

# Social Networking Websites and Teens: An Overview

by Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden

**55% of online teens have created a personal profile online, and 55% have used social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook.**

Washington-- More than half (55%) of all of online American youths ages 12-17 use online social networking sites, according to a new national **survey** of teenagers **conducted by** the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

The survey also finds that older teens, particularly girls, are *more likely* to use these sites. For girls, social networking sites are *primarily* places *to reinforce pre-existing* friendships; for boys, the **networks** also provide opportunities for **flirting** and making new friends.

A social networking site is an online place where a user can create a **profile** and build a **personal network** that connects him or her to other users. In the past five years, such sites **have rocketed** from a niche activity into a **phenomenon** that **engages** tens of millions of internet users. The growth in the popularity of these sites **has generated concerns** among some parents, school officials, and government leaders about the potential **risks posed** to young people when personal information is made available in such a public setting.

The data memo, written by Senior Research Specialists Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden, is based on a survey conducted by telephone from October 23 through November 19, 2006 among a national sample of 935 youths ages 12 to 17. The survey asked about the ways that teenagers use social networking sites and their reasons for doing so. *Among the key findings:*

- 55% of online teens have created a personal profile online, and 55% have used social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook.
- 66% of teens who have created a profile say that their profile is not visible to all internet users.
- 48% of teens visit social networking websites daily or more often; 26% visit once a day, 22% visit several times a day.
- Older girls ages 15-17 are **more likely** to have used social networking sites and created online profiles; 70% of older girls have used an online social network *compared with* 54% of older boys, and 70% of older girls have created an online profile, *while only* 57% of older boys have done so.

"There is a popular idea that every American teenager is using social networks, and that they're **plastering** personal information over their profiles for anyone and everyone to read," says Amanda Lenhart. "***These findings*** change that story – not every teenager is using a social networking website, and of those that do, more than half of them have in some way restricted access to their profile."

Teens say social networking sites help them manage their friendships

- 91% of all social networking teens say they use the sites to stay in touch with friends they see frequently, while 82% use the sites to stay in touch with friends they rarely see in person.
- 72% of all social networking teens use the sites ***to make plans*** with friends; 49% use the sites to make new friends.
- Older boys who use social networking sites (ages 15-17) are more likely than girls of the same age to say that they use social networking sites to make new friends (60% vs. 46%).
- Just 17% of all social networking teens say they use the sites to flirt.
- Older boys who use social networking sites are more than twice as likely as older girls to say they use the sites to flirt; 29% report this compared with just 13% of older girls.

"Both boys and girls rely on social networks **to keep close tabs** on their friends, but older boys are much more likely to use them to meet new friends and flirt **in the comfort of** an online environment," says Mary Madden. "Older boys are really the ones taking advantage of the true 'networking' features offered by the sites."

The Pew Internet Project survey was conducted from October 23 to November 19, 2006 and has a **margin of error** in the overall **sample** of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The [Pew Internet Project](#) is a non-profit, non-partisan initiative of the [Pew Research Center](#) that produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on children, families, communities, the work place, schools, health care, and civic/political life. Support for the non-profit Pew Internet Project is provided by [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#).

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