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| 1. Annotate the article with at least five notes that show evidence of understanding and thinking. |

**How Your Cell Phone Hurts Your Relationships**

*The mere presence of a phone affects how you relate to others.*

By Helen Lee Lin, *Scientific American,* September 4, 2013

Most of us are no stranger to this scenario:  A group of friends sits down to a meal together, laughing, swapping stories, and catching up on the news – but not necessarily with the people in front of them!  Nowadays, it’s not unusual to have one’s phone handy on the table, easily within reach for looking up movie times, checking e-mails, showing off photos, or taking a call or two.  It’s a rare person who doesn’t give in to a quick glance at the phone every now and then.  Today’s multifunctional phones have become an indispensable lifeline to the rest of the world.

We might expect that the widespread availability of mobile phones boosts interpersonal connections, by allowing people to stay in touch constantly.  But a recent set of studies by Andrew K. Przybylski and Netta Weinstein of the University of Essex showed that our phones can hurt our close relationships. Amazingly, they found that simply having a phone nearby, without even checking it, can be detrimental to our attempts at interpersonal connection.

Przybylski and Weinstein asked pairs of strangers to discuss a moderately intimate topic (an interesting event that had occurred to them within the last month) for 10 minutes.  The strangers left their own belongings in a waiting area and proceeded to a private booth.  Within the booth, they found two chairs facing each other and, a few feet away, out of their direct line of vision, there was a desk that held a book and one other item.  Unbeknownst to the pair, the key difference in their interactions would be the second item on the desk.  Some pairs engaged in their discussion with a nondescript cell phone nearby, whereas other pairs conversed while a pocket notebook lay nearby.  After they finished the discussion, each of the strangers completed questionnaires about the relationship quality (connectedness) and feelings of closeness they had experienced.  The pairs who chatted in the presence of the cell phone reported lower relationship quality and less closeness.

Przybylski and Weinstein followed up with a new experiment to see, in which contexts, the presence of a cell phone matters the most.  This time, each pair of strangers was assigned a casual topic (their thoughts and feelings about plastic trees) or a meaningful topic (the most important events of the past year) to discuss — again, either with a cell phone or a notebook nearby.  After their 10-minute discussion, the strangers answered questions about relationship quality, their feelings of trust, and the empathy they had felt from their discussion partners.

The presence of the cell phone had no effect on relationship quality, trust, and empathy, but only if the pair discussed the casual topic.  In contrast, there were significant differences if the topic was meaningful. The pairs who conversed with a cell phone in the vicinity reported that their relationship quality was worse.  The pairs also reported feeling less trust and thought that their partners showed less empathy if there was a cell phone present.

Thus, interacting in a neutral environment, without a cell phone nearby, seems to help foster closeness, connectedness, interpersonal trust, and perceptions of empathy — the building-blocks of relationships. Past studies have suggested that because of the many social, instrumental, and entertainment options phones afford us, they often divert our attention from our current environment, whether we are speeding down a highway or sitting through a meeting.  The new research suggests that cell phones may serve as a reminder of the wider network to which we could connect, inhibiting our ability to connect with the people right next to us.  Cell phone usage may even reduce our social consciousness.

Perhaps it would be going too far to prepare for important conversations by throwing your cell phone into the closet, or leaving it in the car on first dates. But if you are spending the day with people you really care about, you might want to reconsider the next time you reach for your phone to reply to a text message or check sports scores.  Just having that phone nearby is bad enough.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What new information did you learn from this article?
2. What ideas did you like in the article?
3. What ideas did you dislike in the article?
4. What is your overall reaction to the article?