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Educational psychologist Michele Borba discusses new research that highlights a link between social networking websites and anti-social, narcissistic behavior among young users.

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"Can Social Networking Make you a Narcissist?" Nataie Morales, correspondent. NBC Today Show.
Can Social Networking Make you a Narcissist?

NATALIE MORALES, anchor:
Do you and your kids spend a lot of time on Facebook? Well, a new study looks at the connection between social media sites and egocentric, even narcissistic behavior. So what should you watch out for? Michele Borba is an educational psychologist and TODAY contributor. Good morning, Michele. Good to have you here.

Dr. MICHELE BORBA (Educational Psychologist): Good morning.

MORALES: This is a hot-button issue...

BORBA: It's an interesting one.

MORALES: ...you know, because a lot of us do use these social networking sites...

BORBA: Yeah.

MORALES: ...but is there really a connection to narcissism? Let's break down first...

BORBA: Yeah.

MORALES: ...I mean, it's one thing to be self-confident, but it's another thing to have psychological issues relating from narcissism, right?

BORBA: Exactly. And the dangers of too much of that in terms of narcissism means that you're going to have a tough time in terms of interrelationships...

MORALES: Mm-hmm.

BORBA: ...creating them and maintaining them, and it diminishes empathy, and that's the red flag we're really worried about in terms of parenting.

MORALES: And this latest paper, we should point out, this was a small study.

BORBA: Small.

MORALES: It was 100 students, it was done by undergraduate psychology major at York University in Toronto. And basically concluded that users with narcissistic behaviors...
MORALES: ...could be clearly identified by their Facebook pages. So are we a little bit overreacting here to this?
BORBA: You--yes. In terms of--this particular piece of research, it's an interesting discussion. But don't go jumping the conclusions and remove the Facebook account too soon. There's some other research that's even more fascinating. First of all, we're looking at Jean Twenge's research that is profound, she has been studying kids, thousands of them, and is seeing a steady rise in narcissism offline. But now she interviewed them online and discovered that 57 percent of teens say that social networking does exasperate narcissism and two-thirds of them say they're the most narcissistic generation ever.
MORALES: They--so they recognize that.
BORBA: So it's the kids saying it.
MORALES: And they're almost proud of it, it seems like, right?
BORBA: Yeah.
MORALES: I mean--now questions for, then--for the parents. I mean, can you really, first of all, blame these social media sites for all of this, or is it more that, you know, these kids are going to self-promote anyway?
BORBA: Natalie, I think we need--I--yeah. I think we need to take a little credit ourselves.
MORALES: Right. Yeah.
BORBA: If we--a little bit too much trophies and too much putting this kid on center stage.
MORALES: Right.
BORBA: Parenting does matter, and not enough no's, that's the first thing. But the culture has also changed. A celebrity-driven culture, says a lot of research, exasperate it, and not enough face-to-face connection. If you don't have that one-on-one time, what you're actually doing is diminishing empathy, and empathy is the anecdote for narcissism.
MORALES: So what are the telltale signs that parents need to be on the lookout for?
BORBA: Researchers say there are some signs that you can see in terms of your kid online; the first one is, when he is on Facebook, everything is `all about me,' it's constant promoting, it--for the college age set. Pronouns; you'll hear a lot more "I"s and "me"s. And you'll also see competition, `How many friends do I have this month, how many friends do I have this day?' But it's constant, constant, constant checking.
MORALES: Just because you have 1,000 friends, that doesn't make...
BORBA: Yeah.
MORALES: ...mean you have deep friendships.
BORBA: Exactly.
MORALES: Right.
BORBA: Exactly. And then the other thing you're looking for is the photos they say are far more glamorous and in your face as opposed to the little snapshot ones. Not one of those is going to say the kid's narcissistic. Believe me, you can see the same patterns offline as well as online.
MORALES: You got to remember that whatever you put out there on Facebook, that's yours for life.
BORBA: Exactly.
MORALES: Right? And that's going to follow you. If you're applying for a job, they always say don't put
on Facebook what you don't want a prospective employer to see.

BORBA: Oh, you're so right on, Natalie.

MORALES: So...

BORBA: Yeah, so...

MORALES: ...something for the kids and the parents to be thinking about as they...

BORBA: Yeah.

MORALES: ...check out their kids’ entries.

BORBA: Yeah.

MORALES: Thanks, Michele Borba, as always.

BORBA: You're welcome.