

Can cell phones make you feel less connected to your friends and family?

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Kent State University researchers study whether cell phone use makes us feel closer to our friends and family members. Credit: Kent State University

In this digital age, with phones at our finger tips, you would think that access to constant communication would make us feel closer to one

another. But a new study by researchers at Kent State University shows that may not be the case. In fact, cell phone use might actually lead to feeling less socially connected, depending on your gender or cell phone habits.

Three researchers, Andrew Lepp, Ph.D., Jacob Barkley, Ph.D., and Jian Li, Ph.D., from Kent State's College of Education, Health and Human Services surveyed 493 [students](#), ranging in age from 18-29, to see whether cell phone use, including texting and talking, was associated with feeling socially connected to their parents and peers. The results show a significant difference between men and women.

Female students reported spending an average of 365 minutes per day using their cell phones, sending and receiving an average of 265 texts per day, and making and receiving six calls per day.

Male students reported spending less time on their phone (287 minutes), sending and receiving fewer texts (190), and making and receiving the same amount of calls as the female students.

For the women, the study found that talking on the phone was associated with feeling emotionally close with their parents. However, when it came to relationships with friends, texting was associated with feeling emotionally close.

For the men, the opposite holds true - daily calling and texting were not related in any way to feelings of emotional closeness with either parents or with peers.

Researchers also looked at problematic use, which is a recurrent craving to use a cell phone during inappropriate times - such as driving a car, or at night when you should be sleeping. For both the men and women, the study found that problematic cell phone use was negatively related to

feelings of [emotional closeness](#) with parents and peers.

"In other words, the students in the study who tended to use their cell phones compulsively and at inappropriate times felt less socially connected to [parents](#) and peers than other students," Lepp said.

According to Lepp, the study suggests that the phone may have more social value for women compared to men, and women may be better at using it to augment or complement existing social relationships.

As for problematic use, Lepp says given the [cell phone](#)'s many other functions, communicating with one another may no longer be the phone's central purpose, which could be replacing more meaningful forms of relationship building, such as face-to-face communications for both genders.

More information: Andrew Lepp et al, College students' cell phone use and attachment to parents and peers, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2016.07.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.07.021)

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