What’s the Disconnect? Exploring Gender Differences in the Effects of Phubbing

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Mobile devices, which are typically used to facilitate communication and social interaction, often do just the opposite. The term “phubbing” is used to describe the act of snubbing someone by paying attention to a digital device, thus disrupting social interaction. No studies, to our knowledge, experimentally manipulate phubbing during face-to-face interaction in a controlled lab setting, and there is limited research on the relationship between being phubbed and gender outside of relationship satisfaction surveys (cite, year). The present study aims to address this gap by exploring the initial effectiveness of an experimental manipulation of phubbing during a joint problem-solving task and examine gender differences. A college-aged sample (N=83; 53 females; Mage = 20, SD = 4.25) was partnered with same-age confederates to complete a timed anagrams task with or without interruption from the confederate’s mobile device, mimicking realistic intrusions in everyday life of college students. Mood (happy, sad, anxious) and affect (positive, negative) were rated before and after the task. Anxiety related attention bias was assessed using the dot probe before and after the task. Happiness ratings dropped in the phubbing condition from pre- to post-task and did not change in the control condition. In the phubbing condition, negative affect increased in females from pre- to post-task and did not change in males. High trait anxious males had greater threat bias and difficulty disengaging from threatening stimuli after being phubbed than high anxious females. Results suggest phubbing negatively impacts mood, affect, and anxiety related attention bias with notable differences between genders.