

# Facebook study finds emphasis on college rituals

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Study by Temple professor finds that college students use Facebook photos to portray an idealized college life.

Like many [social networking sites](#), Facebook has transformed the way we use and share personal photos. Each month, more than 3 billion photos are posted on the social networking site. But the types of photos you share might vary depending on your generation. A recent Temple University study found that [college students](#) use Facebook photos to portray the ideal college life, primarily through photos that depict [friendships](#) and emphasize self.

The study, “Look at us: Collective [Narcissism](#) in College Student Facebook Photo Galleries” will appear in the book, *The Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, which will be published this year by Routledge.

“The central objective among college students on Facebook was the recording and posting of their participation in the social rituals of college,” said Andrew Mendelson, study author and chair of journalism at Temple. “Their photos reveal the primacy of relationships and the importance of the [peer group](#),”

Mendelson and co-author Zizi Papacharissi of the University of Illinois, Chicago, examined, with permission, 20,962 photos and 13,543 comments on 333 Facebook pages belonging primarily to college freshmen and sophomores.

The researchers zeroed in on the subject matter in the photographs as well as that missing from the photographs; the behavior of the subjects; the aesthetics of the images; the organization of the photographs and comments on the photos.

The majority of photos portrayed students with their friends of the same gender, usually in [social settings](#) such as parties or sporting events.

“It was really interesting to see the visual worlds that students construct for themselves,” said Mendelson. “It’s an argument to each other of the life they wish for and idealize.”

Also notable was what was missing from the photos: family members, especially older family members, and anything related to academics such as studying or going to class.

“The photos are not about the reality of college, but rather building this idealized college experience,” said Papacharissi.

Women were more likely to post photos and more likely to tag photos than men. Women also had more photos of themselves and more comments about their photos than men. Parties were the most common setting for the photos and, despite being underage, the students didn’t try to hide drinking. However, few photos showed cigarette smoking or drug usage.

The photos were rarely candid, with subjects often posing for the camera or interacting with the photographer. The subjects were also often physically close to each other, sometimes touching or leaning against each other.

The researchers also analyzed comments made about the photos and the tagging of photos and found that both served to “reinforce group

cohesiveness and closeness.” On Facebook, one can tag or name individuals in a photo.

“That’s where we really saw this relationship-strengthening. Tagging and comments confirm you’re important to your friends because you’re part of the story,” said Mendelson. “Comments allow friends to relive the pictured events and emphasize the shared good times, reinforcing the idealized college life they are living.”

The authors suggest future research following students as they progress through college.

As people age and their lives change, their Facebook pictures and how they portray their lives change. So it follows that as students get into their junior and senior years, and set their sights on internships and jobs, their goals in presenting themselves are to appear professional and responsible.

Ultimately, say the authors, the photos we post on [Facebook](#) reveal the visual story we are telling others about ourselves.

Provided by Temple University

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