

# spotlight newsletter

Counseling and Personal Development Center  
Westchester Campus • Volume 5



## SPOTLIGHT ON HOOKING UP ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND RELATIONSHIPS

e-mail • text messaging • chat rooms  
bulletin boards • blogs • social networking  
video sharing • photosharing • IM  
computer games • virtual worlds

**AT OUR COUNSELING CENTER,** no matter what brings someone in, we often find ourselves helping students create more satisfying and meaningful family, intimate, social, and work relationships. In today's world, it is impossible to ignore the role of electronic media in all of these relationships.

People "Facebook stalk," combing through Facebook pages searching for subtle and not-so-subtle hints about people. We find out old boyfriends are seeing someone else. Via text message, we hear from a girlfriend that she wants to break up. We discover a partner has cheated on us when we see a picture posted online or text messages not meant for us to see. We immerse ourselves in virtual worlds that can be more exciting than our real lives. We get online and, with little effort, spend more time hooked up than we had planned.

In this issue of *Spotlight*, we hope to stir up some thoughts and expand your ideas about electronic media and its impact on our day-to-day relationships.

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### Inside this issue:

How Often Are We Hooking Up?  
Is Hooking Up on Electronic Media Good or Bad?  
Balancing It Out  
True or False? Random "Facts" About Social Networking  
Match Social Media Users to Their Desires  
Dealing with Cyberstalking and Cyberharassment  
Move Over Facebook: New Alternatives

### How Often Are We Hooking Up?

**A GROUP THAT LOOKS AT GADGETS AND CONSUMERS,** Retrovo Gadgetology, asked media users about their social media habits. Though not a scientific study, the answers are still fascinating. Of the social media users who responded:

- 48% said they checked or updated their Twitter or Facebook after they went to bed or first thing in the morning.
- 49% of those under 25 and 27% of those over 25 did not mind being interrupted by an electronic message during a meal.
- 24% of those under 25 and 12% of those over 25 did not mind being interrupted while in the bathroom.
- 11% of those under 25 and 6% of those over 25 did not mind interruptions during sex!

### Facebook Facts:

- Facebook is the largest social network with more than 500 million users.
- Half of all active Facebook users log on each day.
- Users spend more than 700 billion minutes on Facebook per month.
- Facebook may be the fastest-growing company ever.
- 35% of America uses Facebook regularly.
- The number of Facebook users rises by 5% every month.
- The average Facebook user is on the site for just under one hour daily.

Source: Facebook and *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World* by David Kirkpatrick, Simon & Schuster, 2010. This is a good read if you want to learn more about the history and development of Facebook.

[www.pace.edu/counseling](http://www.pace.edu/counseling)

# Is Hooking Up on Electronic Media Good or Bad?

## Some benefits of using electronic media to connect with others include:

- ◆ Connecting with friends and making new ones
- ◆ Exploring new interests and connecting with others who have similar interests
- ◆ Learning more about the behavior and thoughts of other people
- ◆ Developing technical skills
- ◆ Practicing ways to express yourself
- ◆ Encouraging independence and independent learning
- ◆ Overcoming social isolation and anxiety
- ◆ Promoting organizations, clubs, or causes
- ◆ Building a positive or different self image
- ◆ Making it easier to talk to romantic interests



## On the other hand, some risks of using electronic media include:

- ◆ Data theft
- ◆ Computer viruses
- ◆ Online stalkers
- ◆ People lying about who they really are
- ◆ Sleep deprivation
- ◆ Prospective employers and schools seeing information that puts you in a negative light
- ◆ Over-reliance on electronic media communication and more superficial relationships at the cost of in-person people skills
- ◆ Damage to ongoing and future in-person relationships
- ◆ Hurt from racial slurs and other inappropriate comments online
- ◆ Dependence on online relationships over in-person relationships and less time for in-person familial and social relationships

*Note: For more information on the experts and studies referenced for this article, contact our center at [www.pace.edu/counseling](http://www.pace.edu/counseling).*

## What do the experts say?

### *Experts report the following positive effects:*

- ◆ Electronic media helps people be in touch more often and longer.
- ◆ People with internet access feel more satisfied with their lives.
- ◆ Women seem to find more happiness from internet access than men.
- ◆ Spending time on the web encourages feelings of freedom, control, security, and influence, which increases well-being and happiness.
- ◆ Older adults using the internet showed greater happiness and well-being than those who did not use the internet.
- ◆ Technology and social networking builds useful skills. It also creates an important place for young adults to explore their interests, become more independent, express themselves, widen their friendship circles, develop technical skills, and broaden their independent educations. All of these skills will promote competence in the digital age, when the focus will be on producing media, not just consuming it.
- ◆ Well-adapted teens use social networking sites to improve already positive friendships.
- ◆ Social networking sites create a more intimate space where teenagers and young adults can have more opportunities to connect with peers and share personal details about themselves in a positive way.
- ◆ And a surprising finding... Physical activity does not decrease with increased media use.

### *Other experts report these negative effects:*

- ◆ Teens who are depressed or show aggressive or antisocial behavior are more likely to harass and persecute others, take online risks, or be victims of online cruelty and intimidation.
- ◆ Teens who used instant messaging as a substitute for in-person communication reported feeling more distant from their instant messenger friends than their phone or in-person friends.
- ◆ Electronic communication, due to its convenience, may make people less interested in in-person contact with others.
- ◆ Online interactions can be more “shallow.” People may be less likely to connect with others in a way that encourages empathy, awareness of emotional nuances, and translation of social cues (e.g., body language, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact). Some experts are concerned that relying too much on online connections to others will affect wiring in the brain and vital social skills will weaken or never grow.
- ◆ Gary Small, a professor, neuroscientist, and author of *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, concludes that growing up using computers leads to strong technical skills and poor “face-to-face human contact skills.”
- ◆ Almost half of all heavy media users (16+ hours of media content per day) got fair or poor grades (C's or lower). These extreme media users also said more often than others that they got in trouble a lot and often feel sad, unhappy, and bored.

# Balancing It Out: Hooking Up Without Harm

**S**TUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND were asked **not** to use their cell phones or any forms of electronic media for 24 hours. Could you do that? What might that be like? Being able to take advantage of the rewards of electronic media use while minimizing some of the drawbacks is really what is most important. As with so many things, finding a balance is best. Here are some ways:

1. Think about how you feel when you are in the midst of electronic communication. A combination of feeling good and feeling guilt could signal some imbalance.
2. Clock your time spent in electronic activities. It should not be the majority of your free time or your day.
3. Take a social media break. You be the expert. Observe how it impacts you.
4. At night, choose sleep over electronic connection.
5. Pick in-person communication whenever possible. Don't pass up social or work opportunities for electronic time. If your performance at school and work is shaky, are you spending too much time hooked in? If the last several people you met were online, you may be losing balance.
6. Save your most sensitive emotional information and communications for conversation and experience with someone in-person. This will strengthen the relationship no matter what you are saying.
7. When you need to confront or discuss a difficult subject with someone, always do it in-person. For instance, don't break up with someone electronically! It may be scarier or harder to have serious or emotional discussions in-person—but the benefits will outweigh the risks.

8. Think about whether you are taking too much comfort in electronic communication. If it is the biggest outlet for your sadness, frustration, or sexual gratification, this is problematic.
9. Use a timer and decide beforehand how much time you will spend in these activities. When the buzzer goes off, disconnect. If unplugging brings anxiety, depression, or irritability, or you realize you lose track of time online, you may need to look at your use more carefully.
10. Current or past histories of anxiety, depression, addiction, or lack of social supports may make you more vulnerable to some of the risks of electronic media.

We all know the importance of nonverbal communication. Starting in the mid-1960's, Albert Mehrabian, PhD, did seminal work in this area that is still significant today. He found that:

- ◆ 93% of messages about feelings and attitudes were communicated effectively through nonverbal cues, like facial expressions, body language, gestures, use of space, and more.
- ◆ Words accounted for only 7% of what was communicated, while 38% came from how the words were said and 55% came from nonverbal means.

All this critical information about feelings and attitudes—a peek inside another human being—vanishes in electronic communication. And as you might imagine, the quality and depth of relationships in the short- and long-term can suffer as a result.

Ultimately, for the most successful and satisfying relationships with family, friends, lovers, and coworkers, we need to be able to communicate the small and big things in person. The benefits and growth opportunities of doing so, even when it is hard and may not go well, are vital. Ultimately, if these conversations cannot happen in person, the relationship will be at great risk.

## True or False? Random "Facts" About Social Networking

1. Compared to females, males are much less likely to say they have a significant other in the "About Me" section of MySpace profiles.
2. In a survey, one third of students, due to concerns about identity and privacy, do not think faculty should be allowed on Facebook. Females had many less concerns about faculty being on Facebook than males.
3. Studies reveal that comments and photos detailing bad behavior increased the perceived attractiveness of males and had the reverse effect on females.
4. A study reveals that approximately 300 friends is seen as optimal. More or less friends are judged negatively.
5. Professors who disclose information about their personal lives on their profiles decrease students' motivation and comfort in the classroom.
6. Females strengthen existing friendships through social networking sites, while males tend to make new friends and flirt.

(Answer key: 1- True, 2- False, females were twice as likely to be concerned, 3- True, 4- True, 5- False, it's just the opposite, 6- True)

Source: [www.psychologytoday.com/node/21121](http://www.psychologytoday.com/node/21121) and Pew Research Center, 2006



### Match Social Media Users to Their Desires

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 1) Twitterers    | A) Have mixed interests                                  |
| 2) MySpace users | B) Want video game, entertainment, and celebrity content |
| 3) Facebookers   | C) Mostly interested in news                             |
| 4) Digg users    | D) Like news and community                               |

Source: Chitika, an online advertising network.

(Answer key: 1-C, 2-B, 3-D, 4-A)

# Dealing With Cyberstalking and Cyberharassment



**CYBERSTALKING HAS BEEN DEFINED** as the repeated use of the internet, e-mail, or other electronic communications to harass or threaten an individual. Cyberstalking is traumatic and leads to all of the symptoms we might expect following trauma, including: anger, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, self-blame, sadness, hopelessness, difficulty concentrating, withdrawing from others, and feeling numb. Physical symptoms of trauma may include: insomnia, being easily startled, racing heart, aches and pains, feeling tired, and muscle tension.

## The Facts:

1. The majority (approximately 80%) of victims are female.
2. Most cyberstalkers are male.
3. The anonymity of the internet probably lowers inhibitions and likely encourages more aggressive behavior.
4. Most stalkers know their victims personally through work or past romantic associations.
5. A big trigger for stalking is the end of a relationship or the hope of a new relationship.
6. Motives for cyberstalking can include: romance, hate, revenge, religious beliefs, money, and politics.

## How to Deal:

1. Pick a screen name that does not reveal your gender.
2. Don't share personal information about yourself online (cell phone, home or work address, class schedule, where you are going).
3. Use and understand privacy settings.
4. Avoid flirting online as it can have scary consequences.
5. Report threats in a chat room or on a message board immediately.
6. Ignore and end hostile communications. Don't respond to "flaming" or online provocation, as this can increase the amount and intensity of communication.
7. If this does not work, send the offender, if they are known to you, a firm warning in writing stating that their contact is unwelcome and instructing them to stop all communication.
8. Save copies of this communication in both hard and electronic form.
9. Consider creating a log with more information about the circumstances around each communication.
10. Report offensive messages and file a complaint with the offender's and your internet service provider, who can then shutdown their account or website.
11. Use tools available to block communication from specific individuals.
12. Consider filing a report with local law enforcement or contact your prosecutor's office to see what your options are. Most states have laws against cyberstalking, though there is no U.S. federal law.
13. Think about changing your e-mail address, internet service provider, and phone numbers and looking into encryption software or privacy protection programs.
14. Use much caution and thought before agreeing to meet online acquaintances in person. If you do, always do it in a public place. Tell someone where you will be and arrange to check in with them at a specific time.

Source: [www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org), [www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org), and [www.cyberguards.com](http://www.cyberguards.com).

## Move Over Facebook: New Alternatives

Are you tired of Facebook? Are you worried about privacy?

**R**ECENT CONCERN ABOUT FACEBOOK'S REVISIONS of its platform and privacy policy has created new opportunities for other social networking sites. Check out some of these new groundbreaking social networking opportunities:

**Akoha.com**—A community that encourages fun things that make a positive difference.

**Applesseed** (<http://opensource.appleseedproject.org/>)—The first open source, fully decentralized social networking software.

**Crabgrass** (<http://crabgrass.riseup.net>)—Communication tools tailored to meet the needs of grassroots organizers.

**Diaspora** (<http://joindiaspora.com>)—The creation of four NYU students, offers "privacy aware, personally controlled, do-it-all, open source social network" and allows people to set up their own social networking centers.

**Elgg.org**—An open source social networking engine.

**Flickr.com**—Control which friends see your pictures.

**TheFridge.org**—Allows people to still be on Facebook and Twitter, but they can join a "private fridge" and communicate with each other without having to worry about bosses or parents seeing what they post.

**LinkedIn.com**—A way to separate your work and personal life.

**Meetup.com**—Find live, in-person connections with people who share similar interests.

**Ning.com**—Create your own social network—in less than 60 seconds.

**Pip.io** (<http://pip.io/>)—Start, organize, and discover conversations.

**OneSocialWeb.org**—A new experimental social network.

**UMeNow.com**—People only; no ads allowed.

- ◆ Did you know that **sixdegrees.com**, launched in 1997, and **Friendster.com** were social networking sites before Facebook?
- ◆ Don't like Facebook's ilike? Try **Imeem.com** and **Lastfm.com** instead.
- ◆ Is Twitter's 140 character limit too limiting? Go to **tumblr.com** or **Livejournal.com**.
- ◆ Concerned about privacy on Facebook? Try **ReclaimPrivacy.org** for a free tool to scan your Facebook privacy settings and identify what is public or **YourOpenBook.org**, which shows people how much private information is exposed through Facebook.

### WESTCHESTER CAMPUS COUNSELING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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(by appointment only)

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**In case of an emergency when the Counseling Centers are closed:**

Westchester students may contact a 24-hour crisis hotline at (914) 347-6400.

