

Peers and online activities trigger jealousy in adolescents

March 5 2018, by Hannah Lennarz



Credit: Radboud University

Adolescents are more likely to experience feelings of jealousy when they spend time online or interact with peers, according to research by psychologist Hannah Lennarz at Radboud University. Lennarz will

defend her Ph.D. on 9 March.

Emotions play an important role in our daily lives. Most people experience a range of emotions in a single day or even over the course of hours or minutes. Adolescence is a period of development associated with physical and psychosocial changes and heightened emotions. In what context do [adolescents](#) experience emotions? How do young people feel in their daily lives? Who do they spend time with and what do they do? How do emotions fluctuate throughout the day? Previous research on emotions and [emotion regulation](#) in adolescents was often conducted in a laboratory setting or was preceded by surveys. Psychologist Hannah Lennarz took a different approach.

App that measures emotions

Lennarz asked 86 young people to track their emotions for two weekends and asked another 280 young people to track their emotions for an entire week. They received notifications on their mobile phones nine times a day. The app asked questions like: What are you doing now? How jealous do you feel at this moment? Who are you with? This helped Lennarz identify the daily emotions experienced by young people aged 12 to 16.

Jealousy online and among peers

Jealousy is known to reach its peak in adolescence. "This is based on previous research," says Lennarz, "we know that interpersonal relationships change during adolescence. Friends become more important and young people want more freedom from their parents while still relying on their support. All of these factors can contribute to feelings of jealousy." Unfortunately, the timing and intensity of these feelings remained unknown. "We know it differs per person, but we

don't know how it manifests in daily life."

Lennarz's research reveals that young people tend to experience jealousy when are spending time online and when they are interacting with peers. "One possible explanation for this is that adolescents want to feel like they belong to a group of peers; if they don't, they may start to feel jealous. They also have to learn how to deal with changing friendships and are more sensitive to criticism than others. This could make them feel excluded, which in turn could arouse jealousy. In terms of [jealousy](#) while spending time online, we think this is triggered by the airbrushed online image people craft of their lives. Most people don't share the negative things in their lives with their online followers," explains Lennarz.

Is social support a bad thing?

Lennarz also researched how young people regulate their emotions. Acceptance appears to play a significant role in this process. Excessive worrying and seeking too much [social support](#) tends to be associated with symptoms of depression. "Worrying is not a surprising conclusion, as it almost always has a negative impact on well-being. But the negative correlation with social support did surprise us, as seeking support is almost always seen as a good thing. Further research is needed to shed more light on this result, but the cause may be due to the different forms of social support out there. You can voice your concerns and ask for advice or you can commiserate with someone else."

Feeling sad or angry instead of 'bad'

In her research, Lennarz reveals that identifying emotions is important for the well-being of [young people](#). "My research shows that being able to identify negative emotions – knowing that you feel sad or angry

instead of just 'bad' – is associated with fewer negative emotions and gives you the confidence to be able to change your emotions," says Lennarz. According to the psychologist, the study revealed that emotions and emotion regulation varies from person to person. "It's important to understand that everyone responds differently to situations. There's no one size fits all."

Provided by Radboud University

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