

# Facebook assures us we're good enough, smart enough

March 19 2013, by Susan Kelley

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(Medical Xpress)—Stirring an inner Stuart Smalley, Facebook profiles reassure our self-worth, because they offer a place where we can display the personal characteristics and relationships we value most, says a Cornell communication expert in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (March 2013).

And after receiving ego setbacks, users of [Facebook](#) unconsciously gravitate to their online profiles to boost their sense of self-esteem, says the report.

"The [conventional wisdom](#) is that Facebook use is merely a time sink and leads to an assortment of [negative consequences](#). But our research shows that it can be a psychologically meaningful activity that supplies a sense of well-being at a relatively deep level," says co-author Jeff Hancock, Cornell associate professor of communication. "The extraordinary amount of time people spend on Facebook may be a reflection of its ability to satisfy ego needs that are fundamental to the human condition."

The study, "Self-affirmation Underlies Facebook Use," was co-authored with Catalina Toma, Ph.D. '10, as part of her dissertation. She is now an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

The researchers asked 88 undergraduates to give a brief speech. While waiting for feedback, participants were allowed to look at their own Facebook profile or someone else's. After a few minutes they received

[negative feedback](#) about their speech, regardless of how they did, and were asked to rate how accurate the feedback was. Participants who looked at their own profile were less defensive about the negative feedback than those who looked at someone else's profile.

In a second experiment, students were given either negative or positive feedback about their speech. This time they were given the option of browsing their own Facebook profile or other online sites, such as [YouTube](#) or news sites. Those who received negative feedback were more likely to choose Facebook than those who received [positive feedback](#), the study found.

The research suggests that Facebook profiles could be used strategically in applied self-affirmation interventions, such as those aimed at decreasing young adults' resistance to anti-smoking messages, says Hancock.

Furthermore, the experience of engaging with one's profile-based self may give emotional benefits to millions of social network users, he says, by restoring deep-seated notions of themselves as a good person loved by a network of friends and family.

"Perhaps online daters who are anxious about being single or recently divorced may find comfort in the process of composing or reviewing their online profiles, as it allows them to reflect on their core values and identity," Hancock says. "Students who are feeling stressed about upcoming exams might similarly find solace in their social networking site profiles."

The paper explains that self-affirmation translates into everyday activities. People fulfill their fundamental need to see themselves as valuable, worthy and good by making themselves aware of what they consider the defining aspects of their sense of self, such as values, goals

and personal relationships.

Just as setbacks and challenges are pervasive in everyday life, so are opportunities to offset them, Hancock says.

Facebook has the ability to repair the damage caused by ego threats, and users actively seek it out to soothe a wounded ego. Hancock says: "As a widely available, everyday source of self-affirmation, Facebook appears to be a useful instrument in people's efforts to preserve self-worth and self-integrity."

Provided by Cornell University

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