

# USU Study Connects Some Social Media Use to Marital Dissatisfaction | CEHS

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A new study shines some light on whether social media and gaming use were connected to dissatisfaction in marriages. In some cases, the answer was yes.

Dr. Jeffrey Dew and Dr. Sarah Tulane, both researchers from the Family, Consumer, and Human Development Department at Utah State University, used data from a survey of 3,455 people regarding their marital satisfaction, conflict and perceived instability. The survey also asked participants about their time spent on television, social media and gaming.

The USU researchers' results were published in the *Journal of Family Economic Issues* in December 2015.

According to their findings, wives often used social media more often than their husbands—and that imbalance did not necessarily correlate with marital dissatisfaction. Of those surveyed, 21 percent of the wives reported never spending time on social networking sites, compared to 40 percent of husbands.

But when husbands spent more time on social networking than their wives, they were also more likely to report marital conflict—and so were their spouses.

"It may be the case that husbands who perceived their relationship to be unstable were using social networking for longer periods of time to compensate or cope with the

instability... seeking to strengthen positive relationships with friends online or develop new positive relationships (including romantic relationships) with other individuals," the study said.

Gaming, too, seemed connected with marital dissatisfaction. If both partners were spending the same amount of time on it, it did not appear to affect the quality of the marriage. But if either the husband or the wife was spending more time playing, it was associated with higher conflict, lower satisfaction and higher perceived instability in the marriage.



Both researchers were surprised with their findings on gaming. "I had expected greater gender differences," Dew said. "I thought that maybe it would be more of a problem the more men engaged in gaming, rather than the differences in gaming being what mattered. But I suppose this shows how some couples might use gaming as a mutually enjoyed activity."

All of the data used for this study was from couples in which both spouses participated.

The researchers emphasized that the effect size of the relationship between media use and marital quality was small—as is often the case with studies of marital quality in national samples.

"We do not want to overstate the association between entertainment media use and marital quality," they wrote. "It may be that the association between media use and marital quality is, in reality, relatively small. ... An alternative explanation that fits the findings is that entertainment media use may only be a major problem for a minority of couples."

What's more, the authors recognized that it is hard to draw clear cause-and-effect conclusions from their data. "In

a low-quality marriage, spouses might engage in more media use to compensate for the poor relationship.”

Dew and Tulane recommended further, longitudinal study to better understand the effects of entertainment media on marriages.

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