

## Feeling unloved? Like this post

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Joshua Hart, associate professor of psychology. Credit: Union College

Insecure? Craving attention and needing to feel good about yourself? Chances are Facebook is your friend. A new study suggests that people who are generally insecure in their relationships are more actively

engaged on the social media site - frequently posting on walls, commenting, updating their status or "liking" something - in hopes of getting attention.

In two surveys of nearly 600 people ages 18-83, researchers at Union College asked participants about their tendencies in close relationships and their Facebook habits.

The research suggests that there are at least two kinds of active Facebook users: people who are higher in attachment anxiety, and people who are higher in extraversion.

People who were higher in attachment anxiety - that is, they worry that other people don't love them as much as they want to be loved, and are chronically concerned about rejection and abandonment - reported greater amounts of what the study refers to as "feedback seeking" on Facebook.

Because these people need a lot of reassurance that they are loved and are very sensitive to other people's opinions about them, they turn to Facebook, with its 1.2 billion users, for feedback, according to the study published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

"Compared to more secure people, those higher in attachment anxiety are more feedback sensitive," said Joshua Hart, associate professor of psychology and the lead author of the study. "They report feeling much better about themselves when they get a lot of comments, likes and other feedback on their posts and worse about themselves when their Facebook activity generates little attention."

Anxiously attached individuals' level of feedback sensitivity correlates with how active they are on Facebook, Hart says, "and it appears that this strategy may work: they report receiving more attention than people

lower in attachment [anxiety](#)."

Hart's co-authors are George Bizer, professor of psychology at Union, and former students Elizabeth Nailling and Caitlyn Collins.

Previous research on the relation between personality and styles of engagement with [social media](#) is limited and has generated mixed results. The current study is one of the first to examine the reasons people turn to Facebook and the kind of engagement they exhibit as a function of their personality style.

As for extraverts' active Facebook use, the authors leave a fuller explanation to future research. However, they note that extraverts' reasons for active use are different from anxiously attached individuals' inclination toward frequent and varied posting as a platform to get positive attention to compensate for insecurities.

"These studies are consistent with many people's intuitions that some individuals use Facebook to fulfill emotional and relationship needs that are unmet in the 'real' world," Hart said.

"There is a robust debate playing out in psychological science and pop culture as to whether Facebook represents a healthy or unhealthy outlet for such needs. I think the jury's still out on that, but this research suggests that personality is an important factor to consider when investigating the causes and consequences of people's engagement with social media."

**More information:** *Personality and Individual Differences*,  
[www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ... ii/S0191886914007247](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S0191886914007247)

Provided by Union College

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