

Youth Culture Lesson
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Frustrating Facebook

Teens Talk About the Most Popular—and Unpopular—Social Network

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

A full 94 percent of American teens have a Facebook page, but a majority of those same teens don't actually *like* the social networking site that much, according to a new study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

It seems a little strange that Facebook could be so popular and so unpopular at the same time—similar to a mean-girl cheerleader or a jerk on the football team who goes to the best parties though no one seems to admire too much. Maybe that's the point: Many users say Facebook is just too similar to high school.

While some genuinely like the experience Facebook provides, many complain there's too much drama on Facebook: Interactions can be mean and negative. Acquaintances can overshare. Cliques migrate to Facebook with ease, and sometimes the popularity of a user can be gauged by how many "likes" a post gets. Some teens say there are simply too many adults on Facebook now to make it much fun.

Some have grown sick enough of Facebook they've left the site. One 16-year-old girl told Pew, "I deleted it [my Facebook account] when I was 15, because I think it was just too much for me with all the gossip and all the cliques and how it was so important to be—have so many friends—I was just like, 'it's too stressful to have a Facebook, if that's what it has to take to stay in contact with just a little people.'"

However, teens leaving Facebook are still pretty rare. Most are staying put, in part because that's where most of their friends are. If they leave, they'll be out of the loop. Says one 15-year-old girl, "Honestly, I'm on it constantly, but I hate it so much."

Talk About It:

Relationships can be difficult, whether they're face-to-face friendships or online encounters. No matter where we are, people sometimes say things that hurt our feelings or make us mad. Sometimes we can make faux pas, too; but in general, do you think social networks such as Facebook made your friendships and social interactions better or worse?

Do you have a Facebook account? If so, what do you like about Facebook? What don't you like about it? Have you ever been tempted to delete your account? Are there other places online you like to hang out more? If so, where?

Have you ever been frustrated by what someone's said about you on a social networking site? Have you ever been embarrassed by what someone's written on your wall or by a picture he or she has posted?

Some have said Facebook is similar to a person's front door—a place where you do your best to make a good impression without spilling all the embarrassing details of your life. Do you agree? Are you careful about what you say on Facebook? Do you feel that sometimes you, or your Facebook friends, can act differently on Facebook than in real life?

According to the Pew study, many teens don't really talk much about some aspects of their lives because they know adults—their parents, youth leaders or prospective employers—could or would be reading. Are you friends with your parents on Facebook? Is that sometimes difficult? Have you kept things off your Facebook page in order to keep things away from someone (or several someones)?

What the Bible Says:

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:9-12).

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Prov. 27:5-6).

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared” (Prov. 22:24-25).

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:29, 31-32).

Paul Asay has covered religion for The Washington Post, Christianity Today, Beliefnet.com and The (Colorado Springs) Gazette. He writes about culture for Plugged In and wrote the Batman book God on the Streets of Gotham (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and two children. Follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.