

A FINAL QUESTION

Dr Ciaran McMahon
Cyber psychologist



After Labour MEP Nessa Childers called Facebook a “clear and present threat to the mental health of millions of European citizens”, we asked cyber psychologist Dr Ciaran McMahon if the interweb and Facebook are driving us bonkers.

Is Facebook a risk to our mental health?

Nessa Childers' idea that there should be regulations and guidelines is something I agree with.

But will it make us all go a bit ga-ga?

I haven't seen any evidence of that yet. But it is possible. A study recently linked Facebook with depression but really you are talking about a chicken-and-egg situation.

Before you ask which came first, I think you'll find it was the rooster. . .

If there is excessive use of Facebook there is probably another cause of the problem. Excessive Facebook use is just a symptom.

We used to be thin, rich and addicted to coke. Now we're fat, broke and addicted to Facebook.

[Laughs] Addiction is a word we tend not to use in psychology. New technology just takes time for us to adjust to.

Still can't work my damn DVD recorder.

In the '50s we had talk of television addiction. In the '80s we had talk of computer addiction. It generally takes us a generation to adapt to new technology. There will be people who overuse it, but I don't think technology is the problem.

I've heard 50pc of parents 'friend' their children on Facebook and the other 50pc find other ways to embarrass them...

It is a bit of a tricky issue because it is common for students to say their parents requested their friendship on Facebook and they refused.

Funny enough, it was my parents who refused my friend request.

Basically, what they are saying is the world would be a better place if everybody shared everything with everyone.

That's just sick and wrong.

Not everyone wants to share everything. Facebook philosophy doesn't allow for different circles of friends, so you are sharing everything with everyone.

So, I have 173 friends on Facebook, whereas Chris de Burgh has 773 followers. Where's the justice in that?

Researchers found that if you had 50 friends you didn't look as good as someone with 100 friends. With 100, you didn't look as good as someone with 200. But once you got to 500, the effect peaked so a person with 700 friends doesn't look as good to the public as someone with 500.

Yes! I knew it! In your face de Burgh!

Because of the size of our brain we are not capable of being friends with more than 150 people. Facebook doesn't release these statistics too often, but the average number is actually around 130. If it goes beyond that figure Facebook is in trouble because people are just accumulating friends and are not building connections.

So if you got a friend request from Brian Cowen, would you accept it?

No, I don't think so, because I've never met him.

Dr Ciarán Mc Mahon's video detailing how to reap the benefits of Facebook is available at www.facebook.com/psychbook.