

# Cell Phones Permeate Personal Moments

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Sixteen percent of those surveyed admitted to answering their cells while engaging in physical relations.

One of Windows Mobile's slogans is "Do more of what you want to do — on the go," but no one at [Microsoft](#) likely imagined users would do exactly that: use the phone while on the toilet, during a funeral or even in the midst of "extremely intimate moments."

Microsoft Australia polled more than 2,500 mobile users in [Australia](#), [China](#), India, Japan and [Taiwan](#) and found many of them say they use their cell phones during instances most consider private and off-limits to such intrusions. (Msnbc.com is a joint venture of Microsoft and NBC Universal.)

In Australia, 48 percent said they use their phones "while using the loo," the company said, and in Taiwan and China, the numbers were even higher, 68 and 66 percent, respectively.

Overall, 6 percent of all respondents said they have taken a call on their phones during a funeral, 10 percent have done so "inside a place of worship" and 16 percent admit to answering their cells while

engaging in physical relations. The physics of the latter is almost as unimaginable as the behavior itself.

Microsoft played it pretty straight in a press release about the survey, which was recently released:

“Other than showing some of the more unconventional uses of phones, these results show how entrenched in all aspects of our lives mobile phone have become,” said Grace Kerrison, Microsoft Australia’s director of mobile communications business.

“Entrenched” is one word. “Addicted” is another. “Oblivious to others” is three words, but also fits. The kind of mobile behaviors described in the survey are not foreign to many of us in the United States, particularly the “loo” episodes.

### **That voice from the stall**

Go into any department store or restaurant restroom, and chances are you’ll hear snippets of conversation from a stall: “Did you see the look on his face when she said&hellip” or, “Yes, I’m calling to see if you have the Wii in stock?”

“Many people have lost sense of what’s appropriate behavior,” said [Rachel Weingarten](#), author of “Career and Corporate Cool,” and a business etiquette expert.

“As cell phones bend the boundaries of personal and public space, people literally take their lives with them and can frequently forget what’s appropriate and what’s incredibly inconsiderate, if not outright bizarre,” she said.

Weingarten, of Brooklyn, said she often hears people “making long phone calls from the public restrooms at Barnes & Noble,” for example.

Once she was on the receiving end of such a call from a business associate.

“I heard the tell-tale tinkling sounds and I said, ‘I think you need both hands for the task at hand, please call me back when you’re free to talk,’ and promptly hung up.

“I figured if this person was so incredibly inappropriate, I didn’t have to worry about appearing rude by hanging up.”

One woman, from Huntsville, Ala., is not proud she engages in such behavior, but admits to it and agreed to an e-mail interview. (“You won’t use our real names, right?” she said. “Please don’t. My mother would cry.”)

So, what follows may be in the category of “TMI” (“too much information”), and consider yourself warned.

“I usually hold it until I’m done talking if it’s not someone I’m really close to,” she said. “Otherwise, I’m straightforward. ‘Hey, I’m in the bathroom at Target,’ or ‘I’m in the dressing room at Dillard’s,’ or whatever. I do try to limit my bathroom (conversations) to close friends, generally. Or else I just text. I text in the potty a lot.”

### 'As natural as breathing'

She's not alone, and experts know it. There's a definite segment of society for whom being on the phone any time — and anywhere — is the norm.

“It's almost like the phone has become part of your person,” said Noah Arceneaux, a San Diego State University assistant professor of media studies whose specialty is the relationship between technology and culture.

“For these people, talking on the phone is not an unusual act — it's as natural as breathing,” he said. “I'm sure that they don't think that it's inappropriate to use the phone in certain situations, like in the bathroom or in church.”

In the Microsoft survey, 36 percent of respondents said they have taken calls during a wedding ceremony, 29 percent during business meetings and 27 percent while inside a library.

Michal Ann Strahilevitz, professor of marketing and consumer behavior at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, said she's familiar with the sight of library violators talking, and “talking loudly.”

“No one is doing this to be annoying,” she said. “We are junkies. The cell phone is there. Plans have gotten cheaper. More people than ever before have unlimited texting and calls.”

### Stress fueled by technology

[Debbie Mandel](#), a stress management specialist, believes behaviors tied to using a cell phone, no matter when or what the occasion, happen because human beings are “addicted to stress, which is fueled by technology.”

“We need to stay connected, to be on, because we think that we are so important — necessary to perform — and we would miss out” by not taking that one call, no matter if it comes during what would otherwise be an inappropriate interruption, said [Mandel](#).

Weingarten, the business etiquette expert, isn't as interested in the sociological explanation of such bad behavior. She just wants it to stop.

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When she hung up on the business contact that was in the restroom calling her, “I knew clearly that I was taking a chance on losing an account,” she said.

“While there are so many movies showing the requisite two men bonding over business while at the urinals, in day-to-day business it's completely unacceptable and something that even in this economy I won't put up with.”

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