Exploring the role of social networking sites within adolescent romantic relationships and dating experiences

# Details

## Year

2015

## DOI

10.1016/j.chb.2015.08.042

## Issued

2016

## Language

English

## Volume

55

## Start Page

## End Page

## Authors

Van Ouytsel J.;Van Gool E.;Walrave M.;Ponnet K.;Peeters E.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Computers in Human Behavior

## Publisher

Elsevier BV

## Topics

* Social mediation
* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Risks and harms

## Sample

57 respondents between 15 and 18 years old from two secondary schools in Flanders, Belgium participated in 11 same-sex focus group interviews with each 3 to 8 participants (4 male-only focus groups and 7 female-only focus groups)

# Abstract

This study focuses on how adolescents perceive the ways in which romantic relationships are experi\_x0002\_enced and expressed through social networking sites. Eleven focus group conversations among 57 ad\_x0002\_olescents between 15 and 18 years old in Flanders, Belgium were analyzed. The findings demonstrate
that social networking sites play an important role in relational information seeking. Pictures and status
updates are regarded as the most important source of information about a potential romantic partner. In
order to express romantic interest respondents indicated that they would like pictures and status updates
from several years ago or that they would initiate a conversation through private messages. The re\_x0002\_spondents in our sample did not consider being Facebook Official as an important part of a romantic
relationship. The adolescents recognized the potential of social networking sites to elicit jealousy and
identified forms of controlling behavior such as sharing passwords or monitoring the partners' profiles. A
romantic break-up often led to removing ex-partners from one's profile pages and adolescents most
frequently observed the posting of emotional status updates by ex-partners as a result of the relationship
dissolution. The discussion includes suggestions for future research and implications for practice.

# Outcome

"Social networking sites are used by adolescents for signaling romantic interest by liking one's status updates and pictures and for the purpose of relational information seeking. Pictures were regarded as an important source of information to evaluate their crushes and
potential romantic partners and are seen as more difficult to forge. Respondents found it easier to initiate conversations with their crushes and romantic partners as compared to starting a face-to-face conversation since it feels less intimidating and more relaxed. The asynchronous nature of the communication, which enables them to think about their response, might contribute to the perception that it is easier to have flirtatious communication through Facebook. The lack of emotional feedback and the risk that messages might be misinterpreted by the receiver, however, are solved by inserting emoticons such as smileys or kisses into their conversations to make
them less formal.
Relationship statuses on Facebook are less formally announced on Facebook since there might be social disapproval from peers as well as family members but rather by more casual acts, such as posting joint photographs. Respondents indicated that feelings of jealousy were elicited when others would comment on their romantic partners' status updates or photos or when their boyfriend or girlfriend
appeared with someone else in a picture. A way of coping with jealousy and relational insecurity was asking the romantic partner's password as a mutual token of love and trust but is also a kind of insurance policy against unfaithfulness. Given the fact that romantic break-ups are common during adolescence, the exchange of passwords might be particularly risky as information from private accounts could get published online by a revengeful ex-romantic partner. Traditionally, a romantic break-up just resulted in removing the ex-partner from one's profile and the removal of joint pictures and messages and/or posting emotional status updates or trying to make the ex-partner jealous by posting images and status updates." (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016, pp. 82-84)