

# Cellphones can damage romantic relationships, lead to depression

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Research from Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business confirms that cellphones are damaging romantic relationships and leading to higher levels of depression.

James A. Roberts, Ph.D., The Ben H. Williams Professor of Marketing, and Meredith David, Ph.D., assistant professor of marketing, published their study - "My life has become a major distraction from my cell phone: Partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction among [romantic partners](#)" - in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*.

For their study, the researchers conducted two separate surveys, accounting for a total of 453 adults in the U.S., to learn the relational effects of "Pphubbing" - or "partner phone snubbing." Pphubbing is described in the study as the extent to which people use or are distracted by their cellphones while in the company of their relationship partners.

"What we discovered was that when someone perceived that their partner phubbed them, this created conflict and led to lower levels of reported relationship satisfaction," Roberts explained. "These lower levels of relationship satisfaction, in turn, led to lower levels of [life satisfaction](#) and, ultimately, [higher levels](#) of depression."

The first survey of 308 adults helped Roberts and David develop a "Partner Phubbing Scale," a nine-item scale of common smartphone behaviors that respondents identified as snubbing behaviors.

**The resulting scale includes statements such as:**

- My partner places his or her cellphone where they can see it when we are together.
- My partner keeps his or her cellphone in their hand when he or she is with me.
- My partner glances at his/her cellphone when talking to me.
- If there is a lull in our conversation, my partner will check his or her cellphone.

The development of the scale is significant, the study states, because it demonstrates that "Pphubbing is conceptually and empirically different from attitude toward cellphones, partner's cellphone involvement, cellphone conflict, and cellphone addiction."

The second survey of 145 adults measured Pphubbing among romantic couples. This was done, in part, by asking those surveyed to respond to the nine-item scale developed in the first survey.

Other areas of measurement in the second survey included cellphone conflict, relationship satisfaction, life satisfaction, depression and interpersonal attachment style (e.g., "anxious attachment" describes people who are less secure in their relationship).

**Results of the survey showed that:**

- 46.3 percent of the respondents reported being phubbed by their [partner](#)
- 22.6 percent said this phubbing caused conflict in their relationships
- 36.6 percent reported feeling depressed at least some of the time

Overall, only 32 percent of respondents stated that they were very

satisfied with their relationship, the study shows.

"In everyday interactions with significant others, people often assume that momentary distractions by their cell phones are not a big deal," David said. "However, our findings suggest that the more often a couple's time spent together is interrupted by one individual attending to his/her cellphone, the less likely it is that the other individual is satisfied in the overall relationship.

"Specifically, momentary distractions by one's cellphone during time spent with a significant other likely lowers the significant other's satisfaction with their relationship, and could lead to enhanced feelings of depression and lower well-being of that individual. Thus, when spending time with one's significant other, we encourage individuals to be cognizant of the interruptions caused by their cellphones, as these may well be harmful to their relationship."

Roberts explained that those with anxious attachment styles (less secure in their relationship) were more bothered (reported higher levels of cellphone conflict) than those with more secure attachment styles (more secure in their relationship). In addition, lower levels of [relationship satisfaction](#) - stemming, in part, from being Pphubbed - led to decreased life satisfaction that, in turn, led to higher levels of depression.

Given the ever-increasing use of smartphones to communicate between romantic partners, the study helps to understand how the use of smartphones can impact not only satisfaction with romantic relationships, but also personal well-being, Roberts said.

"When you think about the results, they are astounding," Roberts said. "Something as common as [cellphone](#) use can undermine the bedrock of our happiness - our relationships with our romantic partners."

In addition to its journal publication, this research provided foundational material for three chapters in Roberts' new book, "Too Much of a Good Thing: Are You Addicted to Your Smartphone?"

**More information:** [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ...  
ii/S0747563215300704](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S0747563215300704)

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