

Adolescent girls who over use internet and social media suffer lower self-esteem and negative body image

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Adolescent girls, who spend long periods each day on the internet, engaging and communicating on social media, are more likely to suffer low self-esteem and negative body image, according to new research to be presented at the Appearance Matters 5 conference in Bristol on Tuesday 3 July.

The NetGirls Project was conducted by Dr Amy Slater and Professor Marika Tiggemann from the School of Psychology at Flinders University, Australia. The report indicates that 40.1% of the 1096 girls, aged between 12 and 16 years, who took part in the survey were dissatisfied with their bodies and one in two were terrified of [gaining weight](#). The study also found that the more girls use the internet and [social media](#), the more likely they are to experience body [shame](#), [dissatisfaction](#) with their weight, and lower self-esteem.

These findings are particularly concerning given that the girls reported using the internet for lengthy periods of time each day. The average “screen time” per day was 3.5 hours, with the majority of this time spent on social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Only 34.9% of the girls said that their parents set rules about when and what they can look at on the internet. Of the 96% of girls who had some access to the internet at home, 72.1% upload pictures of themselves to the internet and 12.1% upload videos of themselves.

Dr Amy Slater explains, “We set out to investigate the role of media in adolescent girls' self image. We were interested to find out how adolescent girls were spending their free time and how different activities related to how they felt about themselves and their bodies. Our findings demonstrate a worrying correlation between excessive media use, particularly social media and the internet, and lower self-esteem, body-esteem and sense of identity and higher depression.”

Dr Slater will also report on the findings of a second study that analysed the content of over 600 adverts found on 14 of the most popular websites targeting adolescent girls. Although a wide variety of products were featured, advertisements for cosmetics and beauty products were the most frequent. Further, many of the products advertised (eg dating services, weight loss products, gambling games) might be considered inappropriate for the intended teenage audience of these websites.

People who featured in the advertisements were generally female, young, thin, and attractive. Dr Slater explains, “A content analysis of adverts found on sites that appeal to [adolescent girls](#) showed likely exposure to those reinforcing the importance of beauty and thinness.”

In addition to findings from the NetGirls project, the [Appearance Matters 5](#) conference will feature cutting edge research on visible difference, [body image](#), cosmetic surgery, ethics, education, the media, weight and provision of care.

Provided by University of the West of England

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