



Is Anything Wrong With This Picture?

Our favorite devices could be making us rude.

BY LAUREN TARSHIS AND KRISTIN LEWIS

COMPOSITE BY TOM GARRETT. PHOTOS: RUSLAN DASHINSKY/E+/GETTY IMAGES (GIRL 2); SHUTTERSTOCK (BOY 1, BOY 2); FOTOLIA (ALL OTHER PHOTOS)

AS YOU READ

Think about how manners have changed and stayed the same throughout history.

America is on the brink of disaster. No, it doesn't have anything to do with the economy or climate change or the fact that *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* was renewed for a 13th season. The problem is that Americans have become extremely—even horrifyingly—rude.

The evidence is everywhere, from the guy gabbing on his phone in the middle of *Star Wars* to your best friend Snapchatting her way through your birthday party. And while obnoxious behavior is nothing new, 74 percent of American adults think that people are getting ruder.*

What is going on?

Rules of Behavior

Manners are a set of rules for how people treat each other and behave in social situations, and they have been around since the dawn of time. Rules of **etiquette** were first written down nearly 4,500 years ago and included such kernels of wisdom as “don't spit on people.” In 13th-century England, good manners meant never riding your horse inside the house or bringing sharp knives to dinner. In 16th-century Holland, if you passed gas, it was polite to cover the

sound with a cough. In colonial America, well-mannered people never warmed their feet by the fireplace, especially when food was being cooked there.

Over the centuries, what is considered socially correct has evolved, but the basic function of manners has remained the same. According to Alex J. Packer, author of *How Rude!*, an etiquette guide for teens, “Good manners make other people feel good—they put people at ease.”

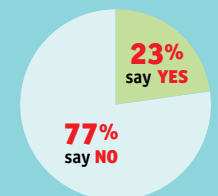
In other words, manners serve to make the world a happier and more pleasant place to live.

Phones in the Bathroom

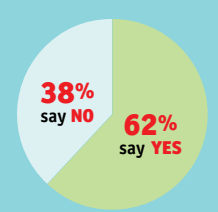
But these days, it seems our society may have lost its way—

IS IT RUDE TO:

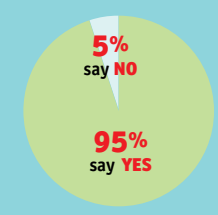
text and walk down the street?



check your phone while out to eat?



text during a movie in a theater?



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

especially when it comes to our phones. We take them into bathroom stalls. We don't bother to take out our earbuds in the checkout line. We post unflattering photos of our friends to Instagram because *we* look good in them.

Poor phone etiquette can even be dangerous. Consider the distracted pedestrian playing *Candy Crush* on her phone as she steps off the curb in front of a cyclist, who then swerves into a mail truck, which then crashes into a telephone pole. Such behavior can

land people in the hospital—or worse. In 2014, more than 2,500 pedestrians ended up in the emergency room as a result of using their phones.



Etiquette Rules for Kids Through the Ages



NETHERLANDS, 1530

- Do not serve yourself food unless invited to by adults.
- Do not lick your plate like a cat.
- Do not say anything about a person that you wouldn't say to his or her face.

ERASMUS, A HANDBOOK ON GOOD MANNERS FOR CHILDREN



*APRIL 2016 SURVEY BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS AND THE NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

Of course, most rudeness does not end in a trip to the hospital. But the tremendous number of phone-related injuries is powerful evidence of what can happen when we fail to be **considerate** of others.

Who Cares?

Aside from when we're out in traffic, though, are good manners really a big deal?

Consider the serious problems the world faces—war, poverty, and disease, just to name a few. You probably have a lot in your own life to worry about too, such as school, sports, and friends and family. Does it really matter if you have a loud phone conversation on the bus? You're busy, and sometimes you need to talk to someone right away.

Besides, our society has become more casual. We send texts instead of handwritten letters. We say "no problem" instead of "you're welcome." It's not that people don't care about each other; it's just that our standards of **conduct** are less formal than they used to be.

It may also be that some ideas about politeness from the past just don't translate to the present. Twenty years ago, it would have been considered vulgar to pull out a book and start reading at the dinner table. Does that mean that today it's tasteless to check your phone during a meal?

Maybe those who are offended by someone texting at the table are stuck in the past, applying old-fashioned standards to a society in which those standards no longer make sense. On the other hand, maybe everyone else has gotten used to being treated with disrespect.

Is it time to start expecting more from each other?

What Really Matters

The fact is, most people are not deliberately **uncivil**—they're just **oblivious**. That girl at the mall doesn't realize her earbuds are emitting an earsplitting whine; she is just grooving to Zendaya. That kid whose phone buzzes during your piano recital doesn't mean to

disturb everyone around him; he just forgot to switch off his phone.

Ultimately, manners are about being aware of those around you and how your behavior affects their experience in the world. Hopefully, the desire to *not* drive other people crazy is reason enough to be **conscientious**.

But if you're looking for another **incentive**, consider this: Good manners—whether **refraining** from taking a selfie in the middle of a play or simply remembering to say "please" and "thank you"—can put you ahead in life. Studies show that teens with good manners are more likely to be successful: They get higher grades, are more impressive in job interviews, and are more likely to get the jobs they want.

So go ahead and be the one who holds the door for others, who gives up a seat for an elderly person, who doesn't bring a phone to the dinner table.

Go ahead and make the world a happier, safer, and more peaceful place. ●

Informational Text



How the Telephone Made America Rude

A century ago, experts feared that a dazzling new invention was turning Americans into a bunch of animals.

The telephone was invented in the 1870s, and by the 1940s, most Americans had one in their homes. For the first time, you could talk to loved ones in real time whether they were around the corner or halfway around the world.

At the same time, many believed that the telephone was ruining America's good manners. (The worst offense? Inviting a person to a party over the phone rather than through written invitation.) Many etiquette guides were written to instruct people on how to behave properly with their new phones.

Telephone comes from the Greek words "far" and "sound."

Phone Rules From the Past

Not so long ago, etiquette guides told people how to be polite on the telephone. Here are some of our favorite rules.



- 1 If the person you are calling does not answer right away, let the telephone ring for at least a minute. He or she may be in another part of the house or outdoors.
- 2 Never answer the phone with "hello." Instead, introduce yourself first and then ask who is speaking. For example: "This is Mrs. Smith, with whom am I speaking?"
- 3 Never shout. Speak as if the person were in the same room.
- 4 Remember that when you telephone, the other person cannot see you: He or she judges you by your voice.
- 5 Men, keep your beards and mustaches out of the mouthpiece.

SOURCES: BELL TELEPHONE SYSTEM, 1920 AND 1951; SAN RAFAEL, CA, TELEPHONE DIRECTORY, 1884.

- **ENGLAND, 1701**
- Do not talk about what happened at school.
 - Do not read books in front of others.
 - Show respect to adults by walking just behind them, even at home.

THE SCHOOL OF MANNERS

- 
- **COLONIAL AMERICA, 1745**
- Do not show anything to your friends that will frighten them.
 - Never hum to yourself unless you are alone.
 - If someone flicks a louse, flea, or tick off you, always say thank you.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, RULES OF CIVILITY AND DECENT BEHAVIOUR IN COMPANY AND CONVERSATION

- **UNITED STATES, 1888**
- Fold your hands in your lap.
 - When you hand a book to someone, always hand it right-side up.
 - Never eat at school.

HOW TO TEACH MANNERS IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM



WRITING CONTEST

Create your own etiquette guide for smartphone use today. Use information in both texts to help you create your rules. Your guide can be in the form of a list, an essay, a poster, a slide show, or a video. Send it to **PHONE MANNERS GUIDE**. Five winners will each receive *Echo* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. See page 2 for details.

GET THIS ACTIVITY ONLINE

