

Who's that Girl? Image and Social Media

Girl Scout Research Institute

Despite popular perception, social networks are not necessarily a “girl’s best friend.”

- A vast majority of girls use Facebook (91%) and MySpace (28%) regularly. Thirty-eight percent have a Twitter account, and girls average eight tweets per day.
- However, the vast majority of girls prefer face-to-face communication. Ninety-two percent would give up all of their social networking friends if it meant keeping their best friend.

On social networks, a girl’s image is not always what it seems.

- Seventy-four percent of girls agree that “most girls my age use social networking sites to make themselves look cooler than they really are.” Forty-one percent admit that this describes them.
- When thinking about themselves, most girls claim they portray a more well-rounded image in person than they do online.
 - In person, girls say they come across as smart (82%), fun (82%), funny (80%), kind (76%), a good influence (59%), outgoing (55%), cool (55%), and social/confident (51% each).
 - The most frequent words girls use to describe how they come across based solely on their online profile are fun (54%), funny (52%), and social (48%).
- Girls downplay several positive characteristics of themselves online, most prominently their smartness, kindness, and efforts to be a good influence.
- Girls who have low self-esteem are more likely to admit that their social networking image doesn’t match their in-person image (33% vs. 18% of girls with high self-esteem).
- Girls with low self-esteem are more likely than girls with high self-esteem to claim that the image they portray on social networks is sexy (22% vs. 14%) and crazy (35% vs. 28%).

Girls have good intentions when it comes to safe social networking behavior, but don’t always act on them.

- The vast majority of girls (85%) have talked with their parents about safe social networking behavior, yet 50% admit they are not always as careful as they should be.
- Fifty-nine percent of girls think they have complete control over what happens with the videos, photos, and other information they post online.
- The average girls boasts 351 friends, but 54% of girls are social networking friends with someone they have never actually met in person.
- Many girls are concerned that they won’t get accepted into their college of choice (42%), will miss a job opportunity (40%), will get in trouble with parents/teachers (40%), or will have friends/family lose respect for them (39%) because of their social networking content.

Girls’ emotional safety and reputations are at risk online.

- Sixty-eight percent of girls have had a negative experience on a social networking site, such as having someone gossip about them or being bullied.
- Almost half (46%) think that social networking often creates jealousy among friends. Forty percent admit to losing respect for a friend because of something she/he posted on a social network.

The upside to social networking includes better relationships and connections to causes girls care about.

- Fifty-six percent of girls agree that social networks help them feel closer and more connected to their friends. Thirty percent think that social networks have increased the quality of their relationships.
- Fifty-two percent have gotten involved in a cause they care about through a social network.