

# Woman's Self-Worth Impacts Facebook Behavior

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Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on March 8, 2011



New research suggests that women who base their self-worth on appearance often place their picture online and maintain large networks on online social networking sites.

University at Buffalo researcher Michael A. Stefanone, Ph.D., said the results suggest that females identify more strongly with their image and appearance, and use Facebook as a platform to compete for attention.

“The results suggest persistent differences in the behavior of men and women that result from a cultural focus on female image and appearance,” he says.

The study was co-authored by Derek Lackaff, Ph.D., University of Texas, Austin, and Devan Rosen, Ph.D., University of Hawaii, Manoa.

Its purpose was to investigate variables that explain specific online behavior on social network sites. Among other things, the team looked at the amount of time subjects spent managing profiles, the number of photos they shared, the size of their online networks and how promiscuous they were in terms of “friending” behavior.

The contingencies, measured by the widely used CSW Scale (contingencies of self worth) developed by Crocker and Wolfe, are important internal and external sources of self-esteem, hypothesized in previous research and theory to affect an individual's sense of self-worth.

Stefanone's study found that contingencies of self-worth explain much of the social behavior enacted online.

In the study, 311 participants with an average age of 23.3 years — 49.8 percent of whom were female — completed a questionnaire measuring their contingencies of self-worth. The subjects were also queried as to their typical behaviors on Facebook.

“Those whose self-esteem is based on public-based contingencies (defined here as others' approval, physical appearance and outdoing others in competition) were more involved in online photo sharing, and those whose self-worth is most contingent on appearance have a higher intensity of online photo-sharing,” Stefanone said.

He noted that the women in this study who base their self-worth on appearance were also the most prolific photo sharers.

“Participants whose self worth is based on private-based contingencies (defined in this study as academic competence, family love and support, and being a virtuous or moral person),”

said Stefanone, “spend less time online.”

For these people, social media are less about attention-seeking behavior.

Stefanone said, “Contingencies on which people assess their self-worth represent a new approach to understanding how personal identities are developed and maintained. This study provides a framework for future explorations of identity construction, social interaction and media use in a rapidly changing communication environment.”

He said that although such behavior seems stereotypical and easy to predict, “it is disappointing to me that in the year 2011 so many young women continue to assert their self-worth via their physical appearance — in this case, by posting photos of themselves on Facebook as a form of advertisement.

“Perhaps this reflects the distorted value pegged to women’s looks throughout the popular culture and in reality programming from ‘The Bachelor’ to ‘Keeping Up with the Kardashians.’”

The study is published in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*.

Source: University of Buffalo