

Facebook makes us feel good about ourselves: study

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People love social networks. That's the obvious conclusion from Facebook's 900 million active users and its current standing as one of the most visited sites on the web, second only to Google. New research from the University of Georgia finds what people may really "like" about social networking are themselves.

"Despite the name 'social networks,' much user activity on networking sites is self-focused," said Brittany Gentile, a UGA [doctoral candidate](#) who looked at the effects of social networks on self-esteem and [narcissism](#).

According to the research, published online this month by the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*, the 526 million people who log on to [Facebook](#) every day may be boosting their self-esteem in the process.

Gentile, along with UGA [psychology professor](#) Keith Campbell and San Diego State University professor Jean Twenge, asked college students to either edit their [social networking](#) page on MySpace or Facebook or to use [Google Maps](#). Those who edited their MySpace page later scored higher on a measure of narcissism, while those who spent time on their Facebook page scored higher on self-esteem.

"Editing yourself and constructing yourself on these social networking sites, even for a short period of time, seems to have an effect on how you see yourself," said Campbell, who heads the department of psychology in the UGA Franklin College of Arts and Sciences and co-

authored the book "The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement." "They are feeling better about themselves in both cases. But in one they are tapping into narcissism and in the other into self-esteem."

MySpace reported 25 million users as of June 2012. MySpace users participated in the experiment in 2008, when the site had 115 million active users. Facebook users participated in 2011. On both MySpace and Facebook, students scoring higher in narcissism reported having more friends on the site.

A total of 151 students, ages 18-22, completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory as a part of the study.

"The NPI measures trait narcissism, which is a stable personality trait," Gentile said. "But spending 15 minutes editing a MySpace page and writing about its meaning was enough to alter self-reports of this trait, suggesting that social networking sites may be a significant influence on the development of personality and identity."

The differences in site format may be one reason why MySpace led to higher narcissism whereas Facebook merely produced higher self-esteem.

"The two sites operate differently," Gentile said. "On MySpace you don't really interact with other people. The pages resemble personal webpages, and a lot of people have become famous on MySpace, whereas Facebook has a standard profile and a company message that sharing will improve the world."

Several previous studies found increases over the generations in both self-esteem and narcissism. These new experiments suggest the increasing popularity of social [networking sites](#) may play a role in those trends.

"[Social networking sites](#) are a product and a cause of a society that is self-absorbed," Campbell said. "Narcissism and self-esteem began to rise in the 1980s. Because Facebook came on the scene only seven years ago, it wasn't the original cause of the increases. It may be just another enforcer."

Social networking should not be seen as an answer to building self-esteem, he said, but the fact that people may get a jolt when logging on doesn't mean they should stop either.

"Ideally, you get self-esteem from having strong relationships and achieving goals that are reasonable and age-appropriate," Campbell said. "Ideally, self-esteem is not something you should take a short cut to find. It is a consequence of a good life, not something you chase."

More information: For the full research article, see [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ... ii/S0747563212001409](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S0747563212001409)

Provided by University of Georgia

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