



Millennials are clueless about cellphone etiquette

By [Catey Hill](#)

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Paramount/courtesy Everett Collection

Stacey Dash, Alicia Silverstone, and Brittany Murphy in the movie "Clueless."

Americans — particularly younger ones — don't know how to respectfully use a cellphone.

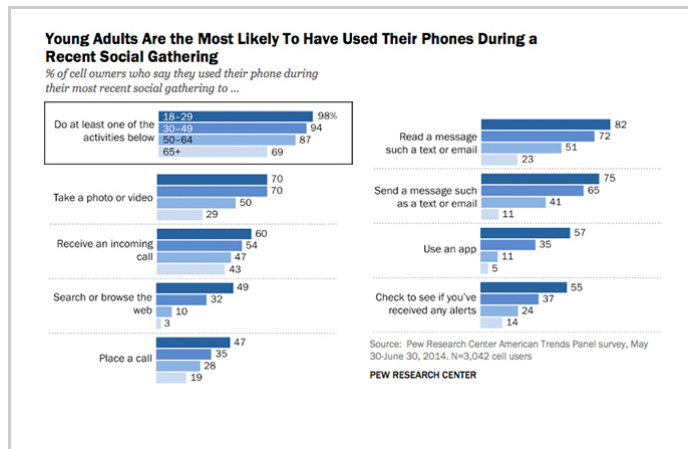
Nearly nine in 10 American cellphone users say they used their cellphone during their most recent social gathering, according to a survey of more than 3,000 adults released Wednesday by the Pew Research Center — and this is something that etiquette experts say, with some exceptions, is a big no-no.

"When you're with people, try to refrain from using your cellphone at all," says Jacqueline Whitmore, the founder of [The Protocol School of Palm Beach](#). "It's important to put people first, cellphones second."

Or, as Pamela Eyring, the president of The Protocol School of Washington, succinctly puts it: "Just put it away."

But that, we do not do. More than six in 10 cellphone users read text messages or emails at their most recent social gatherings, and more than half sent emails or texts and take calls. What’s more, one-third placed a call, the survey revealed.

When you look at how these behaviors break out by age, you’ll see that younger generations are far more likely to use their phones during social gatherings than older ones.



What’s more, millennials (at least those in the 18 to 29 age range) are far more likely than older people to use their cellphones to avoid or disengage from the group they’re with -- a move etiquette experts agree is particularly rude. (Though, to be fair, they are also more likely to do pro-social things with their phones, like taking photos of the group they’re with and posting them, at social gatherings, as well).

Table: Millennials the most likely to use cellphone to avoid the people they’re with

Reasons for using your cellphone in a social setting, by age

18-2930-4950-6465+

No longer interested in what the group was doing26%17%11%6%

Wanted to connect with people who were strangers to the group27%15%9%8%

Wanted to avoid participating in what the group was discussing21%9%4%3%

Source: Pew Research Center; data among people who said they used a cellphone in a recent social setting

The Pew survey isn’t the only one to document our sometimes-abhorrent cellphone behavior. An AARP survey of more than 1,000 adults ages 18 and up found that six in 10 Americans answer their phones in restaurants and half do it in store checkout lines or on public transportation. Even worse: About one in nine say they answer their phones in movie theaters.

What’s more, we see bad cellphone behavior frequently: An ABC News “20/20” survey found that roughly three in four Americans say they at least sometimes see people using their cellphones or sending emails mid-conversation and more than one in three Americans say they see this behavior often. And nearly six in 10 Americans say they often see people in public making annoying cellphone calls.

To be sure, there are some uses of your cellphone that are fine in social situations, experts say. Most agree that it’s fine to take a photo of the group you’re with, or to text or email another person who will be joining your group about

logistics of the meet-up.

Also, if you know you're expecting an important phone call (and do make sure it's actually important) or text, it's okay to have your phone out as long as you let the group know what you're doing, says Eyring. However, if it's a call you then have to take, you should leave the table to take it.

It's also generally okay to use your cellphone at a crowded party, within reason. "Your phone won't be noticed at a gathering where there's noise, music and people standing, dancing and walking around, explains advice columnist [April Masini](#). "It's not as inappropriate to have your cellphone at hand if you need it to catch something important, but that doesn't mean you should walk around talking on the phone -- if you have a call you have to make or take, go outside so you have quiet, you're not shouting, and you're not a telephonic eyesore."

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