

Just like teens, parents get personal on Facebook

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They may not dress like Justin Bieber or Selena Gomez, but parents are a whole lot like their teenagers when it comes to their behaviour on Facebook. That's the finding of a new study by University of Guelph researchers.

Parents are just as likely as their kids to disclose personal information on the social networking site, according to the research, which will be published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* and is available online now.

And (gasp!) mom and dad are just as susceptible to the need for popularity.

"Facebook is not just a phenomenon among young people," said [psychology professor](#) Serge Desmarais, who conducted the study with PhD students Amy Muise and Emily Christofides. "The online environment influences people of all ages. Both parents and teens share and show more about themselves than they might in other [social settings](#), and the same [psychological factors](#) underpin that behaviour."

The study involved 285 non-student adults between the ages of 19 and 71, and 288 youths ages nine to 18. While Facebook requires users to be 13 or older, about 7.5 million users are younger than 13.

The researchers found [adolescents](#) reveal more than older users, but only because they spend more time on Facebook, not because they care less

about privacy. Teens spend on average 55 minutes a day on Facebook, compared to 38 minutes for adults.

Adults were actually less conscious of the consequences of sharing personal information on Facebook, the study revealed. For both groups, spending more time on the site made people more likely to share. Less awareness of consequences and greater desire to belong predicted more disclosure of personal information.

"Once again, the need for popularity was found to be a significant predictor of information disclosure," Muise said, adding that information disclosure is the key factor in assessing one's popularity.

Being on Facebook requires posting pictures and information and engaging in discussions. What others share and say about you is also a big part. "The people who are the most popular are those whose online identity is actively participated in by others. So the more you share, the more others respond," she said.

Popularity and disclosure become linked, the researchers say. "Facebook is an environment that encourages people to share personal information," Christofides said. "People with a high need for popularity may indeed care about their privacy, but they may not be willing to sacrifice their popularity by implementing privacy controls."

The study was funded by a federal grant from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. The researchers selected Facebook because it's the most popular social networking website in Canada. Launched in 2004, the site has more than 250 million active users worldwide.

Previous studies by the three Guelph researchers found that the need for popularity drives young adults to disclose more [personal information](#) on [Facebook](#) and that site use fuels jealousy in relationships.

Desmarais, who is Guelph's associate vice-president (academic), studies gender issues and interpersonal relationships. He said it's important to research online networking sites because they are changing social relationships. "This is the new reality for some; aspects of their lives that were once private are now open for all to see."

Provided by University of Guelph

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