<u>ABC NEWS POLL: MINDING YOUR MANNERS – 5/99</u> EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE AFTER 6:30 p.m. Monday, May 17, 1999

Declining Manners: Four in 10 Say: *#)^%!

Manners, it seems, aren't what they used to be: More than one in three Americans say someone's made an obscene gesture at them while driving recently, and more than four in 10 concede that they personally have cursed in public in the last few months.

No wonder, then, that the overwhelming majority in an ABC News/World News Tonight poll, 73 percent, say most people's manners are worse today than 20 or 30 years ago.

Do people mind? For sure:

-A smashing 85 percent say the world would be a better place if people just said "please" and "thank you" more often.

-Most, 54 percent, call for self-restraint to the point of hiding your true thoughts if it would be unmannerly to express them. (Forty percent say it's "better for people to express what they really think, even if it's bad manners to do so.")

-And a surprisingly high number, 43 percent, say it's worth placing limits on freedom of speech in order to enforce good manners. (Fifty percent say freedom of expression is more important, even if it means tolerating bad manners.)

This is not to say manners currently are the pits. For one thing, people may be recalling the past through the rose-colored haze of nostalgia. And even today, 82 percent say most people they encounter have good manners. (Only 23 percent, however, say those are "very" good manners.)

BLAME - To the extent that manners have worsened, what's to blame? Bad examples on television and in movies are broadly cited, as is stress in today's society. But inadequate parenting is the biggest concern by far: More than eight in 10 Americans say the failure of parents to instruct their children in good behavior is a "major cause" of bad manners.

The schools, meanwhile, get the best grade: Less than half the public, 45 percent, blames bad manners on a failure by the schools to teach proper behavior – anywhere from 21 to 39 points fewer than the number who blame stress, TV and movies, or parents.

"Major Source" of Bad Manners Parenting 84% Television/movies 69

Stress	66
Schools	45

Interestingly, adults with children in their households are as likely as those without to say that bad parenting is a major cause of bad manners.

CHILDREN'S TV - In another expression of concern, 57 percent think most of the television programs children watch encourage them to be less respectful of others; only 15 percent think most children's programs encourage respect.

ACTIONS – Behavior speaks louder than words, and this poll finds something of a mixed result in several measures of manners. On the bright side, fully 93 percent of Americans say that in the last few months they've held a door open for someone they didn't know.

Just 11 percent say they've made an obscene gesture at another driver, and 19 percent say they've gotten impatient with someone in public and spoken rudely to them. Still, that's one in 10 and one in five people, respectively – enough to account for a whole lot of rude gestures and words.

The unmannerly tally goes higher: Thirty-five percent say that in the last few months someone has flashed an obscene gesture at them while driving. And 42 percent admit to having uttered a swear word in public recently.

THE EFFECT OF AGE – Older people have better manners, are care more about them; it's an open question whether younger adults will mellow, too, as they mature. This poll finds that people age 65 and up are four times less likely than the youngest group (age 18 to 34) to have sworn in public lately. And no older folks report having made an obscene gesture while driving, compared to one in five of the youngest.

These divisions continue beyond behavior and into attitudes: Older people are much more likely than young adults to say that minding your manners is more important than saying what you really think. Younger people, for their part, put much more stock in preserving freedom of expression than in enforcing good manners.

	Age	
	18-34	65+
Swore in public recently	62%	15
Gestured obscenely while driving	21	0
Encounter good manners		
among most people	75	90
Believe good manners are more		
important than saying what you think	47	64
Think TV encourages disrespect		
among children	41	67
Think free expression is more important		
than enforcing good manners	60	38

OTHER GROUPS – There are some divisions among the sexes, as well. Most men (55 percent) think freedom of expression is more important than enforcing good manners; women aren't so sure (46 percent agree). And more men (48 percent) have sworn in public lately; fewer women (37 percent) have cussed.

There's one surprising regional difference, as well: Midwesterners, renowned for their mild manners, in fact have the nation's highest rate of swearing in public, narrowly edging out Westerners. It's Southerners who're most apt to keep a civil tongue.

METHODOLOGY - This poll was conducted by telephone May 5-9, 1999, among a random national sample of 1,010 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

News and research organizations wishing to receive ABC News polls via e-mail should send a request to Ben.X.Fitzpatrick@ABC.com.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at: http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html

Full results follow:

1. Would you say that most of the people you encounter have good manners or bad manners? (GET ANSWER, THEN ASK: Is that Very/somewhat good/bad manners?)

	Good Manners			Bad Manners			No
	NET	Very	Smewhat	NET	Very	Smewhat	opin.
5/9/99	82	23	59	16	3	13	2

2. Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, do you think most people's manners are better today, worse, or about the same?

	Better	Worse	About the same	No opin.
5/9/99	5	73	19	3

3. For each item I name, please tell me if you think it's a major or a minor source of bad manners in this country.

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		Major Source	Minor Source	Not a source (vol.)	No opin.
a.	Stress in today's				
	society	66	29	2	2
b.	Parents not teaching				
	manners well enough	84	14	1	1
с.	The schools not teaching				
	manners well enough	45	48	4	3
d.	Television and the movies	3			
	setting a bad example	69	27	2	2

4. Do you think it's better for people to have good manners, even if it means hiding what they really think; or better for people to express what they really think, even if it's bad manners to do so?

	Better to have	Better to express what	No
	good manners	they really think	opin.
5/9/99	54	40	6

5. Thinking specifically about children, do you think most of the television programs they watch encourage them to be more respectful of others, less respectful, or do children's TV programs have no real effect on their respect for others?

	More	Less	No real	No
	respectful	respectful	effect	opin.
5/9/99	15	57	20	8

6. Which of these do you think is more important to society: Allowing people freedom of expression, even if it means tolerating bad manners; or enforcing good manners, even if it means limiting freedom of expression?

	Free expression/	Enforcing good manners/	No
	tolerate bad manners	limit expression	opin.
5/9/99	50	43	6

7. If people said "please" and "thank you" more often, do you think the world would be a better place, or wouldn't it make that much difference?

	Better	Would not make	No
	Place	a difference	opin.
5/9/99	85	14	1

8. For each item I name, please tell me if that's something you've done in the last few months, or not. This is confidential and for statistical purposes only:

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07			Yes	No	No opin	
a.	Held a door open for					
	someone you didn't know		93	7	0	
	Used a swear-word in public		42	57	*	
с.	Gotten impatient with someone in					
	public and spoken rudely to them		19	81	*	
d	Made an obscene gesture at	es	No	- • • •	t drive vol.)	No opin.
u.	another person while driving a car	11	87		1	*

9. In the last few months has another driver made an obscene gesture at you, or not?

			Don't drive	No
	Yes	No	(vol.)	opin.
5/9/99	35	62	2	1

END