitude of ways and the purpose here is to show the different expert opinions that went into researching Victorian etiquette and comparing and contrasting it to current etiquette practices and downfalls in the American sphere. Definitions of misleading terms are set out for the reader to have a better understanding of the true meaning of terms related to polite behavior that are often confusing or thought to have a different meaning than how experts use them. An explanation of the methods used to reach the conclusion are made clear for the reader to understand the steps taken to achieve answers to the research questions. Lastly, in this chapter are the opinions of well-known non-American travelers and their view of general American etiquette as to offer a different view on American etiquette other than social scientists and other academic experts.

The purpose of Chapter Two is to explain what it would have been like to live in the Victorian Era. An explanation of why etiquette literature became so popular at the time is given and a closer at what kind of etiquette modes were in fashion is explained as well. Also, in Chapter Two, the American historian John Kasson's research is predominantly used in describing how etiquette was utilized in a way that made class separation at the turn of the century less distinctive. An explanation of how the mass produced etiquette literature of the time meant much more than met the eye for lower and middle classes especially is explained along with Kasson's view on how embarrassment also became something new American society had to deal with.

Chapter Three showcases what popular new technologies have to do with

etiquette and how they work together and against each other. Looking at the internet, television, media, and cell phone use in America, especially American “millenials” it becomes more clear that although modern technology is making newer generations more intelligent on the one hand, on the other, it is making them more socially awkward. In Chapter Three, statistics are shown to better illustrate how much time is spent using technology as a new mode for communication and the way in which that has changed social interaction among Americans which are found easier and less intimidating, yet Americans also yearn for a common social code that incorporates more traditional etiquette practices, as were popular during the Victorian Era.

Chapter Four ties together with Chapter Three as the research conduct for the Victorian Era is compared to Etiquette during the Communication Age (modern time). Interesting similarities between the two seemingly very different times are shown along with stark differences in what is and was considered polite behavior. Kasson’s opinion about embarrassment and its association to etiquette are brought up again in this chapter and looked at more closely with how that is panning out currently. A multitude of expert opinions and research is used in the chapter to show the impact technology has on how people are currently socially interacting with each other. The Victorian Era is used as a comparative timeframe to better showcase the change overtime and the ambiguous feelings many Americans have about wanting to remain a traditional society, yet move forward with modern technologies and customs as well.

Chapter Five is the concluding chapter of this thesis. This section is used to show the dramatic change that has happened over time and to allow the reader to better

understand the impact technology has on polite behavior in America since the Victorian Era. Retracing the steps set out to conduct research that requires such a holistic approach are reiterated in the concluding chapter of this thesis along with reiterating the importance of comparing two timeframes in order to reach any kind of conclusion. Lastly, a brief explanation of why Americans learning a common standard of polite behavior is so crucial for a healthily functioning future generation is explored.

Definitions of Terms

Terms associated with behavior in social interaction, including “manners,” “etiquette” and “civility” is sometimes used interchangeably, but have different emphases and meanings, which it is important to delineate. While these terms are often popularly used interchangeably, they can be substantially different in meaning. Thus, while both terms look at codes of conduct in a society; the term “manners” is used more widely as a means to describe and explain the implication of the many terms used to describe the more limited aspects of manners. Etiquette, however, refers more to the finite actions generally taught within specific peoples. Judith Martin wrote in the Idaho Spokesman Review, “Manners are eternal principles, such as always showing respect in a house of worship. Etiquette is the set of rules that apply to a particular situation (Martin 2000). Founder of the World Class Etiquette Finishing School, Susie Wilson, explains on her website the difference between etiquette and manners in the following:

People are typically taught manners from a very young age, so that they grow up accustomed to the basic rules of conduct about appropriate behavior in

social situations. Children learn, for example, that it is not polite to stare, to make personal comments, or to cast aspersions upon the selection of food at a dinner. In childhood, people usually absorb lessons about how to treat others and how to behave in a variety of situations. Manners often become second nature when they are taught at a young age. In order to learn etiquette, people must take specific lessons, as opposed to learning by example or through gentle correction. Rather than learning general rules about how to behave at a dinner, someone would learn specifically about which silverware to use when, how the table of precedence works, and how to politely dispose of undesirable food items. Etiquette training also involves how to deal with introductions, and how to behave in numerous environments, from funerals to shooting parties (Wilson 2013).

Civility is another term that often causes confusion, as the term encompasses many meanings that are also subsumed as part of an understanding of manners and etiquette. P.M. Forni, (Johns Hopkins Civility Project), seeking to define what the millennial generation understands as *civility*, asked students to write down words they associated with the concept. The ideas set out by students included: care, niceness, respect, concern, etiquette, tact, morality, manners, compassion, and equality. Forni (1990: 8-9) concluded that: “The list tells us civility is complex. Civility is good. Whatever civility might be, it has to do with courtesy, politeness, and manners. Civility belongs in the realm of ethics.” Civility then is the entire package of manners and etiquette rolled into one, but it is unique because deciding whether something is civil or uncivil requires choosing between right and wrong, whereas judging between whether an action is good or bad manners does not necessarily require an ethical judgment.

Problem Definition

Etiquette experts agree that although we are living in an age of increased and accelerated means of communication (“the communication age”) there is, somewhat

ironically, a noted lack of “real” communication between and among people (Blyth 2009:9). That is, people are having a difficult time expressing themselves in daily conversations in both casual and formal settings. Bookstore and library shelves now have a plethora of “how to behave” books written by experts in different fields encompassing manners, etiquette, and civility. Questions arise relevant to the reasons for such an increased interest in polite behavior; especially as similar to the interest Americans took in etiquette and manners during the late 19th century. The primary question of this research is what is the significance of etiquette as part and product of social and cultural behavior, specifically in the American setting? Are there historically and ideologically ascertainable factors in American etiquette as “code of conduct” looking at the timeframe from Victorian America to modern America? How have scholars and others, including publicly recognized “experts” and temporary and permanent visitors, viewed American social behavior? Have technologies since 1990 impacted etiquette, and or the ways in which it is learned, or not learned?

Examination of new and emerging means of communication available to the public, and associated developments understood as consequences of these means, has been examined on the academic side by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists, among others. This research consistently shows that new ways of communicating are heavily contributing to the ambiguity of modern etiquette and manners, thus confusing to Americans, especially the generation often referred to as “millenials”. In this work, “millenials” will refer to the generation of Americans born between 1990 to early 2000s.

Methods

The method chosen for this research is an extended and differentiated literature review that includes anthropological, sociological, and historical work on American life and values, seen here as the foundations for etiquette as of social and cultural significance; experts (as differentiated from scholars) on etiquette, as well as new challenges to etiquette as “common knowledge” in a time of new technologies that speed communication but work simultaneously impede understanding. The literature review portion of this thesis is laid out in such a way to demonstrate the multitude of categories simultaneously working together demonstrating the elusiveness and ambiguity of modern etiquette. The isolated subtopics were narrowed down after careful consideration as to what is actually impacting current behaviors in American etiquette among “millenials” and others alike.

The specifics of groups identified as central for this research, and the reasons behind their selection are set out in the literature review in the following way: Social scientists and their view on the current state of etiquette and the driving force behind a current desire among Americans to learn manners, experts on etiquette share opinions on what their observations have been and what current appropriate polite behavior ought to consist of intermingled with history of why such practices exist. Visitors add more depth into the subject as a means to step outside of the American norm and compare the current and past attitude and customs to European ancestors. Lastly, the American audience is

explored in order to show the impact of media and current technologies is having on changing codes of manners and etiquette. This work is part of a larger research project in which interviews of members of different generations of Americans would be appropriately and usefully conducted, but are beyond the current purview.

How The American Sphere is Viewed by Non-American Visitors From The Past And Present

When Alexis de Tocqueville traveled and commented on early American life, he argued that America was not what it was when the country first seceded from England and were moving away from “that virile candor, that manly independence of thought, that often distinguished Americans in earlier times...” (Tocqueville 2003:297). The issue of conformity and individualism as part of American life is significant for understanding the boundaries of behavior in social situations. While all cultures have sets of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and areas in between, the use of different behaviors as part of strategies for movement among social classes that in turn open opportunities for economic success are particularly pronounced in American life. This in turn has implications for understanding Americans as conformists and as individualists sheds light on the significance of etiquette and manners as a basis for social communication in the shifting tides of American life.

British novelist Frances Trollope (1796-1873) wrote “Domestic Manners of the Americans”(1832), about living in America for several years and claimed: “However meritorious the American character may be, it is not amiable” (Trollope 1832: 123).

Horrified at what she saw as the unacceptable behavior she observed among men and women living on the frontier, leaving her with no desire to visit America again.

Throughout her memoir she compared the behavior of Americans to that of the English, noting what she identified as a lack of manners, let alone the more refined behaviors she associated with etiquette. She particularly found the casual forms of address offensive and peculiar, and compared the use of the term “Lady” in England with that in America, where it is simply a woman, rather than used as a title. While this shift from a mode of formal address to a term that denoted sex of the individual involved bewildered Trollope, it provides evidence of the movement in American life toward equality in more everyday terms than had been the case in Leutke’s time. There is evidence in Trollope’s remarks that she suspected that Americans would not measure up to her standards before her visit, and the visit itself confirmed her views.

Moved by what he called the *symbolic smile* of Americans, French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) dissected the everyday habits of strangers he observed in restaurants, universities, religious institutions, as well as among passersby, in “Reflections on America” (1964). Although Maritain greatly admired the work ethic of Americans, he, in keeping with the accounts of other Europeans (like Trollope who also noticed Americans spent little time visiting one another just for the pleasure of having company) was simultaneously fascinated and horrified at the lack of time taken for leisure. From his perspective there was little time for making friends because everyone was working so hard. He observed that time spent at work left little time for conversations with neighbors which might be engaged in solely for amusement.

Significantly, Maritain's observations revealed that Americans, took great pride in refining their trade-work and hobbies; and find leisure time focused on conversational and civil refinement of little importance (Maritain 1964). This facet of American life is also mentioned by etiquette experts (Kasson 1990:39) and seems to play a significant part in looking at the way Americans are communicating more with less face-to-face methods than ever before.)

European scholarly visitors such as Davetian and Forni see beauty in the unique qualities of Americans, but comment about what they see as the "rudeness" (here defined as a lack of civility, manners or appropriate etiquette) found in American society. Forni (2001:161) shared an experience from when he was a teenage boy who had only lived in America for a few years. Waiting to be seen by a medical doctor, he was taken aback when the nurse called him in by his first name to come back to the examination room. Forni explained that this simply is not the custom in any other Westernized country. Despite the many changes taking place, in Europe it was still customary to call a stranger "ma'am", "sir," or by their surname. The new American standard of calling a stranger by his or her first name upon a first encounter has become a more accepted part of American etiquette, but it perplexes others (including older Americans!) that perplex others. After years of living in the United States, however, Forni "defends" Americans explaining to his Italian friends when they spoke ill of American manners that Americans are simply more relaxed and have no intention of being rude (Forni: 2001:165). In a similar vein, Caldwell (1999:31) argues that, "foreign observers find the panorama either exhilarating or repugnant, depending on their sympathies." Kashka (2008) presents the view that the

American penchant for first names is often taken a sign of disrespecting elders in other cultures. He argues this as just an extension of American informality, but “for a 66-year-old businessman who is not American it may not be easy for his 22-year-old co-worker to call him Bob” (Kashka 2008).

Tocqueville famously exclaimed in his book, “Democracy in America”

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers – and it was not there . . . in her fertile fields and boundless forests and it was not there . . . in her rich mines and her vast world commerce – and it was not there . . . in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution – and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great (Tocqueville 2003: page).

Tocqueville may have come to America to learn more about the new and interesting American government, but he returned home to France learning much more than he set out to about the culture of Americans. He, like Trollope, found that many aspects of American life were as he had imagined and many attitudes, policies, and civility customs were different than those he had imagined. The element of comparison within as part of his expectations before coming to America, and his observations while in the country are of interest vis-à-vis how non-Americans view life in America today.

CHAPTER TWO

Victorian America

It is often forgotten that prior to the American Revolution, colonial America was modeled after social stratification codes in England; that is, each person knew his or her place within society's class system. Briefly, for purposes here, the "landed gentry" was made up of those members of society who did not work in any formal sense, the middle class was made up of merchants and craftsmen, and the lower class was comprised of laborers and servants. In regard to dress, speech, gesture, and homes, each person as a member of one of these classes knew his/her place in society (Kasson 1990:19). Over time, many aspects of American life changed for colonial Americans, a process that accelerated in 19th century as the Victorian era in early America. As noted in Chapter 1, similarities between the Victorian era and the present, of particular interest in this research is the interest by the general public in codes of etiquette in a time of social change that presented both opportunities and confusion as part of social life and societal position. In both Victorian times and the present, the interest in etiquette and changes and sometimes confusion about, acceptable behavior including dress, language, and general self-presentation, made important differences in assignment of class, including assumptions about character and position. The very obvious differences in class coding of the Victorian era to the present, is traceable to the use of etiquette as a means to rise

through social classes that over time shifted the rigid social pyramid of the past to the blurring of class lines in the present as situated in similar (i.e. dress, language) and related but different elements of life (i.e. access to and use of technology) today

In the Victorian era, as availability of etiquette pamphlets increased, they were widely distributed as more and more people were eager to learn the behaviors and mannerisms once only part of life learned as a member of a society's upper classes. A popular misconception about this period in American culture is that members of the upper echelons of American society were themselves the primary audience for the manuals on etiquette manuals, which in turn lead them to behavior in ways that were part of an inflexible, so-called "refined" lifestyle. In fact, it was mostly the middle and lower classes that found had this interest emulating what they understood as "first class Americans" engaged in every day behaviors.

Thus, etiquette, as a central indicator of social class, became a subject of great interest as the opportunity to move into higher social circles (thus seen as a member of higher social classes) became a central means to move up in class based entirely on knowledge of etiquette. The desire to rise to a higher class than the one into which you were born as part of American life led to a broad public interest in learning how to behave the "right" way, and seen in the "right" place. Thus, the rising tide of interest in etiquette became the base for a proliferation and distribution of etiquette guides, at base connected to an opportunity to move from one class to another not based on what you were born with, or what you had, but tied to how you behaved. The examples for success in such movement were visible to the public itself, and although prior to the Victorian era

this was an available route for certain figures, i.e. Benjamin Franklin's rise from a relatively impoverished youth in which he had to leave school at ten years of age (in the time prior to public schools in America), his personal abilities as a polymath, and his ready identification with and emulation of those of "higher station" allowed him access to and identification with the upper echelons of the political and social ladder, result in his forming a distinctive republican identity, and identified as a member of class into which he was not born. (Kasson (1990:29). Biographies of other men whose names are less well known, also demonstrate this opportunity for class movement at the time as connected to "appropriate" behavior. Kasson (1990:26-28) cites Devereaux Jarratt as an individual "case in point," who started out as a son of a carpenter in 1733 and moved up to a more prestigious position in society as an Anglican minister, whose personal biography demonstrated the successful move into a higher social class based on outward changes in dress, speech and mannerisms without the more extraordinary talents of someone like Franklin.

Thus, people in this era quickly learned how to mimic the characteristics linked to people of higher social standing as in increasing numbers, members, particularly of the middle class, moved "up." According to Yeung (2010:238) this upward mobility can also be seen as a way in part to resolve visible, albeit neither understood nor purposely addressed tensions that had emerged in American life during this era:

The codification and proliferation of daily rituals of conduct might be considered in this light, a partial answer to the contradictions inherent in American society before the turn of the 20th century—those between the cultural ideals of personal freedom, equality, and the individual pursuit of happiness, on the one hand, and the acknowledged social and material inequalities and differentials upon which capitalist logics of accumulation necessarily rest (Yeung 2010:238).

In addition, it was not just the Victorians who had been born into a distinctive classes, largely based on a family patriarch's social standing in society, itself based predominantly on the patriarch's profession which then defined family standing in the community (or lack of it) " ...as believers in progress, apostles of refinement, and popularizers of gentility, ... stood in a far more ambiguous relationship to the past than they acknowledged "(Kasson 1990: 53). Along with Yeung (2010) Kasson identifies tensions in Victorian times, but with a focus on those already *in* the upper class rather than those aspiring to it.

Another interesting facet of this movement was that while books about etiquette proliferated so that individuals could move up in class, writing the books themselves became a vehicle for such movement. Between 1830-1910 fifty percent of etiquette books were written anonymously or pseudonymously, signed as "an American lady", "a gentleman", or "New York's most exclusive social circles" (Kasson 1990: 48). There was huge public demand for new, mass-produced etiquette pamphlets that were widely and cheaply widely distributed in cities and filtering out into the suburbs. As noted, the manuals gave specific instruction for primarily public aspects life as the goal was entry into a level and form of society that was based around being seen; the appearance of being part of a higher social circle than one actually belongs, with the belief (and as noted in many cases in reality) that this was the "recipe for success." Kasson explains: " In the name of civility and self discipline, the bourgeois code of manners deflected the pressures and inequalities of the society back onto the individual (Kasson 1990:6).

Of interest is that famous American men of colonial times, including George

Washington and Benjamin Franklin wrote their own set of etiquette instructions for the people of their time. The guidance provided in Washington's "Rules of Civility" covered *some* means of a more refined mannerism, but took a broader approach concentrating on many practicalities of the time. (Kasson 1990: 15). As compared to earlier Americans, the Victorian manuscript for etiquette covered a much more refined way of living: how to hold cups; how to cross the street; voice tones to use and not use. That is, practices that was among the most detailed and most finite aspects of daily living. In Kasson's view, part of what makes Victorian American unique is that "While courtesy is a growth of ancient days, delicacy is a refinement of modern times and is scarcely to be traced further back than the eighteenth century (Kasson 1990: 18)." Kasson explains that as the word "genteel" once meant "grace and refinement", what it came to mean during the Victorian era was a form of exaggerated refinement. From this viewpoint, most aspects of daily life during the Victorian era were exaggerated in practices from mealtime, courting, casual conversation, hobbies, and even in their way of dress. There was a rule for nearly everything whether you were part of the upper class or sought to enter it.

Additionally, the Victorian period included the growth of the phenomena of "micro-expressions" and meticulous actions, to which Victorians paid close attention, and were also part of increasing growth, thus change in cities of the time. "The dual arts of detection and concealment came to be regarded as necessary skills for urban living (Kasson 1990:96)." An exaggerated example is the way the fictional character Sherlock Holmes is able to immediately sum up a stranger based on a few words spoken by the stranger, their mannerisms, and their dress, a useful skill for people living in these new

urban environments. In 1840 the population of New York City rose sixty-four percent and population increased dramatically during 1860 with a new population of 800,000 (Kasson 1990: 71). Learning the “semiotic breakdown” of the city became crucial for the urban individual, explains Kasson; “ ‘Urban upheaval’ was dramatic in making an abrupt departure from earlier historical experience” (Kasson 1990:70-71). Kasson argues that it is difficult to explain a city as an entity, but from a mole’s eye view if one took a literal look, a holistic look, it “is a disclosed fragmentation and corruption” (Kasson 1990: 72-74). Accordingly, the city was a difficult place to live as a place in which social status and understanding correct behaviors with an array of intricate parts working together were in some ways essential to an individual’s success.

The dramatically changing economy and huge population boom made way for new beginnings and the wide distribution of etiquette manuals was part of that outcome. In part, learning “proper behaviors” became important to the Victorian American because the way of life was so new for everyone. Etiquette was a written standard to live by creating a customary guidance reference for everyone. As previously noted, one of the keys to a well-done performance with learning how to refine one’s character depended on making it seem effortless and natural. The improvements in printing and easily distributable manuscripts allowed more people, especially among the middle class, were able to learn what was supposedly proper and fashionable politeness.

An interesting aspect of what happens when there is such a strict code of conduct is an understanding of the effect of not following the code. Kasson notes the embarrassment of not following the code that became a part of regular life for Victorians. (1990: 114).

There was also a rise in incidence and recognition of agoraphobia among doctors and others, as fear of the marketplace were problems that became more common. In his discussion of accounts of people feeling paranoid about going out and making a wrong move (Kasson 1990: 113) and notes the increase in embarrassment that emerged so abruptly during a changing social context in which shame and embarrassment were part of the cost for violating the new “codes of civility.”

At a time when the segmentation of public and private life was rapidly increasing, the public arena was fraught with special concern as a problematic realm. As one etiquette advisor bemoaned, “Every one with whom we come in contact, however much beneath us, and indifferent to us, possesses the power to pain us by unguarded and unpleasant words.’ Indeed, rudeness threatened... in the slightest expression—a gaze held too long, an insolent gesture, an overly familiar smile, an unwelcome touch. The new social settings of an urban industrial age created a kind of ecology of embarrassment an increased the vulnerability to possible rudeness.... strangers we promiscuously amassed in an intimate proximity. Such scenes were rife with potential obtrusions from which defense or escape could be difficult. (Kasson 1990:115)

Relief from potential embarrassment was provided the multitude of books on etiquette as they “....provided a measure of relief from the uncertainties of ‘correct’ behavior and the shameful uncertainties of self that lay beneath them (Kasson 1990:115).

Thus, the Victorian era was a time of enormous social change for members of society living through it. The interest in moving “up” was accompanied by increased, and often uncomfortable sensitivity to others, especially in urban settings. People found themselves living in a world of cultural “oughts,” many of them detailed and open to the public eye. The opportunity for the etiquette “industry” was high in part because what it offered was a set of essential instructions for a culturally cogent “advancement” as part of American life and society.

CHAPTER THREE

The Impact of the Communication Age

Modern technology has changed dramatically over the last 100 years with specific acceleration since 1990 with the beginning of the Internet in ways that have affected every facet of every day life, including how people interact with each other. In the United States, these changes have led to myriad studies by social scientists directed to understanding the impact of technology on social relations as a particular point of change, and *writ large* as associated to changes in culture and society. Etiquette as a set of understandings about the nature of appropriate and/or less “sanctioned” forms of interaction as integral to social relationships, along with the settings in which they occur, has been studied as a point of impact in regard to these technologies. In this chapter I present an overview of shifting patterns of etiquette and practice grounded in a sampling of work by those that study and/or write about etiquette, including: social scientists; etiquette “experts;” (self-taught and self-anointed “experts” who later gain a societal following, i.e. Judith Martin as *Miss Manners*); non-American travelers as cultural cum etiquette, outsiders in the US; and a glimpse of younger Americans (grade-school through young adults) and changes which they take for granted and “disseminate” as they simultaneously seek and participate in ideas about what constitutes acceptable behavior. The role of technology in all of these populations includes knowledge, but not always

awareness, of shifting boundaries of behavior in social interaction, particularly where social interactions increase in number and speed, but do not occur in person.

The American cultural context in which changes, including the relationship of technology to forms of behavior considered to be culturally appropriate or inappropriate, that is, in the framework of etiquette, polite or impolite behavior, requires some examination of American culture itself as the context in which these interactions as cultural behaviors are constructed and understood. One way to get a grasp of some of the questions that allows access to understanding aspects of American culture as “Americanisms,” are set out by Bellah (1998, see also Lipset and Marks: 2000). Spanning elements of the Constitution and elements of arguments religious freedom in America to aspects of pop culture, Bellah seeks to explain how contemporary Americans implicitly accept and experience life in a common American framework, despite the explicit articulation and recognition of important differences among Americans, tells us “...something enormously important about our culture and that it has, believe it or not, a great deal to do with why our society is so hospitable to the ideology, if not the reality, of multi-culturalism” (Bellah 1998:27). It is a commonplace in much of the social sciences to understand the United States as the product of an ideology, rather than the more familiar taken for granted background of a common history. Bellah’s claim that it *is* possible to have a collective culture, and yet remain individual, is at the foundation of recognized and accepted behavioral boundaries including common etiquette and manners as related to everyday life that tie Americans together, no matter their cultural origins and practices.

Using examples drawn from students at the University of California, Berkeley, Bellah (1998) argued that what made multi-cultural life possible and positive in American life is that while Americans do not share common cultural histories, they shared common ground in popular culture, including figures such as Oprah Winfrey, television shows, products (Nike, Microsoft), sports teams, etc. By extension, understanding commonly acceptable social behaviors as part of etiquette and manners were and are part of shared cultural comprehensions that are part of a common identity for individuals as part of membership in larger groups. In 2016, as compared to the last decade of the 1990s, new technologies have expanded access and increased the speed with which communication in and among social groups including pop culture icons, athletes, etc. face to face interactions decrease, but a sense of membership in larger, including faceless populations, grows. A significant side effect of these new kinds of connections via social media is that picking up social cues from participants is difficult, often impossible; and the boundaries and strategies of such interaction are not established and can change so quickly that the ability to acquire knowledge about preferred and/or acceptable behaviors is impeded and in some cases absent. These “deficits” are compounded by quickly shifting sites and technologies of connection. As Bellah (1998) pointed out as the result of his studies carried out in the 1990s, part of American culture is based around shared social media interaction. The forms Bellah identified in the 1990s already have a “dated” ring to them as he wrote before the proliferation of media venues, social and otherwise. For Bellah’s finding focused on television as the primary technology for shared “interaction” i.e. watching the same popular television shows,

identifying with Oprah Winfrey, and other well-known television celebrities of the time. On one hand, these virtual interactions can produce a collective bond suggesting a shared sense of belonging and oneness; especially for younger people born into a society in which these technologies are widely available. However, messages when it comes to things like etiquette are much more mixed concerning definitions and practice of polite behavior.

A brief look at the use of cell phones (particularly “smartphones”) provides an apt example of a newer (yet not seen as new) means of communication where people interact “at will” far more than was the case in the 1990s. The ubiquitous use of these phones in contemporary society is, similar to television, removed from real life interaction but the removal is subtler than the case in television as a means for constructing a shared reality. That is, telephone technology makes other social cues absent. For instance, facial expressions, which provided the opportunity to pick up cues as to acceptable or unacceptable behaviors, cannot be seen. Phone texting, which has replaced talking among some groups, adds the inability to hear social cues as well as the inability to see them. Social learning about acceptable terms and boundaries for behavior is now nearly or completely invisible. What were once common manner and etiquette practices that occurred in “ordinary” telephone conversations have become increasingly blurred arenas for millennials and others as part of day-to-day interaction. Acceptable terms of social interaction, part of the essential glue of societies and culture, are largely invisible as culture ceases to be an enacted public document (Geertz, 1973).

Further, in the present, a blurring of lines between what should and should not be done in many social spheres, are related to behaviors in social interactions that can become seen as part of moral issues, i.e. those that deal with questions of right and wrong. As Americans adjust to the plethora of electronics that have changed the way people communicate, not just the form and content of a communication, but the means by which it is delivered, the means of communication increase disruption and uncertainty about the terms of appropriate usage. Blyth (2009:61) argues that people no longer communicate effectively because of new means of communication, for instance, emailing and text messaging, but there is nonetheless an associated increase in time spent behind “the screen” (Blyth 2009:61). This is not an American problem *per se*, for example, cell phone usage in India among the younger generation has been implicated in the questioning of the traditional patriarchal family and acceptable boundaries of behavior (Jeffrey 2013). In South Korea there are boot camps to help adolescents who are addicted to video games “wean off” - an idea not so different from American adolescents seeking help from guidance counselors at their schools for violent behaviors stemming from confusing, violent video games (Blyth 2009:127).

As related to appropriate etiquette, or a general understanding of acceptable behavior, including manners, Blyth argues that social codes are fading in the face of confluent factors including globalization, not enough awareness about new technologies (in the sense of how to use them, for example) accelerated communication speeds that change how people use their time in relation other people, including the time to communicate, and communicate comfortably, in person (Blyth 2009:127-137).

In agreement with Blyth's view, Bloom (2008) sees American manners as more casual and less defined, as the result of technology. Bloom conducted a study in which she found that most people once considered a phone call casual, but now consider it more formal, while a text message is now a casual form of communicating (Bloom 2008). Although today people are quick to send an email over a letter, in Bloom's view, the ease of email carries with it the appearance of less sincerity, despite which it has become an increasingly more common means of communication than paper letters. Judith Martin's "Miss Manners Basic Training: Communication" is dedicated to helping people navigate the "do's" and "don'ts" of the electronic world. Comparing cyberspace etiquette to ocean voyages Martin states that, the same concerns about etiquette concerns occurred " [I]n the days when one was able to cross without fellow passengers' leaning their chairs back onto one's lap". In her view, today's "millennials" (loosely, individuals born between 1980 and 2000) are such an independent thinking generation that it is difficult for them to take pointers about etiquette, in part because as a whole, the boundaries of personal space for this generation are not only differently defined than in the past, they are poorly defined in the present. This is related to difficulty in separating what is appropriate in work emails as compared to personal emails. The new generation of young adults thus seeks advice from older generations about how to draw the lines (Martin 1997). Martin states, " The tone also varies from rough to refined. Just as speech and behavior are supposed to be different in locker rooms than in drawing rooms—although you'd never know it from some of today's drawing room conversations—cyberspace has areas in

which salaciousness or flaming are permitted and ones in which they are offensive
“(Martin 1997: 4).

While Kasson contends that: “...[T]he rituals of everyday behavior establish in important measure the structure by which individuals define one another and interact (Kasson 1990:4), the current lack of knowledge of many “common-sense manners” as they were referred to in the past, and other etiquette practices in particular but not unique spaces, is problematic for current Americans. The signs are that this will be part of social behavior dilemmas, especially for future generations where there is likely to be little structure in terms of what behaviors are considered to be appropriate, but also considerate and mentally healthy. “For some teenagers there simply is no world outside of their own heads”, argues Sven Mørch, (a psychology lecturer at the University of Copenhagen who specializes in youth studies). Thus... “The common denominator is a lack of manners. Whereas previous generations misbehaved as a rebellion against authorities, part of today’s youth is so caught up in their own self-centeredness that no authorities exist in their minds. When they don’t show consideration for other people, it is not because they want to humiliate or spite them; it is because other people simply are of no relevance in their world.” (Karkov 2012) One of the problems, according to Mørch, is the inability for people today to get out of one’s own head and consider others, let alone connect with other people.

This emerging lack of personal connection was the subject of a news interview by Maureen Cavanaugh of Gary Small, Director of UCLA’s Memory and Aging Research Center. with questions pertaining to the current complexities and problems

considering how modern technology has played a large role in the devaluing of American manners. Cavanaugh asks Dr. Small how technologies have altered our brains and behaviors related to what she described as the “devaluing of American manners.”

Small, put it this way:

Technology is everywhere and our brains are very sensitive to any kind of stimulation from moment to moment, so think about it. The average young person spends at least nine hours a day with their technology. If you add it all up, TV, iPhones, Blackberries, computers, you name it, now their brains are being exposed to that technology from moment to moment. What is happening? Well, we think that it’s actually altering the neurocircuitry in the brain. So we have a new generation of what we call digital natives. These young people grow up with the technology, they love it, they’re great at it. But the downside is they’re not spending as much time talking face to face so there’s concern that they don’t look people in the eye when they have a conversation or they don’t recognize subtle, non-verbal cues (Cavanaugh 2009).

In the interview that followed Cavanaugh’s questions led Small to discuss findings that while we know the human brain continues to form through an individual’s early 20s, we have no firm evidence about how or whether millenials will be able to learn and exhibit empathy, or reading facial expressions to understand mood. Small’s example drawn from common interactions between parents and children in American society today he describes speaking to his daughter over dinner while she sits there sending text messages. Despite his overt statement to her about his concerns that while she is sending text messages she is giving her his full attention (i.e “ Rachel, when you are doing that while I am speaking I don’t think you are fully listening to me,” she continues on with her texting responding: “ Don’t worry, Dad. I don’t do this to my teachers (Cavanaugh 2009).”

This interview and example is useful for exemplifying concerns among the “older generation” (i.e. parents rather than children) that the concern about how people feel and interact during interview shows is not just concern about how technology is changing the way young people think and interact, but the more serious problem at hand, which is that these new communication technologies make what is socially appropriate ambiguous. Dr. Small’s daughter exemplifies this point in her belief that ignoring her father speaking and using her phone at a dinner table is acceptable, but as long as she avoids that behavior where it is strictly unacceptable, it is tolerable.

Etiquette writer Jodi Smith (2011) has found that telephone calls are an area of concern for many Americans. Smith lists common courtesies one should employ while making and receiving a call, including elements like: stating who you are as the caller, identifying who should be the one to end the conversation and a list of polite tips on how, to end the conversation with someone who cannot “take the hint.” Smith also offers advice on how to deal with a ringing phone, as this is often a source of concern: “Many people feel that this ringing is a summons that must be obeyed. Nothing could be further from the truth. The phone is a tool that should be at your beck and call not the other way around” (Smith 2011:63). Although at first glance it may seem that usage of the telephone should not be something under the sub-heading of modern etiquette with technology, the telephone is still relatively new and knowing when it is appropriate to make a phone call over sending a text message has become part of emerging elements of American manners in a way that has become confusing for many members of society.

Jeffrey Kluger, shares statistics and concerns about new ways of communicating

and the effects. “The telephone call is a dying institution”, he says. “The number of text messages sent monthly in the U.S. exploded from 14 billion in 2000 to 188 billion in 2010, according to a Pew Institute survey, and the trend shows no signs of abating. Not all of that growth has come out of the hide of old-fashioned phoning, but it is clearly taking a bite — particularly among the young. Americans ages 18-29 send and receive an average of nearly 88 text messages per day, compared to 17 phone calls. The numbers change as we get older, with the overall frequency of all communication declining, but even in the 65 and over group, daily texting still edges calling 4.7 to 3.8. In the TIME mobility poll, 32% of all respondents said they'd rather communicate by text than phone, even with people they know very well. This is truer still in the workplace, where communication is between colleagues who are often not friends at all. ‘No more trying to find time to call and chit-chat,’ is how one poll respondent described the business appeal of texting over talking (Kluger 2015).” It seems that there is a correlation between higher texting rates relating to fewer face-to-face, or at least, voice-to voice- encounters. This leaves little room for people communicating this way to practice manners or be in a shared space where civility is learned.

Other interesting evidence that adds to this research is looking at how mannerisms related to new technologies are being talked about publicly. Through the media, TV shows, radio, news, web forums, and numerous other public sources the word is getting out that Americans are “quirky” and “unknowing” in the manners department. The new hit TV shows with high reviews, for example, *Scream Queens* consistently, (in ways meant to be humorous) has scenes that point toward the awkwardness and social anxiety

Americans have with communication. In a particular albeit typical scene, a mysterious murderer attacks a woman in a scene that shows the irony of technology invented for communication that is not used for that purpose. Instead of using her phone and dialing 911, the woman being attacked quickly begins to send out a mass text message, without making a verbal sound, explaining the scene to her friends. In her text she explains in great detail the current happenings, even exclaiming, “AHHHH” at the beginning of her message, as if she is yelling, which she is not. She then proceeds to crawl over to her laptop computer on the floor as the murderer is chasing her to send the same sort of message on her Twitter account (Haries 2015). The scene is eye opening as it makes real life problems dealing with the ambiguity of how to use technologies for communication comical in ways that reveal a deeper disconnect.

The omnipresence of technologies for communication used in ways that silence it as a means for interaction with real people, is presented as a point of humor in the world of advertising as well. For example, Campbell’s new RealLife campaign has a commercial featuring two adults, sitting next to each other, i.e. “together” at a table at home, eating Campbells while they interact with their phones rather than each other the entire time. The hashtags “#romanticdinner” and “#reallife” appear during the commercial’s main scene, but at the end the message; “ Real, Real Life” appears along with the Campbell’s logo. The message is clear; a quick can of no-hassle-to-make soup is perfect for a modern family that also depends on quick, no-hassle methods of communication. Despite differences in perspective and purpose, advertisers, and social scientists, increasingly

present and focus on real world changes in the ways in which we increasingly connect in virtual ways.

Blyth (2009) argues that as social codes fade in the present, people are also being changed, and further, that technology, computers, and their ancillaries are altering human beings as active in the social world (Blyth 2009:33). MIT psychologist, Sherry Turkle, is one of the leading researchers examining the effects of texting on interpersonal development. Turkle argues that having a conversation with another person teaches kids to, in effect, have a conversation with themselves — to think and reason and self-reflect: skills that are considered essentials of human development.

Thus, a brief examination of existing literature for children, designed to teach them appropriate standards of behavior in different contexts demonstrates the lack of a shared code of rules regarding manners and etiquette that the majority of American children are not learning. Sheryl Eberly's "365 Manners Kids Should Know" covers subjects from how to set the table or how to address adults, something nearly every children's etiquette book includes. Eberly's section on "netiquette", or "manners for the way people relate to each other on the Internet" (Eberly 2001) offers instructions on what a child should do if he or she encounters something "inappropriate" on the Internet or how to send a proper email to a friend. This information reveals the scale and scope of change in types of behaviors considered important in relationships in the social world. Holydoke's (1997) children's etiquette book, include many of the same topics found in Eberly's work, but Holydoke (1997) has tips on how to speak on the telephone courteously; a subject of more salience before the omnipresent forces of the Internet.

Digital means of communication expanded during and since the 1990s, and associated changes in and from etiquette, to “netiquette” are important.

As happens with almost any aspect of culture and associated behavior, questions arise as relevant to changes in what is appropriate and inappropriate, in this case, in relation to polite behavior. While it has been widely accepted that there has been a profound change in contemporary manners in comparison to those of the American past, occurred. There is not clear way to answer such a question, but posing it is helpful as part of the effort to understand manners and etiquette today in an on-going as well as historical context, get a sense of when and how these shifts occurred, and what they mean for the nature of social, cultural and societal life in the present, and their potential for getting a sense of the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Comparing Victorian Etiquette to Current American Practices

Cut adrift from its stabilizing anchor in a once rigid class system, human comportment has floated into a world where the iconography of civility can conceal assaults ranging from vulgarity to barbarism, even to mortal danger. It's scarcely surprising that the increasing preoccupation with manners, etiquette, and civility America evinced in the nineteenth century has turned in the twentieth into anxiety, even panic. – Mark Caldwell

As noted by Caldwell, “Etymologically, ‘etiquette’ means ‘ticket’. Manners especially when they constitute acquired rituals rather than instinctive considerateness have immemorially served both as a badge of entry into elite class and a barrier against encroachments by the *déclassé*” (Caldwell 1999:30). Today the meaning of etiquette in the American setting has changed and no longer acts, as traced in Victorian times, as a ticket into higher social circles. In 2016, neither “good manners,” nor knowledge of “refined etiquette” as a more elaborate form of behavior, has the significance, sentiments or capacity to evoke the same metaphorical walls (that is keep interlopers defined as those who do not know how to behave “well”) from entering a higher class. Examining the similarities and differences between practices defined as “polite behavior” or “standards of etiquette” from the past has little meaning in present social interaction where new and rapidly changing modes of technology are either abandoning, or re-defining manners, as a by-product of culture.

Today people tend to find Victorian etiquette both fascinating and in a sense terrifying to read about. Myriad websites dedicated to comparing modern etiquette with Victorian etiquette exist, and discussions often end with numerous comments posted by readers who are astonished that some practices continued into the recent past. One such website, *HubPages*, has a poll where 1,126 people voted on how useful Victorian etiquette practices could be for modern American society. Twenty-four percent of the respondents voted: “Yes, I think if we adopted their rules our society would be changed.” Sixty-six percent of the respondents voted: “Maybe, but some of their rules are not suitable for modern times.” Ten percent of the respondents voted: “No, the Victorians were etiquette crazy and there is no place for their rules in modern society. (Howell: 2009). These results are consistent with the ambiguity often encountered in contemporary discussions on the use and desire to learn “better” manners as part of etiquette.

Anthropologist Shirley Yeung’s work examines understanding the meaning and relevance of etiquette, and its social sub-category, “manners” in social life in different time frames as embedded in notions of “right” and “wrong:” “Nineteenth century manners, contrast the notion of etiquette as an artificial external form, or merely a set of gate-keeping rituals, but were inextricably linked to morality and standards of authenticity and sincerity” (Yeung 2010:235). In her view:

...[L]earning ‘manners’ was not merely a matter of managing strategic impressions but entailed a practical form of ethical self cultivation and improvement- one that aimed to discipline moral reflexes through the ‘externals’ of speech, gesture, and other embodied dispositions, somewhat similar to the printed and aural materials of Islamic ethical discipline....

Yeung's argument raises important questions such as: Why is etiquette important? Are we still able to be sincere with new technologies such as text messaging, and if so, how? Her argument that morals and manners work together, that manners are essentially the actions one chooses to use in order to demonstrate moral is a concept shared by the Victorians. The issue of how morals and manners play into etiquette comes up to an extent that can be surprising. As Fiona Cameron-Williams of NYMetroParents.com argues, "In the democratic present, perhaps the way to distinguish useful etiquette from frippery is to discern which rules help us *be* good rather than *seem* good" (Cameron-Williams 2015).

Multi-societal institutions and associated meanings and changes in the modern and postmodern period, including changes in technology as discussed, provide grounds for understanding a view in which Victorian etiquette is "not suitable for modern times". Concern with knowledge of the details that determine seating arrangements, or how to set out flatware when arranging for a dinner party can be seen as extraneous to the event itself. What is interesting, however, is that just as there was an interest in learning "polite behaviors" as defined during the Victorian Era their evidence of a renewed desire to learn their analogues today. Bernstein (Harvard Business Review) reports that there are always a significant number of inquiries asking for rules on what behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate at dinner meetings, in the workplace, and with coworkers of a different gender. She states, "Etiquette lays out the rules of sensible living. It helps us be less annoying, and to be venal about it, get what we want. It can save us from the quotidian nuances of office life. Most importantly, it allows us to redraw the boundaries

that define civility and ensure our own sanctity (Bernstein 2014). So, on one hand people say etiquette practices are dated and unnecessary, but on the other, they want to know how to behave properly in changing social situations, which is basic to knowledge about etiquette.

Many experts try to explain the nature of what have been called “Americanisms” (Lipset 1996), but McGiffert (1964) argues that there only two primary ways to explain the character of the American. McGiffert argues that these two images of “the American” are strikingly dissimilar. On the one hand, the American is individualistic and idealistic. On the other, there is a press as part of the American cultural self to be both conformist and materialistic (McGiffert 1964:22). The Founding Fathers of the United States commonly referred to as the country’s “first gentlemen,” took every opportunity to tell the public how the ideal American ought to behave (Washington 1890). For hundreds of years the independent, straightforward, plain, agrarian American, was the ideal prototype modeling appropriate behavior for all citizens (McGiffert 1964:23).

In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin uses the phrase that would later become a popular song for young children and a mantra for many Americans even today, and tells us something about appropriate expectations about behavior: “Early to bed, Early to rise, Makes a man healthy, and wealthy, and wise” (Franklin 1735). This aphorism embeds much of the American outlook regarding valued behavior as it encapsulates ideas of good daily habits (in an agrarian society early to bed and early to rise was a necessity if you were to get your work done), which lead to the rewards of a life appropriately lived. These ideas were set out as a “rule” to live by, and literate or not, the phrase and its

recipe for a successful life was widespread.

The other side of the American self, contradicts the idea of the individual, independent, even stubborn (as self-reliant) American; that is, the conformist, cookie-cutter American. America's self-description as "the land of opportunity" is a place where newcomers seek to fit in and be accepted. While the effort to fit in is a common human behavioral effort, the emphasis on this idea of behaving "like you belong" is in part the product of the celebration of "inventing oneself new" having left life as it was known, behind to live a new (and better) life in a new (and better) place. From the early days of the country, family history, including experience, language, and the behaviors of every day life was to start in the new land, not inherited from the past. While this is not the sole factor in the conformist element of American life, it can be argued as manifest over time in present behavior, in which there is a cultural press to be accepted by following the current trends in fashion, electronics, and often shared political views as part of the "in-group." The need to feel like you fit in is something Americans have in common during the Victorian Era and today as well. There is a familiar sense in which Americans want to be individual and unique, yet at the same time often desire acceptance and sometimes anonymity.

Thus, there is immense ambiguity concerning the topic of etiquette and manners that makes forming even simple opinions based on informed grounds, difficult at best. However, given knowledge about how societies exist and thrive as networks of social institutions in which individual humans act, interact, and make sense of reality through a shared cultural set of meanings (at least as sufficient for practical purposes) that point to

conclusions that bely the ideal claims made in America about the nature and value of all things new as compared to the “old” – which often form the base of shared cultural reality and its attendant conundrums.

Etiquette, as part of and consistent with common courtesies, are related American standards of simplicity and equality as codes for behavior. If not always as a “ticket” is a universal cultural construct, that is: Americans (and others) use, and in some sense, need, a solid position of manners and etiquette guidelines to follow in order to avoid continual social disruption, including awkward circumstances, embarrassment and incivility. As discussed above, according to Kasson (1990) at one point and time in American history, and not so long ago, the aim of practicing a higher standard of manners, civility, and refined etiquette, was hope to gain access into more esteemed social circles. Research conducted for this project suggests that while that class and position in society are still concern, it seems a far powerful as a motivation or base for American behavior in the 21st century, compared the Victorian period. As Caldwell (1999:33) states: “By 1900 class had become confusing and unreliable as a predictor of social behavior, and thus far more permeable for the interloper. Contemporary Americans do not seem as concerned with entering a higher level of class; rather they are interested in simply fitting in with society at large. However, sometimes the means to do that are elusive.

Part of going to a business lunch or dinner is the concern over who will or should pay; when to stand when someone else approaches the table, and other situations in which the behaviors were prescribed and described, as they were during the Victorian Era. Bernstein says of this, uncertainty: “ Social modes are changing. Even

Miss Manners states, ‘Wider cultural confusion that has left the workplace riddled with etiquette land mines. Whether you blame resistance or relaxing the old rigidity of behavior or ignorance of traditional businesslike behavior, everybody...seems to be getting on everybody else’s nerves’.” According to Judith Martin (writing as etiquette expert Miss Manners points out: “The ambiguity in society’s standards where traditional businesslike behaviors seem rigid and outdated...(means) there is still a need for a standard knowledge and acceptance of what is considered polite behavior. During the Victorian Era the need to know the terms of polite behavior was simply accepted and expected, today while it is clear to some, that etiquette is still needed, the needs itself is questioned as acceptable.

Even during the Victorian Era, technology played a role in the way etiquette changed, or even appeared. Today, in the “Communication Age,” the use of technology compounds the issues and circumstances, but just as during the Victorian Era social and demographic changes today push social shifts that create new class distinctions as part of through urbanization and new occupational categories. Today, technological changes including proliferation of communication, media as well as the use of automobiles, and newer technologies as part of them, set up situations in which ambiguity about *really* constitutes polite behavior is associated with the effects of technology on society as a whole, as well as on individual actors.

Thus, technology affects the way we communicate and the ways we behave in relation to those forms of communication in complicated ways, even for those do not use it. The opportunity that comes with these technologies makes information and

communication easily and quickly available around the clock. But Kasson argues that a lack of common standards for use of new technologies as related to etiquette (i.e. how and when to contact someone, and what form of contact to use) creates gaps in knowledge about what is appropriate and what is not. Just as in the Victorian age, “Embarrassment”...becomes part of regular life. Embarrassment feeds on uncertainties of status, of belonging, of living up to ambiguous standards of social performance in society in which all claims of rank are subject to change” (Kasson 1990:114). Nuances they were expected to remember while out in public causing a great deal of stress and feelings of embarrassment for many. These are often the same feelings people have today

Also at play are “Americanisms” (Lipset: 2000) as part of values and the values, and the ways in which they play out in American life. The “power elite” is not part of what is generally meant in the social sciences by “Americanism” especially as covered in fields like sociology and anthropology. Hart (1996: 124) argues that the idea of Americanism is passé, stating that: “ The power elite dresses in good taste, speaks standard English, within a set range tone and volume, has good manners, and generally conforms to the modern American version of the gentlemanly ideal as derived principally from England and crystallized them between about 1688-1715” While Hart’s view on “Americanisms” as a tool to understand American life differs from most social scientists that consistently study American life, he makes a relevant point about the power elite” in that there are efforts other Americans make to emulate them. As Kasson also argues, that the upper class is the one everyone else is looking up to and trying to mimic (Kasson 1990). Judith Martin states:

One of the unacknowledged but jealously prized American freedoms is the freedom to assume a misleading appearance through choice of clothing, dwelling, and possessions. The common exercise of this goes beyond the universal quest to look richer than one actually is to a mild form of fantasy through using artifacts associated with a way of life other than one's own (Martin 2003).

Martin joins others, including early anthropologists looking at life in America (e.g. Kroeber 1927) in noting how even the most finite decisions regarding personal appearance are symbolic. Using hair as an example she recounts the symbolism of the wigs worn by men in colonial America. Later, meaning attached to hair length was part of female society, and there have been variations in different decades, for instance, short hair for men in the 1950s, long hair for men in the 1960s. Black church-women's hats serve as symbols of "fanciful and outrageous creativity" and "preserving manners and morals" (Martin 2003). These aspects of personal experience and dress are part of the significance of image in American life, and also associated with the use of etiquette and manners, which in turn have meaning for the way people feel about themselves as individuals. Thus, fashion expert, Nina Garcia has written books for the general public as a means to help "every day" Americans understand basic rules of dress which she argues as a "lost art", just as the "art" of manners has undergone a major transformation in recent years (Garcia 2007:xiv).

It can be argued that present day Americans might welcome the kinds of literature produced in Victorian times in part as a means to avoid embarrassment as part of changes in appropriate behavior made more complex by the introduction of new technologies which create new kinds of behaviors. The interest in polite manners and

etiquette has grown in America, particularly as part of globalization and changes in international affairs, including immigration.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Etiquette is the machinery of society... It prevents the agony of uncertainty, and soothes even when it cannot cure the pains of blushing bashfulness. If one is certain about being correct, there is little to be anxious about. – John F. Kasson

As a recognized “guru/advisor” on American manners, Judith Martin states plainly: “...everyone uses manners, just as everyone uses language”. She goes on to say, “Often people conclude without seeing how much etiquette is even in their own families alone that ‘Etiquette itself is defunct’. Despite experiencing the evolution of etiquette, as some aspects of it fall into disuse and others are refined and updated in accordance with social and personal changes, people believe the choice to be limited to practicing, or refusing to practice, the only possible rules, by which they mean the rules of their childhood (Martin 2003:85)”. Amy Bernstein says of etiquette, “Etiquette after all is a code of conduct that allows us to live and walk together with relative ease, fosters good relationships, and reduces the social frictions that impede our happiness and even our professional success (Bernstein 2014).” Expert opinions from anthropologists, historians, psychologists, and other academics all agree that manners are important and knowledge about how to behave, where and when, provides security for individuals as they navigate the social world.

A difficult part of the research in this work is the extent to which certain groups of people, specifically children and teenagers do not know how to act in specific social situations and use avoidance of these situations as the means to cope with their lack of knowledge. The material examined for this research suggests that there is a deeper underlying problem. “Feeling uncomfortable” is the manifestation of a genuine lack of knowledge about what constitutes acceptable/unacceptable behavior in social settings, which in turn disrupts social interaction.

As Kasson contends, “...[T]he rituals of everyday behavior establish in important measure the structure by which individuals define one another and interact (Kasson 1990:4).” The current lack of knowledge of many what would normally be assumed as common-sense (i.e. taken for granted because implicitly learned in the process of interaction) manners and etiquette practices, as a means to facilitate social interaction to as a goal for social advance, is problematic for many Americans. Traditional transmission as the primary means of enculturation, which allows individuals to unconsciously absorb and use familiar culturally situated behaviors, their use and their boundaries, are at risk of disappearing. As noted above, as argued by Sven Mørch “For some teenagers there simply is no world outside of their own heads.” This has troubling implications for sociality as part of everyday societal behavior in the present and the future.

I argue here that it is important to point out that subjective, historical, psychological, anthropological, sociological investigators have studied manners using different methods and with different foci, but they agree on the central point that

manners, etiquette, and civility are related to each other and are essential to societal function and the security it provides to individuals as they negotiate (an increasingly complex) social and technologically driven, landscape. Awkwardness, isolation, social discomfort do not disappear even in well integrated and healthy societies, but the strains placed on individuals in conditions of rapid change in which meaning is fragmented and the boundaries of behavior unclear, is a threat to the bases of human interaction as part of secure social groups. Etiquette, so often taken for granted, has been part of the glue that holds all social groups together. “Minding our manners” is really important.

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