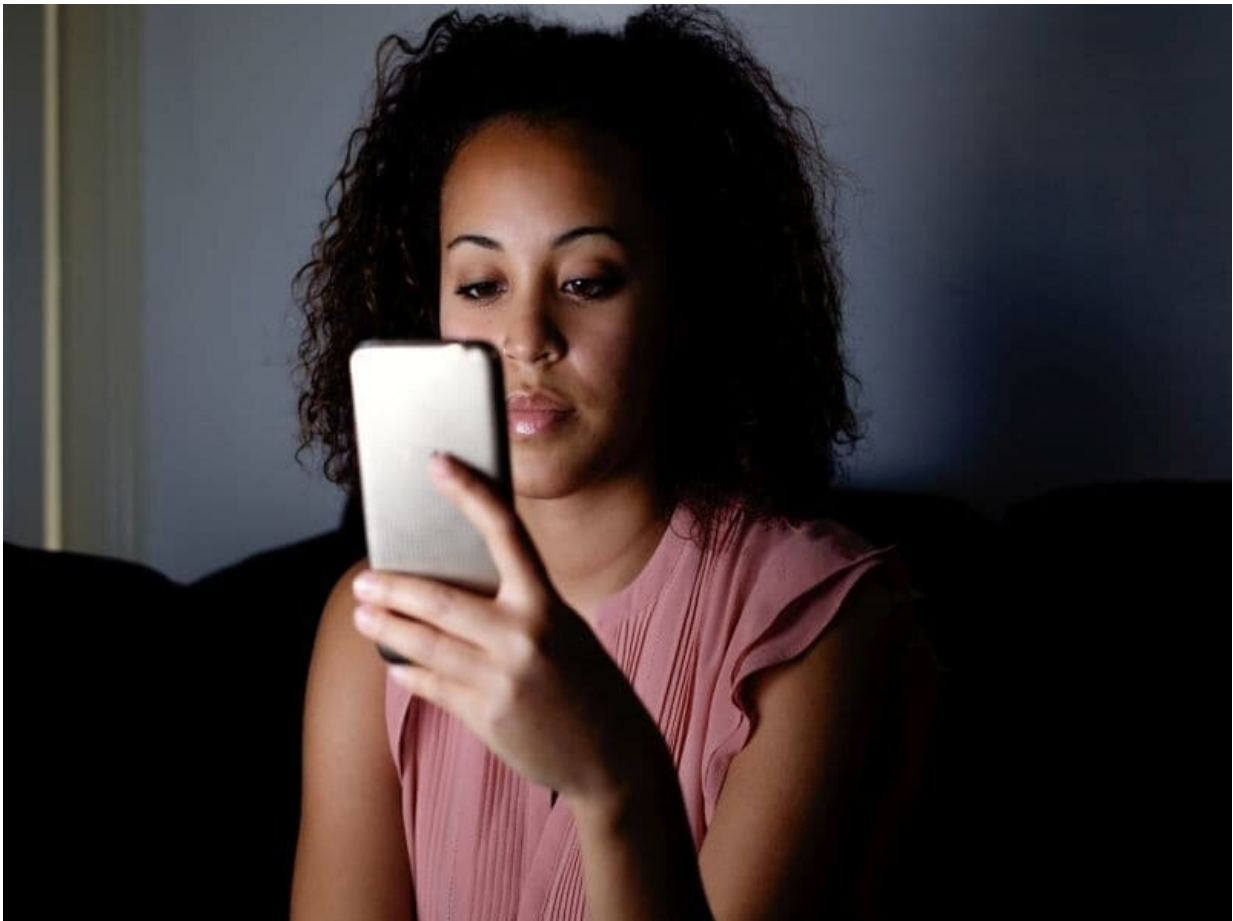


# Millennials' odds for depression rise with social media use

January 10 2019, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—Millennials struggling with depression aren't being helped

by their use of Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat, a new study reports.

College students who meet the criteria for [major depressive disorder](#) tend to use social media more often and are more heavily addicted to social media, researchers found.

They're also more likely to use social media in ways that exacerbate or highlight their depression, the study said.

For example, depressed [young adults](#) are more likely to compare themselves on social media to people who appear better off than them, said first author Anthony Robinson. He's a research assistant in the psychology department at Texas State University.

Folks who post to Facebook or Instagram take pains to portray themselves in a flattering light, Robinson said.

"If people are making comparisons based on this inflated image that's being presented, it can cause feelings of inferiority," Robinson said.

Depressed young adults were also more likely to be bothered if tagged in an unflattering picture, less likely to post pictures of themselves with other people, and more likely to self-censor what they posted to avoid the judgment of others, results showed.

For the study, Robinson and his colleagues asked 504 undergraduates at Texas State to complete an [online survey](#). The survey assessed their social media use and asked a variety of psychological questions.

Those with symptoms of depression reported behaviors like excessive sleeping, feelings of hopelessness and guilt, or a loss of pleasure in activities they used to enjoy, Robinson said.

About 16 percent of the students met the criteria for major depressive disorder, which Robinson said was an "extremely high" proportion.

Major depressive disorder affects nearly 7 percent of Americans 18 and older in any given year, according to the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health. Young adults 18 to 25 are the age group most likely to have had a major depressive episode in 2016, around 11 percent.

The no-holds-barred, say-anything-without-consequences nature of social media could contribute to people feeling bad about themselves, Robinson said.

"If you're spending more time on these platforms and you're being trolled or cyberbullied, it's going to have a negative effect on your psychological well-being," Robinson said.

But because this was an observational study, the researchers can't say in what direction the association between depression and social media works, noted Joseph McGuire, an assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore. He was not involved with the study.

"Is it that people who tend to be on social media more then start to feel depressed, or is it that the people who are more depressed are more withdrawn and this is their only [social contact](#)?" McGuire asked.

"If I spend two hours a day, am I more likely to be a little bit down or depressed compared with someone who is only on 20 minutes a day? Or do I never go out because I'm depressed, but I still want that social contact, so I log on to social [media](#)?" he continued.

Another new study backs up these findings. Researchers found that people are more aware of their own physical ailments if they tend to use

Facebook a lot and frequently compare themselves to people apparently better off than themselves, according to findings in the January issue of the journal *Heliyon*.

College students who are feeling depressed should assess their own [social media](#) use, and either cut back or try to change their online behaviors if they are using the technology in ways linked to depression, Robinson said.

It wouldn't hurt at all if they also sought counseling, McGuire said.

"There's a lot of counseling centers available at academic centers. There's that support there, and it's intended to help kids who are struggling," McGuire said. "Reaching out to a professional, even if you don't think you have a problem, then you can at least start to have that dialogue."

The new study was published Jan. 9 in the *Journal of Applied Biobehavioral Research*.

**More information:** Anthony Robinson, B.S., research assistant, department of psychology, Texas State University, San Marcos; Joseph McGuire, Ph.D., assistant professor, psychiatry and behavioral sciences, Johns Hopkins Children's Center, Baltimore; *Journal of Applied Biobehavioral Research*, Jan. 9, 2019

The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more about [major depression](#).

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