

Unfriending and Unfollowing Practices of College Student Users of Facebook

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Abstract

Facebook has become an integral part of college students' lives within the United States. This study aims to provide information on how college students feel and react to information overload, information avoidance, and their privacy concerns. It also aims to find any gender differences between men and women regarding how they unfriend and unfollow other users on Facebook and what their reasoning is. The findings suggest that college students do feel a sense of information avoidance on Facebook that leads them to unfriend or unfollow offending users. Some mentioned feelings of information overload, but it was not a concern that worried them. Many of the participants mentioned that privacy concerns were important to them, but they would rather censor themselves than unfriend or unfollow users that they did not want to see their postings. Generally, the participants held negative attitudes towards Facebook, but felt obligated to keep using the social media site for convenience and to find out information about others. There were no clear differences between men and women in their unfriending and unfollowing practices.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction	5
Literature Review.....	8
Methods	24
Results.....	27
Discussion	44
Conclusion.....	50
Bibliography.....	51
Appendix	57
Recruitment Email:.....	57
Recruitment Questionnaire:.....	58
Interview Guide:.....	59
Interview Transcripts:.....	60

Introduction

Facebook, a popular social media site created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, was initially made as a method for Harvard University students to connect with other like-minded individuals (Phillips, 2007). It quickly spread to other universities and high schools, and is now used by teenagers and adults of a variety of ages. As of December 2013, the site has 1.23 billion monthly active users, and 757 million users access the site daily (Protalinski, 2014). Amongst American college students today, Facebook is a widely used tool for communicating one's interests, pictures, and videos, along with sharing thoughts, feelings, and ideas. In 2013, the percentage of United States college-aged adults using Facebook was measured at 88.6% and is the most widely used social media network on campuses (McDermott, 2014). Users between ages 18-29 have a median of 300 friends (Smith, 2014); these users see a wide variety of information from these friends on their news feeds.

The verb “unfriend,” meaning, “to remove someone as a ‘friend’ on a social networking site such as Facebook,” was the New Oxford American Dictionary Word of the Year in 2009 (Gross, 2009). The word was chosen due to its currency and potential for longevity – no matter what the social media platform, it is easy to find a user who has deleted a connection to another user. The word has transferred to other social media sites and even to common language. A Facebook user can “unfollow” another so that a certain friend's updates and posts will not appear on the user's news feed; “unfriending” someone means that the user will no longer see the friend's profile and this friend will no longer be able to see the user's information and updates. This process is simple and

relatively painless; in most circumstances the recipient will never know he or she has been unfriended (Sibona, 2014).

Since social media has become a pervasive force in today's society, its impact on users is important to study; however, there is little research done on users' reasoning behind removing friends and if this relates to the field of information science. According to Pew Research, 71% of Facebook users ages 18-29 have deleted a person from their friends list in 2011 (Madden, 2012). Though this phenomenon does occur in Facebook, there has been little research done on what kind of reasoning goes behind unfriending someone, or if unfriending a user on Facebook has any relation to principles within information science. Studies also have not looked in depth into privacy in unfriending behaviors (Sibona, 2014).

The specific questions the research addresses are as follows:

1. Is there any difference a college student feels when unfollowing someone as opposed to unfriending him or her?
2. Are there any major differences between males and females in unfriending and unfollowing practices on Facebook?
3. Do college students feel any sense of information overload or information avoidance when unfriending someone on Facebook? Are there any other underlying reasons for negative feelings towards information on Facebook?
4. Are there any privacy concerns in unfriending someone on Facebook? Are there certain situations in which a Facebook user wants to protect information from

another user?

Literature Review

Facebook is an immensely popular social networking tool for college students – it is used for keeping in touch with friends, contributing pictures and information, and sharing updates about a user and his or her life. However, a user has the option of unfriending or unfollowing another user for any reason, and unfriending is a common occurrence amongst Facebook users. 71% of Facebook users ages 18-29 have deleted a person from their friends list in 2011 (Madden, 2012). In 2010, popular television host Jimmy Kimmel announced November 17 to be “National Unfriend Day,” encouraging his viewers to unfriend anyone deemed unnecessary or annoying (Griggs, 2014).

When a Facebook user unfriends another person, the unfriended user will no longer see the person’s updates and information on his or her news feed. The amount of information the unfriended user sees varies, depending on the level of privacy restrictions the user has in place. Unfollowing is a different action, where the unfollowed user will no longer appear on the user’s news feed, but the two are still friends in the context of Facebook. This option was implemented in late 2013, following other social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram, and the unfollowed user is not notified if someone uses the option (Depper, 2013).

However, it is difficult to explicitly deem who is and who is not an unnecessary friend and why a user could unfriend or unfollow another user. The reasons for unfriending are not always obvious and can be influenced by many factors. This literature review will first look at studies relating to Facebook usage and more detailed statistics on how and why users unfriend other people. It will then move to possible

motivations for unfriending, with particular emphasis on those that are related to information science, which are information avoidance and information overload. Privacy concerns and gender differences in unfriending and unfollowing will then be discussed.

Unfriending and Unfollowing on Facebook

Currently, Facebook is the most popularly used website in the United States; it is where Americans use the largest share of their time spent online, approximately 17% (Sibona, 2014). For teenagers and young adults, friendship forming is an important type of identity formation (Lewis and West, 2009). However, some of these friends may be weak ties; they are fluid and can be dissolved in an instant (Sibona, 2014). According to Rainie and Wellman, “it takes little work to keep large numbers or hardly known (or long-lost) ties on your ‘friend’ list” (Rainie and Wellman, 2012). These connections are then very easy to delete once they are no longer useful, or result in any kind of negativity.

As compared to studies of relationship dissolution in close friends and divorces, Facebook relationship collapse is very different due to the greater diversity of situations in which a user can be unfriended (Sibona, 2014). For example, Facebook friends can be deleted for having differing views on numerous topics or for updating their page too frequently; this is very different from dissolving friendships that exist in the offline world. While a Facebook user may have someone as a friend on Facebook, it is not always clear if they are friends offline. While people form friendships offline because they are rewarding and can be based on similarities in age, religion, ethnicity, and gender, Facebook friendships can be based on increasing the number of friends collected by an

individual or because “it’s easier to say yes than no” (Sibona, 2014). These kinds of online friendships seem to be ones of mutual convenience or avoidance of conflict, and may be easier to end online than an offline friendship would.

A study analyzing 34,012 friendships on Facebook done by researchers at the University of Cambridge found that a Facebook relationship is more likely to break if the two users are not embedded in the same social circle, are not of similar ages, or if one is neurotic or introverted (Quercia et al, 2012). Interestingly, the study also found that friendships of three people (triads) were more likely to be stable if there was at least one female in the group. For triads with no female friend, 54.5% of the relationships broke; with triads with two female friends, only 33.8% of the relationships broke. However, the study could not explain why this happened.

In a study done by surveying 1,330 Twitter users whom had recently tweeted about Facebook unfriending, 18.6% responded that the last user they had unfriended was a high school friend, the top response (Sibona, 2014). The study also showed that the respondents who unfriended high school friends reported that they did so because these friends posted about polarizing issues or too frequently about unimportant topics; the survey responders were less likely to unfriend high school friends for offline behavior than for online behavior (Sibona, 2014). In comparison, work-related friends were more likely to be unfriended for offline behavior than for their online behavior (Sibona, 2014). Another study regarding Twitter use in South Korea showed that users are most likely to unfollow users who created too many tweets in a short period of time, tweeted about uninteresting topics, or tweeted about mundane details about their lives (Kwak et al, 2011). These results are similar to unfriending/unfollowing behaviors in Facebook, and

since the two are very similar social media platforms, one's behavior on Twitter can carry over to Facebook.

Facebook itself does not encourage unfriending. In 2014, an outside developer created an app for Facebook called "Duster," which suggested to users what friends they should delete. Facebook disabled the app because it "encouraged unfriending among users...this is an intended limitation on Facebook functionality and is not allowed" (Bereznak, 2014). The app was used for "mass unfriending," or deleting many users at a time in a "cleanse" of one's list of friends. Mass unfriending has not been researched fully but is described by bloggers and online writers as a way to feel less cluttered. In describing mass unfriending, *Slate* writer Dan Kois states "once [Facebook] felt like a stadium packed full of strangers yelling at each other...now it feels more like a cocktail party" (Kois, 2014). He believes that mass unfriending is a way to reduce "friend clutter" and will "make your online experience a lot cleaner, better, [and] more meaningful." However, he does not mention reasons for unfriending these people other than not knowing them well; his discomfort at having so many friends is possibly based in feelings of information overload.

Motivations for Unfriending and Unfollowing: Information Avoidance

Information avoidance is defined as any behavior intended to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information (Sweeny et. al, 2010). It can also be defined as when a person instinctively knows the answer to the question in their mind, but does not want it confirmed through information seeking (Narayan et al.

2011). Much of the research on information avoidance comes from psychology in studies on selective exposure, where people are particular about the information they seek when evaluating attitudes and judgments, along with dissonance theory. Based on these theories, people will avoid information that challenges their own beliefs, because this kind of information creates cognitive dissonance (Sweeny et. al, 2010). Within the context of Facebook, a user may unfriend someone due to controversial posts regarding topics such as politics, religion, and society that do not agree with the user's own opinions; unfriending the user in question would remove feelings of confusion or help the user feel less uncomfortable.

Cognitive dissonance is a negative feeling that people can experience when they are presented with information that conflicts with their existing beliefs and values. When confronted by this information, people are “motivated to reduce [it]. One obvious strategy of accomplishing this objective is to avoid inconsistent information that might provoke dissonance” (Smith et al, 2008). Within the context of Facebook, a user may hold certain political beliefs, and when faced with opposing political beliefs, he or she may unfollow or unfriend the offending user to avoid the information and the feeling of dissonance.

Selective exposure is a theory in psychology that states that people are likely to seek out information that agrees with their beliefs or choices, and avoid information that disagrees. Within this theory, a person will:

...tend to seek out information in which he expects to contain good features of the alternative he has chosen and should avoid positive information about the rejected

alternative, he should also avoid information which he expects to give bad features of the chosen alternative and should seek out information that contains the negative features of the alternative he rejected (Mills et al, 1958).

This kind of information avoidance can happen within Facebook: for example, a college student may decide to pursue an English degree rather than biology. He or she may choose to keep reading statuses from a friend stating how difficult biology classes are, or about how fulfilling an English major would be. He or she would then unfriend or unfollow a user who claims that biology majors will find jobs after graduation more easily or will be paid more.

Within information science, researchers are interested in the phenomenon of information avoidance where people avoid information even though it may have critical implications for their health, relationships, and well being (Sweeny et. al, 2010). For example, a study of elderly women in a retirement residency found that many of the residents were greatly in need of health information, but they avoided it and pretended that they were doing fine without it (Savolainen, 2014). Most often, people avoid information because it will evoke negative feelings. People judge information to be unwanted because it can cause feelings such as sadness, disappointment, anger, guilt, jealousy, and shame (Sweeny et. al, 2010). Several studies have shown that people anticipate that when they avoid certain kinds of information, the regret they will feel over learning the information would be greater than they would feel if they avoided it (Sweeny et. al, 2010). In one study regarding information avoidance, participants kept journals regarding their information behaviors, revealing that some actively avoided certain types of information: one actively avoided all kinds of bad news because it made her depressed,

while another religious participant avoided any information that would force her to question her faith (Narayan et al. 2011). Generally, people “are more likely to run the proverbial other way if they perceive little or no potential for benefit from the information and anticipate little regret over avoiding the information” (Sweeny and Miller, 2012).

Within Facebook, it is possible that users engage in information avoidance when unfriending or unfollowing people to avoid a sense of cognitive dissonance or perceiving threats to their own beliefs. For example, in Narayan’s study, one subject stated, “My friend is not a believer like me but we are friends so I avoid discussing the subject with her” (Narayan et al. 2011). In this case, a Facebook user with a similar problem might unfollow her friend so she does not feel any discomfort over their differing religious beliefs. However, most research regarding information avoidance shows that people avoid information that threatens their attitudes and beliefs; there is far less research on other motivations (Sweeny et. al, 2010). Currently, it remains unclear what emotions prompt information avoidance, or how people balance the desire to pursue positive emotions and avoid negative emotions (Sweeny et. al, 2010). In Facebook, users may experience finding positive and negative emotions in response to reading their friends’ updates.

In a study of young adult users of Facebook, researchers found that the subjects followed three informal rules in regards to the Facebook use, one of which was “do not spy on or stalk other users.” (Miller and Munday, 2014). Some of the subjects viewed this behavior as “creepy,” while one avoided the behavior because it caused him to “overanalyze stupid stuff.” While the subject did not mention if he had unfriended or

unfollowed anyone, reading another user's information made him uncomfortable and caused him to avoid it.

Information avoidance could be a major factor in deciding to unfriend or unfollow a particular user on Facebook. Users can distance themselves from other people who post information on things that the user disagrees with or does not want to know about. It is important to understand what makes social media users uncomfortable and what kind of information they do not want to see because it can help provide insight to create better online experiences for them.

Motivations for Unfriending and Unfollowing: Information Overload

Information overload is a subjective experience in which one feels a lack of time to make effective use of information resources available in specific situations (Savolainen, 2007). Someone experiencing information overload may feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they have found and are unsure of how to make sense of it all. A large amount of information acts like noise when it becomes overloaded; it can cause anxiety, boredom, and distraction (Savolainen, 2007). Individuals can cope with overload by using strategies such as queuing or filtering, or even discarding or ignoring certain information (Savolainen, 2007). In a study of university librarians, many of the librarians used multiple types of tools and filters to keep themselves informed without becoming overwhelmed with information (Sullivan, 2004).

Within Facebook, users may unfriend some of their friends due to the fact that

they feel overwhelmed by the information they see on their news feed; this is a sort of cleaning or uncluttering. In a study done by Reijo Savolainen, 20 environmental activists in Finland were interviewed to discuss how they monitored everyday events in the media, including reading emails (Savolainen, 2007). The majority of the participants felt that they found overload to be a real problem, and felt bored with the repetitiveness of information gleaned from radio and television. They coped by filtering information quickly by scanning emails and skimming through articles. This kind of filtering strategy was based on the need to focus on the most useful information and weed out useless material. In Facebook, it is possible that users may filter their news feeds to weed out unimportant information; this kind of filtering can consist of unfriending or unfollowing other users they find boring or uninteresting.

A study of 22 Korean Twitter users also helps illuminate the feeling of information overload in social media. 20 out of the 22 respondents had unfollowed a user who engaged in “burst tweets,” or tweeting multiple times in a short period (Kwak et al, 2011). When asked why they did not like the burst tweets, the respondents said that they “felt overwhelmed at the sheer amount of information of burst tweets.” In interviews of teenage users of Facebook, one girl mentioned, “sometimes I hide [other users] because whatever they’re talking about is confusing to me because I don’t know what they’re talking about or I get stuff...that I don’t really want” (boyd and Marwick, 2011). The researchers found that other users in the study found interpretable content that did not relate to them “frustrating” because it “clogs up Facebook.”

Connection overload, a subset of information overload, occurs when people feel continuously connected within social media, causing distractions and other detrimental

effects. In a study of college students in the US, Ireland, and South Korea, researchers found that the relationship between connection demands and negative affect was not what they had hypothesized: the more connections and demands, the less the negative affect (LaRose et al, 2014). Since these results go against previous studies of information overload and stress, the researchers concluded that psychological well being could be an important factor in determining if a user will feel overwhelmed.

Currently, the phenomenon of information overload has mostly been studied in work-related contexts, and there are few studies in non-work settings (Savolainen, 2007). It is also unclear if users of social media sites regularly feel overwhelmed with the amount of information presented to them. Within this study, evidence could be found that suggests whether or not Facebook users unfriend or unfollow other users due to information overload.

Motivations for Unfriending and Unfollowing: Privacy Concerns

Though Facebook users can control what parts of their profiles are public and private, many users still feel a sense of fear regarding their privacy online. Many users have rejected friend requests from people they do not know, or if they do not want the person to see their posted information. In a study of 260 Facebook users, 96% of the participants had rejected a friend request from someone due to privacy concerns; the most common answer was that they did not know the person, and the second most common was that they knew the person but did not want to give them access to their profile (Johnson et. al, 2012). 69% had unfriended a user; while many did so because of

unwanted status updates, 45 participants had unfriended someone because they were unsure if they actually knew them (Johnson et. al, 2012). However, it is often difficult to know who exactly is looking at one's Facebook profile; Facebook does not provide any way for users to see who has looked at their profiles. In a study of London undergraduate Facebook users, the subjects were at a consensus that they were aware that other users could look at their profiles or "stalk" them, but few knew exactly what parts of their profiles were available to certain individuals (Lewis and West, 2009).

While Facebook users have rejected friend requests due to a concern for privacy, they have also unfriended people for the same reason. In a study of librarians using social media within the workplace, one described unfriending an administrative assistant after she had left a negative comment on the subject's post; the subject stated that "it felt like a violation and that it wasn't professionally 'safe' for me to remain friends with her because she was likely to...pass on information to my superiors" (Del Bosque, 2013). Others self-censored themselves to avoid accidentally disclosing private information. This may also hold true for college student users of Facebook; they may want to unfriend people they work with or know through professional means in order to prevent the exposure of negative information.

In a study of Canadian teens regarding privacy, Kate Raynes-Goldie concludes that young Facebook users are more concerned with social privacy over institutional privacy. She states that the participants "were more concerned about controlling access to personal information rather than how the company behind Facebook...and its partners may use that information" (Raynes-Goldie, 2010). These Facebook users are more concerned with what their Facebook friends and others see (the people they can imagine),

rather than what corporations will do with their data (the people they cannot readily imagine). She also states that the participants were “concerned with how, when and who could see their personal information: both in terms of information they had provided themselves on their profiles, as well as comments others had left on their walls or through photos they had been tagged in” (Raynes-Goldie, 2010).

Concerns with “social privacy” include the fear that the wrong people may see certain photos or status updates. Many users are aware of the fact that the content they post may be accepted by some friends and not by others (French and Read, 2013). Without any privacy control, it is very possible that messages meant for one social group may be seen by members of another. In a study done by French and Read, 14 out of 18 interviewees stated that they used blocking functions to prevent certain individuals from seeing information that they posted. The most common explanation was that the individuals felt more comfortable sharing information on social media when they knew that some people could not see it (French and Read, 2013).

Young adult users of Facebook have used many methods to protect their privacy on Facebook. According to Raynes-Goldie, many change their name to an alias, using a fake last name, an initial, or their middle name; however, according to a study by Zeynep Tufekci, 94.9% of her study sample used their real names (Tufekci, 2008). Other young adults have prevented family members from posting on their “wall,” viewing their pictures, or commenting. In interviews of teenage users of Facebook, danah boyd encountered one fourteen-year-old boy who would block his cousins from seeing statuses about video games that they disapproved, which the boy considered “embarrassing”

(boyd and Marwick, 2011). Another teen believed that it was “weird” and felt uncomfortable when her mother would post pictures of the girl on Facebook.

Despite privacy concerns, Tufekci concludes, “the need to be seen is greater than the fears students have about privacy concerns” (Tufekci, 2008). This is why many young adults continue to use Facebook, even though it is possible that the wrong person may see an unflattering or negative post. However, a study of teenage Facebook users by danah boyd and Eszter Hargittai found that the young adults were not complacent regarding their privacy on the social media site: “the majority...are engaged with managing their privacy settings on the site to at least some extent” (boyd and Hargittai, 2010). Their study also saw that those who were more active on Facebook were more willing to change their privacy settings. boyd and Alice Marwick judge that the young users “believe that they have kept strangers out while remaining unaware of who else may have access to that data...while teens generally do not account for invisible third parties, they do account for eavesdroppers” (boyd and Marwick, 2011). These “eavesdroppers” can consist of anyone who sees posted information that has nothing to do with them, such as parents and other family members. boyd has also stated that “teens don’t see privacy as a binary or about simply restricting access to content. They use privacy settings to keep ‘creepers’ away but their real battles over privacy play out among the people that they know” (boyd, 2010). In this sense, “the only way to have privacy is to appear to be fully public” (boyd, 2010).

Privacy is a major concern for many social media users, who want to protect sensitive information or photos. However, it can be unclear from whom college student users want to protect their information, and what kinds of people they view as threats to

their privacy.

Gender Differences

Though men and women both use Facebook, women are more active. Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg reported that female Facebook users “have 8% more friends and participate in 62% of the sharing” (Goudreau, 2010). According to a September 2014 Pew Internet study, the trend where women use Facebook more than men has continued (Duggan et al., 2014). These differences in online behavior between men and women, according to gender and communications researcher Sherry Perlmutter Bowen, have roots in how boys and girls are raised differently: “Girls learn to build relationships by sharing social information. Boys learn to compare and compete with others, always striving for more success” (Goudreau, 2010). According to Rainie and Wellman, there are also differences in how men and women make and keep friends online:

In pre-Internet days, women were most often responsible for keeping networks going...although husbands and wives often saw the same friends. In the early days of the Internet, men were more active than women. Now, on the one hand, there is less difference in what women and men do online. On the other hand, a study of American undergraduates still finds a traditional difference between men and women in their Internet use. Women use the Internet more to reinforce their existing core ties, while men are more apt to use the Internet to develop new relationships.

According to a Pew Internet report, a woman with an average size social network is aware of 13% more stressful events in the lives of her closest friends and 14% more aware of the stress in acquaintances' lives, as opposed to a woman who does not use Facebook. A male Facebook user is only 8% more aware of stress in the lives of his close friends and 6% more aware in acquaintances' lives as opposed to a male who does not use Facebook. This kind of stress can lead to an increased risk of diseases and other psychological problems (Hampton et. al, 2015). Since women are more likely to be aware of stressful news in their friends' lives, it is possible that they will want to distance themselves from that information as to protect their mental health.

A study done by boyd and Hargittai found no differences between men and women in their confidence regarding their management of their privacy settings. However, they did find that women were much more likely to have changed their Facebook privacy settings and had done so multiple times, "suggesting that women are more actively seeking to manage privacy" (boyd and Hargittai, 2010).

Currently it is unclear how differences between men and women affect how they use Facebook and how they unfriend or unfollow other users. Through interviews, it may be possible to see if there are any distinct differences between men and women in their perceptions of information avoidance, information overload, and within their privacy concerns.

Conclusion

Unfriending is common amongst Facebook users, and there are many reasons for doing so, including feelings of information overload, wanting to avoid certain information, and privacy concerns. However, most of the literature regarding American college students and their use of Facebook involves survey results, while in-depth answers explaining why they unfriend users are rare.

Studying unfriending behavior on Facebook is important because it shows where social information can cause feelings of discomfort and fear. Since technology is deeply embedded in today's society, it is crucial to understand how posting personal information online affects people and what reactions they will have when information makes them uncomfortable.

Methods

This was an exploratory study to more fully understand the reasons why young adults unfriend or unfollow other users on Facebook. Interviews with full time university students were conducted to see what reasoning they used when removing another user from their news feeds and if there were fears regarding the spread of information or encountering unsettling information. The sample size was kept small due to time constraints and to be able to fully analyze the information the interviews provided.

The Sample

The population of interest was educated young adult users of Facebook, because Facebook is the most widely used social media site used amongst adults (Duggan et. al, 2014). The study was conducted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, using undergraduate students that attended the university full time. This setting was applicable to the study because it focuses on young adults, the main users of Facebook (Duggan et. al, 2014). These students were likely to be regular users of Facebook and were also likely to have unfriended or unfollowed another user. A convenience sample was recruited from the undergraduate population of UNC. Participants ranged in age from 18-24. Of the approximately 18,000 undergraduates at UNC, 58% are female and 42% are male. Therefore, of the 11 students involved in the study, 6 were female and 5 were male to accurately represent the population size.

The students that were interviewed as part of the study were recruited through use of a mass email recruiting listserv. Those who applied completed a screening questionnaire, which asked for their age, gender, status as a full-time undergraduate, and if they had unfriended, unfollowed, or blocked someone within the past two months. Students who were Information & Library Science majors were excluded because they would understand the principles of information overload and information avoidance, which could influence their answers. Those who fit the criteria were selected, and from this group, the 11 interviewees were chosen randomly.

These students were compensated \$20, as provided by the Dunlevie Honors Undergraduate Research Fund, administered by Honors Carolina. To receive compensation, the interviewee was to answer the majority of questions from the interview guide, but was not forced to answer all of them. No risk to the participants was anticipated, but if an interviewee became upset or emotional due to a touchy subject, he or she would be referred to the UNC Counseling and Psychological Services for professional help.

The Interviews

The students were interviewed for 10-30 minutes regarding their usage of Facebook, their unfriending and unfollowing practices, and what kind of emotions they had experienced in unfriending or unfollowing an individual. They were also asked about their privacy concerns and practices on Facebook. They were interviewed on campus one-on-one and were paid once the interview had been completed. These

interviews were audio recorded, and the transcriptions are provided in the appendix, along with the interview guide.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were concluded, they were transcribed and then analyzed for certain types of behavior through open coding. These behaviors included unfriending or unfollowing due to information overload, information avoidance, or privacy concerns, as well as any other motivations that were revealed during the interviews. When the interviews were completed and analyzed, the findings helped to reveal the common Facebook unfriending practices amongst them, and showed how they reacted to information that made them uncomfortable or upset.

Results

Research question #1: Is there any difference a college student feels when unfollowing someone as opposed to unfriending him or her?

This question cannot be definitively answered due to the fact that 5 of the 11 participants did not know the difference between unfollowing and unfriending on Facebook (participants #3, #4, #6, #8, and #9). Some of the participants believed that unfollowing was the same thing as unfriending, similarly to Twitter. Others recognized that on Facebook they could unfollow pages or celebrities they had “liked,” but did not realize that they could do the same for their own friends. To find out the opinions of the participants who did not understand the difference between unfollowing and unfriending, the difference was explained; they were then asked what kind of distinction they would make between unfriending and unfollowing if they had to make that choice regarding a hypothetical user.

Despite the fact that slightly more than half of the sample understood the purpose of unfollowing, there were differing opinions as to the usefulness and appropriateness of unfollowing. 7 participants believed that unfollowing was less extreme and less offensive than unfriending. By unfollowing a user, they could stop the user’s frustrating or annoying material, but still keep the relationship intact if they felt the need to find information about the user or connect with them.

Unfriending is more aggressive than unfollowing, because they don’t know if I unfollow them or not, but I don’t want to see their postings, so it’s much better to unfollow then unfriend without hurting them. (Participant #1, male)

Unfriending them, they know, but if you unfollow them, they don't. (Participant #2, male)

I probably I'd be more apt to unfollow people than unfriend them because of the conscious...you're cutting off a relationship with someone...I would prefer to unfollow someone so I don't leave negative ties to that person. Because they know when you unfollow them, it'll leave a bitterness...Unfriending is risky since they'll say, "Oh, why did she unfriend me?" But unfollowing, it's still like, "You're my friend!" (Participant #4, female)

One of the girls [I unfollowed], we were close friends, so I guess I would feel bad to unfriend her and she'd probably notice. I just weed out her stuff, unfollow her, so it doesn't show up. (Participant #7, female)

Certain people I might unfollow, like maybe be their friend because in the future to have that network, I guess, that would be a reason why I'd unfollow them rather than unfriend them. If I'm probably never going to see you again, then I'd unfriend, but if they were just annoying me I'd unfollow them but want to keep the connection. (Participant #9, female)

Some people just post a lot and it's annoying, but you still want to be friends with them or look at their pictures...if you're unfollowing them you still want to be friends with them, but unfriending means you don't want to see them at all. (Participant #10, male)

Sometimes they're actually really good friends and I just don't agree with what

they're saying. I don't think it's as extreme as unfriending, but with unfollowing I don't have to see the content but we're still friends. (Participant #11, male)

However, two participants did not like the distinction between unfriending and unfollowing, and believed that unfollowing a user as opposed to unfriending them was cowardly:

[Unfollowing] seems very, I don't know, there's something weird about that. I can't put it into words. It's not like you're committed to blocking this person out of your life. It's doing it halfway, it's kind of lazy. I don't know why you would do that, actually. Why wouldn't you just unfriend them? (Participant #3, male)

I feel like it's kind of fake, like I don't really understand why you'd want to keep them as a friend without seeing their updates, like what's the point of having them as a friend still? The person's not going to know if you unfollow them. I guess if you wanted to keep the relationship, because they would know if you unfriended them, because then you wouldn't be able to see their profile. Other than that I don't really see the point. (Participant #5, female)

The majority of the participants believed that unfollowing could be used as an alternative to unfriending when they wanted to see the user's updates or information, or when they did not want to risk hurting the other person's feelings by unfriending them.

Research question #2: Are there any major differences between males and females in unfriending and unfollowing practices on Facebook?

There were no major differences found between the male and female participants in their unfriending and unfollowing practices. Neither group was more likely to unfriend or unfollow another user due to online reasons over offline reasons, or vice versa. Participants of both genders stated that they had methodically unfriended users in their friends list, while others had not.

Research question #3: Do college students feel any sense of information overload or information avoidance when unfriending someone on Facebook? Are there any other underlying reasons for negative feelings towards information on Facebook?

Information Overload:

There was no general consensus amongst the participants as to feeling any sense of information overload. Of all the participants, only 6 out of 11 (#2, #5, #7, #8, #9, and #10) referenced feelings or situations that came about as a result of their news feeds. The words the participants used to describe their news feeds included “cluttered” (Participant #10, male); “clogged” (Participant #9, female); and full of “spam” (Participant #2, male). Some mentioned that it was difficult to find information that directly affected them:

People post a lot of stupid stuff and then it’s hard to find interesting or relevant things that you want. (Participant #10, male)

People just post pictures and if someone says something it kind of gets lost in your news feed. (Participant #3, male)

Three of the participants stated that they had felt a positive change when they had unfriended other users:

I felt relieved [after unfriending someone]. I felt like I had control over what I saw on my news feed. (Participant #5, female)

[After unfriending a large amount of people at once] I felt cleaned up. (Participant #7, female)

[I felt] relieved [after unfriending a large number of people at once]...One less bit of drama. I'm trying to be very un-dramatic. (Participant #8, female)

None of the participants directly stated that they felt that their news feed was cluttered to a point where it made them uncomfortable. One participant stated that she had methodically unfriended people to feel a sense of control over her friends, but that it did not impact her much:

I guess I haven't gone through enough to feel like, "Finally, I can get to the people I care about," like there's just so much, I guess I'd feel tired after doing that, taking thirty minutes to just get through the "A's" but nothing like "Oh, I feel so much better now that I've unfriended them." (Participant #9, female)

Another participant mentioned that he did feel a small change when unfollowing people, but it did not seem to be particularly impactful:

[I feel] a little bit better because it's less cluttered, you find more things that are relevant to you over things that don't really matter. (Participant #10, female)

Due to the fact that few participants mentioned a positive feeling when unfriending someone and that none of them any mentioned any distinct feelings of being overwhelmed by their Facebook accounts, information overload cannot be attributed as a common reason for unfriending amongst college students.

Information Avoidance:

All of the participants had unfriended or unfollowed a user to avoid a specific topic. These topics included religious, political, racist, and immoral posts, along with posts that evoked negative emotional responses from the participants.

Of the participants, four (#1, #5, #7, #11) mentioned unfollowing or unfriending a former romantic partner. These participants wanted to avoid seeing updates or posts from these exes because they evoked negative emotional responses. By removing these users from their news feeds, the participants would not see any information regarding these exes that could make them upset:

You don't want to see their [ex-boyfriends'] updates. It's a way like, out of sight, out of mind. (Participant #5, female)

I unfriended him because I got tired of seeing the stuff he was posting, like how he was acting...I needed to cut all ties to get myself beyond it. (Participant #7, female)

Two participants (#2, #9) mentioned that they had unfriended or unfollowed someone due to posting about religious beliefs, but they did not specify if it was a specific denomination or opinion that caused the unfriending. One participant stated that she would unfriend religious users that did not share the same opinions as she did:

I've seen things where people will post that I don't necessarily agree with, like religious things. (Participant #9, female)

Three participants (#3, #4, #5) mentioned that they had unfriended or unfollowed someone due to posting about political beliefs. One participant unfriended a user who posted political information because she did not agree with it, and did not want to feel like she was supporting the user's belief:

I unfriended her because of a political belief that she was constantly posting about that I was completely opposed to...I don't want to see that, I don't want to support her thoughts or opinions...that was a motivation, to not see that on my feed anymore. (Participant #4, female)

Another user specifically mentioned a recent political event that prompted her to unfriend another user:

Right after Eric Garner, when that random man killed two police officers in New York, I tried to have a discussion with one of my friends from high school who's in the military...when I tried to insert my opinion he and all his military friends were really demeaning and condescending and patronizing. (Participant #5, female)

In this situation, the participant felt uncomfortable and offended at the presence of another user with a differing opinion, and she unfriended him to avoid that kind of information.

Two participants (#7, #11) mentioned unfriending another user due to racist comments. The two stated that they would rather unfriend the user than risk the negative emotions that the information would cause them:

He was making very uneducated statements about African-American people, and instead of being sucked into the negativity I unfriended him for that. (Participant #7, female)

Different views that I just don't agree with I'd rather not see...racism is one thing...I know for some topics you can't really change people's opinions, and I'd prefer not to see it, so I'd rather censor it myself. Usually if there's one thing posted about it there's more that follows, so I just cut it off ahead of time.

(Participant #11, male)

Three participants (#5, #6, #8) mentioned unfriending or unfollowing a user that posted information that they found disturbing or offensive:

If they've posted a video or something that I found disturbing, I would go to their profile and unfriend them. (Participant #5, female)

She made a comment about special needs students and I was not okay with that. I don't think she realized it was rude, but it hurt me because I have special needs people in my family. (Participant #6, female)

I unfriend people...if they say something that's prejudiced or biased. (Participant #8, female)

Other participants did not have specific examples as to what would cause them negative feelings and the desire to avoid certain information. However, they recognized that some information had a negative effect on them:

It got under my skin. (Participant #3, male)

It was a negative impact on me, and I didn't really care to continue following. (Participant #4, female)

They'll post "woe is me" type of stuff, posts about how they don't like where they are in life...it brings down my mood if that's all I see on my timeline. (Participant #7, female)

I'd definitely unfriend or unfollow them because I don't want to put [negative posts] in my head. (Participant #9, female)

One participant noted that he felt a positive change once he had removed certain information from his news feed:

It feels good when you get rid of someone who's not really relevant, they went to your high school and they're not really doing anything with their lives. I want to follow successful people or important people. (Participant #10, male)

Though the participants interviewed had many different topics that they found disconcerting, they all felt the need to avoid the information by unfriending or

unfollowing the offending user. By doing this, they felt more control over their Facebook accounts and would not have to worry about the negative emotions the information would provoke.

Negative Attitudes towards Facebook:

Overall, the participants held negative attitudes towards Facebook. When asked how they felt while browsing their news feeds, the majority stated that they experienced negative feelings. Two participants mentioned that the prevalence of advertisements on Facebook bothered them:

In the past, I liked to see people saying things on Facebook and posting pictures, but as time goes...there were more advertisements. (Participant #1, male)

I'm a little bit annoyed because it's different from when I was younger, like in middle school, because now all those pages you liked show ads and stuff, and when I was in middle school I liked a thousand of them...so I'll go though and try to click out of them or unlike the page so that it stops popping up, so sometimes that's frustrating. (Participant #9, female)

Other participants felt a sense of malaise regarding Facebook; it was something that they used to relieve boredom or pass the time. However, they found that most of the information on their news feed was unexciting or irrelevant to their interests.

When I'm on [Facebook] it's usually because I have nothing else to do... it's more like a habit than any necessity to actually be on Facebook. (Participant #2, male)

I'm wasting time...it's pretty much pointless. I just find it so boring...ten thousand selfies or taking a picture of a party, you're just taking pictures of your friends and that's the same as some other night where you took a picture of your friends.

(Participant #3, male)

Most of the time I'm trying to relax, or I'm bored, so I'm doing it mostly for entertainment. (Participant #5, female)

Sometimes it feels annoying. Most of the times it's like, "Why are people posting this?" People post a lot of stupid stuff and then it's hard to find interesting or relevant things that you want. (Participant #10, male)

Some of the participants mentioned that they only kept their Facebook profiles for convenience or a way to glean information regarding what their friends were doing.

A lot of people post pictures and that's their only means of showing where they've gone, like on trips, so they'll say, "Go check Facebook!" and I kind of have to, at that point. (Participant #2, male)

[I keep my Facebook profile] so I don't feel awkward in social situations.

(Participant #3, male)

It's easy to make accounts with places now by logging in with Facebook. You don't have to make up a whole new password. (Participant #10, male)

Some of the participants explicitly stated in the interviews that they preferred other social media platforms to Facebook for various reasons:

I like Twitter more because, when something happens there's actual conversations happening, I find it very interesting. After the Chapel Hill shootings people were saying different things, and it was more interesting that what you'd find on Facebook, and there's more voices since it's more popular. You can just speak out against someone or force someone on Twitter, like "I like or don't like this opinion," whereas on Facebook there's already a filter, they already kind of know who you are. If you're known as a crazy radical they might not follow or friend you. They might not like you. But on Twitter they just won't follow you.

(Participant #3, male)

I do check Twitter more often than I do Facebook, I probably check Facebook maybe two-three times a week whereas Twitter, I'm on Twitter all the time every day. (Participant #6, female)

On my Twitter, not saying that I say bad stuff, but I can say how I feel, what I think. (Participant #7, female)

Facebook is kind of a general thing for me, and Instagram and Twitter are more up to date and specific to things. (Participant #10, male)

Here, two participants mentioned that they felt more constrained by Facebook and could not state their true opinions. Since their Facebook profiles were tied to their names and identities, it was difficult for them to talk candidly without feeling judged.

Only one participant explicitly mentioned a positive use for Facebook, but still seemed to consider Facebook a negative aspect of his life within the interview:

The only positive thing I get from Facebook is that I can chat with friends back home, but I guess that's it. (Participant #3, male)

None of the other participants expressed much positivity or enthusiasm for Facebook.

Research question #4: Are there any privacy concerns in unfriending someone on Facebook? Are there certain situations in which a Facebook user wants to protect information from another user?

Of the 11 participants, 10 mentioned concerns relating to their privacy on Facebook. 9 of the participants (#2, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11) mentioned privacy concerns regarding non-peers, including their parents, other family members, employers, and co-workers. The following participants discussed their fears regarding the fact that their parents or other family members may see their Facebook content:

I've changed the privacy settings for some people...for relatives that you don't really want them knowing everything that you do in college, or even teachers that you friend requested way back in high school...like parties or those kinds of things. (Participant #2, male)

I wish I wasn't friends on Facebook with my parents, because that's always restrictive to what you post and you're worried about what they're seeing. (Participant #4, female)

I have edited the privacy settings before, and then I got rid of things, controlling what was there...[for] parents, uncles and aunts. (Participant #6, female)

Me and my friends dress up and go out and wear dresses, like that kind of stuff, because we're in college!...Then she'll [her mother] comment things like, "Where are you going?" and those kinds of situations I'm like, "Mom, I really don't want you to see!" There are some things I can say there, but if you go on my Instagram or something there are pictures that are not on Facebook because I don't want her to see those, to avoid her acting like a mom. (Participant #7, female)

I do kind of censor what I put up ahead of time, but if I do have something up there that I prefer my dad not see, I will edit the privacy to keep him out. In that regard it's pictures of parties that I'd rather him not see. (Participant #11, male)

Other participants were concerned that employers, co-workers, or other non-peers could see their content:

I think I did it [edited privacy settings] one time to one of my bosses who had added me, which makes me feel like I should get a professional Facebook and a personal Facebook. (Participant #5, female)

Some student teachers I know do things like using their first name and middle name. I use my real name on Facebook, but I have a common name, and I'm wearing sunglasses in my [profile] picture. I figure that they'd have to work super hard to find me. It's like an ethical thing where you don't want to find your students as much as they want to find you. Or, another problem was camp

counseling. When the kids got home they want to Facebook friend you, and we weren't allowed to do that. So I'm all about privacy. (Participant #8, female)

I don't post stuff because of employers can go check that kind of thing.
(Participant #9, female)

If people from my job that I had in high school would friend me I would say no. I didn't want them seeing my pictures.... Facebook is just for personal life as opposed to work. (Participant #10, male)

Of all the participants, only one mentioned privacy fears concerning a peer:

For the [ex] girlfriend, I didn't want her to see my postings either because I thought it would not be good for her either. (Participant #1, male)

The majority of the participants would rather censor themselves on Facebook than unfriend users due to privacy concerns. When posting photos or statuses, they would edit their privacy settings so only certain individuals could see them, or would post to other social media accounts other than Facebook.

[I haven't] unfriended, but definitely changing the privacy settings, so you can only show it to close friends over acquaintances and those things. (Participant #2, male)

I prefer to be friends with someone and filter myself than unfriend them.
(Participant #4, female)

On Facebook you have the option to choose who sees what you post, so I haven't unfriended someone but I have made it so that they can't see what I've posted.

(Participant #5, female)

I have edited the privacy settings before, and then I got rid of things, controlling what was there. (Participant #6, female)

I think of my Facebook as the “angel” version of me. I very much so filter what I want to put out on Facebook. On my Twitter...I can say how I feel, what I think, because the only people that follow me on Twitter are students here [at UNC Chapel Hill] or friends that go to other colleges. Facebook is very much so, “I got an A on another test!” or “So excited for the weekend to come!” and stuff like that. (Participant #7, female)

I definitely censor what I put on beforehand. I feel like Facebook is easy to look through...You never know what other people can't see. If you put something up it's kind of hard to know if someone can or can't see it, even with the privacy settings. (Participant #11, male)

Two participants stated that they did not unfriend any users for privacy concerns, and would just not accept the user's friend request in the first place:

EH: So are you saying that you don't really have anyone you'd need to unfriend for [privacy concerns], but there are people you wouldn't accept a friend request from for privacy concerns?

Participant #9 (Female): Yeah.

If people from my job that I had in high school would friend me I would say no. I didn't want them seeing my pictures. (Participant #10, male)

Only one participant explicitly stated that she had unfriended people due to privacy concerns:

[I unfriended] people from high school. Like people that I never think about anymore, and I'm just like, "I don't think y'all need to come into the next stage of my life. (Participant #8, female)

None of the participants mentioned privacy concerns related to how Facebook itself used their data and could possibly give that data to other companies. They did not raise any concerns regarding what corporations did with their data, and were more concerned with how people they knew would react to their data.

Discussion

Research question #1: Is there any difference a college student feels when unfollowing someone as opposed to unfriending him or her?

The evidence suggests that college student users of Facebook do use unfriending and unfollowing discriminately. The majority of users would use unfollowing to stop the flow of information from close friends, connections they wanted to keep, or people they did not want to offend. They found that the method was less extreme than unfriending, and it was a way to prevent feeling guilt when unfollowing someone. However, a small number of participants felt that unfollowing was “fake” and did not like using it.

Since there were no studies that provided information regarding how Facebook users felt when unfriending a user as opposed to unfollowing him or her, there was no comparison with this result. Further studies can explore the opinions of other Facebook users when unfriending or unfollowing.

Research question #2: Are there any major differences between males and females in unfriending and unfollowing practices on Facebook?

There were no major differences found between men and women in their unfriending and unfollowing practices.

Women are generally more aware of the stressful events going on in their friends' and acquaintances' lives (Hampton et. al, 2015). This suggests that women may be more

likely to unfriend or unfollow another user to avoid stressful information; however, there was no evidence to support that. Overall there is little information on the differences between men and women in how they decide whom to unfriend or unfollow on Facebook.

Research question #3: Do college students feel any sense of information overload or information avoidance when unfriending someone on Facebook? Are there any other underlying reasons for negative feelings towards information on Facebook?

About half of the participants felt a sense of information overload when using Facebook. This group felt that their news feed could become cluttered with irrelevant or boring information. By unfriending or unfollowing other users, some of the participants felt a sense of relief or cleanliness by removing the uninteresting information. However, none of the participants felt that information overload was a major problem in their usage of social media. They did not seem to actively worry about it, or use strategies regularly to reduce the amount of information they received through their Facebook news feeds.

The findings on Facebook users and information avoidance agrees with Kwak's study of Twitter users, who unfollowed users who posted large amounts of information in a short time because it caused them to feel overwhelmed (Kwak et al, 2011). However, the finding that the participants did not seem to care much about feelings of information overload disagrees with Savolainen's 2007 study of Finnish people using email. These participants felt that information overload was a real problem, and employed tactics to reduce the amount of clutter within their email. Despite the two studies mentioned, there

is little information regarding information overload and tactics for fixing it within Facebook.

All of the users had unfriended or unfollowed a user to avoid specific information, so information avoidance seemed to be a big factor in their decisions to remove other users. The participants mentioned avoiding information from former romantic partners, political or religious opinions, and racist or offensive comments. They distanced themselves from this information to avoid negative emotions such as anger or sadness. Amongst the participants, information avoidance seemed to be a stronger motivator for unfriending or unfollowing another user than information overload.

The findings regarding information avoidance correlate with the theory of selective exposure, where people will seek information that agrees with their opinions and avoid information that disagrees (Mills et al, 1958). Some of the participants mentioned that they avoided religious or political beliefs that they did not agree with; this matches Narayan's study that shows people are likely to avoid information that threatens their own beliefs (Narayan et al, 2011).

Many of the users felt an overall sense of boredom with Facebook. Multiple participants mentioned that they only used Facebook when they were trying to entertain themselves, and mentioned that they felt annoyed with many of the posts they saw on their news feeds. They kept their Facebook profiles for convenience, and some mentioned that they preferred other social media websites such as Twitter.

Research question #4: Are there any privacy concerns in unfriending someone on Facebook? Are there certain situations in which a Facebook user wants to protect information from another user?

The majority of the participants felt privacy concerns regarding Facebook. To alleviate these fears, the participants did unfriend other users, but mostly would edit their own privacy settings to prevent specific users from seeing their content. Many of the participants mentioned that they did not want their parents or other family members to see photos or statuses that could portray them in a negative light. By censoring themselves, they could create a picture of themselves that was presented in one way to their peers and another to their elders. Other participants mentioned that they did not want their co-workers or employers to see some of their content and judge them for their actions. Only one participant mentioned privacy concerns regarding a fellow peer; the majority of the participants felt privacy concerns towards older people.

Interestingly, the participants would generally rather censor themselves or change the privacy settings on specific pieces of information rather than unfriend another user over privacy concerns. This is most likely due to the fact that the people the participants felt privacy concerns about were people they knew offline, such as their parents or employers, and would be questioned if the offending user found out about the unfriending.

The participants' feelings regarding their privacy concerns correlates with a study of other undergraduate users of Facebook, where the subjects understood that others could look at their profiles but were unclear on exactly which parts were hidden and

visible (Lewis and West, 2009). The results also match with Del Bosque's findings, where a subject felt worried that her co-worker was friends with her on Facebook (Del Bosque, 2013). The participants seemed more worried about their elders seeing their information as opposed to their peers; there were no studies found that agreed or disagreed with this result.

The results matched Raynes-Goldie's theory that young Facebook users are more concerned with social privacy over institutional privacy. None of the participants mentioned privacy concerns relating to Facebook the company, or other companies that could use their data. They were only concerned with the information that others could see on their profiles; as boyd and Marwick found, they were concerned with "eavesdroppers" rather than invisible third parties (boyd and Marwick, 2011).

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the sample size. The sample of the study is neither entirely representative of the undergraduate population of UNC, nor the entire undergraduate population of the United States. Since the study was exploratory, the sample size was only 11, so the results cannot be attributed to entire undergraduate populations. The participants were not asked about their number of friends on Facebook and how much time they spent on the site due to time constraints and the wish to make the recruitment questionnaire as easy to complete as possible.

One of the major problems experienced during the study was that many of the participants' interview answers conflicted with the answers they provided in the recruitment survey. All of the subjects that were chosen had answered that they had unfriended, unfollowed, and blocked another user within the past two months. While all of the participants answered in the interviews that they had unfriended another user within the last two months, only 5 participants answered within the interviews that they had unfollowed another user. Also, only 5 participants answered that they had blocked another user within the past two months within the interviews. Furthermore, 5 of the participants did not understand the difference between unfriending and unfollowing. Though the concept was explained and they were asked to hypothetically answer the questions as if they had unfollowed a user, the results cannot be generalized. Also, one participant did not understand how blocking another user worked.

Suggestions for further research

Overall there is a dearth of research regarding how social media users experience information overload and information avoidance. Studying how users deal with these problems can help social media websites determine how to present information in the most concise yet interesting way.

Personality traits, such as extroversion or neuroticism, probably have a great influence on how Facebook users decide to unfriend and unfollow another user. There are few studies that research this topic in-depth, which would be important research for both psychology and information science.

Conclusion

The findings of the interviews suggest that college students often engage in information avoidance when they unfriend or unfollow another user because of the information he or she posts. This fits into the psychological theories of cognitive dissonance, confirmation bias, and selective exposure. Information overload was felt by some of the participants, but was not a major cause of anxiety for them. The participants were concerned with their privacy, but mostly from their elders or other non-peers, not from companies looking for their data or other unknown third parties. This suggests that users of Facebook their age are concerned with “social privacy” rather than “institutionalized privacy,” as others have suggested (Raynes-Goldie, 2010). There were no clear gender differences between male and female users and their unfriending and unfollowing practices, which can be studied further.

This study provides information on how college student users of Facebook experience information avoidance and information overload, which can help social media website developers understand what information they feel uncomfortable viewing. This information can also be helpful to those who study privacy within social media, as the participants felt privacy concerns towards people they knew already rather than third parties or corporations using their data.

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Appendix

Recruitment Email:

Subject Line: Have you unfriended someone on Facebook recently? Earn \$20 by participating in a study!

Have you unfriended a Facebook friend within the last two months for any reason? If so, you may be eligible for a study regarding unfriending and unfollowing, and you can receive \$20 for about an hour of your time!

If you're interested, please complete a short screening survey here [<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Q72M95B>]. If you qualify, you may be chosen to take part in an interview.

Eliza Hinkes

UNC Chapel Hill 2015

B.S. Information Science

Undergraduate Honors Thesis: "Unfriending: Information Practices of College Student Users of Facebook"

B.A. History

This project 15-0085 has been reviewed by the Non-Biomedical IRB, which has determined on 1/27/15 that it does not require IRB approval.

Recruitment Questionnaire:

Email: (only use as a method of contact)

What is your gender?

How many years old are you? (Only accepted those 18-24 years old)

Are you an undergraduate full-time student? (Only accepted undergraduates)

Yes No

Are you an Information & Library Science major? (Did not accept INLS majors)

Yes No

Have you unfriended someone on Facebook in the last two months?

Yes No

Have you unfollowed someone on Facebook in the last two months?

Yes No

Have you blocked someone on Facebook in the last two months?

Yes No

Interview Guide:

How do you feel when you browse your news feed?

Can you explain to me an instance where you've unfriended someone, and what the reasoning behind that was?

Was this unfriending based on an event that happened online or offline?

Can you explain to me an instance where you've unfollowed someone, and what the reasoning behind that was?

Was there a reason why you unfollowed that person rather than unfriending them? Did this person have information that led you to unfollow them? What was it?

Have you ever methodically unfriended multiple people on Facebook in one sitting? If so, why?

What did you feel after doing this?

Can you explain to me an instance where you've blocked someone, and what the reasoning behind that was?

Did this blocking occur because of something that happened in real life, or was it about something they had posted online?

Have you ever considered blocking someone, but decided against it? If so, why?

Have you ever unfriended or blocked a person because you didn't want them seeing certain information that was posted on your profile, or you would post in the future?

Interview Transcripts:

Participant #1: 24 year old male, interviewed February 16, 2015

EH: So to start off, how do you feel when you're just on Facebook, and you're browsing through your news feed?

P1: In the past, I liked to see people saying things on Facebook and posting pictures, but as time goes there are people who like...there were more advertisements, and the friends posting [the advertisements], and just sharing some articles, and so on, so I go on Facebook not to see friends posting but to get information and just read the news and articles, and the trends, so it changed.

EH: So you'd mentioned in the recruitment survey that you had unfriended someone in the past two months, do you remember who that was and why that happened?

P1: Because it was a girl, who I was dating in the past, and we broke up, so that's why. I unfollow a lot, but I don't unfollow friends that much, but the only time I unfriend people was when I broke up with someone, or...The only person I unfriended who I didn't date was one professor here, because he gave me a ridiculous grade. I was angry, and I unfriended him, and that was the only moment when I unfriended him.

EH: So with that girl you were dating, that was all just offline stuff, like she wasn't posting anything that made you mad?

P1: I didn't want to see her posts, because it reminds me of her, and the professor too.

EH: So you mentioned you unfollow people a lot, is that just acquaintances, not

necessarily like your good friends?

P1: I don't like to see, like, there are a lot of people who take a lot of selfies, and post them, so I didn't really want to see them, and there are also people who like to post food [pictures], so I'm not interested in seeing them, and especially when a guy takes a selfie and posts it, I unfollow him right away. I really don't want to see it. And also there are people who use Facebook like their diary, so they say everything everyday, like trivial things, so that's why I unfollow them.

EH: So is there any big reason why you unfollow these people as opposed to unfriending them?

P1: Because unfriending is more aggressive than unfollowing, because they don't know if I unfollow them or not, but I don't want to see their postings, so it's much better to unfollow then unfriend without hurting them.

EH: So have you ever just sat down and on Facebook and gone into your friends list and just gone through and deleted people, or have you really only unfriended the girlfriend and the professor?

P1: Yeah, only unfriended the professor and the girlfriend.

EH: So have you ever blocked someone on Facebook?

P1: I don't think I ever blocked someone.

EH: Do you know of any instance where you'd want to block someone on Facebook?

P1: If someone sent me a text [private message through Facebook] trying to attack me or

posting, then I would block them, but that hasn't happened before.

EH: Have you ever considered blocking someone before?

P1: Because there is an option to unfollow, I never really considered blocking.

EH: So when you unfriended your ex-girlfriend and the professor, were you ever worried that they were going to be able to see information about you, or did you only do it because you didn't want to see their information?

P1: For the girlfriend, I didn't want her to see my postings either because I thought it would not be good for her either, but for the professor I was like, angry, so I actually wanted him to realize I unfriended him, and actually he realized that I unfriended him, so he was asking other students if I unfriended him because he gave me a bad grade, like he actually went out and asked around, and also he texted me, which I ignored.

Participant #2: 21 year old male, interviewed February 19, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're just on Facebook and you're browsing through your news feed?

P2: I feel pretty passive about it, honestly, just looking through it because when I'm on it it's usually because I have nothing else to do, so it's not like there's anything I'm looking for at all, just scrolling through...there's a lot of ads on it, nowadays, so it's kind of...if there's anyone you really know of or talked to recently pops up you kind of pay attention but that's about it.

EH: You mentioned in the recruitment survey that you'd unfriended someone in the past two months so can you remember who that was?

P2: I don't know, it wasn't anyone I knew but sometimes Facebook just kind of adds friends from random people, or maybe accidentally you've added someone you don't know and a name just pops up and you don't really know who they are and so, that's when I start unfriending people like that.

EH: Did you ever unfriend somebody because you were mad at them or you had some kind of negative feeling toward them?

P2: No, usually it's just random people I don't know because if it was someone you didn't want to keep in contact with, you just block them usually.

EH: So this was all online things, or you just unfriended them because you didn't know them?

P2: Yeah, [I didn't know them].

EH: So you unfollow people also?

P2: Yes, yeah.

EH: So you do that more than unfriending?

P2: Definitely more than unfriending. Because you get so much spam on your news feed.

EH: So what kind of things do you see that makes you unfollow people?

P2: Usually there's like chain mail posts that are kind of like, "send this to six of your friends" or something and then you'll get like a happy day or something, it's kind of weird like that...I've seen numerous posts like that and whenever I see that I unfollow them.

EH: Was there a reason why you unfollowed that person rather than unfriending them?

P2: I guess unfriending them, they know, but if you unfollow them, they don't, so I guess eventually you could unfriend them but I haven't done that yet.

EH: So when you unfollow people is it just like, they have all this information that they're putting online that you just don't want to see?

P2: Yeah.

EH: So has it ever been that someone posted a controversial topic that you don't want to hear about, like with Ferguson or the recent shootings?

P2: Usually if it's about religion I'll unfollow them, but that's about it. I'm not usually looking for any news topic or anything like that.

EH: Have you ever gone on Facebook and then sat down and methodically unfriended or unfollowed multiple people on Facebook?

P2: I haven't done that recently, but there's definitely been times where I have nothing else to do so I go through and try to see who I remember and who I don't, I think probably by the end of the year I'll sit down and unfriend a bunch of people just because there's no point in having 600 friends on Facebook.

EH: So do you feel better when you don't have as many friends?

P2: Well it kind of makes sense to not have as many friends, especially if you're not talking to them, or you've never spoken to them, so it's just kind of increasing a number/decreasing a number.

EH: So have you ever blocked somebody?

P2: Yeah.

EH: Do you know how many, or is it just a couple of people?

P2: Is blocking different than unfollowing?

EH: Yeah, blocking is where someone can't send you messages or see any of your photos, they can't look at any of your information.

P2: I think I've changed the privacy settings for some people, I guess if that's similar.

EH: So was that where you didn't want them to see something that you'd posted?

P2: Yeah, it's for relatives that you don't really want them knowing everything that you do in college, or even teachers that you friend requested way back in high school.

EH: But you've never blocked somebody that you specifically did not want them to see anything that you posted?

P2: No, because usually I just wouldn't friend them.

EH: If you had a friend or somebody that you were normally friends with and you got into an argument with them, would you unfriend them or unfollow them just to get back at them, or anything like that?

P2: I can't say I've done that recently in any sense.

EH: Have you ever considered blocking somebody or changing the privacy settings but you didn't do it, or is it something that you think about then do it?

P2: I don't know. I don't really do that, just because Facebook is such a passive thing, just scrolling through it, it's more like a habit than any necessity to actually be on Facebook. Usually it'll just be easier to delete someone's number or delete the conversation than using Facebook to unfriend them or unfollow them.

EH: So what reason do you have for keeping your Facebook if you don't really use it, or use it in more of a passive way?

P2: I guess because everyone has it, and it's easy to look up other people if you need to, and I guess mostly for people you don't have the number for, which is what I keep telling

myself, probably by hopefully in the next year or two I'll get rid of it but, I don't know.

A lot of people post pictures and that's their only means of showing where they've gone, like on trips, so they'll say, "Go check Facebook!" and I kind of have to, at that point.

EH: Have you ever unfriended someone because you wanted to keep information private from them, or you didn't want them to see anything you've posted?

P2: Not unfriended, but definitely changing the privacy settings, so you can only show it to close friends over acquaintances and those things.

EH: You mentioned relatives, parents, or teachers, you don't want them to see college-related things?

P2: Yeah, like parties or those kind of things.

Participant #3: 20 year old male, interviewed February 19, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're sitting on Facebook browsing through your news feed?

P3: I'm wasting time, pretty much. Unless I see something, like a picture or something within my immediate friend group, something that has a direct impact to me, it's pretty much pointless.

EH: So is there any reason why you still do it?

P3: So I don't feel awkward in social situations. It is counterproductive.

EH: So are there any big negative or positive feelings when you're on Facebook?

P3: Negative is more the time wasting. The only positive thing I get from Facebook is that I can chat with friends back home, but I guess that's it.

EH: Have you unfriended someone within the last two months? Do you remember who it was and what the reason was?

P3: I remember the reasoning, it was because they were kind of getting annoying. I feel like that's one reason, out of two.

EH: What's the other one?

P3: You have actual confrontational problems, or they're just annoying to you online.

EH: Do you remember what kind of annoying things they were posting?

P3: I think it was just a lot of very political things, I didn't feel like their opinion was as valid as they thought it was.

EH: So how did you feel after you unfriended that person?

P3: Eh, I don't know, I mean I knew them but it was more of an online relationship so I didn't feel as bad. It's not like going up to the person and being like, "Oh, I don't want to be friends with you anymore."

EH: Have you ever unfriended someone because of an offline problem?

P3: No. But I think that could be a reason why you would, for sure.

EH: After you'd unfriended them, did you feel upset that you did it or more happy that you didn't have to read it anymore?

P3: More happy. I think it depends on your relationship offline. If you know them somewhat well, then you could feel guilty or some other feelings. But I didn't know the person that well, so it didn't make a difference in my life.

EH: So have you unfollowed someone in the past two months?

P3: Like Twitter or something, or specifically on Facebook?

EH: Only on Facebook.

P3: No, I don't think so. Unfriended, yes. I don't know what the following thing on Facebook is.

EH: It's not the same as Twitter, like if you're on Facebook you unfollow them so you

don't see their statuses anymore, but you haven't unfriended them. You're still friends with them, but you don't see their information.

P3: I haven't done that before.

EH: Would you ever consider doing it, or had you heard of it before?

P3: No, not really. That seems very, I don't know, there's something weird about that. I can't put it into words. It's not like you're committed to blocking this person out of your life. It's doing it halfway, it's kind of lazy. I don't know why you would do that, actually. Why wouldn't you just unfriend them?

EH: Maybe you don't want to make that person feel bad by unfriending them, but you just don't want to see what they're posting.

P3: The first initial reaction I had to that was that it was some statistical thing, like you care about the number [of friends you have] and that's very elementary, like a weird way of thinking about your social media presence. It's different with Twitter and maybe Instagram, it's not really about the numbers once you get older, I feel like. Maybe I'm wrong, though, depending on the person.

EH: Like your number of friends?

P3: Yeah. That kind of thing is probably more popular when the platform is more popular itself, then it matters more, how many people are friends with you. Facebook's a little bit on the decline, it's less relevant.

EH: If you're browsing your news feed and someone posts about something like a big

event, like Ferguson or the recent [Chapel Hill] shootings, and you didn't agree with them, you would unfriend them over unfollowing them?

P3: Yeah, I guess. The specific situation with me, it was a lot, so I didn't want to even have to deal with it. In general, you try to be open to other people's opinions and that shouldn't get to you, but it got under my skin. You want it to be a public place for opinions to go around, you don't want to squash any other person, whatever their values or views are. You want to see it.

EH: Would you rather unfriend them than try to get into an argument with them?

P3: I think the argument's good. In my situation the unframing was me losing and whatever subconscious battle we were having. It wasn't directed towards me, but me unframing the person showed that I gave up, waving the white flag. Arguments are good, as long as it's in an orderly fashion, you're not saying hateful things, you're just arguing points. As far as unframing people goes, if you have a social problem with them, like you know them outside of the online sphere, unframing them is fine. You're getting rid of a problem, if you're going to scroll through your feed for hours that will cause more emotional trauma if you had a fight with them or something. You can always friend them again. It's like real life, you can always be friends with them again.

EH: So would you ever sit down, go on your Facebook, and look at your friends list and go through and unfriend people methodically?

P3: No.

EH: Could you quantify how many people you've unfriended, like a little or a lot?

P3: A little, but I don't think I could give a specific number. Probably not over five. It takes a specific type of person to go on a rampage like that, like “unfriend, unfriend, unfriend...” It’s emotionally taxing. Maybe if you have a lot of friends in real life that seems fine, like who are they to you?

EH: So it would be emotionally taxing to unfriend people, like a bunch of people at one time?

P3: For a person who has a large number of friends, maybe them unfrinding people is fine for them. For me, if I knew them outside of the online world, I feel like that would be hurting their feelings. It also depends on if you friended them or they friended you.

EH: So you only unfriend people who you didn’t know well offline?

P3: Yeah. Generally most people in college are somewhat nice, but if you knew a person and then figured out that they don’t share the same type of ethics or ideals that you have, and they’re posting a lot and it’s annoying you, I don’t think I’d have anything against [unfriending them].

EH: Have you ever needed to block somebody on Facebook?

P3: No, not really. The situation I spoke about earlier, that should have been a block, but I don’t know if they can see that.

EH: It won’t give you a notification if someone unfriends you. You’d have to go to their profile and look, and then it would say to “add as friend” and they would realize you’d unfriended them. Blocking, they won’t see any information about you.

P3: Oh.

EH: So would you rather have blocked them?

P3: I don't know, maybe. Yeah, I guess. That's interesting. I didn't know about blocking or unfollowing.

EH: Do you know of what kind of situation you'd want to block somebody?

P3: So you're basically gone in their eyes? Probably not. I'd probably unfriend them. Unfriending seems like really absolute, it's the way to go if you have an opinion about something. Blocking is just a little bit of a scapegoat. They would know if you blocked them because you wouldn't show up on anything.

EH: You can't absolutely tell if someone blocked you. You're never 100% sure.

P3: Then maybe blocking's okay. There's a lot of ways to go about Facebook unfriending someone but not [in real life] which is a weird social construct. That's really weird, actually. It's like how you can only like stuff. It's like you don't want to hurt their feelings at all. I think it's important to have those emotions, like "Oh, this person doesn't like me" or "They don't agree with me," which is good.

EH: So you can unfriend someone if you know that they don't like you?

P3: Yeah. I just don't like the idea of just avoiding the situation completely, whereas unfriending seems like they can go up to you and say "Why did you unfriend me on Facebook?" and you can actually talk about it where blocking is a weird roundabout way of doing it.

EH: Like completely shutting yourself off?

P3: Yeah. There's no conversation. It's completely positive, Facebook. It's weird.

EH: Have you ever wanted to unfriend somebody because you didn't want them to see anything that you'd put on your profile?

P3: No, not really. I don't post that much, so I'm an outlier in that perspective.

EH: So do you know how often you post to Facebook or just really not that often?

P3: Not that often anymore, but I'd say in my heyday maybe once or twice a week.

Unless it's important I don't really like to share my mind. There's a lot of things people post that are really stupid or trivial.

EH: So do you only really keep it just to keep in contact with old friends?

P3: Yeah, pretty much, and you can set up events. It's useful somewhat. I like Twitter more because, when something happens there's actual conversations happening, I find it very interesting. After the Chapel Hill shootings people were saying different things, and it was more interesting that what you'd find on Facebook, and there's more voices since it's more popular.

EH: What kind of things did you see on Facebook about the shootings?

P3: You look at stuff like "Overheard [at UNC]" or "Spotted [at UNC]" and it's not really talking about the shootings per se but more of a memorial for the people that got killed, which is fine, I guess.

EH: But you'd rather see discussion on like why the shooter did it or stuff like that?

P3: Yeah, if it was a hate crime or not, it would be a little more interesting.

EH: Do you see yourself using Facebook for a while or can you see yourself not using it?

P3: Well, you need an identity. You need to use it, but it's not going to be a major part of my life. I'm trying to make it something that I don't care about that much.

EH: Do you think the majority of your Facebook friends are people you know or people you knew in high school that you don't talk to anymore?

P3: Now there are people from high school I don't really talk to anymore, but when I was in high school I guess I talked to them somewhat. You kind of get friends just to have friends. It's fun to see what they're doing, and the next day you can go, "This person said this and this" and talk about it, it can sustain you for your first period [of class]. But now I guess there's more people to talk about or maybe it just becomes less important. There's an overpopulation...in high school it was smaller population of kids so when someone posted something you can talk about it, but now people just post pictures and if someone says something it kind of gets lost in your news feed. It's less popular now too.

EH: You would like Twitter better because you can choose people who have more interesting things to say?

P3: Yeah, on Twitter they don't have to follow you back. I feel like it's a huge thing. You can follow comedians or politicians and you can somewhat connect with them whereas [on Facebook] you have to be friends with them, they also have to want hear your opinion. You can just speak out against someone or force someone on Twitter, like

“I like or don’t like this opinion,” whereas on Facebook there’s already a filter, they already kind of know who you are. If you’re known as a crazy radical they might not follow or friend you. They might not like you. But on Twitter they just won’t follow you. There’s more free range. It’s also less about the pictures. There’s something really specific about the pictures on Facebook, and Instagram’s completely different, it’s a waste of time. I feel like pictures are all the same, there’s nothing really interesting.

EH: You mean on Instagram?

P3: On Instagram, you’re diluting the importance of taking a picture by uploading so many pictures but on Facebook, it could be somewhat similar to Twitter. But I guess this is all hindsight. I bet Facebook was great when it was big, people just kind of take pictures and put them up [now] and don’t really do anything else.

EH: So that bores you?

P3: Yeah, it’s a little boring. On Twitter, people don’t just put on pictures, it’s not a big thing. There’s mostly saying things, even if it’s stupid it can turn into something interesting.

EH: Would you ever feel like you wanted to unfollow or unfriend someone just because they put up too many pictures?

P3: Maybe. I just find it so boring. People pictures upload are just so bad. Some of them are okay, right, but just ten thousand selfies or taking a picture of a party, you’re just taking pictures of your friends and that’s the same as some other night where you took a picture of your friends. It doesn’t really show the night. It’s just kind of pointless.

EH: Overall do you find Facebook pointless?

P3: Not really, there's some value. There's accountability, like you can't just say whatever you want like you're anonymous, and if you say something you're out there. Like before I unfriended that person because I didn't like what they were saying. But if they're anonymous I guess I would still unfriend them, and there I'd have no second thoughts about hurting them or whatever. But there's a name to the person, it's like an ID or something. People can look you up and see what you're about. People that hire you for jobs, like bosses or employers.

EH: So you just looking through your news feed is a habit, but you do have a use for it?

P3: Yeah. It's like you download some songs, and you have a whole library of songs but you're only going to listen to ten of them for a week and cycle through them. I feel like with Facebook there are twenty or thirty people I care about out of a couple hundred, and I look out for whenever they post something.

EH: But if you just want to look out for them, do you not really feel a need to delete all the other people that you don't care about?

P3: That's interesting. It's just too much work.

EH: Or would you feel guilty about unfriending these people?

P3: Probably a little bit. I've been friends with them for so many years. Unfriending people is kind of like...I don't know, actually. It's a weird thing because it doesn't affect you but it could affect someone else emotionally. Some distant emotional connection with someone, like you met them once, and you became Facebook friends with them, but

you don't know how it's going to affect them when you unfriend them. It shouldn't really affect them that much, it's not a big deal.

EH: But it could?

P3: Yeah. It's probably a bigger deal because it's such a big part of our identities now. It could be a blow to you when you lose a Facebook friend or a Twitter follower.

EH: Have you ever noticed if someone on Facebook has unfriended you?

P3: No.

EH: Is it not something you try to look out for?

P3: I'm just not into it. I have friends that don't have Facebooks, and I have friends that post a lot of pictures and stuff. There's a range. But I am definitely the minority as far as social media goes. I don't post much on Twitter, either, I just like looking for an interesting conversation.

Participant #4: 19 year old female, interviewed February 20, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're sitting on Facebook going through your news feed?

P4: Typically I'm pretty mellow scrolling through my news feed. Occasionally if there's something social or political happening, people will post all about that and that's really annoying. That sparks concernment or anger, since people have different opinions. If I ever feel angered by something it's usually something politically or socially rooted.

EH: Like something you didn't agree with?

P4: Exactly, yeah.

EH: Have you unfriended someone within the past two months, and do you remember who that was or the reason was?

P4: It was a distant friend of mine, don't know her personally, I just knew who she was since we were Facebook friends and it was just a connection. I'm pretty sure I unfriended her because of a political belief that she was constantly posting about that I was completely opposed to. I can't remember exactly what it was but I know it was politically motivated.

EH: So this was all just online stuff, it was nothing she had done offline?

P4: No, she had done nothing offline. It was all just opinion.

EH: So how did you feel when you did that?

P4: I guess since I did it in a moment of anger, like, "You're terrible! You have a terrible

opinion!” I don’t want to see that, I don’t want to support her thoughts or opinions. I guess friending someone isn’t exactly supporting someone’s opinion, but I didn’t want to see that or see something like that.

EH: Did you feel relieved that you didn’t have to see it?

P4: Sure, you could say relieved, because that was a motivation, to not see that on my feed anymore. So I was relieved to not be upset by seeing a post like that.

EH: So have you unfollowed people within the past couple of months?

P4: I think so, I have a hard time distinguishing between unfriending and unfollowing, since sometimes I don’t know why I followed her when I’m still her friend, sometimes I don’t understand that. But unfollowing...I guess I just don’t really know the difference between following and friending someone. Can you follow a normal person, but not friend them?

EH: You can be friends with someone on Facebook, and then you can unfollow them so you don’t see all their posts and updates but you’re still friends with them.

P4: Oh, interesting.

EH: So you can go look them up to see their photos and stuff.

P4: So they’re not on your feed. I guess I didn’t know...Oh, I probably I’d be more apt to unfollow people than unfriend them because of the conscious...you’re cutting off a relationship with someone. So you had asked if I had ever unfollowed someone?

EH: Yeah.

P4: I didn't know that was an option! But I would prefer to unfollow someone so I don't leave negative ties to that person. Because they know when you unfollow them, it'll leave a bitterness.

EH: They won't know if you unfollow them, but they could figure out if you'd unfriended them.

P4: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. Unfriending is risky since they'll say, "Oh, why did she unfriend me?" But unfollowing, it's still like, "You're my friend!"

EH: So all the people that you've unfriended are just because of social and political things you don't agree with, or make you mad?

P4: Probably. I have unfriended some people who were just literally annoying, that would post the most mindless posts all the time, just about stupid stuff. I wasn't really close to them, didn't have any relationship, so I didn't feel bad about unfriending them. They were just annoying. It was a negative impact on me, and I didn't really care to continue following.

EH: You mean like a negative impact how?

P4: I mean that I'm negatively impacted by being annoyed at their posts. I'm not like upset or anything, I'm just annoyed.

EH: Can you think of anything specific that annoyed you?

P4: Probably people that would post things daily, like "Anyone want to hang out?" and then post their phone numbers with it, and they would literally do it every day. That gets

really annoying. Or people who really complain a lot about everyday things. I guess whiners and stuff, that's annoying.

EH: So was there ever a time where you've sat down and gone to your friends and then methodically unfriended a bunch of people in one sitting?

P4: Yeah, I have. I've gone through and unfriended some people that I know have not gone on Facebook at all anymore, like it's completely pointless to even follow them. I have been hesitant, like the number of friends you have has a label to it, so if you're taking down your number, that doesn't look good, but I have unfriended people who don't use Facebook anymore, but with hesitation. It's an important number, I guess.

EH: After you did this you felt worried about your number of friends, but did you feel anything else?

P4: I don't know if I can identify a specific emotion. Yeah, basically just having a lesser number of Facebook friends, when you're trying to increase that number.

EH: So what I wanted to know is why you'd want to delete these people anyway?

P4: It's just pointless, I guess there isn't like a root meaning to it...

EH: Have you ever felt like you've had too many friends?

P4: Sometimes I feel like I have too many friends that I hardly know. That tends to bother me, sometimes. When I see a lot of people on my feed that I hardly have any connection to, then I'm just like, "Who am I actually friends with?" How representative is this number [of friends] of me? I've never really unfriended people close to me, or

close friends. I'm not one to get mad at someone and unfriend them on Facebook, but people do that.

EH: You mean like close friends?

P4: Yeah. Like if I got into a fight with my best friend, I don't go and unfriend her on Facebook. I know people that do. I'm pretty sure I've unfriended a couple of ex-boyfriends, actually. But mostly it would be like them unfriending me, so I'm like, "Fine, no problem."

EH: Do you ever feel overwhelmed with how many friends you have, or anything like that?

P4: No, probably not. There's a lot of pride in having a lot of friends, I guess. But it's funny since I have a negative idea of people who have a lot of friends, sometimes, because I know they're not friends with 1,500 people. It's not possible. If that makes people look at them in a negative light, maybe I don't want...I guess it gets to a certain point where it's like, "Okay, you're faking it," and you're in a negative light rather than having a lot of friends and you look really cool and you look really popular.

EH: So do you feel like there's a magic number [of friends]?

P4: Yeah, I think that having over a thousand, that's when I'm just like, "Uhhh..." I'm just under a thousand, so I feel really comfortable with my number.

EH: But I guess if you saw someone with only a hundred friends, would you assume they weren't that popular?

P4: Yeah. I'd probably see them as not being that popular, or they're really uptight about who they friend on Facebook, because most people just friend people if they know their name and know their face, that's how it is nowadays. But there are some people who are really stingy about who they're friends with on Facebook, like who can see about them, and they only friend best friends and family. So I put kind of a stereotype on those people of being uptight. So I avoid that!

EH: Have you ever blocked somebody on Facebook?

P4: Yes, typically they're like really creepy people who I have no idea...

EH: Who just friend you but you have no idea how they got there?

P4: I have no idea how they got my name or anything. Or, I've had really creepy second cousins friend me, and I'll friend them because they're family or whatever, and then I'll talk to a family member later and they'll say, "Oh, they've been in prison the past few years" and I'll be like, "Oh, shoot!" and then I'll block them. So it's typically uneasiness with people I don't know, I'll block them if they're threatening. But I don't think I've ever blocked someone I've had anger towards...it's typically people I don't know and I don't want them knowing my name.

EH: So have you ever had an instance where you'd considered blocking someone out of anger, but you'd decided not to?

P4: I would say no, because I feel a lot of guilt behind blocking people. I'd prefer not to unfriend people, but I will if I'm truly annoyed or angered by their posts. I try to avoid blocking people too.

EH: Have you ever wanted to unfriend or block someone because you didn't want them seeing information that was on your profile?

P4: Yeah, definitely.

EH: Would that be more like blocking people, like the people you didn't know?

P4: Yes, I'd be more apt to block people than unfriend them to prevent them from seeing my personal information.

EH: What about parents or teachers?

P4: I wish I wasn't friends on Facebook with my parents, because that's always restrictive to what you post and you're worried about what they're seeing. I guess I wouldn't unfriend my parents because having them see what you post is like a source of trust. Filtering what I post gives trust with them, and staying friends with them gives a source of trust, so filtering what I post establishes trust with them, and I continue to stay friends with them so I keep that trust and don't act all secretive and like I'm hiding stuff, so that's never good. But Facebook I haven't been too worried about. I haven't stopped people from following or unfriending me, but I make sure I don't post certain things. A good portion of the people that I'm friends with are of a certain political party, I know that I shouldn't post a certain article even though I want to, in a way I've shaped how I post things or what I post based on the people that I follow that I don't want to unfriend me. I've had to filter what I post.

EH: What about photos?

P4: Sure. Although I make sure I don't post things that degrade myself, like photos degrading myself. I think that even if I wasn't friends with my parents, anyone else that I'm friends with on Facebook, I don't want them to see me in a negative light, so I don't post degrading pictures in general.

EH: Like something of you drinking?

P4: Yeah, that's what I was getting at.

EH: So what you're saying is you don't really need to unfriend people based on privacy concerns, but you change how you post things?

P4: Yeah. I think it's important, being a friend with someone on Facebook, it's an important connection with someone and building your relationship, so posting something that's immediately negative...I may still like that person and want to be friends with them, but if I unfriend them, they might think, "Oh, that girl isn't nice, she doesn't want to be friends with me!" So no, I don't think you should unfriend people if you stop liking them. I prefer to be friends with someone and filter myself than unfriend them.

EH: Because you don't want to feel guilty about it?

P4: Yeah, guilt is a big part of it.

Participant #5: 20 year old female, interviewed February 20, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're sitting on Facebook browsing through your news feed?

P5: Most of the time I'm trying to relax, or I'm bored, so I'm doing it mostly for entertainment. If I come across a friend I haven't talked to in a while I'll go to their profile to see how their life has been.

EH: Have you unfriended someone in the past couple of months?

P5: Yeah, I unfriended a few people last night. It's been recent.

EH: Do you know what the reasoning behind that was?

P5: Yeah, I personally unfriended them because they were posting really disturbing videos and images and stuff, and I just didn't want to be around it.

EH: How did you feel after you unfriended them?

P5: I felt relieved. I felt like I had control over what I saw on my news feed.

EH: That was all stuff they had done online, there was nothing they had done to you offline?

P5: I have unfriended people specifically like boyfriends and stuff after we broke up as a way to get back at them, let them know I'm done with the relationship, and friends that I've gotten into arguments with, I would unfriend them as well.

EH: So you felt better once you unfriended them?

P5: Yeah, I remember one time I was in a relationship with a guy and every time I got mad at him I would unfriend him or say that I was single, like every single time that was my way of getting over it.

EH: So have you unfollowed anyone in the past couple of months?

P5: No, I don't believe in that.

EH: Why don't you?

P5: I feel like it's kind of fake, like I don't really understand why you'd want to keep them as a friend without seeing their updates, like what's the point of having them as a friend still? The person's not going to know if you unfollow them. I guess if you wanted to keep the relationship, because they would know if you unfriended them, because then you wouldn't be able to see their profile. Other than that I don't really see the point.

EH: Have you ever sat down on Facebook and methodically unfriended a bunch of people at once?

P5: No.

EH: How do you unfriend people? If you see them on your news feed do you unfriend them?

P5: Yeah, only if they've posted a video or something that I found disturbing, I would go to their profile and unfriend them. I've also done things, like on Facebook you have the option to choose who sees what you post, so I haven't unfriended someone but I have made it so that they can't see what I've posted.

EH: With relations to that, did you prevent them from seeing stuff on your profile because of a privacy concern?

P5: Yeah, pretty much, it was more of their personality, I didn't want them to see what I was doing. I guess that's kind of fake of me, but whatever.

EH: Did you ever do it to anyone like your parents or teachers, older people?

P5: I think I did it one time to one of my bosses who had added me, which makes me feel like I should get a professional Facebook and a personal Facebook. But not my parents or anything.

EH: Have you ever blocked someone on Facebook?

P5: Yeah, mainly ex-boyfriends. But mainly men who were creepy, aggressive, harassing me almost, that I didn't know.

EH: So for your ex-boyfriends, that was all offline stuff they had done, and you wanted to get back at them?

P5: Yeah. And you don't want to see their updates, like you're mad at them. It a way like, out of sight, out of mind.

EH: So would you feel uncomfortable if you saw their updates, from an ex-boyfriend, would it make you feel upset?

P5: Yeah.

EH: Have you ever had a time where you considered blocking someone, but you decided

not to?

P5: I'm sure I have, probably not that recently. Probably if they saw something I found offensive, and I didn't want to deal with them on Facebook anymore, and I just decided to let it go. I decided it wasn't that important to go to that extreme.

EH: So what kind of things would make you feel uncomfortable, or that you found offensive that made you want to unfriend people?

P5: Recently it's been really sexual stuff, like sexual videos, or really violent things, like what's going on with ISIS and the beheadings and stuff. Mostly for me if you request me, I normally just add you, and once you start harassing me or something like that I'll go ahead and unfriend you.

EH: Did you ever have anything related to Ferguson or the recent Chapel Hill shootings that made you uncomfortable?

P5: Yes. It wasn't Ferguson, it was right after Eric Garner, when that random man killed two police officers in New York, I tried to have a discussion with one of my friends from high school who's in the military, and he posted a status about it, so when I tried to insert my opinion he and all his military friends were really demeaning and condescending and patronizing, so I decided to end the friendship there.

EH: So you unfriended him?

P5: Yeah, I unfriended him.

EH: So this was all online stuff?

P5: Yeah.

EH: So all offline stuff, that's just with ex-boyfriends or arguments you'd gotten into with friends, would you do that for both online and offline arguments with them?

P5: It depends on what the argument is about, like I've had friends I've had conflicts with and I didn't go to Facebook and unfriend them. I guess it would depend.

EH: Do you know of any recent things that have happened?

P5: No, that was really in the past. Ex-boyfriends have been more recent.

Participant #6: 18 year old female, interviewed February 23, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're sitting on Facebook browsing through your news feed?

P6: I guess with a lot of the social issues going on, sometimes I see things that will anger me or make me sad. If my family's posting something, actually my mom just posted that my little cousin just lost his first tooth, which I thought was cute. I think you get a wide variety of emotions, I think it depends on what you've liked on Facebook and who you're friends with.

EH: Have you unfriended someone within the past couple of months? Do you remember what the reasoning behind that was?

P6: Mainly it's because it's people I don't talk to much anymore, in that particular instance it was someone I wasn't really friends with in person anymore. Especially if some of their updates were annoying me, so there's a couple people I've unfriended for that.

EH: So you're scrolling through your news feed and you see an update from them, realize you're not really friends with them, and then unfriend them?

P6: Yeah.

EH: So is this stuff that's online, you haven't had to friend anyone because of offline events?

P6: In that particular case it was someone I was once friends with in middle school, and

as high school went by we tried to remain friends but things happened and we don't talk anymore. Technically my feelings towards them prior to unfriending them were because of offline things.

EH: Do you remember what you saw that prompted you to unfriend them?

P6: It was kind of some rude comments that were unnecessary. I think she made a comment about special needs students and I was not okay with that. I don't think she realized it was rude, but it hurt me because I have special needs people in my family. It kind of hurt me.

EH: Have you unfollowed anyone within the past couple of months? Do you remember what the reason behind that was?

P6: Sometimes there's kind of the childish, "you didn't follow me back" stuff, or I didn't like their tweets, so I unfollowed them.

EH: Twitter unfollowing is different from Facebook unfollowing. Do you have any instances where you've unfollowed someone on Facebook?

P6: No. I think my unfollowing/unfriending reasoning is different for both [Twitter and Facebook] because I use them for different things.

EH: So people you'd unfollow on Twitter are different from people you'd unfriend on Facebook?

P6: [*Nods*]

EH: Okay. On Facebook you can unfollow someone so you don't see them on your news

feed but you're still friends with them. Have you ever just unfollowed someone on Facebook but still remained friends with them?

P6: Yes.

EH: Do you remember why you would have done that?

P6: I do check Twitter more often than I do Facebook, I probably check Facebook maybe two-three times a week whereas Twitter, I'm on Twitter all the time every day. I think seeing it daily as to more now and then, I may not be thinking about it at the time.

EH: Do you know of any reasons why you'd want to unfollow somebody on Facebook as opposed to unfriending them and getting rid of them completely?

P6: There are certain things, like I know certain "like" pages that I don't want to see the ads and some of the sponsor messages. I want to get to whatever I'm trying to look at.

EH: Have you ever sat down on Facebook and gone to your friends list and methodically unfriended a bunch of people at one time?

P6: I don't think I have. I have gone to my friends list to see who I was friends with, but I don't think I have.

EH: So have you ever blocked somebody on Facebook?

P6: I did in middle school.

EH: Do you remember what the reasoning behind that was?

P6: Someone made a rude comment under a picture of mine so I blocked them. I block

people on Twitter, too. Actually did that last week.

EH: Why'd you do it on Twitter?

P6: Because it was after the Duke-Carolina [basketball] game, and I made a statement about [NC] State fans and this State kid made a rude comment and I was like, "block!"

EH: Do you think you'd block anybody on Facebook currently or not really?

P6: Probably not, just because I don't get on it as often.

EH: So when you were in middle school, this person posted a rude comment online, it wasn't anything they had done offline?

P6: Right.

EH: So have you ever had an instance where you've thought about blocking someone but you ended up not doing it?

P6: Yes, when I was in high school, my best friend was dating a guy and they broke up, and she wanted to do the collective "we both hate him now," but he didn't do anything to me personally, and we were friends prior to the relationship, and I didn't.

EH: Have you ever felt like you wanted to unfriend somebody on Facebook because you were worried about them seeing information or pictures that were on your profile?

P6: Family, yes.

EH: So how do you do that? Do you control what you're posting, or do you edit the privacy settings?

P6: I have edited the privacy settings before, and then I got rid of things, controlling what was there.

EH: So family members, that's like parents?

P6: Yeah, parents, uncles and aunts.

Participant #7: 21 year old female, interviewed March 3, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're sitting on Facebook browsing through your news feed?

P7: I usually get up there maybe once a day or every other day, so just to catch up with everyone from back home and see what my friends from high school are doing are now doing in college and see what my family is doing. It seems like now that I'm in college and I've grown so much, a lot of people from back home have stayed the same. A lot of people have not been so open-minded, for example the ISIS crisis that is going on. Here at the university we can talk about these things in an educated setting, where the people back home only know what they see on TV and that not even be reproduced in the right way on Facebook.

EH: Can you explain to me an instance where you've unfriended someone, and what the reasoning behind that was?

P7: One of the people was a guy I went to high school with. It was around the time when a lot of protests were going on and uproars about racial injustice in the police...

EH: The Ferguson protests?

P7: Yeah. People expressed their feelings and thoughts, and Facebook is like a diary to some people. Just some of the comments that he was saying, basically, and I'm the type of person, I love everyone, I think that everyone should have the right to a pursuit of happiness, and I have friends of all different races and colors, but if I feel that you're wrong I can't help but say something. So he was making very uneducated statements

about African-American people, and instead of being sucked into the negativity I unfriended him for that.

EH: So this was stuff that he was saying online, it wasn't anything he did offline?

P7: No, it was just reading the posts all the time. Another one was I used to have a boyfriend, but we're not dating anymore, and I unfriended him because of that. I was in a two year relationship and all of a sudden this year he decided he didn't want to be in a relationship anymore, and I unfriended him because I got tired of seeing the stuff he was posting, like how he was acting. He goes to school here too, and how he was acting in person I needed to cut all ties to get myself beyond it.

EH: So this was all his offline behavior?

P7: Yeah.

EH: What kind of stuff was he posting online that you didn't like?

P7: Making statements like he was happy that we weren't together anymore, basically talking to a whole bunch of girls online, stuff that seemed to me to be out of his character, and if this was the new person that he was, I didn't want to see it or have to deal with it.

EH: Have you unfollowed someone on Facebook?

P7: What do you mean? I know it's different on Twitter.

EH: You can have it so you don't see all their updates on your news feed but you're still friends with them.

P7: Oh yeah, I have done that. A couple of people from high school, they'll post "woe is me" type of stuff, posts about how they don't like where they are in life. Not that that's anything bad, that's just how they feel, but it brings down my mood if that's all I see on my timeline.

EH: Is there any reason why you'd want to unfollow these people as opposed to unfriending them?

P7: One of the girls, we were close friends, so I guess I would feel bad to unfriend her and she'd probably notice. I just weed out her stuff, unfollow her, so it doesn't show up.

EH: Do you have any examples of things that would make you unfollow them, that would make you sad?

P7: A lot of people on Facebook repost videos, and when people repost videos that are inappropriate, like naked stuff or fights, I don't want to see it and it puts you in an awkward situation if you have your computer up around people and this is the stuff that pops up. If people post inappropriate things I'll unfollow them.

EH: Have you ever sat down on Facebook and gone to your friends list and methodically unfriended a bunch of people at once?

P7: Yes. It happened, I would say at the beginning of this semester, so January. I guess, New Year's, it's time to make a change. There were some people on my Facebook, I have 2,100 friends, I made a Facebook so many years ago and you keep adding people, but now some of the people that I've added from years ago, I don't even know anymore. I don't know what they're doing. Not to say it so crudely, and not that I don't care

what's going on with them because that's a rude thing to say, but I'm at a certain place in my life...Some people don't even use Facebook anymore, so there's no point. I deleted so many people.

EH: Did you notice any big feelings after you'd done this?

P7: Not really. I don't know how they felt, but me personally, I felt cleaned up. I've been trying. We learned here, to be professional, and your social media says stuff about you, and the people that you follow. I try to keep that in mind when I add people or follow people, like the content that's on my Facebook. I try to monitor that as well.

EH: Have you ever blocked anybody on Facebook? Do you remember what the reasoning behind that was?

P7: One person that I blocked was a guy that I met and he added me on Facebook because my name is uncommon and he found me and added me. He was sending me very weird messages and some of them were very inappropriate and I didn't like the way it made me feel so I blocked him.

EH: So this was all messages he was sending you, did he post anything that made you uncomfortable or just the stuff he was sending directly to you?

P7: The stuff he was sending directly to me. He didn't post anything on his page or anything like that. He would go on to my pictures and comment so other people could see that, so I would delete the comments that he put.

EH: Have you ever considered blocking anyone but then decided against it?

P7: At one point in time I did block someone and then unblock them. Me and one of my friends here were arguing and it was going on for an extensive period of time, and I just blocked her but I unblocked her afterwards and we're still friends now. It was like, "I don't want to see anything that you do." I don't want to say it was spur of the moment but I felt like it was the best thing to do.

EH: Have you ever wanted to unfriend someone because you were worried about them seeing pictures or statues that you'd put on your profile?

P7: Yes, so my mom is very active on Facebook. She tags me in pictures all the time and all this stuff. I take pictures, not to say that I take pictures of inappropriate things, but me and my friends dress up and go out and wear dresses, like that kind of stuff, because we're in college! I post it and I think, "wait a minute..." Then she'll comment things like, "Where are you going?" and those kinds of situations I'm like, "Mom, I really don't want you to see!" There are some things I can say there, but if you go on my Instagram or something there are pictures that are not on Facebook because I don't want her to see those, to avoid her acting like a mom.

EH: Other than your mom is there anyone else?

P7: There's church members, some of my teachers from high school, they had the rule that once you graduated you could friends with them on Facebook. I have teachers. I was a counselor at a Christian camp a couple of years ago, and a lot of the staff and the people from that camp, we're friends on Facebook too. I think of my Facebook as the "angel" version of me. I very much so filter what I want to put out on Facebook. On my Twitter, not saying that I say bad stuff, but I can say how I feel, what I think, because the

only people that follow me on Twitter are students here or friends that go to other colleges. Facebook is very much so, “I got an A on another test!” or “So excited for the weekend to come!” and stuff like that. Whereas I’ll talk about “Scandal” or stuff like that on Twitter.

EH: On Facebook do you feel like you control what you post or do you have specific privacy settings?

P7: The only real privacy settings that I have, I have old pictures, I got my Facebook when I was in like 7th grade. I have settings so I can only see those pictures. I also have settings so I can review things before they go on to my timeline. So when my mom does tag me in those photos I can either accept or deny that other people can see those. If someone mentions me in a comment or tags me in a picture I can decide if I want that to show up or be connected to my page or not.

Participant #8: 22 year old female, interviewed February 23, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're sitting on Facebook browsing through your news feed?

P8: I would say quick, because I try not to stay on long, so I do a quick scroll to see what's new and then I...I don't linger.

EH: So have you unfriended anyone in the past couple of months? Do you remember what that situation was and what the reasoning behind it was?

P8: I think it was a friend of a friend, and usually I unfriend people if they're pretty negative or if they post a lot of sad things and I don't know them that well. Or if they say something that's prejudiced or biased. I'm not a person who has a ton of friends on Facebook, I keep it pretty bare minimum.

EH: Just the people you know in real life?

P8: Yeah.

EH: So all this, this is stuff that happened online as opposed to offline?

P8: Right, these are people, if I unfriend me, it's usually because I haven't seen you in two years. It's never like, "I'll unfriend you because you said that."

EH: Do you remember any examples of things that made you mad or anything?

P8: Sometimes it can be pretty silly. There's this girl who's a Duke fan, and a pretty vocal one. Sometimes I'll say, "I don't have time for this in my life." So I'll unfriend them. More than that it's usually people who are saying some bad things or biased

things. I remember – I had a friend sophomore year of college. I'm a senior now so it's been a while. We had been roommates but she got a little weird so we stopped being roommates. I unfriended her, and everyone who had been in our friend group found it a big deal.

EH: The stuff that she was doing, was this online posts?

P8: No, this was in person stuff. I felt like I didn't need this person in my life anymore. Usually I'm pretty chill, this stuff is so rare. It doesn't happen often. But I also don't friend people a lot, I'm not very active on Facebook.

EH: Have you unfollowed anyone on Facebook in the past couple of months?

P8: Yeah, I've unliked pages, if I liked some friend's jewelry business and I don't see that person anymore I'll weed it out. I try to keep a professional look at it too since I'm student teaching, so I don't want anything that looks unprofessional on it.

EH: Have you unfollowed any person as opposed to pages?

P8: There was a politician that I followed, but he had a big scandal. His name was Anthony Weiner. He had a tremendous scandal and he's not someone I like anymore. I definitely unfollowed him, it was pretty immediate.

EH: Have you unfollowed anybody that you knew in real life that was a friend?

P8: No, only people that I used to know or friends of friends, so beyond the roommate I had or the group of friends I was in. It's kind of like sticking to your real friends.

EH: Do you know of any instances where you'd rather unfollow a person as opposed to

unfriending them?

P8: What's the difference?

EH: You can have a friend on Facebook and unfollow them so you don't see any of their updates on your news feed but you can still be considered friends with them. You can look at their page but none of their updates will show up on your news feed.

P8: Okay, in that case I haven't made that distinction.

EH: So you really just unfollow pages you've liked and unfriend people?

P8: Yeah.

EH: Have you ever gone to your friends list and methodically unfriended a bunch of people at once?

P8: Yes. I have done that. People from high school, maybe some distant relatives who were getting a little too into conspiracy theories. I don't go into that. So I find it frustrating.

EH: Do you remember any feelings you had after doing this?

P8: Relieved!

EH: Why relieved? Just because you didn't have to see what they were posting?

P8: Yeah. One less bit of drama. I'm trying to be very un-dramatic.

EH: Have you ever blocked anyone on Facebook?

P8: I have strict privacy settings. I don't know if that's quite the same thing. I've never

had a really negative relationship. Blocking has a really negative connotation. Like you don't want them to see you anymore.

EH: Yeah, they can't contact you, they can't see your profile, anything like that.

P8: I haven't done that.

EH: Can you imagine any instance where you would want to block somebody?

P8: Yeah, and it's sad to say but I would for family members. Can it also just be that you don't want your family to know everything about you? It can also be like that too?

EH: Yeah.

P8: But blocking is for specific people, I guess.

EH: Did you know about blocking before?

P8: Yeah, I'd heard of it. I just don't think I'd ever use it.

EH: Has there been anyone you'd considered blocking, but then you decided not to?

P8: No.

EH: So you mentioned that you have really strict privacy settings. Have you ever wanted to unfriend somebody because you didn't want them seeing something on your profile?

P8: Yes.

EH: What kind of people would that be?

P8: People from high school. Like people that I never think about anymore, and I'm just

like, “I don’t think y’all need to come into the next stage of my life.”

EH: Do you have things like pictures or statuses that you don’t want people seeing?

P8: Yeah, absolutely. I use Facebook as a way to store pictures, like if I take a selfie and I want to use it for Tinder or something, then I’ll keep it on Facebook and set it so only that I can see it, but I can still upload it to Tinder. Statuses, I am one of those people that never ever posts statuses, like ever. I’ll like things occasionally, but I’m more of a messaging person.

EH: Like direct messages?

P8: Yeah. But I guess I’m not an out in the open Facebook user.

EH: You mentioned you’re a student teacher so would you want to set your privacy settings so your students can’t look you up?

P8: Some student teachers I know do things like using their first name and middle name. I use my real name on Facebook, but I have a common name, and I’m wearing sunglasses in my [profile] picture. I figure that they’d have to work super hard to find me. It’s like an ethical thing where you don’t want to find your students as much as they want to find you. Or, another problem was camp counseling. When the kids got home they want to Facebook friend you, and we weren’t allowed to do that. So I’m all about privacy.

EH: Have you ever wanted to protect your photos or anything from your parents or family members?

P8: Yeah, I know that selfies are not a bad thing but I feel kind of silly for taking them.

That's a personal thing that I have to get over. I don't mind other people's selfies, but I don't think that I post that many. It's kind of a self-conscious thing, I try to keep it as down low as possible. Every so often I'll post a nice picture of me with a family member or friend. So not everything is super secret.

Participant #9: 18 year old female, interviewed February 20, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you just sitting on Facebook and scrolling through your news feed?

P9: Sometimes I'm a little bit annoyed because it's different from when I was younger, like in middle school, because now all those pages you liked show ads and stuff, and when I was in middle school I liked a thousand of them, and I'm like, *oh my gosh*, so I'll go though and try to click out of them or unlike the page so that it stops popping up, so sometimes that's frustrating.

EH: Is there anything that your friends post that annoys you?

P9: I guess, the same thing in middle school, you added all these people that you're not really friends with, so all their posts show up and you don't really care about them, I have over a thousand friends, and do I know over a thousand people? Heck no! I don't really care what they're up to, so normally the people who post stuff I don't even talk to anymore.

EH: Can you explain to me an instance where you've unfriended someone, and what the reasoning behind that was?

P9: Yeah, I guess I did like a Facebook cleanse or whatever, I didn't get very far but I went though and basically unfriended people who I don't keep in touch with and haven't seen since middle school, like I know your name but that's about how much I know about you. So just so I can filter through and see the people I actually care about. Nothing against [the people I unfriend], but I just don't really know them.

EH: So these are all the people you actually want to see updates from?

P9: Yeah, right.

EH: So you would consider this all online, there wasn't anything offline that made you mad or anything?

P9: No, not really, I didn't go through a rage, like unfriending an ex-boyfriend, it wasn't anything like that.

EH: Did you feel anything after doing that, like feel any positive or negative feelings?

P9: I guess I haven't gone through enough to feel like, "Finally, I can get to the people I care about," like there's just so much, I guess I'd feel tired after doing that, taking thirty minutes to just get through the "A's" but nothing like "Oh, I feel so much better now that I've unfriended them." I've done that on other things, like on Snapchat and stuff, there have been boys or people I've talked to and I've unfriended them because I don't really care to see what they're doing because we broke up or like, and that makes me feel better because it helps me move on. I've unfollowed people on Instagram for the same reason, because I'm on those more and that has people I'm directly in contact with.

EH: Have you unfollowed someone on Facebook within the past couple of months?

P9: Yeah, I have.

EH: What kind of reasons do you do that for?

P9: Yeah, I did it just because I don't know them anymore and I probably have 1,300 friends and I just want to narrow it down.

EH: Was there a reason why you'd unfollow someone as opposed to unfriending them?

P9: Oh, that's a good question. Like unfollowing on Twitter?

EH: On Facebook.

P9: You can unfollow people on Facebook? How do you do that?

EH: You can have it so you don't see all their updates and pictures and stuff on your news feed, but you're still friends with them.

P9: Oh, I didn't even know that you could do that! But, I mean, I'd probably be more likely to do that. Like, unfollow them. Because that's what my main problem is, just clogging up my news feed. Certain people I might unfollow, like maybe be their friend because in the future to have that network, I guess, that would be a reason why I'd unfollow them rather than unfriend them. If I'm probably never going to see you again, then I'd unfriend, but if they were just annoying me I'd unfollow them but want to keep the connection.

EH: So what kind of things would you see on your news feed that would annoy you?

P9: Like obnoxious posts, obnoxious statuses, I guess like, I did a lot of musical theatre [in high school] so younger kids in the group would friend me on Facebook and I would definitely unfollow them because they're younger and they post a lot of ridiculous things. If anyone posts ridiculous things I'd unfollow them. I've seen things where people will post that I don't necessarily agree with, like religious things, and if anyone posts inappropriate things I'd unfollow them. I've seen people post immoral things or use bad

language, so I'd definitely unfriend or unfollow them because I don't want to put that stuff in my head.

EH: You mentioned that you've methodically unfriended people on Facebook, is that something you do often or do you try to make a habit of it?

P9: I guess not, I mean when I first got to college I said that I'm seriously going to go through all my social media and delete all these people from high school who I was friends with just for the sake of knowing what was going on, but now I'm never going to see you again. I remember at one point I would go on every night and work on going through, and then go back and start where I left off, but that lasted like three days, and I was just like, whatever.

EH: So it was just too much effort?

P9: Yeah, definitely too much effort. And when I would unlike all those pages, there'd be times where I'd do that in shifts because it was just too much at one time. But it's not like a habit I have, like I don't go every couple of days, that was just a one time thing.

EH: So did you just do that because you felt overwhelmed by how many friends you had?

P9: It's kind of just because I got tired of being like, "unfriend, unfriend, unfriend..." There were just so many to go through.

EH: So have you ever blocked somebody on Facebook?

P9: Yes, I have. When I've gotten like friend requests from people, mainly guys that are just random, and they range from having one mutual friend to thirty mutual friends, but

I'll go to their page and, wait, let's go back to high school. I would like having a lot of friends in high school because it made you look cooler, so I'd be like, "oh, I'll add you since we go to the same high school," or "I've heard of you, so I'll friend you." Now I don't care anymore so if I don't know you personally, I'm just not going to add you for the sake of not having to go through it later, but there have been random people where I'm like, "I've never heard of you!" I'll go to their page and I'll look at their mutual friends and a lot of the time it's just all girls, so I'm like, "Oh, that's creepy," so I'll block them just because I don't know who you are, I don't want you to look at my page even though it's private, but I'll just block them anyways.

EH: Have you ever wanted to block someone because of something that happened offline, like a friend or an ex-boyfriend or something?

P9: I don't think so... Maybe sophomore year [of high school] I blocked my ex-boyfriend because I was mad, but I grew up and unblocked him because it was pointless. But no, I don't think I've ever done that.

EH: Have you ever felt like you wanted to unfriend or block someone because you didn't want them seeing things that you had posted on your profile?

P9: Kind of with those guys, or those people I don't know, I don't want them seeing pictures of me or what I'm doing. Granted I don't post statuses or anything, if I'm doing anything on Facebook I'm mostly looking at what other people are doing or posting pictures. My dad always warns me on Twitter not to say where we're going on the weekends, so I'm very cautious of that, because you can Google your name and your Facebook comes up. Also I don't post stuff because of employers can go check that kind

of thing. I wouldn't block employers, but there have been times where I haven't wanted to be friends with my friends' parents, like there was that phase in high school where you want to do that. Not that I was doing anything bad, but what would they think?

EH: So are you saying that you don't really have anyone you'd need to unfriend for that reason, but there are people you wouldn't accept a friend request from for privacy concerns?

P9: Yeah, I have friends who have definitely blocked their parents from social media just so they can't see what they're doing. I haven't had anything to hide, so I don't really do that, but even some people post other things of you and you don't want them see that.

EH: Can you remember any instances of a status or something that annoyed you on Facebook, or have you seen anything related to like Ferguson or the recent Chapel Hill shootings that made you upset?

P9: Not necessarily. I know a lot of BuzzFeed articles and news stories come up on Facebook now, and I don't really take the time to read them. I normally look at things that are funny or inspiring stories instead of news or bad news, but I guess when I say things on Facebook that annoy me are just self-centered or they'll say like, "Oh, we've been dating for two months! I'm so *in love!*" and I'm like, "No, you're not!" I mean I'm not going to tell anyone that they can't say they're in love but just cheesy stuff like that. More of those things are things that I think are pathetic, and the fact that you have to post it on Facebook and let everyone know. News story-wise, if I wanted to look into it I could.

EH: How do you go about unfriending people?

P9: Sometimes if they're from a long time ago and they pop up on my news feed I'll click on their name, go to their page, and unfriend them. But when I do the cleanses I'll go on my friends list and go through it like that.

Participant #10: 18 year old male, interviewed February 23, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're sitting on Facebook browsing through your news feed?

P10: Sometimes it's interesting and sometimes it feels annoying. Most of the times it's like, "Why are people posting this?" People post a lot of stupid stuff and then it's hard to find interesting or relevant things that you want.

EH: So what kind of things would annoy you?

P10: People inviting me to play those games is a big one. Also sometimes people's statuses are really stupid, and those threads that are like, "Write one word about me and comment, and I'll inbox you!" Stuff like that.

EH: Have you unfriended someone within the past couple of months? Do you remember what the reasoning behind that was?

P10: Because they were annoying. Or, sometimes I would scroll through and wonder, "How do I know this person?" I've had a Facebook since 6th or 7th grade, and I hadn't really used it. Now I use it more in college and I wonder how I know these people or why I'm friends with them.

EH: You unfriending these people, is it more of stuff they did online as opposed to offline?

P10: Yeah.

EH: Do you feel like you have too much stuff on your news feed?

P10: Sometimes it can feel a bit cluttered. A lot of things that clutter it are these pages I liked back in middle school. Pages that were stupid things, like “when your battery is low” or something like that. Then they post articles and stuff that’s annoying. When I’m scrolling I see it and unfollow them.

EH: Have you unfollowed anyone on Facebook?

P10: I think so, some people just post a lot and it’s annoying, but you still want to be friends with them or look at their pictures.

EH: So is that why you’d want to unfollow rather than unfriend?

P10: Yeah, if they just have a lot of things to say.

EH: So is there a big difference between the people you unfriend and the people you unfollow?

P10: Kind of...I guess if you’re unfollowing them you still want to be friends with them, but unfriending means you don’t want to see them at all.

EH: Do you ever feel better or worse when you unfriend or unfollow people?

P10: A little bit better because it’s less cluttered, you find more things that are relevant to you over things that don’t really matter.

EH: Have you ever gone to your friends list and methodically unfriended a bunch of people at once?

P10: I tried it once but it just gets boring after a while. You somewhat want to keep a lot

of friends so it looks better, but I do this more so on Twitter because there are apps that show you who to unfollow. But not methodically.

EH: Did you notice any big feelings when you were doing this?

P10: It feels good when you get rid of someone who's not really relevant, they went to your high school and they're not really do anything with their lives. I want to follow successful people or important people.

EH: So you generally would rather have people that you think are more relevant to your life, and who you want to be?

P10: Yeah.

EH: So have you ever blocked anyone on Facebook?

P10: No, but I recently found out that someone had blocked me. It was one of my friend's exes, and we were trying to look up a picture he posted, and I tried to search for him but it said "content not found." But I don't think I've ever blocked anyone, unless it was spam or something.

EH: How'd you feel when you found out that person had blocked you?

P10: It was surprising. I wasn't even that close with them or anything so it wasn't a big deal. Just surprised, not really hurt or anything. I guess they really cared enough to go through the effort of blocking instead of unfriending. I guess that means they never want you to find them.

EH: Was this all stuff that happened offline?

P10: Yeah.

EH: Have you ever considered blocking anyone but ended up not doing it?

P10: Yeah, one or two people. It could have been stuff that happened offline, but I feel like it would have more of an impact if I had blocked them on Instagram or Twitter or Snapchat. I feel like that would be more impactful.

EH: Do you use those more often?

P10: Yeah. Facebook is kind of a general thing for me, and Instagram and Twitter are more up to date and specific to things. I have notifications disabled for Facebook on my phone since it's mostly people inviting you to events that don't really matter.

EH: If you don't use Facebook as much, is there a reason why you keep it as opposed to deleting it altogether?

P10: I guess because the friends list that I have is more from past school, like high school and middle school. I'm friends with some teachers on there, I guess I like to connect with them. I guess convenience, it's easy to make accounts with places now by logging in with Facebook. You don't have to make up a whole new password.

EH: Have you ever wanted to unfriend someone because you didn't want them seeing information that you'd put on your profile?

P10: I suppose, yeah, but I don't really put anything up that I don't want people to see. I guess if something happened offline where I realized that I didn't want someone to see my pictures anymore.

EH: Can you recall an instance of that ever happening?

P10: Not really...Or if people from my job that I had in high school would friend me I would say no. I didn't want them seeing my pictures.

EH: Was there any reason why?

P10: I guess because I didn't think it was very professional. I just worked with them, I didn't consider myself friends with them. Facebook is just for personal life as opposed to work.

EH: What about your parents or family members?

P10: I'm friends with a lot of family members and my parents on Facebook. My parents don't really use it that often but my cousins sometimes do. It's nice to keep in touch and update with them. But I haven't unfriended them because I didn't want them to see my pictures and stuff.

EH: So if you were posting pictures you'd rather do it to Instagram?

P10: Yeah. But I do allow Instagram to post to Facebook. I'm friends with more people on Facebook than Instagram, so more people can see it.

EH: But that's not all your pictures?

P10: Yeah, a couple. More recently I started doing that but some I just don't feel like putting on Facebook.

Participant #11: 19 year old male, interviewed February 23, 2015

EH: How do you feel when you're on Facebook browsing through your news feed?

P11: Fine, normal.

EH: How do feel when you're looking at different types of statuses, do any stand out?

P11: Political views definitely stand out. That's really the big thing.

EH: Do you have any specific feelings when one comes up?

P11: It depends on what political view it is, or what topic it is. Not really, though.

EH: Have you unfriended somebody in the past couple of months? Do you remember what the reasoning behind it was?

P11: Past relationships. Unfollowing is usually for political views.

EH: So these past relationships were because of things that happened offline, nothing online?

P11: Yeah. I just didn't want to see it.

EH: So did it make you uncomfortable, coming across stuff like that?

P11: It's just sometimes you want to leave stuff in the past.

EH: So unfollowing people is all online stuff?

P11: Yeah, different views that I just don't agree with I'd rather not see.

EH: Did you have any reasons why you'd unfollow them as opposed to unfriending them?

P11: Sometimes they're actually really good friends and I just don't agree with what they're saying. I don't think it's as extreme as unfriending, but with unfollowing I don't have to see the content but we're still friends.

EH: With recent things that have happened, like Ferguson or the Chapel Hill shootings, is that stuff that you don't want to see?

P11: Yeah, definitely racism is one thing. I personally don't agree with some things regarding feminism so when I see that I'll unfollow them.

EH: Like really extreme things?

P11: Yeah.

EH: Does it make you angry and you don't want to see it?

P11: I wouldn't say angry. Not even aggravated is the right word. I know for some topics you can't really change people's opinions, and I'd prefer not to see it, so I'd rather censor it myself. Usually if there's one thing posted about it there's more that follows, so I just cut it off ahead of time.

EH: You'd rather just cut it off than try to argue with them?

P11: Yeah, not try to argue or reason or change their views. They can keep theirs and I'll keep mine, but I don't have to see their views.

EH: Have you ever sat down and looked at your friends list and methodically unfriended a bunch of people at one time?

P11: In the past three months or just in general?

EH: In general.

P11: Yeah, probably. That's more so if someone just doesn't use Facebook anymore, I'll just remove them,

EH: Did you ever feel anything specific after you'd done this?

P11: No, not really.

EH: Was there any reason behind doing it?

P11: No, certain times I just have free time so I'll do it. But no real push to do that.

EH: Have you ever felt concerned about your number of friends?

P11: No, not really. Maybe in middle school, but not really.

EH: Have you ever blocked anyone on Facebook?

P11: Yes.

EH: Do you remember what the reasoning was?

P11: I just don't want them to see what I have on there. I have a brother, sometimes we don't get along. I had him blocked for a little bit in high school, but nothing big.

EH: It wasn't something that happened in the offline world, you just didn't want him seeing what you were posting?

P11: I would say it could be connected to the offline world, whereas our relationship outside of Facebook had caused me to block him. But, I didn't want him seeing what I was posting.

EH: Is there anybody else besides him?

P11: No.

EH: Have you ever considered blocking someone, but decided not to?

P11: I would probably say yes. Overall if I didn't block them, my reasoning would be because I would see it as petty on my part.

EH: Petty to block someone?

P11: Yeah. Therefore I didn't think it was necessary. It wouldn't really bother them, yeah, petty is the right word.

EH: So what kind of things did you not want your brother to see on your profile?

P11: Who I hung out with, what pictures I was tagged in, status updates. We just kept apart, Facebook was a big way of showing what I did in my life, so I kept him out of that.

EH: Is there anybody else that you didn't want to see your profile, or any other privacy concerns?

P11: With regards to pictures, you know how you can edit the privacy on certain pictures? I do that. Some pictures I upload just for me, keep the privacy so only I can see it. I keep it online but I would rather others don't see it. You also can get tagged in certain pictures you don't want your parents to see or family members. In that case I would untag it or change the privacy settings. But that's pretty rare.

EH: Do you ever censor what you yourself are putting online so your family or others can't see it? Or do you post something and edit the privacy settings?

P11: No, I definitely censor what I put on beforehand. I feel like Facebook is easy to look through.

EH: What do you mean by that?

P11: You never know what other people can't see. If you put something up it's kind of hard to know if someone can or can't see it, even with the privacy settings. I do kind of censor what I put up ahead of time, but if I do have something up there that I prefer my dad not see, I will edit the privacy to keep him out. In that regard it's pictures of parties that I'd rather him not see.