

Internet and Social Media

B.R. SZYMANSKI, J.E. PACHANKIS, H.Q. LIN, B.R. LEVY. *Cruelty on social networking sites: greater sensitivity of older adults. Gerontechnology 2018;17(Suppl):88s*; <https://doi.org/10.4017/gt.2018.17.s.087.00> **Purpose** Despite the widespread adoption of social networking sites, there is not a consensus on how they affect members' mental health<sup>1-5</sup>. Much of the research that has been conducted thus far has excluded older adults and is limited by assessing social networking site use broadly, and not accounting for individual experiences on social networking sites. There are reasons to believe that older and younger users may be impacted differently by their online experiences due to differences in life stage and past social networking site and life experiences. Younger users may be desensitized to online cruelty through repeated exposure to it, while older users may be newer to social networking sites and therefore remain affected by negative content. We hypothesized that witnessing cruelty on social networking sites would be associated with worse quality of life and this association would be stronger in older participants. **Method** We analyzed data from a nationally representative study of social networking site use among American adults<sup>6</sup>. The study sample consisted of 1047 individuals (32.8% over 50 years old) who indicated they used any social networking site. Multinomial logistic regression was used to assess the association between cruelty on social networking sites and quality of life. **Results & Discussion** We found that witnessing cruel behaviors online was common: over 80% of participants reported ever seeing cruel or offensive behaviour on social networking sites. Online cruelty was associated with lower quality of life in the full sample (OR = 0.81, 95% CI: 0.70 to 0.93). When we tested whether the association differed by participants' age, we found that online cruelty was associated with worse quality of life among older participants (OR = 0.51, 95%CI 0.44 to 0.75), but not younger users (OR = 0.91, 95%CI: 0.77 to 1.07; (Figure 1). This supports the need for additional research on the mental health effects of social networking sites that considers the individual user's experience, and the inclusion of older adults.

References

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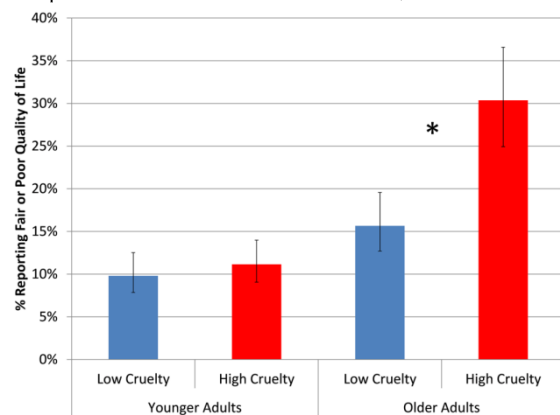


Figure 1. Low quality of life by age and exposure to social networking site cruelty (\*p<0.001)