

Girls more prone to social networking depression

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Credit: Brittany Randolph

Gender and level of 'investment' in social networking sites are more important than frequency of use when trying to understand how sites such as Facebook influence youth, according to Murdoch University researchers.

The new study – involving 1,819 years 9 and 11 students from 34 WA high schools – used a questionnaire probing how [social networking sites](#) (SNS) were used, frequency of use and emotional investment as well as social self-concept, [self-esteem](#) and depressed mood.

Professor Bonnie Barber and Ms Corey Blomfield Neira found that female users were more invested in SNSs and experienced more negative outcomes than both males and female non-users.

"It appears from present results that SNS use may have negative aspects for female youth while being a positive leisure activity for male youth," researchers say in the article.

"The current study found that male youth with an SNS profile had significantly higher social self-concept.

"Our results suggest that male youth may see SNSs as a place in which to practice and refine their social skills and competencies, and thus feel more socially competent.

"In contrast, female youth who had an SNS profile reported significantly higher levels of depressed mood, and lower self-esteem."

The researchers say female youth use SNSs to seek feedback about themselves, and likely perceive some of the feedback to be negative.

They equate SNSs to a 'social resume', where youth display features of themselves with which they are most satisfied, and note adolescents may feel their SNS 'friends' are engaged in much more exciting lives.

"It may be the case that in those youth who become highly invested in their SNSs are less able to discern between the 'social resume' of their SNS friends present and the actual reality of those friends' day-to-day

lives," researchers say.

"Thus, such youth would be using unrealistic and inflated comparisons when evaluating themselves, which may explain in part why investment in SNSs is linked to poorer self-esteem and higher [depressed mood](#)."

However, the researchers caution that the study does not establish causality, as youth with lower self-esteem and depression could simply be more prone to invest in SNSs than their peers.

Instead, they suggest that the situation may involve a more complex bidirectional relationship.

But their findings may help parents who wonder about limiting [social networking](#) access.

"Instead of focussing on how often [youth](#) are using their SNSs, much closer attention should be paid to the degree to which adolescents are invested in their SNSs as this is where problems with SNS use may arise," they say.

More information: Blomfield Neira, C. J. and Barber, B. L. (2014), "Social networking site use: Linked to adolescents' social self-concept, self-esteem, and depressed mood." *Australian Jnl of Psychology*, 66: 56–64. [DOI: 10.1111/ajpy.12034](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12034)

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