

Study: Facebook photo sharing reflects focus on female appearance

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In a new study published in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, University at Buffalo researcher Michael A. Stefanone, PhD, and colleagues found that females who base their self worth on their appearance tend to share more photos online and maintain larger networks on online social networking sites.

He says the results suggest that females identify more strongly with their image and [appearance](#), and use [Facebook](#) as a platform to compete for attention.

Stefanone describes the study results in a video interview:

"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, "Contingencies of Self-Worth and Social-Networking-Site Behavior," was co-authored by Derek Lackaff, PhD, University of Texas, Austin, and Devan Rosen, PhD, University of Hawaii, Manoa. It appeared in the journal's current issue.

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 says.

Stefanone notes that the women in this study who base their self worth on appearance were also are 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)," says Stefanone, "spend less time online." For these people, social media are less about attention seeking behavior.

Stefanone says, "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."

Although it's stereotypical and might have been predicted," he says, "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.'"

Stefanone's research emphasis is on group-level, computer-mediated communication (CMC), distributed groups and Internet-based communication tools like [social networking sites](#). He also explores novel uses of CMC technologies like blogs and social network sites, and the effects these tools have on interpersonal relationships.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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