

Researchers study what Facebook reveals about our relationships

October 26 2012, by Gavin Au-yeung



You know that Facebook friend who's always uploading photos to publicize his perfect romance. Maybe you are that friend.

But do those photos reveal any truths about our relationships?

Yes, says a new study led by University of Toronto researchers; from our relationships to our personalities, the way we portray ourselves online reflects the lives we live offline.

"When [Facebook](#) first became really popular, I think there was this idea that people were posting false identities online - and we're finding that's not the case," says lecturer Amy Muise of the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM). "I think a big reason for that is because we're really

anchored by our offline identities on Facebook.

"Facebook isn't really anonymous, most of our friends on Facebook are people we know in real life, so we might be able to manage people's impressions a little bit, but because people often know us offline there doesn't seem to be a large amount of deceit going on.

And displaying a dyadic photo (one showing both partners) as a profile image on Facebook can be a significant indicator of relationship satisfaction, Muise says.

With U of T Mississauga professor Emily Impett, Matt Dubin from Claremont Graduate University and Laura Saslow from the University of California, Muise has co-authored a paper entitled "[Can you see how happy we are? Facebook images and Relationship Satisfaction](#)".

Recently published in the *Journal of [Social Psychology](#) and Personality Science*, the paper comprises three separate studies.

In the first study, 115 people were asked about their shared Facebook photos in comparison to how they rated their satisfaction with [personal relationships](#). The second study examined levels of [relationship satisfaction](#) among 148 people and tracked photos posted over the course of a year. The final study involved 108 couples keeping daily diaries which were compared with their online postings about their relationship.

Researchers found people were more likely to post relationship-related content on Facebook on days they were greatly satisfied about their relationship.

"We know from traditional research that couples who feel closer in their relationships are more likely to use pronouns like 'we'," explains Muise. "And so, in a sense, Facebook provides another way to explore that relationship, and a dyadic profile picture can be seen as a modern way of

expressing this idea of we-ness."

Facebook was effective for the study because sharing about relationships is built into the website, says Muise. Users are encouraged to upload pictures of people with whom they spend time, and to fill out and display a relationship status on their profile.

While the recent study links profile pictures with happiness, Muise is also interested in exploring relationship visibility on Facebook further, including our reactions to those who post frequently—or perhaps excessively—about their relationship.

"I'm planning another study now with colleagues where we're trying to answer that exact question," she says. "Does there become a point where it's just too much?"

Provided by University of Toronto Mississauga

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