



LENS

# Everyday Social Behavior During a Major Depressive Episode



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Do those with major depressive disorder spend less time socializing?

As you can see in the *DSM-5* criteria for major depressive disorder, the symptoms include reductions in enjoyable social contacts, less satisfying social lives, and poor social functioning. However, this information is generally learned from self-reports. There are few empirical studies that have tracked the nature of actual social interactions of those with major depressive disorder. Jenna Baddeley and associates (Baddeley, Pennebaker, & Beevers, 2012) conducted such a study.

These researchers had individuals with MDD and a control group wear an electronically activated recorder for 3–4 days. The device recorded 90-second sound clips from the person's immediate environment every 12 minutes, although the participants were unaware of when the recordings were taking place. These clips were then transcribed. The average age of participants was in the thirties.

Looking at the results of real-life interactions, those with MDD and the controls did not differ significantly in the amount of time they spent with others, the amount of time they talked, and the amount of time they were with one other person. However, there was a difference in the amount of time those with MDD spent in groups or with friends. Those with MDD spent less time in groups. In terms of content, those with MDD expressed more negative emotions and spent less time laughing. The negative emotions expressed by those with MDD referred more to themselves (e.g., “I feel guilty” or “sorry”), whereas the negative comments of those in the control group tended to be a general statement such as, “that is a stupid idea” or “damn it.”

Overall, this study demonstrates a novel way to study the everyday life of people with depression. The study shows that those with MDD and controls spend similar amounts of time talking and interacting with other people. However, those with MDD spend less time in groups and express more negative emotions, especially with their romantic partners.

**Thought Question:** How would you design a study to look at everyday social behavior by using social media? What would be your research hypothesis? What would be your independent and dependent variables?

Based on Jenna L. Baddeley, James W. Pennebaker, & Christopher G. Beevers, *Everyday Social Behavior During a Major Depressive Episode*, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4, 445–452, 2012