

Facebook or MySpace, youths' use reflect face-to-face interactions

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Though parents often have concerns about letting their teens use social media Web sites like Facebook and MySpace, a new study by University of Virginia psychologists suggests that well-adapted youth with positive friendships will use these sites to further enhance the positive relationships they already have.

However, they warn, teens who have behavioral problems and difficulty making friends, or who are depressed, may be more inclined to use [social media](#) in negative and sometimes aggressive ways, or not to use such sites at all.

The study appears in the January issue of the journal [Developmental Psychology](#).

"We were interested to find that the best-adjusted young people were far more likely to use social media as an extension of their positive [friendships](#), while less socially adept youth either did not have [Facebook](#) or MySpace pages, or, if they did, were more likely to use these sites in less-than-positive ways," said U.Va. psychology professor Amori Yee Mikami, the study's lead author.

Mikami and her colleagues assessed the friendship quality and popularity of 172 13- to 14-year-olds, and then, eight years later, "friended" the study participants on their Facebook and MySpace pages to examine their interactions and friendship quality in those domains.

"It was like being a fly on the wall at a slumber party," Mikami said.

She found that the youths who were better adjusted in their early teens were more likely to use social media in their early 20s, regardless of age, gender, [ethnicity](#) or parental income, and that, overall, the patterns of friendship quality and behavioral adjustment as early teens continued into early adulthood.

"We're finding that the interactions [young adults](#) are having on their Facebook and MySpace pages are more similar to than different from the interactions they have in their face-to-face relationships," Mikami said. "So parents of well-adjusted teens may have little to worry about regarding the way their children behave when using social media. It's likely to be similar positive behavior."

However, Mikami warns, [teens](#) with behavioral problems or who have difficulty maintaining positive friendships may be more likely to use social media sites in negative ways, just as they may behave negatively in their face-to-face relationships. Negative use of the sites would include using excessive profanity, making hostile remarks or aggressive gestures, or posting nude photographs of themselves or others. They also have fewer supportive relationships with their Facebook and MySpace friends. But this group also is less inclined to use social media at all.

Overall, 86 percent of the youths in Mikami's study used the social media Web sites, which parallels the national average, she said.

"Use of Facebook and MySpace is really pervasive among this age group, so it's understandable that young people would want to be connected with their peers in this way; it's an extension of the relationships they already share," Mikami said. "So parents should try to stay involved with their children and make an attempt to understand their online world in the same way they would want to understand any other

aspect of their lives.

"The key as a parent is to be supportive rather than intrusive and to keep an open dialogue with your children so you can know what they are up to and who their friends are, both online and in person."

Provided by University of Virginia

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