

Syracuse University

**SURFACE**

---

Media Studies - Theses

S.I. Newhouse School of Public  
Communications

---

12-2012

## Facebook Ruined My Marriage: Digital Intimacy Interference on Social Networking Sites

Lynessa Marie Williams  
*Syracuse University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://surface.syr.edu/ms\\_thesis](https://surface.syr.edu/ms_thesis)



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Williams, Lynessa Marie, "Facebook Ruined My Marriage: Digital Intimacy Interference on Social Networking Sites" (2012). *Media Studies - Theses*. 7.

[https://surface.syr.edu/ms\\_thesis/7](https://surface.syr.edu/ms_thesis/7)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Media Studies - Theses by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

## Abstract:

This study employed a mixed method approach to understand how Facebook interferes with romantic relationships. The methods included a qualitative textual analysis of 53 Facebook interest groups about marriage dissolution as a result of Facebook. The text consisted primarily of wall comments. However, images, links, and Facebook likes were also analyzed. Concepts were organized into themes that detailed how Facebook contributes to computer-mediated relationship dissolution, a concept dubbed *digital intimacy interference* (DII). The textual analysis also unveiled how and why individuals use Facebook groups to discuss *DII*. The textual analysis was then used to inform a quantitative study of individuals' Facebook behavior and feelings about Facebook's role in romantic relationships. The survey measured participants' Facebook behavior and whether their behavior related to their feelings about Facebook and its role in romantic relationships. Correlation and independent sample t-tests were run to establish whether there is a relationship between certain Facebook behaviors and feelings about romantic relationships. The two methods were designed to generate a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of digital intimacy interference on social networking sites.

FACEBOOK RUINED MY MARRIAGE:  
DIGITAL INTIMACY INTERFERENCE ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

By

Lynessa M. Williams

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in Media Studies at Syracuse University

December 2012

Copyright 2012 Lynessa M. Williams

All rights reserved

## Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank God for granting me the opportunity to pursue a master's degree and for providing me with the strength to see it through. I would also like to thank my family, especially my parents, for their never-ending love and support. Mom and Dad, you always believe in me and when necessary restore my faith in myself; and for that, I am forever grateful. I also want to thank my Aunt Barbara and my sisters for always lending a listening ear when I needed one, and my best friend Alicia for being with me for my graduation ceremony. I want to say a special thanks to my dear friend and colleague Sherri for encouraging me throughout this process and for always reminding me that I deserve to succeed.

I must thank the members of my defense committee. Thank you Dr. Newman for providing your Psychology expertise. Dr. Ward, thank you for enlightening me about the world of social media. Last, but certainly not least, thank you Dr. Gorham for giving me your time even when it was limited and for encouraging me to keep pushing.

I thank all those who have had a hand in helping me get to this point. You are appreciated.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	9
Chapter 3: Methods .....	19
Procedures and Instrumentation .....	24
Chapter 4: Results .....	33
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	79
References .....	87
Appendix A .....	98
Appendix B .....	104
Appendix C .....	106

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It is a commonly held belief that communication is the key to a successful relationship. It's been said that good communication results in relationship success, while bad communication is said to result in relationship dissolution. Communication scholars Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor developed *Social Penetration Theory* to explicate how interpersonal relationships evolve (1973). According to their theory, intimacy develops as partners navigate from relatively shallow communication to deeper connections over time (1973). The transition from shallow communication to deep communication builds intimacy, an emotional closeness necessary to maintain a healthy relationship (1973). Shallow communication may consist of asking someone's name or where they are from, whereas deeper communication may include sharing intimate details about one's personal past. Deep connections increase intimacy through *self-disclosure*, an intentional exchange of relevant information at the presumed risk of both partners (Mader & Mader, 1993). As a result, relationship communication fosters intimacy and builds trust between relationship partners as they begin to feel understood and accepted (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004).

Romantic relationships are of the deepest of interpersonal relationships. As individuals' transition from adolescence into adulthood, romantic relationship intensity gradually increases. In the early stages, adolescent relationships are casual, superficial, and brief (Feiring, 1996). From middle adolescence and beyond, interaction and interest in members of the opposite sex increase (Shulman & Scharf, 2000). During late adolescence, it becomes more important that intimacy and social support increases between

relationship partners. Throughout early adulthood, romantic partners develop intense feelings of affection and deep intimacy and commitment to one another (Ponti, Guarnieri, Smorti & Tani, 2010). They also demonstrate more care and comfort, and become more sexually active (Ponti et al, 2010). Consequently, as adolescents get older and lead into adulthood, romantic partners rank higher within their social networks because they are able to indulge each other's need for intimacy and support (Ponti et al, 2010).

Prior to the digital age, the notion that communication fosters a healthy relationship most commonly referred to traditional offline communication, whereby couples maintained intimacy primarily through face-to-face interaction. However, the proliferation of the Internet, mobile phones and social media revolutionized the way the world communicates within social networks. Social media in particular make it possible for people to extend beyond two-way communication by allowing networks of people to instantly connect across geographical locations by exchanging personal information online.

The 2012 Digital Marketer reported that 91 percent of today's online adults use social media regularly (Experian Marketing Services, 2012). The number one social networking site is Facebook.com, which boasts over 900 million users worldwide as of March 2012 (Socialbakers, 2012). Five hundred and twenty six million users are active daily and 500 million active via a mobile device (Facebook, 2012). At the close of March 2012, Facebook maintained more than 125 billion friend connections and processed 300 million photo uploads daily (Facebook, 2012). Facebook users also generated nearly 3.2 billion "likes" and "comments" during the first quarter of 2012 (Facebook, 2012). Statistics published by the CVP Marketing Group (2011) revealed that the average Facebook user spends about 15 hours on the site per month and 23 minutes per visit, and overall



Facebook users share more than 30 billion bits of content daily generating 770 billion page views each month (CVP Marketing Group, 2011). Today, Facebook accounts for one out of every five page views on the Internet worldwide (Alexander, 2012).

Though social media demographics change daily, women now make up 57 percent of the US population on Facebook (Skelton, 2012), and generally are more likely to engage on social networking sites across platforms (Emerson, 2011). A study on gender differences in self-disclosure revealed that women were more open to disclosing personal information about themselves than men, while men were more likely to share images and links about sports than women (Bond, 2009). While young adults ages 18-24 continue to be power users, posting more photos and content than their older counterparts (community102.com, 2011), 46 percent of Facebook users are over the age of 45 (Skelton, 2012). Yet, Facebook-related research, particularly on this population, is minimal. The growing number of middle-aged adults on Facebook suggests that Facebook is not just a trend for young people, thus it is important to understand how the social media phenomenon impacts various populations.

One of the more common practices upon setting up a Facebook profile is entering your relationship status. Sixty percent of all Facebook users who have done so, identify as being in some type of relationship (O'Dell, 2011). Thirty-one percent of Facebook users are listed as married, five percent are listed as engaged and 24 percent are listed as in a relationship (O'Dell, 2011). These demographics show that relating to others is a key function of Facebook and social networking sites. It also shows that expressing one's relationship status in a public form is also important. The significance of computer-mediated communication in romantic relationships is underscored by the surge in online

dating, which is a huge phenomenon in the digital age as a result of social networking sites like Facebook. One out of three Americans says that they know someone who has dated online and 30 million adults have friends who have found long-term partners and spouses online (Hines, 2008). However, while Facebook is highly revered as a place to form new connections, it has also been cited as a significant source for relationship stress and dissolution (Bindley, 2012).

Recent popular press stories have reported that Facebook is involved in 1 out of 5 divorce cases (Luscombe, 2009; Chen, 2010; Adams, 2011; Alleyne, 2011). In fact, 81 percent of America's top divorce attorneys have seen an increase in the number of cases citing evidence from social networking sites in the last five years, and Facebook continues to be a top culprit (American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, 2010). These statistics suggest that attention should be paid to the potential negative affects of social networking, especially in light of the consequences relationship dissolution can have for families.

Divorce can be hard on any couple. Settling assets, granting child custody, and coping with the emotional distress can all be too much to handle, even without the lens of social media; nonetheless, more and more couples are seeing their relationship's demise play out in front of everyone including their Facebook "friends." In a preparatory study of social media and relationships I researched how new media create an opportunity for three-way interactivity in relationship communication - that is, users interact with each other at the same time interacting with media (Williams, 2010). I proposed that the exchange positions media as a third party in relationship communication, thus creating potential for a negative impact on the relationship. During this preliminary study, I developed the term *digital intimacy interference* (DII) or the absence of relationship

closeness as a result of the disturbance of media and its influence (Williams, 2010) to describe media's influence on romantic relationships.

I argued that social media create increased opportunities for *digital intimacy interference* given their broad range and accessibility (Williams, 2010). Facebook gives users a Birdseye view of what's happening with everyone in their social network, while at the same time equipping users with obscure social functions such as a Facebook "like," or private chat to enable them to communicate outside of the public view. As one Facebook member puts it, "People get tempted, human nature. Social networking makes this so easy to go down roads that lead to hurt and pain (Facebook ruined my marriage, 2011). Although this introductory research produced the concept of *DII*, it did not employ an empirical study.

Nonetheless, research has addressed the potential for relationship tension to occur on social networking sites. A particular study found that there is a significant relationship between the amount of time spent on Facebook and feelings of jealousy (Muisse, Christofides & Desmarais, 2009). The study tested relational factors that contributed to "Facebook-specific-jealousy". It revealed that gender and trait jealousy, personal and relational factors, as well as Facebook use contribute to jealousy. The qualitative analysis from the study revealed that accessibility of information, relationship jealousy, Facebook as an addiction, as well as lack of context enhance the experience of jealousy (Muisse et al., 2009). They concluded that Facebook might subject users to "jealous-provoking" content about their relationship partner that results in heightened surveillance of their partner's profile (Muisse et al., 2009).

However, the study's sample consisted of college students aged 17-24 of whom only 0.7% were married. Older couples experiencing relationship trouble as a result of Facebook, face unique consequences that are worthy of observational study. Older adults do not have the advantage of growing up with Internet technology and may lack the digital propriety to avoid scandalous behavior on Facebook. Furthermore, relationship dissolution for older couples, particularly married couples can affect more than just the couple. Divorce requires psychological reorganization of an entire family (Togliatti, Lavadera & di Benedetto, 2011). Still, most research on social networking and relationships has focused on college-aged students (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Moorman & Bowker, 2011; Mansson & Myers, 2011), but Facebook statistics show that nearly half of all Facebook users are over the age of 45 (Skelton, 2012). This suggests that more research on adult use of social media would be helpful to understand how the social media phenomenon is impacting older adults in relationships.

Although relationship tension is undoubtedly a common phase of interpersonal relationships, there is still little academic research examining the behaviors that lead to relationship dissolution on social networking sites like Facebook. A social media study demonstrating how people attempt to negatively or positively influence the development of a relationship in their social network revealed that network members attempt to influence a targeted relationship by expressing approval or disapproval and engaging in behaviors that correlate with those feelings (Sprecher, 2011). Such a behavior might include telling a friend that they can do better than their current partner. More than half of the participants in the study believed that their reactions to the relationship had an impact on the relationship outcome (Sprecher, 2011). The study showed that romantic

relationships were more likely to draw intense reactions because of their “centrality” and their influence on members of the social network (Sprecher et al., 2002).

This study is important because it illustrates how approval or disapproval from a social network can influence relationship satisfaction and ultimately influence the outcome of the relationship. While this study demonstrated the impact one’s social network has on relationships from the social network’s perspective, it is important to explore social media effects from the standpoint of the individuals in the relationship, as they are the population directly impacted by *DII*. One way to do this is by looking at Facebook groups. A Facebook group is a community of Facebook users who are connected online through a particular interest. Groups can be “open” to anyone with a Facebook account or “closed,” requiring permission to join from a group administrator. Anyone with a Facebook account can create a group and invite others to join. There are hundreds of thousands of Facebook groups on a variety of topics including Facebook’s role in relationship dissolution. For example, a group titled, “Facebook ruined my marriage” consists of a population of Facebook users who have already experienced *DII* within their relationships. Members of the group participate in discussions on the Facebook wall, where they post comments, ask questions, and give advice to others experiencing relationship dissolution as a result of Facebook use.

This research aims to take a deeper look into the Facebook group community and explore the communication of people experiencing relationship turbulence in order to understand how *DII* might occur on Facebook, and how having a group might help individuals cope with the stress of their failed relationships. As well, this study aims to understand what social media behaviors individuals in relationships find inappropriate.

The next chapter will provide more literature and information to better explain *DII* through various relationship stages. It will also address previous research on relationship irritations and relationship maintenance and the factors that contribute to these stages in the context of social networking, as well as coping methods for individuals whose relationships have ended. The following chapters will include a description of the methodology employed for this study, as well as a chapter explaining the results. Finally, in summation the final chapters will include a discussion of conclusions drawn and areas for future research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

In 1995 there were just 16 million Internet users, worldwide making up less than 1 percent of the world population. However, in 2011 the number of users ballooned to 2.1 billion, making up 30 percent of the world population (Internet World Stats, 2011). Internet growth has been said to enable individuals to broaden their social networks beyond their local neighborhoods into online social communities (Wellman, 2001). As a result of Internet technology, communication between social networks continues to shift from local to non-local and from face-to-face to computer-mediated communication (Hampton 2001; Hampton & Wellman 2001).

Research has shown that the introduction of new communication technology often raises questions about whether a new innovation will negatively affect the quality of interpersonal relationships (Fischer, 2002; Kraut et al., 1998; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002). Communication scholars Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis (1998) conducted a study to examine how Internet use affects social involvement. They found that increased Internet use was associated with withdrawal from one's social circle and resulted in less psychological well being (Kraut et al., 1998). Kraut et al. (1998) explained that strong personal ties are usually supported by physical closeness or proximity, and that the Internet diminishes the significance of physical closeness in initiating and maintaining strong social connections. These physical connections are what safeguard people from the stresses of life (Cohen & Will, 1985; Krackhardt, 1994), and a withdrawal from these physical relationships may have negative implications for one's sociality (Kraut et al., 1998).

Nie and Erbring (2000) substantiated previous theories about the effects of Internet use on society with a preliminary quantitative study that measured the time spent using the Internet and interaction with one's social environment. They found that the more time people spent using the Internet, the more they lost contact with their social environment (Nie & Erbring, 2000). This study coincided with traditional views about social communities as strictly physical spaces, and about relationships developed online as relatively weak (Kraut et al, 1998).

Vergeer and Pelzer (2009) argue that an important distinction must be made about the type of Internet use (e.g. informative, entertaining, communicative) as having an impact on how an individual is affected and the type of connections they make online. As Shah, Kwak and Holbert (2001) pointed out, Internet use is not one-dimensional. They suggested that research on uses and gratifications of media use would provide insight into what impact media use has on an individual's production of social capital (Shah et al., 2001), which is made up of resources available through social communication (Lin, 2001).

*Uses and Gratifications Theory* is the belief that media users seek out media technology and content based on a specific need or gratification. Research on Uses and Gratifications Theory has briefly addressed Internet use and social networking sites (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004; Ruggiero, 2000; Bumgarner, 2007). Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) surveyed undergraduate Facebook users in the U.S. and found that most students used Facebook to maintain existing offline relationships, rather than to meet new people. They found that using social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook might improve students' psychological well being, by providing



social benefits for users with low self-esteem and low life satisfaction (Ellison et. al, 2007). Their interests because of SNS then connect these individuals.

Facebook groups in particular provide an added sense of community. A quantitative study on Facebook group uses and gratifications examined the needs and real world social conditions that drive Facebook group use (Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009). Participants joined political groups primarily for socializing, entertainment, and to seek status and information (Park et al., 2009). While this study highlighted the usefulness of political Facebook groups, the motivations can potentially be applied toward other topics as well. However, qualitative research on Facebook groups has not been done. Assessing the actual interaction between group members will provide more insight into the motivations for using Facebook groups as support for real world circumstances.

Previous studies show that communication scholars have held conflicting beliefs about whether computer-mediated communication (CMC) increases (McKenna, Green, and Gleason, 2002) or diminishes (Jacobson, 1999) relationship quality. While some regard CMC relationships as having less relationship quality (Cummings, Butler, and Kraut, 2000), relationship type (e.g., friendship, romantic partnership) is believed to be more influential on relationship quality than the mode of communication used (Baym, Zhang, and Lin, 2004). Nevertheless, research addressing social media specifically as it relates to romantic relationships is rather limited.

Social presence is a key element of how individuals navigate relationships. For romantic relationships, *social presence theory* says that face-to-face communication (Ftf) is necessary to maintain a social presence because it allows people to communicate with facial expressions and non-verbal cues (Short, Williams, and Christie, 1976; Miranda &

Saunders, 2003). However, for CMC relationships, *social penetration theory* suggests that self-disclosure is necessary to build intimate relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In online communication, increased self-disclosure is a way to increase intimacy despite can the absence of Ftf communication. Jhiang, Bazarova, & Hancock (2011) found a link between disclosure and intimacy in CMC. Participants in the experiment were arbitrarily assigned either ftf or computer-mediated communication with a person who, prior to the communication made either low- or high-intimacy self-disclosures (Jhiang et al., 2011). Using the hyper personal model (Walther, 1996), they found that the relationship between disclosure and intimacy was stronger in computer-mediated-communication versus in face-to-face communication and that intensity of intimacy was mediated by observed self-disclosure in CMC. In other words, by watching others self-disclose through CMC, individuals attributed higher levels of intimacy to their relationship with that person.

Perceived intimacy in CMC can influence whether individuals communicate through social networking sites. A study of Facebook friends' attitudes about online self-disclosure and online social connection found that feelings about one's online presence were indicative of the likelihood that they would communicate through Facebook (Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Yuping, and Swafford, 2011). Results revealed a direct interaction effect between self-disclosure and social connection and an indirect effect for relational closeness. A key inference of this study was that disclosure of more sensitive information might discourage individuals with social anxiety from communicating through social networks (Ledbetter et al., 2011).

This study looked at friendships as opposed to romantic relationships; however, it provided insight into how studies focused on audience perceptions are designed. It also is

one of few studies that conducted research related to social media using college students as well as adults. Furthermore, it relates self-disclosure and connection with relational closeness. *DII* serves to explore the negative effects of self-disclosure. The key finding that disclosure of sensitive information may discourage some from engaging through social media is relevant to understanding the potential aftermath of *DII*. Perhaps there are many others who have experienced *DII*, but have not felt comfortable with their online social presence in order to disclose such personal information. On the other hand, the shared interests of Facebook groups may motivate people to self-disclose information they would not otherwise, if there were no others in support of their similar interests.

In addition to understanding how the social environment motivates one to self-disclose, research has examined what modes of communication individuals use the most when communicating with people in their social network. A study was done on the types of communication used with the three closest friends in the participants' social networks (Stern, 2008). Key factors that influenced the forms of communication were included. They are: (1) social tie locality, or the proximity of social connections, (2) frequency of communication, and (3) degree of Internet usage. The results revealed that most people stay in touch with their social networks through email, especially when relationships are long distance (Stern, 2008). Increased used of CMC, even among close friends illustrates how social media has increasingly become a part of our daily routine. However, as individuals continue to self-disclose on different modes of communication, the threat of *DII* remains.

Joseph Walther's (1996) study of selective self-presentation online began to address how self-disclosure could work against intimacy. The study described how users edit

messages before distributing them to their social network. Walther argued that selective self-presentation creates potential for over-attribution of positive characteristics to relationship partners (Walther, 1996). In this regard, the strength of online relationships are questionable because one's "true self" remains uncertain online. Nevertheless, self-presentation can play a significant role in shaping the ways individuals communicate through CMC. Physical attractiveness is often a major factor in selective self-presentation online and deception (Toma & Hancock, 2010). Users typically have goals for how they construct their online identities, and the medium of communication often influences those goals (Toma & Hancock, 2010). Individuals who are said to be less attractive are more likely to strategically enhance their photographs to offset or deceive others about their appearance (Toma & Hancock, 2010). Although enhancing photos to appear more attractive is misleading, social networking sites allow users to create their own identities with ease, using avatars and profile information (Marcus, Machilek, & Schutz, 2006). This can potentially pose risks to SNS users.

One particular concern with online self-presentation is privacy. Gibbs, Ellison, and Chih-Hui Lai (2011) explored the relationship between privacy concerns, uncertainty reduction behaviors, and self-disclosure in online dating. They found that the use of uncertainty reduction strategies is determined by dating anxiety, specifically concerns about "personal security, misrepresentation, recognition, and self-efficacy (Gibbs et al., 2011)." These concerns can potentially affect the nature of self-disclosure between an individual and his or her potential partner, perhaps leading to *DII*.

Some social media users even rely on SNS as a platform to end relationships. Kaityln Starks (2007) examined relationship dissolution through computer-mediated

communication to understand how past romantic relationships have ended using the Internet. Respondents were asked to identify differences and similarities between computer-mediated and face-to-face communication in relationship dissolution as well as ideas for what is appropriate and inappropriate when ending a relationship. They offered that online breakups were more direct and less empathetic. They also maintained that the Internet was an inappropriate place to break up (Starks, 2007). However, it is increasingly becoming the platform to do so.

Research has also addressed how Facebook contributes to the distress following a breakup (Lukacs, 2012). The study explored breakup practices unique to Facebook and how Facebook's structural capabilities contribute to emotional distress following a breakup. A key factor was *interpersonal electronic surveillance* (IES), (Lukacs, 2012), a concept first explored by Robert Tokunaga (2011), that he described as the use of communication technologies to monitor others' online and offline behavior. Lukacs (2012) found that there is a relationship between IES and breakup distress. Although this research addressed how Facebook use can impact post-relationship experiences, little research has been done to understand Facebook use and existing relationships.

In addition to the various reasons relationships end, there is the possibility that these relationships may be rekindled at some point. Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester and Surra (2007) conducted a qualitative study of several couples over the course of a year as they navigated through relationship conflict. The study searched for trends and themes across couples that contributed to their status as "on" or "off" in the relationship. Though research found little reasoning for why couples rekindle broken romances, it addressed reasons for relationship deterioration such as finding alternatives, or seeking independence (Dailey,

Rossetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2007). In social media, problems that exist offline can manifest online. Social media can perhaps make finding alternatives more easily accessible. Thus, this study is helpful for understanding motivations for ending relationships beyond the influence of Facebook-related relationship conflict.

Only very recently has research begun to explore the negative influence of social networks on romantic relationships. A recent study alluded to the concept of *DII*. This study examined the influence of social networks from the perspective of network members (Sprecher, 2010). College students were surveyed about a relationship in their social network in which they had a negative or positive experience. Respondents' feelings about the relationship were believed to be associated with their behavior and attempts to influence the relationship. Results showed that roughly two thirds of the students surveyed believed their behaviors had an impact on the relationship's outcome.

This study provided a quantitative look at how individuals within a social network perceive their own influence on a targeted relationship. This is a great jumping off point for my study because of its attention to social media as a potential irritant to relationships. However, it only looks at the influence from the perspective of the social network, whereas I am interested in the perspective of the individuals in the relationship. This study does however; show how one's social network is still a major influence on romantic relationships whether they are parents or siblings, or friends online. An immediate social network can, again be a primary source for relationship conflict.

Research has more recently extended to show a connection between technology and relationship conflict outside the realm of social media as well. A study of mobile phone use in romantic relationships examined the use of cell phones and how they influence

autonomy and connection (Duran, Kelly, and Rotaru, 2011). College students were given self-report measures of rules for cell phone use, phone conflicts and conflict management, and perceptions of autonomy versus connection. The results showed that cell phone use in romantic relationships was indeed a basis for autonomy and connection conflict (Duran et al, 2011). Issues arose over the frequency of calling and texting members of the opposite sex (Duran et al., 2011). This study provides perspective about appropriateness in computer-mediated communication and romantic relationships. Perhaps issues with mobile phone use in romantic relationships will be similar to issues that arise with social media use in relationships. This study also provides perspective on boundaries for social media use. Setting rules for use could serve as a preventative measure for relationship conflict.

Still, most research concerning the impact of communication technology on romantic relationships has dealt primarily with online relationships, self-presentation, self-disclosure, and friendship. Research has addressed gender differences and self-disclosure (Bond, 2009); mobile phone use and autonomy versus connection (Duran, Kelly, Rotaru, 2011); self-presentation, deception, and attractiveness in online dating (Toma & Hancock, 2009; 2010), and friends and online social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). However, the current study aims to reveal how Facebook members rely on the platform as a communication tool and what role Facebook plays in romantic relationships. The study tackles social media and relationships of adult, single, dating, engaged, married, and divorced couples. By and large, research on social media has related to college students because they are the largest population that use social media; however, the amount of adults using social media continues to grow (Madden, 2010). Also, communication as well

as psychology scholars have explored divorce and family support (Soliz, 2008), inappropriate disclosure and its impact on children of divorce (Tamara, McManus, Hutchinson & Baker, 2007), and communal coping strategies (Tamara, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006). However, there is little academic research about the role of technology as a contributor to marriage dissolution.

Thus, the current study aims to address *DII* on Facebook by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What do members of Facebook groups about marriage dissolution as a result of social media discuss with others in the group?

RQ2: What do members' discussions and shared links reveal about how and why digital intimacy interference occurs on Facebook?

RQ3: What behaviors do Facebook users perceive as inappropriate by their partners on social media?

The methods section will address in more detail how these research questions were addressed using a mixed method approach.



### Chapter Three: Methods

This study employed a mixed research method of data collection. A qualitative textual analysis of all Facebook groups on the subject of social media and marriage dissolution was done to explore how members reacted to *DII* in their relationships, and to reveal the types of behaviors that most commonly lead to relationship dissolution. The textual analysis then informed a quantitative study of adult couples and their social media use. Mixed method approaches have recently become more frequent in academia (Tashakhori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson, 2003) and are ideal for addressing a research problem with a holistic and analytical approach (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989; Tashakhori and Teddlie, 1998). Key reasons for using a mixed method design are to use the results from a particular method to complement or develop the results from another method (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

For this study, I used qualitative data from a textual analysis of Facebook groups about marriage dissolution to inform a quantitative survey of individuals either married, divorced, separated, dating or single who use Facebook. The goal was to understand how individuals who have experienced marriage dissolution because of Facebook continue to use Facebook as a medium to discuss their experiences with others in an online social group. Also, this study aims to explain how the platform of social media can create relationship conflict. Lastly, the study purposes to reveal how survey respondents perceive appropriateness of Facebook behaviors and how they evaluate their own Facebook use as well as that of their significant other's. Given the goals of this research, a mixed method approach is the most effective means for exploring the concept of *DII* among Facebook users navigating relationships.

## Qualitative Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is ideal for collecting qualitative information about how members of various cultures interpret and make sense of the world around them (McKee, 2003). In this case, the cultural community is made up of Facebook users who discuss their relationship conflict in Facebook social groups. The text is comprised of Facebook likes, comments posted on the discussion wall, links and images shared within the Facebook group. This information will provide insight into how each individual makes sense of the *DII* within his or her relationship.

Fifty-three Facebook interest groups were used for textual analysis. These groups were chosen from Facebook using the site's search function. Keywords used in the search were: Facebook, marriage, and relationships. Content was retrieved from the group walls using screenshots. Field notes were taken and data was then organized into themes. Data collection dates back to the first post of each Facebook group and ended in May 2012. As a researcher I had limited access to some of the Facebook pages. Facebook group pages are classified as "closed" or "open." Open Facebook pages allow for anyone with or without a Facebook account to view content on the group page as well as comment on the group "wall," a message board where visitors engage in discussion. Closed pages require that users have a profile and request to join the group before viewing or sharing content with others in the group. This request has to be approved by a group administrator.

Administrators can post discussions, edit content on the group page and adjust the group privacy settings. Facebook groups can also be "secret" so that it is not listed in Facebook group search, but only viewable to those invited by an administrator. I opted to

only analyze groups with open access. This allowed me to remain inconspicuous. Also, I used mock initials in place of the group members' names to protect their identity per IRB protocol.

Analysis was conducted using both a structuralist and post-structuralist approach. A post-structuralist approach offers that each individual makes sense of the world differently given his or her own personal life experiences (McGee, 2003). This approach is necessary to understand each group member's unique relationship situation. However, a structuralist approach implies that while different people may make sense of the world differently, they share common beliefs and thus respond in similar ways (McGee, 2003). The structuralist approach created understanding of the group dynamic and how individuals collectively make sense of the phenomenon of *DII* on Facebook. The results from the qualitative data then informed a quantitative survey of Facebook users.

### Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data is useful for providing a numeric description of social phenomena (Creswell, 2009). In mixed method research, using multiple approaches can complement, develop, initiate, or expand a current or future study (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). In this case, the qualitative textual analysis helped develop the survey instrument. In addition to uncovering the uses and gratifications for using Facebook groups to discuss *DII*, the textual analysis unveiled key findings that explicate how *DII* occurs. In order to further understand the *DII* phenomenon, quantitative inquiry was used to attempt to quantify some of the themes addressed and to further understand the relationship between Facebook behaviors and relationship tension. The end result is a cohesive and holistic understanding of the

potential for *DII* on Facebook.

The target demographic for this portion of the study was couples and individuals ages 18 and over who use Facebook. Although young adults ages 18-33 continue to be social media power users (Zickuhr, 2010), Pew Research shows that the average age of adult users of social networking sites (SNS) has increased from 33 in 2008 to 38 in 2010 (Rainie, Purcell, Goulet, & Hampton, 2011). Now more than half of all adult SNS users are age 35 and older (Rainie et al., 2011). This coupled with the fact that the likelihood of a first marriage by age 30 is 74 percent for women and 61 percent for men (Goodwin, McGill, Chandra, 2002), could mean that adult couples that use social media may be experiencing an increased risk of *DII*. Thus, adults are the target unit of analysis.

Survey participants were recruited through digital invitations via email and on social media using several non-probability sampling methods. The requirements were that participants be 18 and over, have a Facebook page, and that they be in a relationship either currently or prior to completing the questionnaire. Facebook and Twitter were the primary platforms used to gather participants using a network sampling method launched from within my social network. Individuals within my networks then shared the research information with their respective networks creating a snowball sampling effect. The survey was then distributed to Twitter accounts that mentioned keywords: relationships, marriage and divorce in the bio-description. Twitter accounts geared toward male audiences were targeted upon realizing that responses returned early were predominantly female. The survey was also shared among the Facebook groups that were used for the textual analysis. As a result, 144 Facebook users responded to the survey from all over the world including 21 US states and 13 different countries; however, it is important to note

that for reasons unknown, not all respondents chose to answer every question.

Respondents were entered to win a \$10 American Express gift card for their participation. They submitted their responses via the survey instrument website Survey Gizmo. This free website generated results and provided descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2009) making data analysis more simplified. Per IRB protocol, the identity of the participants was protected. Data collection took place from February 2012 to May 2012.

Despite targeting male participants, respondents for the survey were mostly female (63%). Twenty-two percent were male and 16% declined to identify their gender. Although the disproportionate gender demographics are a limitation to the research, prior studies have shown that women are generally more likely to respond to traditional survey questionnaires than men (Curtin, Presser, and Singer, 2000; Moore & Tarnai, 2002) and are more likely to respond to online surveys as well (Sax, Gilmartin & Bryant, 2003). Women also spend more time than men on social networking sites across platforms (Emerson, 2011) and account for 62% of shared content on social networking sites (Goudreau, 2010). This may suggest that the gender difference in responses is representative of the gender difference in overall social media engagement.

Survey respondents were 39% black and 33% white. Six percent were Hispanic, 3% Asian and 4% did not identify as any of the aforementioned groups. They ranged in age from 18 years old to 65 years old. The largest group of respondents was adults age 22 to 34 (59%). These ages fall just below the age of average social networking adult users (Rainie et al., 2011). The second largest groups of respondents were adults age 35-44 (8%) and young adults age 18-21 (8%).

Participants included single (27.%), dating (30.%), married (28%), separated (3%), and divorced (1%) Facebook users. However, the small sample of divorced respondents is perhaps a limitation to the research. On the other hand, the fact that the majority of respondents are in relationships offers a perspective from individuals who perhaps have not experienced *DII* that resulted in relationship dissolution, while Facebook group members from the textual analysis offered their perspective after already experiencing *DII* that ended their relationships. The difference in perspectives allows us to see how perceptions and experiences of *DII* can vary depending on standpoint. It is important to note that respondents were not probed about the status of their previous relationships so it is possible that participants who identified as married on the quantitative survey may have been divorced or separated prior to their current relationship.

### *Procedures and Instrumentation*

The instrument (See Appendix A) for this study included a 28-item survey focusing on participant's Facebook use and behaviors, and confidence that Facebook use does not compromise relationships. Responses generated statistical data about Facebook behavior that was then analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). The survey instrument included several survey scales as well as open-ended questions and demographic information about ethnicity, age and gender.

### *Measures*

*Facebook Usage.* The survey included Facebook usage measures such as time spent on Facebook and Facebook activity while online. Though previous studies have employed a

Facebook Intensity Scale to measure Facebook usage by how connected participants are to the social network (Ellison et. al, 2007), this study required a custom scale to address specific concerns observed in the textual analysis. Furthermore, the Facebook Intensity Scale developed in 2007 measures time spent on Facebook ranging from *less than 10 minutes to more than three hours*. This range does not reflect the growth of Facebook users from 58 million active users in 2007 (Kelly, 2012) to more than 526 million in 2012 (Facebook, 2012). Users are spending more time on Facebook with 46% logging in more than once a day (Ryan, 2012) and spending at least 23 minutes online at each login (CVP Marketing Group, 2011). Thus respondents were asked how much time a day they spend on Facebook and indicated their responses on a 4-point scale ranging from *less than one hour daily to more than six hours a day* ( $M = 1.92, SD = .80$ ).

*Facebook activity.* Participants were asked to describe their Facebook activity by selecting multiple phrases that best described what they do while on Facebook. The items for this question were derived from data from the textual analysis. Respondents' Facebook activity primarily consisted of Eighty-eight percent of all the participants spend time updating their status, 66% browse and comment on others' pictures, 79% comment on wall posts, 49% message or use Facebook chat, while only 23% add friends, 24% browse through others' friends, and 17% play games.

*Relationship status.* Descriptive information about respondents' relationship statuses and Facebook use was collected to provide context for some of the responses. Thus, the survey included a contingency question for measuring current relationship status. The survey questions about the respondents' personal relationships were dependent upon

whether they identified as single, divorced, or separated versus dating, engaged, or married. This ensured that single, divorced, or separated participants were not being asked questions that related exclusively to dating, engaged or married participants. Individuals who were in relationships were asked more questions about how their Facebook use makes them feel about their current relationship whereas individuals who identified as single or divorced responded to questions about whether their Facebook use influenced their past relationships.

Respondents in a relationship were asked whether they listed their current relationship status on Facebook. Seventy-two percent responded that their current relationship status is listed on Facebook while 28% did not list their status. Of single, separated, and divorced respondents, 58% listed their current relationship on Facebook and 42% did not. Individuals in a relationship were asked how long they've been in their current relationship and single individuals responded to how long they were in their last relationship with written in answers. Responses were coded into months and then recoded into years. Respondents in current relationships had relationship duration of 0-11 months (14%), 1-5 years (51%), 6-15 years (21%), 16-25 years (6%), 26-35 years (5%), and 36-45 years (1%). Some single respondents shared that they had never been in a relationship (8%), while others shared that their last relationship endured for less than one month (3%), from one month to 11 months (25%), 1-9 years (59%), or from 20-28 years (5%).

*Descriptive information about Facebook.* Several bi-polar scales were used to collect descriptive information about respondents' Facebook interaction with their current partners or ex-partners. These questions yielded yes and no responses. Seventy-nine



percent of respondents in relationships are Facebook friends with their current relationship partner and 22% are not. Fifty-six percent of all respondents were friends with their ex-partners and 44% were not Facebook friends with their ex-partners. Single participants were also asked whether Facebook played a role in the end of their last relationship. Twenty-one percent shared that Facebook did play a role in the end of their previous relationship, while 79% said Facebook did not play a role in their relationship.

*Inappropriate behaviors.* Participants were asked to write in their responses to what types of information regarding romantic relationships they feel are inappropriate to share on Facebook. The top responses were sexual details (30%), fights and/or arguments (13%), information confidential between partners (5%) and intimate pictures (4%).

*Sharing and discovering inappropriate behavior.* After listing written responses about what behaviors participants feel are inappropriate to share on Facebook, respondents were then asked whether they have shared information that could be perceived as inappropriate or compromising to a past or present relationship, and if they have discovered inappropriate or compromising information on Facebook. Bi-polar scales were used collect *yes* or *no* responses. Sixty-three percent of respondents maintained that they have not shared information on Facebook that could be perceived as inappropriate or compromising to their relationship, while 17% said they have shared inappropriate or compromising information on Facebook. Twenty percent were unsure about whether their behavior was inappropriate or uncompromising to their relationship. Interestingly, 44% of respondents have discovered information on Facebook that could be perceived as inappropriate or compromising to their relationship and 56% have not discovered

inappropriate or compromising information on Facebook.

*Password Access.* A 4-item scale was used to determine if respondents in a relationship had password access to their partner's Facebook profile. Responses included *yes, we have each other's passwords* (20%), *no, we do not have each other's passwords* (75%), *I have his/her password, but he/she does not have mine* (4%), *and he/she has my password, but I don't have his/her's* (1%). I also collected responses about the reason each participant's last relationship ended. Connelly and McIssac's (2009) 4-point Breakup Reasons Scale was drastically modified to customize the responses for this study. The original Breakup Reasons Scale was created for their qualitative study on high school students. The scale organized several 4-to-8-item subscales into four main categories (i.e. *intimacy, affiliation, sexuality, autonomy*) that described reasons relationships end. However, the abbreviated scale included the options: *incompatibility* (37%), *infidelity* (14%), *grew apart* (22%); *trust issues* (14%) *and other* (13%) to simplify responses. These items were taken from the subcategories of the original scale. There is likely more than one reason a couple breaks up, so instead of collecting explicit details about breakup reasons, this scale takes a more thematic approach that requires the respondents to identify the reasons that best resemble their circumstances based on these categories.

*Deleting Facebook.* Following questions about Facebook's role in relationship dissolution, a 2-item bi-polar scale was also used to collect data from respondents about whether they would ever delete their profiles. Fifty-seven percent said they would delete their profile, while 43% said they would never delete their Facebook page.

*Overall Facebook impact.* Respondents were asked about their overall feelings about

Facebook's impact on their romantic relationships. Twenty percent felt Facebook has positively impacted their relationships compared to 21% who felt Facebook negatively impacted their relationship. Majority (60%) of respondents do not feel Facebook has had any impact on their relationships.

*Viewing current and ex-partners profile.* Research has shown that more than 56% of social networking users have used social networking sites for spying on their partners (Thorhauge, 2012). Tokunaga's (2011) interpersonal electronic surveillance scaled was used as a reference to measure how often users viewed their partner's and ex-partner's Facebook profile. The instrument included a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= *never*, 5= *always*) showing that 32% of respondents in a relationship view their partner's profile sometimes and regularly. Thirteen percent never view their partner's profile, 18% rarely view, and 6% always view their current partner's profile ( $M = 2.99, SD = 1.12$ ). Of respondents who were not in a relationship, 32% never view content from their ex-partner's profile, 35% rarely view, 23% sometimes view, 9% regularly view, and 2% always view their ex-partner's profile ( $M = 2.49, SD = 1.26$ ).

*Confidence and Facebook activity.* A Likert-type scale (1= *not confident*, 5= *very confident*) was developed to measure confidence that one's relationship partner's Facebook activity was uncompromising to the relationship ( $M = 3.88, SD = 1.21$ ). Likewise, this scale was used to measure confidence in one's own Facebook activity ( $M = 4.12, SD = 1.12$ ).

*Facebook-specific problems and preexisting issues.* A Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree*, 5= *strongly agree*) measured users' feelings about whether Facebook has caused problems in past or present relationships or whether pre-existing issues in the relationship

were exaggerated through Facebook.

### **Role of the researcher**

The role of the researcher in the qualitative facet of this study would best be described as participant observation. Though the term has typically been used to describe the role in field study in which the researcher spends time in the subject's physical environment, instead, I spent time in an online social environment and observed Facebook users' behaviors. The subjects who were members of the Facebook groups were initially unaware that my research was taking place. However, after collecting qualitative data, I began to solicit participants for the survey portion by posting a message on the group walls asking for members to participate. Apart from that, my relationship to the subjects and the environment was unobtrusive. I did not probe the Facebook group members with questions or engage in discussion of comments posted on the wall. Also, I did not friend any of the group members or interact with them on any social network during any phase of the research.

Researching online behavior comes with certain threats to validity. Facebook users are able to construct their own online identity by creating a user profile. This control allows them to omit unfavorable information about themselves as well as over-emphasize positive characteristics, thus creating a distorted perception of who that person really is. Also, people sometimes use fake Facebook accounts to impersonate others or falsify information about themselves. It then becomes difficult to be sure who you are connecting with on social networking sites. Nonetheless, this study takes into consideration the idea that self-presentation on Facebook may not be fully accurate.

Though I only observed the exchanges in the Facebook group, I must acknowledge my own personal experience with social media and relationships to address any potential biases and clarify my stance as a participant-observer. I have been a member of the Facebook community since July 7, 2006. At the time that I joined Facebook I was in a relationship and was Facebook friends with my then boyfriend. We remained friends online throughout the remainder of the relationship and are still friends on Facebook today. Throughout the duration of the relationship, Facebook rarely created problems; however, post relationship information was revealed through Facebook that shed light on how remaining Facebook friends with an ex can be challenging. I am an avid user of several social media platforms and have maintained an active Facebook account throughout the data collection and analysis phase of this study, spending several hours a day visiting Facebook. Also, I have 600 Facebook friends, many of whom have experienced relationship conflict, and sometimes dissolution because of information found on Facebook.

During my research, I witnessed several Facebook exchanges between friends who are either in committed dating relationships, married, or single and still connected online with an ex. Though the focus of this study is the communication about Facebook and relationship trouble discussed in online Facebook groups, I also observed this communication within my own Facebook network. During the time of research, I was also exposed to many popular press articles on the subject. As a result of my personal experience with using social media as well as my friends' experiences, I became interested in studying the phenomena and its impact on romantic relationships. Consequently, witnessing *DII* among friends in my personal social network contributes to my understanding of how it takes place. Researcher bias is conceivable because the material is

emotionally sensitive. Nonetheless, incorporating my own personal experiences of *DII* into the research allows for a richer analysis from a variety of perspectives.

## Chapter Four: Results

### *Qualitative Results*

This section will highlight several key observations that emerged from the qualitative analysis of Facebook comments. These observations are organized into themes. The themes feature information about how titles of the Facebook groups revealed information about the function of social media as a tool for discussing *DII*. Other themes discussed include: reasons why Facebook users communicate through Facebook groups, the specific tools that contribute to *DII*, and the argument about whether these tools, or rather the individuals who use them are ultimately responsible for *DII*. These themes highlight the concerns of Facebook users, which informed quantitative survey of Facebook users.

### *Titles*

Facebook groups are a way for people within the Facebook community to connect and share information surrounding a common interest. The group title identifies this common interest and indicates to potential group members what the focus of the group will be. The titles of the Facebook groups about social networking and romantic relationships were very telling about how some feel about Facebook and *DII*. Though an analysis of the group comments will provide deeper insight into the elements of this argument, some meaning can be extracted from the Facebook group title names.

For example, "Facebook: A relationship's worst enemy," is a group which has amassed 167, 644 likes. The title describes the pejorative feelings some feel toward Facebook while the group title "Facebook doesn't ruin relationships, people with FB kill them" illustrates the reservation others have with placing all of the blame on the social

network. Instead this title implies that some attention should be given to the fact that the way people use Facebook is a crucial element to the social network's adverse affect on romantic relationships. Another group title "Facebook doesn't ruin relationships, the pricks who abuse the freedom do" underscored this point. This title also brings up a new point that Facebook provides certain freedoms that if abused can have very severe consequences. At any rate, these titles outline two opposing arguments about whether Facebook itself or rather its misuse by people contributes to *DII* in relationships.

The group titles also make some distinctions between the types of relationships Facebook affects. Certain groups identified marriage specifically in the group's title while others referred to Facebook's negative impact on all relationships. For example, a group titled "Facebook destroying jobs, friendships and relationships on a daily basis" addressed Facebook's impact on friendships and professional relationships as well as romantic relationships, while a group titled "Facebook almost ruined my marriage" highlighted marriage specifically. Also, several groups duplicated the same title. "Facebook ruined my marriage" and "Facebook ruins relationships" were repeated several times. It is interesting that instead of joining an already existing group, a user would create an entirely new group with the same name. Possible reasons for duplicate groups are that the group creator did not know a group already existed or that they just wanted to create a new closed or open group about the same subject. It is also possible that the administrator wanted to generate their own discussion stemming from their particular network of friends and have primary control over who joins the group and what topics are discussed. Still that there are so many groups with a similar focus brings attention to the concern many have about the impact of Facebook on relationships. As well it demonstrates their desire to express that concern



with others who have similar experiences.

While Facebook group titles inform potential members what the focus of the discussion will be, they may also reveal something about the group administrator's motivations for starting the group. For example, a group titled "Facebook eff's up relationships. smh. :( " included a crying face emoticon. The group page also featured a crying baby in the profile picture.

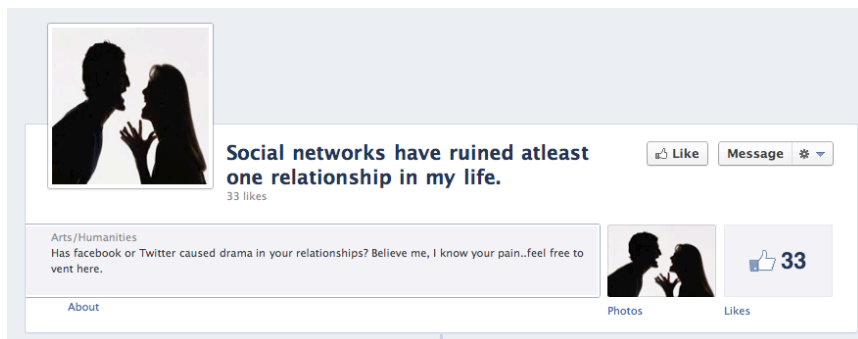


These images can be read as symbols of the emotional state of the person who created the group at the time, and potential group members can be influenced by these images to join the group.

Some group titles were framed as questions to stimulate conversation. One group was titled, "What would relationships be like without Facebook?" Certainly relationships have existed, succeeded and failed before Facebook; however, the implication here is that a significant change has taken place since Facebook was introduced. Another group, "Facebook, destroying relationships and friendships? Or exposing the truth?" also posed a question in the title. Two popular sayings come to mind when reading this, "The truth hurts" and "the truth will set you free." This title brings up an interesting consideration in analyzing how people communicate about Facebook's impact on their relationship, which is whether people view a breakup as a positive or negative thing given Facebook exposed the truth. This is a topic also discussed in the Facebook group comments.

Many Facebook groups also include a brief description that reveals more details about the purpose of the group. A group titled “Social networks have ruined at least one relationship in my life” includes a description saying, “Has Facebook or Twitter caused drama in your relationships? Believe me, I know your pain...feel free to vent here.”

The group page also features a silhouette image of a couple fighting.



The description sets a foundation for group discussion, while the photo adds visual imagery to the idea of Facebook and relationship conflict. By posing questions, or by using gripping language, both the group title and the description are communication tools that can be used to compel potential members to either join or “like” the group.

Although many of the titles include a negative tone, not all of them are intended to imply that one should hate Facebook. CT a member of “Facebook ruins lives” said that, “this group has nothing do with hating Facebook. In fact, it’s part of all of our lives whether we deny it or not...but it can in some instances, make your life miserable at times.” The notion that Facebook is an essential part of our everyday lives, yet also a source for intermittent misery, is an essential element to this analysis of *DII* in relationships because it raises questions about whether the amount of time spent on Facebook can increase the likelihood that one will experience *DII*. CT’s acknowledgment that discussing Facebook’s negative ramifications does not mean that you hate the social network is important to the analysis

and overall understanding of *DII* because it sets the tone for an open discussion, and open discussion is a key starting point to unraveling this phenomenon.

### **Reasons for Commenting:**

It seems ironic that a platform for connecting people would result in so many breakups. On the wall for “Facebook destroying jobs, friendships and relationships on a daily basis” member OJ points out this irony saying, “its funny how the thing that’s meant to bring people together is causing so many problems.” There is even more irony in the fact that the Facebook users who have experienced the downside of social media continue to use it to discuss how social media has ruined certain aspects of their lives. Though ironic, the comments on the discussion wall reveal important information about why the platform is perhaps the best place to give voice to these issues. Uses and gratifications theory reminds us that people typically choose certain media based on their individual communication needs. Therefore, it is a key function of this study to explore how Facebook groups meet the communication needs of users and what value and meaning they extract from the group discussions.

### *To disagree*

Each Facebook group included a description explaining why the group was formed. A group titled “Facebook and MySpace are relationship killers” explained, “This group is for anybody who had an argument or even a break up over something on Facebook or MySpace. Feel free to share your stories.” In a comment from January 4, 2007 one group member said, “How crazy is it that I find this group and I am currently arguing with an ex over this stuff. And watch out, it’s not just MySpace and Facebook. Other sites will kill you too.” This illustrates that a main and perhaps obvious reason for commenting on the group

wall is to share similar experiences.

The data from other Facebook group comments also revealed that many people joined relationship-focused Facebook groups in order to contest other group members. Some group members left remarks suggesting it was “stupid” to blame Facebook for relationships or marriages ending. It seemed as though they had no motive outside of providing a dissenting opinion to the idea that Facebook plays a substantial role in relationship dissolution. The commentary was sometimes condescending and mean.

On the wall for “Facebook destroying jobs, friendships and relationships on a daily basis” AR posted, “you people are stupid, your on Facebook complaining about Facebook...get a life or just stop logging on if you hate it that much.” In one exchange on the group wall for “Facebook Ruins Lives” HR expressed her feelings saying, “BEST group ever-Facebook just about ruined my marriage.” In reply, group member BE said, “ To ‘HR’ if you are married and a couple sentences could ruin your marriage, grown the fuck up...NOW.” It is unclear whether HR saw BE’s response to her comment as these comments were left in February 2007 before Facebook enabled the capability to mention other users in comments. Within the last year or so Facebook implemented a mention function similar to Twitter where Facebook notifies a person if someone tagged his or her name in a comment. In any case, RH did not comment or engage in further discussion on the group page.

Group member SD seemed to grow frustrated with some of the comments that did not contribute to the discussion. On February 23, 2007 he wrote:

Look...how about an administrator just disables the wall. We agree that Facebook has the potential to, and often does cause communication based relationship problems. With the exception of those who joined to mock the group. That’s all that really needs to be said, unless I missed something?

SD highlights a key observation my analysis of Facebook groups. Although the

administrator can create a group and give other members authority to add pictures and update information on the discussion wall, they do little to regulate the conversation so as to prevent extraneous comments, advertisements and attacks on other members. The administrator's main role was creating the group. Typically they did not post discussion questions, but rather discussion was generated by the group members' comments.

*To share experiences*

Many of the comments across Facebook groups were solitary meaning people would post a comment sharing their experience or expressing their opinion about whether Facebook affects relationships and then not comment again or respond to others' comments. However within these comments, users revealed very intimate and shocking details about how Facebook interferes in relationships. On November 17, 2011 BPM told her story to the "Facebook ruined my marriage" group. She wrote:

Hi everyone, I wanted to share my story of losing my husband to Facebook husband-hunting females. In October 2009, my husband was diagnosed with stage 4 non hodgkin's lymphoma. He also had both feet in the grave when we arrived at MD Anderson in Houston. We left 4 sons at home with relatives and went for a miracle cure. My husband was 39 years old at that time. While we were in the hospital, he created a Facebook account so he could keep family, friends and co-workers updated on his status. Well after 8 months in Houston and a stem cell transplant, we returned home to our boys cancer free. Within 4 months, my husband came to me asking for divorce and the following spring on April 15, 2011 my husband walked out on our 12-year marriage for a happier life. He told me he didn't love me anymore and had a new life and was going to live it without me. One month later I discovered why. He reconnected with an old high school classmate on Facebook while we were in the hospital. Unbelievable!

BPM's extremely personal account illustrates how the Facebook comments can reflect negatively on the individuals mentioned. It is important to keep in mind that we are only being given one side of the story, which posits Facebook and BPM's husband as the antagonist. BPM's testimony does not make mention of the part she had to play in the

outcome. We must also consider that other factors unbeknownst to the audience may have contributed to this divorce. The comment does not provide context to help other members understand the status of the relationship at the time, thus it seems like the person who comments is always a victim of *DII*, when perhaps that is not the case.

One particular exchange on the “Facebook Ruins Relationships” page illustrates how reading from different perspectives can change how you feel about a situation. On

September 1, 2011 TD wrote:

My fiancé I was with for 4 years met an old [girlfriend] on Facebook and started messaging and then phonecalls. Within 3 weeks he came over and ended our relationship with no explanation, abandoning my children and myself...people be careful...and always respect those you are in a relationship with and remove people they ask you 2 remove!”

This comment received three “likes” which are clickable buttons used to show support or agreement. However, on September 7, 2011 group member SD responded to TD’s comment saying:

Your relationship was over before even that!!! I mean you are 50 not [freaking] 15 years old. All you had to do is talk to the right sibling and I could have told you 2 week earlier. All you two did was fight. Life is too short not to be happy!!!! Those were not his children. Your post makes it look like he walked out on his own children and that is not true!!!! Keep putting your spin on things [TD]!

Without SD’s comment, the average person is inclined to feel sympathy for TD and a natural reaction is to offer support; however, TD’s claim that SD’s story is untrue brings doubt upon entire scenario. This conversation shows that sometimes people join groups to draw sympathy though they may not be telling the full truth. The group members do not come to confess what they’ve done wrong; rather they come to explain how Facebook or their ex-partner is to blame for relationship failure.

*To vent*

Another group member vented her frustrations with the social network. ASJC wrote on the group wall “Facebook a relationship’s worst enemy” on June 19, 2010 saying:

I swear since I joined Facebook it has destroyed my life! It’s made me soooo paranoid and I hate how bitchy it is. It’s a way of hiding I think! Why if you have something to say that’s bad about someone don’t you grow some balls and say it to [their] face? Thank you Facebook for proving to me and I’m sure a lot of other people that humans are vicious creatures, some with no hearts at all. Can I just state the fact that this isn’t aimed at anyone I’m just having a rant lol.

*To gain and give support*

While some Facebook users joined groups to vent and share their stories, many also came to gain support from sharing. Member GK wrote on the wall for “Facebook ruined my marriage!!!!” saying:

Isn’t it nice to know we’re not alone? I try not to have pity on myself. Listening to others’ stories helps “in a way” even though you hate to hear stories similar to “yours.” I wish I didn’t love my “soon-to-be” ex. Life would be SO much easier!!!!!!!!!!!! [December 15, 2010]

Coincidentally GK was one of the most communicative members of the group. She responded to nearly everyone’s comment, shared her story with others in the group and even offered advice on how to resolve divorce issues telling SAL that it is “not a good idea to represent yourself especially during a divorce.” Her comment suggests that for her communicating with others through this Facebook group provides comfort and perhaps a temporary relief from having “pity” on herself.

In response to GK’s above comment about how nice it is to know you’re not alone through such a unique divorce, member SAL wrote:

I don’t know about that. I’m on the other end of the spectrum. I’ve been told by many wise people who have gone through a divorce that you eventually come to a place of apathetic peace, and there is where the healing begins. I’m trying really hard to get there but I’m sitting on the decision whether or not to contest the divorce. He under-reported his earnings by over \$400 a month and inflated mine, resulting in about half the amount of arrearage and support we’re legally entitled to.

[December 15, 2010]

SAL seems to have a different perspective on the experience of sharing stories through the Facebook group. Though she continued to engage in discussion with GK, her comment reveals that she is hesitant to acknowledge the benefits of being in this Facebook group or has not realized them. Perhaps she has not reached the point of “apathetic peace.” The exchange between SAL and GK demonstrates that people respond differently to similar life circumstances, and therefore may communicate differently in the group discussion. Another thing to consider about how people engage in discussion is the timeline of when the relationship ended. GK’s husband left December 26, 2009 leaving her and her two sons in a lot of emotional distress. She said:

It’s almost been a year, and a day hardly goes by that I don’t shed a tear. I still love and miss my husband! Some people have NO morals and are SO selfish. This world is going to hell in a hand cart-the devil is definitely winning when it comes to ruining marriages.... ☹

[December 14, 2010]

The timing surrounding GK’s comments is noteworthy because she began sharing on this group wall around the anniversary of when her husband left on December 26th. Perhaps this influenced her outlook. She noted that her children were devastated and that “that date will forever haunt them as their dad walking out,” thus it appears GK is drawing support from the group specifically at this time. This observation indicates that the timing of a breakup may influence when a person is likely to seek support through a Facebook group.

JV, the administrator of this group encouraged members to keep sharing and supporting one another. She said:

Please keep sharing your stories and supporting others through their hard times. I am glad people are still using this group. Even if it is to vent some frustration, anger or to receive comfort knowing that you’re not the only one who had been betrayed/hurt. JV-Group creator



The administrator's comment suggests that there is value in sharing on the Facebook group wall regardless of the reason for sharing. Whether users join to gain support from others' or to give support, or whether they join to vent; there is value in catharsis and there is value in conversation.

*To post links and articles*

Building conversation about *DII* was not restricted to comments. Members also joined Facebook groups to share news articles relevant to the subject matter. CE posted an article link to the "Facebook ruins lives" page on March 16, 2010 with the comment "wife murdered for Facebook status!" TM a member of the group "Facebook and MySpace is ruining relationships" posted a link to a website with the caption "if you want to fix the problem in your relationship and get back together, then you have got to do something about it," to which member JMJ responded "Agreed with @TM. Good relationships take action ☺." He then posted a link to his relationship blog.

On "Facebook ruins relationships" CI shared a link to an article from [cheateralert.com](http://cheateralert.com) asking "Can Facebook Ruin Your Relationship?" LM posted a link to "Welcome to Facebook killer of relationships." In her post, which received five Facebook "likes" she shared an article titled "Having an emotional affair is cheating." None of the members of these groups commented on the articles. This does not mean that group members did not read the links; however, it might suggest that they prefer to share through comments rather than links.

One potential reason for limited interaction with linked content is that some group pages get flooded with advertisements and links that are irrelevant to the subject matter. For example, on the group wall for "Welcome to Facebook, the killer of relationships"

someone shared a link inviting members to “meet single intelligent Ukranian girls and women seeking their soul mate and future partner.” The ad called for people to meet Ukranian girls and women for marriage. This advertisement brings attention to the practice of soliciting Facebook users to marry immigrant women for citizenship, and it is another way Facebook is changing relationships.

### *To meet new people*

Among the most peculiar of comments on the Facebook group walls are the one’s soliciting dates. Though not a traditional dating site, many do use Facebook to meet new love interests and interestingly, some people joined the Facebook groups to find relationship partners. On June 7, 2010 RD wrote on the wall for “Facebook a relationship’s worst enemy” saying “I need a relationship that can be fun, happy, exciting, caring. Does anyone know [where] I’m coming from? [Preferably] females? LOL.” Another member of this group also posted about looking for love. MH said, “my Facebook chick just left me because of one of my post ☺ lolz...i’m lookin’ for a new date online!” This shows that some members used Facebook groups as a way to conclude relationships and also start new ones.

### **Infidelity**

Infidelity was by far the number one complaint of the Facebook group users. Many credited Facebook with not only causing problems in a relationship, but some married couples indeed felt Facebook was responsible for their divorce. In one case, several members of a group titled, “Facebook Ruined My Marriage” conversed about a 19-year relationship that came to an end because a husband left his wife to start a new life with someone he met on Facebook. On May 24, 2011 the wife writes:

**NS:** My husband of 19 years left me for a woman he met on Facebook. They had been talking on IM [Instant Messaging] for over four years. He has been [gone] for two

months now. And she is also still married. They are living together in the same town as me...

**KG:** Facebook ruined my 19 years of marriage as well. It's called husband unemployed spending too much time on computer trying to rekindle a love from when he was 18 and she was 14. Shattered my heart and my two boys' hearts (12 and 15) he has been having a LONG distance relationship with her for a year and a half and she lives in California!! OMG. He's living in a fantasy world.

By many standards 19 years is considered a long-term marriage. Both couples have spent over a decade of their lives together and have created a family whose lives will be greatly impacted by the changes divorce brings. One observation during this analysis was that many of the relationships that experienced *DII* were relationships of 10 or more years. This discovery raises questions about whether *DII* is at all related to the amount of time a couple is in a relationship and if so, what factors contribute to *DII*. The fact that NS's husband was able to instant message for over four years without being found out showcases how social networking has built-in features that are inherently problematic if misused. It may also indicate that there is a lack of communication between the relationship partners that leads one to seek intimacy elsewhere. Also, KG's awareness that her husband is "living in a fantasy world" is a noteworthy observation as it alludes to the idea that for some, Facebook is escapism.

MM a member of "Facebook destroying jobs, friendships and relationships on a daily basis" offered her thoughts saying:

I think a lot of people just enjoy attention they're not used to getting and they create a false reality for themselves. A lot of relationships are destroyed over it but I find it hard to believe these online relationships work. At some stage the real world will have to bite them on the ass.  
[May 18, 2011]

The idea that Facebook is a "fantasy world" and a temporary relief from reality is a concept SJ of "Facebook ruins lives" experienced first hand when her husband began an

online relationship. She wrote, "Facebook is ruining my marriage. Hubby met someone on here who's filled his head with bullshit tales of what a better life he would have with her...he is pining away like a love-sick kid over her." This case shows how communicating through Facebook can create an illusion that the relationship one has developed online is better than the relationship one already has in the "real world." An online relationship may not be considered physically cheating, but it does allow a person to emotionally escape whatever trials currently going on in the relationship.

BD left a comment on the wall for "Facebook ruins lives or at least relationships" explaining how the Facebook "addiction" is problematic:

It is the addiction of mainly one partner spending more awake time, and family time and personal time living in front of the computer on [Facebook] every waking hour possible that ruins the relationship, that they put up a personal brick wall to the world and [fuck] all else [that] matters ☹.

This seemed to be the case for CJ who shared on the wall for "Facebook ruins lives" how Facebook has interrupted quality time with his wife. "This site has ruined my relationship with my wife," he said. "All she does every night is go on Facebook and never puts it down, sometimes even bringing [the] laptop to bed and still on it.

JM from "Facebook destroying jobs, friendships and relationships on a daily basis" said Facebook is "easy to spend too much time on." "When we get stuck in our FB account, we tend to not notice we are "gone" from the lives [of] those right next to us, and so they go too," he said.

CJA added:

If people would spend as much time on their relationship as they do on Facebook, strolling down the pages and looking at everybody else's business, instead of paying attention to their own, more relationships might work! Facebook is nice once in a while, but if that's all you pay attention to, then you might just be left with nothing but Facebook to keep you company, while everyone else moves on without you.

ES shared his opinion of how Facebook and social networking have contributed to the decline of our culture. He wrote on the group wall for "Facebook ruins lives" saying:

I'm of the opinion that Facebook (along with cell phones and instant messaging) is a major contributor to the devolution of our culture. People get so caught up in these fake methods of communication that they forget how to communicate in person. They care more about their digital friendships than their real friendships, and I think there is something really fucked up about that.

Again, we see a dichotomous relationship between "real" and "fake" expressed. Implicit here is the idea that computer-mediated communication is somehow inauthentic and that the only "real" relationships are those that maintain face-to-face interaction. These comments reflect the ideas of early Internet research that suggested that more time on the Internet would result in a withdrawal from one's "real" social environment (Kraut et al., 1998). Though Facebook is itself a social environment, in some cases, individuals become enthralled in their online social network and subsequently neglect the tangible relationships with the people physically closest to them.

However, one of the major issues associated with spending too much time on Facebook is the likelihood that one will reconnect with someone from a past relationship. An exchange from February 8, 2011 detailed a husband's scenario in which his wife left him when she reconnected with an ex-partner after just a few weeks of being on Facebook. DK writes:

My wife of 2 years (together for nearly 7 years) joined Facebook in December 2010. By 12/23 she was calling an old boyfriend she found on Facebook. Today she tells me she's moving to NY to live with him. She hadn't seen him in 12 years...and just up and walked away, right after getting in touch with him. Needless to say she wasn't expecting me to find out, but I did. She left less than three weeks ago. I don't blame Facebook, but it sure didn't help.

[February 8, 2011]

JW, another member of the group responded saying:

This is a similar story to mine. My wife is in New York right now as well and her ex, whom she hadn't talked to in about 10-11 years is up there too. This is very interesting how similar the story is. I am torn up over this whole Facebook thing.

[April 26, 2011]

This exchange reinforces the notion that escapism and nostalgia are motivations for

infidelity on Facebook. As well, discontentment with one's current relationship may also be a contributor. What is missing from many of the comments is what the relationship status was prior to *DII*. This ingredient is necessary to draw a linear connection between Facebook use and relationship conflict.

Another observation from the Facebook comments is that many of the people who's spouses found and ex-partner online or met someone new ultimately left their current situation to explore another relationship despite any associated risks. DK shared that his wife left without hesitaion. He said, "My wife took off January 16<sup>th</sup>. It's been four months. She never wavered. I have to return serve of my divorce papers today. She never intended on coming back. I hope your situation works out better than mine did." [April 26, 2011]

JW responded saying:

Wow. It saddens me to hear that and it is a shame how powerful this Facebook is, but it also makes me think that the other person was in a relationship for the wrong reasons at the time. I feel for you, as I am in deep depression myself.  
[April 26, 2011]

DK then offered his sympathy saying:

Trust me man, it gets better. First month all I did was sit in the dark and sob. I'm on month four. Two months since I have seen or spoken to my *still* wife. I'm dating again...a lot. I blame Facebook as much as I blame her. It would have happened either way; it was just a matter of time. Facebook is just a means to an end.  
[April 26, 2011]

DK and JW both note the deep emotional strain that they felt upon ending their relationships; however they seem to have found comfort in knowing that someone else shares their very unique experience of Facebook ruining a relationship. Here we also see that DK does not place all of the blame on Facebook but acknowledges that there is a chance the relationship would have ended anyway. In this particular case, DK saying, "Facebook is just a means to an end," suggests that Facebook is just the particular medium

through which the inevitable will take place. DK offered more on this saying:

Women and men are gonna leave regardless. All Facebook does is give them a way to find the person they've been trying to find. After my wife left, my eyes were opened to a LOT of things that were wrong with her and our marriage...and a lot pointed out by friends and family. Trust me. If she's leaving, she's doing so for herself, not so much because of you. Good luck.

[April 26, 2011]

This comment calls into question the idea that Facebook is to blame for relationships ending. It seems as though DK is not completely disillusioned by Facebook, but rather understanding that his marriage had preexisting issues that were brought to a head because of the social networking site. However, group member GK still thinks Facebook is to blame. According to her "Facebook gives people the tools to easily look for old lovers ☹ because they think the grass is greener on the other side." She added, "maybe for a few months." This proved to be the case for JW who replied:

Yes indeed GK...funny thing is she is now ready to come home and I don't know how to take it. I want her home, but it feels like she wanted to do her own thing and then say, "aaaahhhh ok, that's out my system. Ok, now you can have me back." Don't think it is fair.

JW's scenario addresses the misconception that "the grass is greener on the other side." DJ of "Facebook destroying jobs, friendships and relationships on a daily basis" wrote on the group wall explaining how the relationship that one develops on Facebook may not sustain in "real life." He said:

Facebook is like the new friends reunited. It kills relationships in seconds 'cause some muppet starts being nice and people think the grass is greener on the other side, but it is not always like that. People got to learn- just 'cause someone is nice on here does not mean that they are like that in life, and what you got is worth fightin' for so put the effort in people...

CD of "Facebook a relationships worst enemy" underscored DJ's sentiment. She said:

People should realize that although you might chat to someone on FB (Facebook) for hours at a time, etc., there may not be a chemical/physical attraction if you meet!

I know as I have experienced this. And not all people on here are honest about themselves and who they are. Sometimes the fantasy is better than the reality!

As we discussed earlier in the literature review, research shows that self-disclosure can disrupt intimacy because of selective self-presentation (Walther, 1996). Facebook users can edit photos, messages, and profile information that creates an ideal, yet sometimes false, online social identity. Through selective self-presentation, some Facebook users may over-emphasize positive attributes to potential relationship partners, thus creating the illusion that the “grass is greener on the other side.”

This illusion seems to be intensified when reconnecting with an ex-partner.

A few comments from “Facebook ruined my marriage” show how Facebook bringing people together can ultimately break some apart. CL wrote, “18 years of marriage and wife finds an ex on Facebook. Wonderful.” SYD also shared on the wall after her husband “just up and left” after having an affair with an old classmate he reconnected with on Facebook. BS added that Facebook “let an old flame rekindle itself” in his wife’s heart. BM’s husband also connected with an “old friend” who, when confronted by BM about how Facebook started it all, responded ironically saying, “Bloody Facebook- you have no idea how many divorces I’ve dealt with which were started by Facebook.”

One group member described reconnecting with an ex as reconnecting with “the one that got away.” The phrase implies that for some, reconnecting on Facebook is a second chance to explore a relationship with someone from the past, for whom you may still have feelings. Perhaps rediscovering a former love feels safer than meeting a “stranger” online because the relationship is familiar territory. Also, Facebook users can rationalize the connection as an innocent reunion. AP shared how her husband saw “nothing wrong” with his interactions with an old high school friend. She wrote on the “Facebook ruined my



marriage” wall saying:

My husband has added all his old friends from high school and has women reminiscing about hickeys he gave them, how they said “good bye,” what a great kisser they remember him being!! I was like, “whoooooaaahhh” way too personal for me. He sees nothing wrong with his behavior and won’t stop. It’s just a matter of time before things get worse...We are now separated.”

On the group wall for “Welcome to Facebook, the killer of relationships,” ML

explained how this “innocent” communication leads to relationship conflict. She said:

We hear so many times a person say; “I wasn’t cheating because we never had sex,” or “we were only friends.” What is happening is that a man or a woman finds a “friend” and as they become closer and closer, the spouse gets pushed away. It really is not a good idea to share intimate details of your life with the opposite sex if you are married or in a serious relationship. This will only lead to an emotional relationship that your spouse cannot compete with. This friendship will start to fill a void that already existed in the relationship, as all relationships have some holes, and as this void gets filled, the person will start to feel that their spouse is not good enough and compare them to the friend. “She listens to me and my wife doesn’t,” or “my husband is so critical of me and my friend likes me just the way I am.” Once this starts, it is hard to go back and someone is eventually going to end up hurt in the end.

In her comment, ML describes infidelity on Facebook as a process during which users start as friends, and then through self-disclosure develop a more intimate relationship. Self-disclosure is an important factor in this process because it is the gateway to intimacy. Also, her point that “friendship will start to fill a void that already existed,” is important because it speaks to the idea that the root issue lies within the individuals and not necessarily Facebook. However, these comments also reveal that for individuals attempting to fill a void in their relationship, Facebook is an ideal place to look.

A member of “Facebook and MySpace are relationship killers” explained why Facebook is an ideal site for adulterous relationships saying:

Facebook gives people the chance to talk to people they would have never had the chance to in the first place. You can set everything to private and block people. I know a guy who says he’s single who’s in a relationship and hides everything

including the conversations he has with other females and acts like its no big deal, yet she can't see them. I think Facebook can ruin relationships. It's too easy to hide things from your significant other these days.

This user calls attention to Facebook's interface and its capabilities that enable users to hide or reveal content, thus inherently making the site cheater-friendly. This suggests that perhaps Facebook is an accomplice in relationship infidelity. Further analysis of Facebook comments is necessary to uncover the specific Facebook features that contribute to relationship tension.

### **Sources of Tension**

Analysis of the comments revealed several aspects of Facebook that generate relationship tension. These include, public and private messages, Facebook chat, pictures, liking, and lurking. Many of these functions are built directly into Facebook's interface and are used in a variety of ways. However, for some group members, having so many communication options on Facebook leads to relationship problems.

In many relationships, the opinion of one's family and friends is important to relationship development and maintenance; so much so, that a landmark event in a relationship is when romantic partners meet each other's parents. This meeting is significant because relationship approval and acceptance by family often influences partners' decision to move forward with the relationship. In fact, research shows that approval from family and friends is linked with overall relationship satisfaction and maintenance (Eggert & Parks, 1987; Parks, Stan, & Eggert, 1983; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992, 2000). Similarly, research on online social networking and romantic relationships has shown that approval or disapproval from one's social network can influence a relationship (Sprecher, Felmlee, Orbuch, & Willetts, 2002).

A primary difference between the influences of one's offline social network on a relationship versus the influences of an online social network is access to information. Without social media the information that family and friends are privy too is limited to what the relationship partners disclose to them; however, Facebook provides a courtside seat to witness the highs and lows of a relationship play out through social media. The group description for " Facebook and MySpace is ruining relationships" shed some light on how open information on Facebook can be problematic. It read, "If facebook/myspace has caused drama in your life, this is the group for you. Whether it is you reading your spouse's wall, messages, monitoring their comments, harassing the people that they talk to, etc... this is your group." This description is a good example of how Facebook communication can create relationship tension. It also pinpoints specific areas of concern such as messaging, comments, and wall posts.

JLB left a comment on the wall of "Facebook and MySpace is ruining relationships" that was very insightful about how Facebook's interface is a source of tension. She said, "In my opinion, Facebook and MySpace are no longer social networking sites meant to reunite long lost friends. They are dating services and meat markets for people to send messages and pokes to just any random person." A Facebook "poke" is a function that allows a user to get the attention of another user by clicking the poke button. When someone pokes another user, that person receives a Facebook poke alert letting him or her know they have been poked. It also gives them the option to poke back or to delete the poke. Though Facebook notes that pokes can be used in a variety of ways, it is often interpreted as a flirting mechanism.

HT discovered how innocent pokes can be a source of relationship tension when he

got into an argument with his girlfriend for “poking” her friends. He said:

My ex and I had an argument over me poking a few of her friends on FB a couple of weeks ago. In my own defense, I'd only been on Facebook for like 3 days. I didn't really know any of the “unwritten rules” and didn't consider it friend stealing if I knew the people too. I was just looking to meet people. She blew up at me about it and wouldn't let it go. Sadly, I haven't really been able to talk to her civilly since. Truth be told, I'm having some issues letting the relationship go. We were together almost 5 years and broke up over distance. I guess considering that we had such a big argument about something so trivial it's probably for the best that we're no longer together, though...\*sigh\*. Man, I'm glad I had some place to get that out...Thx FB!

When a user joins Facebook, they are most likely unaware of the unspoken rules of being a part of the social network. Though Facebook provides explanations for many of their functions (i.e. likes, pokes, comments) it is not always clear how others will perceive them. What HT thought was a good way to meet people, ultimately upset his girlfriend. Also, the people whom he poked may have interpreted the pokes to mean something other than what HT intended. It is notable that HT and his girlfriend ended their relationship following this incident and that the relationship was long distance. It is possible that HT's girlfriend's interpretation of his pokes was skewed given they were in a long distance relationship.

One Facebook group member addressed how image-driven Facebook flirting is. WIB said:

Facebooking is a way to look around at other people and flirt and so on. It is like a meat market. Messaging or adding random people of the opposite sex that you've never met is usually done purely based on looks and to look through their “new found friend's” pics. But I also think that these problems will only start when the boyfriend/girlfriend are insensitive, like the attention from the opposite sex, wanna flirt around, or just wanna be single. So it's not down to the site, it's down to the people. And I feel really bad for everyone who's pic seems to be popular on Facebook and gets requests regularly, but turns them all down for their other half, while their other half can't be bothered to have the courtesy to return the favor; and instead uses excuses like, it's just fun, I'll never see them anyway, we started talking randomly, we played online poker. Yet, coincidentally they don't seem to be adding any people who aren't their type or of the same sex.

This comment provides a great deal of insight into the logic behind some users' actions. WIB calls attention to the superficial process of selecting Facebook friends. Although Facebook users have various communication tools and open access to communicate with a variety of people, she notes that it is typically people of the opposite sex, who fit the prototype of someone they would be attracted to, that they choose to engage in supposedly harmless communication with. Her quotation marks around "new found friends" may suggest that the friends were perhaps not found, but searched. However, she seems to regard this selection process as a natural function of Facebook and only considers it a problem when relationship partners are "insensitive" of their significant other's feelings. This is shown in her example of one partner deflecting the advances of Facebook flirts, while the other participates in flirtatious behavior.

Group member JLB also shared that she and her boyfriend fight often because of Facebook flirting. She said, "I found out that random women are sending him inappropriate pictures and messages. He sometimes gets six friend requests a day!" Though she said her boyfriend "loves the attention," it began to ruin their relationship. She said, "My bf and I never had a trust issue before Facebook came along, but over the last few months I find myself obsessed with what's going on and my confidence has bottomed out."

The idea that Facebook interaction impacts one's self-confidence was an issue expressed by several groups and members. The group description for "Facebook can be the death of relationships and friendships!!!! Lol!" explained, "secret messages lead to affairs" and "rumors" and "makes a girl/guy insecure." TB of "Facebook ruins lives" agreed that Facebook made him an "insecure asshole" toward his girlfriend although he knew she wasn't cheating on him, and MN shared that "Facebook just makes me jealous because of a

guy I like, likin' someone else and my ex dating someone else." SD also felt Facebook ruined her relationship because of jealousy. She wrote:

It's caused me to contribute to the destruction of one of the best relationships I've ever had. Because of the pictures on my boyfriend's Facebook (he's at a different school), I went into a jealous fit that is totally atypical of me. I still have no clue where it came from. The relationship didn't fall apart just because of it, but I'm almost positive the jealousy contributed.

Another member shared:

I had an instance where my other half went [through] my Facebook profile and went [through] photos of each and every friend I had last year, it made me angry and I said to him, just ask and I will show you, snooping behind one's back and checking out your profile is invasion of privacy, so I blocked them, they even went as far as creating a fake profile. I did search email addresses and was surprised at what came up. Beware of Facebook.

These scenarios illustrate how Facebook's settings can be manipulated to reveal and conceal information. They also demonstrate the emotional distress some feel as a result of using Facebook while in a relationship. The obsession with their partners' Facebook activity is a reflection of their insecurity about their partners' behavior as well as a reflection of their jealousy of the interaction between their partner and other people on Facebook. It is a noteworthy discovery that some of the group members had no prior issues with jealousy and insecurity, and that they attribute these feelings to Facebook. This observation is consistent with research that purports access to information on Facebook can increase jealousy and consequently increase surveillance of a relationship partner's profile (Muisse et al., 2009). The jealousy generates paranoia, which gives rise to the invasive behavior. Further analysis revealed possible reasons these Facebook features provoke jealousy and insecurity.

ED a member of "Facebook and MySpace is ruining relationships" explained how insight into one's relationship through these Facebook communication tools could be too

much. ED wrote:

Unfortunately with Facebook, you are letting a shit load of people into your relationship, it then becomes easy for shit to [be] said, not said, reinterpreted and regurgitated. I keep it simple, the friend I have the least amount of contact with on FB [Facebook] is my GF [girlfriend] haha.

ED's comment reflects the idea that a social network is essentially an audience. In allowing an audience into your relationship they begin to have influence. One group member explained how she and her boyfriend had been together just under a month and were already experiencing trouble because people on Facebook were posting old pictures from past relationships on their walls perhaps trying to sabotage the relationship. In another comment, group member NL shared about a couple she knew that separated because "an outside person" was purposely trying to break them up by planting ideas in the husband's mind about his wife's behavior. She said, "Once someone puts something in your mind it's hard to get it out."

The idea that someone would use Facebook to deliberately sabotage a relationship shows how powerful the social network can be, even against seemingly strong relationships. Also, it shows that people should be cautious when interpreting information on Facebook because what you see on Facebook, is not necessarily what you get. This certainly applies to pictures posted on Facebook. One member shared how pictures ended her relationship with her boyfriend after she discovered he was taking pictures with other women who were leaving photo captions claiming him as their boyfriend. Pictures on Facebook are a source of relationship tension because they can be interpreted in many ways. One member explained, "you can be out in a bar and have a compromising picture taken and posted in minutes on Facebook for all to see...regardless how innocent the pic may be."

The ease and quickness with which one can upload information to Facebook can create issues because users may not fully assess the risks associated with posting information at the time they are sharing it. At the same time, the audience that makes up one's social network is gathering meaning from the photo or message posted, perhaps prematurely because they do not have all the information they need to make a judgment about the photo. This miscommunication is therefore a major drawback of Facebook communication. CSM of the group, "Facebook, destroying jobs, friendships & relationships on a daily basis" elaborated on this saying:

The problem [is] people don't have trust communication and they misinterpret things (just like texting), so they make up their silly conspiracies instead of acting like adults and talking about the situation. What they read or see isn't always the truth of the matter. If you really cared about that person you wouldn't get caught up in a little stuff that really doesn't matter, I have people send me messages to say hello and I'm instantly accused of cheating. All Facebook does is remind me of high school drama when all I want to do is keep in touch with old friends.

A notable takeaway from CSM's comment is the assertion that couples without "trust communication" are subject to misinterpreting things on Facebook. He compares communication through Facebook to communication through text messaging, both of which are void of face-to-face communication. His comment alludes to the idea that in order to establish trust, there must be face-to-face communication. Also, CSM's claim that people make up "silly conspiracies" instead of "talking" suggests that face-to-face communication may eliminate some doubt. HOQ of "Facebook ruins relationships" added that misinterpretation on Facebook is due to the absence non-verbal cues. She said:

Facebook ruins relationships because people take Facebook out of context. People are quick to jump hot because of a comment that is left on their man's page or a comment that he leaves someone etc, without considering the fact that they do not have people's tones, facial expressions etc. to go with it. It's not like people are gathered together in a room. This is over the Internet.



This comment suggests that without the non-verbal cues from face-to-face communication, it is perhaps easier to misinterpret information, and with Facebook, there is more information to interpret. For example, HOQ shared that denying friend requests gives the impression that you are hiding something. She said, "Do not let someone 'deny' a friend request from their girlfriend/boyfriend. That is when the 'what are you hiding' and arguments come into play." Also, "liking" and "lurking" are Facebook activities that can create tension based on how they are interpreted. Liking is a Facebook feature that allows you to express approval for a comment, status update, picture, video, or article by selecting the "like" button near the comment or picture. Lurking refers to Internet users who merely browse through others' pages without ever making their presence known.

Liking and lurking have become sources of tension because they are among the subtlest forms of Facebook communication. GR of "Facebook ruins relationships" shared that there is "nothing quite like having to watch your girlfriend's ex boyfriend 'like' and lurk every fucking comment she makes." According to him, his girlfriend lacked the "common human decency to maintain proper boundaries in a relationship." TM also noticed the same person "liking, commenting, and flirting" on his partner's page. It appears that these group members associate liking and lurking with Facebook flirting, and are particularly annoyed when an ex-partner carries out this behavior. Liking and lurking are difficult to interpret because they do not include any written communication. Therefore, it is rather simple to dismiss claims that a person is flirting. Nevertheless, liking and lurking are sources of tension because they are discreet and can be a gateway to more inappropriate communication.

The Facebook comments also revealed that public displays of affection were a

source of tension. KA shared that he “got shit for not saying Happy Valentine’s on Facebook” to his wife even though he was sitting right next to her celebrating in person. Group member IJ responded that you “gotta do it publically.” KA then replied saying, “it’s not official til it’s on Facebook.” This observation is very telling about the value of having online social presence. For some, publically showing affection on Facebook is just as, if not more important than being physically present in a special moment. KA’s assertion that “it’s not official” until it’s Facebook official reveals that public displays of affection on Facebook can validate a relationship for the Facebook network. In some cases, the approval from one’s Facebook network is much like the approval of family and friends.

In addition to public displays of affection, Facebook is also often the place for public displays of conflict. Usually when relationships end, both individuals go through a state of catharsis that includes purging material things that were representative of the relationship. This process includes returning personal items borrowed throughout the relationship, deleting old messages, and extracting photos from the wall. Now in the social media age, when breakups occur, the digital equivalent takes place. Ex-partners delete messages, un-tag or delete photos and sometimes delete their ex from their Facebook friends. As BR noted, “you lose a friend or finish a relationship in real life, then you have round two on Facebook.”

BR’s comment reveals how the aftermath of a breakup due to *DII* can also be a source of tension when it is shared with the couple’s Facebook network. Group member AA said, “I can’t stand it when couples post why they’re mad at each other and then hash it out online for us all to see. This is a social network, so please keep your personal problems where they belong, at home.” This study is perhaps an ideal example of this sentiment.

Many of the people sharing on the Facebook group walls are sharing their stories post-breakup. They have disclosed very personal details regardless of how unfavorable they are. AA establishes that Facebook is no place for personal problems because it allows everyone to see. This may suggest that the visibility of relationship conflict on Facebook has an impact on the relationship as well as the social network.

Facebook group members were able to identify other sources of tension through discussion with other group members. When SAJ shared that Facebook use led to her significant other cheating on her, another member noticed that the scene was a little familiar. SK replied to SAJ's status saying, "Hey SAJ, was he really secretive about his Facebook account etc? Did you guys bicker over it?" SAJ replied, "yeah why?" SK said that she was "just looking for the signs" because she's "just got that feeling." This exchange provides insight into how some users make sense of their partners' Facebook activity and their attitude about sharing details of their Facebook use with relationship partners. SK suggests that her partner's secrecy about his Facebook activity could mean trouble for the relationship. Secrecy did prove to be a telltale sign for group member RL who shared how her friend used Facebook's settings to hide his affair. She said:

You can set everything to private and block people. I know a guy who says he's single, who's in a relationship and hides everything including the conversations he has with other females and acts like it's not big deal, yet she can't see them.... it's too easy to hide things from your significant other these days.

Some Facebook users employed preventative methods to ensure their relationships remained Facebook proof. LJA shared that she and her husband have their Facebook passwords in the same place so that there is "nothing to hide." She added, "That's what marriage should be. It's the marriage that's the problem, not Facebook." DDJ took things a step further by sharing an account with his wife. He said, " me and D share a wall together

and have a blast on it; that way there's nothing to hide and we have that much [more] love and trust for each other." However, MS rejected the idea that sharing Facebook accounts symbolized a trusting relationship. She felt it was "silly" to share a Facebook profile with your partner. CC agreed saying, "stop having joint accounts with your husband and wife. Ridiculous." He added that it makes a "confusing mess of things," but said, "if there isn't any trust in a relationship I guess the need to be able to see everything everybody says is necessary."

These comments illustrate how different methods for preventing *DII* can have different relationship implications. While DDJ felt sharing profiles was a way to express trust in the relationship, CC felt that sharing Facebook accounts means you don't trust each other. Here we see that Facebook users have different interpretations of the same prevention method.

Other group members shared that keeping an open line of communication was the best solution for avoiding Facebook-related relationship conflict. SP said "establishing from the start of the relationship what you're comfortable with can help to prevent future problems." Ultimately, she believes "relationships are built on trust and if you don't have honesty as the foundation for your relationship then you are wasting your time." This comment reiterates the previously expressed notion that pre-existing conditions are magnified on Facebook. Predetermining boundaries for social media use is a good strategy for preventing *DII* because it communicates what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable for relationship partners. This is important because misunderstanding what each partner perceives as appropriate and inappropriate Facebook behavior is a source of tension.

One solution for avoiding *DII* on Facebook came from JJ of “Facebook and MySpace are killing relationships” who said, “Don’t look into shit and you won’t get your feelings hurt!” She felt that the discovery of foul play on Facebook is onset by constant surveillance of others’ profiles. In her opinion, many people are not ready to handle the openness of Facebook. In fact, she likens Facebook relationship trouble to relationship trouble with past forms of computer-mediated communication. JJ said:

Between Facebook, MySpace and cell phones there is no privacy. Everyone wants to have this open and honest relationship, that’s never going to happen. As much as we want to say we can handle the truth, we can’t. Better yet, we don’t want to and that’s cool. First, it’s going through each other’s text messages and finding shit you might like. Second, is the password to your voice messages to show the other person that you trust them and you don’t have anything to hide until an ex-boyfriend calls and leaves a message and you don’t erase it. There’s the first damn argument. Then it’s trying to be slick and get the Facebook password and MySpace passwords. This shit is a no no!

This comment suggests that perhaps communication technology has always posed a risk of *DII*. OCC of “Facebook and MySpace are relationship killers” said, “tagged started the relationship ending thing, then MySpace and Facebook finished it.” One might deduce that all computer-mediated communication contributes to the decline in relationship intimacy, but although cell phones, email and instant messaging all came with their own relationship risks, it is important to consider that Facebook encompasses the functionality of all of these communication tools in one package, while providing access to a seemingly endless network of people to connect with. For this reason, it is arguable that Facebook poses a greater threat of *DII* than previous modes of computer-mediated communication. However, some Facebook users protested the assertion that Facebook causes *DII*.

### **Facebook is not responsible:**

Though group members acknowledged that social media negatively influences

relationships, they rejected the idea that Facebook was solely responsible for ruining relationships. Many expressed how “silly” it was to blame a website for relationship failure. CT of Facebook ruins relationships said, “ If Facebook ruins relationships, then guns kills people, pencils misspell words, cars make people drive drunk and spoons make you fat.” Even some who had experienced relationship trouble maintained that Facebook was not responsible for the break up per se, but that it brought preexisting issues to the surface and allowed everyone within a social network to have a courtside view to watch the drama unfold.

Group member IH of “Facebook ruins lives” said, “Facebook doesn’t ruin lives, it’s the insecurities of the people who use Facebook that ruins lives, and THAT’s a fact!” JM said, “It’s not Facebook, really. It’s the people who destroy on a daily basis. Facebook just makes it public.” BC responded to his comment saying, “agree!!!!!!! Only like this group to like this status.” One particular conversation between two group members captured the general argument about whether Facebook causes *DII*. SM posted a status to a Facebook group saying, “It’s not about Facebook. It’s about what people say on statuses, wall posts and other comments. You just have to be careful on what you type. Facebook has nothing to do with it.” VY rebutted that “if it wasn’t for Facebook, then people wouldn’t have the opportunity to do those things.” SM then replied:

I know Facebook is open for you to say things, but you have to remember that it’s your fault for saying what you write....so you can never blame Facebook. It’s what YOU write, not what they provide. That’s why a lot of people lose jobs, friends, relationships, etc. They don’t keep their big mouths shut!

VY’s comment represents the overall feelings of those who felt Facebook should not be blamed for relationships ending. However, his suggestion that members “keep their big mouths shut” is somewhat contrary to the nature of social networking. Facebook is a

platform that relies on the self-disclosure of its users in order to flourish; yet, this self-disclosure is what sometimes leads to relationship conflict. RN stated that she agreed with SM that what one says on Facebook causes trouble; however, she said, "Facebook does provide an open box asking, 'What's on your mind?'" RN implies that Facebook induces self-disclosure by asking users to share what's on their mind status, to upload pictures, to comment and to like. On the other hand, another member said, "Facebook is just a tool to make it easier to do and easier to get caught;" therefore, "you can't blame Facebook...if someone is a liar and cheat, they'll always find a way." These comments exemplify the overall conflict many have about whether Facebook's features inadvertently promote infidelity, jealousy and insecurity, or whether these traits will play out regardless of the communication tool, if they are inherent within a person. Nevertheless, these comments beg the question, since Facebook encourages users to share their lives, does that obligate them to assume responsibility for relationship dissolution?

Some feel that although Facebook is not responsible for ending relationships, it should do a better job of managing content. CJA of "Facebook ruins relationships" wrote:

I don't think Facebook ruin's relationships, it's the people that have no respect for their relationship, and the people you shouldn't trust after they say you should. The one's that make friends with young men and women they have never met and like pages with sexually explicit photos. Or pay special attention to ex's or old girlfriends or boyfriends. Actually, they shouldn't have the need to be friends with an ex that's supposedly a chapter in their life that is over! If someone really loves you, Facebook will never be as important as you, and they would give it up for the person they love. Also, Facebook has too many sexually descriptive pages available. It should be monitored better and kept family friendly! Facebook is supposed to be a place to connect with old friends and family...not a porn site or whore dating site!

This comment expresses how different Facebook users have different expectations of Facebook. CJA feels Facebook should be reserved for connecting with friends and family instead of being used as a "whore-dating site;" however, many Facebook users do

intentionally use it to connect with potential suitors and those who have no intentions of being romantically involved with someone they meet or reconnect with on Facebook, sometimes find themselves in amorous situations because of photos or messages. CJA's comment reveals that *DII* can be a result of a person's online behavior as well as the openness of Facebook. His inference that one should not have a desire to be Facebook friends with an ex if that "chapter in their life is over," implies that for some, perhaps the chapter is not over. This alludes to the idea that Facebook users either consciously or subconsciously seek out past romantic relationships. Also, CJA's claim that someone who "really loves you" will give up Facebook again shows how he prioritizes offline relationships over using Facebook.

On the other hand, JTM felt differently about social networking. In an exchange with fellow group member TV, he expressed that Facebook "killed" his relationship before it started. TV then told him that he should have deleted his Facebook for his girlfriend, but he replied, "she wasn't worth all that!" It is very telling that despite the drama Facebook caused, JTM was unwilling to delete his profile to improve the relationship. He also said that if he were to get in a committed relationship, he couldn't be Facebook friends with his girlfriend. This comment may suggest that JTM has concerns about the threat of *DII*. He then said, that he wouldn't want to see her page, though she could see his because he "wouldn't have anything to hide." It seems JTM is more confident in his own Facebook use, but is not as confident about his significant other's. TV responded saying that if it were up to her boyfriend, she wouldn't have a Facebook.

SS commented on the group wall saying he also has a rule that only one person in a relationship can be on Facebook. NV responded saying, "I too have this rule." These



conversations show how being Facebook friends with a significant other is often a calculated decision. Each partner has different comfort levels with Facebook and they also may have varying opinions about appropriate versus inappropriate behavior. As a result, some group members establish these boundaries such as only having one person in the relationship on Facebook or exchanging passwords, or sharing accounts. Other Facebook users shared tips that included not being friends with your ex-partners to avoid temptation and conflict, to not being friends with your current partner to avoid reading too much into content that is posted.

**Suggestion to delete Facebook:**

One of the most frequently proposed solutions for avoiding *DII* was to delete Facebook. Group member SM expressed how his frustration with Facebook caused him to reach a boiling point. SM said:

I totally agree that without a doubt that Facebook and MySpace has destroyed a relationship [that] I was in. That simple flirt or a message taken the wrong way has wreaked havoc on my life. It's a shame that there isn't something that can be done to stop this from continuing to happen. It's a shame that some people have such insecurities in there life that they let a simple post or comment to destroy people lives. It burns me up inside and [I'm] totally flabbergasted that this is happening. I can't believe that I am not the only one this is happening to...Facebook is getting out of hand and if this continues to happen I will be forced to leave and never return.

SM's statement that nothing can be done to stop *DII* on Facebook shows how helpless he felt about his situation. This is underscored by his conclusion that the only option is to leave and not return. However, for many users, leaving Facebook is easier said than done. Group member HLH said, "I went off for a bit. Only put it back on to keep in contact with a few friends." As I mentioned earlier, the "Facebook can be the death of relationships and friendships" group's description read, " Secret messages lead to affairs, rumors and whatever else in the world of Facebook. Sometimes it can bring happiness,

other times it makes a girl or guy insecure, and friends distant!” Group member DBB commented on the description saying, “Don’t we all know it, but we still log in to the false life of Facebook lol.” This comment demonstrates that though users are aware of the relationship issues Facebook can cause, the value of remaining a part of the social network outweighs the risks of drama.

Some struggle with deleting Facebook because they feel they will be missing something. NL shared that while she agrees Facebook “causes a lot of unnecessary drama and over-analysis,” she believes people stick around because they are “too addicted” or feel they “will be out of the loop if they [terminate] their account.” In fact, the most common explanation for not deleting Facebook despite all of the relationship conflict was that it is “addicting.” A member of the group “Facebook ruins lives” wrote on the wall suggesting that those who were complaining about Facebook “delete it if you hate it that much.” EK replied explaining, “it’s addicting. I would, but I just can’t do it.” SN echoed the comment saying, “It’s addicting, but it just complicates things.”

Despite their discontentment and in some cases outrage about Facebook’s capacity to ruin relationships, many of the Facebook group members had their profiles active months, and even years after they commented on the group wall. CO said, “I’m thinking about deleting my page for many reasons. I guess what I don’t see and don’t know won’t hurt!” A group member replied in support saying, “Follow your intuitions. If something does not feel right...probably isn’t! Sometimes it hurts to find out the truth but it makes you see who people really are inside [smile].”

The tough decision to delete a profile shows the paradox of Facebook as a social community building relationships, while concurrently destroying others. Although

Facebook had the potential to “ruin” users’ relationships, they still found it too valuable to delete, and even those who did delete their profile sometimes reopened it to keep in touch with family and friends. Another reason users struggled with deleting their Facebook profile is the waiting period. Member PA explained that there’s a “14-day waiting period before your account is actually deleted....one look at your profile during that deletion period and it resets the clock back to 14 days and your account is reactivated.” It is important to note that this policy is from a comment from 2010 and has since been updated.

The current deactivation process as explained on Facebook says: “Deactivating your account will disable your profile and remove your name and picture from most things you've shared on Facebook. Some information may still be visible to others, such as your name in their friends list and messages you sent.” Although your account is inactive, pictures of you on Facebook may remain via other users’ accounts. This suggests that abstaining from social media is not necessarily fail-proof way to avoid *DII* because it is not as easy to delete a social footprint, as it is to create one.

### **There is some good in Facebook**

Not all Facebook group members bemoaned social networking. In fact, some members credited Facebook with helping them discover the “truth.” MM said, “it helped me catch out my cheating ex. And now I couldn’t be happier!” DR also shared how Facebook helped her catch her “two-timing ex.” She said, “If I never knew he was cheating on me, I probably would still be with him.” MSA shared that, “what you think you’re missing or losing, maybe you’re actually GAINING!” Though group members may have lost their relationships, they gained the truth and the truth was very valuable to these members. In

some ways, they are grateful that Facebook exposed them to the “reality” that many members suggested eludes social networking.

Other members made the argument that Facebook has brought “four times” as many people together as it has torn apart. CAS said a family friend she found would have been long lost if it weren’t for Facebook. MC also shared how Facebook helped her stepdaughter find her father after 20 years. AS added that Facebook “holds a lot of unforgettable memories even if that’s all they are.” She said, “If it weren’t for Facebook I wouldn’t have so many wonderful pics of my family who I miss dearly.” Though she “can’t say it ruined everything,” she said it “didn’t exactly help.” LAR had a mixed reaction about Facebook. He said, “I have lost a girlfriend due to Facebook but have gained a girlfriend and an 18-month child through Facebook.” These comments underscore the overall consensus that while Facebook can be a threat to relationships, it is also responsible for building relationships as well.

However, in one case, a group member was hesitant to disclose her relationship details on Facebook. She felt it was better to refrain from telling her story on Facebook in order to avoid further consequences of *DII*. This suggests that sharing in a group forum can continue to cause relationship tension despite relationship partners trying to seek support.

In addition to these key themes, the Facebook comments also revealed pertinent information about how users communicate with each other in Facebook groups. The interaction between group members revealed that by and large, users self-disclose on Facebook groups to simply share their stories. Engagement is not expressed in a typical conversation format; but rather, users engage and offer support by “liking” each other’s comments. A like either means that you agree with a statement someone has made, or you

support the fact that they made the statement. However, a like does not necessarily signify that one statement is more important or well crafted than another, in fact, majority of comments did not receive likes nor responses. The lack of feedback on group walls indicates that some members are not using the group to its full potential.

However, it does not mean that group members are not extracting meaning and value. Users can derive meaning and get help from the Facebook groups without engaging, but just reading instead. Nonetheless, it is interesting that while many group members struggled to delete Facebook because they felt it was the only way to communicate, they did not interact with each other as much as they used the group pages as a platform to vent and share personal stories. Although several group pages had zero or no comments at all, they did receive page “likes.” This shows that Facebook users sometimes associate themselves with groups because they believe or support the subject matter, but would rather not participate in the dialogue. Still, showing interest and support for the group validates its existence. Members communicated interest in the subject by creating their own groups, liking groups, liking comments, and reading content that was shared on the discussion wall. It shows that the issues identified in the groups’ titles and discussions are relevant to the Facebook audience, but that are different ways to communicate that without participating in the discussion.

Despite the limited responses on some group pages, overall, members found great value in sharing their stories. There were few notable differences between the way women expressed themselves and the way men expressed themselves in the Facebook group discussions. Although research has shown that women are generally more likely to use social networking sites (Emerson, 2011) and to self-disclose more than men (Bond, 2009),

the qualitative data only revealed a slight difference between men and women's communication in the Facebook groups. While both groups were open to sharing personal details about their experiences and both sought support on *DII* from the Facebook groups, women were often more expressive in their comments. They shared more specific details than men about how Facebook ruined their relationships.

Women were also more responsive and engaged in more wall conversations than men. More women replied to comments and liked others statuses, showing support and understanding. Men also showed support and understanding toward other group members; however, they were less expressive in many cases. Their status updates were sometimes shorter with fewer specific details or elaboration. Male group users also seemed more apt to reject the notion that Facebook ruins relationships and instead, frequently embraced the idea that individuals are responsible for relationship success or dissolution. Nevertheless, gender differences in communication in Facebook groups about *DII* were minimal. This may suggest that online disclosure styles between men and women in Facebook groups are based on their individual experiences rather than their gender.

#### *Quantitative Results*

Respondents were asked to list three behaviors they felt were inappropriate to share on Facebook. Similar responses were then coded into general categories. Sexual details (30%), fights/arguments (13%), intimate pictures (6%), and any information that is "confidential between partners" (5%) emerged as the main types of information about personal relationships users felt were inappropriate to share on Facebook. Specific responses included:

*Sexual details.* Sexual fantasies, amount of sex, or desires about other people.

*Fights/arguments.* Venting about the other person as a status post, vulgar language or insults, or hatred and slander of a current or former love.

*Intimate pictures.* Pictures in suggestive poses; over-sharing pictures of activities, or pictures showing public displays of affection.

*Confidential between partners.* Personal secrets, money, family issues, or anything that goes on in the household.

The responses to this open-ended question revealed a variety of behaviors Facebook users of various relationship stages deem as inappropriate. The responses show that Facebook users generally feel that expressing feelings of excessive relationship satisfaction or excessive relationship dissatisfaction can contribute to *DII*.

These written responses also reflect content revealed in the textual analysis. The Facebook group members shared very detailed information about their personal family matters, financial concerns, as well as information about their partners that consistently placed them in a negative light. These were all elements survey respondents identified as inappropriate. Although the Facebook group members shared these details post-*DII*, there is the potential for Facebook-related relationship tension to continue following the breakup.

The textual analysis revealed several key findings that provide insight into how *DII* occurs on Facebook. These findings served as the blueprint for a quantitative study that attempts to measure in responses the potential for *DII*.

*Facebook use.* A key observation stemming from the qualitative analysis was that some Facebook users felt excessive social networking use would lead to an individual's withdrawal from the "real world". This retreat from real life marks the inception of *DII* within the relationship and contributes to infidelity because Facebook users are spending

more time online sharing information about themselves and interacting with others. Due to this observation, it was expected that statistical data would show that increased time on Facebook would negatively influence one's confidence about whether their online activity was compromising to their relationship as well as whether their partner's activity was compromising to their relationship. Survey responses indeed indicated that the more time participants spent on Facebook, the less confident they were that their partner's Facebook activity was uncompromising to their relationship,  $r(88) = -.23, p < .05$ . This finding supported claims in the textual analysis that spending time on Facebook was central to the problem of *DII*.

*Viewing profiles.* It was also expected that people who spent more time viewing content from their current relationship partner's Facebook profile would, as a result, feel less confident about that their partner's Facebook activity was uncompromising to their relationship. Facebook group members in the textual analysis expressed that they became "paranoid," "jealous" and "insecure" after viewing their partner's profile pages. As we discussed earlier, one Facebook user went into a "jealous fit" after seeing pictures on her boyfriend's Facebook page. Although she expressed she had "no clue where it came from," it seemed as though her jealous fit was prompted by her Facebook use. Therefore, I tested the relationship between viewing content from a partner's profile and confidence that their Facebook activity is uncompromising. Results showed that the more often users viewed content from their partner's page, the less confident they were that their partner's Facebook activity was uncompromising to the relationship  $r(88) = -.24, p = < .05$ .

Interestingly, there was also a positive relationship between viewing content from a current partner's page and viewing content from an ex-partner's page  $r(87) = .36, p < .01$ .



This suggests that interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES) of a current partner's profile may promote IES of an ex-partner's profile, which is problematic as results also showed a positive relationship between viewing content from an ex-partner's profile and experiencing relationship problems because of Facebook  $r(118) = .33, p < .001$ . As well, viewing an ex-partner's profile was positively related to pre-existing issues in the relationship being exaggerated through Facebook  $r(118) = .39, p < .001$ . These results indicate that the behavior of IES is closely linked with *DII*. People who felt Facebook had caused problems in their relationship viewed their current partner's profile more often  $r(88) = .23, p < .05$ . Likewise people who felt pre-existing issues in their relationship were exaggerated through Facebook viewed their current partner's Facebook profile more often  $r(88) = .31, p < .01$ .

*Sharing information.* The textual analysis also sparked interest in how self-disclosure contributes to *DII*. Self-disclosure is encouraged on Facebook, as it is a social networking site. However the textual analysis revealed how the information shared on Facebook can lead to relationship problems. I tested this hypothesis and responses rendered a positive association between sharing information (i.e. status updates, pictures, messages, wall posts) on Facebook about a personal relationship and experiencing Facebook-related relationship problems  $r(118) = .37, p < .001$ . Results also revealed that Facebook users who spent time sharing information about their relationships were less confident about their own Facebook activity being compromising to their relationship,  $(90) = -.32, p < .01$ . This may suggest that some Facebook users are perhaps aware that their Facebook use poses a threat of *DII*.

*Confidence in Facebook activity.* It was expected that experiences with *DII* would

influence feelings users had about Facebook use in their current relationship.

Responses rendered a strong negative relationship showing that people who felt Facebook caused problems in their relationship were less confident that their current partner's Facebook activity was uncompromising to the relationship,  $r(87) = -.51, p < .001$ . People who felt Facebook had caused problems in their relationship were also less confident that their own Facebook activity was uncompromising to the relationship  $r(90) = -.43, p < .001$ . Also, those who felt pre-existing issues were exaggerated through Facebook were also less confident that their own Facebook behavior was uncompromising to their relationship  $r(90) = -.47, p < .001$ ; and also less confident that their partner's Facebook activity is uncompromising to their relationship  $r(87) = -.54, p < .001$ . The results suggest that having a prior occurrence of *DII* in a previous or present relationship can influence the current relationship.

Results also showed a very strong positive relationship between one's confidence that their own Facebook activity is uncompromising to their relationship and their confidence in their partner's Facebook in uncompromising to the relationship  $r(88) = .60, p < .001$ . These results reflected data from the textual analysis. Facebook group members who shared that they disagreed Facebook interfered with relationships shared how establishing relationship boundaries and open communication prevented *DII* issues. Perhaps these elements contribute to making relationship partners feel secure about their Facebook use.

*Long-term relationships.* The textual analysis revealed that many people in long-term relationships experienced *DII*. Individuals who had been in relationships for 15-20 years shared their experiences of their long-term partners leaving after reconnecting with

ex-partners online or growing tired of the relationship; therefore, it was expected that people in relationships for longer periods of time would have increased occurrences of *DII*. However, this claim was unsupported as results showed that the longer people were in relationships, the less Facebook caused problems in their relationships  $r(90) = -.24, p < .05$ . They also were less likely to experience pre-existing issues in their relationship being exaggerated through Facebook  $r(90) = -.32, p < .01$ .

One possible reason may be because people in more long-term relationships spent less time Facebook  $r(95) = -.22, p < .05$ . They also viewed their ex-partner's Facebook profile less  $r(89) = -.41, p < .001$ , and subsequently were more confident that their Facebook activity was uncompromising to their relationship  $r(92) = -.36, p < .001$ , as well as more confident in their partner's Facebook activity  $r(88) = .30, p < .01$ .

An independent samples t-test was conducted with the confidence in Facebook activity scale, sharing relationship information scale, and viewing Facebook content scales as the testing variables; and gender as the grouping variable. Results rendered that there was no statistically significant difference between the Facebook use and behaviors of men and women in the current sample. This result does not support prior research that asserts women are more likely to self-disclose or spend more time on Facebook (Emerson, 2011). However, the results reflect imbalance nature of the sample as a result of the gender disparity. It does however corroborate findings in the textual analysis that show little difference between the communication of men and women on the subject of *DII*.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

The current study explored digital intimacy interference (*DII*) or the absence of relationship closeness due to media disturbance and how it occurs through Facebook. It employed a mixed-method approach to understand how users who have experienced *DII* use Facebook groups to discuss relationship dissolution, and their comments reveal about how and why *DII* occurs. The qualitative analysis of Facebook groups about relationship dissolution informed a quantitative survey of Facebook users. Several key concerns emerged from the analysis of Facebook group comments that warranted further exploration through quantitative study. Thus, the relationships between time spent on Facebook, confidence in Facebook activity, past and present experiences with *DII*, and Facebook behaviors such as viewing past and present partners' profiles and sharing information about personal relationships, were tested for correlations. The end result was a comprehensive understanding of Facebook's contribution to *DII* of romantic relationships.

The results of both the qualitative and quantitative analysis revealed that there is a prevalent threat of *DII* on Facebook. Research question one explored what members of Facebook groups about marriage dissolution as a result of social media discuss with other in the group. A textual analysis of Facebook group comments provided insight into how individuals draw from online communities to gain support and understanding of *DII*. Their comments revealed a paradoxical relationship with social networking and relationship closeness. Users develop somewhat of a love-hate relationship with Facebook. Although Facebook makes it possible for people to connect, some of Facebook's best features for staying connected with friends and family (i.e. Facebook chat, pokes, pictures and messaging) can prove to be a double edged sword when misused. Instead of using these

connection tools with integrity, many use them as a gateway to relationship affairs. However, Facebook often proves to be the only place to connect with a wide variety of people, with varying interests, across geographic locations. Users often struggled to balance their desire to remain connected with their desire to rid their relationships of Facebook-related relationship tension.

The textual analysis revealed that Facebook users join Facebook groups regarding relationship dissolution to ultimately identify with the experience of *DII* and to relate to others who have also experienced *DII* as a result of Facebook use. Group members sought support from other members, offered each other advice and helped one other cope with the reality of Facebook “ruining” their relationship. Self-disclosure in the Facebook group setting fostered group intimacy as members shared extremely personal accounts of how Facebook ruins relationships.

Research question two questioned the Facebook behaviors that lead to *DII*. The Facebook group discussions provided insight into the specific Facebook features that can have negative consequences for romantic relationships. Most notably, these features included photos; status updates, wall posts and private messages. Also, adding friends and communicating with ex-partners was a standout source of Facebook-related relationship tension. Users expressed that the absence of context is a major contributor to jealousy, insecurity and paranoia regarding partner’s Facebook use. Someone can post a photo on Facebook that gives the appearance of foul play because the background information is missing. Relationship insecurity coupled with obscure Facebook activity is a dangerous combination that sometimes leads people to draw unsubstantiated conclusions. These assumptions then provoke heightened interpersonal electronic surveillance of partners’

Facebook profiles.

Research question three employed quantitative study to understand the behaviors users found inappropriate. Sexual details, fights and arguments and intimate photos ranked high on the list of inappropriate details to share on Facebook. As well, sharing information about personal relationships on Facebook was positively associated with experiencing Facebook-related relationship problems in past or present relationships. Facebook group members discussed strategies for limiting the influence of Facebook on relationships. Many felt trust and communication were necessary at the foundation of relationships in order to sustain a partnership on Facebook. These sentiments were perhaps quantified through statistical evidence of a relationship between individuals in long-term relationships and fewer occurrences of Facebook-related relationship conflict. Long-term relationships have more time to develop intimacy, although some long-term couples in the textual analysis reported occurrences of *DII*. Nonetheless, this finding suggests that maintaining relationship intimacy can be key in preventing *DII*.

Not all users felt it was possible to coexist with a romantic partner online and many suggested that relationship partners should establish boundaries of Facebook use to prevent future conflict. These suggestions included not being friends with relationship partners, limiting Facebook profiles to one person in the relationship, or exchanging password information. Some suggested keeping an open view of all information shared between partners could benefit the relationship, while others identified this as a direct source of relationship tension. Some survey respondents perhaps invested in this philosophy by sharing their Facebook password with their significant other; however, many did not exchange passwords with their partner. As well many respondents rejected

being friends or communicating with their ex-partners, perhaps in an effort to reduce the potential for *DII*. These adjustments show that Facebook users are becoming increasingly aware of the digital factors that may interfere with relationships and some are taking precaution to ease insecurity about their relationship partner's Facebook use.

Although, Facebook was widely cited as the key contributor to relationship conflict, some, group members opined that issues that exist in a relationship (i.e. jealousy, insecurity, trust, infidelity, time) would only be amplified through Facebook use. Statistical data underscored this sentiment showing a negative relationship between users who felt pre-existing issues in their relationships were magnified on Facebook and having confidence in their relationship partner's Facebook use. This debate about Facebook's contribution to *DII* centered on the opposing views that Facebook is responsible or Facebook users are responsible for *DII*. One member even struggled with himself to interpret Facebook's role in relationship dissolution. Initially he dismissed claims that Facebook causes *DII*, but later added that it "didn't help." On the other hand he described Facebook as a "means to an end" and therefore was as much to blame as his wife for their divorce. He finally concluded that regardless of his wife's Facebook activity, if a person is unhappy they are going to leave. This member's comments reflect the sentiments many had about Facebook and relationships. Although people had strong feelings about Facebook's role in the dissolution of their relationship, they maintained their accounts and some felt "addicted" to the social networking site.

The willingness to remain a member of an environment that has contributed to relationship dissolution underscores the importance of social media in our daily communication. However, it also highlights the necessity to address concerns of *DII* as a

result of Facebook use. Although many felt individuals are responsible for the outcome of their own relationships, others felt Facebook's capabilities equip its users with the tools to perpetrate inappropriate behavior. The findings suggest that the combination of users' personal characteristics with Facebook's capabilities make it possible for *DII* to occur.

#### *Research limitations*

This study is one of the first to address Facebook-related relationship dissolution among adults, particularly using a qualitative and quantitative approach. Thus it uncovered a wealth of information about the threat of *DII* on Facebook. Still, this study had several limitations. Although the quantitative study was designed to complement the qualitative textual analysis, the convenience sample of respondents and small sample size created limitations for drawing strong statistical conclusions. Furthermore, the female skewed sample limits results about gender differences. Divorced men and women were also largely underrepresented in the sample. These limitations make it difficult to generalize results for a larger population. Also, the survey design allowed participants to self-report their Facebook use and feelings about their relationships, which may result in a social desirability bias.

The qualitative analysis also consisted of limitations. Many Facebook groups regarding romantic relationship dissolution were closed, deleted, or abandoned thus limiting access to the content. Also, although the textual analysis provided substantive information about *DII*, missing from the text was the relationship background information that would be helpful in providing background context for group members' comments. Also the group members' Facebook profiles were non-accessible and not used in the analysis. Perhaps observing their Facebook activity could also provide context for their comments.



Nonetheless, this study serves as a great starting point for understanding *DII*.

### *Social Media Landscape*

Regardless of users feelings about Facebook as having a positive or negative impact on relationships, users continued to keep their profiles active. Even after taking a self-imposed break, users typically reactivated the profiles at some point. This speaks to the fact that while Facebook and its improper use can do major harm to one relationship, it can foster others by connecting people through varying interests, even one so ironic has Facebook hate. The irony of using social media to complain about social media is apparent in this research, although completely understandable. There are not many other ways to get a direct and candid response about such personal issues as marriage and relationships and the tension caused by social networking. Furthermore, the struggle to delete Facebook illustrates the overall dependence many have on Facebook. It has become a part of the daily routine of many people. It is almost instinctual to check for Facebook updates every few minutes. Despite what relationship issues Facebook may spark, it widely regarded as the optimal place to communicate with people online.

However, the sometimes-negative influence of Facebook on relationships leads some to feel that the site should consider its impact. Several news outlets have reported incidences of Facebook use that ruined relationships and resulted in sometimes-fatal consequences. Now that Facebook has become a playground for divorce lawyers to find content for their clients' cases, it is clear more attention should be paid to the adverse effects of Facebook as a social community. More education is necessary about social etiquette and how to avoid the pitfalls of such an open arena. All communication tools come with certain risks; however, just as Facebook has become a major game changer in

communication, it has become a major game changer for relationships as well. There is a lot of potential for abuse of the communication tools and many are not equipped with the knowledge to responsibly exist on social media. Thus, more research on the impact of Facebook is necessary as well more as research on all of social media. New technology is emerging seemingly by the minute. Social networking sites like Twitter, Linked In, Google plus, Pinterest, and Instagram are dominating the social media market and gaining millions of users daily; however as the world pushes to be more and more connected online, we should also make efforts to not forsake the quality of our offline or “real life” relationships.

#### *Future Research*

Future research should continue to explore the types of information being shared that negatively influences relationship satisfaction. While the survey of Facebook users’ behaviors attempted to quantify information found in the textual analysis and understand the statistical relationships between Facebook use and relationship dissolution. Future research should explore these relationships further and address more specifically how relationship demographic information such as relationship status, duration, and satisfaction affect *DII*. Future research should also address in more detail the pre-existing conditions that have bearing on relationship satisfaction. Both the results from the textual analysis and quantitative study lacked explicit details about participants’ relationship statuses prior to being a part of this study. This information is important to move toward understanding a causal relationship between *DII* and Facebook use.

Research should also continue to explore *DII* in spaces like Facebook groups and expand to other social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram). As new social media emerge, study of its impact on *DII* is necessary to harness the phenomenon so users

understand the drawbacks to social communication. Future research should also seek to understand the aftermath of *DII* and explore how ex-partners continue to navigate an online social space. It is clear that social media is here to stay, and while this study serves as a great starting point for addressing DII, it is my hope that future research will produce more awareness about social media's dark side and that solutions will be provided so social media users can maintain an online presence without sacrificing offline relationships.

## References

1. Adams, R. (2011, March 8). *Facebook a top cause of relationship trouble, say us lawyers*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/mar/08/facebook-us-divorces>.
2. Alleyne, R. (2011, January 21). Facebook increasingly implicated in divorce. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/8274601/Facebook-increasingly-implicated-in-divorce.html>.
3. Alexander, A. (2012, February 20). *Facebook user statistics 2012*. Retrieved from <http://ansonalex.com/infographics/facebook-user-statistics-2012-infographic/>.
4. Altman, I., & Taylor, D. C. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of Interpersonal relationships*. New York, NY: Holt.
5. Baym, N., Zhang, Y. B., & Lin, M. C. (2004). Social interaction across media: interpersonal communication on the Internet, face-to-face and telephone. *New Media and Society*, 6(1), 41-60.
6. Bindley, K. (2012, January 03). *Facebook relationship problems: how social network and jealousy affect your love life*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/09/facebook-relationship-problems-social-networking\\_n\\_955980.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/09/facebook-relationship-problems-social-networking_n_955980.html?)
7. Bond, B. J. (2009). He posted, she posted: Gender differences in self-disclosure on social network sites. *Rocky Mountain Communication Review* 6(2) p. 29-37.
8. Bumgarner, B. A. (2007). You have been poked: exploring the uses and gratifications of facebook among emerging adults. *First Monday*, 12(11), Retrieved from <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2026/1897>.

9. Chen, S. (2010, June 1). Divorce attorneys catching cheaters on facebook. Retrieved from [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-06-01/tech/facebook.divorce.lawyers\\_1\\_privacy-settings-social-media-facebook?s=PM:TECH](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-06-01/tech/facebook.divorce.lawyers_1_privacy-settings-social-media-facebook?s=PM:TECH).
10. Cody, M. J. (1982). A typology of disengagement strategies and an examination of the role intimacy reactions to inequity and relational problems play in strategy selection. *Communication Monographs*, 49, 148-70.
11. Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98, 310-357.
12. Community102.com. (2011, June 28). *How different age groups interact online*. Retrieved from <http://news.community102.com/how-different-age-groups-interact-online>.
13. Connelly, J., & McIssac, C. (2009). Adolescents' explanations for romantic dissolutions: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32(5), 1209-1223.
14. Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
15. Creswell, J.W., Plano Clark, V., Gutmann, M., & Hanson, W. (2003). Advanced mixed methods designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed method research in the social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 209—240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
16. Cummings, J. T., Butler, B., & Kraut, R. (2000). The quality of online social relationships. *Communications of the ACM*, 45(7), 103-8.
17. Curtin, R., Presser, S., & Singer, E. (2000). The effects of response rate changes on the index of consumer sentiment. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64: 413–428.

18. CVP Marketing Group. (2011, March 28). *Facebook demographics revisited: 2011 statistics by ken burbary*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/note.php?>
19. Dailey, R., Rossetto, K. , Pfister, A., & Surra, C. (2007). *A qualitative analysis of on-again/off-again romantic relationships: " it's up and down, all around"*. International Communication Association, 1-37.
20. Duran, R. L., Kelly, L., Rotaru, T. (2011). Mobile phones in romantic relationships and the dialectic of autonomy versus connection. *Communication Quarterly (59)*1, p. 19–36.
21. Ellison, N. B., Steinfeld, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12*(4), 1143-1168. Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/ellison.html>.
22. Emerson, R. (2011, September 26). *Women use social media more than men: study*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/23/women-use-social-media-more\\_n\\_978498.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/23/women-use-social-media-more_n_978498.html).
23. Experian Marketing Services. (2012). *The 2012 digital marketer: benchmark and trend report* (pp. 86-87). Retrieved from <http://go.experian.com/forms/experian-digital-marketer-2012?WT.srch=PR EMS DigitalMarketer2012 040412 Download?send=yes>.
24. Facebook. (2012, April 20). *Key facts*. Retrieved from <http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22>.
25. Feiring C. Concepts of romance in 15-year-old adolescents. *J Res Adolesc* 1996; 6: 181-200.

26. Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1 (3/4), 175-194.
27. Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B. and Chih-Hui Lai. (2011). First Comes Love, Then Comes Google: An Investigation of Uncertainty Reduction Strategies and Self-Disclosure in Online Dating. *Communication Research* 38(1) 70–100.
28. Goodwin, P., McGill, B., and Chandra, A. (June 2009). *Who Marries and When? Age at First Marriage in the United States: 2002*. National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db19.html>.
29. Goudreau, J. (2010, April 26). What men and women are doing on Facebook. *Forbes.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/2010/04/26/popular-social-networking-sites-forbes-woman-time-facebook-twitter.html>.
30. Greene, J.C., Caracelli, V.J., & Graham, W.F. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11(3), 255-274.
31. Hampton, K. (2001) *Living the Wired Life in the Wired Suburb: Netville, Glocalization, and Civil Society*, Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Sociology, University of Toronto.
32. Hampton, K. & Wellman, B. (2001). Long distance community in the network society: contact and support beyond netville. *American Behavioral Scientist*, (45)3, p. 477–496.
33. Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research*. (2nd ed., p. 281). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

34. Hines, T. (2008, February 13). *Is facebook helping or hurting your love life?*. Retrieved from <http://www.fastcompany.com/articles/2008/02/Facebook-love-life.html>.
35. Jacobson, D. (1999). Impression formation in cyberspace: Online expectations and offline experiences in text-based virtual communities. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 5, 1-30. Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol5/issue1/jacobson.html>.
36. Jhiang, C. L., Bazarova, N. N., & Hancock, J. T. (2011). The disclosure-intimacy link in computer-mediated communication: an attributional extension of the hyperpersonal model. *Human Communication Research*, 37(1), 58-77.
37. Kelly, H. (2012, February 6). [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://venturebeat.com/2012/02/06/facebooks-growth-by-the-numbers-infographic/>.
38. Ledbetter, A. M., Mazer, J. P., DeGroot, J. M., Meyer, K. R., Yuping Mao, and Swafford, B. (2011). Attitudes toward online social connection and self-disclosure as predictors of facebook communication and relational closeness. *Communication Research*, 38(1) 27-53.
39. Kraut, R., Patterson, M., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukopadhyay, T., & Scherlis, W. (1998). Internet paradox—A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being? *American Psychologist*, 53(9), 1017-1031.
40. Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.



41. Luscombe, B. (2009, June 22). Facebook and divorce: airing the dirty laundry. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1904147,00.html>.
42. Madden, M. (2010, August 27). *Older adults and social media*. Retrieved from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1711/older-adults-social-networking-facebook-twitter>.
43. Mansson, D. H., & Myers, S. A. (2011). An initial examination of college students' expressions of affection through facebook. *Southern Communication Journal*, 76(2), 155-168. doi: 10.1080/10417940903317710.
44. Marcus, B., Machilek, F. and Schultz, A. (2006) Personality in Cyberspace: Personal Web Sites as Media for Personality Expressions and Impressions, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 6, 1014-1031.
45. Moore, D. L., & Tarnai, J. (2002). Evaluating nonresponse error in mail surveys. In: Groves, R. M., Dillman, D. A., Eltinge, J. L., and Little, R. J. A. (eds.), *Survey Nonresponse*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, pp. 197-211.
46. McGee, A., (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
47. McKenna, K.Y.A., Green, A. S., & Gleason, M. E. J. (2002). Relationship formation on the Internet: What's the big attraction? *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 9-31.
48. Miranda, S., & Saunders, C. (2003). The social construction of meaning: An alternative perspective on information sharing. *Information Systems Research (ISR)*, 14(1), 87-106.

49. Moorman, J., & Bowker, A. (2011). The university facebook experience: the role of social networking on the quality of interpersonal relationships. *The American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences Journal*, 15, 1-23.
50. Muise, A., Christofides, E., & Desmarais, S. (2009). More information than you ever wanted: does facebook bring out the green-eyed monster jealousy? *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(4), 441-444. doi: 10.1089=cpb.2008.0263.
51. Nie, N. & Erbring, L. (2000) Internet and Society: A Preliminary Report, Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society: Stanford University.
52. O'Dell, J. (2011, May 31). *The facebook effect on relationships*. Retrieved from [mashable.com/2011/05/31/Facebook-relationships/](http://mashable.com/2011/05/31/Facebook-relationships/).
53. Park, N., Kee, K. F., & Valenzuela, S. (2009). Being immersed in social networking environment: facebook groups uses and gratifications. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(6), 729-733. doi: 10.1089=cpb.2009.0003.
54. Pietromonaco, P. R., Greenwood, D., & Barrett, L. F. (2004). Conflict in adult close relationships: An attachment perspective. In W. S. Rholes and J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications* (pp. 267–299). New York: Guilford Press.
55. Ponti, L., Guarnieri, S., Smorti, A., & Tani, F. (2010). A measure for the study of friendship and romantic relationship quality from adolescence to early-adulthood. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 3, 76-87.
56. Quan-Haase, A., & Young, A. L. (2010). Uses and gratifications of social media: a comparison of facebook and instant messaging. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(5), 350-361. doi: 10.1177/0270467610380009.
57. Rainie, L., Purcell, K., Goulet, L.S., and Hampton, K.N. (2011, June 16). *Social Networking Sites and Our Lives*. Retrieved from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2025/social-impact-social-networking-sites-technology-facebook-twitter-linkedin-myspace>.

58. Ramirez, A., Jr. (2007). The effect of anticipated future interaction and initial impression valence on relational communication in computer-mediated interaction. *Communication Studies*, 58, 53–70.
59. Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication and Society*, 3(1), 3-37. doi: 10.1207/S15327825MCS0301\_02.
60. Ryan, E. (2012, November 16). [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://soshable.com/the-social-revolution-of-facebook-infographic/>.
61. Sax, L., Gilmartin, S., & Bryant, A. (2003). Assessing response rates and non-responsive bias in web and paper surveys. *Research in higher education*, 44(4), 409-432. doi: 0361-0365/03/0800-0409/0.
62. Shah, D. V., Kwak, N., & Holbert, R. L. (2001). "Connecting" and "disconnecting" with civic life: Patterns of Internet use and the production of social capital. *Political Communication*, 18 (2), 141-162.
63. Short, J., Williams, E., and Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications*. London: Wiley.
64. Shulman S, Scharf M. Adolescent romantic behaviors and perceptions: Age- and gender- related differences, and links with family and peer relationships. *J Res Adolesc* 2000; 10: 99-118.
65. Skelton, A. (2012, March 09). *Social demographics: who's using toda'ys biggest networks*. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2012/03/09/social-media-demographics/>.
66. Socialbakers.com. <http://www.socialbakers.com/blog/361-facebook-grew-7-users-per-second-all-of-2011-special-infographic/>.

67. Soliz, J., (2008). Intergenerational support and the role of grandparents in post-divorce families: retrospective accounts of young adult grandchildren. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* 9(1), 72–80.
68. Sprecher, S. (2010), The influence of social networks on romantic relationships: Through the lens of the social network. *Personal Relationships*, 18, 1-15.
69. Sprecher, S., & Felmlee, D. (1992). The influence of parents and friends on the quality and stability of romantic relationships: A three-wave longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54, 888 – 900.
70. Sprecher, S., & Felmlee, D. (2000). Romantic partners' perceptions of social network attributes with the passage of time and relationship transitions. *Personal Relationships*, 7, 325–340.
71. Sprecher, S., Felmlee, D., Orbuch, D. L., & Willetts, M. C. (2002). Social networks and change in personal relationships. In A. Vangelisti, H. Reis, & M. A. Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *Stability and change in relationships*, 257–284. New York: Cambridge University Press.
72. Stafford, T. F., Stafford, M. R., & Schkade, L. L. (2004). Determining uses and gratifications for the internet. *Decision Sciences*, 35(2), 259-288. doi: 10.1111/j.00117315.2004.02524.
73. Starks, K. M. (2007). Bye Bye Love: Computer-mediated communication in relational dissolution. *Texas Speech Journal*, 32(1) p. 11-20.
74. Stern, Michael J. (2008). How locality, frequency of communication and Internet usage affect modes of communication within core social networks. *Information, Communication & Society* 11(5) p. 591–616.

75. Tamara D. A., Hutchinson, S., & Krouse, S. (2006). Toward a theoretical model of communal coping in postdivorce families and other naturally occurring groups. *Communication Theory* 16, 378–409.
76. Tamara, D. A., McManus, T., Hutchinson, S., & Baker, B. (2007). Inappropriate parental divorce disclosures, the factors that prompt them, and their impact on parents' and adolescents' well-being. *Communication Monographs* 74(1), 78-102.
77. Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
78. Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of mixed method research in the social and behavior sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
79. Thorhauge, S. N. (2012, May 24). [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://www.mindjumpers.com/blog/2012/05/time-spend-online/>.
80. Togliatti, M. M., Lavadera, A. L., & di Benedetto, R. (2011). How couples re-organized themselves following divorce: adjustment, co-parenting and family alliance. *Life Span and Disability*, 14(1), 55-74.
81. Toma, C. L. and Hancock, J. T. (2010). Looks and Lies: The role of physical attractiveness in online dating self- presentation and deception. *Communication Research* 37(3), 335–351.
82. Unknown. (2010, February 10). *Big Surge in Social Networking Evidence says Survey of Nation's Top Divorce Lawyers*. Retrieved from <http://www.aaml.org/about-the-academy/press/press-releases/e-discovery/big-surge-social-networking-evidence-says-survey->

83. Unknown. (2011, June 21). Internet growth statistics: Today's road to e-commerce and global trade internet technology reports. Retrieved from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/emarketing.html>.
84. Vergeer, M., & Pelzer, B. (2009). Consequences of media and Internet use for offline and online network capital and well-being. A causal model approach. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 15, 189-210.
85. Wellman, B. (2001) The persistence and transformation of community: from neighborhood groups to social networks. *Report to the Law Commission of Canada*, 1-96.
86. Williams, L. *Digital Intimacy Interference*. (2010).
87. Zickuhr, K. (2010, Dec. 16). *Generations online in 2010*. Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1831/generations-online-2010>.
88. Zuckerberg, M. (2010, July 21). *500 million stories*. The Facebook Blog. Retrieved from <https://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=409753352130>.

## Appendix A

### Facebook and Romantic Relationships Questionnaire

---

#### Consent Form

My name is Lynessa Williams, and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you are not obligated to participate. This consent form will explain the study, but please refer to my contact information toward the bottom of the form if you would like to contact me with more inquiries.

I am interested in learning more about the potential interference of social media in adult romantic relationships, a concept I have dubbed "digital intimacy interference." This survey includes questions about your Facebook activity and your personal relationships. You will be asked about your social media use, how often you use social networking sites, and how you generally communicate with others using the site. You are not obligated to identify yourself by name; however you will be asked questions about your identity (i.e race, gender, age). The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Information you include in this survey will remain fully confidential and will only be reviewed by myself, and my advisor Dr. Brad Gorham.

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping me to understand the impact of social media on interpersonal romantic relationships. This information will perhaps provide substantive evidence of relationship conflict due to social media and raise awareness on the issue. Participants may experience marital issues as a result of the subject matter. However, this research could also provide insight into marital relationships and the impact of social media, which is an issue valuable to studies on increasing divorce rates. Participants are encouraged to complete the survey privately and to not share responses with your marital partner in order to ensure minimal risk. However, please remember that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and that there are no consequences for deciding not to participate. Participants who complete the survey are eligible to enter to win a \$10 American Express gift card. The first 70 participants will win. You will be asked for your name and email address so your gift card can be mailed to you. All information collected for the giveaway will be kept confidential and will not be used after you have received your gift card.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact me via email at [lmwill06@syr.edu](mailto:lmwill06@syr.edu) or contact my advisor Brad Gorham at [bwgorham@syr.edu](mailto:bwgorham@syr.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the researcher, if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

By continuing, I acknowledge that all of my questions have been answered, I am over the

age of 18 and I wish to participate in this research study. In addition, I know that I can print a copy of this consent form for my records.

---

Page One

1) How much time a day do you spend on Facebook?

- Less than one hour daily
- 1-3 hours a day
- 4-6 hours a day
- More than 6 hours a day

2) Which of the following best describes your Facebook activity? (Check all that apply)

- Updating my status
- Browsing and commenting on others' pictures
- Browsing and commenting on others' posts
- Talking with others through messages and Facebook chat
- Adding new friends
- Looking through others' friends
- Playing games

3) What is your current relationship status?

- Single
  - Dating
  - Engaged
  - Married
  - Separated
  - Divorced
- 

Page 2

4) Is your current relationship status listed on Facebook?

- Yes
- No

5) How long have you been in your current relationship?

---

Page 3

6) Are you Facebook friends with your current partner?

- Yes
- No



7) Do you have password access to your partner's Facebook profile?

- Yes, we have each other's passwords
- No, we do not have each other's passwords
- I have his/her password, but he/she does not have mine
- He/she has my password, but I don't have his/her's.

8) How often do you view content from your current partner's Facebook profile?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Regularly
- Always

9) How confident are you that your Facebook activity is uncompromising to your relationship?

- Not confident
- Somewhat confident
- Neither confident nor not confident
- Confident
- Very confident

10) How confident are you that your partner's Facebook activity is uncompromising to your relationship?

- Not confident
- Somewhat confident
- Neither confident nor not confident
- Confident
- Very confident

---

Page 4

11) Is your current relationship status listed on Facebook?

- Yes
- No

12) How long were you in your last relationship?

---

---

Page 5

13) Which of the following best describes the reason your last relationship ended?

- Incompatibility
- Infidelity
- Grew apart
- Trust issues

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14) Did Facebook play a role in the end of your relationship?

Yes

No

15) Are you Facebook friends with your ex-partner(s)?

Yes

No

16) How often do you view content from your ex-partner(s) Facebook profile?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Regularly

Always

17) How often do you share information (i.e. status updates, pictures, messages, wall posts) about your personal relationships (past or present) on Facebook?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Regularly

Always

---

Page 6

18) What types of information regarding romantic relationships do you feel are inappropriate to share on Facebook?

19) Have you ever shared information on Facebook that could be viewed as inappropriate or compromising to your relationship (past or present)?

Yes

No

Unsure

20) Have you ever discovered information on Facebook that may be viewed as inappropriate or comprising to your relationship (past or present)?

Yes

No

---

Page 7

21) Facebook has caused problems in my relationship (past or present).

Strongly Disagree

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

22) Pre-existing issues in my relationship (past or present) have been exaggerated through use of Facebook.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

23) Would you ever delete your Facebook profile?

- Yes
- No

24) Over all, do you feel Facebook has impacted your relationships positively or negatively?

- Positively
- Negatively
- Facebook has not impacted my relationship

---

Page 8

25) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

26) Which of these best describes your ethnicity?

- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- Native American
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

27) How old were you on your last birthday?

---

---

New Page

28) I would like to enter to win a \$10 American Express gift card

- Yes

No

---

Enter to Win!

---

Thank You!

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us.

---

## Appendix B

## Facebook Group Names

1. Facebook-a relationship's worst enemy!!!
2. Facebook-destroying jobs, friendships & relationships on a daily basis
3. Welcome to Facebook, the Killer of relationships
4. Facebook ruins relationships!!!:(
5. Facebook-destroying relationships since 2004, Like if you agree
6. I wonder how many relationships Facebook ruin a year? Congratulations
7. Facebook ruins lives, or atleast relationships
8. Facebook eff's up relationships. smh. :(
9. Facebook Doesn't Ruin Relationships, Getting Caught In Your Lies Does
10. Facebook Can be the Death of Relationships and Friendships!!!! Lol!
11. Facebook = a relationships worst enemy!
12. I hate Facebook relationships
13. Facebook breaks up relationships
14. Facebook chat ruins relationships
15. Facebook Full of 13 year old girls moaning about their relationships
16. Facebook ruining relationships since 2004
17. Face-book doesn't ruin relationships, the Pricks who Abuse the freedom do.
18. Is Face-book ruining relationships
19. Facebook Official Relationships that the other person doesn't know about.
20. Facebook doesn't kill relationships; People with FB kill them.
21. How many relationships Facebook destroyed?
22. How Many relationships has Facebook ended?
23. Horrible Facebook breaks up relationships
24. Facebook ruins relationships
25. Facebook destroys relationships
26. Facebook Relationship's don't last
27. Facebook a cause of fight in relationships
28. Study Facebook and it's impact on romantic relationships
29. Does Facebook destroy relationships
30. Facebook determines all relationships
31. Facebook breaks up relationships
32. I wonder how many relationships Facebook ruins every year
33. Facebook: ruining relationships since 2004
34. Join if you think Facebook ruins relationships :(
35. Facebook, destroying relationships and friendships? Or exposing the truth?
36. What has Facebook done to relationships?
37. Facebook...the death of all relationships"
38. Facebook, making and breaking friendships and relationships since 2004
39. Facebook doesn't ruin relationships; it's the people on it!
40. Facebook is just another aide in ruining relationships.

41. Facebook: The #1 Cause of Death in Relationships
42. Facebook bringing people together: shenley academy destroys relationships
43. Relationships always end over Facebook
44. How many relationships has Facebook ruined?
45. I wonder how many relationships Facebook has ruined this year!!! Lol ☺
46. What would relationships be like without Facebook”....
47. How many relationships have been destroyed through Facebook?
48. Facebook Marriage fail. \m/
49. Facebook marriage breakups
50. Facebook ruined my marriage
51. Facebook mess up my marriage
52. Facebook almost ruined my marriage
53. Facebook Ruined My Marriage

## Appendix C

## Digital Intimacy Interference Study Flyer

# facebook ruined my marriage!

**COUPLES!!!!**  
Take a short online survey  
on how Facebook  
influences relationships.



**Participants are eligible  
to win a \$10 American  
Express Gift Card!**

<https://edu.surveymzmo.com/s3/848226/facebookrelationships>

**You Must:**

- be married, divorced, separated, remarried, single
- have (past or present) active Facebook account
- be 18 or over

Syracuse University  
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications  
Media Studies

For more information please contact researcher Lynessa Williams:  
SUrelationshipstudy@gmail.com  
Research is conducted at Syracuse University

### Vita

Lynessa Williams is originally from Los Angeles, CA. She graduated from California State University, Chico in 2010 with a B.A. in Communication Design. Williams has always expressed an interest in media and communications. Whether working in front of the camera, or analyzing media from behind the scenes, she knew from an early age that she would explore career opportunities in the field. However, her desire to explore media portrayals of underrepresented people led her to pursue an advanced degree at Syracuse University in Media Studies. There she expounded on her knowledge of media's influence and gave back to the institution by assisting with courses. Williams worked as a teacher's assistant for Syracuse University's Multimedia Storytelling course, and also as a program coordinator for Syracuse University's Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship. However, it was her experience as a teacher's assistant for Syracuse University's Social Media Practice course that exposed her to academic study of social media. Williams will continue to pursue opportunities in the emerging social media field following completion of her master's degree.