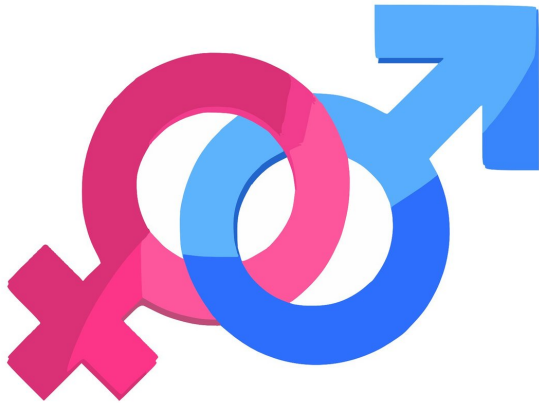


How gender inequality is reproduced on social media

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Researchers from the Higher School of Economics analyzed 62 million public posts on the most popular Russian social networking site VK and found that both men and women mention sons more often than daughters. They also found that posts featuring sons receive 1.5 times more likes. The results have been published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

In recent years, social media has become an important source of data for researchers. In particular, it allows them to observe everyday social interactions and to get insights into the reproduction of [gender inequality](#). Researchers Elizaveta Sivak and Ivan Smirnov used public posts about children made by 635,665 users from St. Petersburg on VK, the most popular Russian social networking site. Common topics for such posts included celebrations of achievements and important events (19 percent); expressions of love, affection and pride (26 percent), and reports on

spending time with children (27 percent).

The results demonstrate a [gender imbalance](#): The researchers found 20 percent more posts about sons than about daughters on social media. Sons are more often mentioned by both men and [women](#). This difference cannot be explained by the [sex ratio](#) at birth alone (106 boys to 100 girls in Russia), thus indicating gender preference in sharing information about children. Previous studies have shown that children's books are dominated by male central characters; in textbooks, female characters are given fewer lines of text; in movies, on average, twice as many male characters as female ones are shown on camera. Gender imbalance in public posts may send yet another message that girls are less important and interesting than boys and deserve less attention.

The researchers also found that posts about sons receive, on average, 1.5 times more likes. The posts about daughters written by the mother, on average, receive 6.7 likes from women, and 1.1 likes from men. Their posts about sons get 10.7 likes from women and 1.8 likes from men. Father's posts about daughters receive 5.3 likes from women and 2.6 from men. Their posts about sons receive 6.7 likes from women and 3.7 from men.

It means that women like posts more often than men, that women prefer posts written by women and men prefer those written by men, and, most importantly, that both women and men more often like posts mentioning sons.

"This imbalance could send a signal that girls are less significant than boys. The fact that posts about sons get more likes only enhances this effect," says Ivan Smirnov, the co-author of the paper and the head of the Computational Social Science Lab at HSE.

"The gender preference in sharing information about children may seem quite harmless compared

with other layers of gender disparity. However, given the widespread popularity of [social media](#), even moderate bias might accumulate. Millions of users are exposed to a [gender](#)-biased news feed on a daily basis and, without even noticing, receive the reaffirmation that paying more attention to sons is normal."

More information: Elizaveta Sivak et al, Parents mention sons more often than daughters on social media, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2019). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1804996116](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804996116)

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