

# Phubbing is a Sign You Might Have a Problem

We have all been there. We've been slighted by the person we are speaking with as they reach for their smartphone to check a social media notification. This practice of snubbing is so common that in 2012, the Macquarie Dictionary helped to [create the new word "phubbing"](#) (a combination of phone and snubbing) to describe this problematic behavior.

Smartphone users are not just phubbing casual acquaintances; they are phubbing significant others. The consequences are not surprising—lower marital satisfaction and depression according to a [study](#) by Meredith David and James Roberts humorously titled, "My life has become a major distraction from my cell phone."

[Another study](#) by Varoth Chotpitayasunondh and Karen M. Douglas found that phubbing is increasingly accepted as normal behavior, despite the consequences to our relationships.

Still another study found that the urge to check social media is now [stronger than the urge for sex](#).

Sean Parker, the first CEO of Facebook, now considers himself a "conscientious objector" regarding the use of social media. In a recent interview, [his observations](#) about social media explain why we behave so rudely. Facebook, he relates, was designed with the intention of consuming "as much of your time and conscious attention as possible."

To keep your attention, Parker revealed, "we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that's going to get you to contribute more content, and that's going to get you ... more likes and comments."

You are willing to phub because the dopamine rush (a neurochemical known as [the “reward molecule”](#)) seems worth it. The dopamine released from exercise, from completing a job well done, or from a warm conversation, might last all day. The dopamine released from receiving a Facebook like lasts minutes, and for some that’s a problem. As soon as you receive one hit; you are reaching for your phone to receive another.

If you own an iPhone, you’re reaching for your phone an average of [80 times a day](#). A smartphone is an extraordinarily useful gadget; but Nicholas Carr, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, has a [sharp question to explore](#): “So what happens to our minds when we allow a single tool such dominion over our perception and cognition?”

Carr, the author of [The Shallows](#) and other books on technology, surveys the scientific literature and reports on findings. What he finds is alarming. “Not only do our phones shape our thoughts in deep and complicated ways, but the effects persist even when we aren’t using the devices,” he reports. “As the brain grows dependent on the technology, the research suggests, the intellect weakens.”

Reporting on research by Adrian Ward, a cognitive psychologist, Carr writes that even hearing a smartphone “ring or vibrate, produces a welter of distractions that makes it harder to concentrate on a difficult problem or job.” Presumably desktop notifications on our computer produce the same effect.

Our phones are impacting our health, too. Carr found evidence in a 2015 study “that when people hear their phone ring but are unable to answer it, their blood pressure spikes, their pulse quickens, and their problem-solving skills decline.”

Another study found useable intelligence is impaired by the location one’s smart phone. In an experiment with undergraduate students at the University of California, the

location of their smart phones impacted how well students could focus and how well they could “interpret and solve an unfamiliar problem.” Students whose phones were left in another room were the best problem solvers. Even those whose phone was in their bag or backpack experienced impaired intelligence. Not surprisingly, useable intelligence diminished most for students whose phone was in view (but unused).

Yet, Carr writes, “nearly all the participants said that their phones hadn’t been a distraction—that they hadn’t even thought about the devices during the experiment. They remained oblivious even as the phones disrupted their focus and thinking.” Curiously, we are unaware of the impact of our phones.

Carr has a succinct explanation for why our relationships suffer when we phub: “Smartphones serve as constant reminders of all the friends we could be chatting with electronically, they pull at our minds when we’re talking with people in person, leaving our conversations shallower and less satisfying.”

I recently delivered a happiness workshop. A participant shared how Facebook was crimping her love of photography. Each time she framed a shot, there was background noise in her head as she wondering how many likes she would get on Facebook if she posted the photo. Few in the room didn’t recognize the thought process she described. In a sense, she was phubbing herself.

As we anticipate the next dopamine rush, is the present moment we are living less important to us? Are we phubbing our lives away?