TMS TRENDS

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FACEBOOK USE LINKED TO DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

Facebook, the social media site, has been used as an effective tool for connecting with new and old friends. Some users, however, find themselves spending too much time viewing Facebook and may inevitably begin comparing their lives to the activities and accomplishments of their friends.

According to University of Houston (UH) researcher Mai-Ly Steers, this amount of time spent on Facebook may be linked to depressive symptoms. Steers' research on the topic is presented in the article, "Seeing Everyone Else's Highlight Reels: How Facebook Usage is Linked to Depressive Symptoms" published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*.

Steers conducted two studies to investigate how social comparison to peers on Facebook might impact users' psychological health. Both studies provide evidence that Facebook users felt depressed when comparing themselves to others. Steers said that those afflicted with emotional difficulties may be particularly susceptible to depressive symptoms due to Facebook social comparison after spending more time on the site. For already distressed individuals, this distorted view of their friends' lives may make them feel alone in their internal struggles, which may compound their feeling of loneliness and isolation. Steers hopes the results of these studies will help people understand that technological advances often possess both intended and unintended consequences.

EARLY LIFE STRESS LINKED TO IMPAIRED DEVELOPMENT OF REWARD CIRCUITS

Researchers at Duke University and the University of Texas Health Sciences Center conducted a longitudinal neuroimaging study of adolescents in order to better understand how early life stress contributes to depression. They recruited 106 adolescents, between the ages of 11-15, who underwent an initial MRI scan along with measurements of mood and neglect. Participants then had a second brain scan two years later.

"Our analyses revealed that over a two-year window during early to mid-adolescence, there was an abnormal decrease in the response of the ventral striatum to reward only in adolescents who had been exposed to emotional neglect, a relatively common form of childhood adversity where parents are persistently emotionally unresponsive and unavailable to their children," explained first author Dr. Jamie Hanson.

This study, published in *Biological Psychiatry*, suggests that, early life stress compromises the capacity to experience enthusiasm or pleasure. In addition, the effect of early life stress may grow over time; people who initially appear resilient may develop problems later in life. Dr. John Krystal, editor of *Biological Psychiatry*, adds, "Further, it suggests that survivors of early life trauma and their families may benefit from learning about the possibility of consequences that might appear later in life. This preparation could help lead to early intervention."

From the TMS Institute of Pennsylvania!